



# Humanistically Speaking

December 2020



*A Humanist hotline to a secular worldview*

# CHRISTMAS CANCELLED?

We wish all of our lovely readers a very happy Christmas/Winter Festival/Yule/Santamas whatever you wish to call it, and however you decide to celebrate or ignore it. After an unforgettable year of madness we hope that you will be able to enjoy some joyous time with those you love (including yourself) and that 2021 will be a year of opportunity, fulfilment, and good health.

## Features this month:

- Humanist Climate Action
- Should We Go A-Carolling?
- Why I don't do Christmas
- Humanism in Action
- SACRE Volunteer
- Annual Review
- and much more

Get your own *Humanistically Speaking* hot-lined direct from the editors

[Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto: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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## CONTENT DISCLAIMER

Our editorial team consists entirely 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 the South Central England Humanists Network or Humanists UK.

**So here** we are, at the end of our first year, and my summary report is at the end of this issue on page 30. I do hope, dear reader, that you have enjoyed this year as much as we have!

Christmas articles are inevitable at this time – even for a Humanist magazine – and there's plenty of personal comment on pages 8, 15 and 18. There's also an article about the Humanist Climate Action Group on page 6, and about how we treat and eat animals on pages 28 and 29.

But we cannot ignore the terrible killings that happened in Europe – born from the insane notion of being 'in the name of God', and we include a Muslim perspective on page 27.

I hope all these articles are of interest, and inspire your own reflections, so do please email us and tell you what you think – but not just about the issues mentioned here. Let us know about *anything* that you think might relate to Humanism.

I would also like to draw special attention to page 4. It doesn't just list the winners of our *little book of humanism* competition, but it asks those of you who might feel inclined, to make regular donations to *Humanistically Speaking*. Next year, we will be a smaller, monthly magazine, and we want more competitions, more up to date reporting, and at the same time help the editors, who pay for their own printing, and publishing software. But we also have ambitions to grow into a national newsbrief, and that demands professional standards with related costs.

So my appeal to you is this: If you like what we do, and can spare just £1.00 per month by regular bank transfer, then you could play your part in transforming our regional magazine into a national Humanist newsbrief. But even if you *don't* donate, please *do* become a regular subscriber. Just email us at [Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto:Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com) and enter one word: **Subscribe** and we will do the rest. By joining that list, you will get your regular future issues delivered direct, and at the same time inspire us with your seal of approval.

Thank you for your continued support, and we would like to wish you all a very happy winter holiday!

**David Brittain**

Send your own comment to  
[Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto:Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com)

# BREAKING NEWS



## Getting the word out – how humanist group leaders can help



*Humanistically Speaking* has a potential readership of 2,500 - but only if group leaders help share the word. We really do appreciate our link being placed on your website, but this could be limiting our impact if your members only visit your website occasionally. The latest issue could be out of date by the time your contacts realise it's there.



Some groups have a mailing list of paid members and supporters. Sending our link along with your own newsletter each month would be the easiest and best way to support us, and help keep everyone up to date.

For other groups, sending it out via a Meetup link might be another solution. This may capture a different range of audience members, and might bring distant ones into your reach if they read an article that inspires them to get in touch. Of course, there's also Facebook, Twitter and Instagram feeds too, which hopefully will stimulate conversation and enliven your feed. What benefits us, really helps you too, and helping each other is why we are here.



## So what do you think of it so far?

### 'Humanistically Speaking' goes monthly...

Following on from our end of year review, and the enthusiastic feedback we received during the *Humanism in Action* online conference at the beginning of October, we've taken the big decision to **go monthly** starting in 2021!

One of the driving forces is our desire to keep on top of news stories and stay current. Once normality resumes we also want to be able to advertise live your humanist events around the region. With your help and engagement we'll do our best to stay topical!

*Humanistically Speaking* covers a lot of subject areas and there are more topics we'd like to cover. Our aim is to keep you informed, educated, and inspired, offering a two-way communication medium and forum to share what works, what doesn't, and what you and your neighbouring humanist groups are getting up to as well as including topical news and our regular features. Our twelve month trial is now complete, and we'd love to have your feedback, both positive and negative, on how you think we did.

# BREAKING NEWS



## ...and the **WINNERS** are...

Following October's issue of *Humanistically Speaking* we held a prize-winning lottery for all of our lovely readers who have requested a direct subscription. The lucky winners have now received a copy of Andrew Copson's and Alice Roberts's new book, *the little book of humanism*. Names were randomly-plucked from *Humanistically Speaking's* direct subscribers list, and we were very happy to send the winners their own copy of this wonderful little hardback book. And the winners were:

- ❖ **John Cregan** *Farnham Humanists*
- ❖ **Tony Peach** *Basingstoke Humanists*
- ❖ **Alan Montgomery** *Farnham Humanists*
- ❖ **Richard Scutt** *Dorset Humanists*
- ❖ **Charlie Yianoullou** *Guildford & Woking*
- ❖ **Greg Kent** *Brighton Humanists*

If you didn't win, there will be another book-winning lottery in the New Year – so keep your eyes peeled for that announcement, and so long as you are a regular subscriber, you will have another chance to win!

**Not yet a regular subscriber?** That's easy to change. All you have to do is email us at [Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto:Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com) and type just one word – 'Subscribe'. We're open to any reader, it's free, it couldn't be easier to register, and there are absolutely no strings attached.

You'll get your own personal copy of *Humanistically Speaking* sent direct to you, and your name will be automatically placed in the hat for the next competition!

### Arriving late to the party...?

In case this is your first visit to *Humanistically Speaking* we have come quite a distance since our first printed issue. Our back issues are available below, and you will see the various growth and design improvements made over time as we have found our way.

Jan

Apr

Jun

Aug

Oct

Values

### Like What We Do? Help Fund Us!

*Humanistically Speaking* is created by unpaid volunteers, yet we do incur some costs and we'd like to expand our operations. Could you make a voluntary donation by Standing Order from just £1.00 a month? Or a one-off donation? We'll leave our bank details here and let you surprise us. Please use HS DONATION as the reference.

Account name: **Basingstoke Humanists**  
**Sort 30 98 97 – Acc 33031168**

- *Running Costs*
- *Technology upgrades*
- *Leaflet printing*
- *Travel expenses*



# Playing The Trump Card

*Looking at the 45<sup>th</sup> President through Humanist eyes*

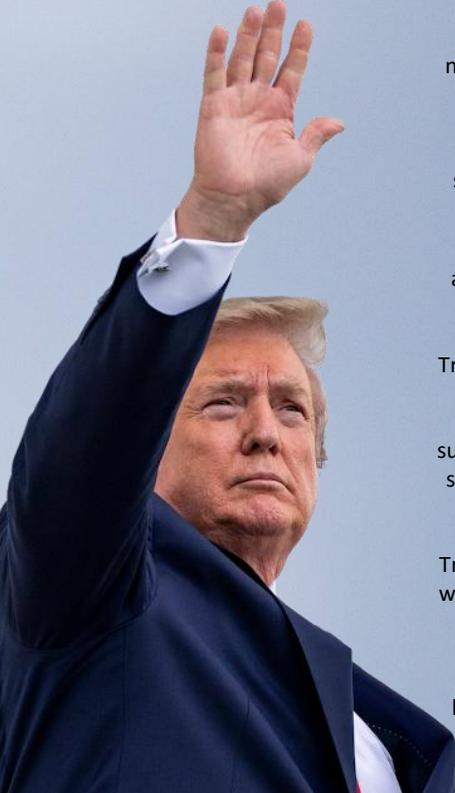
**I'm not a Trump fan.** There, I've said it, and I've probably now alienated half of you, or have I? It's probably fair to say that Trumpism didn't greatly resonate with most humanists. The throw-away comments, the tantrums when it looked like he was losing, the demands for a recount and the claim that his votes were legal whereas Biden's votes were fraudulent. Plus the whole 'fake news' thing. There was something about Donald Trump that rubbed me up the wrong way. I think it was the way he walked on stage, the swagger, the superiority, glancing down at those so clearly beneath him. But could we have expected anything else? Wasn't he just playing the role which destiny and his fans demanded?



Aaron Darkwood  
Creative Design Editor

He started out with privilege and this was followed by a business career of getting whatever he wanted, where nobody ever said 'No'. Was it any wonder he became the world's most famous narcissist? Some might argue that being a billionaire is the perfect rehearsal for the presidency, that he simply fulfilled his destiny. But how should we account for his many flaws? Should we blame him personally, or his family heritage and upbringing?

I'm no Republican but I don't feel any distaste for the average Republican voter. I can hold a conversation with them without feeling I've been talked down to. I can engage and debate, discuss and reach an outcome. But Trump does none of these things. He sets a course and no person, fact, or evidence can change his direction. He ignores opponents, talks over them, tweets them into submission with childlike wittering and complaining. I feel sorry for him. Is it too late for him do you think? Would a week's stay at my imaginary *Humanist Bootcamp* teach him how to relate to other humans? Is someone like Trump reformable from a humanist point of view? Should we pity him as a lost, vulnerable child, in need of ordinary human affection? He can't ask for help, he can't go for counselling, and he can't mingle with the rest of us in everyday activities. In the end he is Donald, a human being flawed and damaged like the rest of us. Should we not feel a bit of humanist compassion for him?



Do you agree with our values, why not check them out here:

[Humanist Values Booklet](#)

# Humanist Climate Action

*A group within Humanists UK to tackle Climate Change*

*In August we reported that Humanists UK is to set up a new campaign group, 'Humanist Climate Action'. The group is not yet fully operational but you can get involved now and influence how the group develops.*

In June, Humanists UK signed a letter to Prime Minister Boris Johnson, along with over sixty other climate coalition organisations, asking for a 'green recovery' from the pandemic. Humanist Climate Action will continue to publicise and support this campaign, helping to ensure that the Prime Minister delivers on the promises he made at the Conservative Party Conference.

What else will Humanist Climate Action do? That partly depends on the humanist volunteers who get involved. HCA is looking for more people to join the steering group so do please get in touch if you are interested. You can participate online.

A year from now in November 2021, the UK will host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow. World leaders will come together to agree measures to reduce climate change. The host is expected to lead from the front and so we need the UK to be a living example of how to move an economy away from fossil fuels. Over the next 12 months numerous organisations will be campaigning for 'green' initiatives, reforms and commitments here in UK, ready for hosting COP26. Humanist Climate Action can be part of this urgent task.

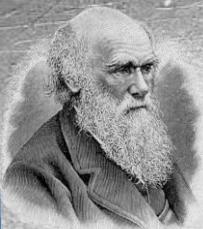


The Government has issued a *Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution*. At the Conservative Party Conference, Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised that by 2030 offshore wind will be powering every home in the country – the UK will become 'the Saudi Arabia of wind power' with the Green Revolution creating hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of jobs. Will he deliver on these promises? Join *Humanist Climate Action* to make sure he does.

There are many things that Humanist Climate Action can do such as encouraging humanists to get involved in environmental campaigning, lead greener lifestyles, and explore the moral dilemmas that will arise as climate change worsens such as how humanists should respond to migration pressures from countries most affected by drought and other climate impacts.

What Humanist Climate Action does will depend on who gets involved and puts their time and effort into making it happen. Come and join us?

Email Rachel Taggart-Ryan [rachel@humanists.uk](mailto:rachel@humanists.uk)



Charles Darwin.

# Dear Darwin

Ask Charles your difficult questions...



The Mount, Shrewsbury.  
Darwin's family home.

**Dear Darwin**

I'm one of those people that society hates with disgust, has no role for and no understanding of. I am a minor-attracted person, and although I don't act on my attractions they are there, they are there everyday and I hate myself. The prospect of life forever single is daunting and in my country my existence is not even tolerated. Should I just kill myself?

**Harry Kent** (name has been changed)

**Dear Harry**

Evolution is indifferent to the moral and legal boundaries drawn by *Homo sapiens* but of course we are right to draw such boundaries. You are experiencing a form of attraction which has been outlawed by society. But society rarely hears the cry of anguish from those who recognise such feelings in themselves but who, at the same time, are struggling to stop themselves from offending.

My advisers have recommended that you seek counselling. I realise this will take courage and some financial commitment but please do persevere to seek help and support so that you will feel less isolated and despairing. You can start your search with [StopSO.UK](http://StopSO.UK).

You may also like to watch this lecture by researcher Sarah Goode which was presented to Dorset Humanists in 2018.



Click icon to watch YouTube video

**Dear Darwin,**

I am on a budget and a dozen family members will each be spending £25 each on me, but I cannot afford to spend that much on them. People say that Christmas is all about giving - I don't want to be all about receiving. Am I a bad person? This has been keeping me awake at night since the adverts started in October.

Gillian, West Sussex

**Dear Gillian**

£300 would have bought a small house in my day so I sympathise with your plight. It's insensitive for family members to give lavishly to someone who can ill-afford to reciprocate. I wonder whether you feel able to have a discreet word with them to scale it back this year? I'm sure they would rather know than to cause you embarrassment and difficulty.

**Dear Darwin**

Why do Humanists celebrate Christmas? Surely this is the opposite of everything an atheist would follow?

Bob Sleight, Slough

**Dear Bob**

I would advise you to think of it as a food festival and as an opportunity to help the homeless.



# Thought for the Day

## *Should We Go A-Carolling?*

**“While shepherds washed their socks by night all seated round the tub...”**

So sang my brother and I way back in prehistoric times. Well, OK, in the 1950s when, I hasten to add, I was *very* little. I seem to remember there were various other carol parodies involving King Wenceslas sliding down the banisters and the Three Kings using various forms of transport (“one in a taxi, one in a car”). However, when, at age sixteen, I was “converted” in a local Baptist church, such irreverent shenanigans went out the window, along with much else that was fun and enjoyable, and the lyrics of these ancient choruses assumed a serious significance.

Nowadays, I’m pleased to say, I am long reclaimed by the secular world and Wenceslas once again slides down the banisters in his pink pajamas, yelling “penny a bunch bananas” (my how fruiterer’s prices have changed!)

My partner and I have lived in our West Sussex village for ten years now. It’s a lovely community with two pubs, two churches (one Anglican, one Baptist) and a Village Hall. Since the Village Hall is the only secular meeting venue in the village, apart from the pubs, I was happy to be invited to join its Council of Management, a group of worthy locals, mostly connected with the various user groups that meet there; the Yoga group, the Craft Group, Local History Society, etc. The hall is run entirely by volunteers and largely funded by fundraising events, one of which is the annual carol concert, when we are visited by a local brass band which churns out all the old favourites from “I Saw Mummy Kissing Santa

*By assistant editor  
Maggie Hall*



Claus” to “Away in a Manger”. We provide mince pies, tea and coffee and a good time is had by all. In the first section, before the interval, we are usually regaled by the more secular seasonal offerings such as “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer”. After the break, however, the good old carols are wheeled out and we are invited, nay expected, to join in the singing of them. They are all there; “Oh Come All Ye Faithful”, “Oh Little Town of Bethlehem”, “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen”. Everyone stands and warbles away with suitably seasonal enthusiasm.

Now, as a humanist this has always presented me with a bit of a dilemma. Do I join in and sing with the customary gusto about the infant in the manger with his various domestic animal attendants looking on, Jesus coming to “save us all from Satan’s pow’r” and all that, or do I skulk in the kitchen under the pretence of doing the washing up? I have tried the skulking but I’ve never actually been able to make the process last for the whole of the second act. There are also some rather nice old non-religious songs

Next issue: send us your own *Thought for the Day*

[humanisticallyspeaking@gmail.com](mailto:humanisticallyspeaking@gmail.com)

included in the community singing, like “The Christmas Song” (the one about chestnuts roasting on an open fire), which has always been one of my favourites and one I love singing. I have always enjoyed singing and in the past have performed in musicals and pantomimes and even won talent competitions. These days the old pipes are a bit rusty but I do enjoy giving them a bit of exercise during the festive season. The brass band’s MC also introduces various corny old activities like getting us to stand up and sit down to the music or rattle our keys during “Jingle Bells”.

One year I tried just keeping quiet during the religious ones but it felt very strange and unsooable, so now I’ve decided that whenever Covid allows us to hold such events again, which sadly won’t be this year, I will just let rip with the

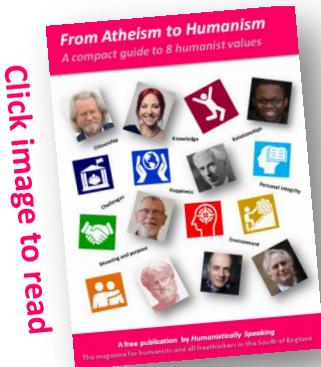


*Axial Tilt is the Reason for the Season*

others. So what if I’m singing about stories that I don’t believe are true and characters from a Bronze Age myth? After all, I used to sing “Puff the Magic Dragon” to my children when they were small as well as “Away in a Manger” and I’m pleased to say that they have not grown up to believe that dragons and gods are real.

## From Atheism to Humanism ... our Humanist Values

We are immensely proud to release our FREEBIE extra in this issue of *Humanistically Speaking*: **From Atheism to Humanism: A Compact Guide to 8 Humanist Values**. Inspired by many, written by David Warden with an afterword by Executive Editor David Brittain, and designed by Aaron Darkwood, this 22-page booklet will help to answer those perennial questions such as “I’m an atheist, why bother with Humanism?”. Let us know what you think, and then share it with everyone. And why not share this issue of *Humanistically Speaking* too?



### PLEASE SHARE US ON

- Your Groups Email list
- Your Meetup Group Mailing system
- Your Facebook page image with a link
- Your Instagram Page
- Your Website



Missed the link, here it is below, please download and share

[LINK TO VALUES BOOKLET](#)



# How Do You Feel About Halal?

By Amelie Forbes



Here we are, settling into the festive season. Many are probably looking forward to having their roast turkey on Christmas Day. Some will be buying their birds from the local farm, while others will be sourcing from the local supermarket. Some won't be purchasing turkey at all, while others will be heading to the local Halal butcher. In whatever form and wherever from, food is at the forefront of many minds at this time of year... but will the subject of Halal meat be entering those minds?

Halal meat is meat that is acceptable for consumption under Muslim law. The Halal method includes the animal being killed by having their throat slit by a sharp knife. Having lived in a Muslim country myself, 'Halal' is a word that I heard many times, but was never a concept I truly understood. While the RSPCA doesn't approve of Halal slaughter without animals being stunned before killing, Halal butchers in the UK are exempt from being legally required to pre-stun animals. A study of

slaughtering methods in England and Wales in 2018 (carried out by the Food Standards Agency) found that 58% of certified Halal meat was from pre-stunned animals. But what about when animals aren't pre-stunned? The truth is, it would take 5-7 seconds for a sheep to lose consciousness after having their throat slit and 22-40 seconds for an adult cow or bull – that means a significant amount of suffering before death.

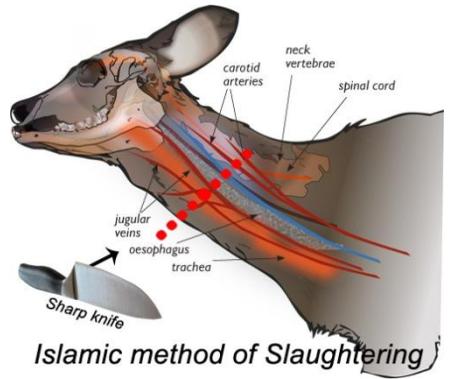
One argument for the Halal method is that it follows the word of God (known as Allah in the Muslim faith). The way in which animals are slaughtered is considered acceptable by God, in light of the fact that a prayer is uttered to prepare the animal for death, along with the claim that God designed animals to feed and clothe humans. The idea that animals were created to benefit humans can't really be disproven, as there is no way of knowing for sure whether there is or isn't a God, and therefore

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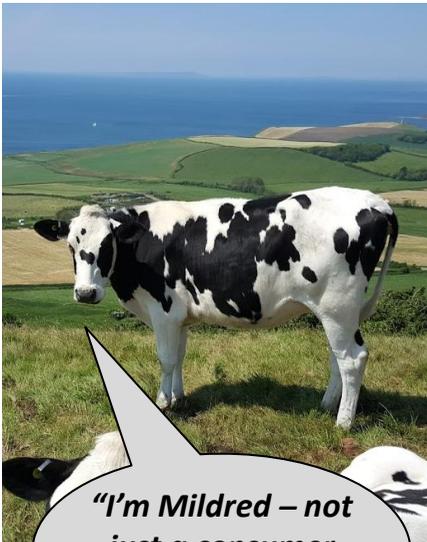
[humanisticallyspeaking@gmail.com](mailto:humanisticallyspeaking@gmail.com)

what this God's intentions are. However, it does seem strange that animals can feel pain and emotions, as well as seemingly having the desire to live. If God intended animals to exist solely for human use, wouldn't he want them to die peacefully and willingly?

Another argument is that animals go into a state of submission when they hear the word of God, understanding and accepting that they are going to be slaughtered. An issue with this argument is that, from a psychological perspective, animals don't have the capacity to fully understand the situation. Their display of 'submission' could also be the stress response of 'freezing', suggesting that they are still out of fear and not submission. The animals may also have been conditioned to 'submit', thus acting as a result of their training and not of their own initiative.



*"I found that the majority of people think that Halal meat is morally justifiable"*



*"I'm Mildred – not just a consumer product!"*

Having asked a number of people about their views on Halal meat, I found that the majority of people think that Halal meat is morally justifiable. The general consensus was that Halal meat is no more or less justifiable than any other meat. As a vegetarian, I don't think that the consumption of meat is justifiable under any circumstance because it causes unnecessary suffering to animals who are unable to give consent to being killed, as well as taking its toll on the environment. This leads me to question: can we criticise Halal meat if we still eat meat (Halal or otherwise) ourselves? If Halal meat production is problematic, what is there to be said about non-Halal meat production?

*By Amelie Forbes*

# Young Humanists

Young Humanists  
Ambassador **Ronnie Barr** reports on  
European Young  
Humanist Month

**I think it's fair to say that this year has been something of a let down for most of us.**

The UK has been in and out of various stages of lockdowns, pride events across the country have been suspended for the year, and for most of the summer people protested the injustices faced by the BAME community. I've never considered myself particularly privileged; I've spent most of my life bullied for various aspects of my identity which has then escalated to outright hate crime as I've become an adult, and this has contributed a lot towards my driving need to ensure that people are safe and protected. Over the past few years I've tried to step up and represent others who may not feel heard in the humanist community through my roles as Diversity Rep and Young Humanists Ambassador though I can't say I've made the big impact I was hoping for just yet. So when I saw that this October was European Young Humanist Month I jumped at the chance to attend.

With many events cancelled, postponed, or moved online Young Humanists UK partnered with Young Humanists International to host the first ever (but hopefully not the last) European Young Humanists Month. With four separate Zoom talks around *Queerness in Europe*, *Anti-Racism and Fostering Inclusion*, *Renouncing Religion*, and *Blasphemy in Europe* the ultimate goal was to showcase the issues faced by various diverse communities and encourage us



to consider what needs to be done to support them. Given the amount of backlash and controversy we've seen overtaking the media these past few months, particularly in regard to BLM and transgender youth, I feel these talks couldn't have come at a better time.

From the get-go *Queerness in Europe* sparked intense discussions around the issues facing

Find Young Humanists at

<https://humanism.org.uk/community/young-humanists/>

## QUEERNESS IN EUROPE



*“We need to stop being so afraid to talk about such sensitive topics - it’s okay to get things wrong and make mistakes when talking about issues that need addressing.”*

LGBT+ people from trans issues and gender recognition to the lack of proper LGBT+ education in schools and the resulting misinformation that occurs. Even as a queer transman myself hearing about the struggle to legalise same-sex marriage in Italy and the lack of help for the transgender community in Northern Ireland was shocking.

*Anti-Racism and Fostering Inclusion* highlighted not only the problems faced by BAME communities but also the difficulty in having conversations around these issues and the lack of diversity in the Humanist community. While Humanists pride ourselves in being diverse and tolerant there’s no denying that many of our local groups and those that run them are made up of predominantly white British people.

*Renouncing Religion* had speakers share heart-wrenching stories involving their experiences of discrimination following exiting their previous religions and the backlash that’s received as a result from family, friends, and those who are still religious. Currently there’s no word to describe the discrimination faced by apostates, ‘atheophobia’ seems to be a new word on the rise but this is specific to discrimination against the non-religious in general.

The final talk on *Blasphemy in Europe* covered the current blasphemy laws that are still in effect today, the affect these laws have on people criticising religion, and the ongoing battle to have these laws repealed including

Humanists UK’s own attempts to repeal the blasphemy laws in Northern Ireland. While Europeans might not see dead letter laws as a cause for concern the fact they can be brought back at any time is incentive enough for other countries to outlaw supposed blasphemy.

We have come a long way over the years from the discrimination and inequality we used to see as normal but it’s abundantly clear that there is so much more that needs to be done. First and foremost we need to stop being so afraid to talk about such sensitive topics, it’s okay to get things wrong and make mistakes when talking about issues that need addressing so long as you are willing to listen and learn more.

We will all have had different experiences regarding inequality, be it discrimination we’ve experienced personally or that we’ve seen affect other people. These individual experiences don’t automatically invalidate someone else’s. We need to understand that there’s no quick fix for inequality and that for a lot of these larger-scale problems it will take a lot of time and much campaigning before they are rectified. Nevertheless, smaller changes we make ourselves can still make the world of difference on an individual level; being respectful of others, listening to their stories, and having discussions around how we can be more accommodating are still steps in the right direction.

# GROUP NETWORK

Check out what's going on within the network by clicking links below

Below you will see contact links for all the groups within the network. MEETUP is typically where many group events can be found, with their website and email listed for further group information.

Our readership spreads wider than our Network. Why not see if your group wishes to join us? You do not need to be a network member to receive our magazine, simply email us at [Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto:Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com) type in **SUBSCRIBE** in the subject box.



## South Central England Humanist Network

Click/tap any of the links below

SCEHN MEMBER GROUPS

Basingstoke Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Brighton Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Bromley Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Chichester Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Dorset Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Farnham Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Guildford & Woking	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Horsham Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Isle of Wight Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Portsmouth Humanists	<a href="#">Facebook</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Reading Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
South Hants Humanists	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Winchester (PENDING)	<a href="#">Facebook</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>
Windsor (NEW MEMBER)	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Meetup</a>	<a href="#">Email</a>

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.



# Why I don't do Christmas



Christmas Free Zone

Contrary to popular belief I am quite an extrovert, lively and colourful creature (*see my lounge below*) where colourful lights, bright clothing, extravagant ideas and endless dreams can be encountered, but Christmas is not a time of joy for me, and hasn't been for many years. Like all good atheists I played the game, did my duty and held in there for as long as I could but eventually I just drew the line, enough was enough.

Initially the family would indulge in gift lists, price caps etc., where we each bought things that we knew we were getting, but they would often still be something "you" wouldn't have bought yourself. Yet we smiled politely, looked overjoyed, and shelved the gift or if brave enough, asked for a receipt and took it back, to then buy the thing you actually wanted. WHY do we do this to ourselves?

Being invited to someone's home at Christmas when you're single, is like going on a date with a couple. You are there like a spare part. Everything they do amplifies your outsidership. I have spent Christmas with family and with friends, and on all occasions they have been pretty solitary, upsetting experiences. As well-meaning as everyone truly is, returning home to a single, empty, cold house at the end of the night is soul destroying. There have been many a Christmas with teary eyes and sleepless nights. My last Christmas was 2009.

As if family aren't enough then there are all those TV programmes and Christmas films, although "Die Hard" is a Christmas film I do enjoy. I typically go for a walk on Christmas morning, but even then there are families being happy, couples holding hands... there is simply no escape. I would very happily go into hibernation after Halloween and not come out again until it is all over.

People like the fact that their homes are decorated brightly with coloured lights. Well why wait for Christmas? My home has lights in most rooms tinting it in any of the 16 colours I choose. Low energy, environmentally friendly, mood-enhancing and soft on the eye. No dull and boring atheist here!



How do you cope at this time of the year? Do you do something totally unexpected? Why not tell us?

# Why I don't do Christmas...

## I don't have children

Christmas is very much a child-centred event, with the excitement, the surprise, the lies stories that are told, the anticipation. For parents too it is about building the experience for the children.

When you don't have children, it does seem fairly pointless.



## I'm single

Spending lots of money on your partner, or even making them something special, cooking them a meal, and all that "together" stuff, really loses its appeal when it's just you there. This is actually made worse when "couples" then invite you into their home to watch them be happy and together.

## I'm not wealthy

Even when I used to do Christmas, it always seemed crazy to me that we would all join in this task of spending money we couldn't afford, buying guessed gifts for people we may or may not like, ALL AT THE SAME TIME? Why on earth do this in the same month? Image, pride and a desire for an argument-free Christmas requires you to spend more than you need to, thus building up debt. What a lovely way to start the New Year.



## Unwanted Gifts

Spending months in preparation doesn't help when buying gifts for difficult people. In the end you go with your "best guess" and hope that they like it. You might then in return receive a gift you really hate, have no use for, or just wish they hadn't bothered as you hate to see waste.



## I'm not Religious

As a single person, going to church, enjoying mass, sharing in celebration of the festive event would be a reason to do Christmas... but I don't have a faith, I'm a Humanist, with ideals set around solid factual experiences.



## Christmas Cards

As an environmentally-conscious person, I don't like to see waste, and although Christmas cards can be recycled to a degree, they do seem pointless. Quite often an ego-boosting exercise for those with the most, boasting they have 150, when you have 6? Then those times when someone gives you a card whom you had forgotten....

## Christmas Sparkly lights



A home decorated with Christmas lights does look nice, I will openly admit this. But if this is so nice, why only do it once a year? In my own home I have coloured lights and they are there all year round. Using less energy, providing atmosphere and warmth; they are a great addition to my IKEA décor plan.

## Christmas spirit... No not that one

For some, Christmas is a great excuse for a piss-up drinking session to down far more alcohol than the body can handle in order to feel merry. I'm not a heavy drinker, I'm barely a light drinker. But I guess drinking helps to drown away the fears of the bill in the New Year. Why not celebrate New Year's Eve instead? At least this marks the passing of a year, something worthy of celebration.



*By Aaron Darkwood*

# Christmas:

# A Humanist Interpretation



*By David Warden, Assistant Editor*

I empathise with Aaron's feelings about Christmas. Christmas does seem to be a time for families and if you don't have one it can feel desperately lonely. To make matters worse, it seems that well-meaning invitations can simply amplify the feelings of being an outsider. And it appears there is no escape from Christmas jollity which intrudes into your home via the TV set and bores into your soul when out and about doing the shopping.

So what is to be done? Can Christmas be survived and even enjoyed under these circumstances? I think the secret, if there is one, is to make Christmas meaningful for yourself and to be happy for other people if they are enjoying it in their own way (and empathic for them if not).

So for a start, if you're a humanist, let's disregard the word 'Christmas' with all of its Christian connotations. The Christians simply adopted an ancient midwinter festival and bolted on their own stories about wise men and a baby in a manger.

The whole point of the midwinter festival is to help human communities get through the cold, damp, darkness of winter. We bring fir trees and evergreen foliage into our homes as an antidote to the bare lifelessness of nature at this time of year. We celebrate the providence of food and drink by indulging in traditional roast dinners, rich puddings, and uncorking the best wine we can afford. We extend a little hospitality if we can and send greetings to old friends. We enjoy some treats on TV.

So with a little imagination it may be possible to make a midwinter festival plan that works for you and your budget. If your friends are committed to family events on and around 25<sup>th</sup> December, see if they would like to meet up the week before, or in the gap between Christmas and New Year. They might be glad to escape family for a few hours for a walk or some other activity.

On the day itself, if you are alone, plan a slap-up meal for yourself and your favourite film. If you do go out, and see others in family groups, try to dislodge feeling sorry for yourself with generous feelings of happiness towards those other humans you encounter. Maybe smile and say hello. Every little connection fires up your dopamine system.

You may encounter a homeless person and you may decide to help out in some way. Doing a good deed for those less fortunate is certain to give you a warm glow of positive feelings, not to inflate your ego or pride, but simply because it feels good to do good.

Enjoy the cold crisp air, the sunshine or clouds, the trees (even the bare ones), and any birds and animals struggling to get through the winter.

So make it special and meaningful for you and always be grateful for shelter, clothing, warmth and food.

I wish you a very happy humanist midwinter festival.



## ***A Personal Reflection on a Murder...***

It was a cold, bright day when a small remembrance ceremony was organised in the grounds of St. Thomas' Hospital, near Westminster Bridge in London. It was essentially a Christian ceremony, but this was no ordinary event. It was to remember the five people – including a brave policeman – who were murdered by Khalid Masood in that terrible jihadist attack on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017.

There was a small crowd in attendance. A few hospital staff, some policemen, a contingent of firefighters and a handful of folk from among the general public. As you might expect, it was also attended by a Muslim chaplain, although I understand he didn't play a significant part in the ceremony. But among that little group was a Humanist Pastoral Carer – David Savage – and David happens to be a member of Farnham Humanists.

The ceremony was solemn and heartfelt. Everybody there must have felt a sense of tragedy, if not personal loss, and during the ceremony a wreath was laid for those who died on that awful day. But the wreath was not just for the murdered. It was also for the murderer.

When David told me this story, I became quite emotional, much to my surprise. Of course, I felt, the murderer – deranged as he was – was as much a victim as those he killed. But what

caught my breath was the ability of those who attended – some of whom had suffered the most terrible hurt – who seemed able to put their horror and anger to one side, and allow the killer to be named with those he killed. The ceremony was organised by Christians, but I thought this was a noble and Humanist thing to do. The object of this kind of jihadist horror is precisely to instil fear, hatred and division. On this occasion, it did *not* create division, but rather a coming together. And so I am very happy to report that the jihadist objective was a failure.

But it raises a fundamental question about those who murder as a matter of dogma. Are they bad people who deserve nothing more than our hatred and banishment? Or are they just poor deluded people who need our help and support? And if not, how are we going to stop future actions like this?

And perhaps even more fundamentally, can we ever separate the person – the human being – from the inhuman thing they do? It's a tough question, and speaking personally, I really cannot say.

**David Brittain**



***David Savage, who attended this ceremony, is the author of 'Non-Religious Pastoral Care: A Practical Guide'***



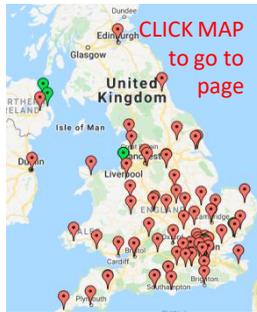
## Zooming with Humanist Groups by Aaron Darkwood

What an immensely enjoyable three days it was, at the Humanists UK “*Humanism in Action*” event that replaced this years GRAM (Group Representatives Annual Meeting). Typically, once a year two members from each group are invited to London to discuss a whole array of topics, and in a room of 60 or so persons ideas are exchanged and plans drawn up. This year however, with the Zoom facility,



over 25 members spent up to 12 hours across three days together which enabled many more topics to be looked at and in greater detail. It also provided for many different speakers to take the lead, delivering a wide array of knowledge and shared experience. If you have never been to a GRAM, it is certainly worth doing, and if this is repeated next year on Zoom, absolutely take your place. You can pick and choose which of the hour slots you can make, although for me many of them were of key interest, and those that weren't actually surprised me. For members, this is one of the best things Humanists UK have provided to actually support groups, and I was very pleased to have accidentally tagged along. I thought it was a conference!

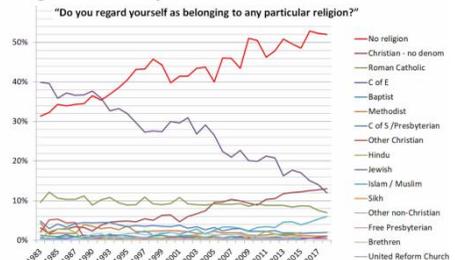
I have been a key advocate of the GRAM events and have attended several, feeling that they are a great opportunity for networking with other groups, to learn what works and what doesn't, and before this magazine existed, was really the only way for groups to interact outside of the occasional email.



For groups I would say do try and take part in these events. We have over 60 groups on the Humanists UK groups page, and I'm sure some are missing, and yet only 25 faces were at the GRAM? It was free,

easy to attend and I was surprised there weren't 150 faces staring back at me. These events are optional, but I really do think you would gain a lot from attending, and personally encourage all of you to look out for next year's events.

### Religious identity – rise of the ‘nones’

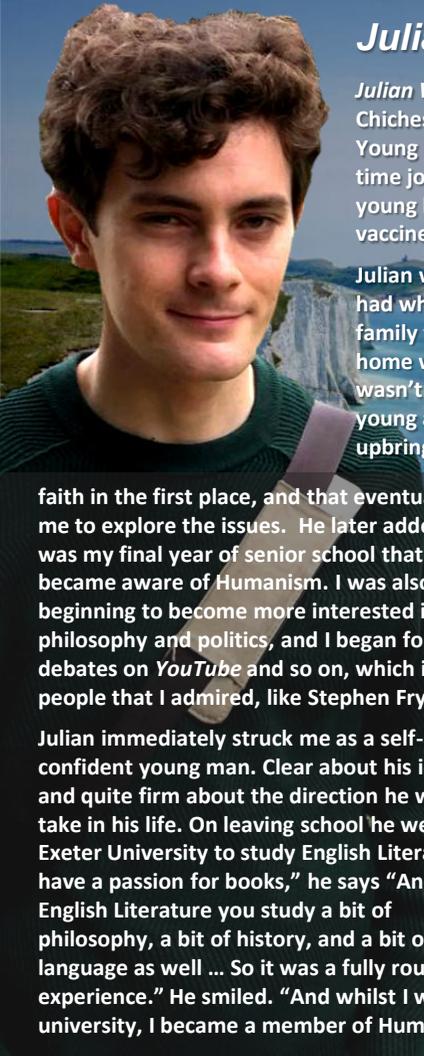


One of Jeremy Rodell's slides on Religious identity



# Interviewing the 'Chair'

Our regular spotlight on Humanist group leaders interviewed by David Brittain



## Julian Webb - Chichester Humanists

Julian Webb is a very busy young man. Not only does he Chair Chichester Humanists, he also manages nationwide events for Young Humanists whilst at the same time holding down a full time job. And more than this, he has won the heart of a beautiful young lady by the name of Claire, and if all goes well (with Covid vaccines!), they plan to marry in late 2021, or early 2022.

Julian was born in Bedford in 1993 to Phil and Karen Webb, and had what most of us would describe as a normal childhood, into a family that wasn't so much un-religious, as non-religious. "At home we just never discussed God," he told me. "Religion simply wasn't part of our lives, and I identified as an atheist from a young age. In fact, it was partly *because* of that lack of a religious upbringing that I became curious as to why people acquired a

faith in the first place, and that eventually led me to explore the issues. He later added ... "It was my final year of senior school that I became aware of Humanism. I was also beginning to become more interested in philosophy and politics, and I began following debates on *YouTube* and so on, which included people that I admired, like Stephen Fry."

Julian immediately struck me as a self-assured, confident young man. Clear about his ideas, and quite firm about the direction he wants to take in his life. On leaving school he went to Exeter University to study English Literature. "I have a passion for books," he says "And with English Literature you study a bit of philosophy, a bit of history, and a bit of language as well ... So it was a fully rounded experience." He smiled. "And whilst I was at university, I became a member of Humanists

UK" (then known as the British Humanist Association). "But there's a big gap between being a member of a Humanist association and being an active Humanist, isn't there?" I said. "What's the story there?"

"I did start a couple of Humanist groups while I was in Exeter, and I became more interested in wider ethical issues that were related to Humanism like assisted dying, and how we approach religion and belief in schools, so I was obviously keen. Even after I graduated I formed and ran a Humanist group in Exeter for a few years. But I only became involved



Are you a **Chair** waiting to be interviewed?

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with Chichester Humanists about three years ago. That's when I moved there to be with my fiancée Claire, and when I did, it seemed natural to seek out my local group. I soon joined and became a member of the committee.

Julian is 26 years old, and, given the average age of many local Humanist groups I asked about Chichester. "The age group in Chichester definitely skews towards the retired," he said. "And I suspect that has quite a lot to do with how much free time people have. We do get some young people attending events depending on the topic, but they rarely become committed members, which is a shame. Having other younger people there does make it more attractive and welcoming to people of a similar age."

Chichester has recently become a branch of Humanists UK, so any resident who is a member of Humanists UK is automatically a member of Chichester Humanists. And on that basis, Chichester are looking at a range of about 350-400 members.

Julian's other connection – with Young Humanists – is a different story, of course. He has been active with Young Humanists for coming on four years now, fulfilling the role of Events Manager.

"We have a regional network of YH ambassadors," he said. "And – when COVID-19 allows - we organise national events such as political drinks receptions. This is where we invite Humanist politicians to come along and meet young Humanists on a social level, and discuss campaigning. The All-Party Parliamentary Humanists is quite large he said." *(Julian's right. For the record, the All-Party Parliamentary Group is made up of 110 MPs, and is chaired by Conservative Crispin Blunt MP, whilst Labour's Baroness Massey of Darwen is the Secretary).*

Although Julian is the Chair of Chichester

Humanists, work commitments have obliged him and Claire to live in Brighton these days, and since moving, Julian has made an impression there too. "Caroline Lucas is my MP at the moment, and I have I have written to her about Humanist marriage. She came back very supportively ..." he says, "... which was very nice to read. I don't know whether she is a member of Humanists UK, but I know she very much supports the work we do."

Returning to the subject of Humanist marriage I pointed out that we seem to be winning all the battles, but we have yet to win the war, and I reminded him about the recent court case in which the judge declared that even though there was no case against Humanist weddings, for reasons best known to herself she still deferred to Parliament for a final decision.

Claire is a Humanist too, and they both hope to have a 'legal' Humanist wedding ceremony ... That is, if the Government can get its finger out in time ... "My family isn't very religious, and although Claire has more religious relatives, they are supportive of us Humanists" he says.

"But the law could be the biggest sticking point. We both hope the Government will have amended the existing legislation by then so that we can wed as Humanists. If it doesn't ... well, that would not stop us getting married, of course. But still, it would be a disappointment." "I would like a ceremony that is meaningful to us, and accorded the legal respect it deserves," he said. "We don't want to be discriminated against because of our beliefs and what will be a meaningful ceremony would be all the more meaningful because of the legality of it." He paused a little before adding ... "Given the time scale we have in mind, we would hope that by then Humanist weddings will be legalised."





Julian and Claire hope for a legal Humanist wedding

I then raised the possibility of Julian and Claire having children. “What would you do if the only option available was a faith school?” I asked. “We know that Alice Roberts had problems with this for her own children, so how would you feel about religious indoctrination then? Would you withdraw them from religious Instruction or assembly?” Julian looked concerned, but determined. “I would be very disappointed in principle if they had to go to a faith school that excluded exposure to other ideas, in the same way that I would not want my children to go to a single sex school. But if there were lessons that included open discussion about a range of faiths and beliefs, I would actually *want* them to attend.” He then paused a little to reflect on my second question. “Would I withdraw them from religious assemblies? We would have to consider carefully the social implications of keeping our children away from that, and I would probably want to talk it over with them.”

One thing we hadn’t so far discussed was the effect of the pandemic on Chichester Humanists, and when we did, Julian was perfectly frank. “Since lockdown we have held all of our events online, which I’ve also been doing with Young Humanists. In those events we try to add variety by mixing in some speaker-

led events – and these generally tend to draw more people.” He then added. “I also think coronavirus will change things in the long term. These online events have allowed us to reach people who might not have been able to join an in-person event in the past. When it’s safe to hold face-to-face meetings again, Chichester will resume them, but we’ll probably mix that up with online events as well. The mix will be important. But having face-to-face local connections between people of like mind sharing ideas, and making new friends will always be very valuable.”

And finally, when I asked what advice he would offer to Andrew Copson and the trustees about the running and policy of Humanists UK, his answer was loud and clear in his approval. “I think it is going in the right direction from a Young Humanists perspective ...” he said. “Pastoral care, climate change, black lives matter, moral authority. These are the things that make me an active Humanist. It’s the campaigns that motivate me. We need broad, ‘in principle’ organisations behind us like Humanists UK that are large enough to provide the overall support structure needed, of course, but we also need to bear in mind that these days people of my age tend to want to be involved with particular issues that effect specific change.” Something to bear in mind, I thought. But for an overarching organisation like ours, the best way to address this kind of highly-focussed thinking may require some careful consideration and planning.

That was the end of what for me was a fascinating discussion, and I was delighted that Julian agreed to be interviewed, albeit online. It was my privilege to have his exclusive and informative company for the hour or so that we had, and Julian left me with a feeling of optimism and confidence about the future of Humanism.

*Thank you, Julian.*



# A day in the life...

## of a SACRE volunteer

*Our regular look at humanist volunteers*

**Interview with Jennie Johnson (pictured right), a member of SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education)**



### *Describing my role in one sentence:*

To represent Humanism and the non-religious perspective on the Surrey SACRE responsible for advising Surrey County Council and its schools on RE, Collective Worship and related issues.

### *Five key responsibilities in my role:*

1. To provide humanist and non-religious input to Surrey's RE Syllabus which by law is reviewed every 5 years.
2. To provide the same for Surrey's guide to Collective Worship.
3. To keep up to date with government and other guidance on RE and Collective Worship.
4. To support Surrey SACRE's other outputs e.g. guidance to visits and visitors, School Speakers' Forum, Partnering Visits with Schools and audit of RE.
5. To attend Humanists UK's annual Education Days for Humanist SACRE representatives and School Speakers.

### *How did you discover this role?*

At the first meeting of Farnham Humanists in 2004 it was suggested that I contact Surrey County Council to ask how I could apply to join the local body responsible for RE. Nowadays I would start by approaching Humanists UK.

There are still some SACREs in England without humanist members so anyone who is interested should make contact with Humanists UK.

### *What appealed to you about the role?*

I believe strongly that all school pupils should learn not only about different religious beliefs and traditions but also about non-religious beliefs and ways of thinking.

Children are born to parents with particular beliefs; they are not born as humanists, Christians, Muslims etc. I think every young person should be free to work out for themselves what they believe.

Moreover, presenting knowledge about different beliefs if done well, and especially if enhanced by personal contact, can help improve empathy and understanding between people and reduce prejudice and discrimination.

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## *Take us through a typical day performing this role.*

There isn't a typical day. Days vary from preparing for every term's SACRE meeting, contributing to SACRE's RE and Collective Worship documents to answering students' questions like "What does your religion or belief teach you about gender?".

Surrey's is perhaps a more active SACRE than some. I volunteer for our School Speakers' Forum and School Partnering Visits sub-group. Prior to Covid-19 this meant I was going into schools two or three times a term and contributing to related meetings and reports.

School Speaker visits are fun but exhausting. We go in as a team representing up to eight beliefs. Visits range from carousels ("speed dating"), panel Q&As to eight half-hour class lessons. It's been good to get to know the faith representatives better and we think it's a bonus that the students see us all getting on well together.

During Covid we have been producing self-videos for a school virtual visit in November describing what our belief means to us and giving answers to students' questions. An aim is to create resources for possible use by other Surrey schools.

School Partnering visits involve observing RE and Collective Worship and feeding back our findings to the school. It's instructive to see the syllabus in action and hear directly teacher and pupil comments.

Occasionally, before a SACRE meeting, I have needed to put an argument together referencing Education and Human Rights laws and the latest government guidance. Humanists UK are superb at providing support with this.

## *Do you require specific skills or training to conduct your role?*

You need to be knowledgeable about Humanism and how SACREs work. Humanists UK has excellent online resources for this <https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/> and <https://humanism.org.uk/> Non-judgemental listening, empathy and sensitive advocacy are all important. Being interested in other beliefs helps.

## *What is most challenging about your role? How do you navigate complications?*

Being usually the only person with my perspective out of a group of 20 to 25 people on SACRE can be challenging. I try to promote greater inclusivity of the non-religious perspective at the same time as listening and acknowledging that I've understood others' viewpoints. I only pick the "battles" which are the most important and potentially winnable. Although RE and Collective Worship law has barely changed since 1944, I often use the argument that the Human Rights and Equality Acts indicate that references to 'religion' should be read as 'religion and belief'. The UK moving towards becoming less religiously oriented also helps of course.

## *What are the rewards in this for you? Why would you recommend it?*

The rewards have included:

- After 14 years finally becoming a full SACRE member!
- Changing from a syllabus with "non-religious" and "humanism" appearing 3 times in total to a syllabus containing a compulsory Humanist unit and "humanism" appearing 149 times.
- Teachers telling me how much pupils like learning about Humanism and how good our resources are.

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# Essay Competition

*Can you sum up Humanism in fewer than 70 words?*

When I was first introduced to Humanism it took me a few weeks to grasp what it was. It seems obvious to me now, but back then I was trying to nail it. If it were just atheism why did it need another name? The pieces didn't gel and Wikipedia and other sites had so many words that it needed something short, concise and to the point. Something you can "sell" to someone from a stand in 30 seconds.

This week the American Humanist Association posted their Manifesto 3 on Instagram, and Humanists UK added theirs, I now invite you to better it!

In fewer than 70 words, craft a message that encapsulates Humanism. Something plain spoken, fit for all ages, that fits in a spoken paragraph (as opposed to bullet points) and we will post them and see what people think. Maybe we can adopt one that will be fit for this magazine. No prizes for this one, but grateful recognition for some of the best.



*Aaron Darkwood*  
*Humanist since 2014*

[CLICK TO EMAIL](#)

## HUMANIST MANIFESTO III

Humanists aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. We rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifestance of humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.

[americanhumanist.org](http://americanhumanist.org)

## HUMANISM IN A NUTSHELL

- 1. PUTTING HUMAN BEINGS AND OTHER LIVING THINGS AT THE CENTRE OF YOUR MORAL OUTLOOK**
- 2. SEEING THE WORLD AS A NATURAL PLACE AND LOOKING TO SCIENCE AND REASON TO MAKE SENSE OF IT**
- 3. PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING HUMAN FLOURISHING ACROSS ALL FRONTIERS, AND CHAMPIONING HUMAN RIGHTS FOR EVERYONE**

**AND THAT'S ABOUT IT**  
#humanist

 Humanists UK



# Letters & Emails

**I was appalled** at the response by Penelope Mountford to wearing face masks ('Don't Mask the Truth', October issue). As humanists I thought we supported using science to establish what is true. The current WHO advice on balance is for the general population to wear face masks in public when social distancing cannot be observed and this advice has been followed by the UK and most governments across the world. But according to Penny Mountford, mask wearing is a political act and nothing to do with science. It is a 'social evil' and I am a 'gullible fool' for wearing a 'badge of enslavement'.

This rhetoric is something I would have expected from the likes of Piers Corbyn or David Icke at their conspiracy promoting rallies, rather than being given equal space to 'explain the controversy' as with proponents of evolution vs creationism being taught in school science lessons.

I don't feel strongly about advocates of flat earth theory or those who want us to believe the moon landings were faked, as these are fairly harmless and clearly laughable. However when conspiracy theorists undermine the safety of not only a few individuals but the whole population, as humanists we should be calling them out rather than giving them space in our own publications.

*Mike Adams, Guildford and Woking Humanists*

**My blood really began to boil** on reading the *Humanistically Speaking* issue which allowed Penelope Mountford free rein to pen the most immoderate, inaccurate and ageist diatribe against the wearing of face masks. Ms Mountford appears to have no grasp of

evidence-based findings (which is based not on one isolated scientist's findings but those of the majority of researchers). There is an abundance of scientific evidence demonstrating that wearing a face covering significantly reduces the chance of the wearer passing on the virus, especially if combined with other measures of handwashing and physical distancing. In the case of a potentially devastating virus such as we are dealing with, common sense - let alone science - tells you that some protection is better than none. Comparisons with other countries are unhelpful - Sweden has a different culture, with different attitudes. And all that foolish talk of 'enslavement'. If you think that having to wear a face-covering for the good of other people (by the way, it's called common decency, consideration or even altruism!) robs you of your much-valued British freedom - you must have a strange idea of freedom. For a better understanding of the concept of freedom try living in Iran, North Korea, Pakistan or perhaps Belarus! I would also add that if folk are so concerned that wearing a mask is demeaning or unsightly, perhaps they have a vanity problem.

The deeply offensive remarks about older people are probably the worst part of this ignorant rant. Has it occurred to you that some people, after a lifetime of hardship and problems, might find they are only able to have a decent quality of life in their later years?

*Carol-Mary Fraser*

■ **Penelope Mountford no longer writes for *Humanistically Speaking***

# A Muslim Perspective on the attacks in France

*Humanistically Speaking asked trainee accountant Mustafa Khan to comment...*



As a Muslim in Britain, hearing about the recent tragic attack in France saddened me, because any life lost unjustly is a tragedy. We sincerely pray for those who lost family members and loved ones.

But what worried me even more are the social and political ramifications of this event – specifically how ordinary law-abiding Muslim citizens would bear the brunt of the anti-Muslim hysteria and disproportionate backlash that would inevitably follow. Not only that, but the consequent media campaign and the harvesting of political capital by Macron from this event to position himself as a ‘saviour’ of French values and boost his recently falling ratings. Sadly, I was correct in my estimations.

There are roughly 6 million Muslims in France – around 10% of the population. If a few people from this group go tragically mental and act against the interest of the population, then they need to be dealt with according to the law. Factually speaking, the statistics are no worse than from other minority groups. But the response and reporting are completely different and incredibly biased.

To emphasise this point, many readers will not be aware that following the attack, two Muslim ladies with their children were stabbed under the Eiffel Tower, called ‘dirty Arabs’ and told to ‘go home’. What is tragic is not just the incident itself (which is one example of many), but the clear double standards in how it was treated, reported and received by the French

population. There was no hysterical reporting this time; no one called the attackers’ religion into question; there were no public statements from Macron. Most people are not even aware this occurred. The question is, why?

I have only used one example here, but there are plenty more. Because of this ridiculous imbalance of media reporting and clear agenda against Muslims, French people are being fed the lie that there is a ‘Muslim problem’, seemingly justified by the constant and selective stories they are given.

How often history repeats itself; the Nazi party a century ago rose to power on the back of a sustained media campaign of 20 years or so against an innocent Jewish minority, based on the actions of a few individuals. For this reason, it became a ‘Jewish problem’, and the German population was completely convinced of this fact.

The recent situation in France has a similar trajectory. The French government have used this attack to justify closing down Mosques, breaking into Muslim households and humiliating family members. This vicious cycle will only continue, and more violence will be perpetrated until the French government is called to account for its actions; it is our civil duty to call out injustice wherever it occurs, whichever minority group it occurs against.

**I believe that this is not just a Muslim perspective, but the perspective of those who believe in justice, fairness and truth.**

# Should we eat other animals?



***Jamie Woodhouse promotes Sentientism - a philosophy that grants degrees of moral consideration to all sentient beings. He will present a talk on this topic to Dorset Humanists on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021 7.30pm. All welcome!***  
[jamiewoodhouse.com](http://jamiewoodhouse.com)

Humanism, I believe, needs an upgrade to *Sentientism*. Sentientism is an ethical philosophy or worldview that applies evidence and reason and extends moral consideration to all sentient beings. Sentient beings have the ability to experience things – suffering or flourishing. They include humans, non-human animals and potentially even artificial or alien intelligences.

Humanism focuses on the central importance of the human species to the detriment of other sentient beings. In short, Humanism is too anthropocentric. Humanist campaigns (all of which I support) are almost entirely focused on the human species and more specifically on resisting religious civil privileges and harms. I can only find one humanist campaign that focuses on non-human animals, and that's the campaign against pre-stunning slaughter. The campaign does address animal suffering as a factor but seems just as motivated by wanting to avoid privileging religious views. It is implied that non-religious slaughter is morally acceptable, despite the supposed humanist concern for sentient non-humans.

Take animal farming for example. This causes industrial-scale suffering and death for trillions of sentient beings every year. In addition, partly due to its inherent inefficiency compared to plant agriculture, animal farming is a major contributor to the climate emergency.

Animal farming also contributes to the antibiotic microbial resistance crisis due to the over-use of antibiotics where they are not medically required. Animal farming and consumption also makes deadly zoonotic diseases (including coronaviruses) more likely. Commercial fishing is the source of between 20-40% of ocean plastic in many areas, which in turn causes suffering and death to sea life. The pleasure people get from eating and drinking animal products does not warrant the suffering caused and alternatives are easily available to most. In a sentientist world, abattoirs and slaughterhouses, butchers, fishmongers, live animal transportation and hunting/fishing would disappear. Bullfighting, dogfighting, cockfighting, aquariums, zoos, horse racing, hunting and fishing for sport would also disappear.

Most humanists needlessly consume products that require the harming and killing of sentient non-human animals – implying that, in terms of their actual choices, they do not grant them a meaningful level of moral consideration. Humanism tends to consider humans only as moral agents or subjects.

So, in my view, Humanism needs an upgrade. Anthropomorphism limits us and our morality whereas Sentientism takes us to the next level. At the very least, I'd like to start a debate and maintain constructive pressure on the Humanist movement to extend moral consideration to all sentient beings.

Click [here](#) to read more about Sentientism and [Facebook group](#)

Click [here](#) for Sentientism talk on 27<sup>th</sup> January 7.30pm

# Humanists & other animals



**Humanist celebrant  
Cath Sutherland asks  
“Isn't it time that  
humanists recognised  
that the suffering of all  
sentient beings should  
be avoided wherever  
possible? Shouldn't this  
logically be part of  
what it is to be a  
humanist?”**

Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens* (2015) and *Homo Deus* (2017), has a completely different definition of humanism than members of Humanists UK. He claims that over the last 300 years or so humans have come to see themselves as the masters of the Earth, the only species that really matters, with the right to use all other earthly resources, including all animals, as we wish and without wasting much thought on the consequences for them – all that really matters in this view of life is that humans are ok. Hence most of the religions have a morality that applies only to behaviour to other humans. Hence humans have always inflicted intense suffering on billions of animals, and we still do.

Harari's type of humanism is coming to an end. Population increase, our resource-hungry modern technologies and Western lifestyles, the slow collapse of biodiversity, and climate change, are going to mean that we will soon no longer take the natural world for granted, but will start to prize, venerate and desperately try to protect it. It will be a change of values that is rooted in our human desire to survive. We need the natural world, we are

part of it, and if we destroy it, we will eventually destroy ourselves.

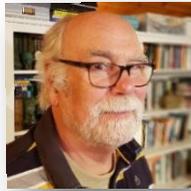
In the coming decades, as we recognise the need to protect and cherish the natural world, the suffering of animals, both wild and farmed, will be recognised much more. At the moment it goes 'under the radar' with the occasional brief horror getting attention, such as the knowledge that billions of animals in Australia burned alive in the bushfires which were almost certainly caused by global warming.

A sign of the coming change of attitude is the growing number of Western young people opting to become vegans. For example, according to an Ipsos Mori poll commissioned by the UK Vegan Society, the number of people opting for a vegan diet climbed from 0.25% to 1.16% in the period 2014-2019. As we start to value other animals more, inflicting suffering on any animals will become more unacceptable than it is today.

There have always been people who object to cruelty towards animals used by humans, such as work-horses and farmed animals. The UK already has minimum standards of animal welfare, thanks in part to the European Union. As more of us humans start to empathise with animals, and try to put that into practice, maybe the whole-of-life suffering of factory-farmed animals in UK, and around the world, will be hugely reduced.

Isn't it time that humanists recognised that as compassionate people, we should believe that the suffering of all sentient conscious beings should be avoided wherever possible? Shouldn't this logically be part of what it is to be a humanist? Shouldn't we be clearly saying so?

# 2020: Our 'Alice in Wonderland' Year!



Executive Editor David Brittain reviews *Humanistically Speaking's* first year

**I feel sure that future historians will look back at 2020 as one of the most bizarre years in the whole of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

And not just because of coronavirus, but because of the strange US presidential election, because a passionate Swedish schoolgirl led a worldwide movement about climate change, because of 'taking a knee' in sport after a black man was murdered by a US policeman, because of British Royals resigning from their 'job', because of the UK's break-away from the EU after nearly half a century... And all of this with the very real possibility, it seems, that humanity might have at last discovered life on another planet – not on cold Mars, though, but on hot Venus!

But for me, I will always remember a meeting that took place in October 2019 that changed 2020 irrevocably for me. I had long nurtured the idea of a Humanist magazine that addressed issues that Humanists care about, but was not necessarily a campaigning broadsheet, and this was my chance. Aaron Darkwood seemed keen on the idea, and David Warden seemed interested, so we met – along with Ronnie Barr – at David's Bournemouth home. The meeting went very well, I thought, and we quickly agreed to work together to produce a bi-monthly magazine that was specifically designed to be interesting and easy reading for Humanists throughout the south of England. By then, of course, we had the South

Central England Humanists Network (SCEHN), and readers among the SCEHN groups would form our readership base. At least, that was the plan.

The title took some weeks of head-scratching, though, before Aaron came up with *Humanistically Speaking*. I found it a bit of a mouthful myself, but I got used to it and the name eventually stuck. Our mission would soon be established. *HS* would be given the broad objective of helping to construct and sustain a Humanist community throughout the region. A trial of twelve months was set, and it would commence from the start of the forthcoming decade.

The first issue went out on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020, and it was well received, although we realised early on that the production and issue of hundreds of hard copies was a mistake. There was also initial resistance from some of the SCEHN groups. "*We have our own group magazine ...*" some said "*... and with all the stuff we get from Humanists UK, the National Secular Society, and the stuff we produce for our own members we will be overwhelmed, and buried with information. A new regional magazine will just not be read at all.*"

... And to be fair, born as it was with our high expectations and unstoppable enthusiasm, our first issue did *not* have a wide circulation. Some groups passed the virtual version of *HS* on to their members, whilst others simply pasted it

onto their website or Facebook page. And others (though thankfully very few) simply did nothing at all. But that was not discouraging for us – it was a challenge, and the scepticism was understandable. It was our job to win hearts and minds.

And there were advantages in a slow start. In the early months our low circulation offered the editors an opportunity for learning, and developing our skills. It also gave Aaron the chance to exercise his extraordinarily creative mind, and it was largely thanks to him that the design of the magazine was exceptional from the very beginning.

And then Covid-19 came along... It's strange to relate that I suspect *Humanistically Speaking* actually *benefited* from the enforced isolation that followed. People became separated from each other, and I think *HS* offered another way of keeping in touch. It certainly became very popular quite early on, and by the time our third issue was released our reach began to spread into groups beyond the SCEHN borders.

But it was the proposal from Farnham Humanists' Alan Montgomery that SCEHN should donate a sum of money to the *HS* project that was the landslide moment for us. The cash was an enormous confidence boost, a cause of inspiration, and an acknowledgement indeed that we *were* winning friends.

We became bolder. We invited Maggie Hall (Brighton Humanists), Tricia Wallis (Farnham Humanists) and Penelope Mountford to join the editorial team and add their own unique perspectives. And over the following few months we expanded our circulation range well beyond SCEHN to Reading, Windsor, Swindon, Exeter, Hastings, Bristol and Canterbury. And indeed Reading and Windsor are now also joined into the existing SCEHN network.

But our wings have spread even wider since then, and in unexpected ways. 17 years-old

Amelie Forbes has become a regular editorial contributor to *HS*, and she is beginning to open doors with younger readers, which gives much hope for the magazine's future.

Plaudits began coming in from readers, too. And then, to cap it all, we got some very favourable compliments at October's online *Humanism in Action* conference, this year's replacement for the Group Representatives Annual Meeting. *Humanistically Speaking* gained national attention at this conference which led to groups from all over the UK asking for their own regular subscription.

At the time of writing, we now have over 120 direct despatch subscriptions to individuals, 19 *group* direct despatch subscriptions, and whilst it is impossible to properly assess, we know that our estimated readership is at least 2,500.

With *that* kind of feedback after just five issues, the editorial team at *HS* were beginning to think that we must be doing something right!

So to summarise the year in a phrase, as my friend and fellow editor, David Warden put it, "It's been a roller-coaster ride." In truth, *Humanistically Speaking* seems to have already acquired a life of its own, and has been far more successful than any of us dared hope. The trial was a success, and there is no doubt that it will continue beyond the trial year into 2021. But in what format?

Well... *Humanistically Speaking* will be smaller but more frequent as we move to a regular monthly issue, which might require some more editors, so if there are any more budding editors out there, now's the time to declare an interest in volunteering. Other things need to be considered too. My view is that *Humanistically Speaking* needs an income to pay for a range of expenses

including printing and publicity, more competition prizes, better publishing software, and to provide decent honoraria for our hardest pressed editors. So there is an internal debate going on now about how – or even whether – *HS* should fund itself, and there are several options. We can ask our readers to subscribe a small regular sum by direct debit – perhaps £1.00 or so per month, or a few pounds a year? Or we could ask the groups we serve to make an annual contribution. Or we might even consider paid advertising.

And what about the *style* of the magazine? Should it continue to publish personal stories like the Chairs' Interviews? Or Humanist thoughts? Or editors' opinions? And what about Lockdown Laughs? Is a jokes page appropriate?

And how hard-hitting should *Humanistically Speaking* be? Should it be political at all, or limit itself to be easy reading? How far should it go towards wider interests, like books and art? And especially in support of local readers? How 'newsy' should it be about what's going on with Humanism in the South of England? And how far should we go in inviting representatives from religious organisations to contribute?

Some of these questions are surprisingly slippery to answer, others are sensitive, and of course we will need to ensure that we don't have overworked editors producing large issues every month. Our idea is essentially simple. We want to produce an easy to digest, informative and fun magazine that is of interest to Humanists like you, which offers a proper local voice, and is produced on a regular basis.

We won't have all the answers in time for our monthly launch in January, that's for sure. But if you, beloved reader, have any thoughts or

comments to offer, do please tell us what you think.

I'd like to end this report by thanking the editorial team for their creative input, their consistent dedication, their open-mindedness to new ideas, and their amazing contributions. *Thank you, guys!*

And also to thank you, our readers, for your support, and your engagement with *Humanistically Speaking* ... We have always needed you, and we like to think you are getting to need us.

And this message comes with my wish – our wish – from the editors of *Humanistically Speaking* that all our readers will have a very healthy, happy, and virus-free New Year. I look forward very much to 'meeting' you all again in January.

**David Brittain**  
Executive Editor

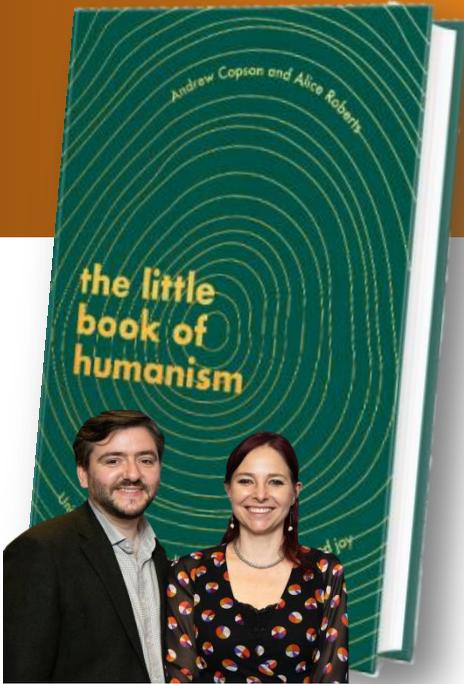
**Christmas is a'coming,  
The goose is getting fat.  
Time to fill a shoebox,  
With toys and other tat.  
But the people who do shoeboxes  
Are running a big heist.  
They're going to use your shoebox  
To preach their Jesus Christ.  
So when they ask for shoeboxes,  
Don't you be taken in.  
The best thing for your shoebox  
Is to stick it in the bin.  
(The recycling one.)**

*By Kim Northwood*

*Note: Samaritan's Purse International Relief 'Operation Christmas Child' has been controversial for many years because of its evangelistic motives.*

## Book Review by David Warden

*'The Little Book of Humanism'*  
(2020) by Andrew Copson and Alice Roberts is the Number 1 bestseller in 'Ethics and Morality' on Amazon



An updated compendium of humanist wisdom in a handy format is long overdue. The last substantial such volume, Margaret Knight's *Humanist Anthology From Confucius To Bertrand Russell* came out in 1961 and Marilyn Mason's *The Thinkers' Guide to Life* was published in 2000.

The little book of humanism is organised into nine chapters including classic humanist themes such as 'Being good', 'Thinking clearly', 'Science and progress', 'Religion and faith', 'Thinking about death, and 'Living well'. The 'Children of earth' chapter includes a welcome correction to humanist anthropocentrism by including 'five freedoms for animals' promoted by the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Over one hundred humanist thinkers have been packed into this small volume including ancient philosophers such as Protagoras,

Epicurus, Confucius, Lucretius, and Marcus Aurelius. Great names from the twentieth century include Isaac Asimov, Douglas Adams, Jacob Bronowski, Simone de Beauvoir, Rosalind Franklin, and Sir Julian Huxley. We are brought fully up-to-date with contemporary contributions by Julian Baggini, Jo Cox, Steven Pinker, Alan Bennett, Zadie Smith and Gloria Steinem. The depth and breadth of humanist wisdom across different ages, genders, races, and cultures demonstrates the reach and ubiquity of the humanist worldview.

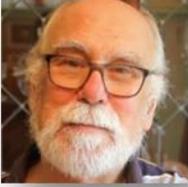
A smörgåsbord of quotations, however, runs the risk of banality. How on earth, for example, can the great novelist George Eliot have come up with something as trite as this: "It will never rain roses: when we want to have more roses, we must plant more trees". And seeing Robert Ingersoll's tied old cliché on happiness yet again, "Happiness is the only good, the time to be happy is now, and the way to be happy is to make others so", makes me want to scream. It's not the only good and there's more to happiness than altruism.

The best quotations in this volume subvert its general premise which is that Humanism can be condensed into nuggets of wisdom. The whole point of Humanism is to deconstruct received wisdom by thinking for yourself. And so my favourites are this one from Margaret Mead: "Children must be taught how to think, not what to think", and Stephen Fry's admirable advice: "Don't take anybody's word for it. Find out for yourselves".

Have you read the little book of humanism yet? Tell us what you think.

[Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com](mailto:Humanistically.Speaking@gmail.com)

# A FINAL THOUGHT...



## *In the name of God?*

*Humanistically Speaking Editor David Brittain asks why those who murder in the name of Allah we call 'terrorists', whilst those who murder in the name of Christian beliefs we simply call 'murderers'.*

The announcement of the death of Peter Sutcliffe, also known as the Yorkshire Ripper, on 13<sup>th</sup> November coincided with the writing of my article on the Westminster Bridge attack (page 18).

Sutcliffe murdered far more women than his 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessor, and, like his namesake, he inspired fear among women wherever he struck.

His stated motive seemed to be some bizarre idea of 'doing the work of God' by working to rid the streets of those prostitutes who so offended his Roman Catholic faith.

If that's right, it says much about a Christian church that is not that far removed from Islamic teaching in the sense that both faiths have spawned people who are prepared to justify murder on the grounds of a 'higher calling'.

And yet, we don't call Sutcliffe a 'terrorist', preferring instead to call him a 'mass murderer'. Nevertheless, the broad motive seems to be the same: To punish those who offend their God.

Yes – we know that the scriptures of both faiths say that killing is sinful, but both of them also seem to justify, at times, slaying God's enemies. The question is, how do the pious come to terms with those contradictions?

It seems to me that there is a terrible logic about these murders, and it goes like this: "God is the creator and the highest authority of all, so if I interpret a call to murder as a command from God, then so be it. God's will."

### FACTBOX

Peter William Sutcliffe (2 June 1946 – 13 November 2020), also known as Peter William Coonan, was an English serial killer who was dubbed the Yorkshire Ripper (an allusion to Jack the Ripper) by the press. On 22 May 1981, he was convicted of murdering thirteen women and attempting to murder seven others between 1975 and 1980. He was sentenced to twenty concurrent sentences of life imprisonment, which were converted to a whole life order in 2010. All except two of Sutcliffe's murders took place in West Yorkshire; the others were in Manchester.

*Wikipedia*

## *Humanistically Speaking*

A free magazine created for and by Humanists

*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.*



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

