



# Humanistically Speaking

July 2021



*A Humanist hotline to a secular worldview*

## GLOBAL HUMANISM

Features this month:

- Leo Igwe Interview
- FGM and MGM
- Humanist Schools in Uganda
- Humanism and the EU
- Israel-Palestine Conflict
- Asylum Seekers
- Murder in Pakistan
- Atlas Hugged book review
- Your letters and emails
- Poet's Corner
- The Golden Rule

Humanistically Speaking



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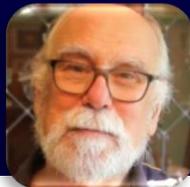
Humanistically Speaking

*A Humanist hotline to a secular worldview*

# In this Issue

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 Humanist groups or Humanists UK.

This month's edition of *Humanistically Speaking* has a particular focus on international Humanism and global issues of interest to Humanists. We tackle some huge topics and doubtless we shall return to them. One particular concern is that Humanism is not welcome everywhere in the world – see my *Thought for the Day* on page 16 about Pakistan.

Steve Hurd, chair of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust, has written a fascinating report about establishing Humanist Schools in what is a highly religious and superstitious country, and where belief in witchcraft is also a significant issue. You'll find his report on page 5.

My interview with Leo Igwe at page 14 also explores the subject of witchcraft. Based in Nigeria, Leo is nearly 1,000 miles away from Uganda, but witchcraft is still an issue. He is a champion of exposing so-called trials and punishment of women and children, and has suffered the consequences of crossing vested interests, in particular the hugely profitable Liberty Gospel Church. Leo has suffered death threats, imprisonment, beatings, attacks on his supporters, and even his family. This is clearly a brave and determined man, and my talk with Leo turned out to be an interview that I will never forget.

On other pages, David Warden asks whether humanists can support the State of Israel, Lily Berrell explores whether Brexit has adversely affected Humanism in Europe, and Amelie Forbes discovers just how difficult it is to apply for asylum. Aaron and David report on their exclusive interviews with two people, one male, one female, whose lives have been affected by the cruel practice of circumcision.

We have also to report that Ronnie Barr has retired from the editorial team to pursue his chosen profession. It's always a little sad when young writers move on, but that's the way of life, and we thank him for his service, and wish him well in his new career. That's all from me for now. Time to open the pages, enjoy the read, and if there is anything you want published next month, just send an email.

David Brittain



## Malcolm Love

We are very sad to announce the death of Malcolm Love. Malcolm was the partner of Maggie Hall who writes our popular 'Maggie's Musings' column every month. We send Maggie our heartfelt condolences.



Malcolm was a member of Brighton Humanists and a professional painter for over fifty years. He graduated with a Fine Arts Degree from Reading University in the mid 1960s and completed a Master's Degree with research into drawing strategies in Art Education in the 1980s. He has exhibited at a number of venues in London and the South East over the years, including the Whitechapel Gallery and Cambridge University as well as teaching art in secondary, further and adult education and undertaking private tuition. His work is in private collections both here and abroad. Some of his work was featured in our October 2020 edition.



**Shadows at Cucuron  
Oil on canvas  
by Malcolm Love**

*Cucuron is a village in the south east of France.*

## Humanist Climate Action: Are we doing enough?



Mike Flood from Milton Keynes Humanists fears not. With the rebrand of *Humanists for a Better World* to [Humanist Climate Action](#) there was, perhaps, the expectation that we as humanists were going to be more globally focussed on planetary repair, at least from an individual perspective. Are we really doing enough?

On the Milton Keynes Humanists [Big Issues](#) page Mike shares his sense of disappointment and a link to his three-page discussion paper that he would like to bring to our attention.



- \* Should we be doing more as Humanists?
- \* Are we proactive enough in caring for our planet?
- \* Should we make a more conscious effort to influence those around us, including governments?

Why not write in and let us know?



## Ronnie Barr

We're sad to announce that Ronnie has decided to leave our editorial team to focus on his new apprenticeship in digital marketing and associated college studies. Ronnie has been with our team from the outset and we will miss his excellent writing on issues of interest to young people in general and young humanists in particular. We wish him all the very best.



## Humanists International awards £90,000 to humanist projects



Every year, Humanists International awards a series of grants to support the projects of its Members and Associates around the world. This year, the umbrella organisation for global humanism has announced that more than £90,000 has been awarded to support 18 humanist projects around the world.

For example, nearly £10,000 was awarded to a project to promote critical thinking and sexual health and reproductive rights empowerment among women and girls in Uganda.

Read more here: [Supported Projects](#)

## Appeal to restore grave of Charles Bradlaugh



The National Secular Society has launched an appeal to restore the grave of its founder Charles Bradlaugh MP, which has fallen into disrepair in recent decades. The NSS invites members and supporters to contribute to the project, which is estimated to cost £12,000. Bradlaugh was a 19th century political activist who argued for the abolition of the blasphemy law and the disestablishment of the Church of England. He died on 30 January 1891 and was buried at Brookwood Cemetery. You can contribute to the restoration of this important secularist monument by clicking on the link below:

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/bradlaugh-appeal.html>



Inclusive education based on reason, compassion, tolerance



*By Steve Hurd  
Chair of UHST*

## The place of Humanist Schools in a highly religious society

Witchcraft is still a potent force in Uganda. Many people visit traditional healers and superstition abounds. That said, the Abrahamic religions, brought by Arab slave traders and British colonialists, have a strong hold on society. 80 per cent of the population belongs to one Christian denomination or another and most of the remainder follow Islam. Uganda and much of the rest of Africa has been assailed by different belief systems. Evangelical Christian sects have established churches and schools, insisting that creationism rather than evolution is taught within them and on coercive forms of discipline. Different Muslim groups are working hard to win hearts and minds by building mosques and madrasas and giving gifts for people to convert. Christians and Muslims, for the most part, live very happily together in Uganda. However, exclusive Christian and Muslim sects are promoting social segregation by only admitting children from families that belong to the religious foundation running the school.

The small number of Humanist Schools stand out in a number of respects. They are inclusive – children from all religious traditions and none are encouraged to live, work and play together in harmony (the high schools are two-thirds boarding). Boarders are permitted to practice their religion if they are religious – one hour of devotion. Church leaders recognise that the schools are different – they are secular and humanist. So, while they still visit events at the school they don't preach there. The schools have promoted positive Humanist values as being universal – people of all religions and none can adhere to Humanist values. Visitors always comment on how happy and welcoming the staff and students seem to be. They are well-ordered schools based on personal responsibility. Where problems arise, guidance rather than violence is the watchword. The schools have a democratic structure. When cases of inappropriate behaviour arise, by students or teachers, they are referred to the class prefect who takes them to the school ▶

council, a representative body of students and teachers, chaired by the school's Humanist Counsellor. As Moses Kanya, headteacher at Mustard Seed School points out in a recent video interview [here](#), parents have come to realise that children who attend humanist schools are turning into fine people who have a natural self-discipline, who think for themselves and have social responsibility.

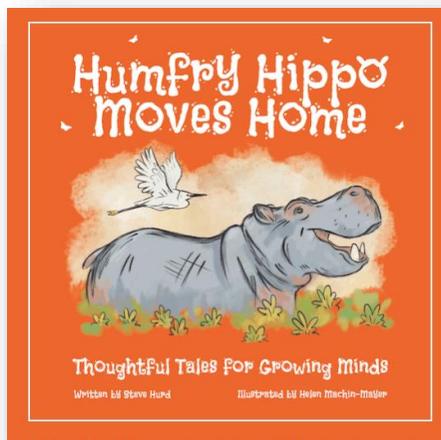
Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UHST) was established as a charity in 2008 to help the humanist schools in Uganda to achieve high standards of education and welfare and to provide scholarship to enable bright children from poor local families to attend the schools. As Humanists, the schools and our charity value free enquiry and want to promote the habit in children of questioning received wisdom and thinking for themselves. To this end, we have flooded the schools with books and through a *Reading for Pleasure* programme fostered a reading culture. We have also uploaded a huge quantity of material onto the school intranets to promote self-guided enquiry learning. The results have been remarkable. The Humanist Schools were hugely under-resourced in their early years. Now they have decent infrastructure, committed teachers who are paid regularly, and good learning resources.

UHST has also helped by funding staff development on an individual and collective basis. The result has been a huge increase in staff loyalty (a very low quit rate). Welfare provision has improved the participation and retention of girl students by improving toilet hygiene and providing school clinics and Afripads (re-useable sanitary pads). The range of extra-curricular activities for students has grown to include competitive sports (football for boys and girls), humanist clubs which make social improvements in the community (e.g. hand-washing stations, tree planting), music,

***“The humanist schools value free enquiry and want to promote the habit in children of questioning received wisdom and thinking for themselves... and humanist clubs make social improvements in the community.”***

dance, drama and debating. As well as providing a rich education that goes beyond the confines of the National Curriculum, the Humanist Schools have also seen a steady rise in their position in school league tables. The two Humanist High Schools currently stand about 5<sup>th</sup> out of 35 high schools in the District at O-level. As A-levels have improved the numbers moving onto university and vocational training (teachers, health workers, commerce, tourism) has increased.

You can help support the humanist schools by direct donation and/or by buying these thoughtful children's books. Click the image below for more information.





By Amelie Forbes

# Amelie Analyzes *The Refugee Problem*

**The United Nations have estimated that there are 21.3 million refugees throughout the world. That's around 0.27% of the world's population. 0.27% may seem like a relatively low figure, but zooming in on specific countries reveals the extent of the problem. In Lebanon, for example, around 1.5 million people are refugees, which is 25% of the total population. It's clear that the number of people fleeing their home countries is high.**

Given these statistics, I would suggest that we have a real issue on our hands. What kind of world are we living in when millions of people feel the need to flee from their home countries? Sometimes, people are leaving in the hope of having a better life. More often than not however, people are having to leave out of desperation or are forcibly removed by their government. In many countries, a person's religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or political beliefs could be perceived as a danger, or even illegal.

Behaving in a way that deviates from social norms is life-threatening for many people. Not only is there the question of whether a person will be persecuted for simply being themselves, there is also the terror that comes with living in a war zone or constantly suffering from the ramifications of natural disasters. There are many reasons why a person may migrate, with the majority of

those reasons being less a matter of preference or choice, and more a matter of simply surviving. After all, a person wouldn't make a journey in which there's a fair chance that they may die unless they absolutely had to.

## People trafficking

The desperation and turmoil many people experience to prompt them to migrate is further highlighted by the fact that people turn to people smugglers. When coming from a repressive government that denies people their human rights, there is little chance of escape if they are attempting to do so openly. If someone has an element of their identity that the government of their country is trying to crush, they may risk imprisonment or worse if they attempt to leave their country via the official route. If a person *does* have the option of leaving their country in a law-abiding way, they may be waiting for months to make it through the legal processes involved. Not everyone will have the time or the money to wait it out for that long, not to mention how exhausting it could be to be continuously waiting for a green light that may never come. In this case, a smuggler's promise to get a person out within a matter of weeks seems to be the much more viable option. Another factor in the choice to trust smugglers is the fact that people sometimes know little to nothing about the policies and laws of the countries they are travelling to, instead doing anything they can to just get ▶

to somewhere safer than the place they are living in. With little chance to plan ahead and no choice but to escape in any way they can, people are forced to make potentially extremely dangerous decisions.

## The UK situation

After all of the barriers they have already had to face, a person must push through further barriers if they survived the journey to a safer country. I was shocked when I found out that the UK has only taken in 0.003% of the world's refugees<sup>1</sup>, although when I had a closer look at the system that people have to go through if they wish to seek asylum in the UK, this figure aligned with the context.

The first step of claiming asylum in the UK is screening, which takes place either at the UK border or over the phone if a person is already in the UK and become eligible for asylum. At the screening they are photographed, have their fingerprints taken, and asked questions about who they are and why they wish to claim asylum. It is then decided whether their case is given to a caseworker or whether the person is to be sent to another safe country in which they could claim asylum. If the case is given to a caseworker, the person then has an asylum interview, in which they must explain how they were persecuted in the country in which they were living and why they are fearful about returning. After the asylum interview has taken place, it can then take up to six months for there to be a decision about whether the person has permission to stay in the UK or not. During this time, the person may be required to attend reporting meetings. If they are not given permission to stay in the UK, they are able to appeal this decision.

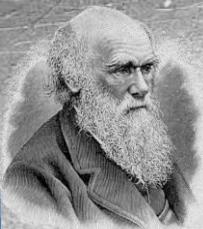
What strikes me about the process of applying for asylum in the UK is that it is

largely dependent on time and access to resources. In order to understand the asylum application process myself, I had to access the government website. If I were a real asylum seeker, how would I be able to obtain the necessary knowledge to make an application if I didn't have access to the internet and a computer? Having access to the internet and a computer is a luxury that not everyone has. An applicant would also need access to a phone and a postal address to receive letters. Even if a person has nowhere to live, they still need to be able to access a phone to call in about getting housing support. If a person arrives in the UK with barely enough money to survive on, nowhere to live, and no access to a phone and/or the internet, how possible is it for them to claim asylum?

Between 2016 and 2018, 36% of cases were granted asylum on the initial decision, rising to 54% after appeal. This suggests that there are flaws in the system. If asylum wasn't able to be rightfully provided in the first instance, there was something wrong in the system that led to 18% of decisions needing to be revisited and corrected. If the UK system is flawed, maybe there are issues in systems across the world. After all they have to go through before they get to safe countries, refugees may be being let down by the processes that are supposed to save them.

**In light of everything that I have discovered, I think that we need to do better. With a system that isn't accessible to all and may be providing questionable judgements on cases, how many lives are being lost due to people not getting the support that they need? How many human beings are being pushed aside and forgotten?**

<sup>1</sup> Statistic from : <https://helprefugees.org/uk/>



Charles Darwin.

# Dear Darwin

Ask Charles your difficult questions...



The Mount, Shrewsbury.  
Darwin's family home.

## Dear Darwin

It is time for my daughter to undergo the ritual cut as is tradition in my culture. But some of your Humanists have interfered so I said I'd write to you to stress the importance of keeping with tradition that stretches back through the ages. A girl is not pure unless we take her to the cutter, and failure to do this would mean she and our family would be outcasts. As you know her health will be improved, and she will be much more suitable for marriage. Please tell your Humanists this is a normal practice and we have every right to do this.

Mercy Agnawi, Ipswich

## Dear Mercy

Speaking candidly from the perspective of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, I am inclined to describe this practice as savage, but I'm acutely aware of the fact that doing so may earn me the opprobrium of 21<sup>st</sup> century culture warriors who will accuse me of Western imperialism.

So let us have a fireside chat, man to woman so to speak. I am not a gynaecologist but I very much doubt that your daughter's health will be improved as a result of this procedure. Indeed, I very much fear that it may lead to dreadful complications. According to the NSPCC website, female circumcision is often performed by someone with no medical training who uses instruments such as a knife, scalpel, scissors, glass or razor blade.

Children are rarely given anaesthetic or antiseptic treatment and are often forcibly restrained. It's a dangerous practice and can cause long-lasting health problems that continue throughout a child's life including incontinence or difficulties urinating, frequent or chronic vaginal, pelvic or urinary infections, menstrual problems, kidney damage and possible kidney failure, cysts and abscesses, pain during sex, infertility, complications during pregnancy and childbirth, emotional and mental health problems.

It is for these reasons that the practice is illegal in the UK and I would urge you, therefore, to seek advice to empower you to make the right and lawful choice for your daughter. I appreciate how difficult it is for you to defy cultural traditions, beliefs and norms, but you have an opportunity to end this practice for the wellbeing of your daughter and her daughters.

Please watch the three-minute film below and use the contact details provided at the end.



# Aaron Explores

Trying to see the wood for the trees: **Circumcision**



## It's not just a female thing...

This month, *Humanistically Speaking* interviews people whose lives have been adversely affected by female and male circumcision. In this exclusive and revealing interview, Aaron speaks to Adam (not his real name).

Thank you Adam for being open enough to share your feelings about this topic with us. Male circumcision was a mainstream practice in the UK in the past, but now it's almost exclusively performed for religious purposes. Can you tell us at what age was this done to you, and at what stage in life did you realise you were different?

Well, I was circumcised when I was a baby, and when I was a child, during swimming, changing rooms that sort of thing, I did realise I looked a bit different from other children, but as a child, I just thought that there was a natural variation. I only realised that an operation had happened when my parents told me as a teenager.

**How would you describe your reaction to having this choice made for you?**

I was very upset. As soon as I found out about it I looked it up and found out how the penis is meant to work for someone that isn't circumcised, and I felt that I was missing out on that function as well as the aesthetic changes which I don't like.

**What would you say are the differences between a penis with a foreskin and yours?**

For somebody that has a foreskin they can pull the foreskin back and forth over the head



of the penis, and that gives a kind of lubricating effect during penetrative sex and feels good.

All of this tissue was removed in my case, as well as the frenulum which along with the ridged bands on the foreskin (also removed), are meant to be the most sensitive parts of the penis to fine touch. The glans of the penis is also exposed to rubbing against clothing all day long, so it becomes dry and less sensitive.

One side effect which can occur when someone is cut as a child is that the scrotum can extend further than normal along the underside of the penis to make up for the lack of skin. This condition is called "webbed penis" and usually happens when the amount of skin removed was particularly aggressive, which was true in my case and can only be fixed with further surgery.

Would you/have you had your child circumcised?  
Have you asked them about it since?

 [send an email](#)

## Talk us through the real-life consequences of living without a foreskin.

Well for one thing, if I want to masturbate, I need to use lube. It's almost impossible to do so otherwise – I get chafing if I don't use it. There's a different grip that I have to use that I had to discover by myself when I was a teenager, as the information I had learned about it in sex education in school only really applied to intact penises.

## When you became sexually active, from your perspective, how did that feel? Did you have to teach your partner?

So I've only ever had sex with intact men, in that they still had a foreskin. The difference is that they knew how to manipulate themselves and other intact men, but they didn't know how to do that to a man who is circumcised, which is understandable as it's something I struggle to do. It is quite difficult to stimulate a man who has been circumcised.

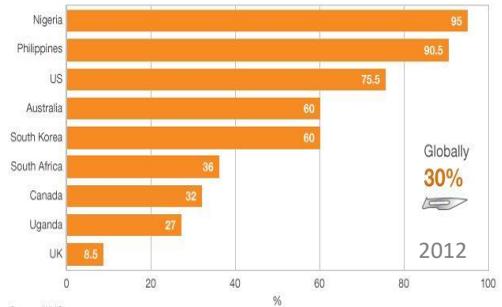
## Would you say this has left things unfulfilled?

In a way. I used to be very upset about it when I was a teenager because physically I feel I don't get as much from sex as I might otherwise have done. I don't feel I can participate fully. Now I just focus on making my partner feel good and doing things that involve their body. I don't expect to experience an orgasm during sex. No partner has ever made this happen for me yet, and I've come to accept that in a way.

## Describe your emotional state right now in discussing this?

I would say I'm okay with it. I used to be very upset but I'm not as angry about it now. It's not because it's not worth being angry about because it is, but I feel I have spent enough time being angry. I would still very much prefer for it to have not been done. If it were a choice between a million pounds lottery win or to be intact, I would choose the latter.

How many men are circumcised around the world?



If any men reading this have been similarly affected, there is a practice called foreskin restoration which increases the length of the shaft skin until it covers the glans like a foreskin would, which isn't as good as being intact but it's better than nothing. It takes several years of putting the skin under slight tension so it's not an overnight process, but a lot of men who've tried it have been happy with the results.

## If a law was proposed to ban this procedure for men, which side would you say Humanists should come down on?

Well Humanists UK already opposes infant [male circumcision](#) as it does for FGM, which is a position that I agree with. I want to be clear that I don't think there's any moral reason to ban adult circumcision as long as the man chooses it for himself but doing it to a child takes away their future ability to make that choice for themselves.

**Thank you Adam for being so open with us today. So often FGM is raised, rightly so, as an abhorrent thing to do to a child, and yet males are left undiscussed. Hopefully today we have managed to balance that, demonstrating that there are life changing consequences to this level of abuse. I fully support a ban to this practice globally.**

# Does Brexit weaken International Humanism?

By Lily Berrell

**The European Union supports and defends fundamental human rights including 'the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion'. When implementing laws, the governments of EU countries are bound to comply with and protect the Charter of Fundamental Rights.**

Putting aside complex and divided political views regarding the EU, including its failures and weaknesses, it is hard to appreciate, at today's distance, how much the creation of the origins of EU meant. Just five years after the end of the war, one of its immediate and central purposes was to establish peace and justice following conflict, injustice and human atrocities in Europe.

## **How does the EU protect people's rights?**

Against the odds, the EU has managed to persuade huge numbers of people to focus on unity rather than division, and as a Humanist I would feel proud being part of a community that defends my freedoms. Many fundamental human values are supported in law by the EU: no member state may use the death penalty as punishment; LGBT rights are protected and same-sex relationships are legal in all member states; the EU is a secular body with a separation of church and state; and social equality and unity is promoted through education.



EUROPEAN  
HUMANIST  
FEDERATION



Humanists  
INTERNATIONAL

**Humanists International engages with the European Commission and European Parliament whilst the European Humanist Federation is focused on fighting for religious and faith equality at the EU level.**

Despite public opinion on issues such as assisted dying, UK politicians have little desire to displease religious leaders and are able to avoid addressing such topics due to the ever-existing power of the Church and links between religion and state. Since leaving the EU, there is now even less incentive for these politicians to take such matters seriously. Indeed, in 2017 Humanists UK expressed its concern about what Brexit would mean for discrimination in faith school employment. This is illegal under EU law and was under investigation by the European Commission. Since leaving the EU, the UK is no longer bound to follow EU law in the field of ▶

employment, rendering humanist campaigns against inequality in faith schools dubious.

## How do humanists engage with the EU to promote their values?

There are many examples of humanists making progress on a united, international front, such as Humanists International engaging with the European Commission and European Parliament, including in annual meetings to discuss human rights and their implementation. Recently, Humanists International took part in a seminar hosted by the European Parliament to discuss the future of trade policy, making the case that trade should not come at the expense of human rights. The EU's recent economic integration with countries in North Africa has led humanists to call for the decriminalisation of blasphemy laws in some of these countries, as is required in EU external freedom policies. We can therefore see that while the EU protects human rights, its institutions such as the parliament also allow for important dialogue to take place.

Leaving the EU will impact and undermine humanist causes in the rest of Europe. The European Humanist Federation (EHF) is a collective body of secularist organisations in 25 European countries, and its activities are focused on fighting for religious and faith equality at the EU level. The EHF is recognised internationally and their campaign 'A Vision for Europe' underlines the importance of global cooperation and progress. Whilst it is great that Humanists UK (a member of the EHF) and other humanist groups in the UK recognise the need for humanist causes to go beyond a national level, the absence of UK MEPs is surely disheartening for those within the European Parliament facing greater



opposition in their campaigns for women's sexual rights and healthcare, among other issues.

## Where does Brexit leave us?

Regardless of my deep regret that the EU will not be a part of my future, it is clear that many humanists recognise the importance of continuing international unity with our European neighbours and beyond. In many ways, I feel that the values I support can be promoted through humanist organisations, if no longer directly through European institutions. I hope that Brexit has shown Humanists UK the need to continue to diversify and expand, and although this may be harder outside Europe, we can still be involved in dialogue both through the EHF, at an EU level, and through Humanists International, on a global level.

***As a young humanist, I hope for progress through international collaboration. European figures have driven forward the march of progressive ideas and, despite Brexit, we should not be dispirited.***

# Brittain Interviews...

Our video conference with notable Humanists, interviewed by David Brittain

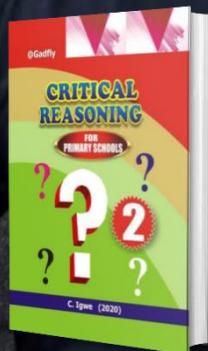
## Leo Igwe

In this exclusive interview, the extraordinary Leo Igwe shares his experiences as an active Humanist in Nigeria. He explains why he has enemies simply because he exposes the suffering caused by unscrupulous and corrupt individuals who use local superstition to make themselves rich.

To watch the full video interview click the YouTube button below.



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



### How you can support Leo

Leo has designed a critical thinking course for school children and he plans to run the first workshop in the coming weeks. Each workshop costs 200 dollars. Please help him with this humanistic project. You can donate via *Humanistically Speaking* at:

Account Number: 33444562

Sort code: 30-98-97

Reference: Leo Igwe

◀ Click image for more details. Leo will send us full reports on what your donation paid for along with classroom photos.

Who would you like us to interview next?:

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# Thought for the Day

## ***Executive Editor David Brittain argues that the right to offend needs to be defended with all the vigour we can muster...***

On 13th April 2017 at the Abdul Wali Khan University, Pakistan, a fanatical mob searched the campus looking for Mashal Khan. They eventually found him in his student lodging. They began beating him with sticks, before stabbing and shooting him. It's not clear whether he was still alive when he was dragged outside for further beatings, but he was probably dead by the time his body was lynched. What had he done to cause such rage? His crime was that he had criticised the Islamic faith, and dared to announce himself a Humanist.

From my western perspective, it is hard to understand the mentality of mobs like this. If Allah was offended by Mashal Khan then Allah must surely be capable of dealing with it himself. I mean, Allah is God, isn't he? So why on earth would he need to satisfy his need for vengeance though some deranged mob? The answer to that, of course, is that Allah doesn't exist. What's more, I suspect that 90 per cent of the violent mob who murdered Mr Khan similarly have their own doubts. But of course, in the hysteria and outrage that had been whipped up, it probably paid to join the mob. Feigning rage like that must be good cover for someone who is in fear of being accused of blasphemy themselves.

But in my view this murder was not about anything so straightforward as religious piety.



**Student Mashal Khan: stabbed and shot for being a Humanist in Pakistan**

It was about maintaining power. Someone engineered this, and when Mr Khan was accused of blasphemy, it became almost obligatory for everyone else to join in, for fear of being accused of blasphemy themselves. And if I've got that right, then all I can say is that it must be truly stifling there to the freedom of thought that we in the West value so highly.

Islamic fundamentalism is shored up by fear, and it is through fear that it acquires the kind of manic power that even the Government is afraid of. Note Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's party describing blasphemy as an "unpardonable offence", and the Government's Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar demanding that "Facebook and other

service providers should share all information about the people behind blasphemous content with us".

There's not a chance that Facebook will comply, and he knows it – but it's good press and motivated by the same fear that 90 per cent of the mob feel. Moreover, let's not forget that he has made it very clear who's side he's on and has thus no doubt saved himself from the mob. Fear can be infectious, even for those in high office.

But we in the UK have had our own share of beheadings, murders, book-burnings, honour-killings, death threats and violent demonstrations. All meant to intimidate, of course, and intimidate they do. More worrying is that this kind of crime in the UK is often committed by local born Muslims. Now, I don't have a crystal ball to discover as to why that is, but I suspect that the religious ghettos that have been thriving in our community, strengthened by indoctrination in some so-called faith schools, may have something to do with it.

In such a society as ours there is a tendency to try to respond with more tolerance – to try to accommodate. But ultimately that tolerance is stretched to the extreme and eventually to breaking point. Even our politicians play games now, with demands that our Prime Minister should make a full, public apology for comments he made about burka-wearing women looking like letter boxes, no doubt with a grovelling admission from him that it was deeply offensive, and that he would see to it that it would never happen again – if necessary, through more legislation.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am not at all blind to Boris Johnson's weaknesses, and it was a stupid thing to write. But I am unimpressed by the opposition's demands. Indeed, I'm even

***"If we keep giving in to anything that someone else decides is offensive, sooner or later a home-grown mob will thrive here, and those of us in the UK who might think differently will live in fear of our lives."***

*alarmed* by them – because for me this represents the thin end of the wedge. If we keep giving in to anything that someone else decides is offensive, sooner or later a home-grown mob will thrive here, and those of us in the UK who might think differently will live in fear of our lives.

According to Humanists International, there are no less than 85 countries where Humanists suffer severe discrimination, and seven (Nigeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia) where Humanism is actively suppressed by the state. These are surely holiday destinations that Humanists would be wise to avoid!

Now my next observation might seem like a disclaimer, but it is not. The vast majority of Muslims are peaceable people, who are horrified by the extremists. Indeed, there was outrage even in Pakistan to Mr Khan's killing. Over 57 people in the mob there have since been put on trial and 31 imprisoned, including one, a fellow student, who admitted shooting him, and has been given a death sentence. But extremists there are still. And not just in Pakistan.

We must stand firm. The right to offend, that Humanists UK stands for, is not just a passing notion. Nor is it a nicety for middle-class sensitivities. It is a fundamental right that underscores almost everything a civilised society stands for. It needs to be defended with all the vigour we can muster.

# The campaign against FGM

David Warden interviewed FGM campaigner Salimata Badji Knight

**I met up with Salimata Badji Knight (known to me as 'Sali') for coffee in Westbourne on a blisteringly hot day in June. I was amazed by her story...**

Sali speaks perfect English with a strong French accent. She grew up near the Place de la Concorde - one of the major public squares in Paris. As a teenage girl she recalls asking her friends, "So when did you become a woman?". They seemed puzzled, so she was more specific: "At what age were you cut?". In the ensuing conversation she was shocked to discover that she was different from her peers.

Sali's family come from Senegal in West Africa but they can trace their ancestry back to Ramses II, also known as Ramses the Great, who is often regarded as the greatest pharaoh



**Salimata Badji Knight**  
**"How can I use my life to stop FGM?"**

of Ancient Egypt (13<sup>th</sup> century BCE). His successors and later Egyptians called him the "Great Ancestor". One of the main ways in which you were marked out as a descendant of the great pharaoh was through the rite of circumcision. Essentially, it was (and for many, still is) an initiation into the community of your ancestors and it marks your passage from childhood to womanhood.

When Sali was just 4½ years old, she was taken 'on holiday' back to the village of her family in Senegal. Soon after arrival, she was told that she was going 'on a picnic'. She remembers that at a certain point she was held down by a group of women and she started hitting and biting them to stop the painful cutting. She even remembers the clothes they were wearing. ▶



Sali told me that she had always had a strong sense of ‘me’ from a very young age. When she discovered that her school friends had not undergone circumcision she felt angry that something had been done to her without her consent. When she confronted her mother, her mother burst into tears and said she had had no power in the matter. “It was your grandmother who wanted to do it. She thought it would make it easier for you to get a husband”. By this time, her grandmother had died.

Sali started to read up on the subject and she learnt a lot from [Cheikh Anta Diop](#), a Senegalese historian and anthropologist of pre-colonial African culture. She discovered that the practice had been handed down through the matriarchal line for thousands of years. It was an integral part of traditional African religion and it conferred their identity as Pharaonic people as distinct from Bantu people. Although her mother is Muslim, the practice of circumcision predates Islam by millennia.

Her father apologised to her and the practice has now finished in her family. Sali is very proud to say “This is my legacy – I am a ripple in the river”. In 1996, they succeeded in saving 50 girls from having the procedure carried out in their village in Senegal. Also since 1996, the practice has been illegal in Senegal and it has almost been stopped. She has trained many men to understand and they have been very helpful.

Sali loves children and would like to have had her own. But a vaccination programme, in addition to the FGM procedure, has left her and many other women unable to have children. Sali is now a practising Buddhist and her meditation and chanting have helped her to let go of any anger and to direct her energy into campaigning.

60,000 girls are at risk in the UK every year



### **Circumcision initiates children into the ancestral line of the great pharaoh Ramses II**

Image credit © Ad Meskens / Wikimedia Commons

and 200 million women worldwide are believed to have undergone the procedure. Sali has been interviewed by the BBC and by Sky News but she prefers to work in the background rather than become a celebrity campaigner. She does not want to be seen as a victim or put Africa in a bad light. She has worked with the NSPCC to help set up a 24-hour FGM ChildLine. Children recognise the letters ‘NSPCC’ and they can text privately if they are worried.

**Towards the end of our conversation Sali told me that “We are Nubian people which means ‘sunkissed’. Our skin is very dark because people with lighter skin would not have survived in the African climate.” Nubian people are descended from the early inhabitants of the central Nile valley, believed to be one of the earliest cradles of civilization. When Sali goes back to Senegal, however, her relatives describe her as ‘white’ because she has grown up in Europe. This seemed like a great starting point for a future conversation.**

Read more about Sali’s story here:

<https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/salimata-badji-knight/>



# *Can humanists support Israel?*

## **Recent events in Jerusalem and Gaza have brought the deadly Israel-Palestine conflict into the media spotlight again. David Warden asks: “Can humanists support Israel?”**

In March 2020, our Humanist-Christian dialogue group in Dorset invited a local rabbi to speak to us about anti-Semitism, following allegations of anti-Semitism swirling around the Labour Party. At the time, I thought the obvious humanist solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict was a secular state, neither Jewish nor Muslim, which guaranteed the human rights of everyone. But I’ve come to see that Jewishness is not just about religion. It’s an inherited cultural identity, like Englishness. And just as England is predominantly a homeland for the English, Israel is predominantly a homeland for the Jews. That’s not to say that states and nations should be monocultural or monoethnic but a one-state solution for Israel-Palestine would almost inevitably lead to another Muslim or Islamic state. A bi-national federation with security guarantees could work as a hybrid solution.

### **The background**

The traditional solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is the one which was envisaged by the United Nations in 1947: partition into two independent states. But let’s step back a bit to understand the background. The Jews and their

ancestors lived in the region we now call Israel or Palestine for approximately 1,600 years. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century they rebelled against Roman rule and they were expelled from their homeland. Some Jews remained but the majority created a diaspora across Europe and beyond.

Throughout the centuries, Jews were reviled and persecuted as ‘Christ-killers’ and money-lenders. They were also treated as second-class citizens in Muslim lands and, along with Christians, forced to pay a discriminatory tax. Anti-Semitism came to a head in the late nineteenth century and Jewish refugees from Russia and elsewhere started migrating to Palestine, a sparsely populated region of the Ottoman Empire at the time. In most cases they purchased land from absentee landlords.

After the First World War, the British ruled over Palestine and they looked favourably on the creation of a national homeland for Jews. Zionism, as it came to be known, was always flatly opposed by the Arabs who considered that Palestine was Arab-Muslim land. The 1937 Peel Commission called for Palestine to be partitioned into separate states but its report was met with an Arab revolt which was brutally crushed by the British. During the Second World War, the British-appointed leader of the Palestinians, Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini, met Adolf Hitler and requested support in opposing the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish national home (Wikipedia). The British also had a policy of restricting Jewish migration to Palestine ▶

and this resulted in many more Jews being murdered in the Holocaust than would otherwise have been the case.

After the Second World War, a United Nations plan proposed the partition of Palestine into two states. Civil war ensued and when Israel declared national independence on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1948 it was immediately attacked by its Arab neighbours. By 1949, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians had been displaced from their homes in what is referred to as the Nakba (the catastrophe). Hundreds of thousands of Jews also left their ancestral homes in surrounding Arab countries.

From 1948-1967, the West Bank was occupied by Jordan. In 1967, Israel fought another war against its Arab enemies which lasted just six days. This resulted in Israeli occupation of the West Bank and other territories. UN Resolution 242 stipulates that Israel must return to the 1949 armistice lines – the so-called ‘Green Line’. But this is dependent on the ‘termination of belligerency’ from the Arab Palestinians. Israel has complied in part with 242, for example by returning Sinai to Egypt and Gaza to the Palestinians, and in 1988 the Palestine Liberation Organisation recognised Israel’s right to exist. But the Islamist organisation Hamas rejects recognition of Israel and seeks the ‘liberation’ of all Palestine (2017 Hamas Charter).

### **Self-determination**

One of the key humanist principles at play here is self-determination. Do Jewish people have the right to self-determination in their own secure state? I believe they do, as do the Palestinians. Numerous two-state solutions have been proposed over the years, including the Camp David and Taba (Sinai) proposals in 2000-2001. But no solution has proved acceptable to both sides and Palestinians have often resorted to violence and terrorism which



**Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak with Bill Clinton and Yasser Arafat, 1999. Arafat walked away from a two-state solution. Image Wikipedia.**

provokes Israel’s deliberate policy of disproportionate retaliation.

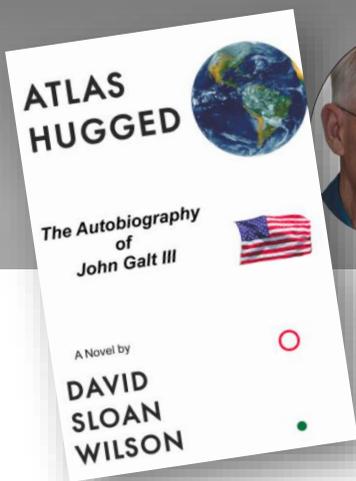
There are extremists on both sides. A minority of messianic Jews want the whole territory to become ‘Greater Israel’, and they are supported by fundamentalist Christians in the United States who see this as a fulfilment of Biblical prophecy. Perhaps a majority of ordinary people on both sides are prepared to compromise in order to secure peaceful co-existence but after so many failed attempts the political will is lacking. The solutions, ultimately, consist of compromise, fairness, justice, humanity, dialogue, truthfulness, empathy and political leadership. We’ve had a century of peace talks already. Will it take another century of bloodshed and misery for humanity and justice to prevail?

*David Warden welcomes comments and corrections.*

### **Suggested reading**

*The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Very Short Introduction* (2013) Martin Bunton

*The Palestine-Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction* (2005) Gregory Harms with Todd M. Ferry



## Book Review by David Warden 'Atlas Hugged' (2020) by David Sloan Wilson

**David Sloan Wilson is an evolutionary biologist and a Distinguished Professor of Biological Sciences and Anthropology at Binghamton University, New York. He is also one of the founders of the Evolution Institute.**

This novel is David Sloan Wilson's fictional rebuttal of Ayn Rand's cult novel *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). Rand is famous, or infamous, for promoting the economic and personal philosophy of 'Greed is Good' which has inspired some of the world's leading financiers including former Chairman of the Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan.

Wilson's big idea is that we need to complete Darwin's revolution by conceptualising humanity as an evolving superorganism. The way we organise things at the moment can be compared to a body with cancer. 'Greed is good' works to the advantage of the cells which are ferociously multiplying but they will ultimately kill their host. The human body needs to be regulated: its temperature, blood-pressure, cell multiplication and so on are all carefully regulated to ensure that the whole body functions well. We need to upscale this concept to the entire planet to ensure its survival. But this does *not* mean central

planning. Managing the entire planet is too complex for that. What we need instead is *variation* and *selection* of ideas that work. To use another analogy, it means running the planet like a Toyota factory which manufactures a perfect car every minute. The way Toyota has achieved this is to involve every employee and every team in contributing ideas and solutions to the evolving enterprise.

Economics as currently practised is pre-Darwinian. We need to ditch central planning and 'greed is good' philosophies fast. Wilson sets out the evolutionary science in his non-fiction primer *This View of Life* (2019) – the title of which is taken from a passage in Darwin's *Origin of Species*: 'There is grandeur in this view of life...'. I'd recommend you read *This View of Life* before reading the novel.

The novel is free for whatever donation you can give and available from the website below. John Galt III is the strikingly tall and handsome grandson of the original John Galt in Rand's novel. There are some blistering sex scenes with his girlfriend Eve (in case you need some enticement). Professor Howard Head is an avatar of David Sloan Wilson and he inspires John Galt III to take on the evil empire which has been inspired by Rand's 'greed is good' philosophy. Can the world be converted to benign evolutionary thinking before it's too late? Read the novel, and be inspired.

■ Thanks to Ed Gibney of North East Humanists for sending me a copy of the book.

# Ethical Encounters

Exploring moral questions  
By Paul Ewans



RIGHT WRONG

**Humanists are often advised to rely on the Golden Rule: 'Treat others the way you would like to be treated yourself'. But just how useful is this rule as a guide to action?**

It is easy to grasp the logic of the rule. We know what it is to suffer pain and distress, so we should not inflict these things on others. We know what it is to need help when we are in trouble, so we should help other people when they are in trouble. The Golden Rule's strength is that it recognises our common humanity, but we are not all identical in every way and we should not simply assume that everybody has the same needs that we do ourselves. We should recognise each person's status as a unique individual with their own preferences and desires. So the Platinum Rule may be a better guide: 'Treat others the way they want to be treated'. Following the Platinum Rule ensures that we respect other people's autonomy and that we are not influenced by stereotypes of gender, race or culture, to give just a few examples. It also ensures that our treatment of others is not based merely on our own personal experience of life. The Platinum Rule requires us to ask people what it is that they want rather than simply assuming that we already know.

But we should not let the Platinum Rule take priority over all other moral rules and

principles. 'Treat others the way they want to be treated' does not mean that judges should give convicted criminals light sentences because this is what the criminals want. Judges serve the demands of justice and should act accordingly. For the same reason, following the Platinum Rule does not mean that we should allow someone complete freedom of speech so that they can abuse other people as much as they like. We should not treat people the way they want to be treated regardless of any harm done to others. Moral dilemmas require careful thought, not a slavish reliance on a particular rule, whether Gold or Platinum.

## Pre-Christian versions of the Golden Rule (selection)

Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing. *Thales, 464 BCE*

We should conduct ourselves toward others as we would have them act toward us. *Aristotle, 384 BCE*

Cherish reciprocal benevolence, which will make you as anxious for another's welfare as your own. *Aristippus of Cyrene, 365 BCE*

Act toward others as you desire them to act toward you. *Isocrates, 338 BCE*

This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you. *Mahabharata 5:1517, 300 BCE*

What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary. *Rabbi Hillel, 50 BCE*



# Letters & Emails

## Evolution and Darwinitis

Aaron Darkwood's article in the May issue of *Humanistically Speaking* had a few faults in it that really need to be corrected if we want Humanists to be taken seriously. The first is a minor one where Aaron referred to Abraham Maslow and "his famous pyramid." Maslow never actually used a pyramid in his writings. Scott Barry Kauffman's recent book [Transcend](#) explored and explained this wonderfully. Worse, however, was when Aaron stated at the end of his essay that "we are as evolved as we possible (sic) can be." Evolution is not a directional arrow where more is better. In fact, there is no "more evolved." All life has evolved throughout Earth's history (phylogeny) and continues to do so during the lifetime of each individual (ontogeny). This may be just a slightly sloppy turn of phrase, but it betrays a kind of unearned Darwinitis that our fiercest critics are right to point out as wrongheaded. We can do better.

*Ed Gibney*

*Author and Evolutionary Philosopher  
Publicity Officer for North East Humanists  
[www.evphil.com](http://www.evphil.com)*

*Aaron writes:* Thank you Ed for your feedback. I was using the term 'evolution' in my article to refer to human development. Statistically, we wage fewer wars, live longer lives, our technology advances, our humanitarian instincts have improved, our awareness of and commitment to looking after our planet have increased. I agree, however, that there is a more scientifically precise definition of the word 'evolution'.

## From Atheism to Humanism

I think the overall impression of your *From Atheism to Humanism* booklet is one of very high quality. The glossy paper, inks and printing are of a very high standard. However, I found the addition of A. C. Grayling's 'Ten Commandments', Richard Dawkins's 'Ten Commandments', Bertrand Russell's 'Ten Commandments of Critical Thinking', the AHA 'Ten Commitments', Alain de Botton's 'Ten Virtues' and Philip Nathan's 52 humanist principles frankly confusing, bearing in mind that the sub title to the main title is *A compact guide to 8 humanist values*. Would it not be simpler and more impactful to simply keep to the 8 humanist values referred to in the sub-title of the booklet? All in all, even unchanged, the booklet as it is remains a very high quality publication.

I have contacted a friend who works in a local prison to find out who the booklet should be sent to, as well as the local probation office and the spiritual and pastoral team at the local hospital trust. I will let you know what responses I get from them.

*John Dowdle, Watford Humanists*

What a great magazine! You must be very proud of the vibrancy of your team and its scope and reach. I especially loved the articles by the younger members.

*Karen Blakely*

I found the June Issue very interesting. Teddy Prout's interview was of particular interest to me as he gave a lot of practical advice.

*Assad Abbas*

# Poet's Corner

By Alexander  
Williams



## What's a Humanist?

They trust in methodologies objective and specific  
They describe observed phenomena in a manner scientific  
They reject all explanations couched in ghosts or ghouls or spirits  
They circumscribe their arguments with naturalistic limits  
They ask to see the evidence before they reach conclusions  
They prefer to confess ignorance than make up false solutions  
They try to meet all human beings with kindness and compassion  
And to treat all other animals in corresponding fashion  
They've no evidence of afterlife, so reasonably deduce  
That this is the one life that we have of any earthly use  
They put aside the magical claims of many an ancient text  
And instead use moral judgement to decide what to do next.  
So, in answer to your question, having thought the whole thing through  
I'd say it sounds a lot like me. Would you say it's like you?



An illustration from Ernst Haeckel's *Kunstformen der Natur* (1899), showing a variety of hummingbirds.  
Wikipedia public domain.

## Hummingbird

What on Earth more wondrous  
Than a hummingbird exists?  
Nature's glory  
Floating sharp, a sliver  
Silver in a liquid air  
Purple-dash flash-blue of slicing  
Vibration, mocking gravity  
Drinking deep the lees  
Of floral nectar hidden  
From less specialised imbibers  
Bobbing wonder  
Flit of beauty  
Pinnacle of process  
Evolutionary  
Cousin of  
All life.

# Humanistically Speaking Coverage

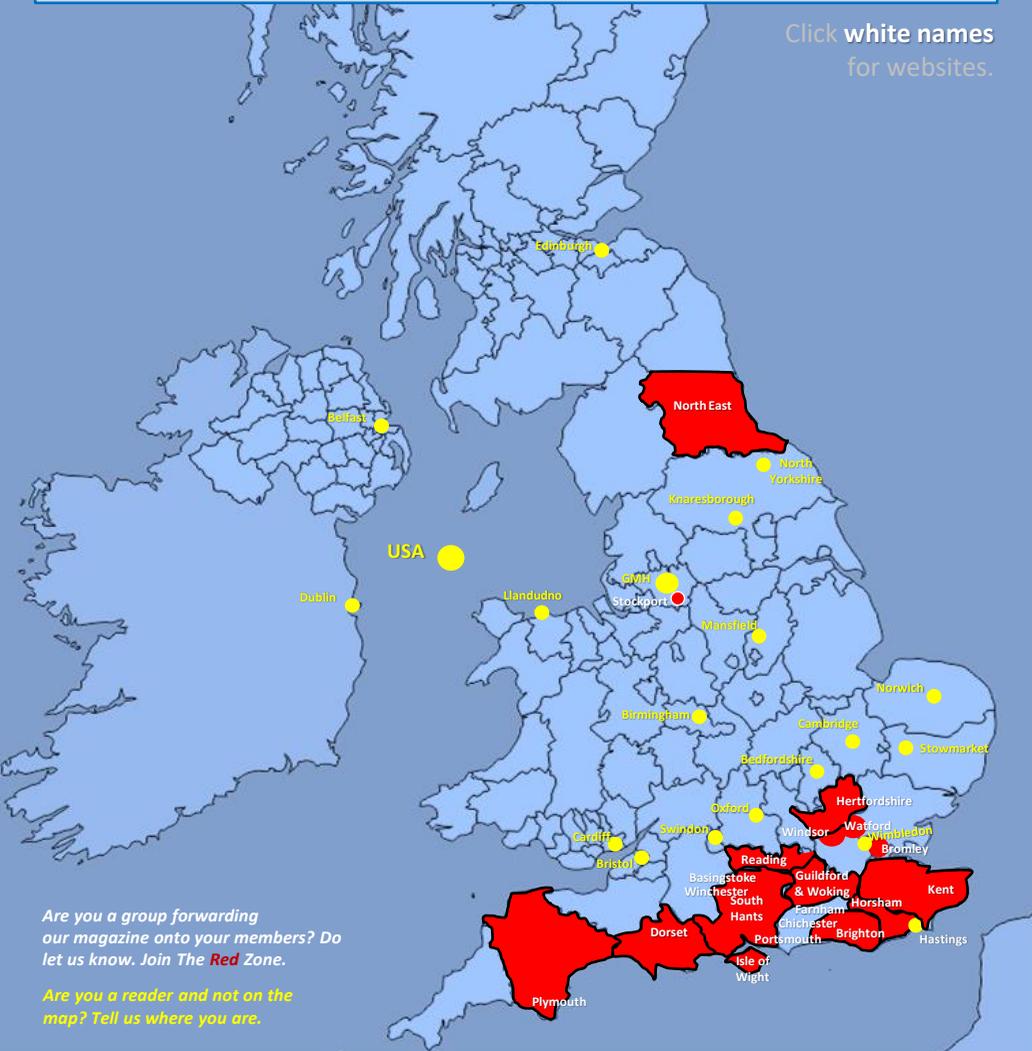
*A guide to those groups sharing our magazine*

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Are you a group forwarding our magazine onto your members? Do let us know. Join **The Red Zone**.

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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



In addition, we have our vital back-office support team of:

Sean (Webmaster) Phil (YouTube video editor), Barbara (Treasurer), Alan (Business advisor) as well as several admin staff yet to be found.