



Humanistically Speaking

September 2021

A Humanist hotline to a secular worldview

With this Ring...



FEATURES THIS MONTH:

- Afghanistan Situation
- Fraser Sutherland Interview
- Humanist Marriage
- Prayers in the Council
- Your Letters and Emails
- Poet's Corner

Fraser Sutherland is Chief Executive at Humanist Society Scotland. In an exclusive interview with David Brittain he talks about Humanist marriage and many other issues...

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*A Humanist hotline
to a secular worldview*

In this Issue

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

David Brittain
Executive Editor



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CONTENT DISCLAIMER

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

As we were putting the finishing touches to this month's edition of *Humanistically Speaking* I came across this shocking message from an atheist living in Kabul. I contacted the author and he authorised me to publish this slightly abridged version:

"I'm proud to say that I'm an atheist. I live in Afghanistan, and I just want to say that I will stay tall and accept my execution. Tell our story and tell your child that we tried our best, and at the end of the day we lost. But we achieved humanity and freedom from Islam. We might be not alive to tell future kids of Afghanistan that you should reject Islam and became human and love humanity but we can defeat Taliban by knowledge and atheism. Sorry if there's any spelling or grammar mistakes I'm not in a good mentality situation. You help us to find the truth and a way out of fairy tale stories. Thank you."

Sincerely, Razm Mal

I've never met this man and I struggle to articulate how I feel about his defiant message against radical Islam. I will, however, remember him for his inner strength and his courage. Humanists International has received numerous reports of humanists and human rights activists across Afghanistan who have gone into hiding. You can read more [here](#).

On to other matters. In this issue we focus on Humanist marriage and the relative inertia of the Westminster Government. Humanists UK's Rachel Taggart-Ryan attempts to explain the delay. Following her article, there's a guest feature by Julian Webb and Claire Berrisford, who have been hoping for a legal Humanist celebration, but who now may be obliged to attend a Registry Office whether they like it or not.

We also have a fascinating interview with Fraser Sutherland, Chief Executive at Humanist Society Scotland, plus another 'ethical encounter' by Paul, more poems by Alex, and an interesting recorded discussion between two council leaders who review the outcry they caused when they abolished prayers from the agenda of council meetings.

And with that, what are you waiting for? Get comfy and tuck in for another great read ...

David Brittain



HUMANIST NEWS

Nigerian humanist Mubarak Bala formally charged



On 3 August 2021, formal charges were brought against President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, Mubarak Bala, before the Kano State High Court. Bala, who was not present in court, was formally charged with causing a public disturbance under Sections 210 and 114 of the Penal Code of Kano State respectively. He faces 10 counts of causing a public disturbance in connection to Facebook posts he is alleged to have made over the course of April 2020, which are deemed to have caused a public disturbance due to their “blasphemous” content.

Andrew Copson, President of Humanists International, said “It has taken the Kano State authorities more than a year to bring formal charges against Mubarak Bala. Their failure to do so until now highlights still further these charges’ lack of basis. We reiterate our consistent calls. If Mubarak is to be tried, it must be in a place with the jurisdiction to do so and where he can expect a fair trial.” Full story [here](#).

‘Woke values’ will be the ‘demise of Humanism if left unchecked’



President of the Quebec Humanist Association Michel Virard (left) has criticised Roy Speckhardt, Chief Executive of the American Humanist Association, for

promoting ‘woke values’ in place of Humanism. Following an article by Roy in The.Humanist.com entitled “[Signs You’re Being Co-Opted by the Far Right](#)”, Michel Virard commented: ‘Roy, this list is, unfortunately, proof enough that you have been swept into the Woke ditch. No, Critical Race Theory is not a ‘proven’ theory, although it certainly has some interesting insights in the US context. However in other contexts, it is doubtful one can draw anything conclusive from it. The abandonment of the Enlightenment values such as the search for objective truth (both words now anathema for Wokes), universal values and true compassion, rather than a culture of resentment, will be the demise of the Humanism movement if left unchecked. The de-awarding of Richard Dawkins was a symptom of something amiss at the AHA. Now we know.’



HUMANIST NEWS

Like What We Do? Help Fund Us!

At our Annual Editors' Review we agreed that we want *Humanistically Speaking* to remain a free publication, to reach as wide an audience as possible. All of our volunteers give their time freely, but we do of course need to raise some money in order to operate.

Other magazines are costing around £4 per issue but as our operating costs are modest, and we harm no trees in production, we feel that just £1.00 a month is fair, and thus our request is for a supporting donation of just £12 a year for those who can afford it.

To support *Humanistically Speaking*, just click the **big red donate button**.

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Hello Aussie Humanists!



When UK-born Dr Heidi Nicholl moved to Australia five years ago she went looking for a humanist community in Australia, but she found it was more common to hear about atheism than humanism.

The former, she says, is mainly “saying what you’re not” – a person who doesn’t believe in God – while the latter is “almost always presented as being something and for something”. Nicholl says that humanists are not “anti-religion... we’re actually pro-values, meaning and fulfilment”. Heidi is now head of a new organisation Humanists Australia.

Click the image of Heidi above for the full *Guardian* story.

Like *Humanistically Speaking*? Tell someone!



In our quest for world domination (okay, that may be just Aaron) we’d like you to help us out by telling one other person about *Humanistically Speaking*. A family member, neighbour, a friend at work or someone you feel could benefit from our free Humanist magazine. *Thank you!*

Humanist Marriage

What's causing the holdup?



By Rachel Taggart-Ryan
Campaigns Officer at Humanists UK



As many of you will be aware, the UK Government has had the power to legally recognise humanist marriages in England and Wales for eight years, but has failed to do so. This raises the very pressing question of why has the Government dragged its feet over such a non-controversial change in the law?

Humanist marriages are now legally recognised around almost all parts of the UK, Ireland, and Crown dependencies, with the exception being England and Wales. Since legal recognition was granted in Scotland in 2005, they have exponentially risen in popularity. In 2019, there were more humanist than Christian marriages – 23% of the total number of weddings taking place. Similarly, in the Republic of Ireland, humanist marriages gained legal recognition in 2012 with 9% of legally recognised marriages being humanist in 2019, placing the Humanist Association of Ireland only behind the Catholic Church and civil marriages.

What's the problem?

So what is the problem for England and Wales? The truth is we don't really know. The answers given by the Government and affirmed by the High Court are both very legally technical, involving slow moving political minutiae, and frustrating for humanist couples who just want to mark their marriage in a ceremony that reflects their beliefs, causing no harm to the rights of



anyone else, just as their religious counterparts can.

Thanks to campaigning from Humanists UK and members of the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group, the Same-Sex Marriage Act 2013 contains a section that gives the Government the power to lay an order to grant legal recognition. But eight years on, it is yet to do so. It has spent that time 'consulting' on the matter. In 2014, the first such consultation showed over 90% of respondents in favour of legal recognition, but the Government still blocked the change. Next the Law Commission did a 'scoping exercise' of wider marriage law concluding that the lack of recognition of humanist marriage was unfair in 2015. Yet, still no



action was taken. A third consultation, again held by the Law Commission, is due to report back at the end of this year.

High Court ruling

In June last year, the High Court ruled that the failure to grant legal recognition does amount to discrimination. It did so in a case brought by six humanist couples, supported by Humanists UK. However, the Court did not issue a formal declaration of incompatibility between marriage law and human rights law because the above-mentioned consultation was still ongoing. The Government argued that it did not want to change marriage law on a piecemeal basis, instead favouring wholesale reform following on from that consultation.

However, this argument has been undermined by recent marriage reform to enable outdoor civil marriages on an interim basis. This makes clear that the Government can legislate to legally recognise humanist marriages on the same basis, which would solve the problem for couples who want to have a humanist marriage prior to the end of the current review while not committing to any particular wording of legislation beyond that.

Ultimately, humanist marriages are hugely popular, good for families, and good for the

economy. Legal recognition is not opposed, but is in fact supported, by most of the major religious groups in England and Wales including the Church of England. A change in the law to allow legal recognition is simple, already within the Government's gift, and would end a clear inequality between humanist and religious couples. There is no good reason to delay such recognition.

Humanist Ceremonies

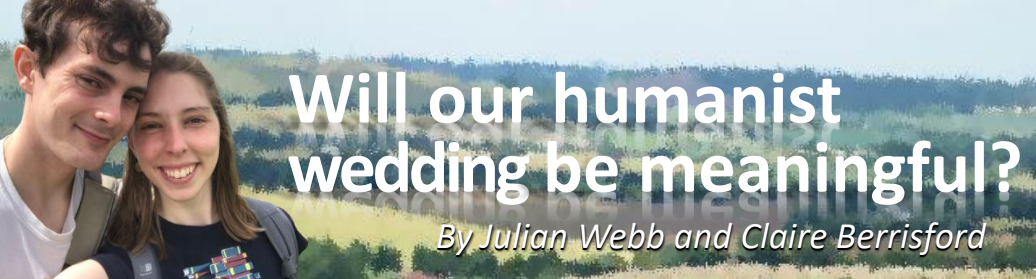
Humanist Ceremonies™ is a growing network of over 500 celebrants qualified and accredited by Humanists UK. They work across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. (In Scotland celebrants are trained by the Humanist Society Scotland.)

You can find out more on the Humanists UK website here:

<https://humanists.uk/ceremonies/>

<https://humanists.uk/ceremonies/celebrant-trainers/weddings/>

<https://humanists.uk/ceremonies/find-a-celebrant/weddings/>



Will our humanist wedding be meaningful?

By Julian Webb and Claire Berrisford

When you think of getting married, what comes to mind? Is it the scene of a couple saying their vows in front of the people they love? Is it a ceremony filled with small personal touches? Is it the snapshot of confetti and huge grins as the newlyweds celebrate their first steps into married life together? Or is it a ten-minute legal process in an unfamiliar room with a stranger, two witnesses, and cookie-cutter vows?

We are Julian and Claire and we are humanists. Having been in a loving, committed relationship for almost seven years, we got engaged in 2020: a bright spot amid the darkness of the pandemic. Long before then, we had decided that, if we got married, it would be a humanist wedding. This choice has always been important to us; a humanist wedding is a non-religious ceremony that, unlike a civil wedding, is entirely bespoke, which means it can reflect the beliefs and values of the couple.

It didn't take long for us to decide that we would get married in Bath: a place which holds special memories for both of us. A friend has agreed to conduct the ceremony. We are enjoying the adventure of planning our day – from table names (mythical creatures?) to the colour of the father-of-the-groom's tie (blue?) – and we can't wait to bring our families together to celebrate.

However, there is still one uncertainty which could drastically change the day: we do not yet know whether humanist marriage will be legally recognised in England by our wedding date.

Eight years of delay

At present, humanist marriages are legally recognised in Scotland (since 2005), Ireland (since 2012), and Northern Ireland (since 2018), but not in England and Wales. In 2013, the Marriage Act gave the Government order-making powers to give humanist marriages legal recognition. Yet here we are, eight years later, still unable to have the beliefs on which our marriage will be founded recognised in law. Despite good news from the High Court in 2020 – when the judge ruled that the lack of legal recognition of humanist marriage is discriminatory – there has not been any progress since. The situation is currently under review by the Law Commission and the couples involved in the High Court case are considering appealing on the basis that a likely three-year wait to address the discrimination is unacceptable.

It is deeply frustrating that our ability to have a ceremony that is meaningful to us, reflects our values, and is legally recognised is determined by simple geography. Were we to hold the wedding a couple of hundred miles north or west of our chosen location, we would be accorded the legal right that many other faith and belief groups take for granted.

As humanists, we have a set of beliefs that we choose to live by. We both feel an obligation to contribute to the people and places around us and we use reason and compassion to guide the choices we make. The importance of life's big moments is especially precious to us because we believe we only have one life and that every part of it should be savoured. Yet, unlike myriad religious groups, we are discriminated against by our country's laws and, if the law doesn't change by our wedding date, we will also have to bear the cost of a separate legal ceremony that says nothing about our values as a couple.

Why does it matter?

Come autumn 2022, we will get married whether humanist ceremonies are legally recognised or not. We will create a ceremony that reflects who we are and gather together with the people we love. In this, we are truly lucky. So why does it matter whether the ceremony is legally recognised or not? It's all in the meaning. As humanists, we believe that it's up to us to create our own meaning in life. At the end of the day, it's not the flowers, the

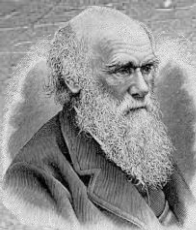
cake, the guests, or any other of the wedding paraphernalia that really matters. What matters is the ceremony and the pledge that joins two people together.

So, while we have no doubt that, whatever happens, our wedding will be one of our most treasured days, perhaps the greatest gift would be for the ceremony itself to have the true meaning that it promises.



Legal status of humanist weddings in the UK

In the UK, marriage is a devolved issue: humanist marriages enjoy legal recognition in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, and Guernsey, but not yet in England and Wales. Couples who have a humanist wedding in England or Wales will also need to attend a register office for the marriage to be legally recognised. *From Humanists UK. Click for more.*



Charles Darwin.

Dear Darwin

Ask Charles your difficult questions...



The Mount, Shrewsbury.
Darwin's family home.

My Dear Darwin

It's your old 'bulldog' here, Thomas Henry Huxley. You are keeping well, I trust?

The editors at *Humanistically Speaking* have raised me up from my grave in North Finchley. Their miraculous powers are damned convenient because I have a question for you.

During the time of our repose, it has been discovered that several alternative species of humanity once existed at the same time, and that one way or another they were all out-competed by our own species.

However, my question for you, dear chap, is not about the past, but the future. In the process of evolution is it not to be expected that the human species may diverge, and that at some time in the future there may evolve several alternative sub species of humans? I mean, there is strong evidence that people already separate themselves and marry according to various talents, inclinations, athleticism and general ability, etc., so perhaps that process has already started? My question for you is this – will we split into separate sub species that in the end may not even be able to interbreed? And if so, will the various sub-species tolerate each other?

Best wishes

My Dear Huxley

Good to hear from you old chap. You're right about the editors here being fiendishly clever.

Yes indeed, the excavations since our time have been astonishing. And to think that we actually interbred with *Homo neanderthalensis*. That may account for our rugged good looks.

As to the future, it is course perfectly possible that *Homo sapiens* could split into different species but under what environmental conditions? I suspect there would have to be insurmountable barriers, brought about perhaps by interplanetary colonisation, plus a million years or so for different populations to become distinct species.

Some form of transhumanism seems a more likely prospect with genetic modification of humans to eradicate disease, stupidity, and unhappiness. Unmodified humans might then come to be seen as 'savages' and I would not like to speculate as to their likely fate at the hands of the supermen.

Let's meet at the club again soon and talk about old times.

Aaron Explores

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



In all honesty I didn't know where I was going to go this month, as a single gay man, on the theme of marriage ceremonies. And then it hit me. From my earliest memories I'd always aspired to marry the man of my dreams in a conventional, although non-religious marriage. But it was not legal and that was that. But now, in my sixth decade, that it is legal but not yet humanist, I'm not sure it's what I want anymore.

As a living witness to failed marriages everywhere my question is this: are two human beings destined to be manacled together ...for all time? (Well, for the one life we have?) With seven billion humans to choose from it, seems almost inconceivable that anyone would choose *just one* and that would be that.

In the world of Star Trek, the Ferengi people have a five-year marriage contract. When that period ends you can re-contract for another five years. The Bajorans have a civilized 'separation' ceremony. At the end of their agreed time together they simply go their own ways in peace and harmony.

If, for some reason, we needed a time period on these things, I think a five-year marriage would be a good way to go about it. You have your wedding, live your lives together, then have your separation or re-contract for another five years if you so choose. This would certainly keep our celebrants busy with extra work if nothing else. But wait, I know what you're thinking: what about the kids?



Mixed-race marriage: Leeta and Rom. Leeta was a Bajoran female who lived during the 24th century. She married Rom and moved with him to Ferenginar when Rom became Grand Nagus of the Ferengi Alliance. (As everyone knows!)

If people separate after five years, who gets the children? Well, it seems that a lot of marriages end for one reason or another anyway, and those messy divorces really bring disturbance and heartache to children in those families. At least in this case you know it's coming and the parting is more than amicable.

Steven Bartlett, in his book [Happy Sexy Millionaire](#), explores what it means to be married, and why we do it. So let me ask you, why did you get married? Some of you will say out of love, but is that an answer? Would you not have stayed in love without the marriage? Was it for tax reasons? For the children? Something else?

What's your overall opinion about weddings? Do you like going to them? Would you marry again?

 [send an email](#)

I would be more than a little surprised if some of you didn't answer, "because it's what we do" as humans. It's forecasted that we learn, we love, we marry, and we procreate. This is what it means to be human.

I recognize the need for companionship, but one doesn't need to enter into a contract for that. I recognize the requirement for monogamy and trust, but these can be agreed with or without the ring on your finger. You can call someone a partner, you can change your name, you can live together and have a family all without the wedding, so who is the wedding for? Is it for you, or is it for the state? Is it expected of you?

I think, as society has programmed us, there is a certain sense of 'arrival' in a wedding: that you have achieved, levelled up, succeeded in doing what is expected of you, and now that WEDDING has been ticked off on the bucket list, it then allows for the next chapter in life.

There's an immense amount of pressure to follow in these footsteps, and for those of us still single at @# years old, there's a sense of failure for not having achieved. I remember the term 'on the shelf' being used in an English class at school and, although no one says that anymore, I feel very much *shelved* myself.

So as an outsider what does this look like? In this issue we hear from Julian and Claire on their seemingly endless wait to have a legal humanist wedding. I view this as a decision to be recognized, a commitment on their part, a choice and a demonstration of love for one another and this is absolutely fine. If I were to tempt them with my five-year marriage contract what reaction would I expect to receive? I guess a mixture of shock, wonder and hurt! Perhaps that I was questioning whether their love was in some way not

Our world is a much different place from how it was when most of these ideas and solutions were devised. We have the internet, more information, longer lives and more choices. If this isn't enough cause to at least try to re-imagine the outdated blueprint of how you're 'supposed' to live your life, of how your 'supposed' to love then I don't know what is.

Steven Bartlett in *Happy Sexy Millionaire* (2021)

strong enough to make it beyond the five-year period? If I were to offer this to some future partner would they not think this too? Is it not the aim of every wedding that has ever taken place to stay together for all eternity? And yet we are human beings. We evolve, we change, and we grow, sometimes with the person we're committed to for life, but often without them. We may grow apart and out of duty we are tolerated or put up with as we change for the better, or for the worse.

Of course, marriage doesn't have to be with one partner. When books were written on behalf of invisible deities, men could change the rules to suit their needs. Do you want four wives? No problem. Could we live in football team dozens, swapping and changing with the weather? One man and one woman is the minimum biological requirement to reproduce; it has no deeper meaning than that in the whole scheme of things, yet generation after generation, we follow our ancestors and do what is expected of us.

I'd like a wedding, but I recognize it's an egotistical show of my love for another human being and I want to show off that I too have 'achieved'. Does my vanity really deserve this kind of embellishment? I mean, after all, who really likes going to other people's weddings?

That blows my future invites to weddings ☺

Why I got married

by David Warden

Aaron asks in his piece this month, 'Why did you get married?' It's a good question...

I lived with my partner John for twenty years before entering into a civil partnership. The reason we waited so long is because civil partnerships were not invented in the UK until 2004 under the Blair government. I remember my seven-year-old niece saying to me, "Will you ever get married?". She was obviously thinking of an opposite-sex pairing even though she knew I always turned up to family gatherings with John. Hetero-normativity was, well, the norm. People used to ask me, 'Are you married?' and the straightforward answer was 'No' even though I had been in a live-in partnership for decades.

I think the main impetus for going ahead with our civil partnership was simply the fact that we now could. It was a milestone on the road to gay equality. It would have been rude not to. We had a low-key ceremony, with no official photographer, at Bournemouth Town Hall and a lunch for family and friends at a beach restaurant (cost around £2,500). It was the happiest day of my life.

Ten years later, the law changed again under David Cameron and we were able to get a 'free upgrade' to full marriage equality. We trotted along to the Town Hall again, just the two of us, followed by coffee and cake in Westbourne. Our wedding celebration cost around £10, plus the cost of extra certificates. The coffee shop owner asked why we were dressed up in suits. I don't think he believed me when I informed him that we'd just got married.



Aaron worries that marriage means being 'manacled together for all time'. It needn't be like this. Progressive thinkers like Bertrand Russell (see my book review) have long recognised that a strong partnership can withstand other loves.

Before I got married to John I always felt at some level that the relationship was temporary or provisional. The decision to get married focuses the mind and it forces you to make a commitment to another person, independent of the vicissitudes of life: "For better or worse, in sickness and in health...". There is a deep peace and contentment in being married, having made promises to each other in public. I also appreciate the social equality which flows from same-sex marriage.

There is a school of thought that gay people should not mimic heterosexual norms. The artist Derek Jarman believed this. He thought that gay people should live lives of complete sexual hedonism. Of course there is greater freedom in being single. Perhaps no solution is optimal. Marriage is not necessarily better, but it does supply its own harvest of rewards.

Making a Stand!

Reaching out to the community around us

Aaron is a strong advocate of reaching out to the public to inform them about Humanism. He was delighted to see an article in the NE Humanists newsletter about doing just that. He takes a look at our public-facing image and suggests how we can increase our impact...

For 99.9% of the time, we are communicating with humanists and thus not really reaching out or growing our ranks in any way. I'd like to change this. Could you help?

Seeing the North East Humanists stand lifted my spirits, and I was delighted to see that this wasn't a one-off occasion but part of a series of street events that they had undertaken. Here in Dorset, our group typically advances on the public twice a year at two major events, one being Pride, the other a carnival, but could we do more?

It's true that when events come along we are there representing one aspect or another, as shown below when we informed people



Outreach to the public by Kate Hinton

"We continue on our travels to reach out to the public. On July 10th we were in Durham Market Place along with other market stalls. We were made very welcome by the market managers after they had managed to leave us off their list! As luck had it, they were able to give us a covered stall that was not in use that day and which kept off a slight drizzle in the early morning.

We had conversations with about 23 people. Not quite as many as in Newcastle, but all had a real interest in humanism and one man had recently joined NEH and was keen to know more about us. We had a long conversation with a family of a mother and two daughters who were vegans and were very much in sympathy with Humanist beliefs. And another long conversation with a young man, a graphic designer, who was interested in Eastern philosophies."

about our dialogue group called 'Out of the Box'. But I would be really interested to hear what events humanist groups around the country are attending. What is your impact at these events?



Dorset Humanists owns a massive gazebo (shown above) which is very robust, weatherproof and requires a team to erect it, but the effort involved makes us less inclined to appear on a frequent basis. How can we make this a simpler operation which can be done almost monthly?

An inside event requires just a table and pop-up stands. We've done this at Bournemouth University (shown below) with mixed results, but it was far easier without battling the wind and other elements. We also gained a walk leader and treasurer from the event, so well worth it in that regard!

Is there anything *Humanistically Speaking* could do for you that would make it easier for you to go out and reach the public? Are there leaflets you would like to see that don't exist?



Would you like a universal pop-up stand designed? How about table-top stands? Would you like a magazine issue dedicated to communicating with the public? How to reach out to people?

Dorset Humanists has had a big impact with its design and marketing being seen in various places, but I would really like to see what other groups are doing. I am criticized by my fellow editors for being “Dorset heavy” on example images, but of course I can only use what I have. Plus there are no doubt things that other groups have tried that could be shared and used by all groups?



Little did Maggie Hall know that meeting up with David Warden and me in Brighton would blossom into an editorial collaboration some years later!

So, my challenge to you is three-fold:

1. Send me pictures of what your group has been doing in the public eye thus far.
2. Design a strategy that will get your group out on the streets at least twice before the end of this year.
3. With plenty of advance notice, I challenge every group in the UK to make a concerted effort for World Humanist Day next 21st June. I would love to publish a hundred pictures of groups everywhere meeting the public.

So, are you with me?

Aaron Darkwood

Brittain Interviews...

Our video conference with notable Humanists, interviewed by David Brittain

Fraser Sutherland

Fraser Sutherland is Chief Executive at Humanist Society Scotland. In this exclusive interview with David Brittain he talks about Humanist marriage and many other issues. Scotland has had legally recognised Humanist marriages since 2005. Since then, Humanist weddings have become the second most popular in the country. Among other things, Fraser explains why Humanist Society Scotland has been so successful, whilst David speculates as to the *real* reason why there seems to be so much Government resistance in England and Wales. A truly *must watch* interview!



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



Who would you like us to interview next?:

Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com



Thought for the Day

by David Brittain

To have and to hold... *forever*?

Until recently, marriage seems to have been a common state of affairs all over the world and, as far as I am aware, almost without exception. Like coupled swans, who stay together for life, the magic number for we humans, it seems, is two.

But this is not so for our nearest ape cousins. With chimps, the dominant males in the troupe invariably get the girl. With gorillas, it's the dominant silverback, and with bonobos – where females can dominate – there seems to be a sexual free-for-all. The human ideal of one-to-one pairings for life would not be recognised by any of them.

I think there is a case for saying that marriage is a social construct, rather than a biological imperative. Yes, we marry for love (hopefully) but there are also a range of other reasons – for security, for children, for status, for fear of loneliness, and for sex, to name just a few.

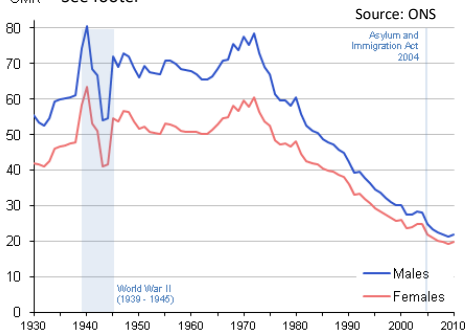
One common denominator of marriage is the public swearing of an oath. A declaration, if you will, of love, partnership, and sexual integrity. Although in some, the drive to pass our genes on via any willing route remains strong, and there's a tendency to wander if we think we can get away with it. Humanity was ever a horny species.

However, genetic accountability is one thing, but social demands are quite another. It's no



**David Brittain
with Linda on
their wedding
day**

accident that religion has been so closely associated with marriage. But I suspect the root of *religion* in marriage has much more to do with securing the future of that particular faith than swearing any oath before God. It's also no accident that several faiths – Roman Catholicism and Islam, among others – demand the conversion of any non-believer before sanctifying the marriage. Indeed, Catholicism makes its intention even clearer, in that it will allow a 'mixed' marriage, but only if the faithless partner agrees to have their children brought up as Catholics. Either way, the religious organisations can secure access to the children where the process of passing on their dogma can begin – even from the cradle. Hence the importance of christening, baptism, circumcision, confirmation, bar mitzvas and bat mitzvas and all the paraphernalia of permanently marking children either physically or mentally as belonging to the faith that claims them.



The General Marriage Rate (GMR) in England and Wales has crashed since 1930 (Office for National Statistics)

The religious need to control marriage is linked to their desire to control *all* sexual behaviour, particularly women's. In the religious worldview, the purpose of sex is for the production of children alone. Hence, sex is only acceptable within the confines of marriage and transgressors are punished.

The bible is full of Jezebels (an 'immoral woman') and there are many punishments for women who stray from the approved moral path. They range from social disapproval, to imprisonment, to torture or even death by stoning. This also applied to homosexual activity in men, with similar outcomes. Even in my lifetime, sex before and outside marriage was disapproved of (despite Bertrand Russell's pioneering campaigning in the 1920s – see David's book review) and the newspaper agony aunts who were so common in the UK fifty years ago were always telling young girls to keep themselves 'pure' for the man they would marry, apart from the agony aunt Claire Rayner, who was President of Humanists UK.

So why are marriage rates in the UK falling so dramatically? According to the Department of

National Statistics, the marriage rate for men fell from 84 per 1,000 in 1972, to just 21 per 1,000 by 2017. That's a crash of nearly 75 per cent in just 45 years! One reason for this, according to the ONS, is that people are marrying later in life, although that can't be the whole answer. Most religious faiths still demand celibacy outside of marriage, but their influence is less powerful in the UK now, and as a result the social stigma of cohabitation has eroded. It's also interesting to note that non-religious ceremonies have outstripped religious ones every year since 1992, and now account for over two thirds of weddings.

The availability of the pill may be another reason. When the pill came on the scene in 1961, Government controls ensured that it was *not* available to unmarried women until the Labour government made it available to all women via the NHS in 1967 (Source: A *history of the pill* – The Guardian 2007).

These days there is no 'shock, horror, probe' anymore when an unmarried couple decides to live together. Indeed, in many circles it's expected. And I'm led to wonder whether – free from social and other constraints – the human species is at last able to be itself.

I still think marriage is great (I married twice, after all) but it's not for everyone, and if people choose an alternative way to live their life, good luck to them, I say!



Swans: together forever



Musings by Maggie

Bizarre marriage customs from around the world!

In 2015 my eldest son got married in Tokyo to a lovely Japanese girl, who is also an extremely talented professional violinist. The wedding itself was quite an experience. It was the full traditional deal at a Shinto Shrine. Neither the bride nor the groom are in any way religious, but Japan is a remarkable mixture of the modern and the traditional, and when it comes to weddings, tradition often holds sway. Only my son could expect his atheist mother to take part in a Shinto wedding!



It was all in Japanese, so I had no idea what I was doing, but it involved a lot of waving about of branches, drinking sake (saké) and clapping. We were also treated to two very lovely dance routines by some young women which were obviously very meaningful if only one knew what was going on.

A traditional Japanese wedding involves three changes of costume for the bride and two for the bridegroom. The photo (top right) shows the couple in their traditional gear for the actual wedding ceremony.



Maggie attended her son's traditional Shinto wedding in Tokyo

After the ceremony comes the formal reception, with a sit-down meal, speeches, and plentiful alcohol. The photo (far left) shows them in their dining outfits, ceremonially smashing open a sake barrel to kick off the celebrations. Then there was another change of clothes, more speeches and more music, some of it provided by the bride. In the evening there was another, much less formal celebration in a night-club across town, where there was more drinking, a cake, some silly games and more music by the bride and members of her orchestra.

It was all a bit of a culture shock, but an experience I would not have missed for the world, and it triggered my curiosity about different marriage customs around the globe. What I found was quite fascinating. For instance, German couples are expected to demonstrate their ability to work as a team at the reception by using a two-handed saw to cut a log.



In Mauritania, brides spend the weeks before the wedding trying to put on as much weight as possible, because obesity is seen as a sign of wealth. There is a tradition called “leblouh”, where special female “fatteners” force-feed the young women with fattening foods to make them attractive to their husbands.

A very strange French custom involves the gift of a new chamber pot on the wedding night, in which a mixture of the leftover food and drink from the celebrations is all mixed up for the couple to finish up before retiring to bed. Apparently, the tradition has been modified somewhat in modern times and the contents of the pot are restricted to bananas, chocolate and champagne. Still, hardly an appetizing contribution to the nuptials in my opinion.

And if you think that’s gross, brides and grooms of the Tidong tribe of Malaysia are not supposed to go to the toilet for three days before the wedding in order to ward off bad luck. One can only hope their wedding gifts include a generous supply of senna pods!

In Anglo-Saxon England, marriage was purely a matter of politics and economics, a way of

establishing an alliance between families to their mutual advantage. The wishes, and much less the consent, of the couple were not considered. This changed in 1140, when the Benedictine monk Gratian penned the Canon Law textbook, *Decretum Gratiani*, which required the couple’s verbal consent. Although marriage was considered by the Roman Catholic Church to be sacramental, it was not until 1563 that the Council of Trent made it officially one of the seven sacraments. This was in response to certain Protestant teachings to the contrary.

The marriage vows, with which we are still familiar today, date, almost unchanged, from the Book of Common Prayer of Archbishop Cranmer in 1549. Up until The Clandestine Marriage Act of 1753, the state had no control over marriage. The Act required couples to get married in a church or chapel by a minister in order for it to be legal. However, the Marriage Act of 1836 permitted non-religious civil marriages to be held in register offices. It also allowed nonconformists and Catholic couples to marry in their own places of worship, rather than being obliged to have the ceremony overseen by the Church of England.

The Marriage Act 1994 was introduced as a private member’s bill by Gyles Brandreth, amending the Marriage Act 1949 to allow marriages to be solemnized in certain ‘approved premises’. As pointed out elsewhere in this edition of *Humanistically Speaking*, we still await government action to make humanist marriage ceremonies legal in England and Wales, as they already are in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Let’s hope that those couples who have been patiently waiting for that to happen will not need to wait much longer, especially if they are emulating the people of the Tidong tribe of Malaysia.

To pray or not to pray...

Report by David Brittain

Outrage in Isle of Wight council chamber when prayers are stopped...

After sixteen years of trying, unsuccessfully, to get formal prayers at the start of council meetings stopped, Councillor Geoff Brodie took his chance when he was elected leader of Isle of Wight Council. He ended the practice without calling a full debate on the issue. This caused outrage in the council chamber and leader of the opposition, Councillor Steve Hastings was reported to have been 'disgusted' by the decision.

The leader of the council is permitted to choose whether or not to appoint a chaplain to say prayers, and Councillor Brodie decided not to do so. Moreover, he has called for the end of council prayers since being elected in 2005, arguing that they were discriminatory.

Humanistically Speaking is aware that another councillor, Martin Biermann, who was Mayor of Basingstoke some years before, did something similar and so we decided to bring both gentlemen together for a recorded chat about their experiences, and if you click on the link below you can enjoy their fascinating exchange.



◀ **David Brittain interviews Geoff Brodie and Martin Biermann. Click to watch.**



Top: Isle of Wight Councillors Geoff Brodie and Steve Hastings and (left) former Mayor of Basingstoke Martin Biermann



The Local Government (Religious etc. Observances) Act 2015 was inspired by Eric Pickles MP after the National Secular Society won a court case on the issue three years before. The Pickles Act now enshrines in law that a majority of councillors can impose acts of worship on other councillors as part of the official business of meetings in England. However, the council leader can end the practice unilaterally. In Basingstoke's case, forced prayers were re-instated as soon as Martin Biermann's period of office ended.

In the interests of fairness, we approached Councillor Steve Hastings for his comments, and this is what he said:

"My objection and 'disgust' was not with Cllr Brodie's position, which is well known to me and indeed the whole council, as he has attempted to remove prayers from the ▷

Council meetings for some sixteen years with motions at each full council AGM and each time it has failed.

The fact that it failed is simply due to democracy and debate with a vote on the issue, which I think is the right way to decide on this clearly emotive subject. This matter was once again on the agenda but was withdrawn by Cllr Brodie once he became Chairman, which is his right and I respect his position, but that meant it was decided unilaterally rather than having a debate followed by a vote, which would have been open and transparent, which our new administration claim they wish to be, but there was nothing open nor transparent about this process.

As the other side had the numbers to take over the administration and achieve their Chairman, they probably would have had the numbers to make this decision as well with the motion remaining on the agenda, and at least then we would know the position of all of the administration members, rather than just the one that we already knew, and that is where my disgust came from as we should have known the position of all members as to which way they voted.

I have no problem with the fact that prayers have been removed from the agenda as this

service can and will be held prior to the main meeting. It is just *how* it happened and the lack of openness and transparency of an administration that claims to be so.

I can now only assume that the whole administration is in favour of the move as they were aware of the item on the agenda, but it feels like they took a political decision to make Cllr Brodie Chairman so that this happened without the usual debate and vote and to get his support to make up the numbers they needed in their rainbow alliance, and this from a Leader who says he wants to take politics out of the council!"

My personal view is that if any activity is causing discomfort to even *one* participating individual, if not germane to the issues in question, then it should be withdrawn without the need for a debate or a vote. There is nothing stopping those who wish to pray in a separate room without causing embarrassment to others. Let's hope the members of Isle of Wight Council bear this in mind when Councillor Brodie's period as leader comes to an end.

We'd love to know if your council begins meetings with prayers, so please do email us at HumanisticallySpeaking@gmail.com to let us know. If you don't know, why not ask them, and tell us what they say?

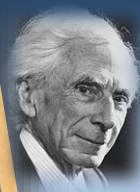
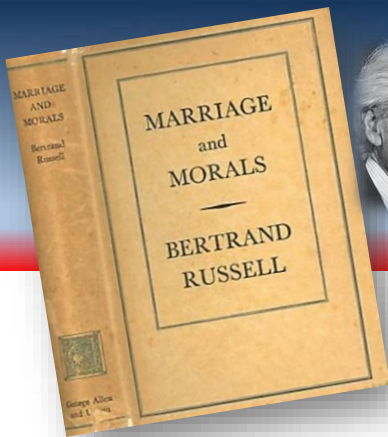


Maggie makes video debut!

It's not just David Brittain we let in front of a camera! Assistant Editor Maggie Hall makes her *Humanistically Speaking* debut in addressing our lovely readers.

Why not see what she has to say on the video link [here](#)? ►





Book Review by David Warden

'Marriage and Morals' (1929) by Bertrand Russell

Bertrand Russell OM FRS (1872-1970) was the grandson of the Liberal Prime Minister John Russell, a pioneering philosopher of logic and mathematics, and a social reformer. He was a member of the Advisory Council of the British Humanist Association.

We've come a long way since Russell published this book in 1929. On page 18 he writes: 'I do not know how it may be with savages, but civilized people have to learn to perform the sexual act. It is not uncommon for doctors to be asked by married couples of some years' standing for advice as to how to get children, and to find on examination that the couples have not known how to perform intercourse.'

When Russell married his first wife, Alys, in 1894, they had no previous experience of sexual intercourse. After three weeks he complained of 'sexual fatigue' and decided he no longer loved her. Sadly, they remained in their joyless marriage for twenty years. He married his second wife, Dora, mainly in order to have children. When in due course this marriage broke down, he embarked upon a third marriage to a woman nearly forty years his junior. It was only on his fourth attempt, to an American biographer called Edith, that he finally found the marital contentment he had craved for so long.

Marriage and Morals is a curious compendium of history, information, and opinion but it's written in Russell's highly readable and popular style. He is, of course, very critical of the Christian view of sex which he describes as a 'morbid aberration... tending towards mental disorders and unwholesome views of life'.

Russell believed that 'romantic love is the source of the most intense delights that life has to offer' and that this should form the motive for marriage. But he adds that such feelings are less important than responsibility and affection for any children which result from the union of two people. He championed equality between men and women including premarital and extramarital relations using contraception. He felt that 'adultery' was no barrier to subsequent happiness as long as husbands and wives avoided 'melodramatic orgies of jealousy'.

Russell was greatly in favour of rational sex education, believing that 'ignorance on such matters is extraordinarily harmful'. He regarded the law on homosexuality to be 'the effect of a barbarous and ignorant superstition' and that 'frank pornography would do less harm if it were open and unashamed'. He was opposed to laws against obscene publications and taboos on nudity.

His second wife Dora described Russell as 'one of the great liberators of her generation'. We may not agree with everything he wrote in 1929, especially on the topic of eugenics, but in large part we owe our sexual freedoms today to progressives like Russell.

Ethical Encounters

Exploring moral questions
By Paul Ewans

RIGHT WRONG

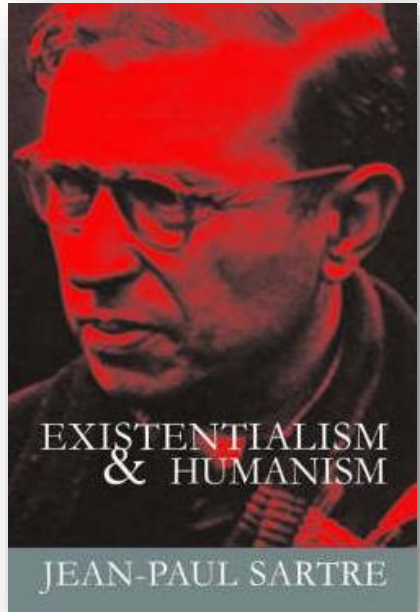


Tragic Dilemmas

Sometimes in life we face a 'tragic dilemma', a situation in which there is no good outcome. The result will be bad in any event. Worse still, we may be forced to choose between options which are all either repugnant or immoral so that we will be left feeling tainted and guilty, no matter what we do. How should we deal with dilemmas like these?

In his lecture *Existentialism and Humanism* Jean-Paul Sartre gives the example of a student who asked for his advice in 1940 after France had been defeated by Germany. The student's elder brother had been killed in the fighting and the student badly wanted to avenge his brother's death. But the student's mother – who had been profoundly affected by the death of her oldest child - was relying on her surviving son to help her get by. What should the student do? Should he make his way to England, join the Free French Forces and become a soldier in the fight for the liberation of his country? Or should he stay at home and comfort his mother who would be plunged into despair if he went abroad?

Sartre says that in fact the student already knew what advice Sartre would give him. The advice was: 'You are free, therefore choose – that is to say, invent'. No rule of morality can answer the question: 'Should I stay at home or go abroad?' and the world itself offers no help either. What then should the student do?



There is no right answer. It depends entirely on what kind of person the student wants to be. If he wants to be the kind of person who looks after his mother, he should stay at home. But if he wants to be the kind of person who avenges his brother then he should go abroad.

So, when trying to solve a tragic dilemma, it may be a mistake to focus on the question: 'What should I do?' It may be better simply to ask ourselves who it is that we want to be.



Letters & Emails

From
The Rt Hon
Conor Burns MP



David Warden wrote to his MP to get the Government line on the current situation with regard to Humanist weddings. This was the reply he received:

Thank you for taking the time to contact me about humanist marriages. I understand the strength of your feeling you have for this subject.

I share your concerns about the current marriage laws and agree that meaningful change needs to take place. I am sure it will come as no surprise to you that when the Government held a consultation on this in 2014, the majority of respondents were in favour of changing the law to allow legally valid non-religious belief ceremonies in unrestricted locations.

I am sure you will be glad to hear that the Government wants to reform marriage ceremonies to make sure there is a simple, fair and consistent legal framework, so that people can have a wedding that is meaningful to them.

As you are aware, that is why the Government announced in June 2019 that the Law Commission will conduct a fundamental review of the law on how and where people can legally marry in England and Wales. As part of the project, the Law Commission will be

considering how a scheme could include weddings conducted by humanists and other non-religious belief organisations and where weddings should be able to take place.

The Law Commission's consultation on proposals for reform of the law governing how and where couples can get married closed on 4 January 2021. I understand responses are now being analysed. These responses will inform development of the Law Commission's final policy, to be published in a report with recommendations for Government in the second half of 2021. I understand that the Government will then decide on provision for non-religious belief marriage in light of the law Commission's recommendations.

I believe that the requirement for venues to be seemly and dignified should be maintained. However, I welcome that, alongside the Law Commission review, outdoor civil wedding and partnership ceremonies in England and Wales [have been] legalised for the first time. This change [took] effect on 1st July 2021 and will offer greater choice to couples in a boost to the wedding sector after a very challenging period.

I hope this outlines the progress being made for humanist marriages.

Humanistically Speaking appreciated

Really glad to be involved with *Humanistically Speaking*; reading it has fast become one of the pleasure points of my month!

Best, Alex Williams (our poet in residence – see Poet's Corner in this issue).



Letters & Emails

Should Christians contribute to *Humanistically Speaking*?

I understand that *Humanistically Speaking* is for everyone – but as a Humanist magazine, is it appropriate to invite committed Christians to proselytise, as in page 25 of your August issue? John MacDiarmid justifies his Christian support for the death penalty ‘in very restricted circumstances’, he says, on the grounds that ‘taking human life is no ordinary crime. It is a wilful destruction of the image of God’, he says. I don’t know if Mr MacDiarmid is aware of his self-contradiction, but by his own standards, killing the murderer is *exactly* the same ‘wilful destruction of the image of God’ as the perpetrator has committed. So, killing other people – *whatever* they have done – is not for fallible humans. Indeed, by Mr MacDiarmid’s own assertion, the only one who has the moral right to kill a human being, is his God. The author’s problem, of course, is that this doesn’t happen. That’s because his kind of God, at least, is a fiction, and there must be some corner of Mr MacDiarmid’s mind that knows that, whether he admits it or not.

I’m sorry if this message seems a bit cross, but I always feel a little sick when the religious declare a kind of genteel piety on behalf of philosophies like Christianity or Islam that have a long history themselves of blood and suffering, and – much worse – killing *in the name of their belief*. Something that no humanist in history has ever done.

Regards, Brian Turvey (Major)

Popularity of Humanism with school students

Ray White’s article on his experiences as a humanist schools visitor reminded me of a very similar experience I had at a secondary school in Buntingford in Hertfordshire. It was a long day, as I had to leave Watford at around 6.30am to ensure I reached Buntingford without incident before the start of the school day.

The morning was taken up with visiting classrooms to give a brief outline of Humanism, followed by a question and answer session. In the afternoon, after a light lunch, we were empanelled together with the school head teacher presiding over a Question Time involving me, a couple of Christians, a Jew and a yoga teacher (presumably representing Hindu beliefs). Like Ray, my answers got the most applause and support – as well the most laughs – from the school audience.

After it was over, a number of the students thronged around me, saying that they all agreed with the answers I had given. On my way out, the school head teacher opined that the humanists had definitely “won the day”!

I stopped school visiting work because – as Ray says – Humanists UK is now much more ‘regimented’. I took early retirement as an FE College Lecturer because the job had become far too tick-box orientated for me by the end. Humanists UK has fallen into the same trap, it seems to me.

John Dowdle, Watford Humanists

Where Love Is Felt

We fall in love, but marriage is a climb
Which thrives on thoughtful steps and kindly words.
In partnership, the journey is sublime,
With thrilling views and comforting rewards.

A baggy word, this love, so loose and lithe,
Denoting both the moving and the still.
First, an emotion, savage, wild and live,
Then a commitment, requiring care and skill.

We search to find the partner who has grown
The flower of passion with the stable stem
Of values and beliefs that match our own,
And when we do we proudly marry them.

How cruel, then, that the law should intervene
And prevent those values taking pride of place
On our wedding day, rendering them unseen
And banishing our beliefs from our loving space.

Scotland and Ireland have bravely led the way,
Now England and Wales must swiftly follow suit.
Humanist weddings will finally have their day
And belief discrimination be given the boot.

Where love is felt, and love's promise freely shared
No marriage by legal prejudice should be impaired.

Poet's Corner
By Alexander Williams



Prawn Mayonnaise

She knew how they were living was all wrong
And to prove it brought her holy book along.
Her criticism of them really was fastidious
She quoted both from Exodus and Leviticus.
They nodded and, pointing primly at her purse,
Showed her another rather important verse
In which it said shellfish must not be eaten.
She tucked her sandwich away, discreetly beaten.

Fighting Fake

raising awareness of the threat posed by half-truths, deception & disinformation



Dr Mike Flood, Chair of Milton Keynes Humanists, offers free talks to humanist and other groups on how to tackle fake news and bad information...

In today's 'post-truth' world, social media has become the vehicle for touting and amplifying all manner of lies, half-truths, fakery and hate speech. The line between fact, opinion and belief has become increasingly blurred. And this has consequences: it confuses and misleads the public, damages reputations, diverts resources, and sometimes costs lives. It also polarises and divides communities. What's more, bad actors are using bad information and madcap conspiracy theories to undermine trust in science and medicine, hampering our ability to tackle existential threats, not least virulent disease and climate breakdown.

And we can expect things to get worse with the development of the 'Internet of Things', the increasing penetration of 'smart' devices into our lives, and advances in artificial intelligence and deepfake technology (not to mention the growing threat from malware and cybercrime). We are seeing intensified meddling in domestic affairs by hostile foreign powers and extremist groups set on overturning democratic government.

The challenge we face is to find ways of neutralising the threat and rebuilding trust and social capital without compromising the digital economy or our privacy, security and wellbeing — or seeing our country morph into a police state.



istock photo (licensed)

In my talks I explain what has changed to make bad information such a difficult issue for open societies to handle, and I explore what individuals and organisations can and are doing to tackle the problem. B

Six talks (all stand-alone)

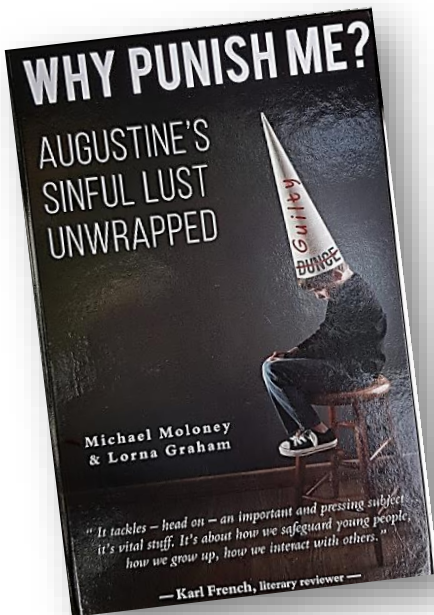
1. Bad Information: What threat does it pose/what can be done about it?
2. Conspiracy Theories & Denialism
3. Bad Information & Human Rights
4. Storytelling & Disinformation
5. Religion & 'Fake News'
6. 'Climate Change Denial'

Mike is Chair of Milton Keynes Humanists. He has a background in the NGO sector (environment, international development & adult education), and runs the [Fighting Fake website](#). Mike does not charge for talks. If groups would like to make a contribution, they can visit his [Wish List Page](#).

Contact: mike@criticalinformation.org.uk

Virtual Book Launch

WHY PUNISH ME? A First-hand account of Catholic abuse



Michael Moloney tells the story of how, as a vulnerable altar boy, he was psychologically and physically abused by Catholic priests. He traces the origins of clerical abuse all the way back to one of the most influential of Church Fathers, Saint Augustine of Hippo.

The church remains mired in safeguarding and clerical abuse scandals. And yet, every year, 20,000 pupils are assigned faith school places against their families' preferences. This book lifts the lid on a story of abuse and religious indoctrination which continues to this day.

Launch event online 29th September 2021 at 5:30pm GMT.

Keynote talk on faith schools by **Alastair Lichten** who is Head of Education at the **National Secular Society**.

Aimed at parents of school-age children and anyone involved in child-minding or education, and followed by an open discussion.

Sales proceeds to the National Secular Society.

[Click here to register for the Launch Event](#)

Registration is limited so be sure to get your **FREE** ticket

From Atheism to Humanism

An update by Aaron Darkwood

One of *Humanistically Speaking's* groundbreaking achievements has been the creation of *From Atheism to Humanism: A Compact Guide to Humanist Values*. It marks the first of many such enterprises that we wish to embark upon over the coming years. In this booklet, we explore what it means to be Humanist, not just an atheist, with humanist values at its heart.

So, what's happening?

We created this booklet with the intention of it going to public areas to promote public understanding of Humanism. The version pictured here was shared via the magazine, and we've received lots of valuable feedback about it. A 100-copy test batch was printed, and we offered these out to groups and individuals to explore and decide how we should proceed. *We still have some left – do you need a hard copy?*

It turns out that you had quite a lot to say about it, both positive and critical, and so we are now busy with the preparation of an updated version which we think will be even better than the first!

One obstacle we encountered is that many groups have been in shutdown and thus feedback from some quarters was quiet. As this changes, we encourage groups to read it and submit their reactions to us over the coming months so that we can move forwards to the next stage.

We might need 1,000 or 10,000 copies! Either way, we will be looking at a funding campaign to help cover printing, with post and packaging being met by groups.



Where should we distribute *From Atheism to Humanism*?

Personally speaking, I'd like to get this booklet into prisons, because this is a place where internet and downloading isn't feasible. With the help of pastoral support workers or humanist groups, we could get 20 copies to each prison for their library or resource centres. How many prisons are in your area?

Next would be hospitals - again with internet either unavailable, slow or hard to access. A place where people often have time on their hands and a need for reading material. Pastoral support workers can be our first contact here, but ordinary humanist group members could distribute to suitable locations. There's also PALS and WRVS.

We could also distribute *From Atheism to Humanism* to universities, libraries, schools, residential homes, probation centres, coffee shops, dentist waiting rooms and doctors' surgeries.

Once the revised copy is ready to print, we will ask you to come forwards with your group name, area for distribution, a rough list of your primary target drop offs, and how many copies requested. My vision is for every humanist group to distribute to all prisons, hospitals and half a dozen other centres by the end of the year. Humanist publications of any kind are scarce, and someone needs to start turning this around so why not us?

What do you think our next publication should be for 2022? How can *Humanistically Speaking* promote greater awareness of Humanism in local communities?

AFGHANISTAN

Humanist thoughts



Some views and opinions from the editors

A Fallen Country

The world tried its best. The core mission was to remove a terrorist threat, which we did to a certain degree with Operation Herrick, from 2003 to 2014. Yet being the West, we stayed on to try and stabilize the country and have been 'leaving' for the past seven years.

We trained their military, gave them equipment, opened up education for women, and introduced an air of freedom and human rights. It wasn't the full package, but it was a taste of what could be enjoyed by its citizens should the country wish to proceed in that direction. It is their country and their choice, and we left it with them. Forty days later, the Taliban have conquered Afghanistan. How did they achieve this?

The Afghanistan National Army is reported to stand at 186,000 strong. Compared to the British Army of around 80,000, it's a substantial military asset. The Taliban stands between 85,000 to 200,000. They were a sizeable insurgency, yet it's reported that some areas have been taken without a shot being fired. Do the Afghan people just want to accept Taliban leadership? Where did the army vanish to? If their own military won't fight, why should outsiders? Were our efforts all for nothing? And were we doing it for us, or for them? The questions mount up quickly.

Can the West implant its values?

The mighty West went into a country with different cultural values and alternative worldviews, yet we have tried to implant ours, whether they wanted them or not. We believe that freedom and human rights are better, yet this belief can conflict with a deity and a holy book that say otherwise. Do we have the right to interfere? Are we the world's saviours? When our efforts go wrong, or don't achieve the outcomes we hoped for, is it our responsibility to put it right?

I agree with President Biden: we cannot occupy a land indefinitely. This is no longer our problem, and thrown into the mix is this 'new' Taliban that wants to work with its neighbours, and give their citizens a chance. As Humanists, do we not forgive, do we give them the chance to prove themselves, do we let those living in a country run that country?

'Lifeboat UK' is overflowing and evacuating people out of one nation into one that is so different culturally is not the answer. With housing waiting lists as they are, adding 20,000 to that is not going to help. Yet it would require national conscription to build a big enough force to conquer and dominate the Taliban threat. And then what? Kill them all? This would amount to genocide. How would that sit with our humanist values and ideals?

Aaron Darkwood

AFGHANISTAN

Humanist thoughts



Some views and opinions from the editors

It is about Islam

I think the silliest thing I heard in the House of Commons on 18th August was Stella Creasey, Labour MP for Walthamstow, saying “It’s not about Islam”.

I’m sorry, but I think you’ll find it is. Of course, I understand the good intentions behind such a statement. No one wants an intensification of hostility towards ordinary Muslims on the streets of Britain. My friend, Sister Tama, an Irish Muslim, has enough of that to contend with already.

But most of the world’s regressive regimes and terrorist groups are Islamic: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Islamic State, the Muslim Brotherhood. It’s not easy to think of any counter examples of Islamic states and groups which are pursuing freedom and enlightenment. At one end of the spectrum it’s just about possible to accept that there’s a moderate and relatively benign form of Islam. But at the other end we have fundamentalist and jihadist theocracy which finds its inspiration in the 7th century.

Arguably, we should have left Afghanistan fifteen years ago when the core mission was accomplished. Liberal democratic states cannot be built by occupying powers in a couple of decades. Liberal democracy has to take root in the people themselves.



The reason we invaded Afghanistan: More British people died in the Twin Towers in 2001 than in any other UK terrorist attack.

Western liberals are swift to condemn the failures of the West. But we should protect and celebrate our precious inheritance, which is based on Enlightenment secularism and humanism. Let’s cherish democracy, freedom of speech, and human rights and refuse to give in to those who wish to police what we may be permitted to say and think.

David Warden



send an email

AFGHANISTAN

Humanist thoughts



Some views and opinions from the editors

Afghanistan: The Genie in the Bottle

After twenty years of occupation in Afghanistan, the West has finally surrendered to the terrorists, and worse - *much* worse than this – abandoned many of its ‘collaborators’ to a fearful and perhaps agonising end. In my view we have given in to savagery, and our hasty exit is nothing less than a betrayal that will debilitate our relationships with other countries for decades on.

In the name of peace at any price, we have demonstrated that our resolve is weak, and our loyalty unreliable. How will this affect the Russians’ approach, I wonder, to our defence of Ukraine? How will the Chinese react as they seek to claim ever more territory in the South China Sea? Perhaps, even more important than this, what does this do to the morale of our brave armed forces when they see their comrades killed and injured for nothing?

We must find the courage to open our eyes and see the truth. An ideological war has been going on for over 25 years, and it is every bit as dangerous as World War II. The Taliban’s victory will be celebrated by every would-be terrorist throughout the world. Their tails will be up, and the bombs prepared and readied for more misery in the future.

The Taliban and their ilk have been instructed, armed and funded by many countries in the

past - most recently (allegedly) by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, but also the USA among others. I do not accept that the majority want to live under Taliban oppression. These thugs represent a foreign invasion. President Biden has just let an oppressive and retarded ideology out of the bottle, and we are dismayed to find that the genie is not a simpleton who can be persuaded back inside, but a representation of Hell on earth.

The fundamentalists will not stop at Afghanistan. Their kind should never be surrendered to, nor should they be tolerated. This betrayal may well be the precursor of atrocities to come, and liberal Muslims everywhere will be horrified and fearful over what has been allowed to happen. Nor will they be reassured by Western governments that have shown a lack of will and weakness in the face of a small but significant minority of Muslims locally who have demanded the encroachment of Islamic ideals into western countries. As with the Nazis, they threaten the West and the East; and as in World War II, we need to seek ways of placing our differences with Russia and China to one side to contain this threat in our mutual interest. Extremists and those who provide for them should never be appeased.

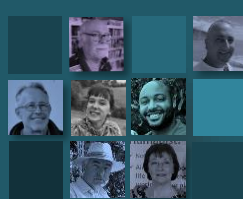
David Brittain



send an email



VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES



Helping us deliver a first-class, free, online Humanist news and views service

Ready to join us?

At our annual review meeting we confirmed that we still need several additional eager team members to help our enterprise run smoothly. Could this be you?

DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

There are so many groups across the UK that have yet to hear from or about us. We could really benefit from having a person to focus on this. Your volunteer role would be to assist the Executive Editor in his aims to get *Humanistically Speaking* known across the UK and help build interaction and communication between existing groups and isolated members without a group nearby. Is this you?

SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATOR

We require a person who loves speaking to people via online platforms. Your role would be to post updates and latest magazine releases, answer queries and maintain our online presence. More than one applicant for this role would be welcome.

NEWS EDITOR

We would like someone to scour the internet for Humanist news stories, not to replicate them, but to summarise into a paragraph and then link to that story so that our readers can be as fully informed as they can be. Fancy this role?

YOUNG HUMANIST WRITERS

We have had a very talented team of younger members writing for us and we'd like to keep this opportunity going so that other young Humanists can gain experience from writing in our magazine.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Helping out with day-to-day admin tasks arising from email inboxes, responding to subscribers, and the like.

SECRETARY

As *Humanistically Speaking* evolves we are looking to become more formal in our organisational structure. There are things we need to do such as writing terms of reference, obtaining insurance, completing digital paperwork and so on, to help free up the Executive Editor. This role might suit a retired HR person, or someone with experience in voluntary groups.

We're all volunteers and we enjoy being involved. But we need to share the workload. Are you the Humanist we're looking for? Could you help with any, part, or all of these roles? All roles descriptions are brief outlines and there can be some overlap if you have the skills and/or ability to want to do some or all parts of any of the above. We would love to hear from you, and we're very open to an informal chat. *Thank you!*

Humanistically Speaking Coverage

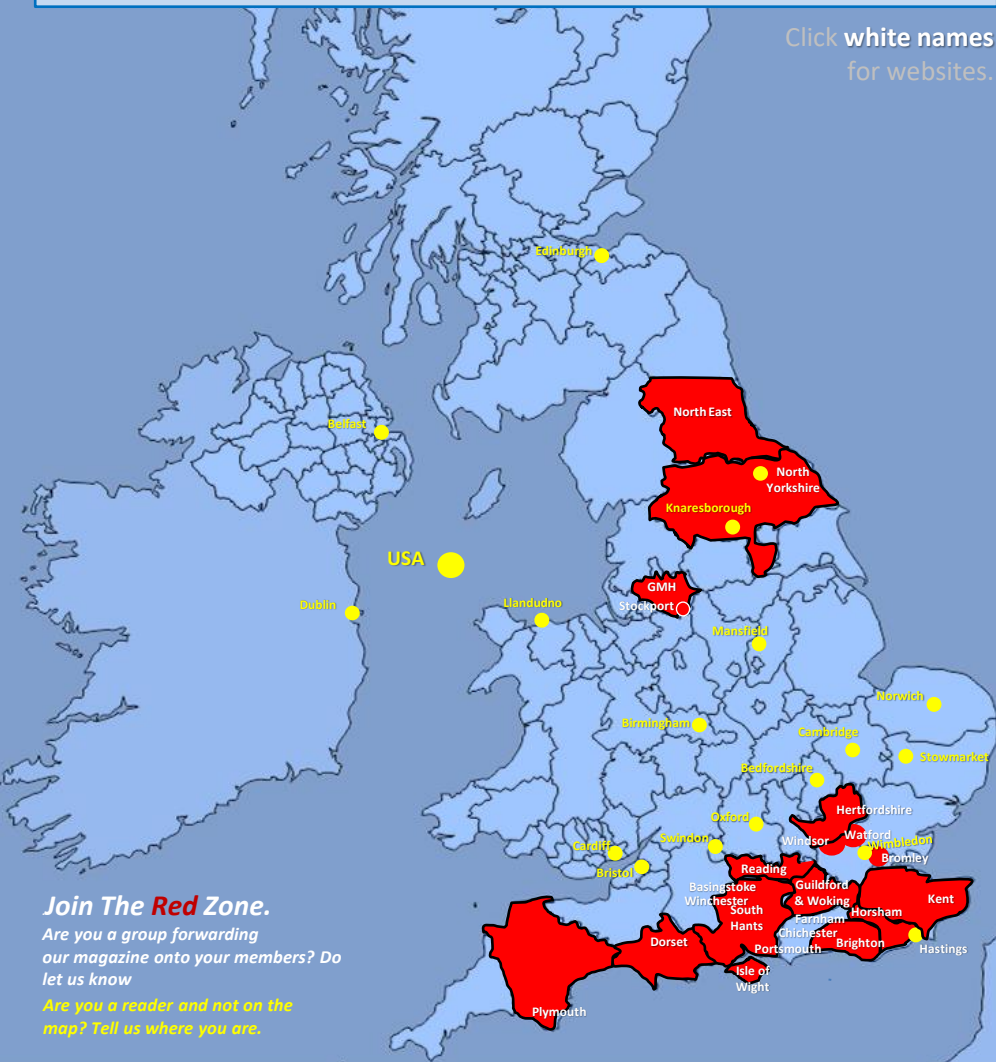
A guide to those groups sharing our magazine

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.



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 (Video Editor), Barbara (Finance Manager), Alan (Business Advisor) as well as several admin staff yet to be found.