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# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

## ■ Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July online event

### Please note rescheduled date

Join us on Zoom at 1.30pm to get settled in. Talk commences at 2pm. Click [here](#) or enter ID and password.

Meeting ID: 891 8650 6757

Password: 459420

## Beyond Binary

**An exploration into masculinity, femininity, and sexuality**



An engaging, interactive, balanced and humorous look at the ever-evolving concepts and continuums of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. We hear a lot about equality, diversity, and difference but do we

pay lip-service to these concepts? How can we process them more meaningfully? Is it still OK to be a straight bloke or is this now deemed to be 'toxic' by definition?

Our speaker Richard Jones is a member of Dorset Humanists. He is a psychotherapist and a tutor for counselling diploma students for Portsmouth University. He's had thirteen years' experience working in the LGBT+ sector and also working with clients with Autism Spectrum Disorder. He has worked as a counselling supervisor and is due to start his Level 6 MSc qualification in September. He is very happy to identify as a gay male but often feels that he's about a quarter female.



**Congratulations! John Glazer and Anne Horsham plan to get married next summer in a humanist ceremony before travelling to New Zealand for a celebration with Anne's family.**

## ■ Virtual Coffee Morning Tuesday 11am

Every Tuesday online until further notice. Enjoy lively conversation over tea or coffee at our online coffee morning. Our events have an international flavour with visitors from Cardiff and New York!

<https://www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists/>

☎ David Warden 07910 886629

## ■ Virtual Pub Quiz Thursday 7.30pm

Every Thursday online until further notice. Pour yourself a beer or a glass of wine from the comfort and safety of your own home, click on the link, and join our quiz! Quiz topics have included Thomas Hardy, Prime Ministers, Science Fiction series, local landmarks, music, science, and much more! You don't have to be a brainbox to attend – it's just a bit of light-hearted fun.

<https://www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists/>

Send bulletin updates to [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk)

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## Join our 'Meetup' group

Please take this opportunity to join our page on 'Meetup' where we post details for all of our online events. Please also take this opportunity to register with Zoom so that you can easily join our online events. You can sign up for free.

[www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists](http://www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists)

<https://zoom.us/>

## Dorset Humanists Pastoral Team

Please contact our pastoral team if you need help or would just like a friendly chat. Our pastoral team members are:

Cathy Silman – Secretary of Dorset Humanists and a Citizens' Advice Bureau advisor. Tel: 07817 695615

Susan Bryson – A member of Dorset Humanists committee and an experienced therapeutic counsellor. Tel: 07980 276234

David Warden – Chairman of Dorset Humanists and a qualified therapeutic counsellor. Mobile: 07910 886629



## Terry Scurr walks 510 miles

Week 17 (28<sup>th</sup> June – 4<sup>th</sup> July) of Terry's epic virtual trek to raise money for

Macmillan Cancer Support. Terry writes: "I walked 38.4 miles this week, following the route from Glenfarg to Killiecrankie, a village in Perth and Kinross, on the edge of the Cairngorms National Park. My total so far is 510 miles. The journey is now 73.9% complete. Only 179 miles to go. This is the longest walk I have ever taken. However, I hasten to say that this walk, on the level, in soft shoes on a carpet, and a wife to chat with while I drink her coffee, is not to be sneezed at." Please give generously to support Terry's fantastic effort.

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/terry-scurr>

## The Abolitionist Project

### From gradients of misery to gradients of bliss...



David Pearce delivered a talk on transhumanism to us on 9<sup>th</sup> May. This is an edited transcript of his talk. You can watch the full video on our YouTube channel.

*"I just wanted to say I really enjoyed my first experience of Dorset Humanists. It's always a great talk if you come away with a list of things you want to look further into, and this talk definitely provided that." Claire*

**T**ranshumanism is a disparate movement but broadly there are three main strands: (1) Superintelligence – the idea that we can radically alter our intellectual capacities and ultimately become post-human; (2) superlongevity – just as silicon robots can be reprogrammed, repaired and upgraded indefinitely there's no reason why we can't do the same for organic robots so that humans can lead indefinite healthy lifespans; (3) Eliminate suffering: it's going to be possible to use biotechnology and genetic engineering to phase out the biology of suffering throughout the living world and replace the information-signalling system based on the conventional pleasure/pain axis, which causes horrendous suffering and misery, with an information-signalling system based on 'gradients of intelligent bliss'. Essentially the whole biosphere is now programmable. What matters is not just the wellbeing of one particular species – *Homo sapiens* – we want to reengineer the whole biosphere so that we can create the wellbeing of all sentience. It's a very ancient goal in one sense from Buddhism to various Utopian schemes but what is different now is that it is possible to specify how it's technically possible.

Why does the problem of suffering seem so insuperable? Hundreds of millions of people experience some form of physical pain and



unfortunately with our existing genome it's inevitable. So that's one big problem we need to tackle. Then there's psychological pain and sadly, in spite of the tremendous advances we see in civilisation, there is the so-called 'hedonic treadmill'. This is a suite of negative feedback mechanisms in the brain that stop most of us being very miserable or very happy for too long.

*"Evolution did not design us to be happy. Being discontented a lot of the time is actually good for our genes even if it's psychologically bad for us."*

Anyone who sat around on the African savanna counting their blessings or a relaxed contented mother who was sure that all would be right for her offspring – she didn't leave as many copies of her genes as the ultra-neurotic mother constantly seeing lions on the horizon. The hedonic treadmill is tremendously powerful. Six months after having a terrible accident which leaves one paraplegic, or six months after winning the lottery, most people will have returned to their default level of wellbeing or ill-being before the tragedy or the great win. Some people have a relatively high hedonic set-point – the default setting around which they tend to fluctuate in the course of a lifetime – other people are less lucky and have a low hedonic set-point. Some people spend most of their lives below hedonic zero – gradients of misery. Any solution to the problem of suffering will need to ratchet up hedonic set points. We know from twin studies that hedonic set point has a high degree of genetic loading. Now that we have decoded the human genome we are starting to tease out the molecular biological details. We need a twin-track approach. I'm not going to be talking today about socio-political reforms today but unless we are prepared to tackle the biological and genetic roots of suffering then in 500 or 5000 years' time our successors will be sitting around and saying 'Why aren't we happy? Why are we so discontented?'

Ethically and morally the abolitionist project should extend to the rest of the living world. The easiest way to do this would be shut down factory farms and slaughterhouses – probably the greatest source of severe, easily avoidable suffering in the world.

Animal abuse seems to lead to terrible global pandemics too. Realistically, this is probably going to happen through a 'cultured meat' revolution. Cultured meat is identical in taste and texture as it exists today but produced without cruelty.

The final stage of the abolitionist project will be tackling the horrendous suffering in nature. That probably sounds impossible and biologically illiterate but these are all technical problems with technical solutions. I'm not invoking godlike superintelligence but recognisable extensions of existing technologies.

We will have to alter our genetic source code. A lot of people are extremely uncomfortable about this – perhaps with good reason.

*"The 20<sup>th</sup> century eugenics movement started off with good intentions but ended up with the horrors of the euthanasia programme and the Third Reich. A lot of people are extremely uncomfortable with the idea of genetic experimentation with kids."*

But the point I would like to emphasize is that if one thinks it's ethically justifiable to bring new life and suffering into the world one is committed to a form of genetic experimentation. This is what sexual reproduction involves. At the moment it's a genetic crapshoot [a risky or unpredictable venture] where two people get together and make love and a kid appears and one hopes that the results are going to be positive. I'm not entirely convinced that this form of genetic experimentation can be justified because there's no prior consent but let's not go down the anti-natalist route. Let's assume that people will want to continue to have children. And so the question we should ask is should we continue the genetic crapshoot or should we actually choose benign genes for our future children to load the genetic dice to give them the best possible start in life? And such traits as pain sensitivity and hedonic set points are amenable to genetic manipulation. Already in China we are seeing the first designer babies. An unfortunate term but which seems to be quite standard.





Starting with pain sensitivity – this isn't just airy-fairy speculation. Consider the so-called 'volume knob' for pain - the SCN9A gene. This gene has dozens of different alleles. Nonsense mutations of the SCN9A gene can eliminate pain sensitivity (congenital analgesia) entirely which is not a good idea because people with this mutation have to live lives wrapped up in cotton wool. But before thinking of abolishing any form of physical pain altogether what I'm talking about is ensuring that future children are born with benign low-pain alleles of the SCN9A gene we can ensure that all future humans will enjoy the pain sensitivity of today's genetic outliers – the sort of person who nonchalantly says 'Oh pain is just a useful signalling mechanism'. They are normally-functioning people but pain isn't very significant in their lives. Tragically there are other versions of SCN9A where one is much more sensitive to pain and this can be extremely debilitating.

*“Scottish woman Jo Cameron was reported in 2019 to have a double mutation of a newly-discovered far out gene which regulates anandamide (from the Sanskrit word ananda, which means 'bliss') which is an endogenous cannabinoid – she has negligible sensitivity to pain, she is almost always happy and never gets depressed.”*

Of course we need to look at risks – will someone with an elevated pain threshold engage in risky behaviour? But essentially, pain sensitivity is an adjustable parameter.

In terms of hedonic range we all know people who are hyperthymic [a personality type characterized by an exceptionally, or in some cases, abnormally positive mood and disposition] whose quality of life tends to be much higher than people who are either neurotypical or people who tend to suffer from clinical depression. The luckiest hyperthymic people today can still behave appropriately and be high-functioning and socially responsible. But their default setting is much higher than most people. Unlike pain we can't point to a single gene that's a volume knob for hedonic set point but there are a number of genes that modulate

hedonic set point. And of you think it's right to have kids should you just roll the genetic dice and hope for the best or should you choose benign gene variants associated with a higher hedonic set point for your future children?

*“I would urge that all prospective parents should be given access to pre-implantation genetic screening and counselling and after trials access to CRISPR<sup>1</sup> genome editing so that they can choose the broad psychological make-up of their kids.”*

Over time there would be a change in the nature of selection pressure. What settings would you choose? From minus ten (despair) to hedonic zero (neutral) to plus ten (bliss). In time I predict there would be selection pressure in terms of ratcheting up hedonic range. The more speculative sci-fi element here would be to go far beyond plus ten. If you think of plus ten as the most wonderful peak experience you have ever had in your life imagine if we decide to create a civilisation with a hedonic range of plus 70 to 100. One can still have immense hedonic contrast and yet the default setting can be much higher than today. People will say surely you need to have pain, suffering, and misery because happiness is relative but we know that some people with clinical depression spend almost their entire lives below hedonic zero who experience gradients of misery. We should be aiming for a civilisation which is based on gradients of wellbeing. Forget about the really speculative stuff for now. Focusing on the next few decades, should we continue the current system of reproduction or should we aim for a more civilised, responsible parenthood approach?

Won't this be horrendously expensive? Won't only the elite benefit? The costs are coming crashing down, having universal screening will be extremely cost effective. It will catch all the well-known genetic diseases which are a tremendous burden on the economy. Depression itself in narrowly financial terms is a tremendous

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<sup>1</sup> CRISPR stands for 'clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats'



economic burden too. Pre-implantation genetic screening is most commonly used in India and China but sadly for gender selection but in principle all future life can be designed. All sorts of other attributes can be chosen too. This is a terrible minefield. In the case of CRISPR babies in China geneticists claimed they were trying to eliminate susceptibility to HIV but which had a benign side effect of enhanced memory and cognition. I suspect they were actually trying to create babies with higher IQ. So there are pitfalls and dilemmas. For instance, we have an impoverished conception of what intelligence is. If parents want to have high-IQ babies they are likely to have a lot of babies with 'super-Asperger's'. I'm not being judgmental here but there are profound ethical worries. We need to ask not only what is the optimum IQ but also the optimum AQ where AQ is the Asperger's or autism quotient. Ratchetting up IQ would also be to ratchet up AQ.

But my primary focus is on suffering, mood, and pain sensitivity and these are amenable to genetic control. I've glossed over many of the technical details. If anyone is thinking doesn't this all sound facile, simplistic, and haven't I considered all the things that can go wrong – all sorts of things can and will go wrong – but the unique, untested genetic experimentation we're doing today leads to all kinds of horrors so the question isn't can things go wrong but how can we minimise and mitigate risks and consider risk/reward ratios.

## The Humanist Case for the Abolition of Ageing



David Wood gave us our second talk on Transhumanism on 13<sup>th</sup> June. David is Chair of London Futurists, co-founder of the Transhumanist Party UK, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts,

and he holds an honorary Doctorate in Science from Westminster University. This

is an edited transcript of his talk. You can watch the full video on our YouTube channel.

### The acceleration of technological change

Some of the most interesting things happen by disruptions, by outside forces. I used to work for Psion which made handheld computers. But we were about to be impacted by the world of smart mobile phones. Our ambition was to combine Psion operating systems and mobile phone applications. Our partners such as Nokia sold hundreds of millions of phones using our software. This sets a pattern of *collaboration* and *convergence* for what's going to happen in many other technologies such as biotech and artificial intelligence in the years ahead. *Disruption* is often followed by a slow and disappointing phase which is sometimes followed by a fast and furious phase. Disruption requires not just new technology but a whole new supportive ecosystem of training, legal agreements and so forth. Disruption often happens in waves and the next wave is often bigger than the last one.

Arguably there have been four industrial revolutions and each revolutionary wave gets shorter because of positive feedback cycles: the first one based on steam and mechanisation lasted for 120 years; the second based on electricity, chemicals and mass production lasted for 80 years; the third based on computers and electronics lasted for 50 years; and we are now in the early phase of the fourth industrial revolution called NBIC:

- **NanoTech** (e.g. computers so small they could enter the bloodstream and your brain)
- **BioTech** (manipulating our genes, better healthcare)
- **InfoTech** (big data processing, artificial intelligence)
- **CognoTech** (improving the neurons in our brain)



The biggest feedback cycle comes from more people on the earth: more brains, more people who are highly educated, people who are networked together. We have more scientists, engineers, designers, educators and entrepreneurs than ever before. We are likely to see more change and more disruption in the next twenty years than in any preceding twenty years period.

### Disruptions in the field of ageing

There have been three major approaches to dealing with illness:

1. **Bad behaviour:** illness caused by vice and immorality – the cure was repentance and good behaviour
2. **Bad hygiene:** illness caused by germs and poor sanitation – the cure included antibiotics and vaccines
3. **Bad biology:** illness caused by cellular damage – the cure is to fix ageing

The fourth industrial revolution is gradually putting this within our grasp – the ability to address damage at the cellular and intercellular level. Heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and Alzheimer's are all diseases of ageing (also referred to as *senescence* - the condition or process of deterioration with age). Gompertz's Law (after Benjamin Gompertz, 1825) states that after middle age our risk of mortality from all causes doubles every eight years. Is this a hard fact of nature or can we do something about it?

Some people do not fall foul of these diseases and they are often in family clusters. Some people are called 'super-agers': they get to the age of 95 with no cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or cognitive decline. They can have active lives into their early 100s. They eventually die of course but not of the usual chronic diseases which are so costly but from rapidly-acting infections. We should be exploring what's genetically different about these people. So if we could replicate super-ageing it could have major economic benefits.



### Rejuvenation breakthrough?

#### Three waves of healthy ageing

1. Technology to help people 'age in place' e.g. accident sensors
2. Technology to enable more people to be super-agers – living like they're 75 even though they're 95+ (learning from diets and lifestyles as well as genetics)
3. Technology enabling people to be 'forever young': living like you're 35 even though you're 125+. This is possible by the year 2060, with a 50% probability. If society makes it a priority we could reach this sooner, by 2040.

#### Reactions to the idea of healthy superlongevity

You may be in two minds. You may think it would be nice to live a bit longer and that it would be better for the economy if people were healthier in later life. At the same time you may think this is a bit dangerous, an unrealistic fantasy. You may think we should focus on problems like Covid or malaria. You may think in the long term it would be disastrous for the planet in terms of overpopulation, climate change, inequality, and so forth. I want to argue that it is a realistic possibility and that it would be very good for humanity.

The naked mole rat is an example in nature of an animal that does not age. Their lifespan is 32+ years which is the world record for rodents. They are highly resistant to cancer and osteoarthritis. Dipping into the science a bit, we all have something called hyaluronic acid (HA) in the connective tissue between our cells. Naked mole rats have longer chains and higher molecular





weights of hyaluronic acid than other animals. The famously wrinkly Shah-Pei dog also has long-chain hyaluronic acid in its connective tissue. Shah-Pei dogs have a significantly reduced incidence of tumours. Experiments with the HA gene have produced transgenic mice which are fitter, stronger, smoother, less prone to cancer, and which have some increase in lifespan. Calico Life Sciences, an offshoot of Google, has recently published research results which confirm that naked mole rats defy the Gompertz Law. Other species resistant to ageing include lobsters, the rougheye rockfish (which can live 200+ years), bowhead whales (which can live 120+ years), quahog clams (500+ years), the Great Basin bristlecone pine (5,000 years), and the albatross (one example of which continues to lay eggs at age 68).

*"I'm inclined to agree with Richard Feynman: 'There is nothing yet found in biology that indicates the inevitability of death... it is only a matter of time before biologists discover the cause and find the cure' (1964)."*

We are seeing a Copernican revolution in the bio-gerontological world whereby ageing is being put at the centre of analysis rather than the periphery. Ageing is caused by damage to fundamental biological processes, such as stem cells no longer regenerating, the inflammation reaction becoming chronic, our cells' ability to adapt to stress going wrong, our network of proteins stopping working, our metabolism creating too much junk causing damage to large molecules and causing our proteins to misfold, and causing our epigenetics and regulatory RNA to go wrong. There are lots of ideas about how to deal with these causes. So we could put more research into all of these areas.

Living involves a complex metabolism of biochemical reactions. These biochemical reactions animate us but they have some damaging side-effects at the cellular level. When we're young, we have lots of repair mechanisms which deal with the damage but over time the repair mechanisms also get damaged. The damage makes us more prone to the diseases of old age, including

increased susceptibility to Covid-19. The more damage we accumulate the more we experience multiple co-morbidities. Eventually the damage gets too much and we die.

So why not edit the biological metabolism inside humans to reduce the damage? That's quite promising but it's very difficult because most of the changes have side effects which are hard to manage. The best approach is to do what the human body already does which is to remove damage periodically. A bit like going to the dentist to get damage treated early before it causes any more problems. This is less hard because there is a limited number of categories of damage. This is best summarised by the gerontologist Aubrey De Grey who says that ageing is caused by seven types of damage. He calls this SENS: Strategies for Engineering Negligible Senescence. It includes replacing lost and atrophied cells with stem cells, the removal of zombie cells, removing intracellular waste products and so on.

We can learn from how nature deals with accumulating damage, we can copy mechanisms from nature and we might even go beyond nature's capabilities with things like nanobots. So what can we learn from nature? The axolotl salamander can regenerate its limbs, tails, eyes, jaws, spinal cord, part of its heart and part of its brain. People are studying it hard to find out how it does it and whether we can repair human spinal cords for example.

As we age, our cells lose their ability to divide. The chromosomes get copied but the bit at the end of the chromosomes, called telomeres, don't get completely copied so they get shorter over time and eventually the cells can no longer divide. But there is an enzyme which can extend the telomeres again. Mice injected with this kind of gene therapy have increased their lifespan by 24%.

A technique known as parabiosis has also been used whereby the blood from two mice, one old and one young, circulates between them. This has had a rejuvenating effect on the old mouse but unfortunately an ageing effect on the young mouse. So it's



not seriously being considered as a treatment yet but it's an interesting area of research. See the TED talk on this by Tony Wyss-Coray. Rats treated with plasma injections also showed a rejuvenation effect on blood, liver, and heart.

To conclude, let's look at the future of this technological ecosystem. In the 1980s about ten people were working seriously on ageing. My observations indicate that this number is growing tenfold every decade so by the end of the 2030s we may have a million people working on it. So it's a hard problem, but it could be solved if we get a million people collaborating in a constructive way. These people work in a variety of industries: cosmetics, military, sports, food, pharma, IT and so on. We will also see people wanting to invest in these technologies. So by the 2040s it's likely that we will see affordable, comprehensive, and reliable therapies in wide use. 120 year olds will be quite athletic – 120 might be the new 80 and *eventually* 120 will be the new 30. My estimate is that the probability of success is 50% provided society decides to do it.

People ask why don't you just accept ageing? You may remember the 'Serenity Prayer' which has some good advice for humanists as well as religious believers: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." The *difference* changes over time and science enables us to intervene more and more.

*"Nature, left to its own devices, wants five of your seven children dead, it wants you dead by 50, and everything better than that is brought to you by science, technology and good politics."*  
David Frum

### Further reading

*The Abolition of Aging: The forthcoming radical extension of healthy human longevity* (2016) David Wood

*Ending Aging: The Rejuvenation Breakthroughs That Could Reverse Human Aging in Our Lifetime* (2008) Aubrey De Grey



# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

*From Rt Hon Conor Burns MP,  
Bournemouth West*

Thank you for contacting me about Mubarak Bala, President of the Nigerian Humanist Association. The UK has always championed freedom of religion or belief for everyone and I welcome the Government's unwavering commitment to defending freedom of religion or belief as a universal human right. This includes the right to have no religious conviction or belief. As a country that has always been a beacon for freedom and tolerance, I firmly believe the UK should not shirk its responsibilities in this area and I welcome that defending freedom of religion or belief for all remains a UK policy priority.

I am told that the UK Government, along with international partners, is monitoring the arrest of Mubarak Bala closely. The Minister for Africa raised Mr Bala's case with the Nigerian Minister of Foreign Affairs on 21 May and the UK's High Commission in Abuja has also discussed the case with the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Police. The UK will continue to stress the importance of a transparent investigation that respects Mr Bala's human rights, the rule of law, and the Nigerian constitutional right to freedom of religion or belief.

I am encouraged that, in Nigeria, the UK is calling on the Nigerian Government to do more to reduce conflict and improve social cohesion, including hosting a conference on fostering cohesion back in February 2020. I understand that a process of identifying solutions to meet the needs of all communities has begun. However, there is a long way to go. I sincerely appreciate your concerns about the treatment of Mubarak Bala, who I know has faced considerable hardship in Nigeria over several years and will follow developments closely.





*From Keith Porteous Wood, President of the National Secular Society*

Dear Dorset Humanists

I hope you are keeping well and safe. This has been an unsettling and unprecedented time for all of us. It has changed the way we live and at least temporarily eroded many of the freedoms we cherish.

In the summer edition of the NSS Bulletin we assess the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on secularist principles and campaigning. For example, we prompted the Charity Commission to open a compliance case into the Kingdom Church in south London after it emerged that its bishop was selling 'plague protection kits' consisting of oil and string.

We also welcome a breakthrough on religious education reform in Wales and plans to abolish Scotland's blasphemy law. In both cases more work is necessary to protect fundamental freedoms but we broadly welcome the fact that the Welsh government is to replace RE with 'Religion, Values and Ethics' which will include a requirement to teach about non-religious worldviews.

Various forms of religious fundamentalism are on the rise and religious groups' political lobbying is increasing. All this reinforces the need for a vibrant NSS, to keep making the case for a secular state free of religious privilege and to oppose attacks on basic human rights purportedly in the name of 'religious freedom'.

Your continued support will ensure we are well-resourced and equipped to confront the challenges ahead. Thank you as always for your continued support.

■ Dorset Humanists is an associated group of the National Secular Society. A few copies of the NSS Bulletin will be available as soon as we can arrange events in our usual venues. Meanwhile, please visit the NSS [website](#) and consider becoming an individual supporter.

■ Alastair Lichten, Head of Education at the National Secular Society, is scheduled to speak to Dorset Humanists on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September. His topic will be 'The Case against Faith Schools'.

## Help Protect Humanists at Risk



Gulalai Ismail, aged 33, is a humanist and human rights activist from Pakistan. When she was 16 she founded Aware Girls, an organization that works to empower women and girls in her country, and since 2017 she has been a Board member of Humanists International.

Because of her human rights activism in Pakistan, Gulalai faced (and still faces) harsh persecution and harassment, like many other humanists at risk in her country. She has been accused of blasphemy and terrorism, and eventually she was forced to leave her country and to seek asylum in the USA, leaving her family behind in Pakistan, where they are currently still harassed by the Pakistani authorities.

Gulalai was first detained on 12 October 2018 as she returned to Islamabad from a Board meeting in London. She was arrested by the Pakistani FIA (Federal Investigation Authority), who also confiscated her passport and listed Gulalai's name on the 'exit control list', removing her right to travel.

Within minutes of her being detained, Humanists International was alerted and had begun the process of compiling information and coordinating our global campaign to ensure her safety.

Almost one year after her arrest, on 19 September 2019, Gulalai announced that she had safely reached the United States to claim asylum.

In the video message below, Gulalai reflects on a year of persecution, what it means to live as a humanist in Pakistan, and what role Humanists International played when she was forced to leave her country last year.

■ Dorset Humanists is an associate member of Humanists International.

Watch video and donate [here](#)

<https://humanists.international>





## Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

July 2020

**H**umanism has always been associated with liberal, progressive ideas. Since the eighteenth century Enlightenment we have been champions of science, reason, knowledge, liberty, human rights, economic development, ending poverty, ending discrimination, greater equality, internationalism and so on. But I'm worried about what's happened to the progressive liberal left because it seems to have mutated into an intolerant authoritarian ideology. Anyone who dares question its orthodoxies, or trips on its policing of language, is now cast as sexist, racist, xenophobic, homophobic, transphobic, and they are liable to be 'called-out', 'cancelled', no-platformed, dishonoured, dismissed, and even investigated by the police. We have entered an ugly new era of McCarthyism. I think humanists need to resist the erosion of free thought and free speech which is neither progressive nor liberal.

In 2006, when I worked for Dorset County Council, I co-wrote and delivered a diversity training course for hundreds of council staff. The Race Relations Act of 1976 made discrimination on the grounds of colour, ethnic origin, ethnicity, nationality and national origin unlawful. It placed a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure that their functions were carried out with due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 imposed a duty on public authorities to publish a Race Equality Scheme, showing how they intended to achieve racial equality in employment practices and service delivery. Under the Act, public authorities had a duty to regularly monitor the racial balance of employees and service users. In addition to informing employees about this legislation our training course raised awareness of racial stereotyping and explored how council employees could promote good race relations and eliminate unlawful discrimination. I believed then, and I believe now, that all of this was reasonable and positive. The Black Lives Matter movement, however, is more problematic. Public understanding of complex realities is not well-served by three-word slogans and solidarity postures which can have the unintended consequence of sharpening divisions and worsening race relations. Racism is a complex concept which needs careful handling; it does not serve race relations to assume that everyone is unconsciously racist or that we all bear the guilt of historic crimes. We need fewer slogans, less ranting, more listening, more understanding and tolerance, more friendship, and more informed dialogue if we are going to build on the progress we have made in the last fifty years.