



Humanistically Speaking

June 2020

A Humanist hotline to a secular worldview

THE NEW NORMAL?

After a shock of this magnitude, will life ever be the same again or will we soon return to 'business as usual' as if nothing much has happened? One of the surprising things we have learned is that the government does indeed have access to a magic money tree and that billions can be shaken out of it. But we also know that the magic cannot last forever and that we need to get the economy working again as soon as possible.

We may have learned some surprising things about ourselves and our ability to stay calm in a crisis. We may have been heartened by the kindness of neighbours and friends. Many of us will have appreciated a welcome break from our usual rushing around and a chance to hear the birds and breathe fresh air. Some of us will have had an unpleasant encounter with a nasty illness and many have lost loved ones in cruel circumstances. As a nation, we showed our gratitude to all the keyworkers who kept the essentials going.

What will you have learnt when you reflect on the summer of 2020? Why not share it with us? We would love to hear.

New Features:

- Global Humanism
- Humanist Courses
- Healthy Humanists
- Environment

What wisdom would you pass on to your grandchildren?

A Humanist's view on the natural world

Plus our reader favourites:

- Dear Darwin
- Thought for the day
- Chairman's Interview
- Network News

Get your own *Humanistically Speaking* Hotlined direct from the editors

Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com

In this Issue

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

David Brittain
Executive Editor,
*Humanistically
Speaking*



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Dear Reader,

On behalf of the editorial team, I am delighted to present this, our third issue of *Humanistically Speaking*, and I hope you have as much fun reading it as we have creating it for you. This issue is *even better* than before, and there are lots of new features – some of which I would like to highlight. First of all, please note the significance of our reviving Charles Darwin at **page 5** – quite an achievement, I'm sure you will agree for an association that rejects miracles. Also, HS is grateful to Alan Tear of Basingstoke Humanists for his thoughts on faith schools at **page 6** – and also Bromley Humanists' Asad Abbas for his many contributions to *Lockdown Laughs* at **page 7**. There is also an obituary by me about Barbara Smoker, whose Presidency of the National Secular Society saw it go from strength to strength. And then you have *Tricia's Choices* on **page 23**. Tricia knows a thing or two about books - so if you are looking for a good read, take a leaf out of *Tricia's Choices*.

Page 24 is also interesting. Basingstoke Humanists' talented Stephen Bibby has written several of his own books, and HS is proud to advertise his latest works. So find out what Stephen's mind has created – they can all be bought via Amazon at fantastic prices. If you have ever written a book, let us know. It doesn't matter what the subject is, we will be happy to promote your work. And as if all that wasn't enough, the Chair's report this time is about Southampton Humanists Norman Maclean. His interview is at **page 19**, and he contributes his own report on the environment immediately after.

I sent a copy of his report to Humanists UK's chief executive Andrew Copson, who advised me that there a Humanist Climate Action Group (HCAG) to be established as soon as the lockdown allows. To my mind this represents a very significant breakthrough in fundamental ideas about what we *mean* by the term 'Humanism'. It has long been my view, at least, that there is a Humanist viewpoint on most issues in life, and I wondered whether our readers generally shared that view? Please do let me know in good time for the next issue, and if you are interested in being associated with the HCAG in the meantime, let me know and I will place your name on a joining list to pass on when the time is right.

That's all from me, except to say keep safe, stay well, and enjoy the latest news with *Humanistically Speaking*.

David Brittain

Humanist Courses

David Warden shares his experiences...



David Warden is chairman of Dorset Humanists. He's delivered and co-ordinated several evening courses of interest to humanists over the years. Humanistically Speaking invited him to reflect on his experiences, how he got started, what inspired him, whether he had a favourite course and whether any of them didn't work. What feedback did he get from participants and does he have any advice to other groups on delivering courses?

We launched our first *One Life* course on Humanism in 2012. The original *One Life* course was run at Leeds Atheist Society in the academic year 2007/2008. The Leeds course was packed every week as word of it spread, or at least, word of the free food they provided at each session. The idea behind *One Life* was that non-believers have the same questions that believers do – we want to reflect on the meaning of our lives, we sometimes struggle with moral questions, and we question how we can make the world a better place. The *One Life* course was promoted by the Chris Worfolk Foundation. Another useful framework was provided by the *Exploring Humanism* course written by Robin Grinter and Anna Whitehead for Greater Manchester Humanists. For Dorset Humanists, however, I wrote a course with new material because I wanted it to be fresh and original.

I've now run *One Life* numerous times and it has proved to be a popular way for our members to learn about Humanism. Chester Humanists borrowed my material (with my permission!) and I'm delighted to see that Humanists UK are also promoting an *Exploring Humanism* course (see below).

At Dorset Humanists we've also run evening courses on the Science of Happiness, the Philosophy of Friendship, Existentialism, and Science. We always make our courses relevant to Humanism and our next planned course will be about economics. I don't have a favourite! We usually get very positive feedback although some of the science subjects were mind-boggling! An evening course is a great way for people to interact while learning something new. I now encourage our members with specialist knowledge to get involved in presenting sessions.

Sessions that could be included in a *One Life* course

1. What do humanists believe?
2. The God debate
3. History of Humanism
4. Where do ethics and morals come from?
5. What is a good life?
6. Thinking skills
7. Happiness skills
8. Secularism
9. How to build a good society
10. Humanist responses to global problems
11. International Humanism



A Humanist *Alpha* Course?

One of the questions I am frequently asked about *One Life* is whether this is the humanist answer to the Christian *Alpha Course*. I have to admit, this was one of the motivations for running a course on Humanism. The *Alpha Course* is ubiquitous and millions of people worldwide have attended it, including me! The main difference between the two experiences, however, is that the *Alpha Course* wants you to pray whereas a *One Life* course wants you to think.

The main advantage of attending *Alpha*, I confess, is the free food and hospitality. But here at Dorset Humanists we also love to debate theology with Christians – and to make friends across the barriers of belief and different worldviews.

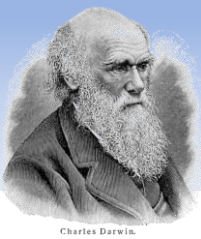
There's no rigid formula to running a *One Life* course, but it should include some of the core topics listed in the panel to the left, and the person leading it should have done their homework thoroughly.

Contact me if you want to ask any specific questions.

Email: chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

You can access an *Introducing Humanism* course online here: www.futurelearn.com/courses/introducing-humanism





Charles Darwin.

Dear Darwin

Ask Charles your difficult questions...

Dear Darwin

I'm sure that if you were alive today you would be extremely concerned about the loss of biodiversity and species extinction. Are humans killing off the 'Tree of Life'? Should I become a vegan? Should I stop flying? Please tell me what to do!

Martin, Hampshire

Dear Martin

Thank you so much for writing. I would indeed be extremely concerned about the environmental pressures you allude to. You may know that I spent five years on board *The Beagle* collecting samples of numerous exotic species from across the world and in particular from the Galapagos Islands. It would indeed be a catastrophe if species extinction continues apace. All species do of course seek to maximise their chances of survival in their ecological niche. The human 'niche' has expanded dramatically since my day and is putting intolerable pressure on the entire global biosphere. I understand that a plant-based diet is more sustainable and better for your gut. I've never heard of humans 'flying' but it may well be better to return to Victorian modes of travel such as sail and trains. I think my best advice at this critical juncture would be to use the opportunity of a global pandemic to reappraise the human

situation and how to restore a better balance between humans and other species. I would highly recommend attending the forthcoming talk by Emeritus Professor Norman Maclean on 8th August who will be addressing some of these very difficult issues. Norman is a Fellow of the Linnaean Society of London, as indeed I was in my day, and I'm sure he will have an excellent grasp of the current situation.

■ *Norman Maclean's talk will be on Zoom. Join www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists/ to be notified of details.*

Dear Darwin

Do you think that coronavirus will enhance human evolution by killing off the least fit?

Sally from Surrey

Dear Sally

Evolution by natural selection is, as you suggest, a grim business. It only works, however, if it kills off organisms before they reproduce. So it rather looks as though coronavirus, which mainly targets the elderly and sick, is not going to greatly enhance the 'fitness' of the human species.

A stylized, handwritten signature of Charles Darwin in black ink.

Thought for the Day

On faith schools...

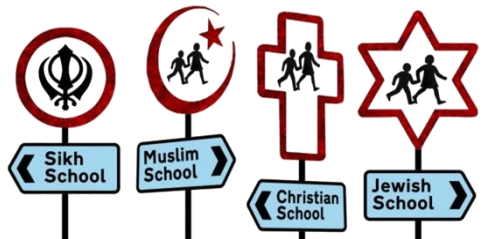
From Alan Tear, Basingstoke Humanists

Amongst the most damaging flaws in our society are racism and religious intolerance. By far the best way to reduce these evils is to ensure that the education of our children is immersed in an environment which reflects the makeup of our society as a whole. To that end, it must be comprehensive, as unbiased as possible, and not based upon the indoctrination in any particular faith.

However well meant, religious education into a particular faith can easily generate a “them and us” mentality in the young mind – “I am right and you are wrong” – literally a “holier than thou” mentality.

There are practical considerations, of course, in that any school that takes pupils from the surrounding area and the local population is unlikely to represent a fair sample of the population of the UK as a whole. But state funded schools should not be allowed to have a selective intake policy, preferring pupils whose parents are of any particular faith.

Faith schools are a negative influence on the racial and religious tolerance within our society. This has been demonstrated by a number of studies ([for example see here](#)). If they must exist at all (and I think there is a good argument for banning them entirely) then they certainly should not receive any funding whatsoever from national or local government and should not have charity status allowing them to pay significantly less tax.



Certain faith schools teach the religion, or the language which is central to that religion, to such an extent that other subjects on the national curriculum are omitted. Other schools (and sometimes the same schools) also omit parts of the national curriculum because it contradicts the dogma of their faith – for example evolution is not taught in some Muslim and Christian schools. Such practices should be banned, and these schools should be closed down if they fail to conform. Those heading or teaching in those schools may also need to be banned from teaching anywhere, to prevent the practice of them just opening another school with a different name, as has occurred.

It is of course acceptable for comparative religion studies to be taught, but strictly on the basis that there is no bias towards any particular faith, and of course, atheism, agnosticism and Humanism should be included!

What do other readers of Humanistically Speaking think? Let us know – email humanistically.speaking@gmail.com and tell us what you think!

Network News

Humanist groups getting together



It's all about us

We are now into our third exciting issue of Humanistically Speaking during which a pandemic strikes the nation. Who could have guessed it? But life goes on and we are all finding ways of communicating with each other. But here at HS headquarters we are made up of members from just two groups, so we urge you to write in and tell us something, otherwise the materials used will heavily feature Dorset and Basingstoke. Tell us what you have done, what went well, something that was a one-off hit, ideally with photographs to bring it to life. We would love to hear from you.

Zooming in and out

Dorset Humanists, yes them again, are very active on the Zoom platform during this pandemic with meetings several times a week. Is your group doing something? Then let us know.



- Tuesday Coffee morning – 11am
- Thursday Quiz Night – 7.30pm
- 4th Wednesday talk – 7pm
- 2nd Saturday talk – 1.30pm
- Café Philo - Wednesdays 7pm
- Out of the Box – 1st Wed 7.30pm

Lockdown Laughs



The sermon this morning, "Jesus walks on the water"

The sermon tonight, "Searching for Jesus"

**Jokes courtesy
of Assad Abbas**

Psychic Fair
Cancelled
due to unforeseen
circumstances

Notice in a Church Bulletin:

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget your husbands.

An old man goes to a church, and is making a confession:

Man: "Father, I am 75 years old. I have been married for 50 years. All these years I had been faithful to my wife, but yesterday I was intimate with an 18 year old."

Father: "When was the last time you made a confession?"

Man: "I never have, I am Jewish."

Father: "Then why are telling me all this?"

Man: "I'm telling everybody!"

This is from the obituary of Frank Giles ... Who was editor of the Sunday Times and private secretary of Ernest Bevin after the 1945 election:

On one occasion, while standing side by side with his boss at the urinal, Bevin said, "This is it Giles, the socialist dream---the means of production in the hands of the people".

Send us your GROUP NEWS

Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com



Healthy Humanists

Action Aaron encouraging exercise



Star Jumps

Sometimes called jumping jacks, do as many of these as you can in one minute.



Squats

From standing straight, squat down and repeat for one minute. Keep weight over your heels, aim to keep back straight.



Static Sprinting

This is a speed static sprint, so go as fast as you can, raising knees to near 90° to your body.



Repeat Squats

Another full minute of squats, check your posture, keep a steady rhythmic pattern.



Repeat Star Jumps

Your final minute of star jumps, if you have any energy left, try and get higher off the floor.

HIIT – full exercises session in just 5 minutes

HIIT stands for High Intensity Interval Training and is a scientifically tested method for doing a lot of exercise in a short period of time, an ideal exercise for those with limited space and no fitness equipment, making it the ideal lockdown exercise at home.

If you are a person who does no exercise at all, then I would suggest you start with a slower version, but if you are someone who regularly takes some form of exercise, maybe at the gym, then this is ideal for you.

The exercises themselves take just five minutes, but with breaks, warm-ups and cool downs, perhaps allow ten to fifteen minutes for the full work out. Start with some gentle jogging on the spot, loosening up your limbs, rotating body parts etc and getting the blood flowing. Then, once ready using a clock or stopwatch, do star jumps for exactly one minute. Now this sounds easier than it is, and you will run out of energy around 45 seconds, but keep at it, it's worth the effort. Then the same for squats.

The middle exercise we really take it up to a full sprint on the spot. Run as hard and as fast as you can, raising the knees up if possible, and keep this up for the whole minute.

Then repeat the first two exercises in reverse.

You will want to take a break between each exercise, but just take ten seconds or so to catch your breath and then launch into the next sections. Be sure to do some cool-downs at the end, with some deep breathing relaxation.

Why not watch legendary doctor Michael Mosely do this on 'Trust me I'm a doctor'?

Video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBiJp6vg638>



Pride in our Work



It is highly likely that Prides will be cancelled this year, but the information still stands

Why all groups should be at their local Pride event

With Equality as the central focus of all Pride events there is a deeply-rooted humanist value at the heart of all prides across the country. Where we have any minority group in society that is being victimised, downtrodden, bullied or simply treated differently it's something we should respond to. The LGBT community have it good in some parts of the country, and bad in others. Generally, the bigger and more southerly the city the better. But even if the UK still has some way to go, we are still a shining example to the world. We are a country still respected, what we do matters, and for all those countries who still judge people based on who they love, we as humanists have a duty, surely, to do our best to make a difference.

Pride is not about the LGBT members, it is about the group delivering a message to their town, their country and to the rest of the world, that ALL people everywhere matter.

Members of Dorset Humanists, whose Pride appearance now attracts members from Southampton, Winchester and the London groups, have numbers of over twenty persons in their parades where half of those are straight people who just support the cause.

Delivering a message...

Prides often have a style for that year often surrounding a costumed theme or something, but we ignore that. For us it is entirely about delivering a message. We have eight specially printed message boards that leave people under no illusion of why we still do Pride. Out of the thirty to fifty groups in the parade we are one of just a few that actually delivers an on-point message.



We welcome replies to any of our stories
Please email us at: Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com

"Such a great day, full of energy and fun"



Putting Humanism on the map

Pride or any street carnival is a central focus for any town, and being in it is vitally important for any Humanist group seeking to be recognised. In Bournemouth we feature both in the parade delivering our message, and then afterwards in our gazebo tent where we engage with hundreds of people curious enough to find out what this Humanism thing is all about.



The stand gets very busy, often with several people inside engaging and asking questions, and several outside handing out leaflets to passers-by. It is our biggest public event of

the year and a great team-building exercise where members come together who may not have spoken previously, and work together to broadcast Humanism.

Branding and Image

We didn't build up our image overnight though. It took a number of years to create the look we wanted, and to deliver the right message to capture the interest of the two thousand people an hour footfall that pass by our stand. Vistaprint have been a great help making our look affordable, and each year we have added something new to keep the stand looking current.

Dorset welcomes any network members to come to Bournemouth during Pride and work with us, join our parade or just see how things are done. We would be delighted to help where possible so you can attend your local Pride.



GROUP NETWORK

What's going on within the network

Spread far and wide our group network is ever expanding yet there are many gaps in between that could be filled. Do you have connections in other towns? Are you a humanist living in one of those between towns and eager to start a group of your own? If so we might be able to help. Within the South Central region we have experienced members who could give advice, be a source of knowledge, and possibly even offer 'hands-on' help to start up your events.



Participating Groups – a group near you?

LOCAL GROUPS

-  Basingstoke Humanists
-  Brighton Humanists
-  Bromley Humanists
-  Chichester Humanists
-  Dorset Humanists
-  Farnham Humanists
-  Guildford & Woking

-  Horsham Humanists
-  Isle of Wight Humanists
-  Portsmouth Humanists
-  Reading Humanists
-  South Hants Humanists
-  Humanists UK (National Org)
-  Winchester (*to be confirmed*)

HUMANIST ADVICE

David – A grandfather's loving letter to Amy

Not everyone is lucky enough to have loving grandparents, but we were particularly moved by this grandfather's advice to his granddaughter as she comes of age.

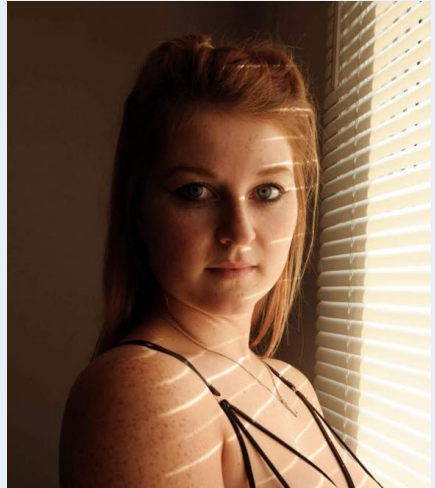
Dear Amy,

This is a private and personal letter to you from a loving grandfather as you reach the threshold of adulthood. It expresses my deepest wishes for your future happiness.

Until now the things you hold dear will have been shaped by the influences around you – parents, school, and friends. But from now on you will become aware of an increasing freedom to be true to yourself, a freedom which comes with the responsibility to consider the effect of your actions on others as well as yourself.

So I am going to offer you some grandfatherly advice but by no means am I holding myself up as an example of perfection! I am very far from that, and have made many mistakes in life. But you may one day find yourself in danger of making similar mistakes and I hope this letter will help you to avoid them.

In a world where 'fake news' is on the increase, always try to form independent opinions on the basis of your own reason and experience.



Don't allow yourself to be led blindly by others, especially those in positions of authority.

Play your full part in society and try not to blame others for any misfortune – make your voice heard, vote in elections, and don't turn away from injustice or cruelty.

Make up your own mind about people as individuals, and try to avoid stereotyping people based on their membership of a group or 'tribe'.

There will be times in life when you will be in a position to examine and assess other people. When those times arise, try to apply reason, justice, empathy and compassion before judging them.

What have you said to your family members? Have you shared your own wisdom, let us know.

Your knowledge, abilities, skills and talents are important and will take you far in life. But never forget the importance of a smile, a sense of humour, and a pleasant, friendly manner. They can make all the difference.

If you encounter people who are rude and unfriendly, try not to take it personally. It's almost certain their behaviour wasn't caused by anything you said or did.

At the age of seventeen, the time ahead of you may seem almost infinite. But 1,000 months is a good lifespan, and you have already lived over 200 of them. So make the most of every day.

When you make mistakes, as we all do, try to avoid brooding on them. Reflect on what you have learned and then get on with life. Remember the maxim, 'The person who never made a mistake, never made anything'.

Whatever you do, wherever you are, and whatever your task, always care about your conduct. Someone, somewhere will always remember it.

However small, or however great your task, be the best at it you can. That will build your self-respect, and win the respect of others.

Always listen to your conscience and remember the importance of compassion and forgiveness. If someone betrays you, be free to forgive, but remain cautious about trusting them again.

Always be true to yourself. If you want to walk in the rain, climb Mount Everest, go surfing in



California, be an astronaut, meditate in Nepal or be a brain surgeon, don't let anyone tell you it's a silly idea. It's your life.

Never forget the importance of love, and remember that genuine love, in all its forms, may be the single most important thing for a happy life.

Try to keep the sense of curiosity that you were born with. Never allow it to be extinguished by cynicism, prejudice or fear.

There are bad things in the world for sure, but never forget there is wonder and beauty in nature, fascination and satisfaction in the pursuit of empirical truth, and amazement and warmth in so many people.

The Universe is bigger than we can imagine. This is also true of the little speck we call Earth. It's rich beyond imagining, and always changing.

Take joy in the short time you have here and allow your experience on this planet to fill you with wonder. If you give it a chance, it will thrill you and take your breath away.

So here's wishing you a very happy life, full of the most important things – good health, goodwill, wonder, friendship, fun, laughter and love.

From your loving grandfather.

GLOBAL HUMANISM



How the rest of the world is doing it...

Humanism: Is it truly global?



Humanism certainly is a global phenomenon with hundreds of humanist groups and associations in every continent on the planet which are represented by Humanists International (see panel next page).

One vibrant group, Humanist Alliance Philippines International (main photo above), promotes secular humanism as 'a progressive philosophy suggesting that human beings, given the right education, can be ethical and morally upright even without divine interference'.

It aims to defend each individual's right to personal and collective freedom, equal treatment and opportunity, and safe and healthy living. HAPI has outreach programmes like the 'Kids Nutrition Campaign' and the LGBTQ & Straight Alliance.

Founded on December 25, 2013 and launched on the first day of 2014, HAPI is a not-for-profit community of progressive secular humanists with a vision of a happy world lifted from ignorance, chaos, and poverty.

Many humanists face persecution and violence. You can help by giving to the Protect Humanists at Risk fundraising appeal. [Visit Here](#)

Humanist responses to the global crisis...



SINGAPORE

"In Singapore for the moment we are lucky and safe enough, and we are not in need of support. Please direct efforts towards other countries and communities who may be in greater need." **Ding Jie Tan, Vice-President of Humanist Society (Singapore)**



Humanists
INTERNATIONAL

LIBERIA

"Sometimes it is easy to deride religious people, but now we cannot afford it. I believe now is time to extend a hand to everyone, to share empathy and compassion with other people, despite our differences." **Momolu Dorley, President of Humanists Liberia**



UGANDA

"Reports show a local and global increase in domestic violence cases, especially towards women. Indeed, a lot of women who were already at risk of abuse before are now locked in their own houses with their violent partners and no way of escape. They cannot even look for help because of the quarantine. It's a terrible situation." **Viola Namyalo from the Uganda Humanist Association.**

INDIA

"The virus doesn't discriminate. Anyone can get it. It will not spare anyone of any ethnic, religious, national or gender groups: it is infecting all humans! We are all one and we shall fight the battle as one." **Narendra Nayak, President of FIRA (Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations)**



Humanists International is a non-governmental organisation championing secularism, human rights and equality, motivated by humanist values.

Founded in Amsterdam in 1952, it is an umbrella organisation made up of more than 160 humanist, atheist, rationalist, secular, skeptic, freethought and Ethical Culture organisations from over 80 countries.

Obituary: Barbara Smoker

The Day I Met Barbara Smoker - A small woman with a big presence

I first heard about Barbara Smoker when I signed on as a member of the National Secular Society way back in the 1970s. In those days she was President of the NSS (1972 - 1996), and I recall seeing her at an NSS AGM at Conway Hall in London's Red Lion Square. I remember her as a small lady who somehow stood out above the crowd, although it has to be said that in those days the National Secular Society wasn't exactly a crowd puller. But by the weirdest coincidence, and entirely unknown to me at the time, I worked with - and was friends with - a niece of hers, Julia, who told me quite a lot about her Aunt, so in a way, although it would be a long time before I actually met Barbara, I always felt that I knew her quite well.



2nd June 1923 - 7th April 2020

The years rolled by, and when I joined the then British Humanist Association in 2006, I became aware of her again, this time attending BHA AGMs. She was small, but somehow had a big presence, and I always noticed her. I guess that's charisma. You can feel their presence because such people are comfortable in their own skin as being different – that's how she was.



Born in South London in 1923 she was the first of six children (her obituary in *The Times* got that wrong, by the way). She was brought up in a Catholic family and by all accounts was very pious, becoming head of the Legion of St. Mary. She somehow found a way out of the pious brainwashing she must have received, but it wasn't until she was 26 years old that she decided

that she didn't believe. Suddenly, on November 5th 1949 whilst standing at the philosophy shelves at a Holborn library, she had a moment of insight. "I knew it was all poppycock", she says, and that moment of realisation changed her life.

With her eyes now opened, she began to highlight the damage that was caused by religion. She declared herself an atheist, edited Humanist magazines, and fought for sexual freedom for women. At various times over the years she became chair of the South Place Ethical Society and the Mary Ward Centre in Tavistock Square. She also became involved in the Family Squatting Society, joined *The Committee of 100*, became an active supporter of CND, and a supporter of the *Make Love not War* campaign. On top of all this, she joined the Shaw Society, serving for a time as a secretary there (she was one of the few who could decipher George Bernard Shaw's shorthand). And as if *that* wasn't enough, for a while she became chair of Exit, (an early form of Dignity in Dying), and an Honorary Vice President of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association.

Along the way she inevitably crossed swords with authority, and collected (according to *The Times* obituary) an impressive list of convictions! She was also a frequent and brave critic of Islam, being beaten to the ground in Sheffield once (at age 60) by Islamic thugs in 1993. She would become known as “queen mum of secularism” by admirers like Michael Foot, Sir Michael Holroyd and Richard Dawkins.



So what was Barbara like as a private person? Well ... I feel that I have a unique perspective through Julia, and she said the following about her aunt:

Barbara was an amazing woman and, I always felt, somewhat before her time. She certainly pushed the boundaries, didn't she?

My personal memories of her are numerous but just a few are:

- her gargantuan appetite, both for life and grub! She definitely wasn't a vegetarian, as has been suggested, particularly if someone else was paying! Her zest for life was incredible and she was still travelling across London on buses, trams and trains right up until the end of her life. She didn't miss too many afternoons at the bookies either!

- being asked at a reunion (in 2000) at my alma mater convent school by my old headmistress (a nun) whether my heretical aunt was still alive and kicking! I hadn't even realised whilst I was at school that the nuns would have any knowledge of her. How naive was I?! Barbara found this hysterically funny when I told her!

- her annual 'Egotistical Yuletide Newsletter' that was distributed to all family members each December, together with one of her heretical Christmas cards. I think my favourite of these cards was Mary and Joseph sitting by the crib in the stable at Bethlehem with the Angel of the Lord proclaiming for all to hear, "It's a girl!"

I could go on all day about my personal memories of Barbara but, in summing up, I found Barbara to be a warm, kind-hearted, generous and highly intelligent lady: a deep-thinker with strongly held convictions that she was absolutely not afraid to voice. An example to us all.

No-one can say better than that! ... My sincere thanks to Julia.

So ... When did I actually meet Barbara for the first and only time? It happened in June 2017 when I was giving a talk at Bromley Humanists about the death of Hypatia (a female philosopher and mathematician who was murdered by a mob of Christians in 415CE). Barbara was a member of the group and she was in the audience. I had no idea that she would be there, but of course I recognised her immediately. We chatted afterwards, and I was immensely flattered when she told me she knew about my work with the Armed Forces Humanists.



As I said in an email to my friend, Julia, "I was deeply impressed with this little, elderly lady who looked so fragile, and spoke so quietly, but with such understanding, such compassion, such eloquence and such cheerful charm."

She died in Lewisham Hospital on the 7th April ... Not of Covid-19, as has been stated by some, but of metastatic cancer.

As with all great people, they leave a large hole when they pass on. But great people also leave their mark, and the ripples of the wake they leave will remain with us for a very long time yet. RIP Barbara Smoker – it was an honour to meet you at last.

For more information about Barbara Smoker's life – get a copy of her autobiography called 'My Godforsaken Life'. It was published last year, and to my shame I haven't got a copy myself yet, but I'm told it a fascinating read!



How are YOU making the most of your time?

Time is a valuable resource, something none of us truly have any control over. It exists, it passes, and once it has gone we can never have it back. We rush around in daily lives to be "in time" and often arrive somewhere unprepared, something was forgotten, we didn't "have time".

Well now **YOU DO**. You have time each and every day to make the very best use, but how are you using it? These valuable moments that arrive as gifts to us each passing day, what are you truly doing with them?

As I write this the world experiences 220,000 deaths, the nation 22,000 deaths, our Humanist region unknown at this time, and this is just from Coronavirus, but the picture is greater than that. This year there have been over 19 million people whose lives have come to an end, either naturally or prematurely. Today alone over 112,000 people have died.

We "should" perhaps value each and every day automatically, but I know I don't, but "could" we choose to learn from the comings and goings of life, to actually use these months given to us to use to our best advantage, but are we? Could we be doing more? Maybe rest and recharge in itself is enough?

We are searching for the most innovative ideas, something outside of exercise and eating. How have you put your time to the very best use?



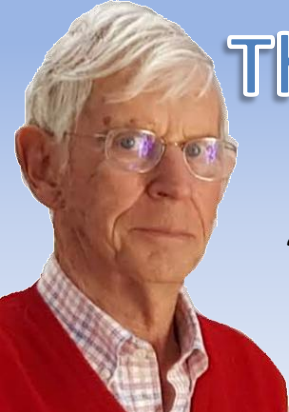
WORLD POPULATION	
7,781,083,668	Current World Population
45,924,469	Births this year
268,565	Births today
19,280,192	Deaths this year
112,750	Deaths today
26,644,277	Net population growth this year
155,815	Net population growth today

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The Chair's Interview

Norman Maclean

"I recently retired from the Chair of South Hants Humanists, but I'm still active!"

...Says Norman Maclean, Deputy Chair of South Hants Humanists ...

There are many sides to Norman Maclean: Emeritus Professor of Genetics at Southampton University, Fellow of the Institute of Biology and the Linnaean Society, and author of many scientific books. And his latest - **A Less Green and Pleasant Land** - which was published in 2015 reflects his passion for protecting the environment. He has also been an editor of the Journal of Fish Biology, and has been Honorary Scientific Advisor of the Marwell Wildlife Park.

But there is much about Norman that is unexpected. For one thing, he entered Edinburgh University with a one year grant from the Carnegie Institute to study agriculture, and left with a degree in Biology. "I didn't have good enough qualifications to get into the sciences ..." he told me ..."But after a while the Director of Studies told me that I was cut out to be a scientist, not a farmer."

And so - after serious and lengthy reflection - he abandoned agriculture and pursued studies in biology. Thus would begin an illustrious career that would develop into experimental science and academia.

But his route to becoming a Humanist also took an unlikely path, because he originally came from a family of devout Christians - the Exclusive Brethren, no less, which meant he was brought up without any outside communication like the radio, or cinema, or

even works of fiction. Nor could he participate in sports. Nevertheless, young Norman's enquiring mind never stopped asking questions, and his later experience at University and the outside world made him challenge his family's faith so much so that - at age 20 - he was asked to leave. This must have been a serious shock to his family - particularly his father - but Norman said that being 'sacked from the sect' as it were, was an easier process than if he had tried to leave. "I was never hounded to go back, as I might otherwise have been", he said. But for a long while he still saw himself as a Christian, and he explored other Christian beliefs - but none of them satisfied him.

It was only later on - much later, when he was about 50 years old - that he decided that he was an atheist. But even then he only became a Humanist when, already in his 70's, he attended a course on Humanism. That was about 10 years ago, and the course was run by David Bothwell, the founder of South Hants Humanists. David's course opened Norman's eyes. Humanism, it seemed, at last answered most if not all of his questions, and at length Norman decided to join South Hants Humanists. "I'm not an evangelist" he says, "And I don't agree with every aspect of Humanist philosophy, but I am proud to call myself a Humanist, and very happy to be a

member of South Hants Humanists.”

He joined the committee about six years ago, and after a year he accepted an invitation to stand as Chair – a post he held for the following five years. “I recently retired from the Chair of South Hants Humanists, but I am still active!” He said, adding “I am still deputy Chair, but Liz Mizon is the Chair now. She was once the Liberal Democrat mayor of Southampton, so she will be quite used to leading and chairing ... And I am quite sure she will do a great job.”

When I asked him what he thinks are the big current issues in Humanism, Norman didn't hesitate. “It's about community involvement and support” He said. “The organised religions seem to do that so well, and although Humanism in the UK has begun that process, it still has a very long way to go to catch up!”

He also feels that Humanists should take a position on wider issues – destruction of the environment, for example, and climate change. These are issues that he felt Humanism should at least take a public position on. I agreed with him, but I said that sounded more political to me. So I asked him if he felt that Humanism should become more political.



This was clearly a tougher question for him, because as we all know, Humanist UK is a charity, not a political party. But after some reflection Norman said what he felt. “Perhaps so ...”, He said, “... if we want a bigger say in the big issues of the day we might need to get more involved into politics.” When I heard that, I privately wondered if perhaps he might one day discuss that further with Liz Mizon.

I found this interview fascinating, even though we were constrained by the need for social distancing and we had to talk via Facetime. This man clearly has more sides and facets to him than a pound coin, and I invited him to write an article in HS about his passion for British Wildlife, and he agreed immediately. Anyone who reads an article from Norman may rather miss out on the reassuring Edinburgh accent of his softly spoken voice, but even so, I can't wait to read it!

Report by David Brittain
Executive editor and chair of Humanistically Speaking

Editor's note: Following Norman's point about politics, Humanistically Speaking would like to confirm that although Humanists UK is not party political, it does, where appropriate, engage with politicians at national and international level on matters of humanist concern.



Environment

A Humanist's View on the Natural World



**A plea to all Humanists to call for environmental sanity
by Emeritus Professor Norman Maclean,
deputy Chair of South Hants Humanists**

I am a late comer to Humanism after a life-long pilgrimage from Christianity to Atheism, followed by a late move to Humanism. In my perception, Humanism encourages a view in which faith in God is replaced by a belief that the future is in our own hands, that is, a sort of faith in *Homo Sapiens*.

I struggle with this concept since, although I acknowledge that our species has achieved amazing things in terms of engineering, architecture, arts and science, and much else, we have failed to control our own world population and have exploited the resources of planet Earth for our own benefit, to the detriment of the planet and its wildlife.

So our world is now one of megacities, industrial sprawl, and increasingly intensive farming and fishing. We have also proved to be a very acquisitive species, with a desire to accumulate wealth and to flaunt it through possession of large houses, large yachts, and private aircraft. This despite an increasing gap between the rich and the poor. We have also exploited the planet hugely and in so doing have created water shortages and desertification, serious pollution of the atmosphere and oceans, increasing accumulation of plastic waste on land and sea, and now an ever-increasing problem with global climate change associated with our activities.

Although all these factors pose problems for human health and prosperity, this is nothing compared to the effects on the Earth's wildlife, the species of animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms with which we share the planet.

I am a biologist by profession, finally as a molecular geneticist interested in gene structure and regulation. But throughout my life I have been passionate about wildlife, its amazing diversity and evolution, and I am very conscious of the huge richness which these other species have brought to the planet. Thus its seas teem with fish and contain amazing coral reefs, while the land contains fascinating deserts, mountains, plains, and rain forest all rich with wildlife.



But all is not well with planet Earth. The extinction rates of many species are now very steep, while few species are prospering. People of my vintage can remember that some seventy years ago, we all had special plastic devices fitted to the bonnets of our cars to deflect insects from splattering the windscreen. Also when one came into a petrol station, a guy would rush out to wash one's windscreen and

remove the innumerable insects that were spattered on it. But the insects have declined so markedly that the windscreen problem is a distant memory.



Most of the present problems result directly from human activity. In a phrase, we have made a desperate mess of the planet. Much of this mess is now probably beyond repair, but even at this eleventh hour there is hope that conservation measures could win over destruction and exploitation. Nature is remarkably resilient, and the best demonstration of this is the return of good populations of many whale species now that commercial whaling has almost ceased (except for Japan, Norway, and Greenland). Whale watching has now replaced whale slaughter. So there are some chinks of light amid the encircling gloom.

Humanists for a Better
World

On Earth Day
A Humanist call to action



So what does all this have to do with Humanism? Simply this, that as a group of concerned people we should be much more involved than we are in the conservation cause and we should throw our weight behind attempts to partially make good the dreadful harm that our species has brought to the planet. Another hopeful sign is the success of the youth-inspired Extinction Rebellion movement, as well as the weight of evidence brought by Sir David Attenborough and his amazing TV programmes.



So Humanism needs to gird up its loins and get involved in activities which address the welfare of the planet and are aimed at redressing the mess that we have brought to planet Earth.



Photo: Kim Hojackni, Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce



Tricia's Choices Book Club Corner



Tricia Wallis runs Farnham Humanists' book club. Humanistically Speaking has asked her to list three books that in her opinion are a 'must read' for any reader over the next two months, and here is her choice.



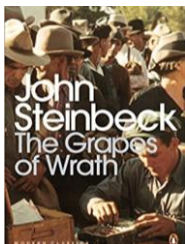
COLD COMFORT FARM **Stella Gibbons (1932)**

A gem of a comic novel. Brilliantly written. What was the 'nasty thing' Ada Doom saw in the woodshed? A satire of late Victorian pastoral fiction. If this doesn't stop you thinking about Covid-19 nothing will!!

EDUCATED

Tara Westover (2018)

A compulsive read. This true story is Tara Westover's first-person account of her upbringing in a fundamentalist, survivalist Mormon family and her eventual escape. A lifetime of psychological and physical abuse which leaves scars no amount of education can totally heal.



THE GRAPES OF WRATH **John Steinbeck (1939)**

Steinbeck's seminal novel. A tragic and definitive account of life during the Great Depression in 1930s America. The Joads, a poor family of tenant farmers, are driven West seeking land, dignity and a future...

If you read (or have read) one or more of these books, send your verdict to Tricia and star them on a count of 0 to 5 stars (with 5 stars being outstanding) and send it to Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com, and we will pass your message on to her.

She will be very happy to find out what you think.

And if you would like to make your own reading recommendation, tell Tricia, and she might add your selection to her list.

Watch out for more of Tricia's choices in the next issue ...



Local Talent Focus

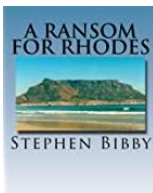
Stephen Bibby



A Local Humanist, an author, you might know him?

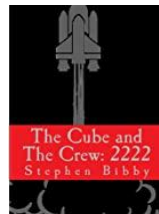
Stephen Bibby is a long-time member of Basingstoke Humanists, and he has also achieved widespread recognition as an author of travel articles and short stories. A frequent winner of competitions, in 2014 Stephen was named 'Writer of the Year' by the Society of Civil and Public Service Writers following publication of his first novel 'Collingwood's Club'. He has now published an exciting sequel entitled "A Ransom for Rhodes", featuring several existing characters and some colourfully drawn new protagonists.

[Collingwood's Club](#) - International financial trader Ben Turner scoops a huge bonus. Life is looking good as he is accepted into the world of the rich and powerful. Befriended by the authoritative Crispin Collingwood, Ben is sent on an assignment to South America. What he discovers there shocks him profoundly and he is forced to re-evaluate his life. He makes a brave decision to return overseas, changing not only his own destiny but also the lives of those whose fate becomes tied to his. Birth, death, love, betrayal and courage all play their part as Ben heads for a final fateful encounter...



[A Ransom for Rhodes](#) - Some two years after his terrifying ordeal in New York Ben Turner has made a successful life for himself, when suddenly his comfortable existence is disrupted. But is all what it seems and can he succeed when faced with a ruthless opponent?

[The Cube and The Crew: 2222](#) - It is the year 2222 and the spacecraft 'Odysseus' is on a mission to discover alien life. But what is the curious object Captain Heathwood Bede discovered on board and what is the true identity of his secretive First Lieutenant? And how will the crew respond to unexpected challenges and, as their adventure reaches its climax, how will they resolve an unwelcome dilemma?



Like to know more about Stephen's books? Or interested in buying one? They are available at Amazon – [follow this link](#) and take it from there. Every book costs less than £3.00!

Are you a member with a talent?

If you are, and you are a member or associate of one of the groups highlighted on the map at page 11 then Humanistically Speaking will be happy to advertise your work to all of our 2,500 readers.

And if you would like to contact Stephen Bibby directly, please send your message to Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com and we will pass your message on to Stephen.

President of Nigerian Humanists arrested for humanist activism

Supporting a story from Humanists UK April 29th, 2020

Humanists UK has called for the urgent release of the President of Nigerian Humanists, Mubarak Bala, who has been arrested and charged on account of his humanist activism in the Nigerian state of Kaduna.

The arrest comes following a pattern of online and physical harassment, culminating in a legal petition to the police accusing him of being 'provocative and annoying to Muslims' on Facebook.

There are intense fears that Mubarak Bala could be handed over to police in the state of Kano, a Muslim stronghold where, if charged with blasphemy, he could face the death penalty under sharia law. Human rights activist Leo Igwe, chair of the Nigerian Humanist Association, has urged the governor of Kaduna and the chief inspector of police to release him.

Humanists UK along with Humanists International has written to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the relevant UN Special Rapporteurs to raise Mubarak Bala's case and apply pressure on Nigerian authorities to request his safe release.



Mubarak Bala
President of Nigerian Humanists

Humanists UK has been among the most active organisations campaigning for the repeal of global blasphemy laws, helping co-found the End Blasphemy Laws coalition with Humanists International in 2015.

Thank you

TO OUR PASTORAL CARE TEAM



DAILY ECHO

News

16th April

Daily Echo community heroes are highlighted by our readers

By Jane Reader | [Twitter](#) Janeheader

Ronald Barr put forward David Warden, Cathy Silman, and Susan Bryson who have been helping out Dorset Humanists by acting as a pastoral care team.

Humanism is about tolerance, kindness, knowledge and friendship, and although Humanistically Speaking is for Humanists, everyone is welcome to read and contribute, regardless of faith or belief.