



Humanistically Speaking

June 2022

Speaking out for the non-religious. On values. On issues. On life.

Is 70 the New 50?



Sex and the over-70s
Glasgow Humanist Conference
Why are Humanists so old?
The Abolition of Ageing
World Humanist Day
The Elixir of Youth

Humanistically Speaking



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Come in, sit down, put your feet up...

David Brittain
Executive Editor



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CONTENT DISCLAIMER

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This issue is about how we age, and questions like “Is 70 the new 50?” increasingly pop up in the media. The West has some difficulty with age – but older populations inevitably hold increasing influence in societies where we live longer, and healthier lives. But is increasing longevity such a good thing? Especially when scientists like David Wood tells us (Brittain Interviews) that living beyond 100 will soon become the norm, and even 120+ may not be unusual. But what will happen to world population levels? What will that mean for our planet's resources? ... And what will be the political impact? Western attitudes to getting old are not universal, however. In Africa and Asia those who the USA refer to as ‘Senior Citizens’ are often figures of authority, where their acquired wisdom over the years ensures that they are valued and venerated accordingly.

On another tack, there was a disagreement between Humanist Group Leaders at a recent meeting I attended. One of them declared that organised Humanism is getting too close to politics, whilst the other said that *no* worthwhile philosophy – Humanist or not – can ever stay out of the political arena. Of course there's politics and there's *Party* politics, and *Humanistically Speaking* should be brave enough to examine both, but the times do seem to be changing, and at Glasgow's International Humanist Conference on the 4th June, the question of whether it is time for a ‘new Humanist enlightenment’ will be considered. It is something that *Humanistically Speaking* has been feeling for since it began in January 2020, and we will review the outcome with interest. Mike Flood's ‘Wither Humanism?’ article argues that Humanism should widen its scope, and aim to seek a position, not just on Humanist UK's objectives, but also on emerging contemporary issues. As a result, *Humanistically Speaking* is interested in forming an advisory ‘Brains Trust’ that can inform, analyse, and advise on issues from a Humanist viewpoint. The core council will be small, but experts will be invited to contribute depending on the issue at hand. If you are interested, and would like to consider joining the core council, please contact Mike at mike@criticalinformation.org.uk to declare your interest.



Humanist News



International Humanist Conference 2022

Humanist Society Scotland is hosting the International Humanist Conference on Saturday 4th June in Glasgow.

In the wake of the seismic changes brought about across the world by the pandemic, the worrying rise in anti-science rhetoric, the rise of fake news and tweeting politicians, and the climate emergency that remains largely unaddressed, this conference will ask: "Is it time for a new enlightenment, and what role should humanism play?"

Speakers include **Professor Dame Anne Glover**, former Chief Scientific Adviser to the European Commission and the Scottish Government; **Rosa Silah**, Kurdish-born human rights activist who now lives in ▷

Glasgow; and **David Greig**, Scotland's most translated and prolific playwright whose work often has humanist themes.

The Scottish Enlightenment brought progress in many areas of life including philosophy, literature, economics, science, medicine, architecture, art, and music, and enriched and improved the lives of many. They want to explore how a new humanist Enlightenment could address the growing inequalities we face, the irreversible harm we are causing to the planet, and challenge the growing body of rhetoric that threatens democracy.

Tickets for the conference on Saturday 4th June are £15 for Humanists International members (£30 for non-members). More information [here](#).

Layout Editor Opportunity

- *Do you know your way around PowerPoint?*
- *Do you have time on your hands?*
- *Do you have a creative streak?*

If you can answer yes to all three questions, then you could be just the person to fill a very exciting vacancy that has just arisen. As a volunteer-run magazine, we can offer no pay, but your reward will be playing a vital part of a team that creates the UK's only free Humanist magazine. **To apply, simply email Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com and we can go from there.**





Humanist News



**World Humanist Day
21st June**



World Humanist Day at Arts University Bournemouth

Arts University Bournemouth will be celebrating World Humanist Day on 21st June as a collaborative project between Student Services, Community Champions, the Faith & Reflection Team, and Dorset Humanists.

One of the art images on display to attract attention will be Michelangelo's *David* – a magnificent icon of Renaissance humanism completed in 1504. The art of the Renaissance departed from centuries of crucifixions and cherubs to celebrate the human form, as in the statuary of ancient Greece and Rome.

David Warden, humanist advisor to Bournemouth University and Arts University Bournemouth Faith & Reflection Team, said “This is the first time we’ve had the opportunity to raise awareness about World Humanist Day on campus. We’re hoping that the art students will be curious about the link between Humanism and the art of Renaissance humanism – at least as a conversation starter!”



◀ Click



Justice for Priyantha?

By our Pakistan correspondent *Wichar Ali*



I would like to draw your kind attention to the creeping fascism and terror of the mob for ordinary rational humanists and the secular citizenry in Pakistan.

Nowadays, those who believe in Humanism and secular values are not directly killed and tortured by the police and other security forces. After the inception of this country, security forces were deployed to intimidate and harass civil society and political dissidents. But now the terror of these agencies has been bestowed upon the vigilante and religiously-charged mobs. Freethinkers, and secular and rational citizens are intimidated in their jobs, transferred to remote areas and often ostracised from social circles. This is the month of fasting, and one has to be very careful not to hint, say or do anything that reflects one's reason and rationality. Never wear your heart on your sleeve. Any sort of deviation from the version of popular charged political Islam and patriotism as defined by the praetorian guards could ostracise and starve anyone here.

The verdict in the case of the murder of Sri Lankan citizen Priyantha Kumara in the name of blasphemy was announced a week ago. A total of eighty-nine accused were charged by the police in this case, out of which six accused were sentenced to death, seven to



Priyantha Kumara was a 49-year old Sri Lankan man who was lynched by a mob on 3 December 2021 in Sialkot, Pakistan over allegations of blasphemy. On 18 April 2022, Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Court handed down death sentences to six of those found guilty and prison sentences to all others bar one.

life imprisonment and seventy six to two years imprisonment, while one accused was acquitted.

In Pakistan, where extrajudicial killings in the name of blasphemy have become the norm, this decision is very welcome and is expected to have far-reaching consequences, but one aspect of this decision is very important, which is that this slain man was a citizen of Sri Lanka. He was a resident of Sri Lanka, and Pakistan could not afford to offend Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has been Pakistan's ally in the past. Pakistan has provided training and arms to ▷



crush the Tamil resistance in Sri Lanka. Not to mention Priyantha Kumara's job in an export factory that earned foreign exchange for the government.

Had Priyantha Kumara not been a foreigner and citizen of Sri Lanka, the case would not have been brought in the first place and it would have been hanging in the courts for years. With the exception of Salman Taseer's (Governor of the Punjab) killer, the accused involved in extrajudicial killings are rarely convicted. At first, the accused are not arrested because they are said to be unknown, and even if they are arrested, nobody dares to testify against them in the court. Whoever dares to do so, simply risks his/her own life.

“The convictions of those accused in Priyantha Kumara's murder should be considered an exception – not to assume that the state is really serious about punishing extrajudicial killings under the guise of blasphemy.”

According to newspaper reports, more than seventy people have been killed in extrajudicial killings in Pakistan so far in the name of blasphemy. Advocate Rashid Rehman of Multan was killed simply because he was defending Junaid Hafeez, a defendant in a blasphemy case, as a lawyer. Many years have passed since his murder but to date no one has been arrested. The state was very much interested in punishing the accused involved in the murder of Priyantha Kumara, which is why it has been heard on a daily basis. The special interest of the state, especially the Foreign Ministry, has played a significant role in deciding this case and that is why the accused have been convicted. The

lives of Pakistani citizens and their lawyers involved in blasphemy charges are in constant danger and the state has turned a blind eye to their protection. The convictions of those accused in Priyantha Kumara's murder should be considered as an exception, not an indication that the state is really serious about punishing extrajudicial killings under the guise of blasphemy.

“Successive regimes have increasingly used religion as a political tool and pushed the country into an abysmal inferno of Islamism”

After the ousting of Imran Khan (our version of Donald Trump) from government, attacks on our soldiers by Islamic State and other extremist groups have increased a great deal from Afghanistan. Likewise, the Muslim minority on the Eastern side of India is being attacked and bulldozed. About 200 million Muslims in India are now being converted into schedule castes at the bottom of the political hierarchy. They are being coerced to live under constant fear. We are more worried about the terrorists who could creep into Pakistan from the Western porous border of Afghanistan. More than 80,000 people have died in Pakistan from these terror attacks. It is hard to gather myself to write a page on our multiple woes and lamentations to follow. Successive regimes have increasingly used religion as a political tool and pushed the country into an abysmal inferno of Islamism.

From Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, to Imran Khan – all political leaders and military dictators have added their input to a process of Islamisation and religious intolerance to stay in power.



Why Are Humanists so old?

Anthony Lewis delves into Humanist demographics

My story is, I think, a typical one for Humanists. I came to Humanism quite late in life through attending the World Humanist Congress in Oxford in 2014 which I summarised in an irreverent blog (link below).

I was lucky to have been able to retire early after a global career as a geoscientist exploring for hydrocarbons. I found my semi-retirement in Windsor isolating. I quickly realised that I was not really part of my local community. So, after the Oxford Congress my husband and I linked up with Humanists UK to set up [Windsor Humanists](#) in 2015. The experience has been a success story for us personally. We have made new friends in the local area, through speaking in schools, being involved with local Interfaith groups, and connecting with nearby Humanist groups via South Central England Humanists Network. I feel much more connected to where I live and to Humanism nationally, in ways I could never have envisaged when I started this new journey.

I probably represent the 'average' Humanist demographic in that I am a retired professional with time on my hands to dedicate to volunteering and becoming an active Humanist. It's a well-worn path which is travelled by many who come to Humanism typically later in life. This pipeline of retired professional graduates represents a key strength of Humanism as it means the activist base is constantly replenished with committed and experienced 'newcomers'.



Rick and Antz at the World Humanist Congress in Oxford

Given the ageing demographic predicted for the UK, the numbers from this group are likely to keep increasing for the foreseeable future. It represents a great solid base for Humanism both locally and at national level.

Most religions, I suspect, have the opposite membership profile to Humanism. They start off young – 'home growing' their adherents through faith schools, thus ensuring children are inducted into the religion of their parents. It's a very effective process honed over millennia. However, this approach means that their numbers decline with age – except perhaps for the evangelical churches. Both [Humanists UK](#) and the [National Secular Society](#) are actively campaigning against faith schools and, just as importantly, campaigning for all children to be taught comparative religious education as a way of breaking this 'harvesting' of children into specific faiths. It will be a tough fight given what an effective strategy it is for the established religions! ▷



So, the answer to the question, “Why are Humanists so old?”, is that Humanism does not seek to convert, evangelise, nor indoctrinate the young. Instead, people find their own way to Humanism in their own time. These ‘self-attracted’ supporters, activists and converts form the bedrock of Humanism in the UK. The result of all this is that Humanists are not a particularly diverse bunch. Humanists are predominantly drawn from David Goodhart’s ‘Anywhere’ tribe as described in his 2018 book [‘The Road to Somewhere’](#). We tend to be male, pale, university-educated, retired white collar professionals who have had careers mainly in academia or in the public sector who mostly live in one of the UK’s larger urban centres. This is a constituency that makes up about 25 per cent of the UK population and Humanism clearly appeals powerfully to this demographic.

However, there are obvious risks for any movement that relies on such a narrow constituency for its membership base. How does Humanism broaden its appeal beyond its current, rather narrow, socio-academic demography? How would Humanism attract more of Goodhart’s ‘Somewhere’ tribe – who are typically younger, blue collar, self-employed tradesmen running small commercial businesses, and carers, who are all very much rooted in their local areas, and rarely have enough wealth to retire early? This constituency represents over 50 per cent of the UK population. The decline in religious faith in the UK has been driven mainly by this demographic becoming more non-religious. What does Humanism offer this non-religious ‘Somewhere’ tribe given that they are locally based and unlikely to be reached by national campaigns? What would ‘blue collar’ Humanism look like? What does Humanism offer a non-religious ‘Somewhere’ person?

We’ve struggled in Windsor Humanists to broaden our appeal to attract local blue-collar members. It’s a classic chicken and egg dilemma. Is it possible for ‘Anywhere Humanists’ like myself to even know where to start, given that we have limited interaction with this demographic outside of our immediate families. For many of us they represent ‘a foreign land, where they do things differently’! As Humanists UK increasingly achieves its political objectives does it need to refocus towards becoming a social movement to consolidate and secure these successes by broadening its appeal to these ‘Somewhere’ communities? If Humanism does not embrace this blue-collar, non-religious constituency could darker, more populist elements grab them instead to undermine and erode our recent progress? In my opinion this represents both an historic opportunity but also an existential threat to Humanism. The challenge is this: can Humanism be a place for bricklayers and plumbers as well as retired professors?



How can Humanism appeal to young bricklayers and plumbers as well as retired professors?



Are you one of these rare blue-collar workers within our ranks? Let us know! Explain how you found us, and what was the draw?



By Chris Smith

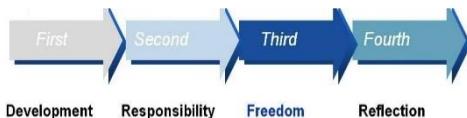
u3a: what it isn't, what it can be, and what it can do for you

It's the University of the Third Age – at least that's how it started in France. In the UK (and beyond) it's rarely pitched at university level and definitely doesn't have an age requirement. And although all u3a groups here are under the umbrella of the Third Age Trust (TAT) they arrange themselves to suit themselves. So, saying what it *is* isn't easy either!

The TAT strap line is *Learn, Laugh, Live*. The learning is cooperative with members sharing their knowledge, working together on a subject of interest or sharing an activity. Laughing is not compulsory, but almost always happens, and being engaged in something new is invariably enlivening.

I joined my first u3a when I retired and realised I knew almost no one where I had lived for a couple of decades. There was a monthly talk by an outside speaker which most members attended. Groups were few and met monthly too. They were mostly small, meeting in someone's home. I returned to studying Latin, practised spoken French, tried to advance my understanding of physics beyond the days of Newton. Of course I kept teaching maths – why would I stop? Then there were walks and visits and meals out.

Four Ages of Life



Having moved to a new area, knowing no one except my immediate family, of course I joined a local u3a. It's very different from the u3a I first encountered. Now there are weekly meetings in three ten-week terms. There's a monthly talk – but what I noticed was the wide range of physical activities from petanque to square dancing. There are classes for ukulele, a choir, bridge at different levels, and crafts. There are a few classes which are small enough for private houses. I continue to learn about science and keep teaching maths topics.

The 'third age' is defined by a time in your life (not necessarily chronological) where you have the opportunity to undertake learning for its own sake. There is no minimum age, but a focus on people who are no longer in full-time employment or raising a family. People often join when life changes, retirement or death of a partner perhaps, and it's been a life-line for many facing challenging times as well as those looking for something once enjoyed or completely new.



Humanism in Africa

by Lynda Tilley

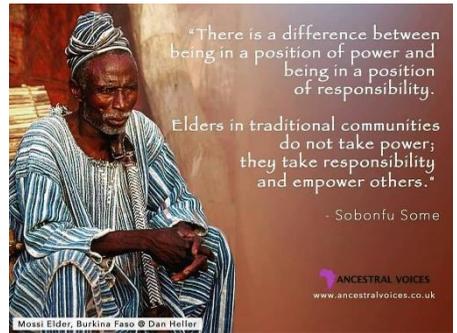


The value of elders in African culture

The onset and meaning of 'old age' varies worldwide according to culture and different 'yardsticks' for defining it exist. In Africa, old age, or being referred to as 'elderly', is considered to be between the ages of 50 and 65 years.

As the average life expectancy in Africa in 1950 was just 36, I guess 50 is not 'too young' to be considered 'elderly'. Our current life expectancy here is 63 years (compared to the world life expectancy of 73 years) which is an increase of 27 years. As a result, we have one of the world's fastest growing populations of elderly people.

As in most countries, our increased life expectancy is thanks to things like vaccination programmes, antibiotics and improved sanitation, but although we now live longer, our health in old age is deteriorating rapidly as many elderly are poor, malnourished, and live in rural areas far from medical facilities. They succumb to preventable or manageable diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure or heart attacks, or from HIV/AIDS, pneumonia and diarrhoea.



Growing older in Africa is welcomed, celebrated even, as it's associated with the 'inner wisdom' which comes with age rather than 'outer ageing' and deterioration of the body. The older you are, the more life experiences you have and the wiser you are. The elderly are also respected as they are considered closer to our ancestors, who play a huge role in all African lives.

We are taught by them that our ancestors live within us and not in the past. We inherit the gifts they had; our lives are still guided by their wisdom even though they are long gone. These are ancient beliefs, acknowledged throughout our continent no matter which tribe or area you come from, and they go back centuries in time. As science can now prove, we inherit most of our genes from our parents, grandparents and great- ▷

Images: www.wisdomspring.org



grandparents and each one of us carries genes which can be traced back (for now, at least) seven to eight generations. The fact that 'our ancestors dwell within us' and that we 'inherit their gifts' is based not only on what our oral history has always taught us but also, all these centuries later, on actual scientific proof.

Sobonfu Somé was a widely respected author, activist and [teacher of African spirituality](#). She was born into the Dagara tribe of Burkina Faso, West Africa, and she travelled the world sharing the ancient wisdoms, healing rituals and practices of her ancestors in order to 'bring people back to being in touch with the earth and their inner values'.

Sobonfu (which means 'keeper of the rituals') was recognised from birth by elders in her community as having special gifts and she grew up knowing what her destiny was. Her life was dedicated to her ancestors and in passing their knowledge on to others worldwide. Her message about the importance of spirit, community, and ritual in daily life was summed up by African-American novelist Alice Walker, who said 'It can help us put together so many things that our modern Western world has broken.'

Elders are the knowledge keepers, the wise, the problem solvers, advisors, comforters and disciplinarians. They pass on cultural traditions and tribal knowledge which was passed on orally to them and this is considered sacred. If we don't learn it and pass it on to our own descendants it will, one day, be lost for ever. As a trusted source of historical information, they are the only 'link' we have which connects our past to our present and, most importantly, to our future.

When elders die, the loss is immense, but we keep them alive by remembering and speaking of them as they did of those before them, as our children, one day, will hopefully



Author and teacher Sobonfu Somé

Image: www.wisdomspring.org

remember us and the knowledge we passed to them. And so, the cycle of life and knowledge continues.

I can think of no better way to sum up the importance of our elders by ending with one of my favourite quotations, taught to me by my own father, who no doubt learnt it from my grandfather. Neither of them followed a religion or a god and today they would be called Humanists – a word which wasn't around in their time, but which now defines them both. My ancestors, whose genes and gifts I carry, who live within me and not in the past, and who's gifts I've inherited:

"We all live amongst those who have gone before us – we walk in their footsteps, we live on their graves – and if the mere act of speaking their names brings them back to life, then that, in itself, is the secret to our immortality."

Author unknown.



Aaron Explores

Humanists don't give up...



Haven't things changed in the last fifty years? Health services boost our life expectancy, the Internet feeds our intellectual needs, endless sources of affordable entertainment are at our fingertips, and we have the ability to communicate with everyone and anyone on the face of the planet. How on earth do people get time to be lonely or bored? Life now is better than ever experienced before at any time in history. But regardless of our differences one thing joins us together: we all get older.

When I was a teenager my grandparents were typically 'old' retirees as opposed to those around me now. Three of them made it to 79 and the other one to 83, but none of them did any real exercise other than walking to the shops or pub. Did they just give up? Two were considerably overweight, the other two were frail and thin. Could exercise, strength building and a social life outside of family have given them more years?

I'm 51 now and have lived on the south coast for over a decade and life is different here. Maybe it's because of the beach, the sea air, the New Forest or Jurassic Coast. But people older than me don't just give up. Most are making the most out of everyday life by being fit and active. Walks I've led in our area will always have people in their 70s attending and it's not uncommon for octogenarians too. Is this a modern trend, or a Humanist outlook on life? We always joke in Dorset that being



a Humanist almost guarantees you will reach 100. It's certainly looking good so far.

Several of our local Humanists are also members of the U3A (University of the Third Age) which organises various activities for that demographic. They're constantly out and about doing a wide range of things, so my hope for an active later life remains high. But as well as physical ability, they're keeping their minds strong and active too, something Humanist groups do very well. Reaching the 'Third Age' with great physical health but diminished neural capacity would be quite a drawback, but as good an effort as we can make, life can always deal us some bad cards. We just need to keep a joker or two ready to help us make a comeback.

When working for a local authority, I had come across the term 'Third Age'. It was only ten minutes ago that I discovered there was a Fourth! A chart I discovered by the 'Council for Third Age' groups life into Preparation, Achievement, Fulfilment, Completion. So the





If your humanist group isn't doing walks, then make it happen! That 100-year life span wont happen all on its own.

First Age is learning and education, the Second Age would be career and family, Third Age is retirement and recreation, and the Fourth Age is care and assisted living. Certainly, the Humanist groups I've come across have predominantly been built from a Third Age demographic with a smattering of Second and Fourth thrown in. Is this because a journey through life gains enough wisdom and knowledge that Humanism is a natural arrival point? Do younger people not have enough experience to reach there, or are they too stressed dealing with all of life's other commitments that they are too busy to even look? Is it only after studying, qualifying, building a career, having children and paying off debts are done that life slows down to permit more?

The First Age is nonexistent in Humanist ranks, and a problem for groups everywhere from my perspective. What a great start in life young people would have if, as is possible in Norway, they were exposed to a Humanist group right from reaching double digits? Building values, logic, science and questioning from a controlled, considerate and scientific mind. Is this even possible, or does life need to programme a brain for over forty years of experience before the Humanist seed can grow? Let's hope our schools teams can work magic and bring younger minds into the mix.

One of our members, Ken (pictured below) made it to 84. He played tennis twice a week and was doing ten-mile hill walks right up to the end. He still drove, had a sharp wit and was and still is my benchmark for fitness into my eighties. There is of course no reason not to aim for 100, and with Ken's example, no reason not to stay fit and healthy.

For me, it's a need to stay involved locally, connected to where I live, comfortable in my own skin and own company and with a varied circle of friends and activities. These, together with frequent mental and physical workouts, are my ingredients for a long life.



A 100-year life?

Achieving it and what this could mean

By John Coss

David Attenborough
still going strong at 96
Photo: [John Cairns](#)



Since ancient times, some people have enjoyed a vigorous old age, including Plato, who lived to be about 80, Michelangelo - 88, Tolstoy - 82, and Bertrand Russell - 98.

The same is true of many 'ordinary' people. One of my grandfathers worked full time in a London office until his late 70s, and had to be persuaded not to dive from the top board of the local swimming pool in his late 80s. One of his own great-grandfathers lived to be 95.

However, the proportion living in the UK to what has hitherto been seen as a great age is a good deal higher now than in the past; and there is every prospect of far more people doing so in future, provided we avoid catastrophic climate change and comparable hazards. Moreover, there are good reasons to think that the majority will be living full and active lives. Rather than 'is 70 the new 50?' it will be 'is 90 the new 70?' This is true for all developed countries, with profound implications in the long run for how people live their lives, and major demographic and financial consequences.

In [The 100 Year Life](#) (2016), Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott point out that life expectancy in the UK has increased on average by about three months every year since 1850 and draw on research suggesting that half the people born in 2007 could live to age 105, compared with half those born 50 years earlier 'only' living to age 95. These are 'median cohort life

expectancies' and are much higher than the 'mean period life expectancies' more commonly encountered, which are currently about 80 years. (For an explanation of these terms, see the technical note.) They are also higher than similar figures produced by the Office for National Statistics, though David Wood, in his [interview](#) by David Brittain, envisages even greater longevity in future.

Eliminating mortality completely up to age 65 would add less than 4 years to life expectancies, so the improvements envisaged here can only come from substantial reductions in mortality at the older ages. Healthier life styles will be a major factor, in particular as to diet and physical exercise, but smoking, misuse of alcohol, and air pollution are also material. We will need to address the social gradient in life expectancy, which is nearly 10 years lower in the most deprived areas of England than in the least deprived areas. The range is even greater in other parts of the UK, and for healthy life expectancy.

Medicine will also have a major role in addressing the chronic diseases of the older ages, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and dementia, through '4P medicine', focusing on causes of disease rather than symptoms. This is Predictive – identifying those at risk of particular diseases; Preventive – aiming to prevent or delay their development; Personalized – to individual patient characteristics, and Participatory – involving people in their own care. ▷



Some thoughts on future prospects

What does this mean for the future? For one thing, change will be gradual, giving time for adapting current practices and institutional arrangements. But will an older population mean greater resistance to change? Much will depend on whether we will be 'old for longer' or 'young for longer'. Personally, I am hopeful that for most people it will be the latter. Moreover, much longer lives is only one of the changes and challenges of the 21stC, which include the continuing explosion in scientific knowledge and technological know-how, and the urgency of dealing with climate change and other environmental issues.

Family structures will change. Child-rearing and support will occupy a smaller proportion of the life-span, four generation families will become the norm, and there will be more great-great-grandparents. The three stage life of education-work-retirement will for many be replaced by a multi-stage life with several transitions between work and 'education'.

Financing longer lives will need many changes in state and personal provision for retirement. Some of us will work into our 70s or even 80s; others will save more during their working life or adapt to a lower income in retirement.

Without a compensating reduction in births, longer lives entail a bigger population, with implications for housing and other infrastructure, and for the human impact on the environment.

I conclude on a positive note with a quotation from *The 100 Year Life*: 'Might these extra years, distributed throughout a life, bring the time and opportunity to explore who you are and arrive at a way of living that is nearer to your own personal values and hopes than to the traditions of the society into which you were born? If so, then this is perhaps the greatest gift that longevity can bestow.'

Technical note – life expectancies

Life expectancy is a statistical measure of the average time someone is expected to live, based on their year of birth, current age and other demographic factors including their sex. There are two measures in common use:

The **mean**: the average age to which someone is expected to live.

The **median**: the age to which half the population is expected to live.

There are also two kinds of life expectancy:

Period life expectancies are based on mortality rates for a particular period, generally a year, and are a measure of the overall level of mortality for a particular group at that time.

Cohort life expectancies are based on the actual or projected mortality rates experienced by a cohort (group) born in a particular year as they progress through life, and are a measure of their life prospects.

Cohort life expectancies were not produced in the UK until fairly recently, but are now available back to 1841. The fall in mortality since the mid-19thC means they are higher than the corresponding period life expectancies, for recent years to an extent depending on the future improvements assumed. In addition, median expectations are higher than mean expectations, currently by about 3 years, and there are small differences between figures for England & Wales, GB and the UK.

The Office for National Statistics provides a good [explanation](#) of the difference between period and cohort life expectancies. The table below is based on their 2019 data set and shows median UK life expectancies by year of birth for their central assumptions as to future mortality.

Year	Male		Female	
	Period	Cohort	Period	Cohort
1951	70.0	82.2	75.3	86.1
1960	71.5	83.4	77.5	87.1
1990	75.5	87.6	81.3	90.4
2020	81.6	91.1	85.4	93.5

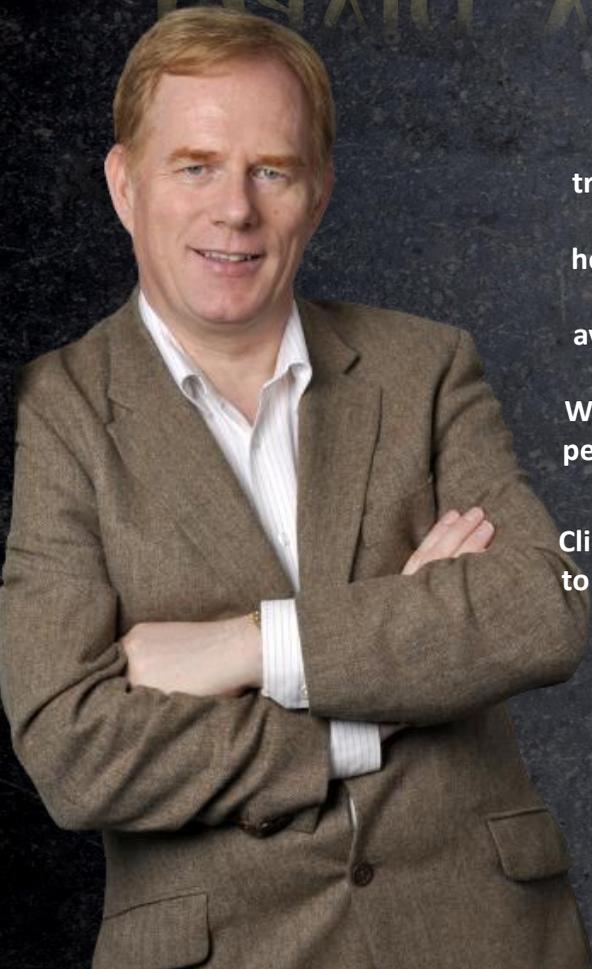
The effect of different assumptions about future mortality on cohort life expectancy is illustrated by the equivalent figures for 2020 on the ONS high improvement basis: male - 96 female – 98.



The Brittain Interview

Our video conference with notable people, interviewed by David Brittain

David Wood



This month, David Brittain interviewed London futurist David Wood about transhumanism and the fourth industrial revolution which holds out the alluring prospect (or threat!) of increasing the average human lifespan to 120 in the coming decades. David Wood believes that many more people can inhabit planet Earth if we live more sustainably.

Click the YouTube button below to watch the full interview with David Brittain.



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After Putin... there is hope for Russia and humanity

We appear to be witnessing the collapse of Putinism. Every military strategist concurs that Putin miscalculated when he invaded Ukraine. He thought the West was too weak and divided to care, he thought that the Ukrainian people would welcome Russian soldiers as liberators, and he believed that he was in command of effective military forces. All of these assumptions have turned out to be mistaken.

A conservative estimate is that Russia has already lost 15,000 soldiers in the conflict in addition to an enormous amount of expensive hardware which will be difficult to replace. By all accounts, the Russian military is corrupt, and decision-making is sclerotic. Soldiers have low morale. Equipment is badly maintained. The 'special military operation' is a shambles. The contrast with Ukrainian forces is striking. Since 2014, when the Russo-Ukrainian conflict started, Ukrainians have been professionally trained by the West and they are being supplied with devastating defensive weapons, such as the UK-supplied NLAW anti-tank weapon which is fired with the cry 'God Save the Queen'.

Through the fog of war, it's becoming clear that Putin will lose. In a matter of months, his



Vladimir the Doomed

Aleksey Nikolskiy/Getty Images

troops will be pushed back to the 24th February line and then completely out of Ukrainian territory, including Crimea. This outcome is almost inevitable because of the overwhelming superiority of the West and the resolve of the Ukrainians. Putin's nuclear threats will make no difference. Any tactical nuclear weapon deployed will result in the complete devastation of Russia's military and economy within days.

Totalitarianism has flung itself into reckless conflict with the humanistic values of liberal democracy and it is losing. When it becomes obvious to the people of Russia that Putin's dream has turned into a nightmare for Russia and its neighbours, they will have another opportunity to rethink the end of the Soviet era. They will have another opportunity to join the community of nations, based on universal values. There is hope for Russia and for humanity.





Musings by Maggie

The Fountain of Youth

The search for a way to banish old age and disease and attain eternal youth, or even immortality, is probably as old as humankind itself. There are myths and stories aplenty regarding an 'elixir of life' or 'fountain of youth' having these miraculous properties, and in more recent times great claims have been made for various scientific, or at least pseudoscientific, methods of prolonging life and restoring youth.

Elixirs

In the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (2nd millennium BCE), Gilgamesh seeks advice from the Noah-like character Utnapishtim, who advises him to find a certain plant at the bottom of the sea. He finds the plant, but before he can test it on an old man it is eaten by a serpent. In ancient China, many rulers

sent out exploratory teams to search for the legendary Penglai Mountain, where the elixir was believed to exist. They either returned empty-handed or failed to return at all. In Indian mythology the elixir is known as the Amrita. According to Hindu scripture the elixir could only be obtained by churning up the ocean floor. The demons agreed to cooperate with the gods in an attempt to do this in return for a share of the Amrita, but the gods tricked the demons, who didn't receive their share. In Europe, the elixir of life is associated with the creation of the mythical philosopher's stone, capable of turning base metals such as mercury into gold. According to legend, some alchemists were reputed to have created the elixir, including [Nicolas Flamel](#) and [Count St. Germain](#). A Japanese folk tale has the moon god sending down the 'waters of rejuvenation' for humans and the 'waters of death' for serpents in two ▷



pails, but the person entrusted with the task sets down the pails to have a rest, whereupon the serpents bathe in it, rendering it useless. The idea that snakes can rejuvenate themselves by shedding their skin has been attributed to this myth.

In various cultures and through many ages, alchemists have attempted to find a formula for such an elixir. The ancient Chinese believed that consuming long-lasting substances like jade, cinnabar or hematite would bestow that longevity on the person who consumed them. Gold, with its well-known non-tarnishing properties, was considered particularly effective. Most substances used were deadly poisonous, including mercury, sulphur, and the salts of mercury and arsenic.

Fountains

Stories about magical waters that could endow those who drink or bathe in them with eternal youth circulated as early as the 5th century BCE, when [Herodotus](#) wrote about them. These stories persisted into the early years of the Common Era, spreading widely during the crusades (11th/12th centuries CE). In the early 16th century such stories were prominent in the Caribbean and prompted many journeys of exploration in search of the miraculous waters.

Shangri-la

In 1933, James Hilton wrote his celebrated novel *Lost Horizons*, a story about the discovery of a lost paradise in an isolated Tibetan valley in which time and the ravages of history have been held back and the people live, in a state of elevated consciousness and perpetual happiness, for far longer than the normal natural span and with a much slower appearance of ageing. Hilton called the valley Shangri-la, but the legendary place on which it is based is called Shambala, a lost kingdom

somewhere in the Himalayas. Although the earliest mention is in India in the tenth century CE, it is usually thought of as a Tibetan myth and occupies an important position in Buddhist teaching.

Monkey Testicles

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a vogue for transplanting various animal substances, including monkey testicles, into humans in order to produce a rejuvenating effect. The main initiator of this practice was a French surgeon of Russian extraction, [Serge Voronoff](#), whose first transplantation of a monkey gland into a human took place on June 12, 1920. Great claims were made for the effectiveness of these experiments, but eventually the practice fell out of favour with the public after it was severely criticised by the scientific community. It is now well known that animal tissue inserted into a human would not be absorbed, but instantly rejected. Any benefit perceived by the recipient can only be explained by the placebo effect.

Because You're Worth It

Today, the search for a method of holding back the years continues. Advertisements for expensive "anti-ageing creams" abound. You have only to go into any large branch of Boots to see shelves full of them. As well as putting the magic stuff on the skin we are encouraged to ingest it. Much is made of anti-ageing supplements. Turmeric is in vogue at the moment, along with green tea, collagen supplements, Coenzyme Q10, vitamins C and E, and a whole list of supplements containing ingredients most of us have never heard of.

A bunch of boffins have now, apparently, come up with a method of skin rejuvenation which can reverse the signs of ageing by as much as thirty years. I expect the monkey glands to make a comeback any second.





Ethical Encounters

Paul Ewans explores moral questions



‘Citizens of the World’

Paul Ewans asks : “Is it right to prioritise those people who have the same nationality as ourselves? Or should we identify with humankind as a whole and not just with the citizens of any one particular country?”

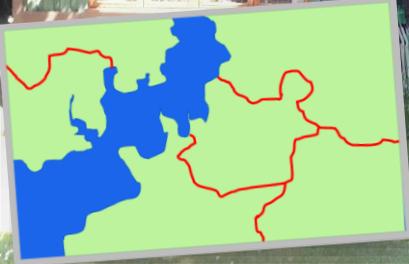
The Stoic philosopher Epictetus asked why it should matter to someone whether they were born in Athens or in Corinth. After all, where someone was born – and thus their nationality – depends in most cases on where their mother happened to be when she gave birth. A person’s nationality can therefore be seen as somewhat arbitrary – as arbitrary as their race or their sex.

Some people have taken this idea to its logical conclusion, declaring themselves to be a ‘Citizen of the World’. Perhaps the best-known example is Thomas Paine who, in his book *Rights of Man* (1791), wrote: ‘My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.’ Other Citizens of the World include from classical times the philosophers Socrates, Diogenes the Cynic, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. From the Age of Enlightenment there are Voltaire, David Hume, Diderot, Goethe and Schiller. And in modern times we have Oscar Wilde, Albert Einstein, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Pankhurst, Fenner Brockway and Stephen Pinker.

For many such people, being a Citizen of the World is not merely to recognise the randomness of nationality. It is also to acknowledge that moral obligations do not stop at national boundaries, that we should show concern for people who are not members of our own community and extend our goodwill and our compassion to embrace all of humankind. People who look at things this way seem to be riding a historical wave. The circle of those with whom we identify has expanded over time – from family, clan and tribe to community, nation and country. And alongside this profound change there has been an increasing acceptance that everyone has rights, and that each person’s well-being is important.

As the threat of global warming looms ever larger, it becomes less and less plausible to claim that our obligations are limited to just one country. So why should we not become Citizens of the World and acknowledge the equal value of every human being, no matter where they are?





The importance of lines on a map

A response to Paul Ewans
by Aaron Darkwood



“...we should show concern for people who are not members of our own community and extend goodwill and our compassion to embrace all of humankind.” Paul Ewans, Ethical Encounters

Sounds good, doesn't it? Kind, thoughtful, compassionate, *Humanist* even, that we should help wherever we can no matter who it is, where they come from or any other demographic criteria. That's all true until you explore what lines on a map really mean.

Humanists, typically, are comfortably well-off retired persons who are not struggling in life. They have their own home, a car maybe, take holidays and have lived a life, held a good career, and are now in a Humanist group to expand their wisdom and try and make a difference. This is *not* the national average. From my perspective, each town and city in the UK has a substantial waiting list for housing, 5,100 in my area alone (2020 figures), the cost of living is a struggle and each and every person entering the UK jumps the queue of people who have lived and worked here all their life, contributed to the whole and then sit back for another few years as immigration on a massive scale hits them right in the face. Sofa surfing, living in a tent (as I had to) is a hard price to pay when uninvited, often illegal entrants are placed

directly into hotels and given affordable housing when those living here struggle with very high rents. When I was homeless, I didn't qualify for a hotel or B&B. I was told to find my own place and I encountered a lot of rejection and unaffordable costs.

Lines on a map are boundaries drawn by inhabitants. Communities are built on similar ethical standards, on shared goals and principles and, yes, absolutely we are understanding and observant of the world around us and want to help, but this must be by agreement of the whole, and at an affordable level to the state and taxpayer.

The UK has an immigration target we aim for each year. We have a refugee figure and extension orders to stay with families for those who come here to work and contribute. On top of that we have foreign students who study here and many who come here on holiday. These are all figures factored in, costed and afforded, and the country as a whole can manage that. When ten times this many come through a hole in the fence we cannot cope, and those living here struggling to manage day to day bear the brunt.

Like most people, I am all for helping others, but the figure has to be agreed, which we do by voting, and has to be fair to those living here. If you overflow the lifeboat, everybody sinks.





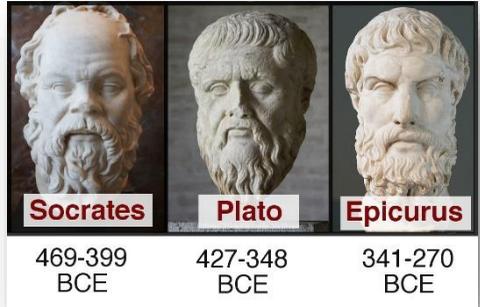
THE CONSOLATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

Paul Ewans

Many classical philosophers believed that one of the most important functions of philosophy was to help us cope with the burdens of old age. So what advice do they have to offer?

The Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius (whose day job was ruling the Roman Empire) believed that we should not worry about old age too much. After all, many things improve with age. For example, figs are best when they begin to shrink and wither, and olives are best when they are near to putrefaction. Also, every change from one stage of life to another is a kind of death, so there's nothing special about old age anyway.

Seneca started thinking about old age when he visited his country estate and suddenly realised that trees which he himself had planted were now grown old. He found in old age that even a little exercise made him tired, but that was a good thing because it meant that he didn't have to do too much of it. Another advantage of old age was that the things which were wrong to do were now things that he couldn't do anyway. Overall, his advice was not to fear old age because getting old was inevitable. (There's logic for you.) Seneca, by the way, had a tough time as



political advisor to the Emperor Nero and came to a bad end.

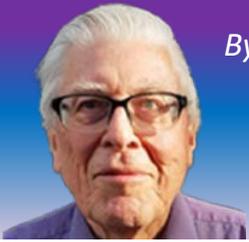
Cicero conceded that most people found old age hard to bear, but it was less bad if you happened to be rich, influential and distinguished – just like Cicero, in fact. As for mental ability, a man's memory only failed in old age if he had the misfortune to have been born a trifle dull. In any case, a man never forgot the important things – where he had buried his money, for example. Cicero was glad to have been released in old age from 'the chains of lust', and Socrates agreed. In his opinion, being free from all that sort of thing made old age a time of great peace and contentment.

Finally, Epicurus believed that the secret of a happy old age was to live in the past, and there's certainly a lot to be said for that. As celebrity TV presenter Anna Ford once observed: 'Any time not spent day-dreaming is time wasted'. Who could possibly disagree?



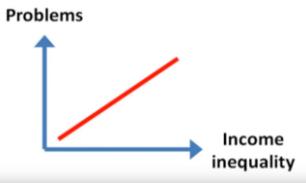
Kate Pickett

Continuing our series of profiles of Humanists who are not as widely known as they should be, including distinguished men and women not generally known to be Humanists.



Kate Pickett is professor of epidemiology at the University of York, and a Patron of Humanists UK. The focus of her extensive research is the social determinants of health and health inequalities. She is a full member of the [Club of Rome](#) and a trustee of the [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#).

With her life partner Richard Wilkinson, Pickett co-founded the [Equality Trust](#) - a non-profit organisation seeking to explain the benefits of a more equal society and is probably best known as the co-author of *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. She gave the [2012 Holyoake Lecture](#) in Manchester on 'Inequality: The Enemy Between Us?' drawing on the research findings presented in *The Spirit Level**. Her main theme was that greater inequality within a society is associated with greater health and social problems, as depicted in this diagram from her presentation:



She gave many examples of this relationship for a range of health and social issues across different countries and different US states, drawing on research from a wide range of sources, and then showed the adverse effects of inequality on those at the higher income levels, who themselves do better in more equal societies (e.g., Scandinavia and Japan),

where the incomes of the top 20% are 3.5 to 4 times those of the bottom 20%. The ratio is about twice this in the more unequal rich countries (including the UK and the USA).



The main themes of *The Spirit Level* have not gone unchallenged. In a [robust response](#) to some of their critics they justify their methodology, and point out (a) that the book is based on a wide range of peer-reviewed research, and (b) they do not claim that income inequality is the only factor contributing to health and social inequalities.

In a subsequent book, *The Inner Level, How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone's Well-being*, Wilkinson and Pickett focus on the individual level and propose practical policies for reducing inequality that should also help to achieve environmental sustainability.

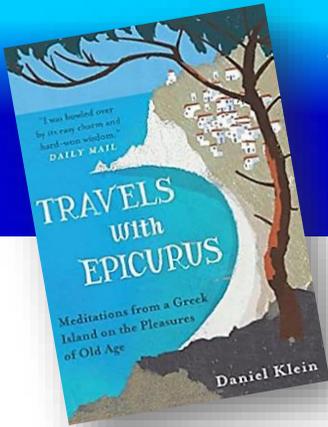
Their [own website](#) provides a comprehensive record of their work, much of which is available to download or view. Of particular note are *The Next Level – good lives for all in Greater Manchester*, a 2021 report from an independent commission chaired by Pickett, and *From inequality to sustainability*, a 2022 report to the Club of Rome. The Equality Trust website is also a rich resource on how to improve the quality of life in the UK by reducing economic and social inequality.



*From 54.15 she suggests that everything she has presented speaks to some core humanist values. See [here](#) for the Q&A session that followed the lecture.

Travels with Epicurus by Daniel Klein

Book Review by John Coss



Daniel Klein is an American writer of fiction and humorous books about philosophy, including *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar: Understanding Philosophy Through Jokes* and several others with his life-long friend Thomas Cathcart. *Travels With Epicurus* was published in 2013.

Travels With Epicurus relates to a month Klein spent on the Greek Island of Hydra at the age of 73. An account of his activities, especially time spent with taverna owner Dimitri and retired Athenian judge Tasso, old friends from many previous visits, provides a framework for meditations on the best way to achieve a fulfilling old age. Klein believes he may find some clues in Hydra. The trip was prompted by his reaction to the 'forever young' attitude of many of his American contemporaries. He took with him a suitcase of philosophy books and other old favourites, from which he takes quotations as the basis for his meditations.

Chapter 1 focuses on the life of Epicurus and his philosophy of fulfilment, as expressed by 'not what we have, but what we enjoy, constitutes our abundance' and 'of all the things that wisdom provides to live one's entire life in happiness, the greatest by far is the possession of friendship.' In later chapters, Klein draws on quotations from philosophers from

Aristotle to Sartre (including Heidegger's 'Why are there things that are rather than nothing?'), other authors and poets, the film *Wild Strawberries* and two Sinatra songs.

In Chapter 6, Klein considers Stoicism and *old old age*: Shakespeare's 'sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.' Unsurprisingly, he is not very keen on this: as he says, it 'stinks'. He doesn't feel able to go along with Stoic indifference, which can seem more like denying pain than indifference to it. On the other hand, he sees no benefit in focusing on the horrors of *old old age* before it arrives: this would be a waste of precious and limited time. But he sees merit in ending life when it is no longer meaningful to remain alive, asking 'do we really want to cling to life at all costs?'

Chapter 7 considers the timeliness of spirituality in old age. Klein is not religious, but acknowledges 'spiritual yearnings' that he can no longer ignore. He thinks he may find the answers by being '*fully here now*'.

In reflecting on his Hydra trip when back home, Klein doesn't feel he has come to any firm convictions, even for himself, as to what is the best way to be old. He concludes that perhaps what matters is asking the right questions and being aware of the old-age options commended by philosophers such as Epicurus and Sartre. I'm inclined to agree, and wholeheartedly recommend this book to humanists, both as an easy read and for later browsing from time to time for topics on which to meditate ourselves about old age.





Whither Humanism?

Mike Flood reflects on the upcoming International Humanist Conference in Glasgow

Is it time for a new enlightenment in the wake of recent seismic events — “the pandemic, the worrying rise in anti-science rhetoric, the rise of fake news and tweeting politicians, and the climate emergency that remains largely unaddressed”? This is the question that *Humanists International* will be addressing at its forthcoming annual conference. If a distinguished panel of speakers concludes ‘yes’, it will then ask: “what role should humanism play?” It will be interesting to see what they come up with.

The debate is being held in Glasgow on June 4th and hosted by [Humanist Society Scotland](#). But the question I want to ask is: why aren't humanist organisations *already* talking about these issues and their implications for human rights, responsible citizenship and inter-generational justice — and “living happier, more confident, and more ethical lives” (one of Humanists UK's three new [strategic aims](#))? A few are, but shouldn't they *all* be, given that we're at a “unique moment in history”?* Humanists have long recognized our responsibility for “our lives and the kind of world in which we live” and our “duty of care to all of humanity including future generations” ([Amsterdam Declaration](#)). But what in practical terms can we do to play our part?



Scottish biologist Professor Dame Anne Glover is one of the keynote speakers at the International Humanist Conference 2022 in Glasgow

Photo [Wikimedia](#)

Emerging Contemporary Issues

I recently crossed pens with one long-serving Humanists UK Board member following a comment he made about “important, but non-core, topics such as AI”. I pointed out that core topics change as new issues emerge and old ones are resolved or become less relevant. And I hazarded a guess that a significant proportion of humanists — and especially young humanists — are today more concerned about global warming than state funding for homeopathy or organ donation (examples of ‘emerging contemporary issues’ cited on Humanists UK's [website](#)). It's not that these issues are not important; it's a question of *priorities* and the signal that the choice of campaign focus sends out. I'd love to see a straw poll of members' views on this.

Back in July 2018, I joined forces with two other local activists to try to persuade Humanists UK's Board to set up a working ▷



*See for example: [Peter Hennessy](#), [Ian Goldin](#), [Stuart Russell](#), [AC Grayling](#), [Yuval Harari](#) and [Neil Levy](#); also [Tim Jackson](#) and [Kate Raworth](#) on introducing a fundamentally different approach to global economics.

group to look into AI and disinformation. They rejected the idea, despite the fact that our proposal would have cost little or nothing to implement and its findings would not have been binding. As I noted at the time, the Bishop of Oxford was [arguing](#) that “every development in Artificial Intelligence raises new questions about what it means to be human” and that “Christians need to be part of that dialogue, aware of what is happening and making a contribution for the sake of the common good.” Humanists, I [reasoned](#), should do too. Indeed, shortly after this, the *European Humanist Federation* actually [proposed](#) the creation of a *European Observatory for Artificial Intelligence*...

In one of his [2021 Reith Lectures](#), Stuart Russell was asked if he thought AI posed an existential threat: “I think so, yes,” he replied, “making AI better and better makes the outcome for humanity worse and worse.” Russell also noted that, as AI takes our jobs, we are going to need to “become good at being human” in order to “support a human economy based largely on high value-added interpersonal services.” This looks to me like an open invitation to humanists and others of good will to step up to the plate.

The attack on science and reason

The Glasgow motion also notes that we’re seeing a rise in anti-science rhetoric and ‘fake news’. Indeed, facts and events are today being manipulated on an industrial scale by crooks, malcontents and ‘useful idiots’, and [weaponised](#) by hostile foreign powers, political opportunists and conspiracy theorists. This infodemic, which is facilitated by social media and aided by AI, is an attack on two of the ‘pillars’ of humanism, reason and truth, and on some of our most cherished human rights. It is undermining science and public health messaging, and it is causing

social division, destabilising democracy, and jeopardising global efforts to tackle climate change.

Change of tack?

Over the last ten years, Humanists UK has done a great job in putting humanism on the map, and lately, cataloguing the history of our movement. This is important work. But if the organisation is serious about tackling ‘emerging contemporary issues’ shouldn’t it be regularly commenting on what looks increasingly like the most serious set of existential threats in our history? They get no mention in the new five-year plan. It is true that many people and organisations are already campaigning on these issues, but as Scotland’s ‘[Eco-Humanists](#)’ point out: “humanists have the potential to add a rational and compassionate voice” and we’re manifestly not doing this. Indeed, with respect to global warming, the 2019 [Reykjavik Declaration](#) calls on humanists to “foster a social and political commitment to urgent action and long-term policymaking to mitigate and prevent climate change.” But as the IPCC (*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*) repeatedly [points out](#), time is not on our side.

You don’t have to be a specialist in epidemiology, artificial intelligence, misinformation, economics, or the climate crisis to have views on the social, moral and ethical issues raised. Perhaps someone in Glasgow will remind delegates about this because fine words are beginning to sound rather like empty rhetoric.

Mike Flood is Chair of Milton Keynes Humanists and runs [Fighting Fake](#). He has written this article in a purely personal capacity.



SEX

Is there still life in the old sausage?

Our honest and open
Humanist John Glazer



There are two subjects that are generally thought of as taboo. The first is asking people how much they earn. The second is discussing an older person's sex life once they get much past their 50th birthday. It is generally thought that the older a person gets, the less interest they have in sex. A misconception I believe rooted in our own feelings about our own parents and their sex lives. I know that when I make a comment about sex, even a humorous one, my own daughters who are both in their early forties pull a face and squirm with embarrassment.

I gave up 'sex' a year after my 69th birthday when I stopped being a sexagenarian and became a septuagenarian. Fortunately, it didn't seem to make much difference to my actual sex life which continued pretty much as before, which was as often as I could persuade my partner that some bedroom aerobics would make a major contribution to her wellbeing and general fitness level.

If 70 is the new 50, and now that I have reached my mid-seventies, I'm very enthusiastic that this status quo should continue for as long as possible. I'm sure that a healthy lifestyle is one of the major contributors to a healthy sex life. So, what are my tips to ensure that rumpy-pumpy doesn't fall off the agenda as we age? At number one



is plenty of regular exercise. Not just aerobic exercise but weight-training as well. Maintaining muscle mass also helps to maintain that most important of hormones – testosterone. Not only will this help to ensure a good blood flow to those parts of the anatomy which need to perform, but it also enhances one's own body image and psychological wellbeing.

At number two is diet. The big enemy here is sugar, not fat which has been the accepted wisdom for that last 50 years. Too much sugar leads to insulin resistance and a build-up ▷



of plaque adhering to the artery walls which restricts blood flow. A restricted blood flow means high blood pressure, and this will, as mentioned above, prove to be counter-productive to maintaining sexual performance. In addition, insulin resistance is likely to lead to accumulations of fat and a reduction in body image which psychologically will be an inhibiting factor.

Tip number three would be to cut back on alcohol as this is another lifestyle habit which is known to lead to erection problems.

The first thing to get straight is that studies have shown that one third of pensioners engage in sex twice a month, which as a septuagenarian is encouraging. So, what does research tell us about the benefits of maintaining a sex life as we get older?

Doing it once a week halves the risk of a heart attack according to a Belfast University study and a roll in the hay at least once a week raises immunoglobulin levels which is a cold- and flu-fighting antibody. So regular sex is not to be sniffed at!

A Royal Edinburgh Hospital paper showed that sex three times a week could make you look ten years younger. Dr David Weeks, who conducted the study, says sex in women can trigger the production of a human growth hormone that helps them keep their youthful looks. Sex also pumps oxygen around the body, boosting the circulation and the flow of nutrients to the skin, making it glow.

Another study, this time at Coventry University, proved that regular sex led to sharper cognitive functions. Carried out in 2016 on more than 6,800 people aged 50-89, it showed that those who were still active in the bedroom had sharper cognitive function. Women who were sexually active scored higher on both word tests and number puzzles. This could be because hormones like

dopamine are released during sex, which could help cognitive function. "Sex helps to release endorphins, which are the 'feel good' neurotransmitters," explains Dr Glenville from Coventry. "It also increases the production of oxytocin, sometimes called the 'love hormone', which can help with pain relief, and it can help reduce stress too."

In addition, a Trinity College Dublin study of 8,000 people over the age of 50 found that couples who maintain a healthy sex life in later life were less likely to feel depressed and were more positive about ageing.

So, with all these benefits and very few negatives, getting older doesn't seem so bad after all.



On the sausage theme... assistant editor David Warden in Berlin





Organised religion has culturally appropriated spirituality

I have just finished reading the excellent May 2022 edition of *Humanistically Speaking*, with its focus on the concept of spirituality. This is an edition which definitely deserves to be read world-wide.

I view all mass-organised religions as being imperial relics. All former imperial states used religious myths and legends to promote systems of laws to support their own legitimacy, otherwise based solely on naked military power.

Secularism is primarily concerned with separation between the state and religious powers. Clearly, the ruling elites over millennia have bonded organised religion and organised states together, which may help to explain why the United Kingdom situation is one where a medieval state is still partly bonded together with an established state religion within a semi- (some might say pseudo-) modern democratic political system.

States and organised religions have conspired together for millennia to achieve cultural appropriation of all former religious and spiritual practices.

Early forms of celebration of the natural cycles of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter have all experienced cultural appropriation by former imperial religious powers. It is interesting to note that the Roman Empire retained Sunday (a day when believers worshipped the Sun) as its day of rest after

making Christianity the imperial religion, subtly introducing the mythical Sun-god Jesus (always shown with a Sun-halo around his head) as a form of cultural appropriation of the earlier and original form of Sun-worship.

Organised religion insidiously inserted itself into otherwise largely secular ceremonies, such as Remembrance Day in the United Kingdom. The original ceremony was introduced to mark the contribution of those who fought and died in World War One. There was no religious component. Gradually – largely led by the Bishop of London – the Church of England insinuated itself into the occasion and inexorably expanded its role within an otherwise largely secular remembrance ceremony.

This is why humanists grapple with concepts such as spirituality today. Organised religion has culturally appropriated spirituality until it is now virtually indistinguishable from religion itself.

We need a new word to describe the feelings of joy and bliss we experience individually and collectively together. I am no football 'fan' but I 'get' the sense of joy and rapture they feel when 'their' team scores a goal. Presumably, the same feelings apply to rugby and cricket 'fans' too.

Thank you to all the editorial team at *Humanistically Speaking* for producing another truly thought-provoking online magazine.

John Dowdle, President of Watford Area Humanists



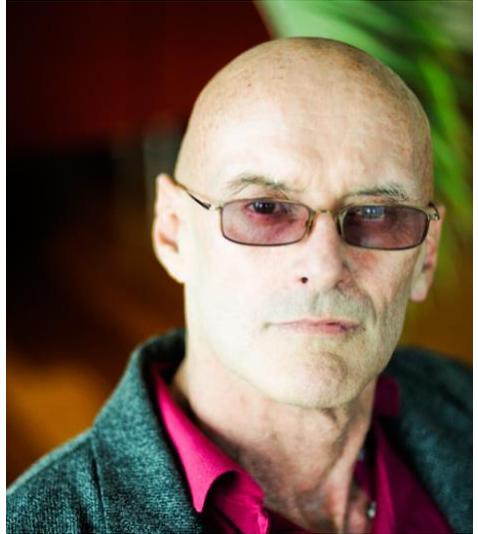


Anti-Humanism in Steve Banks's Music

After reading about Steve Banks's music in the May issue of *Humanistically Speaking*, I was quite interested to see what *The Blue Pearl: A One World Oratorio* was all about as I too am very interested in humanist art. I was pretty dismayed to see, however, that it was very heavily influenced by the new age thinker Ken Wilber.

Wilber is ridiculously prolific and hard to summarise, and he comes across as scientific at times. But he also specifically places humanist, rational, scientific thinking BELOW his so-called integral stages that draw 'wisdom' from shamans and the like. (Google 'Wilber-Combs Lattice' to see an example of this.) If you read the lyrics for Steve Banks's work, much of it comes from Wilber. And the ten part 'Anamnesis' that traces the supposed development of humanity puts 'Rational' in the number four spot where it was lampooned as shallow and unwise. Wilber's work is tricky like that – he sucks people in by sounding scientific and rational one minute, and the next ... not so much. As such, I think Banks's music, though occasionally laudable, had too many strands of anti-humanism in it for me to recommend it. I'm all for Humanists exploring different things and having different opinions on matters that are hard to grasp or have great complexity in their consequences, but there are a few core values that bind Humanists together and I found Steve Banks's lyrics to contravene those.

Ed Gibney, North East Humanists



Ken Wilber (above) is an American philosopher and writer on 'transpersonal psychology' and his own 'integral theory' – a philosophy which aims at the synthesis of all human knowledge and experience.

'Transpersonal psychology' explores topics such as 'spiritual self-development', 'self beyond the ego', 'peak experiences', 'mystical experiences', 'trance', 'altered states of consciousness', and so on.

According to Wikipedia, 'Integral theory' is Ken Wilber's attempt to bring together a wide range of theories and thinkers into one single framework. It is portrayed as a 'theory of everything' including 'matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit'.



Poet's Corner

By Alex Williams



Experience

When full of youth I'm full of regret
With a hey, ho, the moon and stars
Scared that I've not quite made it yet
For all lives end and all lives pass.

A few years on I'm less on track
With a hey, ho, the moon and stars
For I wasted youth by looking back.
For all lives end and all lives pass.

Older still, I can't shake the habit
With a hey, ho, the moon and stars
I turn to the past and try to grab it
For all lives end and all lives pass.

I try to fix what can't be mended
With a hey, ho, the moon and stars
Pulling apart what's mixed and blended
For all lives end and all lives pass.

Now ancient and lame, I curse my life
With a hey, ho, the moon and stars
Curse wasted chances, pain and strife
For all lives end and all lives pass.

Nearing death, I scour the past
With a hey, ho, the moon and stars
Searching for some joy in that ocean vast
For all lives end and all lives pass.

But none can I find from stern nor bow
With a hey, ho, the moon and stars
For the only time I had to live was now
For all lives end and all lives pass.

***Secular Verses (2021)* by Alex Williams is a collection of original poems inspired by secularism, atheism, and humanism. Available [here](#)
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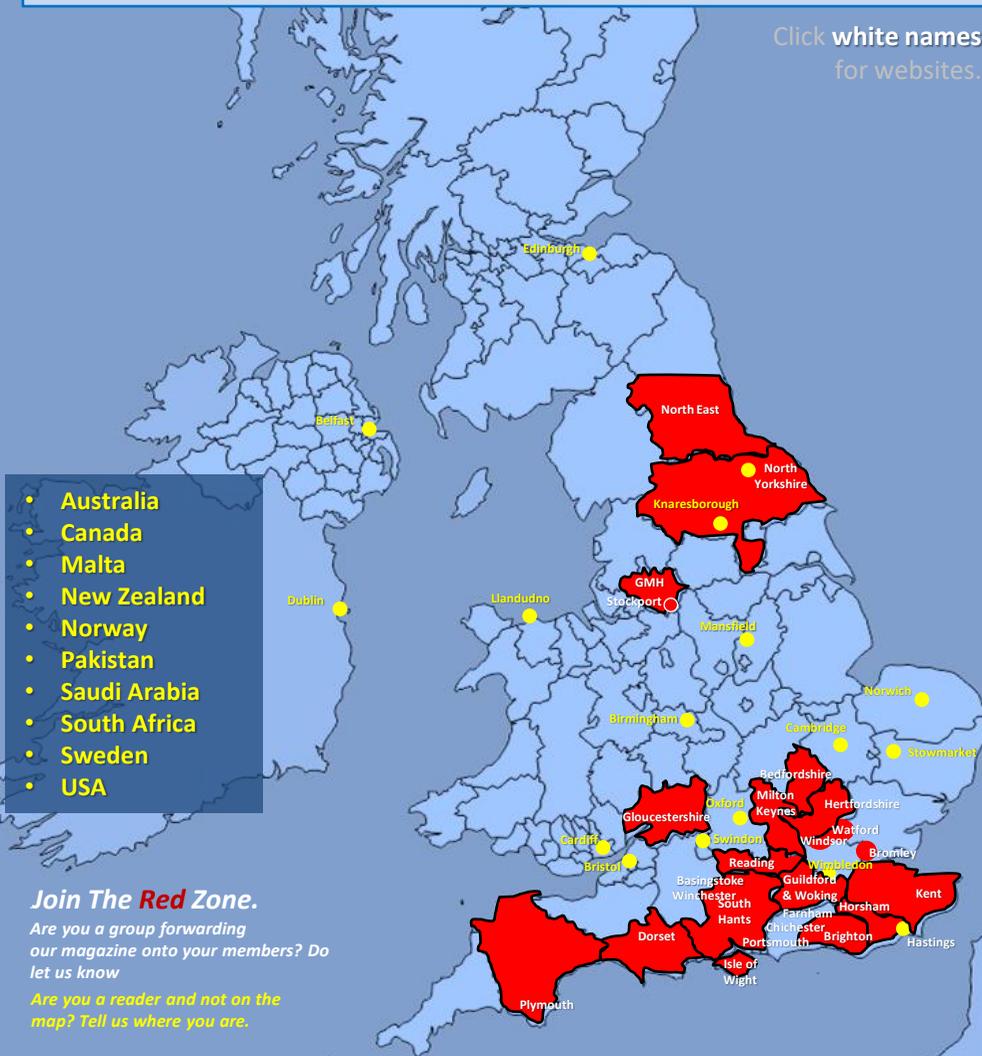
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