

# Humanistically Speaking

January 2022

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

## WAR & PEACE

Richard Norman: a humanist consensus on war?

Steven Pinker on Why Rationality Matters

A Humanist in the Falklands War

War, Peace, and Sex-Strikes

Humanism in Africa

Climate Wars

Poet's corner

Letters



Image courtesy of the Independent

Humanistically Speaking



send an email

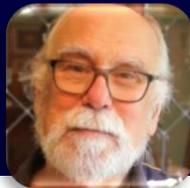
YouTube



# In this Issue

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

David Brittain  
Executive Editor



## Contents:

1. Cover story
2. Editor's Welcome
3. News Section
5. State of the Union – SCEHN network
7. The Glamour of War
9. Humanism in Africa **NEW SERIES**
11. An Army Chaplain
14. Dear Darwin
15. Aaron Explores
17. Brittain Interviews: Rich Maddison
18. Richard Norman
20. War, Peace, and Sex-Strikes
22. Book Review: Steven Pinker
23. War and Killing – Paul Ewans
25. Climate wars
27. Readers' Responses
28. Conscientious Objectors
30. Poet's Corner
31. Groups Map page
32. Back Cover - Editors



## CONTENT DISCLAIMER

Our editorial team consists of humanist volunteers. Articles are written by them, or by our readers and contributors, and published at the discretion of the editorial team. We strive to publish content in line with humanist aims and values but views expressed by writers are their own and not necessarily shared by any associated Humanist groups or Humanists UK.

Dear reader,

We at *Humanistically Speaking* hope you have had a happy winter festival. You'll notice that we have decided to start this brand New Year with a fresh look on our front page. I hope you like the new livery – please tell us what you think!

This issue opens with an update on Dorset Humanists' choir, followed by a report from the SCEHN network's Chair, Anthony Lewis, who describes the benefits of Humanist groups getting together to form self-help networks.

But this issue deals primarily with humanist perspectives on war, and there is a fascinating article from Simon Whipple who was an officer in the Falklands War, plus a report on the experiences of a *Christian* chaplain in the army (there are no Humanist chaplains in the British forces yet).

There are also some truly outstanding observations from Professor Richard Norman, Stephen Pinker, and a fascinating recorded interview with Air Vice Marshall Rich Maddison, who is the Humanist Champion of the British Armed Forces.

But there are also some outstanding articles from Paul Ewans about conscientious objectors, and Maggie Hall detailing the peace-making role women have played, including withholding sex until their men negotiated for peace – examples of which are more common than I ever thought!

But there is *so much more* in this issue, including the first of what will be a series of articles about the struggles that Humanists in Africa have experienced against ignorance, prejudice, superstition and violence – so Lynda Tilley's article is a must read at page nine. The overseas theme will be ongoing, so if anyone would like to write about Humanism elsewhere in the world, we would love to hear from you!

Added to all this, are our usual regular articles, ranging from *Dear Darwin* to *Readers' Responses* to Alex Williams' *Poets Corner*. Overall, I have been enthralled, informed, inspired – and sometimes moved, by some of these articles. So I am happy, and privileged, to report that *Humanistically Speaking* is still getting better, and this month's issue is, quite simply, the best yet. Happy New Year!



# Humanist News



## Critical Thinking Workshops for primary schools in Nigeria

Nigerian Humanist Leo Igwe writes: “The Oyo state education board has granted us permission to organize critical thinking workshops in all the local government areas. We have started with Ibadan South West. I have hired four part-time staff who are delivering the training. We held a training workshop for the teachers. Each primary school sent a teacher to this workshop. In the coming weeks and months, we shall roll out workshops and teacher trainings in the eight zones. These workshops, including books, are delivered free of charge thanks to your support and sponsorship. We are looking forward to holding hundreds of training workshops for teachers and pupils, and distributing tens of thousands of critical

thinking books in the coming year(s). I will be sending reports and photos as we move along.

We need hands to help us: get sponsorships, set up a web site, and promote the project. For some time we have longed for this opportunity. Now it is here. The cost for a workshop is 200 dollars and it covers the costs of books, pupil and teacher trainings.

Please tell your friends and organisations about our critical thinking workshops. Encourage them to sponsor a workshop. We will send each sponsor a report and photos from the workshop.

A Critical Thinking workshop for school pupils and training for primary school teachers in Ibadan South West (6) was sponsored by *Humanistically Speaking*.

For more information email Leo Igwe [nskepticleo@yahoo.com](mailto:nskepticleo@yahoo.com)





# Humanist News



Standing: Elaine, Uschi, Margaret, Lucy, Katerina, Pat; Kneeling: George, Phil, David, David (pianist), Mike  
Photo: by Aaron

## Humanist Choir Festive Performance

Dorset Humanists Choir, also known as *The Hawkridge Singers*, performed a variety of festive songs at a humanist event in December. The Bournemouth-based singing group recently re-formed after an enforced break since March 2020.

The singers performed a range of secular songs including *The Christmas Song* (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire), *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*, *White Christmas*, and *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*.

The group was named in memory of Christine Hawkridge, a former member of the choir, who left a generous legacy in her Will enabling the group to buy an electronic piano.



What's happening in your local humanist group? If you have news and photos to share we'd love to hear from you.



## STATE OF THE UNION

**By Anthony Lewis, chair of Windsor Humanists and South Central England Humanists Network**

**South Central England Humanists Network is, so far, the only regional network of local humanist groups in the UK. It was founded in 2018 by local groups in the region in partnership with Humanists UK. Membership currently comprises thirteen groups stretching East-West from Brighton to Dorset, and North-South from Reading to the Isle of Wight. Two more groups are planning to join us early in 2022.**

The overall objective of the network is to provide support for the volunteers running our local humanist groups. Its remit is laid out in its Charter:

1. Facilitate networking directly between local groups
2. Foster mutual support and co-operation across our region
3. Organise appropriate regional activities as required
4. Support Humanist UK campaigns

I'm currently the Chair of Windsor Humanists and I appreciated the support provided by the network, especially during the pandemic when my motivation waned somewhat with each successive lockdown. Because of this direct personal experience of the benefits of the network I was very happy to take over as

chair of the network last summer from David Brittain. David has unbounded enthusiasm and has moved on to be the executive editor of this magazine – an exciting and unique venture spun out of the network. It brilliantly illustrates the benefits that arise from just getting together three or so times a year. Who knows what further delights will emerge post-pandemic!

Local humanist groups are so important because they offer a local footprint and visibility for the nonreligious perspective. They help to embed Humanism directly into our local communities. They are a key conduit for building and nurturing friendships between humanists locally, and thereby support the wider Humanists UK volunteer base locally. They give our humanist volunteers a 'home'. Local groups also extend, deepen and amplify the reach of Humanists UK beyond that which is possible via national campaigns or virtual networks, and give these initiatives an important and vital local focus and flavour.

Over the summer, I conducted a series of introductory chats via Zoom with most of our local groups. It was clear that the larger groups such as Brighton, Farnham and Dorset have coped well during the pandemic, but the smaller groups have suffered with ▷



attendance at Zoom events dwindling as virtual fatigue set in. It was also clear how much our local groups rely on the commitment of their dedicated volunteers who do so much for the humanist cause at the local level in our communities.

Many of those I spoke to wear a dizzying array of multiple humanist hats! For example, many are involved in inter-faith dialogue, speaking in schools, attending local SACREs, organising local humanist events or contributing to Humanists UK or National Secular Society campaigns. There are so many varied ways to contribute and get active in your local humanist community.

I'd like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and admiration to every one of our volunteers for all their contributions and hard work. It's very much recognised and appreciated. We are thinking about having an annual 'Volunteer of the Year Award' to highlight and celebrate the contribution of our volunteers and to visibly say *thank you*. Stay tuned for further announcements about this here in *Humanistically Speaking* in due course.

At our Council Meeting in September, which was held outside in my garden in Windsor, we agreed three areas of focus for 2022:

1. Relaunch some of our smaller local groups in 2022 as we emerge from the pandemic by supporting them with a 'buddy' from neighbouring larger groups. You can expect to see specific relaunch emails heading your way from your local group in the new year with a focus on getting people to volunteer and get involved!
2. Hold a co-ordination Zoom meeting for our SACRE reps (Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education) across

our region so we can spread best practice and arm our reps with information about what is happening in adjacent SACREs. Most SACREs are isolated from what is going on in their neighbouring boroughs. Most of our humanist SACRE reps are also fairly solitary and isolated. We hope that by linking up and sharing best practice from adjacent SACREs we will empower our humanist reps to get the non-religious perspective embedded even further into RE syllabuses.

3. Liaise with Young Humanists and Student Humanists to investigate how we might forge links between 'Town & Gown' to improve our age demographics in the longer term. For example, Reading and Windsor are keen to link up with their nearby universities but they struggle to know where to begin. If anyone out there can help with this, please get in touch.

Finally, on a more personal note, through getting involved with Windsor Humanists my husband Rick and I have made some real like-minded friends locally whom we would not have met any other way. We both feel much more connected to Windsor through being involved with Humanism in ways neither of us could have envisaged when we started this journey in 2014. Local groups go a long way to meeting the deep need within us all, as human beings, to belong. So, pop along to your local group early in 2022 and get involved. You'll be made to feel very welcome!

## Further reading

[Humanism and Community](#) by Anthony Lewis

[My Mortality](#) by Anthony Lewis

[scehn@humanistgroups.org.uk](mailto:scehn@humanistgroups.org.uk)



# The glamour of war

*By Simon Whipple, committee member of Dorset Humanists, who served in the Falklands War in 1982 as a junior Army Officer*

**When I was a teenage boy I often day-dreamed about taking part in military action. I was always on the winning side, I was never killed or badly wounded, and the fantasies always concluded with me being lauded as a hero and rewarded with wealth and adulation. And so I was ripe to be recruited to the Army.**

The Army had a very skilful advertising agency whose campaign persuaded me that it would be glamorous and enjoyable to join the Army for a few months as a prospective officer in the gap between school and university. At the end of nine months I was, if anything, more enthusiastic, and I was persuaded to come back to the Army as a regular officer after I had finished at university.

Roll forward eight years, to April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1982, and you would have found me as a commissioned lieutenant who had taken up his post as the Intelligence Officer with 5 Airborne Brigade on the very day that the Argentinians invaded the Falkland Islands.

The following three months were the most intense, and exhilarating, of my life. I learnt from scratch all about the Argentinian armed forces and the Falkland Islands, and then ensured that the three thousand men in our brigade knew about their enemy. We trained in Wales to simulate the terrain of the Falklands, and then went to war, travelling in style on the requisitioned liner the QE2.

It was a relief to take part in an operation



where there were no moral dilemmas. Unlike in Northern Ireland, I was convinced that our cause was righteous. The British nation was caught up in war fever, and any civilians I spoke to were supportive.

Among the soldiers I worked with the enthusiasm to go to war was intense. Soldiers who have qualified as airborne forces have been rigorously trained and want to practise their skills whenever a handy little war arises.

Very few people had any doubts that we would win the war. As our ship left Southampton I heard a lone Welsh voice shout from the cheering crowd of spectators, "Keep your head down boyo!" but otherwise we all believed in bloodless victory.

Like my colleagues, my thoughts were slightly detached from reality. I thought it likely that I would be killed, but I was not afraid of death; as an intelligence officer I knew the enemy's capabilities and equipment, and consequently that our fight could be a close-run affair, but I felt no anxiety that we would not win.



Would you like your own copy sent directly to you via email?

Contact [Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto:Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com) type in SUBSCRIBE

I suppose wars would never occur if the participants were completely rational. In the same way as no one would take part in a hazardous sport if they rationally weighed up the risks versus the benefits.

As it turned out, my war was, to a great extent, uneventful. Because my job kept me in the brigade headquarters, I was safely ten miles away from the fighting. I spent much of my time at a desk reading reports that arrived from our patrols, and then sending signals summarising what they had learnt to our bosses. I watched the fighting on the mountains over Port Stanley at night, too far to hear, but able to view a magnificent fireworks display.

No one tried to kill me, I never fired my rifle, and I never saw anyone injured. The most alarming sight I viewed was when one of our anti-aircraft missiles misfired and turned like a Catherine wheel before plunging into the ground. I was flying past in a helicopter as this occurred. I ought to have felt scared, but instead, it just seemed rather exciting.

My immediate superior, who was a very fine officer, was killed when his helicopter was shot down, but I was too engaged in my work to mourn his death. I do so, however, at every Remembrance Sunday.

My memory of warfare is that it is exciting and glamorous. The Falklands Conflict was one of the few times in my life when I have been part of a cause which I felt was completely worthwhile, where my enthusiasm was shared by hundreds of other men, and where we were all admired for our nobility. There are very few events in civilian life which replicate such an experience. To take part as a soldier in a just war is, indeed, part of what humankind is all about.

I don't know how I would have felt if I had been exposed to the grisly reality of war, such as seeing wounded men and having to fight

***“My memory of warfare is that it is exciting and glamorous...”***

for my own survival. One of my colleagues had a role which required him to visit the hospital ships to keep track of the wounded men from the Brigade. What he saw shocked him so much that he became a pacifist and resigned his commission.

I am sure that a Humanist readership would love to hear what influence religion played among the soldiers. It may surprise you to hear that, despite us all feeling that we were close to death, there was very little interest in seeking God's support. Voluntary church parades on the ship heading south had only a very small attendance, about thirty soldiers from a possible 2,000. There was a parade shortly after the ceasefire at which prayers were said for those who died in the *Galahad* disaster. This was generally regarded as moving, and probably provided a useful element of closure for those who had been affected.

The Argentinians had a different experience. I examined dozens of abandoned Argentinian weapons where the conscript who owned that gun had glued a picture of a saint, with a motto which, roughly translated, said “Saint X will protect you” to the butt of his rifle. It is very sad to think of those 17-year-old boys who spent months sitting in chilly trenches waiting for the British to attack and hoping that their favourite saint would protect them.

My conclusion is that the British soldier in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century does not feel the need for spiritual support to cope with the anxiety of war, although perhaps the considerable number of subsequent suicides of Falklands veterans shows that spiritual support provided at the time would have been beneficial later, even if the soldiers had at the time repressed their own feelings of shock, disgust or fear.



# Humanism in Africa

*Part One: An Overview  
by Lynda Tilley*



**Humanism: It's a word that symbolises and defines certain things and yet it's so much more than that. In Africa, the word 'Humanism' symbolises who we've always been, and each country here has their own word for it. In South Africa we use the word 'Ubuntu' which means: 'A person is a person through other human beings'.**



Humanist Action Ghana team pauses for a group photo

As Africans, we're raised and live by things defined as 'Humanism' – honesty, tolerance, helping each other, working together to improve our communities, achieving more together than alone. If we have more, we give more – not necessarily money. We look out for family, neighbours and friends. We're not okay if they aren't.

Our main religions are Christianity (49 %) and Islam (42%). Every Humanist I've asked has this in common – all questioned their God and holy books from when they were children. All agree that we've always been who we are now: good people, with true hearts. We've always helped others and given back. Qualities once credited to our respective gods, which were ours all along, still are, but we're happier and more peaceful now we're religion-free. Whichever religion we've left, whichever country we're from, as Humanists we are all persecuted in some way for our lack of belief. Most of us don't tell people that we have no god; not even our families.

Many lead double lives. In countries like Nigeria, it really is a matter of life or death if we're found out. Ex-Muslims have it the hardest of all. But we battle in all countries. We either can't register groups, or we get harassed by religious leaders or have constant police interference. No matter the Constitution of our country or International Law, at the end of the day 'rules' are made and enforced by religious leaders.

Many of our Humanist groups and efforts – like our Humanist schools in Uganda, are backed by international organisations, or initially set up and funded by them. Humanist Action Ghana is a perfect example. It's supported by 'Foundation Beyond Belief'. Six years ago, they ran a vocational training programme for women accused of 'witchcraft' and have now formed their own Ghanaian-run non-profit organisation, expanded their programme and are moving into an area of Ghana where persecution of women is very high.



Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term meaning "humanity". It is sometimes translated as "I am because we are", or "humanity towards others".



***“Dr Leo Igwe – the Father of Humanism in Africa... a beacon of light, an example of what African Humanism can achieve.”***

**Click image to hear David Brittain’s interview with Leo**

Others, like *Faithless Hijabi* in Tanzania have a mental health programme funded by Humanists International. They support ex-Muslim women in Africa and worldwide and are also part of a menstrual health programme for girls in Tanzania.

Kenya Humanist Alliance are affiliates of the ‘Beyond Belief’ network in their Food Security Project but rely on donations for the widows’ camp and orphans’ home they run alongside their Young Humanist Mothers’ programme. They house orphans and victims of female genital mutilation and young victims of forced marriages, domestic violence or the ‘stigma’ of divorce.

We wouldn’t have been able to achieve what we have so far without the support of overseas Humanists. For this we are extremely grateful. Many of us battle for funding as our communities would rather donate to the church or causes managed by them.

The promotion and growth of Humanism in Africa and the inspiration behind so many of our groups I credit to a man who has worked tirelessly, selflessly throughout his lifetime to promote critical thinking and Humanist values in Africa – Nigerian Humanist and Human Rights Advocate, Dr Leo Igwe. He is the “Father of Humanism” in Africa for this generation and he’s achieved all this in

one of our most extreme religiously-controlled and lawless countries, Nigeria, notorious for its Human Rights abuses. Yet Dr Igwe is the Founder of the Nigerian Humanist Movement – a beacon of light, an example of what African Humanism can achieve.

Dr Igwe made it his life’s mission to end witchcraft accusations and the persecution of alleged witches in Africa. Many of the accused include children. He’s also responsible for introducing Critical Thinking into Nigeria’s Primary Schools, lobbying to have it included as a permanent subject. This is groundbreaking for African schooling and its future.

It’s no surprise then that Nigeria was the country where Humanist groups across Africa finally connected and joined forces, when the President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, Mubarak Bala, was ‘arrested’ for a Facebook post, just under two years ago. Mubarak, who has not yet been tried, is still imprisoned and faces the death penalty under Muslim Shari’a law for his ‘crime’ of alleged ‘blasphemy’. Humanists around Africa took a stand for Nigeria that day – we’re all there still and with each day of Mubarak’s incarceration new friendships are formed and we’re getting stronger together. A new generation of critical thinking and godless Africans – this has never happened before. It is significant.





# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ARMY CHAPLAIN

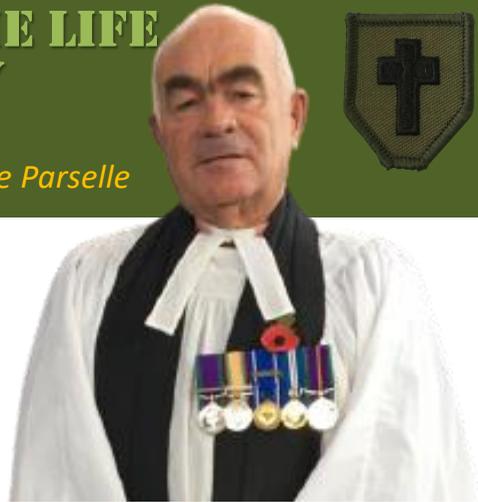
*By the Reverend Steve Parselle*



**We were about to go into dinner when word reached us in the officers' mess that there had been a serious accident at sea off the coast of Cyprus involving three rigid raiders\* and a platoon of officer cadets on their final overseas exercise before passing out and completing one year of training at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. I was one of three chaplains on the staff at the academy and two of us, the Roman Catholic chaplain and myself, were taking part in the exercise. It was thought that there was a fatality.**

The College Commander was insistent that none of the directing staff rush to the accident scene or to the hospital where the shocked survivors were taken. I did not agree and although he was a colonel, and at that time I was humble captain, he was visibly not thinking clearly and was under stress. I politely discussed with him that I and the Roman Catholic chaplain should be allowed to do our job of pastoral work, but he would not be persuaded. I politely informed him that we were going.

One of the cadets had been killed, crushed between two overturned rigid raiders in rough seas and the rest of the platoon was now at the hospital where we joined them. The Catholic Chaplain and I simply sat with the cadets and listened to them and allowed them to weep for their young friend and comrade. In war the death of a soldier does



not stop the war and in this exercise the survivors were soon back out in the field to continue the exercise. Training had to be realistic if it was to be effective. The Roman Catholic chaplain and I were simply alongside them and accompanied them the next morning on their final dawn attack. Later that day a young Royal Marine Officer who was responsible for the training of this platoon was visibly concerned as he had to go and identify the body of the cadet who had been killed. He had never seen a dead body before and was noticeably uneasy at the prospect. He had come to know the officer cadet well over the course of the year they had spent together. I asked if he wanted me to accompany him and he immediately accepted my offer.

A few weeks later at the ball to celebrate the passing out of this group of cadets into army officers, almost every member of that platoon came up to me and said thank you for all I had done to help them on that fatal exercise. My response was that I did nothing, but they replied, "Padre you were there with us and just having you there made so much difference."





***Chaplains are not civilians attached to the Army, but members of it.***

I could have shared countless other examples of my experience as an Armed Forces Chaplain with over twenty four years of service during times of combat, training or in barracks; the fatal shooting of a soldier by his best friend during a live firing exercise; befriending a defendant in the guardroom (barracks jail) who had murdered his father, or a soldier who had murdered his baby son; defending soldiers and officers who had no voice in a hierarchical system whether they were being bullied, being deprived of natural justice or in need of advice or just wanting someone to sit and listen to them; challenging those in command for poor decisions they had made; informing a fellow officer that his son had been murdered by the IRA just a few miles away from where we were in Northern Ireland; comforting families who had travelled to the province because their loved one, a soldier, had been killed in a bus bombing. Hardly a day went by during my years as a chaplain without a soldier or an officer coming up to me and saying, "Padre, can I have a word?"

One of the more famous Army Chaplains, the Revd Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, known affectionately as 'Woodbine Willy' because of

his habit of handing out woodbine cigarettes to troops in the trenches during the First World War alongside his spiritual advice, was once asked by a younger chaplain for advice on how to be a chaplain. He said this, "Take a box of fags in your haversack, and a great deal of love in your heart, and go up to them, laugh with them, joke with them; you can pray with them sometimes, but pray for them always."

Army Chaplains have for centuries drawn alongside soldiers, officers, and their families of all faiths or none as one of them, to offer pastoral care and the services of the Church or their faith group to those in the unit to which they are attached. Chaplains wear the same uniform, have completed a course of training at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, hold a commission and go wherever their unit goes, sharing the hardships and dangers of combat being away from family and friends for long periods of time, taking part in the same training exercises with all the discomforts. Simply being and being the padre to everyone in that unit. Chaplains are not civilians attached to the Army, but members of it.



They are experienced clergy sent by or with the authority of their Church or faith group to offer military personnel the spiritual support and services they would receive had they been at home. They conduct religious services, rites of passage, study groups, and offer spiritual and moral advice. They have time to listen, to be a friend and care for all souls and their families regardless of their rank and status.

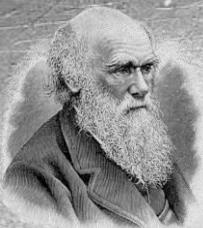
The Army is a young, vibrant, active community. The average age of personnel is 30. There are many young and single soldiers away from the normal support networks that being at home offers. Chaplains help to provide some of that missing support. It was a ministry I loved and found it a great privilege to work alongside some of the most generous, motivated and enthusiastic groups of people, even if they were not all saints. It was an honour to have been their padre and to have served with them.



The Revd Steve Parselle is a retired Church of England priest who served for 24 years as an Armed Forces Chaplain in the Army and a short time in the Royal Navy. He saw active service in Northern Ireland, the First Gulf War and the Former Yugoslavia. Among his many postings he served as Director of Chaplaincy Education and Training at Ampert House, the Armed Forces Chaplains' Training Centre and as the assistant chaplain at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. During his few years in the Royal Navy Steve was chaplain in the Royal Navy's Ice breaker HMS ENDURANCE and enjoyed spending time in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean and the runs ashore on the trip down.



*The Dutch Armed Forces have uniformed humanist chaplains. Why not the UK? Let us know what you think.*



Charles Darwin.

# Dear Darwin

Ask Charles your difficult questions...



The Mount, Shrewsbury.  
Darwin's family home.

*Dear Darwin*

As you know, scientists were profoundly impressed by the power of Newton's Theory of Gravity, in particular its ability to explain the movements of the planets. But it became apparent that the Theory did not explain anomalies in the orbit of the planet Mercury, and – as you may not know – this problem was only solved when Einstein published his Theory of Relativity many years later. Do you think it is possible that something similar may happen in respect of your Theory of Evolution, that your Theory may turn out not to be a complete explanation of variety in the living world? I naturally assume that you never saw any signs that this might be the case yourself.

Humanities Graduate

*Dear Sir or Madam*

It is quite a challenge for me to keep up with all the developments in and challenges to Darwinism since my demise, but it rather looks as though natural selection is holding up well against its competitors. For example, you may have heard of 'punctuated equilibrium' (Stephen Jay Gould) and 'saltation speciation' (also known as abrupt speciation) but until some convincing alternative to the *mechanism* of natural selection is supplied my defenders (dare I say disciples?) will continue to claim that macroevolution is merely microevolution writ large. From the vantage point of your own century it would appear that there is, as yet, no call for theory change nor any prospect of such change in the near future.\*

*Dear Darwin*

Given that you spent most of your scientific career working from home, I wonder if you have any advice for those of us who are now doing the same? How did Mrs Darwin cope with you being about the place all the time?

House Husband

*My dear fellow*

The best advice I can give you is to acquire a large property in the country with sufficient space for your wife, children, nannies, maids, servants, gardeners, barnacles and so forth. My own dear wife was generally engaged in pursuits appropriate to her own sex although from time to time she did assist me with some aspects of my scientific work. Our domestic affairs were, therefore, conducted in an atmosphere of relative tranquillity.

*Dear Darwin*

I have heard that you saw the birth of your first child, William Erasmus, as an excellent opportunity to collect data on the expression of emotion in humans, and that you consequently caused your infant son some mild pain so that you could observe and record his response to it. Was Mrs Darwin aware of these experiments?

Humanitarian

*Kind Sir or Madam*

I confess that Mrs Darwin was on occasion somewhat disconcerted by my single-minded pursuit of scientific objectivity but otherwise reassured by my fatherly devotion to our dear children.



\*Charles is indebted to Michael Ruse *Darwinism and Its Discontents* (2006), especially chapter 6, *Limitations and Restrictions*.

# Aaron Explores

## Are million-man armies a thing of the past?



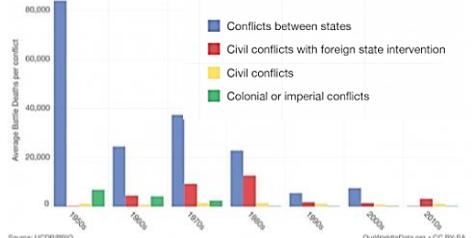
**The human race has become very skilled at our ability to kill each other, with our weapons becoming ever more sophisticated, yet it may surprise you to know that battle deaths have reduced drastically over the years. Join me as I explore whether humanity is actually growing up... or not.**

The chart to the right demonstrates a very clear decline in battlefield deaths over the years, possibly not what people in the 1960s would have expected as nuclear weapons proliferated, along with chemical and biological weapons, joined later by 'nuclear-light' – the radiological or dirty bombs. Whilst we planned, trained and prepared for all scenarios the biggest 'thorn in the side' for all those years was a single man with a gun, or a hidden man with a bomb – this being the reality of Northern Ireland. Yet unlike Israel, where religious and ideological conflict has remained ever-present for the best part of a century, the United Kingdom and Ireland have managed to resolve their issues and peace, of a sort, exists. Is this a human success story?

Our armaments have got better, lighter, more lethal, and our weapons operators better trained and equipped, and yet the number of people we choose to shoot at decreases. No longer do countries carpet bomb a nation to win the game. Strategic smart weapons are used with pinpoint accuracy, and although there are always examples of technology

Average number of battle deaths per conflict since 1946, by type

Only conflicts in which at least one party was the government of a state and which generated more than 25 battle-related deaths are included. Deaths due to disease or famine caused by conflict are excluded. Extra-judicial killings in custody are also excluded.



Source: UCDFP/PRO  
Note: The war categories paraphrase UCDFP/PRO's technical definitions of 'Extrasystemic', 'Internal', 'Internationalized external' and 'International' respectively. In a small number of cases where wars were paraded more than one type, deaths have been apportioned evenly to each type.

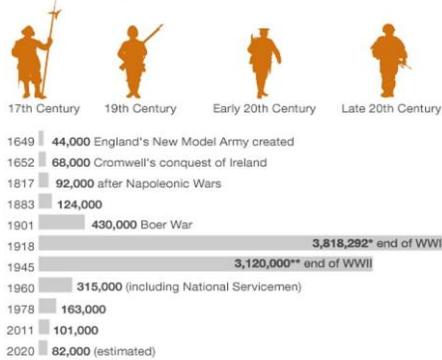
failing, with the wrong target being hit or civilians being wounded, compared to warfare in the last century we've come a long way. Civilians are no longer fair game, at least for most of the civilised world, and this very fact separates the international community into two distinct camps: Geneva convention nations (which would include, up to a point, Russia and China) and independent actors, primarily those with religious cultures. Surely holding a faith should make one *less* inclined to take life, even more so the lives of those innocents who are not armed or part of the fight, but apparently this is not so.

Another metric by which we can judge our humanity is the wars we have fought over recent years. They have either been interventions such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and Libya, where we have gone in to keep the peace or to stop genocidal actions taking place, or a response to terrorist actions. So, are 'nation-on-nation' wars a thing of the past? Our last conflict of this nature was against Argentina, yet neither ▷



Have you served in the military? Are you a member of Defence Humanists? Share your thoughts with us...

### British Army Regulars in numbers



\*Including volunteers \*\*Including the women of the ATS  
Source: National Army Museum and MoD

nation set foot on the homeland of the other. The conflict took place on the remote Falkland Islands.

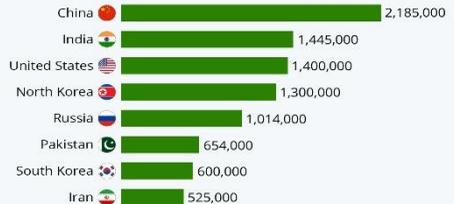
Looking at our defence stance we can see the decline in the number of UK soldiers over the years, with no recent war requiring additional personnel from the civilian population. So maybe conscription is a thing of the past? Our much reduced forces would not be able to repel an unstoppable army, yet the threat of a nuclear strike can and has done. The implication of this is that we no longer need a 300,000 strong army, the rationale being that if a 100,000 strong force couldn't solve the problem, it would escalate beyond what boots on the ground alone could achieve. Humanists may well have mixed views on this being a good or bad thing, yet the nuclear deterrent has both kept the peace and kept our army smaller since 1969. It is such a strong card in the players' pack that both sides of the House of Commons have kept it and agreed to continue to keep it.

So where does this leave our serving soldiers? Working in partnerships, that's where, and surely this is a commendably humanist idea.

One country going to war against another could be deemed rash, hot-headed, or based on vested interests such as oil, but when coalitions are built around mutually agreed aims of attrition, a group of nations can agree a series of stepped responses from sanctions to boots on the ground. The fact that few conflicts are fought alone these days also means that large million-man armies are not required. So one must ask why Russia and China are in this category, with 1,014,000 and 2,185,000 personnel, respectively.

### The Largest Militaries in the World

Countries with the largest total available active military manpower in 2021



Source: Global Firepower



statista

It does make you wonder what their leaders are planning or thinking in order to train, and finance such large militaries? Do we need a million-man army as well? No of course not. There is no conflict that a million-man army will win you that a smaller army can't achieve. The invasion of Iraq was perhaps the last large troop war for a generation. Technology has already developed to a level that that same war, if repeated, would be conducted entirely differently. Drones, unmanned aerial vehicles and remote operated ordnance will be the technologies of the future. But is the fact that our own troops won't be in danger a positive for humanity – or a negative?



The

# Brittain Interview

Our video conference with notable Humanists, interviewed by David Brittain

## Air Vice Marshall Rich Maddison

Air Vice Marshal Rich Maddison OBE served in Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan. He is also the Humanist Champion of the Armed Forces, and in this interview he talks candidly about how the British military is adapting to its increasingly non-religious personnel.

Defence Humanists is a section of Humanists UK. Anyone connected to the forces – including family and MoD civilians – can contact Defence Humanists via the Humanists UK website.



Please subscribe to *Humanistically Speaking*. You can join via our website, or just email us direct and type 'Subscribe'. We'll do the rest.



Humanist  
And  
Non-religious in  
Defence



Who would you like us to interview next?  
[Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto:Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com)



# Thought for the Day

## Richard Norman outlines a possible humanist consensus on the ethics of war

*Richard is a philosopher and a humanist. He is currently Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Kent, and Patron of Humanists UK.*



**In the build-up to the Iraq war in 2003, some members of the British Humanist Association (now Humanists UK) wanted it to take a stand against the proposed invasion. That didn't happen. Other members would have objected if it had, and there wasn't enough of a consensus. But not all humanists agree about assisted dying, and that doesn't stop Humanists UK taking a position. Is there any possible consensus on which humanists could agree about the rights and wrongs of war?**

### 1. Militarism

Martin Ceadel, in his book *Thinking about Peace and War*, helpfully lists five standard positions on the ethics of war. The first is militarism – the view that war is a positive good because of the qualities such as courage and dedication which it promotes. I doubt whether humanists would endorse this. They are acutely conscious of the terrible human costs of war. Wars typically involve the loss of thousands, often millions of lives, and for

humanists every life lost is an irretrievable loss, because it is the loss of the one life we have.

### 2. The promotion of justice

Ceadel's second position is crusading, a willingness to use aggressive war to promote justice. That might have more appeal, but I think we've learnt that bombing and killing people is not an effective way of protecting human rights. The widespread destruction and loss of life are likely to be too great to be outweighed.

### 3. Pacifism

Humanists might therefore be attracted to pacifism, the view that war is always wrong. This position appears to recognise the profound moral objection to the deliberate killing of another human being. But many humanists would regard it as too simple, for we always have to take into account the consequences of actions, and we cannot rule out the possibility that military action might, even if only occasionally, be the only way to prevent an even worse outcome, such as even greater loss of life.



## 4. Defencism

That might lead us to the position of defencism, the view that war is justified as a defence against aggression, but not in any other circumstances. This is a widely held view. As Paul Ewans writes in his article, it appeals to the analogy with individual self-defence. But the analogy is questionable. It seems plausible to say that if someone attacks me, I have the right to kill him if that is the only way to save my own life. It's his life or mine, and it seems right that it is the aggressor's life that is forfeited. But so-called defensive wars are typically fought to defend a country's borders, its territorial integrity, rather than the lives of its inhabitants. They may do that too, but they don't necessarily. The Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982 was an act of aggression, but the British military response did not save any lives. It brought about the deaths of 900 people who would not have died if the UK had instead pursued a diplomatic solution. In such a case, the analogy with the justification for individual self-defence fails.

## 5. Pacifism

That brings us to the fifth of Ceadel's positions, pacifism.\* Note that this is different from pacifism. Pacifism is a strongly anti-war position, a commitment to work for the eventual abolition of war, which "rules out all aggressive wars and even some defensive ones" but which "accepts the need for military force". This looks like an attractive position, but also a frustratingly vague one. What are the exceptional cases where war might be justified? And for what purposes might "military force" be needed?

I would argue for a version of pacifism which draws on the plausibility of the idea of 'defence'. An ethically justifiable military

policy for a country to adopt would be what has been called 'defensive deterrence'. I've suggested that not even all wars which are defence against aggression are necessarily right, but there is nevertheless a strong presumption that aggression should normally be resisted, either by military force or by non-violent resistance. A policy of defensive deterrence would involve deploying strictly defensive weaponry – anti-aircraft missiles rather than long-range missiles, interceptor fighters rather than long-range bombers, coastal frigates rather than aircraft carriers. The aim would be not to guarantee that all aggression could be successfully resisted, but to make the costs for a potential aggressor too great to be attractive. Such a military policy would send a clear message to other states that the country itself had no aggressive intentions, and would therefore be less likely to provoke counter-measures. As such, it would make war less likely. It would also conform to the Charter of the United Nations – something which I hope that humanists would in any case support, and which perhaps represents our best hope for a more peaceful world.

**Might this represent a possible humanist consensus on the ethics of war?**

## Further reading

*Ethics, Killing & War* (1995) Richard Norman. Argues for pacifism, a position which is distinct from absolute pacifism but recognises how difficult it is to provide any moral justification for war.

*Thinking About Peace and War* (1987) Martin Ceadel

*The Moral Philosophers: An Introduction to Ethics* (2003) Richard Norman

*On Humanism* (2012) Richard Norman





# Musings by Maggie

## War, Peace, and Sex-Strikes

Each year in Brighton, at 2pm on the afternoon of Remembrance Day, an ‘alternative remembrance day ceremony’ takes place, organized by the local branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. It’s very brief, non-religious, and usually attended by members of Brighton Humanists, Brighton Quaker Meeting and any other groups or individuals who feel it’s important to remember every person who has ever died in or as a result of war.

There are usually a couple of short readings, sometimes an appropriate poem, and wreaths of white poppies are attached to the railings of the War Memorial at the Old Steine (a thoroughfare in central Brighton) alongside the wreaths of red ones which have been laid at the main ceremony in the morning.

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom was established in 1915, during the First World War, making it one of the oldest extant women’s peace movements in the world. It has done some amazing work over the last 106 years and has a remarkable history.

The white poppies used in the ceremony are obtained from the [Peace Pledge Union](#), an organisation founded in 1934 and initiated by a campaign led by an Anglican priest Dick Sheppard. However, many well-known humanists were also founder members, including Bertrand Russell, Aldous Huxley,



Storm Jameson, and Laurence Housman. The Labour politician George Lansbury was also a member, as was composer Benjamin Britten, who wrote: “The whole of my life has been devoted to a life of creation (being by profession a composer) and I cannot take part in acts of destruction.”

Just like the red poppies sold by the British Legion, the white poppy commemorates the many members of the armed forces who have fallen in war, but also includes the innumerable civilian victims of war who lose their lives either by direct violence or as a result of the effects of war from injury, disease or starvation. This is, of course, still happening today in many regions of the world, notably Syria and Yemen.



Women have always been fundamental to the campaign for peace. Outstanding in my memory is the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, initiated by a Welsh group called "Women for Life on Earth", who arrived at the Greenham Common Airbase on 5th September 1981, having marched from Cardiff in protest at the decision to site 96 Cruise nuclear missiles there. Their original intention was to challenge the decision by debate, and they delivered a letter to the Base Commander which included the statement: 'We fear for the future of all our children and for the future of the living world which is the basis of all life'. The letter was ignored, so the women set up a camp outside the perimeter fence, setting off a remarkable period of non-violent direct action which lasted 19 years and was supported by women from all over the UK and abroad, until the last missiles left the base in 1991 as a result of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The camp remained in place until 2000, after protesters won the right to house a [memorial](#) on the site.

## War or sex

Women's anti-war activism may even go back to antiquity. The Greek playwright Aristophanes wrote his well-known comedy, *Lysistrata*, in 411 BCE. His female protagonist, *Lysistrata*, being thoroughly fed up with the 27-year Peloponnesian War against Sparta, which had already been going for 20 years when the play was first performed, convinces her fellow women of Greece to cease having sex with their husbands until the men negotiate peace and end the war. *Lysistrata* is, of course, a fictional character, but may have been loosely modeled on an Athenian woman named *Lysimache*, a name that means "the dissolver of battle", who was a priestess of Athena Polias (a religious faction in Athens) at the time *Lysistrata* was produced and known to be an opponent of the Peloponnesian War.

There have been several real-life sex strikes in history and in modern times. During the 1600s women of the Iroquois Indian Nations boycotted lovemaking and childbearing in order to persuade the men to put an end to inter-tribal warfare. This, along with other actions which restricted the supply of necessary resources such as corn and moccasins, resulted in the men capitulating and granting the women veto power concerning all wars. In Liberia in 2003, a group of women included a sex strike as part of their activism demanding an end to the vicious civil war there. In 2011, Filipino women withheld sex from their husbands to enforce a stop to clan fighting in the village of Dado as well as among other rural villages, and to open up the roads to the market that were blocked by the violence.

**Male aggressors of the world, take note!**



Aubrey Beardsley's illustration for a privately printed edition of *Lysistrata* (1896)



Want your own copy sent directly to you via email?

Contact [Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto:Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com) type in SUBSCRIBE

# ‘Rationality: What It Is, Why It Seems Scarce, Why It Matters’ (2021) by Steven Pinker

Book Review by David Warden



STEVEN

PINKER

Rationality

WHAT IT IS

WHY IT SEEMS SCARCE

WHY IT MATTERS



Steven Pinker is a Canadian-American cognitive psychologist and public intellectual. He is a Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, and he was the American Humanist Association’s *Humanist of the Year* in 2006.

Steven Pinker rejects the cynical view that human beings are hopelessly irrational and becoming more so. In our everyday lives, we are pretty good at behaving rationally and, as a species, the very significant progress we have made in terms of pushing back the frontiers of disease, famine, war, extreme poverty, inhumanity and cruelty have been, in large measure, due to our collective deployment of rationality. Nevertheless, we need training in rationality just as we need training in literacy and numeracy.

The largest portion of this book consists of a fairly advanced manual in critical thinking. It’s not the kind of book that can be read at speed. Each chapter could form the basis for a taught module in logic, probability, game theory and so on. Much of it will be familiar to those who have read similar books. Most of us by now are, or should be, familiar with biases and fallacies such as *confirmation bias* (selecting

evidence which confirms our beliefs), *ad hominem* attacks (criticising the person, not the argument), the principle that *correlation* does not imply *causation* (e.g., an increase in margarine sales may correlate with an increase in teenage pregnancies, but it’s unlikely that one is the cause of the other), and so on. But there’s a great number of more advanced ideas I hadn’t heard of including *hyperbolic discounting*, *heretical counterfactuals*, *instrumental variable regression* and much more. Getting to grips with this material requires considerable effort.

One of the most alarming revelations was how ignorance of Bayesian reasoning can lead to unnecessary treatment. If you get a positive test result for a disease that has a 10/1000 prevalence in the population and the false positive rate is, say, 9%, what’s your chance of actually having the disease? Many people, including many doctors, ignore the *base rate* (the actual prevalence of the disease) and conclude it’s a 91% chance, whereas in fact it’s closer to 9% because of all the false positives that will result from testing 1000 people.\*

Rationality and intelligence do not necessarily go together. Highly intelligent people can be just as vulnerable as everyone else to fallacies and biases such as *motivated reasoning* and *my-side bias*. But we’re not hopelessly irrational. Often, our irrationalities have rational motivations such as the desire to win an argument rather than to get at the truth. But human progress depends on rationality, and we should all try to get better at it. Pinker’s book is one of many that can help.



\*If you want to check out this claim (and I had to scratch my head a bit!) Pinker does the maths on page 169. Image credit: [Wikimedia](#)



# Ethical Encounters

*Exploring life's moral questions*



## Does war justify killing people?

**In his book *Causing Death and Saving Lives*, the philosopher Jonathan Glover argues that except in the most extreme circumstances it is wrong to kill someone who wants to go on living, even if it seems that this desire to live is not in the person's own best interests. But why is killing wrong and is war an 'extreme circumstance' in which it is not wrong to kill?**

Glover says killing is wrong because it takes from a person the life and the future which are uniquely important and valuable to them. Death takes all that they have and all that they hoped to have. It not only takes the present, it takes the future as well. Plans will not be realised, and desires will not be fulfilled. Death is bad because in death everything is lost. And the death of one person harms others by depriving them of the one who dies. These children lose their mother, this husband loses his wife, this community loses a dedicated nurse or a talented musician. The death not only causes grief and distress, it brings to an end the contribution that the deceased made to other people's lives. Despite this, most people

believe that we are justified in killing in self-defence, to save the life of an innocent person or in war. But some pacifists believe that it would always be wrong for them to kill and they accept that in very rare circumstances this would require them to allow great evils to occur. This kind of pacifism is neither incoherent nor absurd as a personal code, but is not a realistic ethos for society as a whole so long as armed aggression by nation states remains a possibility. We are justified in resisting such aggression, recognising that in some extreme situations killing is the least bad option. We should reject the idea that there is an absolute right to life, or we should at least accept that a person's right to life can be forfeited in some circumstances.

Given the enormous suffering and devastation caused by war, very few wars of aggression can be justified. One possible exception is armed intervention to prevent genocide or to bring genocide to an end. However, governments have been extremely reluctant to deploy military force for this purpose. It is not clearly in their national interest to do so, and the outcome is very uncertain. Another possibility is a pre-emptive military strike against an enemy who is about to attack. The difficulty here is having ▷



The 2003 Iraqi invasion was a very controversial war. Despite evidence being presented to the public by the intelligence services in the form of a dossier which built a case to support the invasion, Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction were never found.



sufficient confidence that an attack is indeed imminent. And some aggressors will claim that their attack is pre-emptive when in fact it is not. Even so, it is not obviously wrong to cause great harm if this will prevent yet greater harm.

People who are not opposed to war on principle presumably believe that war is sometimes necessary. But how do we decide whether to support any particular war? Patriots who say: 'My country, right or wrong' have abandoned all moral responsibility, but is it really possible for anyone to take a rational decision about whether to support a war? The information provided by the British government to justify the 2003 war against Iraq proved to be false – Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, the war was in effect a pre-emptive strike against a country which did not present an imminent threat to Britain, though the government suggested that it did. Given this precedent, it is probably right to refuse to support any war of aggression.

But our moral responsibilities do not end there. Even when a country has been attacked by an aggressor, the way it responds to the aggression has moral implications. Even a necessary war may be conducted in an immoral way. There may be deliberate attacks on civilians or unjustified destruction of civil infrastructure such as schools and hospitals. And a war may change its character over time. No one could have predicted that the Second World War would involve the use of nuclear weapons but had the war not ended at that point, it might have been right to refuse to support it further.

**It takes great courage to oppose your own country in wartime, but sometimes this is the moral thing to do.**

### Further reading

*Causing Death and Saving Lives: The Moral Problems of Abortion, Infanticide, Suicide, Euthanasia, Capital Punishment, War and Other Life-or-death Choices* (1990) Jonathan Glover





# The Voice of Brittain

David unleashed – without his Executive Editor's hat on

## Climate Change and Conflict

Most wars and civil strife are caused by religious differences, right? Well, not always. Of course, we have had religious differences in Northern Ireland, and we still have Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims slugging it out in the Middle East. And then there are Hindus and Muslims in India who are not too keen on each other. And then again, every region on earth seems to have its fair share of terrorists who seem to want to kill anyone who is not like them. Such cruel antagonism goes back to the Crusades and earlier – and probably will continue so long as faith remains an issue of missionary zeal. But there's a new kid on the block which has the potential to be an even greater cause of strife – and that's climate change.

Some climate wars have already arisen, usually inspired by shortages of food or water or arable land. We have already had ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan over access to water in the Indus valley. The flashpoint here is Kashmir, which is already disputed territory between the two nations. It's not as if the problem of water supply is new – indeed the distribution of water from the Indus was agreed through the Indus Water Treaty of 1960. However, climate change was not a consideration at the time, and Pakistan in particular has been in increasingly desperate need since. And as if to make matters worse, it has recently accused India of diverting water upstream for their own use. Bearing in mind that this has already caused



Image: aljazeera.com

conflict between the two nuclear powers, it remains an exceptionally dangerous area of contention. It's worth bearing in mind that in 1948, when the sub-continent gained independence, had Gandhi got his way and India and Pakistan remained as one nation, this might have been a resolvable, internal and national problem. But because India split into two nations – along religious lines – this has now become a decidedly dangerous *international* problem, with nuclear missiles for a backdrop.

And then there's the river Nile, which flows through no less than ten African countries, and which is a critical resource for Egypt, Ethiopia and South Sudan. This also is beginning to look like a rumbling sore that won't go away. It works like this. If Sudan constructs a dam, or a reservoir for its own use, then Ethiopia and Egypt – which are both downstream – are likely to be affected.





**The River Nile: a major source of future conflict?**

This has already resulted in international expressions of concern, and if we're not careful it could be a major source of conflict in the future.

But as climate change intensifies, there will be other, more subtle, factors that will come into play. Some countries may actually benefit economically, whilst others will be disadvantaged, and this disparity might well cause a very unwelcome shift in power for the losers. For example, there is evidence that equatorial Mexico is getting hotter, and the deserts of the southern USA are likely to spread ever wider. In the meantime, water is being drained away as Las Vegas continues to use the remains of what was once the mighty Colorado River. Meanwhile, the coastal climate in the east of the USA seems to be becoming even more unstable with ever worsening storms and tornadoes. Canada, however, might be a net gainer as the northern permafrost gives way to forest and grassland. So what, we might reasonably ask, is the likely political relationship going to be between those three countries, when Canada

finds itself with more arable land, the USA finds itself with less, and Mexico, frankly, just roasts?

Russia is another example. It has vast tracts of land in the north that are still under permafrost. A massive melt over the coming decades might release huge areas of arable land, whilst countries in the south, including European ones, may well find themselves in need, especially in the Mediterranean area. Mr Putin might well be weighing this in his mind, and the power relationship between Russia and Europe seems to be changing already.

There are many examples of unusual droughts, storms, heatwaves, forest fires and extreme flooding going on all over the world, and they all suggest our abuse of the climate – caused by the relentless plundering of our resources through over-consumption and over-population.

Will this be the end of humankind? Of course not. But nature has a way of redressing the balance. Too much or too many of anything – be it animal or vegetable or whatever – will be cut short, sooner or later, and even the human species, with all our ingenuity and invention, is not immune. If we don't contain our use of the planet, nature will keep us in check, and that can be as brutal with us as with any other species. Whether it will be by thirst, starvation, war, or disease it will happen, unless we take steps to control ourselves – and that will take joined-up thinking on a truly worldwide scale.

**To paraphrase the TV celebrity geologist Iain Stewart, don't worry about us taking care of the planet – the planet can look after itself quite well enough. The real question is whether we will still be here or not. Our species must get its act together, otherwise there will be culling the like of which we can hardly imagine.**



## Humanist Climate Action welcomes some progress made at COP26 but pressure must stay on

On 6 November, Humanist Climate Action joined forces with Eco-Humanists, from Humanist Society Scotland, at demonstrations as part of the Global Day of Action for Climate Justice around the COP26 summit and marched alongside representatives from other religion or belief groups in Glasgow and London. Humanist Climate Action (a new volunteer-led network of Humanists UK members and supporters) called on delegates to COP26 to make a firm and meaningful commitment to reduce carbon emissions.

With the summit now over, we welcome some of the progress made at COP26, such as the multilateral agreement on tackling deforestation and agreement to cut methane emissions. However, it is clear from the latest expert analysis that the current set of commitments will not keep temperature rise at or below 1.5°C. Not only are the current pledges not ambitious enough, but also policy around the world does not match action to words, leaving a credibility gap between promises and what needs to be done to halt the climate crisis. The 'phase down' rather than 'phase out' of coal and continued investments in oil and gas around the world, but also in the UK, are particularly worrying. The lack of compassion, fairness and climate justice for the global south at COP26 was also discouraging to see.

Looking forward, particularly to the coming months during which the UK continues to



hold the COP Presidency, the pressure must stay on the big emitters to show progression in reducing emissions and governments around the world must be held accountable for meeting their wider commitments. Further pledges will also be needed to bring closer the \$100bn annual climate finance target which helps developing nations cut emissions and manage the effects of climate change.

*Lori Marriott*

*Humanist Climate Action Coordinator*

<https://humanists.uk/humanist-climate-action/>

## Different perspectives makes *Humanistically Speaking* special

Great December issue of *Humanistically Speaking* – really interesting to read so many different perspectives side by side in a single publication, definitely one of the qualities that makes *Humanistically Speaking* so special!

*Alex Williams*



# Conscientious Objectors



By Paul Ewans

## Paul Ewans tells the story of conscientious objectors

The outbreak of war in 1914 produced a wave of patriotic fervour. When Lord Kitchener called for recruits, more than 750,000 men came forward immediately and by June 1916 over 2,600,000 had volunteered. But some two million men of military age did not volunteer and, as the losses on the Western Front mounted, Britain faced a stark choice – introduce conscription or lose the war.

The Military Service Act (1916) allowed men who had a conscientious objection to bearing arms to claim exemption. Most conscientious objectors were Quakers or members of small Christian sects who believed in the imminent return of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom on earth. They included Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muggletonians\*, Peculiar People, Plymouth Brethren, Sandemanians, Seventh Day Adventists and many more. Other conscientious objectors had political or moral objections to military service or to the war itself. Many were socialists who believed in the brotherhood of man and who rejected war as a means of settling international disputes. There were also a small number of



Lord Kitchener's recruitment poster

anarchists, humanitarians, Marxists and utopians.

Some 17,000 men claimed conscientious objector status. About 350 were given an absolute exemption from war service and were allowed to go home and get on with their lives. About 3,000 applicants agreed to serve in the army's Non-Combatant Corps doing work such as building military roads, and around 7,500 were directed to do civilian work of national importance. But nearly 6,000 'absolutists' refused to support the war in any way. These men often received little sympathy or understanding from the Tribunals judging their cases.



*\*Did you know? The Muggletonians, named after Lodowicke Muggleton, were a small Protestant Christian movement which began in 1651.*

At one Tribunal an 'absolutist' declared: 'Whatever you say, nothing can alter God's law - Thou shalt not kill'. A Tribunal member replied: 'God's law be damned, go and fight'. 'Absolutists' who stood firm were arrested, court-martialled and sentenced to terms of imprisonment with hard labour.

Most people found conscientious objectors incomprehensible. Why would people not support the war? After all, fighting was central to the British national identity and the British considered that they were very good at it. It was widely believed that Britain had never lost a war and that victory over Germany was therefore certain. And patriotism demanded that everyone support the war. Some conscientious objectors told the Tribunals that they had no country, but surely a man had no right to live in a country if he wouldn't fight for it? Many people were very ready to agree that conscientious objectors were cowards, traitors and 'degenerates'.

Christianity was also a key part of British national identity. Duty to God appeared intimately connected with duty to king and country so that rejecting one was seen as rejecting the other as well. Conscientious objectors thus appeared to be irreligious blasphemers. After all, the Church of England supported the war and the Church cold-shouldered those of its members who believed that war was incompatible with Christian teaching. Many people genuinely believed that God was on Britain's side.

So conscientious objectors often experienced considerable hatred and even violence. Many people saw it as their patriotic duty to harass young men who were not in uniform. In Bath a known conscientious objector was burned in effigy outside his own house and hostile crowds often gathered outside pacifist meetings. In many rural areas it was easier to employ German prisoners of war on farms

***"Many people were ready to agree that conscientious objectors were cowards, traitors and degenerates."***

than British conscientious objectors – the feeling against them was too strong. People often tried to conceal the fact that they had a conscientious objector in the family and there were many painful conversations. One woman asked her conscientious objector husband if he would defend her, their home and their children if the Germans invaded. He replied that he would not.

Many conscientious objectors suffered greatly. A number died in custody and others experienced severe mental health problems. Some were not finally released from prison until August 1919. Even so, once they had made their stand on a point of principle, very few turned back. Ironically, many saw themselves as patriots who were trying to defend a British tradition of personal freedom and save the country from an unjust war. And religious conscientious objectors saw themselves as witnesses for their faith.

Did it do any good? Conscientious objectors had no influence on the conduct or outcome of the war, but they achieved two things. Firstly, many were well-educated men who wrote about their experiences in prison, and this led to prison reform. Secondly, the War Office learnt useful lessons, and this made things much easier for the 60,000 conscientious objectors during the Second World War who were treated much less harshly than their predecessors. The Peace Pledge Union which was formed in 1934 continues to support conscientious objectors to this day.



# Poet's Corner

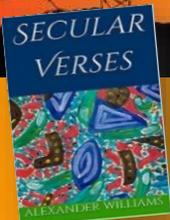


By Alexander Williams

## If I Should Live

If I should live, think only this of me:  
That I am not the soldier you assume,  
That I am not inspired by your words  
Of nationalism, propaganda and doom.  
When I fight, let that battle be  
A just cause, in which all of Nature wins  
Not a war of hate, or prejudice  
Fuelled by ancient grudge or imagined sins.  
Let it be a fight for truth and life,  
A fight in which all nations congregate  
To put aside their differences and strife  
And save our planet from a dismal fate.  
Throw down weapons, lift up hopeful hearts  
Let this be where war ends, and where peace starts.

Inspired by *The Soldier* by Rupert Brooke



 pixers

Alexander Williams is a writer, teacher and singer from Watford. His new collection of poems [Secular Verses](#) is now published and available on Amazon. Click the link or the book image and help support his great work. Details of his previous books can be found at [www.thedialup.blogspot.com](http://www.thedialup.blogspot.com)



# Humanistically Speaking Coverage

*A guide to those groups sharing our magazine*

Our readership spreads wider than our map. Please see our [WEBSITE](#) for full details.

Why not see if your group wishes to join us? simply email us at

[Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto:Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com) type in SUBSCRIBE in the subject box.

Click **white names**  
for websites.

- Australia
- Canada
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- USA

Dublin

Edinburgh

Belfast

North East

North Yorkshire

Knaresborough

GMH

Stockport

Mansfield

Birmingham

Cambridge

Nottingham

Sheffield

Leeds

Cardiff

London

Reading

Birmingham

Worcester

Gloucester

Exeter

Plymouth

Dorset

Isle of Wight

Portsmouth

Brighton

Hastings

## Join The Red Zone.

Are you a group forwarding our magazine onto your members? Do let us know

Are you a reader and not on the map? Tell us where you are.



Do you live in a town where you think a group could flourish?

Contact us and we will see what can happen with the Network's help.

# *Humanistically Speaking*

A free magazine created for and by Humanists

*Humanism is an ethical non-religious worldview. It's about tolerance, kindness, knowledge, and friendship. Although *Humanistically Speaking* is for Humanists, everyone is welcome to read and contribute, regardless of faith or belief.*



Click the 'Happy Human' symbol above to learn more about Humanist values

***Humanistically Speaking* is brought to you by a volunteer team of editors**



David B



David W



Aaron



Maggie



Paul



John



Alex



Lynda



Penny



Anthony

In addition, we have our vital back-office support team of:  
Sean (Webmaster) Phil (YouTube video editor), Tony (Administrator),  
Barbara (Treasurer), Alan (Business advisor) as well as several staff yet to be found.