



Humanistically Speaking

December 2021



A Humanist hotline to a secular worldview

- Professor Norman Maclean
- Dr Penny Morgan
- Megan Manson
- Santa Claus
- Aaron bonds with Polly
- David bonds with Gorilla
- Humanism in Action
- Sentientism
- Dear Darwin
- Readers' emails

SENTIENCE

HUMANITY'S INESCAPABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH ANIMALS

Humanistically
Speaking



send an email

YouTube



Humanistically
Speaking

A Humanist hotline
to a secular worldview

In this Issue

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

David Brittain
Executive Editor



Contents:

1. Cover story
2. Editor's Welcome
3. Humanist News
4. Humanism In Action Report
7. Guest Feature: Animal experimentation on trial
10. Guest Feature: Sentientism
12. Dear Darwin
13. Aaron Explores: Pets or prisoners?
15. Wildlife – Norman Maclean
15. Advertisement Feature
17. The Voice of Brittain
19. Brittain Interviews: Megan Manson NSS
20. Thought for the Day
22. Maggie's Musings
24. Ethical Encounters
26. Letters
28. Poet's Corner
29. Book Review: The Bonobo and the Atheist
30. Santa Claus: The Interview
31. Groups Map page

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.

December is traditionally a time when we relax with a drink and reflect by a warm fire, gazing at pretty lights. But that's only tradition folks, and *Humanistically Speaking* has lost none of its grit! 2021 has been a busy year, but it has also been a worthwhile and exciting journey. Moreover, as we approach our third year it is clear that there will be no let-up – quite the contrary – and new initiatives, and surprises for our readers, are guaranteed as the adventure of 2022 unfolds.

This issue addresses our relationship with non-human animals. How we treat them, how we love them, and how important they are to our lives. But we also eat them, work them, experiment on them and as a species we have a record of cruelty and indifference to their suffering. Some of the reports here raise some uncomfortable questions, and make me reflect, at least, more on what we are as *humans*, rather than our fellow creatures. I must thank Dr Penny Morgan, Jamie Woodhouse, Emeritus Professor Norman MacLean, Roger Heppleston and Megan Manson for their outstanding contributions.

I would also like to take this end-of-year opportunity to thank regular editors, David, Aaron, Maggie, Paul, John and Alex, for their unwavering enthusiasm and hard work, plus those behind-the-scenes folk, like Sean and Phil – unsung heroes maybe – but without whom *Humanistically Speaking* simply could not exist in the form it is today. I have been awed by everyone's willingness and engagement in this project, and for me it has truly been an inspiration and an honour to work alongside you. Thank you.

And thank *you*, dear reader, for your kind words, your positive engagement with us, and your donations. It is *you* that has inspired us, and *you* that is enabling us to move on to ever more ambitious projects. Nevertheless, if you haven't yet donated, but would like to, please donate to **Humanistically Speaking, sort code 30-98-97, account number 33444562**. Your year-end contributions will enable us to make ever greater strides in the cause of Humanism.

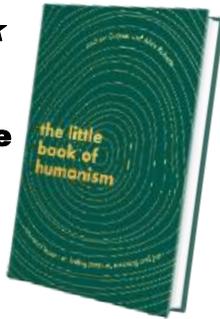
But for the meantime, on behalf of the team, we wish you all a joyful solstice, and a happy new year.

David Brittain



HUMANIST NEWS

The Little Book of Humanism donated to Gloucestershire schools



Gloucestershire Humanists has sent a free copy of *The Little Book of Humanism* by Andrew Copson and Alice Roberts to all secondary/senior schools in Gloucestershire along with links to Humanists UK's *Understanding Humanism* resources and trained school speakers.

This promotional effort has been partly funded by kind donations made throughout the year and partly from group reserves. If you would like to add your support to this cause, then please feel free to donate via the PayPal button <https://glos.humanist.org.uk/>

Any additional funds raised beyond the cost of purchasing and sending these books will be set aside for sole use in future public engagement activities.



Freedom of Thought Report

Launched on 16th November, the *Freedom of Thought Report 2021* by Humanists International, now in its tenth annual edition, examines the legal and human rights situation for humanists, atheists and the non-religious around the world. The report finds that humanists are discriminated against in 144 countries across the globe.

President of Humanists International, Andrew Copson, said: "This year's *Freedom of Thought Report* offers, once again, grim reading. In it we detail the discrimination which humanists and other non-religious people continue to face as a result of daring to express their beliefs and to try to live according to their conscience."

You can click on the image for more information.

HUMANISM IN ACTION



Report by John Coss

Humanists UK's 'Humanism in Action' online conference took place over 12th – 13th November for volunteers working for partner groups, branches, sections, and networks of humanists across the country.

Chief Executive Andrew Copson welcomed participants to the event and explained that Humanists UK had recently completed a comprehensive ten-year review of their strategic aims which will be formally launched in December. He told us that in the UK *over half* of the population are non-religious and a *third* have humanist beliefs and values. But we also know that only *seven per cent* of people in the UK identify as humanists. In this context, he was able to give us a 'sneak peek' of three of their new 'outward looking' strategic aims:

1. "We want more people knowing what humanism is and more non-religious people with humanist beliefs and values recognising themselves as humanists."
2. "We want more non-religious people living happier, more confident and more ethical lives."
3. "We want more people enjoying greater freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and freedom of choice over their own lives."

Humanist Climate Action

In a presentation on Humanist Climate Action, Patron of Humanists UK Richard Norman explained the rationale for this being part of Humanists UK. He thought it was important for humanists to be seen to be putting their principles into practice – actions speak louder than words. Unfortunately, its development had been blown off course by lockdown. Lori Marriott then spoke about their activities and their four objectives which are:

1. To promote environmentally friendly policies, and to endorse and support the actions of other environmental campaigning groups that have similar objectives.
2. To challenge beliefs that are not evidence-based and disinformation about environmental issues, particularly climate change.
3. To encourage humanists to adopt greener lifestyles, following the best available scientific evidence.
4. To ensure that the humanist voice is heard in religious or belief-led initiatives on environmental issues.

During the lively and mostly supportive Q&A session, Aaron Darkwood asked how we should relate to Extinction Rebellion. Richard replied that HCA should not support them as a formal humanist organisation, but personal responses could reasonably be different. More information about HCA here: [website](https://humanists.uk/humanist-climate-action/).

Humanist Marriage

In a session entitled 'Talking to your MP about Humanist Marriage', Campaigns Officer Rachel Taggart-Ryan offered guidance on how to go about this, which Humanists UK is encouraging as part of its legalisation campaign. Anyone interested in doing this would be well advised to get in touch with her - she would be happy to hear from you at campaigns@humanists.uk.

Humanist Heritage

Madeleine Goodall, the Humanist Heritage Coordinator, gave an interesting presentation on Humanist Heritage – The First 125 Years, focusing on some individual humanists from successive decades – 50/50 men and women. Many were prominent in 'progressive' movements such as the suffragettes, availability of contraception, and anti-racism, demonstrating how humanists were pioneers of many modern attitudes. Responding to a question, she accepted that some were involved in less savoury activities such as eugenics and this should be noted on the website – <https://heritage.humanists.uk/> – which is well worth a visit.

Religion or Belief: New Data, New Thinking

Jeremy Rodell gave us a fascinating presentation on the Demographics of Religion or Belief: New Data, New Thinking. For me, this was the highlight of the event and it was disappointing that there was little time for the Q&A. Jeremy first considered 'where we are,

and where we are going' and brought out some striking features of the present scene and predictions for the future, within the 3Bs framework.



Jeremy Rodell Chair of South West London Humanists, Humanists UK Trustee, and volunteer Dialogue Officer – his presentation was a highlight of the conference



Religious identity in Britain is changing dramatically. The main trends are shown in this table:

	1983	2019	2040
Non-Religious	33%	52%	58%
Anglican	38%	13%	6%
Muslim (2040 projected)	1%	7%	9%

Current Anglican affiliation by age:

25-34 3% **45-54** 10% **75+** 33%

Clearly the Church of England is facing big problems, not least its Establishment status, automatic seats in the House of Lords, and privileged position in education. About 75% of the non-religious are atheist or agnostic: half the rest believe in a higher power but not a personal God. Interestingly, about one-fifth of the religious fall into one of these categories too, including a third of Anglicans.

As to values, the majority of Catholics (two-thirds to four-fifths, some depending on circumstances) disagree with church teaching on a range of social issues including same-sex relationships, sex outside marriage, contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage.

In the second part of his presentation, Jeremy drew on the 2021 Cadbury Lectures by Linda Woodhead: 'Values are the New Religion'. Here are some of the ideas she discusses: ▷

The 'live your life' ethic

- Become 'who you are' (e.g.: race, gender, sexuality)
- Show kindness and respect to self and others (even if they are 'different')
- Find your community and support one another
- Leave the world a better place than you found it

Anti-values

- 'Abuse' as cardinal sin
- New offences – including marital rape, coercive control, groping
- Disrespect and unkindness
- Violating duty of care

Why the new values visibility?

- Decoupling of values and religion
- Growth of no religion and cultural pluralism
- From hierarchy and roles to personal choice, responsibility and identity

Summary

- A flight from moralism (being told what to do)
- A profound shift in moral values
- Value pluralism
- Increased values visibility – heightens the potential for conflict

Jeremy concluded by asking if Linda was right and what this might mean for us, posing a series of questions:

1. Is belief only important insofar as it drives values and hence action?
2. Is the contrast between liberal and non-liberal values more significant than that between atheist and religious values?
3. And as majority values are essentially humanist values, do humanists and the liberal religious have more in common than the liberal and fundamentalist religious?

“To what extent should Humanism move from being identified by contrast to religion towards a worldview shared with the liberal religious, in contrast to non-liberal world views?”

Personally, I think the answer to all three questions is yes, and this leads to the three further questions posed by Jeremy:

4. To what extent should Humanism move from being identified by contrast to religion towards a worldview shared with the liberal religious, in contrast to non-liberal world views?
5. Should we do more to engage with those who have different values?
6. Should we talk more overtly about values in schools, through dialogue, and in the media?

I have thoughts on these matters too, and we may revisit them in future, perhaps in a *Humanistically Speaking* on-line event.

There were additional sessions on the Friday on effective design of emails for maximum impact, use of UK IT systems for volunteers, and recruiting and managing volunteers. Perhaps because these sessions were of limited interest for some participants, only about two-thirds logged on for the Saturday sessions. It was also disappointing that the chat function was generally disabled, which meant that 'networking' was constrained. Things may be better next year if we are able to meet in person.

Animal experiments: for and against

Image: BBC Radio4

By Penny Morgan



“The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer? Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being?”

Jeremy Bentham: An Introduction to the Principle of Morals and Legislation (1870)

The arguments, both for and against animal experiments, usually focus on ethical, legal and scientific issues. But ultimately, the question is whether animal experimentation is justified – a large, complex topic which we can't cover exhaustively, so let's focus on two aspects of it.

Scientific issues

The first argument in favour asserts that animal testing is vital to ensure medicine safety. Clearly, this has contemporary urgency for us humans. Research involving animals has been essential during epidemics and pandemics caused by infectious diseases. Animal research was vital in the development and production of the smallpox vaccine which eventually led to its eradication in 1980; by then, smallpox killed 300-500 million people in its 12,000-year existence. Likewise, nearly forty years of research using monkeys, rats, and mice led to the introduction of the polio vaccine that has since saved millions of



Image: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) [click image for link](#)

lives, eradicating the disease from most continents.

But we shouldn't forget that animals are also used to test the safety of domestic and cosmetic products. And most of us, indirectly, support this through purchases.

A second argument in favour claims that animals themselves benefit from animal research. This is true. Rabies, distemper, feline leukaemia, infectious hepatitis virus, tetanus, anthrax, and canine parvo virus are among animal diseases being fought by animal testing.

Less well-known are contributions to animal conservation (e.g., reproductive physiology), saving endangered species from extinction, including the black-footed ferret, the California condor and the tamarins of Brazil.

But, goes the opposing argument, what about using human volunteers or alternative methods? They can at least give consent.

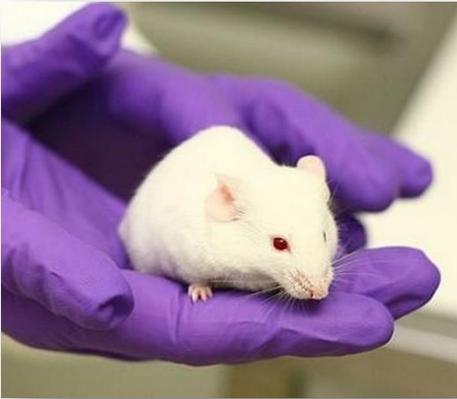


Image: Cambridge News

Furthermore, tests performed on animals may or may not have valid applicability to humans. Thalidomide ‘passed’ animal testing in the 1950s and 1960s, but it turned out to have disastrous effects on pregnancies.

Most animal models are poor predictors of human response, with over 90% of new candidate drugs never making it to patients. And now there are more human-predictive, non-animal approaches available. The Humane Society International’s Senior Scientist Lindsay Marshall believes the animal model is ‘broken’: “The fact is that animal models fail far more often than they succeed... It’s high time UK research funding bodies made a serious investment in human organoids, organs-on-a-chip, computerised systems biology models, and other advanced, non-animal technologies...”

Advances in gene sequencing and phenotypic analysis in humans is ushering in the era of precision medicine, and focused funding and efforts on human-relevant technologies like these are more likely to provide disease understanding and much-needed new treatments.

Ethical Issues

For those who draw a hard and fast line between animals and humans, animals lack cognitive capacity or moral development, and can, therefore, be used in experiments. Put simply, they have no rights. This view sees humans as qualitatively different – a long-standing view reaching back as far as 3,000 BCE. Aristotle’s *Scala Naturae* (natural ladder) became, in Christian medieval times, *The Great Chain of Being*. This view, with its religious overtones, still holds sway in many quarters and leads to a form of dominion over animals, akin to ‘speciesism’. Has this coloured our attitude towards animals? Darwin’s tree of evolution, or Aristotle’s ladder?

Even though animals have no rights, that does not exclude a duty of care for their welfare, to minimise harm. To this end the 3 R’s were introduced over 50 years ago:

- **Reduction – the number of animals used**
- **Replacement – using alternative techniques (above)**
- **Refinement – minimise suffering**

Despite these, the procedures may be inhumane and painful. Nearly 560,000 experiments in 2018 were deemed to have caused moderate/severe suffering.

The 3 R's of Animal Research



Replace

Reduce

Refine

the use of animals whenever possible

the number of animals needed to a minimum

tests to cause animals the least amount of distress

Image: University of Exeter

The government made a commitment in 2010 to reduce animals used in scientific research, but almost 10 years after this declaration the UK remains one of the highest lab animal users in Europe.

We have added to our understanding of animal behaviour. The fields of comparative psychology and cognitive ethology (the study of animal minds) have established that animals have sentience and so can experience pain, anxiety and other forms of distress (the UK government formally recognises animals as sentient beings in law). Further, we now have considerable scientific evidence of various sophisticated intellectual capabilities and complex social organisation in nonhuman animals.



Parrots using tools,
Picture credit Avian
enrichment [Link](#)

Conclusions

Perhaps transcending any other issue here is the ethical dimension. There is much emerging evidence from the study of animal minds that many species (cetaceans, non-human primates, elephants, parrots, etc.) possess 'autonomy' – that is, they are autonomous beings possessed of abilities we were formerly ignorant of, including tool construction and use, self-awareness, linguistic abilities, co-operation, altruism, deceit. These abilities, some formerly considered to be unique to humans, indicate not merely sentience, but sapience.

In the light of this knowledge, do you think we should revise our use of animal testing?

A screenshot of a document from the Home Office. The document is titled "Policy paper 2010 to 2015 government policy: animal research and testing" and is dated "Updated 8 May 2015". Under the heading "Actions", it states: "The Home Office issues licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. We authorise:" followed by a bulleted list: "• projects involving the use of animals in research and testing", "• those who carry out scientific procedures on animals", and "• the places where scientific procedures are carried out". It also mentions "See our guidance on research and testing using animals for more information." and "In 2010, the coalition made a commitment to reduce the use of animals in scientific research and our Working to reduce the use of animals in research: delivery plan is now available. The plan builds on existing work, such as the NC3Rs ARRIVE guidelines to improve reporting standards and ensure that the data from animal experiments can be fully utilised." It concludes with "We are committed to reducing the use of animals in research and the delivery plan shows how alternative methods can deliver fast, high quality research that also boosts economic growth."

Penny Morgan trained as a zoologist at King's College, London and completed a PhD in Comparative Psychology at Bristol University. Her research was primarily on bird behaviour at Bristol University, and as a post-doctoral fellow at Southampton University. Later, she worked as Head of Psychology at Peter Symonds' 6th form college. After retirement she did a law degree, in part to be able to write crime thrillers with animal welfare/rights themes (*Prime Witness, Blood Wood, Devil's Dogs* and *Trophy*).



Where will evidence, reason and compassion take Humanism next?

Jamie Woodhouse

You and I probably had a similar journey to Humanism. Many of us grew up religious by default then moved to atheism or agnosticism as we thought about the ethical and evidence problems of religion. We wanted a naturalistic ethics too, so we adopted a universal compassion for all humans. Surely all human suffering and flourishing should matter morally – whoever we are?

My appeal is for us to keep going on that journey, using evidence and reason to find even more compassionate ways of thinking and living through caring about all forms of suffering, human and not. As ever, traditions and social norms will blinker us, and present tempting dead ends that we need to challenge. Fortunately, we humanists are good at doing just that, so let's go...



A good place to start is with companion animals – those we live with in our homes. We can approach them scientifically and infer their capacity to have experiences (their senticence) from our shared evolutionary

path, behaviour, even communications and neurology. Mostly, we just look into their eyes and spend time with them as a family member. Either way, we become confident that they can suffer, and flourish and we care. However imperfectly, we try to consider their perspective, their sentient point of view, just as we do in human ethics. They matter morally to us.

Then we hit our first big social challenge... farmed animals. The practices of farming and fishing are steeped in social norms and embedded in powerful economic systems. Yet when we consider individual farmed animals with clear eyes alongside our family companions, we find no ethical difference.

Just as with religious beliefs, we have nearly all been taught, from birth, to think of chickens, fish, pigs and cows as products. Yet our Humanist commitment to science and maybe our visits to sanctuaries to spend time with these animals shows us that they too are sentient. We can see how arbitrary our categories are when we consider how some people have pigs as family companions and others eat dogs as food. Surely their sentience means every individual should matter.

Another thinking trap awaits us – the sense that we can farm animals and care about them. If we are brave enough to learn about the reality of farming and fishing and bold enough to consider the perspectives of the animals – that reassuring illusion is shattered.

Some say that the more you learn about religions the more likely you are to become a Humanist. In a similar light, I'd argue that the more you learn about animal agriculture and fishing the more likely you are to become vegan.

Like leaving religion – giving up animal products and exploitation can feel daunting, even scary. We're breaking away from what society tells us is 'normal'. But in both cases, we're doing so for good reasons – following evidence, reason and compassion for others. As with human ethics – all we really have to do is honestly, if imperfectly, consider the perspectives of the victims – whether they are suffering at our hands or because we've paid others to do the harming and killing for us.

In my experience, these fears are unfounded. Leaving religion and going vegan both felt freeing to me. Joys rather than sacrifices. A sense of bringing my beliefs and my actions more closely in line with reality and my values. Cognitive dissonances fading – if never completely disappearing.

On the practical front dropping animal products does take some adjustment but it's never been easier than it is today. Some find it gives them a burst of creativity as they veganise meals and products using plants and new plant-based alternatives. Others take the opportunity to re-think and improve their diets – although you can be an unhealthy vegan too (Oreos and chips and ice cream!).

There's another way this switch is good for us humans as well as our planet. Animal agriculture and fishing have a catastrophic environmental and climate impact. Despite the clarity of the IPCC report, agriculture is too often neglected as a taboo cause (see COP26).

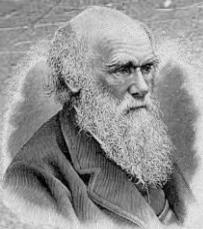
A core problem is the radical inefficiency and food waste of feeding plants through animals instead of eating those plants ourselves.

Therein lies a massive, immediate opportunity to start to free up three quarters of all agricultural land and radically slash our emissions of carbon dioxide and methane at the same time as reducing water usage and pollution. We and our governments can help animal agriculture industries to #JustTransition instead of subsidising their ongoing harms.

While environment, climate change, zoonotic disease prevention, anti-microbial resistance and other human health concerns by themselves are sufficient reason to change – for me the core rationale remains one of compassionate ethics. The simple step of putting the norms society chose for us to one side for a moment and considering the victims. Every sentient being should count.

Some consider this way of thinking as a Humanism that simply takes our 'concern for other sentient animals' seriously. This concern is already included in the Humanists UK and Humanists International definitions. We just need to act on it. Others use the term Sentientism to refer more explicitly to a worldview committed to 'evidence, reason and compassion for all sentient beings'. This perspective doesn't just extend to humans and farmed animals. There may be a quadrillion other sentients living in the wild and maybe one day there will be artificial or alien sentients too, but that's another article.

Let's not kid ourselves – there is no perfect, comfortable end state. Not even Humanism! We can always find ways to do better. That humility and scepticism about our beliefs and ethics is central to Humanism. We've always used evidence and reason to find more compassionate ways of living – even when that means being brave enough to challenge strong social norms, drop harmful traditions and reject falsehoods. Let's keep going!



Charles Darwin.

Dear Darwin

Ask Charles your difficult questions...



The Mount, Shrewsbury.
Darwin's family home.

Sir

One has observed your developing notoriety since the publication of your 'book', if it may be called such, *On the Origin of Species* and indeed your subsequent volume *The Descent of Man*.

One was alarmed at your bold assertion that God's children are descended from the animals. It has not escaped our notice that in so doing you imply that even my own dear Albert was ultimately spawned from a common ape. Indeed, you seem to be declaring that I will never see my beloved again, even in death, and I find this very hard to countenance. Are you insensible to the depths of your impiety as well as your effrontery to your monarch and her family?

Be in no doubt that we are not amused by these dreadful theories and that any recommendation from the Prime Minister to confer honours upon you or scoundrels such as Mr Alfred Russel Wallace will be met with the utmost disfavour.

One would like to thank the honourable Mr David Brittain for applying his good offices so that I may be revived in order that I may do all in my power to impede the progress of your wild theories.

Victoriana

Victoria

Your majesty

I am honoured to be the subject of your most gracious attention. As a naturalist of unremarkable talent and as an humble member of The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge, founded in 1660 and granted a royal charter by your illustrious predecessor Charles II, may I convey our deepest gratitude for your patronage of science and your great interest in scientific matters.

The theory of evolution by natural selection was indeed a matter of great theological controversy in our day and I myself hesitated for many decades before presenting my findings and rough-hewn theory to bear the scrutiny and judgement of my peers. I was, therefore, astonish'd to learn from the esteemed Editor of this journal of note, a certain Mr Brittain, that the theory has spread throughout the Empire, indeed the whole World, and met with growing acceptance by the Peers, Prelates, and Princes of your great-great-granddaughter's reign, as evidence of the Almighty's infinite ingenuity in linking all living organisms together in one great Tree of Life. Doubtless, any remaining Error will be extinguish'd and Truth establish'd by that fine society of Natural Philosophers of which your Majesty remains one of our most generous and knowledgeable former Patrons. I beg to remain your most loyal subject &c.

Charles Darwin

Aaron Explores

Trying to see the wood for the trees



Pets or Prisoners?

As a nation of animal lovers where 59% of households* keep a lifeform captured for their own personal amusement, Brits certainly rank highly in our domestic connection with animals. But is this a good thing?



With the possible exception of cats, which typically have their own cat flap, come and go as they please, and don't subjugate themselves to anyone, other pets, especially dogs, are prisoners of our whims. They are fed when we see fit, exercised if we can be bothered (if it's not raining), get treats when we feel like it, and not if we don't. They are caged in our homes whilst we go to work for eight hours at a time, and often stored away in small boxes whilst we go abroad to catch some sun. Who's getting the better deal here? Can we really make an argument that we like to stroke our animals once in a while, that keeping them prisoner for our personal comfort is a good thing, because the animal gets looked after in return? Prisoners in Guantanamo Bay got fed regularly and let out for exercise once in a while, but I don't recall that being a fun holiday when reading the news reports.

Communication with fellow lifeforms, at least as I write this in 2021, is fairly limited. Maybe one day they will tell us they are unhappy with the arrangement, other than us 'owners' interpreting their moods, behaviour, and the colour and quantities of the parcels they leave behind every once in a while.

My animal fix is satisfied by a friend's cats, another friend's hens (which she insists are 'livestock' and not pets – picture front cover) and the squirrels that come and go in the town centre gardens. The cats are well looked after and have a lot of freedom. I had previously looked after another friend's cat whilst he was away, which he deemed an 'indoor cat'. I was very upset about this arrangement and when visiting felt for the poor thing that never got the chance to go outside.



The big question is this: where do animals fit on the scale of human respect? We eat them, kill them, hunt them and stroke them. We judge one type to be useful for some things, and others for other purposes. When I go for walks to the gardens the squirrels often come and nibble on my nuts, but if I were in desperate need would I trap, kill and eat such a thing if my situation were different? Why is it okay for Chinese people to eat dogs and cats and for us not to? Why is it okay for us to judge them on what they eat? Now I'm a meat eater like the majority of us, yet I will be delighted when lab-grown meat becomes affordable so that lives are not taken for us to be fed. I particularly hold issue with 'single meal' lifeforms such as fish, poultry etc., when a creature dies for just one or two meals. Can we justify this in the 21st century?

Since a friend had hens, and I bonded with them when they were poorly, I now can't buy chickens from Tesco, neither the hot counter ones nor in the chilled section, as it's now too close to pet territory. Seeing the bird shape raw is too close for comfort!

Jamie Woodhouse advocates on another page that we should treat all sentient animals with utter respect, and certainly not eat them as a food source. Maybe he is right. Evolution, canine teeth, our stomachs and the history of mankind may determine our human nature as meat eaters, but is this the time when meat eating will be phased out?

In Star Trek, Commander Riker states: *"We no longer enslave animals for food purposes"* and during banquets, meat is visibly present, but it is replicated, the future equivalent of lab grown meat. It seems our species, at least in this depiction, continues to devour meat, but is eating real or copied meat one and the same? Supposing some future alien life form captured humans for food, then some revolutionary stopped this, and grew human flesh to eat rather than killing us. How would we feel about that? On this topic, should we explore just what is wrong with cannibalism other than we are ethically uncomfortable with it? Perhaps it's just that we don't like eating things that have a name.

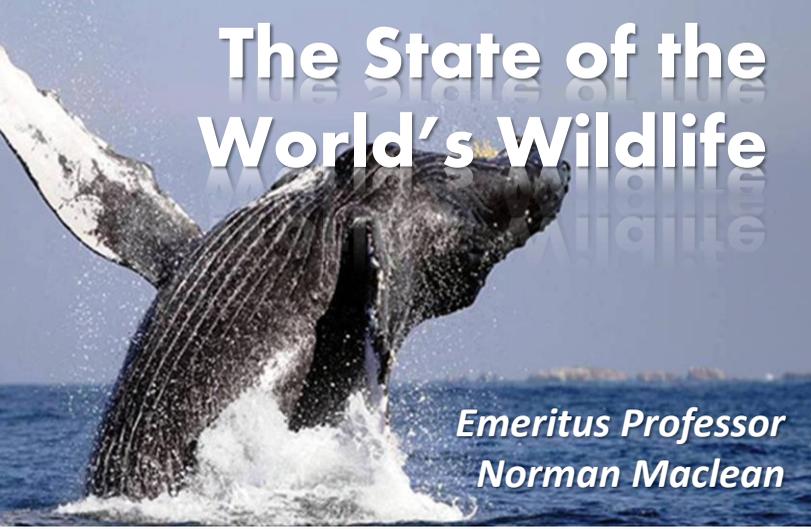


Look into her eyes - how could you eat Polly?



I shall try some of your burned, replicated bird meat.

The State of the World's Wildlife



*Emeritus Professor
Norman Maclean*

In a wide-ranging talk for Dorset Humanists, Norman Maclean said that world's wildlife is not doing very well. It's a somewhat negative story but to try and dilute the negativity he also spoke about species that are doing well, mainly as a result of conservation. This edited report is by David Warden.

Norman briefly explained how life on Earth arose and that life as a living cell only evolved once on Earth. If you look at the DNA sequence of all the organisms on Earth, they've all grown from one original cell. This has only become fully apparent in the last ten years. This probably tells us that it wasn't easy! In other words, the evolutionary step of making a living eukaryotic cell had a low probability.

The Holocene Extinction

Norman listed the five or six mass extinction events throughout geological history caused by severe volcanic activity, global cooling, the acidification of the sea, or a drop in sea level.

We're familiar with the asteroid strike which wiped out the dinosaurs. But extinction events can make way for other species to emerge. Crocodiles and alligators are really modern dinosaurs, and birds and mammals emerged following the extinction of the dinosaurs. So, it turned out to be good news as well as bad news. We're now in the middle of a new extinction called the Holocene caused by ourselves which started about 10,000 years ago when we began to hunt and set fire to parts of the Earth. The current causes of extinction are agricultural intensification, hunting for food and pleasure, deforestation, overfishing, whaling, introduced species, demand for ivory, rhino horn, bird plumes, shark fins, extensive pollution of air, land and sea, climate change, spread of industrial sites and megacities.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) operates a series of species categories such as extinct, threatened, least concern etc., to keep track of extinctions and recoveries. According to the IUCN, more than 38,500 species are threatened with extinction, which is 28% of all assessed species.



Large Blue Butterfly – Southern chalk downs – “...well on the way to recovery”. A large conservation effort.



**Northern Bald Ibis
A small population survives breeding on cliffs in North Morocco - big conservation effort.**



Ladybird Spider – a Dorset speciality and “...doing quite well” – big local conservation effort.

The bad news: Animal extinctions caused by human activity ancient and modern (not a complete list)

- Splendid Poison Frog (2020)
- Spix’s Macaw (2019) - 166 left in captivity
- Northern White Rhino (2018)
- Baiji River Dolphin (2017)
- Pinta Island Tortoise (2012)
- Caspian Tiger (2001)
- Pyrenean Ibex (2000)
- Western Black Rhino (2006)
- Golden Toad (1989)
- Japanese Sea Lion (1970s)
- Caribbean Monk Seal (1952)
- Schomburgk's Deer (1938)
- Thylacine or Tasmanian Tiger (1930s)
- US Heath Hen (1920s?)
- Passenger Pigeon (1914)
- Carolina Parakeet (1918)
- Sea Mink (1894)
- Atlas Bear (1890)
- Quagga (1883 - like a cross between a horse and a zebra)
- Great Auk (North Atlantic, 19thc)
- Dodo (Mauritius, 17thc)
- Aurochs (1627)
- Moa (New Zealand, 15thc)
- Elephant Bird (Madagascar, c13thc)
- Mammoths (c2000BCE)

The good news: species whose numbers have recovered to some extent as a result of conservation (selected list)

- Large Blue Butterfly (England)
- Ladybird Spider (England)
- Freshwater Pearl Mussel (Belgium)
- Loggerhead Turtle (Cyprus)
- Kemp’s Ridley Sea Turtle (Haiti)
- Aldabra giant tortoise (Indian Ocean atoll)
- Corncrake (Latvia and UK)
- Great Bustard (Portugal and UK)
- White-Tailed Sea Eagle (UK)
- Eurasian Stone Curlew (UK)
- Black Vulture (France)
- Kakapo (New Zealand)
- California Condor (California)
- Spoon-billed Sandpiper (Russia)
- Whooping Crane (North America)
- Northern Bald Ibis (Morocco)
- North Island Kokako (New Zealand)
- Hawaiian Goose (Hawaii)
- Greater Horseshoe Bat (UK)
- Southern White Rhino (Africa)
- Greater One-Horned Rhino (Nepal)
- Tasmanian Devil (Tasmania)
- Gray Whale (USA)
- Giant Panda (China)
- Scimitar-Horned Oryx (North Africa)
- Water Vole (UK)



Click my
face to
listen to
me

The Voice of Britain

David unleashed – without his Executive Editor's hat

In Praise of the Gorilla

I suppose everyone can recall a time in their youth or childhood when they visited the zoo. I went several times myself, but one visit I recall was as an adult, taking my own children. It was a beautiful, warm, sunny day, and I took great joy in sharing with my kids those moments of discovery and wonder at the sight of an astonishing variety of animals.

Somewhere along the line we came across the apes, and I remember the sign that said: "The next chimpanzees' Tea Party will be at 3.00pm today". But it was the last exhibit that made the biggest impression on me that day. It must have been a special day in the gorillas' compound because I noticed a crowd of people watching and making tuttering* sounds at one particular cage. Curious, I got as close as I could and held my daughter aloft on my shoulders so that she could get a better look. It was a family scene of three gorillas, and the onlookers were fascinated because the female had only recently given birth, and was holding a tiny black baby gorilla to her breast. But baby was sated, and really wanted to explore and play. The infant wasn't at all shy though, and for a few moments she stared into her human audience with obvious curiosity, if not fascination.



My daughter shrieked with excitement as the newborn gorilla looked in her direction, and she waved at the little ape, but soon she expressed disappointment when the baby just stared for a moment before looking away. But what took my attention was the adult male gorilla – baby's dad – who seemed utterly absorbed and fascinated at the sight of his offspring, and I watched as he reached over to take the infant from mum for closer inspection. Mother seemed to hesitate at first, but it was only for an instant before she allowed her infant to be picked up by her immensely powerful father.

Baby gorillas have such big faces and enormous eyes, and a crop of black hair on their head that makes them look so bewildered and comical. She looked so tiny and helpless compared to her giant father, and when dad picked her up – by the left leg, I think – I did wonder if the youngster would be safe in the hands of this brute who was by ▷



Image: Public domain images.net



Image Video link

Humans wake up in a kalavan zoo

then sniffing her all over as if she were a new toy. But he was so very gentle, and the look on his face was so full of intense curiosity and wonder, as if he was in awe at the sight of this beautiful new arrival whose only interest at that moment was to play with Dad. It reminded me of that sense of awe and wonder that I experienced at the birth of my own children: the curiosity I felt, and a kind of astonishment that another human creature that belonged to me and my partner had come into this world as if by magic. Of course, we have to be wary of attributing human feelings to an animal, but, you know, I felt sure I knew how that gorilla felt at that moment, and I empathised with him in just the same way as I would if he were a human father. This so-called brute could have crushed the baby's head with as much effort as I might crush a grape, but I knew that this tiny infant could never be safer than she was then in her father's immensely powerful arms. It appeared to me to be such a loving, gentle moment. A time of bonding. A new father with a new baby. I found it quite moving, and it brought my own memories flooding back to me.

[**Click here if you would like to listen to David Brittain's article**](#)

As I left the zoo, I thought of those creationists whose scriptures tell them that animals are creatures quite apart from human beings, and I recall a Muslim cleric I met recently who sneered at the very idea that we might be related to the apes.

But I left that zoo with a feeling of kinship, of how close we were, how obvious it is, and how privileged I felt to be related to such a creature.

Evolution tells a wonderful and amazing story. It is also true, and obviously so, to anyone who is prepared to open their eyes and observe animals with honesty. This creature was no brute; this was my cousin. Treat him with dignity and compassion. Treat him with respect.



Image: People.com

Brittain Interviews...

Our video conference with notable people, interviewed by David Brittain

Megan Manson

“Stronger Apart”

David Brittain interviews the highly articulate Megan Manson, who is head of policy and research at the National Secular Society. Megan explains why she believes that Humanists UK and the NSS are stronger apart, as allies, than if they were to merge. She also reveals that the NSS has recently moved away from being a purely atheist organisation to one which is more inclusive of religious people who believe in the principle of secularism. Raised as a Roman Catholic, Megan previously worked for the Japanese government and she has long been active in interfaith initiatives.



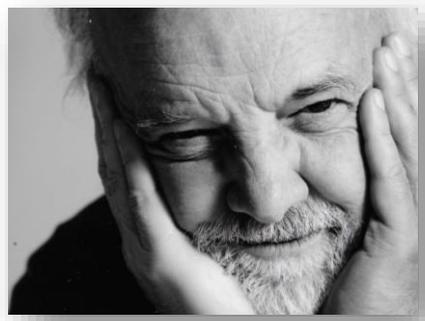


Thought for the Day

Roger Heppleston

“The moral culture of modern Western society is secular liberal humanism - we need to celebrate its achievements.”

Guest writer Roger Heppleston makes his case...



For a country to be stable its citizens have to accept the rule of law and, for laws to be seen as just, they must be underpinned by a common morality. For most of human history this common morality has been determined by priests. Old men consulted sacred texts and divined what they perceived to be God's will. Religions determined acceptable behaviour: the role of women, crimes and punishments and many other mores of daily life. This moral control even extended to economic crimes such as usury and to scientific argument about the functioning of the natural world.

After the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the church started to lose its monopoly on determining moral issues. There began in the West a long process of establishing a new moral code based on natural principles. As Barack Obama said in later times: *“Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. I may be opposed to abortion for religious*

reasons, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or (invoke) God's will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is relevant to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.”

This new 'universal' morality became based on the liberal ideas of freedom and equality that emerged in Britain and the USA in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, alongside natural humanistic ideals of behaviour. It has no recognised name. For want of a better phrase I call it secular liberal humanism. It has transformed our lives.

The natural world is no longer seen as controlled by gods, demons and spirits. Scientific explanations of natural phenomena, including evolution and the creation of the world, are accepted as truths. The old fatalism of religions is no longer present. During the Covid crisis, no one said that this was a punishment from God – medical solutions were sought and found.

Slavery as an institution no longer exists. Its ▷

abolition was inspired by Christians in Britain and America, imbued with liberal ideas. As the poet William Cowper wrote in 1785: “We have no slaves at home – Then why abroad? Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs receive our air, that moment they are free, they touch our country, and their shackles fall.”

This change from a rigid, religiously-inspired morality has accelerated since the Second World War. Women have gained a more important role in society and we have become less judgemental of minorities. No longer are divorcees, unmarried mothers, children born out of wedlock and gay men and women stigmatised. We have laws against discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, disability, race or religion. It is far from perfect but there appears to be a genuine desire to create a kinder, more caring world based on humanistic principles.

At every stage many religious leaders have resisted change, but most of their congregations have embraced the new morality. I have attended several inter-faith groups and it has become apparent to me that many, perhaps most, religious people in the West also *de facto* support secular liberal humanist ideals. The same-sex marriage vote and abortion votes in Ireland in 2015 and 2018 are the latest example of congregations embracing the new morality against the advice of their priests.

The principles of secular liberal humanism now determine the morality of all Western countries. Its natural authority allows both religious and non-religious to live together in harmony, sharing the same moral code. It is certain that it has transformed our lives for the better. However, it is not celebrated as the revolutionary force it is. It has evolved naturally – it doesn't even have a recognised



Barack Obama – a secular humanist message

name. No one prophet has espoused its ideals. No group specifically rallies round its principles. Except humanists, but we are a very small proportion of the population.

Since globalisation and the advent of social media the world has become increasingly fractious. If we are to continue to reap the benefits of secular liberal humanism in the West, we need to positively embrace it as our common morality, uniting us across religious and national boundaries. We need to name it, understand its force, celebrate its success and unite behind its principles. If we do so, we will be stronger together and better able to co-operate to confront the global challenges ahead.

■ Roger Heppleston is a member of Windsor Humanists. He had an international business career in planning and distribution, working for scientific and pharmaceutical companies. Since retirement he has travelled widely and expanded his knowledge through Open University courses. In 2015 he published his first book: *Memes, Societies and Human Evolution: How humans came to dominate the planet and then threaten its ecology*. His second book is *Compete or Co-operate: The Evolutionary Choice that will determine our future* (2018). Roger is a passionate humanist and seeks to promote humanist values from his web site www.eco-humanity.co.uk



Musings by Maggie

"Can They Suffer?"

I have two cats. Eddie (aka "the One-Eyed Wonder") and Freddie are seven-year-old brothers, both black and white and very good natured. They are very affectionate, get on splendidly with each other and are wonderful company for me now that I live alone. Looking at them now, I cannot imagine anyone wanting to harm them.

I am just one of a vast community of cat lovers, cats tying with dogs (12 million of each) as the most popular pets in the UK. There are, of course, always sick individuals who take pleasure in inflicting suffering on others, including, and often beginning with, animals but these are thankfully in the minority and in general cats and dogs are pampered, loved and adored by their owners.

Certainly, I cannot imagine large crowds of people gathering together for the sole purpose of enjoying the sights, smells and sounds of large numbers of live cats being hauled up in a net over a large bonfire and burned to death, yet this is precisely what used to happen regularly at midsummer in Western and Eastern Europe during the Middle Ages. It was an event particularly popular in France and Spain. According to the historian Norman Davies, the assembled people '...shrieked with laughter as the animals, howling with pain, were singed, roasted, and finally carbonized'¹.



Eddie and Freddie
"chillin' out"

Prior to the Middle Ages, cats were regarded as just ordinary domestic animals, but in the early 1320s, Pope Gregory IX, being extremely perturbed by reports from Germany of devil-worship rituals involving black cats, issued a papal bull, known as *Vox in Rama*, condemning these practices, after which cats, especially black ones, came to be regarded as familiars of witches, companions of sorcerers, and generally associated with Satanic practices. Hence, they were considered deserving of torture and death.

Dogs, too, have been victims of abuse, used for animal experimentation, pulling carts and as nonconsensual participants in the disgusting 'sport' of dog-fighting, outlawed in 1835 but sadly still practised illegally, along with cockfighting, outlawed in the same year.

Other animals that have traditionally been subjected to maltreatment at the whim of humans include bears (bear-baiting) and badgers (badger-baiting). Bull-fighting is still legal in Spain, France, Portugal, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Ecuador.

¹Davies, Norman (1996). *Europe: a History*. Oxford University Press. p.543.

**Anna Sewell,
author of *Black
Beauty* (1877)
brought the plight
of maltreated
horses to public
attention.**



Horses, especially during the rapidly industrialising 19th century, were viewed as beasts of burden, often to be worked until death from injury, disease or exhaustion. However, if animals, especially domesticated ones, have always been vulnerable to suffering at the hands of humans, they have also always had their human champions. The novel *Black Beauty*, written by Anna Sewell and published just five months before her death in 1877, served to bring the plight of maltreated horses to public attention in much the same way as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had raised awareness of the suffering of slaves in America twenty years earlier. Together, these two popular works of literature influenced public attitudes to both human and animal suffering, an interesting illustration of the relation between the two. It is also interesting to note that William Wilberforce, best known as a slavery abolitionist, was also a founder member of the organisation now known as the RSPCA.

There have, of course, always been communities who have been respectful towards animals. Jains, for example, believe that animals and plants, as well as human beings, have living souls. Each of these souls is considered of equal value and should be treated with respect and compassion. They are strict vegetarians and strive to live a life of harmlessness and non-attachment to possess-

ions, impacting as little as possible on the Earth's resources. Vegetarianism is also prevalent in Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism. Cows and monkeys are revered in Hinduism and dogs are given a special day in Chinese New Year celebrations, the second day being considered the birthday of dogs – a day when you should be extra kind to your canine companion.

Time has most certainly moved on when it comes to how we think of animals today. Certainly, they are still sometimes maltreated, neglected or exploited, but there is much greater awareness of these issues. In addition to the RSPCA and its counterparts in other countries, there are animal rights organisations focusing on farming practices, sports involving animals, vivisection, etc. and although there are many good environmental reasons for embracing a plant-based diet apart from animal cruelty, it is significant that a record half a million Brits signed up to Veganuary in 2021.



The ancient Egyptians are well-known to have revered the cat, believing that they embodied the spirit of the cat goddess, Bastet. When a cat died it was often mummified and buried and its memory honoured just like a human. Ed and Fred would certainly approve.

Bronze Figure of Bastet, Louvre Museum, France, [Rama, CC BY-SA 3.0 FR](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Ethical Encounters

*Exploring moral questions
with Paul Ewans*

RIGHT WRONG



The Lives of Animals

A world with less human suffering would be a better world, and so a world with less animal suffering would also be a better one. The suffering of animals is often very great and much of it is caused directly by our actions and by our way of life. We should care about this much more than we do.

In the past, many people believed that animals were not capable of experiencing pain and that they were not aware of themselves as living beings, that they did not know that they existed. Fortunately, very few people still believe that animals are no more than sophisticated machines. It now seems obvious to us that many species of animal experience pain and distress, not least because they have nervous systems which are very similar to ours and which respond in similar ways. When we are in pain we perspire and our blood pressure rises, and the same things happen to animals when they are in pain. It is also the case that anaesthesia controls the symptoms of pain in all vertebrates. And if an animal yelps and tries to get away from something that would cause us pain, it is reasonable to suppose that the animal is indeed experiencing pain. It is also apparent that at least some animals have



The curiosity of squirrels as they approach humans indicates a willing connection to our world – or maybe they are inviting us into theirs?

interior lives. Their behaviour and facial expressions clearly indicate that they experience not only anxiety, fear and distress but also happiness and joy.

Animals are living beings with interests of their own and these interests ought to matter to us. Many of the animals which we kill as a matter of routine are self-aware. Each of them is 'the subject of a life' – they have experiences which they recognise as being theirs, and they understand that they have both a past and a future. They are thus greatly harmed by being killed because death deprives them of the future which they wanted to have. Although we cannot know what it is like to live the life of a cat or a canary, it is obvious from the behaviour of such animals that they fear death. And of



Earlier this year, members of Dorset Humanists were enjoying a boat ride when a pod of dolphins joined them, playing in the bow wave of the boat. The onlookers were thrilled to see such life forms interacting by choice with our vessel, yet other nations not too distant, hunt them for sport and kill them, with little or no utilitarian purpose.

course animals which are self-aware also want to be free of pain, suffering and distress so far as this is possible, as we do ourselves.

Morally speaking, we should care about the well-being of any creature which is aware that it exists, and which is capable of experiencing pain. However, creatures which do not meet these criteria cannot be harmed during their lives – except in the limited sense in which a plant is harmed if it is damaged or destroyed – and death also causes them no harm. But where should we draw the line? Chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys, elephants and many other mammals are obviously self-aware. Fish very probably experience pain, and it is very likely that crustacea such as crabs, lobsters, shrimps and prawns do as well. But the position in respect of molluscs such as clams, mussels, oysters and scallops is uncertain. Given this uncertainty we should err on the side of caution. If there is reasonable doubt about any particular creature we should assume that it is in fact capable of experiencing pain and we should try whenever we reasonably can not to cause it any suffering or distress. This means, for example, that we should not take fish out of the water in which they live so that they die from suffocation.

Some people will say that much of this is speculation, that we have no proof that animals are self-aware or even that they experience pain. But given our common evolutionary heritage, the burden of proof should lie with those who claim that animals are different from us in some relevant respect. Yes, human culture is vastly more sophisticated than that of any other species and we are capable of making changes to the environment far beyond anything that animals can do. But this has very little direct moral significance. What counts is the lives of animals as experienced by the animals themselves, and we should assume that animals have interior lives similar to ours unless it is obvious that they do not – because they lack a central nervous system, for example. We should also assume that their lives matter as much to them as our lives do to us and we should therefore accept them as members of the moral community. We should care about their well-being, do what we reasonably can to avoid causing them harm and be willing to make sacrifices on their behalf. If animals could tell us how they feel about the way we treat them, we would probably care much more about their welfare than we do.



Letters & Emails

The Sound of Britain

Another excellent issue of *Humanistically Speaking* for November – thank you. In particular, I enjoyed your new idea of accompanying the text of a report with a recorded sound version in your *Voice of Britain* article, so that if we chose, we could listen to, rather than read your report.

If you think about it, sound recordings offers many options. I can listen in the car if I wish, or at home in an evening if I don't want to read, and just listen. But more important than that, if I'm listening to something that is emotionally strong, like your story about the US serviceman with the child, by listening to your voice, I can hear the emotion, and that helps place me in there with the soldier.

As a (retiring) soldier myself who has twice served in Afghanistan, I can then 'feel' through your voice, David, at least how you felt when you saw the photos, and more particularly even gain an insight into what might have been going through the soldier's mind. I understood his dilemma, and in some way I even shared his anguish.

But in future, could you make it more obvious that there was a recording to hear please? I read the article twice before I noticed the access button on the blue strip at the bottom of the page, and I respectfully suggest that in future the audio link could be placed more obviously, in the same way that you do in the video interviews?

Many thanks, Brian Turvey (Major)



Peter Boghossian from Portland State University is a guest on 'The Angry Atheist' podcast'

Angry or nice atheist?

In *Humanistically Speaking* recently, the sentence "I used to be just an angry atheist, but I saw the light, and I am now a Humanist" tickled me. I think I am still in the "angry atheist" camp – though I try not to be "angry" (very often). I accept religions, religious people, and those that believe (many friends of mine do and we have lively chats – that wouldn't happen often if I was just "angry"). They have every right to what they believe, as long as they don't to force me to believe the same thing. If these beliefs make them happy, then great, I am all for that. So I feel I am a rational and nice atheist – only sometimes do I get frustrated with the silly thing's religion bangs on about!

David Nunn, West Dorset Humanists

Positive Humanism

I have recently been reading *Humanistically Speaking*. The magazine is interesting, lively and worth looking at. The recent issue focussing on inter-faith dialogue would certainly be counted as positive humanism!

David Rhodes, West Dorset Humanists



Letters & Emails

COP26 'utter waffle': carbon capture is the 'magic bullet'

Predictably, the COP26 conference has turned out to be utter waffle, a total waste of time and money, its only legacy likely to be a steep spike in Scottish Covid cases and a further descent of the NHS to breaking point. The view that technology is the most viable solution to managing climate change is one I wholeheartedly endorse. The abject failure of the conference (due largely to uncoordinated, inadequate planning and preparation) to achieve anything of note can only be rectified by commitment to a much greater reliance on:

- a) ever more effective existing forms of clean energy such as wind, solar, hydro on the one hand and the more problematic nuclear option on the other; and
- b) major new advances in the capture, storage and dissipation of all carbon greenhouse emissions, both those currently clogging the atmosphere and those to be expected in coming decades.

The latter problem is complicated by the issue of methane emissions – currently accounting for 30 per cent of total greenhouse gases and increasing at a faster rate than carbon dioxide, and which, unlike carbon emissions (which can theoretically be solved with cutting edge technology costing at least \$5 trillion over the next decade) can only be addressed by a drastic reduction in numbers and imposition of better plant-based nutrition on the world's livestock population, accompanied by mass incentives to cut meat consumption, especially of colon-cancer inducing steak, in the West.

The successful development and implementation of carbon capture, however, truly represents a 'magic bullet' – the only realistic prospect we can entertain of achieving global salvation from the climate change emergency and one which, once it is firmly in place, will ironically enable us to merrily keep burning fossil fuels to our hearts' content.

Instead of grossly irresponsible proposals from COP26 to give billions of our hard-earned cash to irredeemably corrupt African regimes (where it will instantly vanish without trace into private coffers) in the pathetically naive expectation this might get them to up their environmental game, every spare cent we have must be spent on a 21st century 'Manhattan Project' dedicated to carbon greenhouse gas elimination. The only Third World countries we should financially aid are those which submit to stringent birth control and family planning programmes to limit rampant population growth, so raising future living standards and minimising their pitiful current economic dependence on us.

The total cost of both carbon and methane gas reduction is likely to be so enormous that the West alone cannot possibly shoulder it. So who else must pay? Obviously, China. The reckless and dishonest behaviour of this rogue nation in not acknowledging for at least six months the emergence of Covid in Wuhan labs, and building fifty new coal-processing plants and refusing to aim for net-zero greenhouse emissions until at least 2060, disqualifies it from any lenience in the imposition of punitive trade tariffs.

Jeremy May, Dorset Humanists

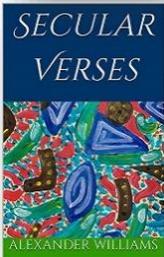
Sheep Space

Time ticks slowly here. Everything ambles
At sheep's pace, travelling in curved lines and rambles
With plenty of pauses to chew at the thistle
Or lick dust off dry leaves as the shepherd boys whistle.
Spaces are left for sheep and goats to graze
Scrub patches where what little grows, stays
Untouched until the mobile farms arrive:
Rural remnants, struggling to survive.
Where these sheep spaces have been forgotten
The now urban ungulates are not downtrodden;
They counter attack by invading the streets
Filling the roadside with wool wisps and bleats,
Forcing a world that is eager to race
To be patient, to revert once again to sheep's pace
Reminding the town of its still recent past,
Of the land last year empty, now filling up fast,
Helping the townspeople pause for a rest
As they hurriedly join in the march of the West.



Click the image of Alexander to watch and hear him reciting this month's poem...

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



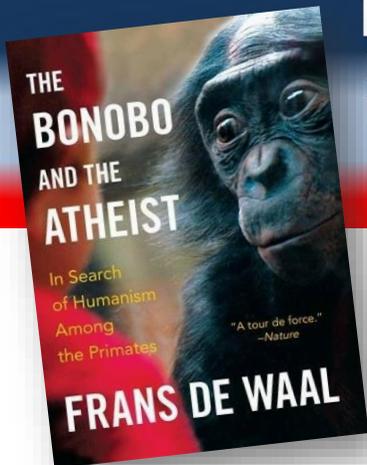
Sheep Space is published in *Black Iris*, Alex's collection of poetry reflecting on his two years living and working in Jordan as an English teacher in an international school. The link to the collection is [here](#).

THE BONOBO AND THE ATHEIST

In Search of Humanism Among the Primates (2013)

by Frans de Waal

Book Review by
David Warden



Frans de Waal is a Dutch primatologist and ethologist and Professor of Primate Behaviour in the Department of Psychology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

Frans de Waal made his name with a book called *Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex among Apes* published in 1982 and reissued for its 25th anniversary in 2007. One of the most shocking scenes in the book was the author's description of the outcome of a power struggle between three chimps in which the losing male, Luit, had his fingers and testicles bitten off. He died from his injuries. But this level of violence was rare in the colony at Arnhem in the Netherlands. Dominance struggles between males was commonplace, but the chimps' social system maintained a relatively stable 'balance of power' rather than a state of war of all against all. An elderly female chimp called Mama was definitely the matriarch. The most touching scene was a report of the chimps watching a documentary film about their own colony. They were visibly moved when a deceased member of the colony appeared on screen.

The Bonobo and the Atheist, however, is a

more interesting book. De Waal positions humans somewhere between common chimps which are muscular and relatively aggressive and bonobos which are more peace-loving and into causal sex. Both species like sex of course, but bonobos routinely use genital rubbing as we might use a handshake to establish a friendly connection.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is De Waal's rejection of the 'vener theory' of human morality which holds that we are basically savage with just a thin overlay of civilised behaviour. His observations overturn this idea by showing that all mammals, and especially primates, engage in prosocial behaviour because keeping the group together is essential for survival. Of course, animals also compete for dominance and sexual privileges, but these drives are kept in check by social codes and reward centres in the brain which make altruism and empathy pleasurable. De Waal thus argues for a 'bottom-up' theory of morality rather than a 'top-down' account, whether from religion or rationality. Morality in this sense is at least 100,000 years older than religion which developed in response to civilization and the growing size of social groups. Religion reinforces moral codes – it did not create them.

De Waal sides with the moral philosopher David Hume rather than Immanuel Kant: prosociality is part of human nature, not alien to it. We can make the world a better place by cultivating our natural sympathies, not by imposing moral rules.



SANTA CLAUS: THE INTERVIEW!

A Humanistically Speaking Exclusive!



Click for Video

The team at Humanistically Speaking wish all our readers season's greetings

Humanistically Speaking Coverage

A guide to those groups sharing our magazine

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

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

Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com type in SUBSCRIBE in the subject box.

Click white names
for websites.

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

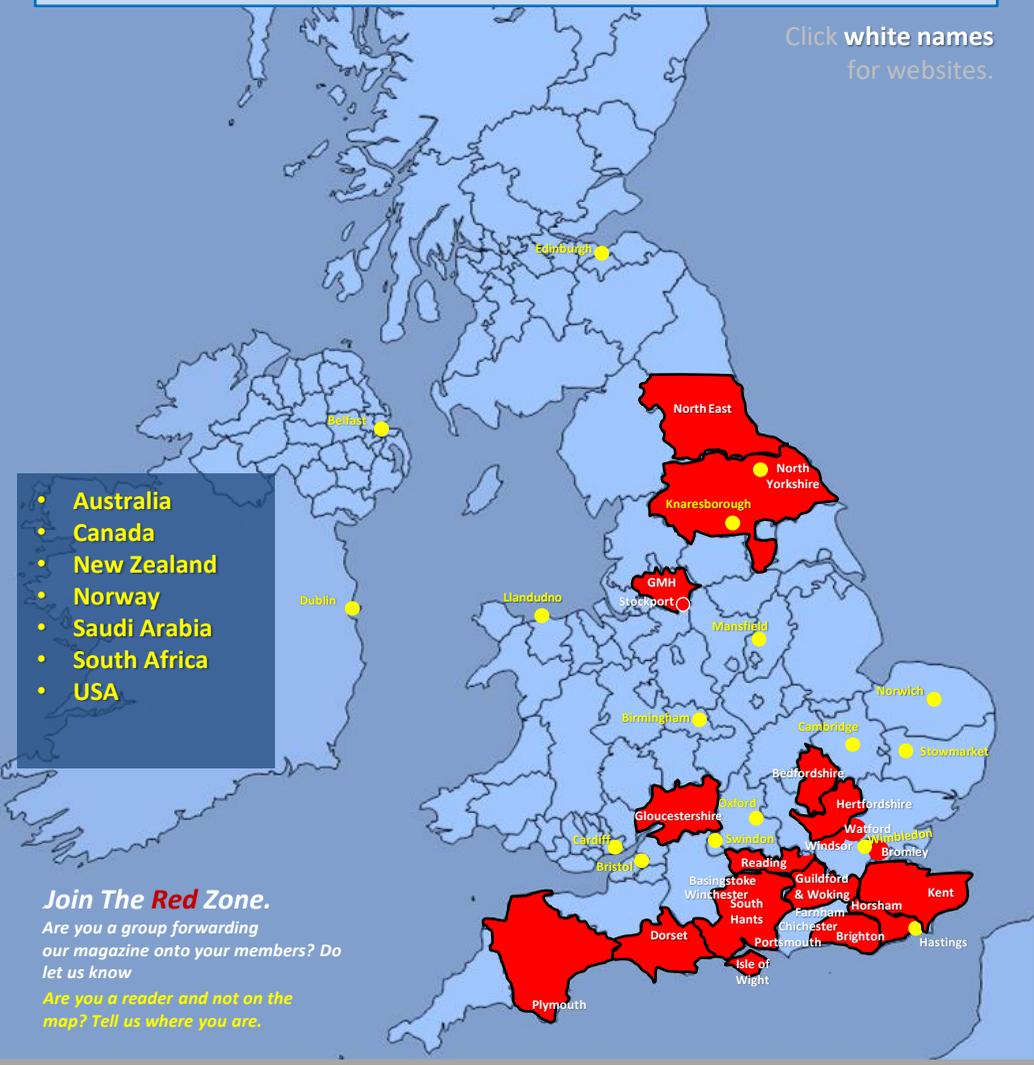
Join The Red Zone.

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

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

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

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



Humanistically Speaking

A free magazine created for and by Humanists

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



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

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



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