



Humanistically Speaking



August 2022

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

Belfast Convention *special report*



**President of Humanists UK
Adam Rutherford speaking
at the Convention**

**Humanistically
Speaking**



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

David Brittain
Executive Editor



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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 Humanists groups or Humanists UK.

Sadly, I was unable to attend Humanists UK's Convention in Belfast. But three members of our team – David Warden, Anthony Lewis, and Alan Montgomery – did attend. David and Anthony enthusiastically promoted our grassroots humanists magazine by wearing specially produced *Humanistically Speaking* t-shirts and handing out promotional cards to anyone who would take one! We hope we've gained many more readers – especially in Northern Ireland, where so many encouraging humanist initiatives are taking place under the excellent leadership of Boyd Sleanor. We may even have gained one or two new contributors so do look out for them in future editions.

We are also grateful to Mike Flood and Susan Guiver for their report of the Humanists International Conference in Glasgow. Whilst less comprehensive than the Belfast reports, it's very helpful to have at least a flavour of the proceedings.

Most of our reports are upbeat and complimentary about the excellence of these events organised by Humanists UK and Humanists international. They are an invaluable way for humanists from across the UK and from other countries to meet and make friends and to celebrate the many achievements of humanism, as well as to highlight ongoing challenges. But *Humanistically Speaking* does not shy away from constructive criticism. Guy Otten detects "a widespread feeling that there is a democratic deficit in Humanists UK", David Warden writes about a lack of viewpoint diversity, while Anthony Lewis calls for greater optimism. Mike Flood thinks that Humanists UK and Humanists International are missing some of the really big existential threats to humanity such as Artificial Intelligence, although this topic was covered to some extent at the Belfast Convention in the talks by A C Grayling and Kate Devlin.

Humanistically Speaking aims to provide an independent platform for humanist views, some of which may be under-represented or even marginalised in organised humanism. We strive to do this in a friendly and supportive way. If the humanist movement is really serious about equality, diversity and inclusion, then we need to hear everyone's voices.



Humanists UK Convention: Belfast

An inspiring weekend

By Guy Otten



Like all Humanists UK conventions, the Belfast one was an inspiring weekend. It combined the delights of meeting other humanists from around the country with the intellectual stimulation of great humanist speakers and the encouragement of hearing about the work of humanism.

Belfast was chosen, I think, because it has been the fastest growing Humanist area and several sessions exhibited some of the achievements Northern Ireland Humanists have been prominent in bringing about or helping to bring forward. For example, legalised humanist marriage, the Integrated Education Act, and various community changes like trying to enhance the night time economy in Belfast where young folk meet together in non-sectarian, integrated night clubs, etc. to enjoy themselves.

Before the Convention started I attended a two-and-a-half hour city walk led by a Belfast humanist, revealing buildings and plaques marking a rich history of freethought, the struggle for Irish freedom, and anti-sectarian action. The convention itself was held in the centre of Belfast at an arts centre near St Anne's Cathedral. Nearby was a large mural showing a dead dove killed by two arrows each of which had crosses on their fletches. Further up the street was the gay scene in Belfast – revealing that Revd Ian Paisley's campaign to 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' was not successful!

Great speakers included A.C. Grayling, Adam

Rutherford, and Richard Wiseman. You can read about their talks elsewhere in this special edition of *Humanistically Speaking*.

The usual Friday evening entertainment consisted of four comedians all up to a high standard including Angela Barnes and Tim McGarry. On Saturday evening there was the usual gala dinner which I think necessitated a later start for some on Sunday while hangovers were nursed.

After the convention ended at 3pm on Sunday the Humanists UK AGM took place. The outgoing Treasurer reported that the charity had received the single biggest legacy in its history, £690,000, from a transwoman who had found a home with humanists.

“I detect a widespread feeling that there is a democratic deficit in Humanists UK”

The reports of the chair of the Trustees Tamar Gosh and Andrew Copson both focussed on the achievements of the organisation, the professionalism and financial management and adherence to the law and code of conduct for trustees. What I felt was missing was any significant mention of ongoing democratic accountability for the activities of Humanists UK, for its priorities and for the development of the strategy. The board of trustees with its partially elected membership is, I imagine, supposed to be enough to address this issue, but I detect a widespread feeling that there is a democratic deficit in Humanists UK.





Humanists UK Convention: Belfast

Session sketches

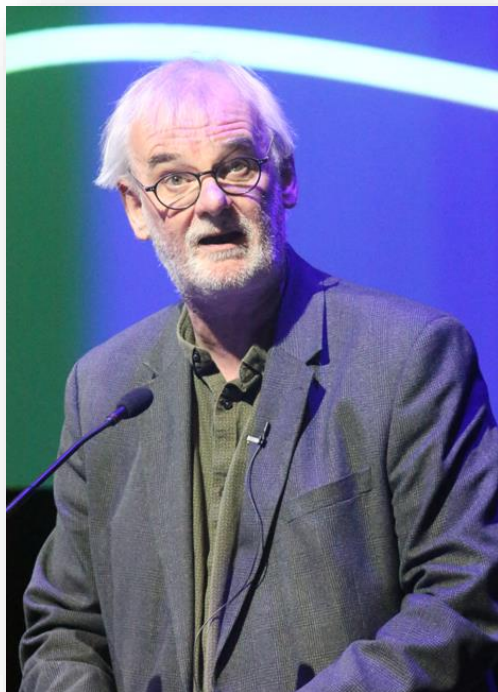
By David Warden and Alan Montgomery



“Linda and I attended Humanists UK’s first in-person annual Convention in three years”, writes Alan Montgomery...

It was strange being back “home”, staying in a city centre hotel in Belfast, the city where I'd lived my early teenage years. The convention centre was on the edge of what had been the financial district, just by the cathedral. My father had worked in a bank, and he'd have been turning in his grave (can ashes turn?) to see the area so transformed. Every noble building had become a hotel or pub with a busy bar and dance floor. Some were nightclubs. The city that I remember being dark and quiet at the weekend was alive with young people enjoying themselves. We rushed quickly past every ear-splitting pub or club. Packs of what looked like feral children roamed the streets, the girls apparently impervious to the cold and rain. Such enjoyment was unheard of in my Presbyterian childhood.

The convention itself, while retaining familiar features, had a different flavour. Belfast is a long way for GB humanists to travel and many of the regulars had not attended; probably half of the audience were Northern Irish people. I'm amazed that the “100% Christian” society, albeit two warring sects of Christianity, that I grew up in now boasted so many humanists. I enjoyed hearing once familiar accents from speakers on the platform, and people in the audience.



Comedian Tim McGarry is a Patron of Northern Ireland Humanists. Photo by Neil Camp.

As usual, Friday night was comedy night. This featured Northern Irish comedian Colin Murphy, who was joined by Humanists UK patrons Angela Barnes and Tim McGarry, and by Eleanor Tiernan – four comedians at the top of their game – shedding light on the human condition and the absurdities of modern life. I enjoyed being able to follow the local references, and their material was a little more irreverent than usual. An enjoyable night.



**Andrew Copson
welcomed delegates
to the Convention:
“The values we care
about most are in
great peril...”**



Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK and President of Humanists International opened the event, the first ‘in person’ convention since Leicester in 2019, by enumerating the values which humanists care about most, including justice, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, liberal progress itself... and he said that all of them have come under threat and seem to be in great peril. He cited the US Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe v Wade as an example. Andrew said that humanists like to take on the big issues, reflect on them, and commit to taking action. He said that during the course of the weekend “We will think about the state of the world... but we’re also here to enjoy each other’s company and have a good time”. He introduced his team at Humanists UK and drew particular attention to the work of Boyd Sleator and said that Northern Ireland Humanists, which Boyd co-ordinates, is one of the bright spots in an otherwise gloomy picture.

Andrew then introduced the first main speaker of the convention, Professor A C Grayling.

**Anthony Grayling:
“We’ve got to break the
law of self-interest”**

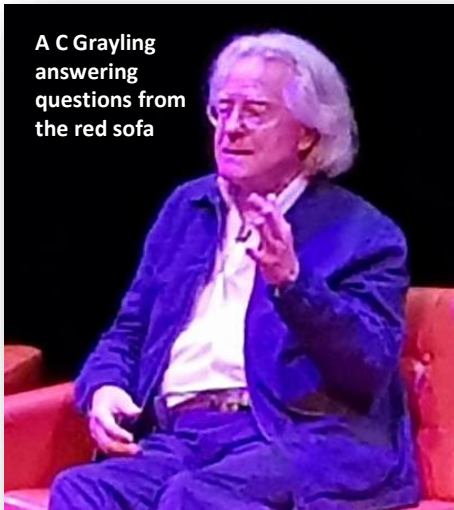
Professor A C Grayling opened the Saturday sessions with an extremely pessimistic talk on climate change, new technologies including sex robots, justice and human rights. He contended that much of human behaviour can be explained with reference to ‘the law of self-interest’: “Anything that can be done will not be done if it can be stopped by those who would pay a price if it were done” and, conversely, “Anything that can be done will be done if it brings an advantage... There are people who want to take things away from us in order to advantage themselves.” ▷



The example he offered was Donald Trump resiling from the Paris Agreement on climate change, and he claimed that nothing comes from events like the COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow at the end of 2021. He said we've got to try and break this iron law of self-interest.

Anthony complained that we as citizens have so little control, and that support of political parties is tribal. Inequality and the deficit of justice and rights are what's driving the crises in climate and technology. He suggested that a more proportional electoral system would lend itself to problem-solving and more international co-operation. For example, the G20 could declare an 'all-out war' on climate change. He said that it's crucial for the 'voice of the people' to be heard and to get governments working together instead of seeking individual advantage.

He concluded by saying that our humanistic impulse is towards kindness and a liberal outlook and that we must try, through activism, argument and persuasion, to make the world a better place. DW



**A C Grayling
answering
questions from
the red sofa**



**Boyd Sleator is the
Coordinator for
Northern Ireland
Humanists.
Photo by Neil
Camp.**

Boyd Sleator: “Dance-floors are diverse places”

We don't hear very much about humanist-inspired community action to make the world a better place, but Boyd Sleator, Coordinator for Northern Ireland Humanists, interviewed five activists about a variety of community projects. For non-natives of Northern Ireland, their quick-fire conversation was difficult to follow at times and could have done with more context and scene-setting. But it was interesting to hear Boyd talk about the importance of dance floors as diverse places where people from different communities can find fellowship and friendship. One of the factors impeding such social mixing is poor provision of public transport after 11pm and this is just one of the areas where community activism can make a difference by persuading councils to improve services. Boyd and Holly Lester, a DJ, run 'Free The Night,' which is a campaigning organisation committed to creating 'a safe, progressive and rich nightlife environment for Northern Ireland'.

Boyd also interviewed Becky Lester and Connor Kerr who run 'Another World Belfast', a secular not-for-profit organisation which helps to support people living in hardship through its 'Show Some Love' campaign. Boyd appealed to local humanists to start similar initiatives. DW





**Andrew Copson
hosted an unscripted
conversation
between Franscesca
Stavrakopoulou and
Adam Rutherford**

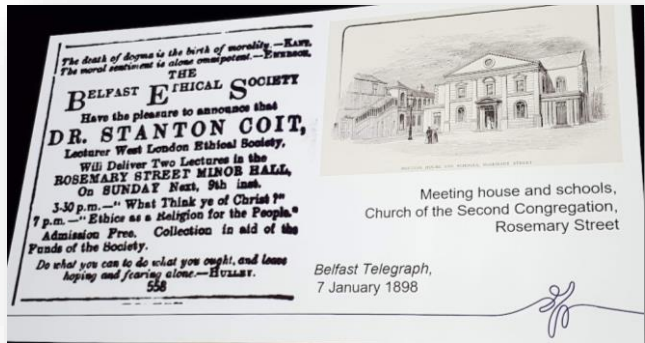
Adam Rutherford: “Biology has a very pernicious history...”

The conversation between Francesca Stavrakopoulou and Adam Rutherford was entitled ‘Deviant Bodies’. Francesca explained that science as well as religion has ‘othered’ some bodies by setting them against bodies which are considered ‘normal’ and ‘superior’. Adam explained that it all started with Aristotle with his views on the biological differences between men and women, including the extraordinary claim that women have fewer teeth! Francesca informed us that bibles from the 17th century contained maps dividing up humans with white Europeans at the top of the race hierarchy and all others ranked below them. Men were considered more godly than women and even Jesus was thought to be white European rather than Jewish. She explained that there was a close relationship between religion and science – it was a shared culture. Adam added that they were all biblical creationists trying to explain how racial differences arose after the creation of Adam and Eve. Andrew asked “Is it just that scientists were influenced by religion or is there something new and dark specifically provided by science?” Adam said that new

sciences such as biology were immediately co-opted into existing frameworks of European expansion and Empire-building. He explained that biology has a very pernicious history (referring to scientific racism and eugenics) and that fundamentally this has a scientific root. “But I’m a scientist” he added. “Science is the backbone of civilisation. I’m not attacking it. Science has demonstrated that differences in skin pigmentation for example are superficial and have no negative valence. Let’s celebrate this trajectory”.

Francesca said that culturally there are certain hierarchies of bodies and some people’s bodies are diminished. For example, women of colour are more likely to die in childbirth and suffer post-birth complications than white women and that’s because of various structural racist ideologies, biases and assumptions. In response to a question, she clarified that she was not necessarily talking about institutionalised racism but methods of diagnosis and accessibility of care for poor people both here and in the US, and people of colour tend to make up a bigger proportion of poor people than white people. She also said that we’ve devalued non-human life. “I think of animals as non-human persons. We assume they do not have personhood – a mind, a soul.” DW





Madeleine Goodall, Humanist Heritage Co-Ordinator for Humanists UK. The notice above shows that Stanton Coit, a leader in the Ethical Society movement in the UK, addressed the Belfast Ethical Society in 1898.

The Belfast Ethical Society

Madeleine Goodall, Humanist Heritage Co-Ordinator for Humanists UK, delved into the history of humanism in Northern Ireland and informed us that the Belfast Ethical Society was formed in 1896 – the same year as the Union of Ethical Societies which today is known as Humanists UK. The Society held weekly meetings on rationalism, science, and evolution and its leaders were also active in the socialist, secularist and co-operative movements. The Ethical Movement had been created by Felix Adler, a Jewish American, in 1876 in New York and was ‘exported’ to the UK, principally by Stanton Coit. The poster above displays a quotation by Immanuel Kant: “The death of dogma is the birth of morality”; by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “The moral sentiment is alone omnipotent”; and by T H Huxley: “Do what you can to do what you ought and leave hoping and fearing alone”. The Ethical Societies viewed ethics as a kind of religion in itself – and the original movement still flourishes in the US.

Sadly, many of the Ethical Societies died out before or during the First World War and the Belfast Ethical Society, which was wound up in 1913, was no exception. The next major presence of humanism in Belfast was the Belfast Humanist Group in the 1960s under the leadership of John D Stuart. They championed ‘the open society’ of pluralism, respect and dialogue, and humanists were influential in the creation of civil rights organisations.

So humanism in Northern Ireland is not a novel idea. It has had a presence for over 100 years. DW

“I was delighted to hear Maddie say that Northern Ireland has a proud tradition of religious scepticism and humanist activism.”

Alan Montgomery





Dr Charlie Lynch gave a presentation on Ulster Unionist MP H. Montgomery Hyde

Humanism inspired the campaign to decriminalise homosexuality



Research historian Charlie Lynch gave us a potted history of the life and influence of the Belfast barrister, politician and author H. Montgomery Hyde. Hyde was avowedly heterosexual but he was what would today be termed an ‘ally’ of gay rights.

Hyde was an Ulster Unionist MP and he campaigned throughout the 1950s in the House of Commons to persuade the government to decriminalise homosexuality. His commitment to humanism, only recently discovered by Charlie Lynch in an unpublished memoir, explains why he took up the deeply unpopular and perilous course of homosexual law reform. He was a member of the Homosexual Law Reform Society and he wrote *The Other Love: An Historical and Contemporary Survey of Homosexuality in Britain* (1970). This book depicted the law on same-sex relations as irrational and inhumane and it pleaded for a more humane approach. DW/AM

Laura Lacole: “Atheism is not believing in God whereas Humanism describes your values...”

In June 2017, Laura Lacole and Eunan O’Kane (photo on next page) fought for and won the right to humanist marriage in Northern Ireland and, two days later, they became the first couple in Northern Ireland to have a humanist marriage. In recognition of this historic achievement, they jointly won Humanist of the Year for 2018.

Andrew asked whether it was still a bit precarious to come out as an atheist or humanist in Northern Ireland. Laura said “Yes, we’re still in the minority, religion is so entrenched... there’s a lack of exposure to these conversations and Northern Ireland has a long way to go, especially in the education system. But a lot of people know what humanism is, it comes naturally to them, but they don’t know the term. After I came off the radio one day, a taxi driver asked ‘So what the f*** is humanism?’. When I explained he said, ‘Well that’s me, but why do we need a label?’ I told him it’s a good descriptive word – it’s a way of defining it. People have moved away from the upbringing they’ve had and they don’t know if there’s a God or not. A lot of people reach out to us because they miss their church and the sense of belonging and identity. Atheism is just not believing in God whereas humanism describes your values. That is something I love about humanism. The first person I came across who was on the same wavelength was Richard Dawkins and I actually got the pleasure of meeting him. It can be really lonely to leave a church or a religion or even a family. All I knew growing up were these two tribes ▷





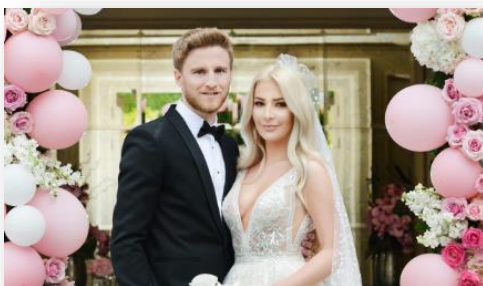
– you don't know there's so much diversity in religion or lack of religion.

On the court case, Laura explained that once people understood that we were not trying to take anything away from religion, but wanted to have the same rights as religion, they were fine about it.

History of the case

In June 2017, the High Court ruled that the lack of legal recognition of humanist marriages in Northern Ireland breaks human rights law, by privileging religious believers over humanists. The ruling followed a claim taken by Laura, co-founder of Atheist NI, and Eunan, a Leeds United and Republic of Ireland footballer, who wanted to have a humanist

marriage. Humanists UK supported the couple in their claim. Consequently, humanist marriages have been legally recognised in Northern Ireland under case law since 2017 and there have been over 1,000 such ceremonies. We are still waiting for England and Wales to catch up. DW



Apostasy and Humanist Care

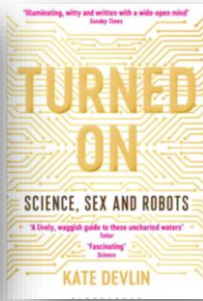
Alan Montgomery writes: “I stayed downstairs, resisting the lure of Laura, a model, media personality and humanist campaigner, who grew up very close to my family’s home in East Belfast. Laura and Eunan are a mixed couple in NI terms. Their resolute determination to have a humanist wedding ceremony, led eventually to a change in the law there. For once NI is ahead of England.

Downstairs, Imtiaz Shams, a joint founder of *Faith to Faithless*, introduced Clare Elcome Webber and Pippa Swan. Clare is head of Humanist Care at Humanists UK, overseeing its work supporting both the pastoral care network in hospitals and prisons, and its peer

support and advice to apostates. Pippa is a humanist pastoral carer and one of the first people to provide care in a Northern Ireland prison. She’s the first person in Northern Ireland to study for an MA in Existential and Humanist pastoral care. The conversation explored the problems faced by those who leave a high-control religion or cult. This can be frightening, leaving individuals feeling isolated and not knowing where to turn. ‘Apostates’ can find themselves cast out of families or communities with no safety net; many face threats or abuse. The session showed the support that humanism can offer to help them recover and flourish.”

**Executive Editor David
Brittain interviewed
Imtiaz Shams for our
February 2022 edition.
Click the image of
Imtiaz to watch this
fascinating interview.**





Dr Kate Devlin is Reader in Artificial Intelligence & Society at King's College London and author of *Turned On: Science, Sex and Robots* (2018). Since the convention she has become a Patron of Humanists UK.

Kate Devlin: “There are amazing people all around the world doing incredibly good things with AI.”

Kate Devlin gave us a quickfire introduction to Artificial Intelligence and its many problems.

If you have a smartphone you are probably using AI. AI is talking to your voice assistant, telling it to do something; AI will give you viewing recommendations based on your previous viewing habits and it will calculate routes for you if you use satnav. If you buy a lawnmower online, AI will recommend twenty more lawnmowers for you. It's not all that intelligent! I've got a robot vacuum cleaner. It's not brilliant but it goes out and scurries around. There's a little bit of AI in there. There's no agreed definition of what AI is but we kind of know what it is. None of the AI we have today is sentient or conscious, nor does it have any general intelligence. It can only do one task. It can't do abstract thought. Machine learning is a subset of AI.

We may think that machines are neutral but human bias can be ingrained in AI software. Cultural norms can be ingrained and software

can refuse to look outside the Western viewpoint. For example, if AI is used as an aid in recruitment based on historic successes all the historic successes may turn out to be white men. Biases creep in with data collection, even when we think we are trying to be fair, and people then act on those biased results creating a negative feedback loop. Facial recognition is a problem. If you have darker skin you will not be recognised correctly by the algorithm. Facial recognition technology is being used in very negative ways in China and Russia. There is no unified standard of ethics for AI because we all have different standards of ethics. For example, how would self-driving cars solve the classic trolley problem? AI has this dark side, but the upside is that if self-driving cars are introduced they will massively reduce road traffic accidents. Medically, it's been outstanding. AI outperforms human radiologists in the detection of tumours and it's really useful in disaster management. It's transforming agriculture – it can be used to detect soil conditions for optimal planting. There are amazing people all around the world doing incredibly good things with AI. We need to be cautious but the super-intelligent robot uprising is way down the line. Be wary about what's happening right now in the way it's disadvantaging people. DW





Rachel Taggart-Ryan: “Retaining blasphemy laws in the UK legitimizes their use in countries where people face the death penalty.”

David Warden reports that Boyd Sleator hosted a panel presentation and discussion about blasphemy laws in Northern Ireland with Alyson Kirkpatrick (Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission), Gary McLelland (Chief Executive of Humanists International), and Rachel Taggart-Ryan (Senior Campaigns Officer at Humanists UK). Rachel and Boyd lead on the Humanists UK campaign to end blasphemy laws in NI which is the only part of the UK which retains them.

Rachel said that most religions prohibit blasphemy – meaning words or deeds that denigrate or show a lack of reverence towards a deity, a religious belief or objects held to be sacred. In twelve countries, blasphemy or apostasy (leaving your religion) are crimes which are punishable by death; in a further 47

countries by imprisonment or other criminal penalties. Sudan has repealed the death penalty for apostasy. One argument commonly put forward in defence of blasphemy law is that it protects vulnerable minorities. This is the opposite of the truth. Laws that penalise blasphemy are a violation of freedom of expression and are used around the world as a means of harassing, victimizing, and discriminating against religious and belief minorities. Retaining blasphemy laws in the UK legitimizes their use in countries where people face the death penalty for expressing views deemed to be blasphemous. There’s direct evidence of this. In 2010, a motion was brought forward in the UN Human Rights Council by the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation that we should enact international restrictions against blasphemy. It took its wording from the Republic of Ireland’s blasphemy law that has subsequently been repealed. The then US Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief stated that countries with anti-blasphemy practices like to quote European countries to unmask Western hypocrisy. Retaining these laws on our books is being used to persecute minorities in other countries. Humanists UK is a founding member of the End Blasphemy Laws campaign set up by Humanists International. ▷



Since its foundation in 2015, ten countries have abolished their blasphemy laws including Scotland earlier this year. Spain is in the process of doing the same.

In 2019, Humanists UK launched a campaign to repeal blasphemy laws in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin, SDLP, the Alliance Party, the Green Party, and People before Profit, have all committed to repealing the blasphemy laws. The Ulster Unionists do not yet have an official policy but most UU MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) who Humanists UK have worked with are supportive. The DUP is the only party which officially remains opposed. Humanists UK has drafted a bill and we are working with several MLAs to take it forward. We think there is majority support in Stormont for doing this. We just need the Assembly to sit!

Alyson Kirkpatrick: “The Christian God only has protection in Northern Ireland – not in Great Britain...”

Alyson Kirkpatrick, a human rights lawyer, spoke in a personal capacity. She spoke about Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. There is no agreed definition of blasphemy, and for something that is a criminal offence this is highly unsatisfactory. It offends against the right not to be punished without law (it’s a common law offence with no proper definition); the right to express publicly one’s own conscience and beliefs, even if that contradicts someone else’s, however deeply felt they are or however ancient their religion may be; the right not to be discriminated against; the right to personal autonomy; the right to private life

etc. Only the God worshipped by Christians appears to be protected – he receives preferential treatment denied to all other gods (positive discrimination). Why? Is the Christian God more easily offended? My Christian friends said: “It’s for us to protect God” and “as believers we are the judges of what offends God, and it’s whether we are offended on his behalf”. Speaking as a lawyer, this is highly unsatisfactory. The Christian God only has protection here in Northern Ireland – not in England, Wales or Scotland.

The new Bill of Rights bill provides that freedom of speech is to take precedence over many fundamental rights. It may at face value seem progressive but this is not progressive. I suspect it will continue to protect Christianity and make speech which is racist, sexist, homophobic and sectarian more acceptable. Northern Ireland has no offence of hate speech, unlike the rest of the UK, to protect vulnerable minorities. This current fixation with free speech more likely is a direct response, I think, to the woke generation. It’s a new step in the so-called culture war. The evidence doesn’t indicate it’s to facilitate dissent to protest against authority and that’s what free speech is about – for those who don’t have power to speak up against those who do.

Gary McLelland: “It’s not just an embarrassing relic to have on your statute book...”

Gary McLelland mentioned Humanists International’s *Freedom of Thought Report*. Blasphemy law is bad law. It is there to protect a majoritarian contested belief, which gives up the principle that people can have divergent views. How many different sects ▷





Andrew Copson (standing, far wall)
making an appeal at the Gala Dinner

of Christianity have blasphemous beliefs according to others sects? So you have to pick one in particular. Humanists are almost by definition blasphemers in many countries. That's what we've been doing here all day. The ability to blaspheme, to challenge ideas, is fundamental to the [renewal?] of those ideas themselves [referring to the Protestant Reformation]. So Christians and religious people should have a vested interest in protecting the ability to challenge their own ideas. Blasphemy laws also protect and shield people who should be challenged – religious leaders who use criminal law to insulate themselves against democratic accountability. They also legitimize violence, vigilantism, and mob violence. They are by definition a majoritarian tool and the effect of them is to persecute minorities.

Humanists International runs a casework programme. Last year we received 259 verified requests for support from humanists at risk. These are people who were being persecuted as a result of their humanist

beliefs or identity.

Gary also spoke about Mubarak Bala, President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, who is serving a 24-year prison sentence in connection with Facebook posts he is alleged to have made over the course of April 2020, which are deemed to have caused a public disturbance due to their “blasphemous” content. There is no such thing as a blasphemy law in Pakistan. What they do is refer to civil unrest but the effect is just the same. Not all blasphemy laws are called blasphemy laws.

It's not just an embarrassing relic to have on your statute book in Northern Ireland. You have an opportunity to send out a moral message to the rest of the world that these laws are bad and should be repealed. I wish you every luck in doing so.



“Integrated Education brings children and staff from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other beliefs, cultures and communities together in one school.”



Robert Cann, Education Campaigns Manager at Humanists UK, hosted a panel discussion on inclusive schools with Kellie Armstrong (Alliance Party MLA), Lynn Johnston (Development Officer for the NI Council for Integrated Education), Matthew Milliken (academic researcher on education policies) and Boyd Sleator.

Lynn Johnston informed us that integrated schools originated in the 1970s with a group of parents who started a campaign called “All Children Together”. Today there are 68, soon to be 70, integrated schools in Northern Ireland (out of 1,000 schools).

Matthew Milliken provided a quick insight into the education system in NI. “We divide schools, we divide pupils, we divide teachers, we divide boards of governors, and we divide administrative systems into *them* and *us*... It’s structurally divided, massively expensive, and severely broken. And I’m doing my best to point out how we can fix it.”

Kellie Armstrong was the sponsor of the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) Act which received Royal Assent on 26 April 2022. The effect of the Act is that the Department of Education will have to increase the number of integrated school places and set targets for the number of children being educated in them. Her ultimate aim, shared by **Boyd Sleator**, is a *single* education system. Boyd added the word *secular* to the overall aim, not to have a *Christian* integrated sector. DW

A fortnight after the Conference the High Court found that laws requiring all schools in Northern Ireland to provide faith-based Christian religious education (RE) and collective worship breach human rights legislation. In a [landmark judgment](#) handed down in the High Court in Northern Ireland, Mr Justice Colton ruled that the exclusively Christian nature of RE and worship violates the freedom of religion or belief of a non-religious family. AM





Richard Wiseman is Professor of the Public Understanding of Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire. Recognise the famous photo behind him? Answer below.
Photo of Richard by Neil Camp.

Richard Wiseman: “Dream big to achieve the impossible...”

David Warden reports that in a self-deprecating, highly entertaining and inspiring presentation for the penultimate session of the convention, Richard Wiseman spoke about magic, illusion, the paranormal, and how to achieve the seemingly impossible. He started his working life as a magician and his warm-up act for us included a magic trick he learnt as an eight-year-old boy (making a red hanky disappear and then re-appear).

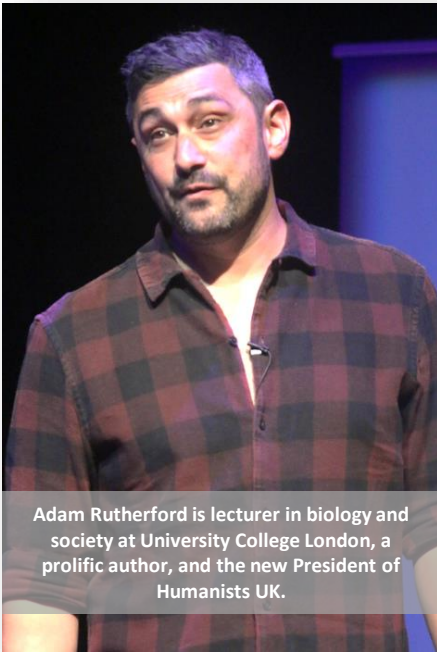
Richard demonstrated that our brains cannot process all the information available to our senses and that, without telling us, they focus attention on what normally matters. We think we are looking at the whole world all of the time but to do that we would need a brain the size of a planet. Our brains distort what we see, depending on the surrounding context, and they can readily detect faces in things like clouds. Magicians exploit the fact that our brains make assumptions about what’s

happening. Years ago, Richard interviewed some of the NASA mission controllers from the Apollo moon landings, and asked them to tell him about the *mindset* that enabled them to achieve the seemingly impossible. President Kennedy told his scientific advisers to “*think bigger, think impossible, and do it by the end of the decade*”. If you were in charge of mission control, who would you put behind those desks? Maybe the most senior rocket scientists? Absolutely not. The average age in mission control was twenty-one. All the senior folks were incredibly sceptical. So they brought in a group of people who were so young they didn’t know it couldn’t be done. They were selected on passion rather than academic background. If they had fire in their eyes, they were recruited. They overturned conventional wisdom and got to the Moon in 1969.

I said to one of the mission controllers: “How did you do it? What’s the secret?” He said “Basically we dared to dream big. We started with nothing.” It’s very easy to look at someone who’s accomplished something and think I could never do that but you have to remember you’re comparing their chapter twenty with your chapter one. So being able to dream big and thinking you can do it is so, so important. I wrote a book called *Shoot for the Moon: How the Moon Landings Taught us the 8 Secrets of Success* (2019) about that mindset.

It’s about imagining a different world. To do something that’s never been done before. To do the opposite of what everyone else is doing. And getting away with it. Our brain allows us to imagine a different future. When you face the inevitable difficulties, look up at the Moon and remember we did it once and we can do it again.





Adam Rutherford is lecturer in biology and society at University College London, a prolific author, and the new President of Humanists UK.

Adam Rutherford: “Science has always been the backbone of civilisation...”

Adam Rutherford thanked Richard Wiseman for a highly entertaining talk which was a hard act to follow, especially as his own talk was going to be about genocide and the history of eugenics – to end this conference on a really positive and optimistic note!

Adam said that science has always been the backbone of civilisation and the set of tools that has enabled our lives and our continued existence. However, I work in a domain of science as a geneticist at UCL, where I focus on the rather more pernicious history of genetics. My latest book is called *Control: The*

Dark History and Troubling Present of Eugenics (2022). Eugenics was created in order to serve a white supremacist and colonial expansion project. I think that reassessing one's history is essential for understanding where we are at the moment.

Eugenics starts with Plato in *The Republic* where he talks about the matching of gold standard women and men to produce gold standard children. Plutarch and Seneca also talk about it. It's been part of all cultures for the whole of history. The word 'eugenics' was coined by Francis Galton in the 19th century. Esoteric ideas can be co-opted by political ideologies and we should be super-aware of this. It's not just a historical artefact. With recent genetic technologies we have seen the re-emergence of some of these ideas. [Adam gave some examples referring to Donald Trump, Dominic Cummings and *Roe v Wade*.] So ideas of eugenics are very much in our present, in our news, and in the centre of governments around the world.

Adam spoke at some length about Francis Galton's ideas about eugenics. Adam said he was extremely racist and had extreme white supremacist views for his time, as well as from our own vantage point. Scientific racism was the norm at the time – races were ranked hierarchically. Most of the key eugenicists of the time fetishized the civilizations of Greece and Rome and saw history as one of decline. It starts with wanting to improve society and ends by excluding everyone thought to be defective: it's an ableist, classist, racist and white supremacist set of beliefs.

Eugenics, considered so toxic today following the Holocaust, was almost universally accepted in the first half of the twentieth century as a means to improve the 'stock' of the population. It was accepted across the political spectrum, including the Webbs, G B Shaw, Churchill, and Balfour.



Marie Stopes was a 'monster' – she wanted to sterilise the Irish and expel them from London. She also hated Jews, Prussians, and Catholics. D H Lawrence also wrote in 1908 about building a lethal chamber for the sick, the halt, and the maimed. Early in his career, William Beveridge also spoke about removing the franchise and reproductive rights from men who were not of the right quality.

Voltaire was an awful racist. Francis Crick was a terrible eugenicist. I feel obliged to mention that previous presidents of the British Humanist Association were also terrible eugenicists. I'm referring to Julian Huxley who was President of the BHA in the 1960s. This is not a criticism of him specifically, but really to illustrate how ubiquitous the cultural acceptance of ideas such as eugenics was amongst all strata of society. Huxley did change his views however – the best way to improve society was to improve society. Crick was Vice President of the BHA in the 1970s. Churchill was the main political driver of eugenics in the First World War era but sterilization legislation was successfully opposed by Josiah Wedgwood, 1st Baron Wedgwood (1872-1943) – a Liberal and Labour politician. We didn't have enforced sterilisation in this country but in thirty-one countries around the world they did.

In the second half of the talk, Adam focussed on America and Germany. Ideas were formalised in the first two decades of the twentieth century which persist to this day. Many of you will be aware of the return of neo-Nazi, neo-fascist, eugenics-type ideologies in recent years, particularly in America, and we saw replacement theory being described as part of those ideologies in Charlottesville in 2017. "The Jews will not replace us." It's very much part of our present. Douglas Murray's recent book *The War on the West* is an obvious version of Great Replacement Theory.

Adam spoke about Sir Ronald Fisher FRS (1890-1962), a British geneticist with eugenicist views; Madison Grant (1865-1937), an American eugenicist whose 1916 book *The Passing of the Great Race* was described by Adolf Hitler as his Bible; Lothrop Stoddard, an American white supremacist who wrote *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat Against White World-Supremacy* in 1920; Charles Davenport (1866-1944) – a biologist who was influential in the American eugenics movement; his deputy Harry Laughlin (1880-1943); and Henry Herbert Goddard (1866-1957) – a prominent American psychologist and eugenicist.

Great Replacement Theory is also one of the central themes in the novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald *The Great Gatsby* (1925), reflecting an obsession with this idea in the top echelons of society. Mary Harriman (1851-1932), was an extremely wealthy railroad widow who, with her daughter, helped to fund the development of eugenics policy along with the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation.

The final part of Adam's talk explained that the Nazi eugenics project from 1933 until 1945 was primarily funded, influenced, and legally frame-worked by American eugenicists. Two eugenics laboratories in Berlin in 1933-38 were funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Ending on a more positive note, Adam quoted Charles Darwin: "As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races." Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man**

DW





Anthony Lewis and
David Warden in
their promotional
tee shirts

David Warden asks: “Where was the diversity of opinion?”

I thoroughly enjoyed the Humanists UK Convention in Belfast. As always, it was superbly well organised and presented by Andrew Copson and his outstanding team.

In the printed programme, however, Andrew referred to ‘the excitement of debate’ and in his opening remarks, he said that ‘humanists like to take on the big issues’. But this convention was notable for its lack of debate and its deadening conformity of opinion. Since 2016, humanism seems to have lost its appetite for diversity of opinion and aligned itself with liberal-left progressivism. Over the

weekend, for example, there were the ritual denunciations of Trump and Johnson, but no mention was made of Vladimir Putin, his monstrous war against Western humanistic values and his genocidal assault upon the Ukrainian people. I wonder why this was. Could it have anything to do with the inconvenient fact that Boris Johnson is a hero to the Ukrainian people or that Biden’s weakness gave a green light to Putin?

Andrew has been explicit about his opposition to small ‘c’ conservatism. In a recent interview for *The Freethinker* he defined this as being ▷



'hidebound, to put a value on tradition that is weighed in itself against other values and priorities' which is 'probably incompatible with the idea that we should think from first principles about things, be free, be self-determined, try to maximise human development.' He mentioned thinkers who have opposed humanism, like Roger Scruton and Edmund Burke, who are alleged to have held that 'we don't want individuals to be rational actors, we don't want the state to be a social contract – we want something more ethnic, more organic, more rooted in timeless things that you can't question... the attitude that puts [tradition] above everything else dogmatically as a point of principle'. I'm not a student of Burke but I have read Roger Scruton and I think this is a caricature of the kind of conservatism he espouses. I believe that humanism needs the yin and yang of liberalism and conservatism to avoid extremes at either end of the spectrum.

The liberal instinct, as Andrew indicates, is to think from first principles, to be free and self-determined. We don't want to be hidebound and tethered to traditions for their own sake. The danger of liberalism, however, is that it can overestimate the capacity of human rationality to create perfect societies. History provides plenty of examples of tradition-busting utopianism which have swiftly turned into murderous tyrannies. Today's liberal-left progressivism has not yet turned violent but it has become extremely censorious and intolerant of dissent.

The conservative instinct is to say that institutions and social units matter for human flourishing: civil society, stable families, cohesive communities, and nations which encourage a sense of belonging and shared values. These instincts do not automatically translate into tribalism and xenophobia. Instead, they can be the basis for stability and



Conservative philosopher Roger Scruton: Is conservatism incompatible with humanism?

Photo: Pete Helme

international co-operation. The liberal instinct, taken to an extreme, is to view families as an encumbrance when they impede the free and self-actualising individual; that borders don't matter because individuals should be free to roam anywhere they please; and that countries don't matter because, well, we should 'imagine no countries'. The conservative insight is that this degree of liberal individualism can be destructive of community, solidarity, trust, and social order.

Liberal-left progressivism enjoys almost total cultural hegemony in higher education, in the BBC, Channel 4 and the Guardian, in most political parties, in the civil service, in comedy and the arts, and in big tech. Given this context, it's almost inevitable that it also dominates organised humanism. But humanism should resist ideological conformity. Humanism is the proud inheritor of ▷



freethought which it rightly promotes when it comes to religion. It should do the same when it comes to our political leanings. I'd like to see a much broader range of thinkers and speakers at future humanist conferences, to challenge ideological conformity. We should be prepared to take some risks and be willing to have some arguments. Small 'c' conservatives should be made to feel welcome as long as their ultimate values align with the humanist desire to build a better world.

Blasphemy doublethink

There was a curious moment during the panel discussion on blasphemy when human rights lawyer Alyson Kirkpatrick implicitly called for Northern Ireland to have an offence of hate speech to protect vulnerable minorities. This was after Rachel Taggart-Ryan, Senior Campaigns Officer at Humanists UK, had said that one argument commonly put forward in defence of blasphemy law is that it protects vulnerable minorities and that retaining blasphemy laws in the UK legitimizes their use in countries where people face the death penalty. It's far from clear to me that a progressive humanist panel calling for the abolition of blasphemy laws and freedom of expression on the one hand should be calling for hate speech laws and curtailment of expression on the other. As the [National Secular Society](#) has observed, '...accusations of "stirring up hatred" are ten a penny on social media alone. It also sends a confusing message about the reach of criminal law. It isn't a crime to hate, so why should it be a crime to encourage others to hate?'. It seems possible, at the very least, that enthusiastic support for hate speech laws in the UK could also be used to legitimise the retention of blasphemy laws elsewhere, or weaken the case against them. I may be mistaken, but it

would have been good to have had more of a debate about free speech and 'progressive' threats to it. Humanists UK could in future invite speakers like Cambridge philosopher Arif Ahmed to put the libertarian case for free speech.

Also during this session, Gary McClelland seemed to conflate blasphemy with heresy and dissent. Heretics and dissenters have indeed been persecuted over the centuries but having a heretical or dissenting belief is not the same as denigrating a religion or a sacred object. Humanists should not be enthusiasts for denigrating and insulting religion but we should, of course, be free to criticise and dissent from it.

Democratic deficit

Guy Otten writes that he detected a widespread feeling that there is a democratic deficit in Humanists UK. There was an obvious example of this at the end of the Annual General Meeting on Sunday afternoon when we were asked to endorse a statement calling for the government's policy of deporting refugees in the UK to Rwanda to be abolished. There was no discussion about this statement. We went straight to a vote. I was the only person to vote against it, which took some courage, not because I want to see genuine refugees deported but because human trafficking and illegal migration to the UK is a complex problem which should have been discussed and debated at the convention if we were going to endorse a statement on it. Motions condemning a government policy, without any thought as to how the situation it addresses can be solved, look like another example of humanist organisations assuming that all right-thinking humanists automatically share the same political viewpoint. We don't. We're a diverse bunch of people.





Humanists UK Convention: Belfast

More optimism please

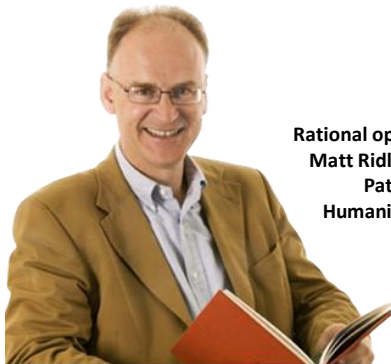
By Anthony Lewis



The Humanists UK Annual Convention held in Belfast was the first that Rick, my husband, and I have attended. I grew up in Northern Ireland so was delighted to be able to attend whilst we were on our annual two-week holiday 'back home' in Ireland so that we could show our support for the NI Humanists.

Highlights for me were the session on the continuing sectarian education system in NI, Adam Rutherford's keynote talk on the sorry history of eugenics, and Richard Wiseman's humorous masterclass on all sorts of 'impossibilities'! I had not appreciated how the Belfast Good Friday Agreement had hard-baked the sectarian divide deeply into the new NI power-sharing institutions, which dismayed me. I thought the Convention was well organised and, as always, I appreciated very much the efforts of all the volunteers involved and of course Andrew Copson's highly effective and professional team in putting on such a great event.

However, attending the event as a couple was not cheap! By the time you add up travel, accommodation, and registration fees our attendance cost us almost £1,500! So afterwards, Rick and I discussed the overall 'value for money' and decided we would want to get far more from the Convention as 'customers' to justify this expense in future. We decided that we would very much like to see three elements added to future conventions to entice us back: more optimism, more diversity, and more grassroots participation. These elements



**Rational optimist
Matt Ridley is a
Patron of
Humanists UK**

would, we think, add more energy, generate more debate and inject fresh dynamism into the conference and help to attract a much wider range of participants. Let's look at each of these three elements in more detail.

“More optimism is needed to counteract a diet of relentless woe...”

Humanism at its core is meant to be a positive life stance, but do we demonstrate this very often? Maybe we have all been infected with a negative mindset as we emerge from the global pandemic. A.C. Grayling's keynote address at the start of the conference did set things off on a somewhat negative tone. But many other talks were also about the threats we face, the challenges, the dangers, and worries about the dystopias of the past and future. As a born optimist and as a scientist I really do despair sometimes at this diet of relentless woe. I feel that humanism should▷



be the movement which is most strongly pushing back against the prophets of doom and despair, advocating vigorously for more science, more technology and more innovation as the best way for humanity to continue to flourish and to solve the challenges we face.

There is no shortage of positive advocates. There is, of course, Steven Pinker, author of *Enlightenment Now*. But we also have our very own Matt Ridley, author of *How Innovation Works*, *The Rational Optimist* and also *The Evolution of Everything*. And there's Walter Isaacson, author of *The Code Breakers* about the race to develop the CRISPR gene-editing technology which was used to create many of the Covid vaccines, and also the excellent book *The Innovators* which describes the 'hackers and geeks' behind the information technology revolution that is now upon us.

"I'd like to see these huge developments discussed at humanist events in a more open, balanced and optimistic way..."

The future is built by those who embrace change and who invent and innovate. In the last few decades, individual entrepreneurs have changed our world beyond recognition and many have become very rich along the way. I suspect many of these people have a humanistic view of reality. These wealth creators have and will continue to change the world whether we like it or not. It worries me that humanism at present cuts itself off from these dynamics with its current anti-business, anti-wealth creation, and 'anti-rich' rhetoric. Unless you tap into this arena you are always



Why not invite humanist Elon Musk?

Photo: The Royal Society [Creative Commons](#)

going to be stuck in a negative, reactive mode – forever the protester rather than the advocate. I'd like to see these huge, ongoing developments in human affairs represented and discussed at humanist events in a more open, balanced and optimistic way, looking at both the positive trends and not just with a negative focus on the risks. For example, Elon Musk recently 'came out' as an atheist and as a humanist – why not invite him along to give a keynote address, rather than just dismiss him as a rich billionaire?!

More Diversity: Humanism is founded upon the Enlightenment values of evidence-based reasoning, the existence of an objective reality and freedom of expression. All are being challenged at present by a range of new and old ideologies from both the left and the right. I view movements such as QAnon and Antifa with equal contempt! It was evident that the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* by the US Supreme Court just before the Convention came as a shock to many attending the conference. But it should not have come as a total shock because there have been many voices sounding the alarm for over a decade. Have we been listening? American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has been warning for many years about this coming ▷



backlash against identitarianism and ‘Critical Theory’ in his books *The Coddling of the American Mind* and *The Righteous Mind*. In her book *Cynical Theories*, British author and cultural writer Helen Pluckrose bluntly asked that if you cannot define what a woman is how can you protect her rights when they come under attack? Maybe the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* is a reminder to all of us about how important it is to listen to a diverse range of opinions so that you are forewarned of what is going on outside your own ‘viewpoint space’.

“We need to inject far more diversity of opinion into future humanist conventions...”

That’s why I think it’s very important to inject far more diversity of opinion into future humanist conventions. For me, most speakers and panel members appeared to be coming at things from a rather narrow, centre-left perspective on most issues. Injecting more difference, more diversity of viewpoint, would introduce much needed energy and challenge. It would be great to have future discussion panels comprising people who actually disagreed with each other! To be brutal, there are few things duller than people who’ve thought deeply about important matters vigorously agreeing with each other about their worthy insights! There lies the path to being shocked by real world events.

There’s no shortage of exciting speakers who could provide fresh perspectives. Many, judging by their recent books and interviews, appear to have a humanistic perspective. For example, Konstantin Kisin, joint founder of the podcast Triggernometry has just

published *An Immigrant’s Love Letter to the West* which could provide a refreshing keynote to test our complacency about threats to the Enlightenment. Or how about inviting historian Niall Ferguson to talk about the development of our money system, which he describes as one of humanity’s greatest innovations? Or Dr Andrew Doyle on threats to free speech. And how about adding the anti-woke comedian Leo Kearse to future comedy line-ups? I’d also like to hear Professor Nigel Biggar present his motivations for founding the Free Speech Union as part of a debate about free speech in Liverpool (the city of the 2023 Humanists UK Convention).

Finally, grassroots participation should be an essential part of Humanists UK’s annual convention to promote and foster support for its ongoing campaigns and to hold its AGM. It’s also a great opportunity for Humanists UK staff and members to meet each other socially and to network and link up. Rick and I enjoyed the social side of the conference very much indeed – especially the gala dinner! But on the whole, the convention was about being talked at most of the time with little audience involvement. What was missing for us was more member participation and more time for Q&A. Perhaps an ‘open mike session’ could give members the opportunity to present an issue of concern. Perhaps a mechanism could be put in place to identify burning issues that could form the basis of a set of parallel ‘special interest’ discussion sessions? These ‘fringe’ sessions could be badged as ‘ideas factories’, with appropriate disclaimers that they do not represent the views or approved policy of Humanists UK. Such open opportunities would give members a chance to address, to some extent, the democratic deficit highlighted in this edition by Guy Otten. Maybe *Humanistically Speaking* itself could host a couple of these fringe sessions at Liverpool in 2023.





Glasgow Conference: Mike Flood and Susan Guiver ask “What role should humanism play?”

On Saturday 4th June, Humanist Society Scotland hosted the first in-person gathering of Humanists International since the Covid-19 pandemic, with over 80 delegates present.

We were drawn to this conference by the theme: “Is it time for a new Enlightenment?” in view of recent seismic events and, if so, “What role should humanism play?” The ‘seismic events’ referred to in the motion included the pandemic, the worrying rise in anti-science rhetoric and ‘fake news’, and the climate emergency. Overall, we thought that the conference was well-organised, and the choice of the great Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s Willow Tea Rooms for the reception was inspired. Naturally, we were disappointed that the keynote speaker, Dame Anne Glover, had to send her apologies after going down with Covid. But we were most surprised that none of the panels directly

addressed the question: “What role should humanism play?” Use of the Vevox Q&A platform also excluded much of the expertise and experience in the room.

A number of the panellists spoke with passion about persecution and human rights violations taking place both at home and abroad. Terry Anderson, who is Executive Director of Cartoonists Rights Network International, spoke engagingly about the work of political cartoonists and the way they are targeted and, all too frequently, come to grief when they displease the powers that be. Roza Salih, a Kurdish-born human rights activist who has just been elected as an SNP councillor, spoke about her fight for the rights of asylum seekers — a cause she has courageously pursued since her school days when, at just fifteen, she co-founded ‘Glasgow Girls’. She impressed us not only ▷



by the change in official thinking on asylum that Glasgow Girls achieved, but also by her humility and infectious charm.

The topic of the first session was misinformation and anti-science. We had leading Norwegian humanists in the audience who we learned at the reception had been running a campaign on critical thinking since 2021. They have already produced a podcast and over twenty short films with personal stories from people who have made mistakes and learned from them. But we didn't get to hear about this. We believe that contributions from leading specialists, followed by questions from a moderator, from the floor and those online, would have been more productive, as was the case at an international conference on misinformation and human rights that one of us attended on return. That said, delegates did raise some interesting questions, for example, about whether Donald Trump should have been banned from Twitter. But the panel appeared unaware of the debate around 'freedom of speech' and 'freedom of reach' that Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugan had addressed in her testimony to the US Senate back in October. As with other questions, there were people in the audience who could have made a useful input. We hope that Humanists International will rethink its approach for future meetings, because vetting questions posted online makes dialogue difficult, and excludes so much audience expertise.

So, "What role should humanism play?"

The organised humanist movement talks about tackling 'emerging contemporary issues', but it is very selective in its choice of topics. One of the questions we wanted to ask was why issues such as artificial intelligence, misinformation and the climate crisis — which

raise such huge moral and ethical issues — are not considered 'core issues' for the humanist cause. We didn't know at the time that the conference had actually adopted the Declaration of Modern Humanism, which (like its predecessors) proclaims that humanists "feel a duty of care to all of humanity, including future generations," and that we "recognise... and accept our responsibility for the impact we have on the rest of the world." The launch last year of Humanist Climate Action is a start, but it is volunteer-led and there is no mention of it or climate change in Humanists UK's new 5 Year Plan.

Broadening the appeal of humanism

We would like to see humanist groups working in close partnership with NGOs that have in-depth knowledge of climate change and topics like AI, misinformation, environmental protection and intergenerational justice because, as Scotland's 'Eco-Humanists' point out, humanists "have the potential to add a rational and compassionate voice". This could also speak to a wider demographic and broaden the appeal of humanism.

In her closing remarks, Professor Maggie Kinloch from Humanist Society Scotland, did return to the conference motion and the role of humanism in the world today, but this served only to highlight the failure of the other speakers to actually address the topic.

Dr Mike Flood is Chair, and Susan Guiver is Secretary, of Milton Keynes Humanists. This article is written in a personal capacity. With the support of Humanistically Speaking Mike is currently putting together a new group to stimulate a broader discussion on the issues raised in this piece. It is provisionally named 'Future of Humanism Group.' Mike's PhD was in organic chemistry.



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