

SUMMER 2005

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# HUMANISM SCOTLAND

The magazine of the Humanist Society of Scotland



**MAKE  
POVERTY  
HISTORY  
MARCH**

**EIBF  
– WIN  
TICKETS  
TO HEAR  
GRAYLING**

**BRITAIN'S FIRST!  
A LEGALLY RECOGNISED  
HUMANIST MARRIAGE**

**PLUS: AIDS IN AFRICA; A HUMANIST YEAR**



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## HUMANISM SCOTLAND

*is the official  
organ of the*

## Humanist Society of Scotland

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[www.humanism-scotland.org.uk](http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk)  
[info@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:info@humanism-scotland.org.uk)

The Humanist Society of Scotland seeks to represent those who adopt a non-religious, but ethical life-stance based on enlightened self-interest. It aims to build a better human world without reliance on supernatural forces.

*Front cover main picture*

Karen Watts and Martin Reijns  
after their wedding at Edinburgh Zoo  
(Photo courtesy of Rod Shearer Photography)

*Inside back cover*

Edinburgh Castle from Princes Street Gardens



Articles published in *Humanism Scotland* are the responsibility of their authors and are accepted for publication, in part or whole, according to the space available and at the Editor's discretion.

The views expressed in such items are likely to be generally Humanist in content but represent, strictly, the opinion of their authors and not necessarily those of the Society.

Letters to the Editor are welcome and need not be from Humanists. They will be published (possibly edited) if, in the judgement of the Editor, they are valid and helpful comments of interest to Humanists.

Writers' names and addresses will be published unless otherwise requested, but all letters *must* have the names and addresses of their writers – anonymous letters will not be published.

It is our intention to enhance the content and influence of Humanism in Scotland.

### Editor

Alex Scott  
51 Inveroran Drive  
GLASGOW  
G61 2PJ  
0141 942 8214  
[editor@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:editor@humanism-scotland.org.uk)

### HSS Secretary

Ivan Middleton  
26 Inverleith Row  
EDINBURGH  
EH3 5QH  
0131 552 9046  
[secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk)

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Design & production by Paul Forbes  
[paul@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:paul@humanism-scotland.org.uk)

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**I** have to report that, sadly, there will be no more *Plain View* columns from Eric Stockton.

'I am very much lacking in energy,' says Eric. 'I can do most things, very slowly, at the cost of more or less continuous fatigue. I'm giving up almost everything except lying about and talking to people who come and see me. As for taking hold of a job and doing it, I cannot guarantee a solution. The problem is chronic heart fatigue and slow heart failure, but I'm in good spirits and wish everybody well.'

A recognition of Eric's contributions to our magazines, past and present, will appear in the next edition of *Humanism Scotland*.



## ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

We are happy to receive articles and shorter pieces for inclusion in the magazine. Articles should normally be between 600 and 1,800 words, with book and film reviews between 400 and 800 words. News items should be approximately 200 to 400 words (but please bear in mind that publication frequency will not always accommodate otherwise newsworthy pieces).

Text can be supplied by email, disk or hard copy. Regular word processing file formats are normally acceptable (e.g. .txt, .rtf, .doc). Please include your name and contact details at the beginning or end of the text, with the date.

Relevant photographs are welcome. Generally speaking, digital pictures should be taken at the highest resolution available. Hard copy photographs can be scanned and returned.

The editor's details can be found on the facing page.



# A MARRIAGE NOT MADE IN HEAVEN (ACTUALLY, IN THE ZOO!)

## SCOTTISH HUMANISTS MAKE HISTORY WITH LEGAL WEDDINGS

IVAN MIDDLETON



Ivan with Karen  
and Martin

Photo courtesy of Rod Shearer Photography

**O**n 18 June 2005 I conducted the first legal Humanist marriage ceremony to take place in the British Isles. This was the culmination of a campaign which had started nineteen years earlier, following the first Humanist wedding in Scotland conducted by Robin Wood. Since then, hundreds of couples who followed had to arrange to have a civil ceremony as well to make their marriage legal. My two sons and their wives went down this path, but they now celebrate their anniversary on the date of their Humanist wedding.

Many office bearers down the years played their part in advancing our arguments: Fergus Watt, George Rodger, Bill McIntosh. The Humanist Society of Scotland had argued that couples who wanted to have Humanist marriages were being discriminated against. Charles Douglas and I, on behalf of the HSS, presented a petition to the Scottish Parliament in 2001. Whilst the Parliamentarians appeared sympathetic, the lawyers assured them no action was necessary.

We then embarked upon a series of meetings with the Registrar General. These took place over a few years. Our argument to him, as it had been to the Scottish Parliament, was that it was now unlawful under the European Human Rights Act to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of their religion or belief. The Registrar General had promised to review our arguments, and we had provided him with statistics showing that we were performing about a hundred weddings a year.

At our meeting with him in April we

were delighted when he told us that his review had led him to the conclusion that our argument was correct, and to prevent any further discrimination he was prepared to authorise twelve Humanist Celebrants to solemnise marriages throughout Scotland. His thinking had been in part influenced by a House of Lords decision which had set out new guidelines on how this clause should be interpreted.

It was decided by the Ceremonies Committee that there should be five Celebrants each from the East and West of Scotland, and two from the North. The Regional Co-ordinators made the selection. Experience of conducting Humanist weddings was an important criterion.

The approved celebrants are:

### In the West

Alastair Douglas, *Glasgow*  
Mandy Evans-Ewing, *Glasgow*  
Jess Fitzgerald, *Glasgow*  
Joe Hughes, *Johnstone*  
Robin Wood, *Kilmarnock*

### In the North

Pam McDonald, *Aberdeen*  
Alan Smurthwaite, *Muir of Ord*

### In the East

Ron McLaren, *St Andrews*  
Ken McMillan, *Edinburgh*  
Ivan Middleton, *Edinburgh*  
Jim Petherick, *Kinross*  
Mary Wallace, *Doune*

We then set about arranging an induction course for our twelve most experienced and suitably located celebrants.

Mary Wallace and I have conducted about 200 weddings between us, and I had been a supply registrar for nearly

three years. We facilitated this course and had a senior manager from the Registrar General's Office explain to us the legal niceties involved.

Fortunately, we are able to keep to our pattern of encouraging the couple to be creative in writing their own vows – and indeed as much of their wedding script as they wished. The only new legal requirement is that we must formally ask each whether they are prepared to accept the other as their lawfully wedded husband/wife. Then we declare them husband and wife, before signing the Marriage Schedule with them and their witnesses. This has to be done using a black pen as this schedule is kept in an archive. The couple later receive their Marriage Certificate from the registrar in whose district the marriage took place.

The first couple to be married in a legal Humanist ceremony were Karen Watts, from County Clare, and Martin Reijns, from Holland – delightful young people. It took place at Edinburgh Zoo. We had issued a Press Release, and just about every paper in the British Isles took up the story in a very positive way. Internationally, we had papers from as far afield as New York and South America cover it. Radio broadcasts and television interviews with Karen, Martin, myself and Charles Douglas followed. The HSS paid for a video to be made of the ceremony itself.

We are delighted for all Humanist couples who choose to be married in Scotland, as they can now celebrate their love and commitment in a way of their choosing. ■

*Ivan Middleton is HSS Secretary*

# NEW CELEBRANTS JOIN THE TEAM

## MARY WALLACE & JIM PETHERICK

In order to cope with the increasing demand for Humanist ceremonies, we ran a training course in Perth in April, and as a result we now have eleven new Celebrants to add to our Register. This brings the total number of Celebrants to forty-five. Some of these are in areas where we desperately need coverage, such as Angus and Dundee.

The course has been extended and updated and now runs over three days with a residential weekend, followed two weeks later by a full day at the Crematorium to conduct mock ceremonies. More time is devoted to skills development than previously, and the number of trainees was capped at twelve, in order to ensure adequate time for development, assessment and feedback.

The course evaluations indicated that the trainees found the experience enjoyable and very effective in equipping them with the skills needed to conduct funerals. 'Very useful and productive', 'great fun and very informative', and 'one of the most professionally conducted courses I have ever attended' – were just some of the comments received.

It is likely that we will run another



course later this year, and if you or anyone you know might be interested in undertaking the training for what is rewarding and enjoyable work, please contact the Ceremonies Co-ordinator. In the future we will also be looking to run a course on weddings and baby namings. ■

Mary Wallace & Jim Petherick are Celebrant trainers; Jim is an NEC member

*The trainees, pictured, are:*

*Seated, from left to right: Helen Wood (Glasgow); Sylvia Cameron (Inverness); Alan McLellan (Glasgow); Louise Scott (Glasgow); Margaret Maclean (Glasgow)*  
*Standing, from left to right: John Duncan (Angus); Gary Smith (Dundee); Jim Graham (Aberdeenshire); Marion Richardson (Aberdeenshire); David Halliday (Perthshire); Gillian Stewart (Fife)*



Cathy Crawford holds the fort (tent)

## When HSS met MPH

**With the G8 summit on our doorstep, Society members went along to lend support to the recent Make Poverty History march in Edinburgh.**

The HSS contingent set up stall in the Campaigns Zone tent, where there was a constant stream of people asking questions about Humanism, including at least one RE (or rather, RME) teacher, and a couple interested in arranging their upcoming wedding ceremony. Volunteers were on hand all day to answer queries, tend the stall and give out leaflets and free magazines. Happily, all the material on offer was snapped up.

Our marchers had to wait four hours before they actually got to leave the Meadows starting point, but this was due to the vast numbers wanting to join. On the plus side, the sun shone.

Overall there was a carnival atmosphere, with only minor crowd trouble. It was a day when various groups came together to do the same thing: make the G8 leaders realise they have the power to end poverty. And at Gleneagles a few days later they went some way towards achieving this goal.

Cathy Crawford, our co-ordinator for the day, extends her thanks to all involved. ■

# BHA Conference Report

JUNE MAXWELL ON A HUMANIST TRIP OVER THE BORDER

The British Humanist Association held their annual conference in Gateshead on the weekend of 10-12 June.

**T**he first speakers gave an overview of their work in various fields. Babu Gogineni of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) talked (in serene and eloquent terms) about the fairly new Apignani Bioethics Centre and its concern for the hindrance to social and medical progress. Matters like stem cell research were being thwarted through the interference of religious groups. He pointed out the need for constant engagement at both local and international levels on these issues. Georges Liénard also spoke of the need for our interaction at local and European level, especially on matters like Concordats. These are policy agreements drawn up between policy makers and member states. The Vatican has already signed (that is to say, exerted its influence upon) fourteen (out of twenty-five) concordats with various countries – the most pernicious being the one with Slovakia.

But it wasn't all bad news. The next two speakers brought some cheer to the proceedings with inspiring talks. Leo Igwe (an intelligent, colourful and happy character) spoke with passion about the social and educative work his group are doing in Nigeria. He also emphasised the great need for this work by explaining some of the daily horrors taking place there, like witchcraft and ritual killings – all practices implicitly sanctioned by outdated beliefs. Perhaps the best news came from Maryam Namazie who told us about the recent and on-going protests in Iran. She cited women overtly burning their hijabs; youths openingly listening to rock music, and out-and-out defiance by women who insist on attending football matches. Now that Iran has qualified for the World Cup, this might just be the catalyst the populace needs to get some democratic principles established in their country. So, the fight goes on in these places.

Sunday brought new delights. Prof. Crick spoke generally about Humanist matters. But alongside him was the more dynamic Prof Frank Furedi, who sparked a very lively debate by saying that environmental (and other protest groups) often sell human beings short. Space here deters me from expanding on his argument, but in essence he believes that rather than concentrating on our 'vulnerabilities' and blaming ourselves

for our misfortunes, we ought to be stressing the resilience of humanity and how it has the ability to overcome formidable obstacles. Throughout the weekend, many others spoke on various matters of concern to local groups.

As a treat, we were invited to a tour of Newcastle, which was exceedingly enjoyable: the Angel of the North, the Tyne Bridge, Newcastle Brown, etc, being among the attractions.

I was sorry to see that out of the fifty or so delegates that attended, these included around fifteen BHA staff; and most of the others were speakers and their partners, and almost all were over sixty! Many of them were disappointed that I was the sole participant from the HSS, but someone said there was also an attendee from Kirkcaldy – so I sought him out. I was surprised to find Ibrahim, an Egyptian and a former Muslim, who works in the Kirkcaldy hospital as a neurologist. We had a good chat on the train home and I've persuaded him (and perhaps his friend) to join the Society and come along to both the Edinburgh and Glasgow meetings. He's promised to stay in touch.

All in all, the event was an excellent opportunity for networking and making new contacts, and it instilled in me renewed enthusiasm for the urgent tasks ahead. ■

*June Maxwell is a GG and NEC member*

## At the World Humanist Congress

by Ivan Middleton

**AMERICANS, Russians, Icelanders, Indians, citizens of the world – all Humanists – flocked to Paris. And of course the Irish, English and Scots were there too. The theme of the Conference was the Separation of Religion and State.**

We met at Maison de l'UNESCO and at the Sorbonne University. Papers were presented on the position in the USA, France, India, Nigeria, Mexico and Russia. Each was full of fairly bad news for varying reasons. Robert Boston from America vividly reminded us of how America's founding fathers had desperately tried to keep religion and state separate. They had observed the dire consequences in Europe when this had not happened. Fundamentalism has changed all that. A similar picture of fundamentalist dogma replacing reason in modern

India was painted by IHEU'S redoubtable Chief Executive, Babu Gogineni.

I will try to identify briefly some highlights:

Suzanne Lalonde gave a paper on 'Why Jesus is More Appealing than Darwin to American Women'. The answer seemed to lie in part in their relative social isolation and exhaustion, and also in their expectation that Jesus will deal with their problems anyway.

In a Workshop on 'How to use the Media', presented by Terry Sanderson (NSS), we were all exhorted not to be paranoid about the press, but rather to give them stories and facts. Terry identified to his international audience how well the HSS had done recently with our Press Release about the first legal Humanist marriage.

Barbara Smoker was recognised as the International Humanist of 2005. It was recalled how she had left an RC prelate speechless in a TV appearance. He had been railing against artificial insemination, and she said to him that she could not understand his opposition to a possible 'Virgin Birth!' ■



Attendees of the Strategy Planning Weekend, which took place in March, with facilitator Jean Bareham in the centre.

The NEC is still keen to hear from members who can offer help or expertise in various areas, e.g. fundraising, education, media, PR.



(Photo taken by Hugh Hill, who also attended)

## NEC Digest

with RON McLAREN

**S**ince the Spring edition of 2004, this report has been conspicuous by its absence, ably pointed out at this year's AGM. Having been adopted, co-opted and mildly bludgeoned into a role of minute taking, it was perhaps inevitable that the subject matter would fall into a full, but still willing, lap. So, picking up from Cathy Crawford, who helped to maintain the flow, and the ensuing gap of 15 months, here we go.

As a relative newcomer, to say that NEC involvement needs commitment is an understatement, not only in personal time but also in its related demands. The much hoped for four hour maximum meeting time has not been achieved, and in some cases the agenda has had to be curtailed to allow priority items to have due level of discussion. The new venue at Grangemouth proved to be worthwhile, although accessibility only by car meant that it would be short lived - hence the hoped for move back to Stirling.

Some recent highlights include: a new Treasurer (Gordon Ross); budgets and financial reporting system with Gordon at the helm; repercussions from the extensive funeral directors survey and consequent elections to the ceremonies network; the awarding of National Lottery funding to review and establish the Society's five year development objectives, and the formation of the related Development Sub-committee; the formation of a Constitutions Sub-committee following the announcement

of charities law review; the appointment of Ivan to the chaplaincy, and he and Charles on ethics consultation; the input from Paul Forbes on the Society's publicity, image and presentation, besides much-needed assistance to an ailing editor; the ongoing demands of consulting in the legals of family law and discrimination; a more structured approach to the training and subsequent assessment of celebrants - old and new; a radical review of our website; formation of a Magazine and Publicity Sub-committee; new NEC members Jim, Jill, June and Mandy; donating to third world humanist organisations (Nepal and Ghana); involvement in the high-profile Make Poverty History campaign: a rewrite of ceremony leaflets, and *The Challenge of Humanist Ethics* booklet; our on-going role in the current planks of our objectives (Bioethics, Euthanasia, Secular Education) and as of 1/6/2005, the defining moment of Legal Humanist Marriage.

All in active progress!

Then there are the routines of planning: EIBF, the Ceremonies conference in September, the Society's annual conference (22-23 October in Perth (Scotland!)). Not to mention the daily, weekly and monthly toing and froing of a Humanist inspired Society, and the rebuttal and enlightenment of those who haven't seen it yet! ■

*Ron McLaren is a DG and NEC member*

## Humanism Down Under

by JOAN GIBSON

While visiting family in the Antipodes, I was invited to the Australian Humanist of the Year Award dinner, hosted by the Humanist Association of South Australia. The award was made to Dr Tim Flannery, Director of the South Australia Museum, in recognition of his 'scientific discoveries and Humanist attitude'. His evolutionary expertise has led him to propound bold and compelling views on population capacity and 'terra nullius' (no man's land).

The presentation was made by Humanist and retired Senator, the Honourable Chris Schacht, who called on Humanists, Secularists and Atheists everywhere to campaign for secular government.

In his acceptance speech, Dr Flannery called for a generosity of spirit, essential for true Humanism. Humanism must make a difference if it is to mean anything. A lot is resting on us to be the salt of the earth and prevent decay in society. Flannery cited ancient agrarian societies such as Tonga, where perishable goods had to be shared, in contrast to now when we can hoard money and be selfish, e.g. allowing the gap between rich and poor to widen.

The Australians were very interested to learn about us and bowled over by our 700+ membership, charity status and development plan. With only sixty-four members in South Australia (population two million) they sadly see themselves as a dying breed and seemed rather downhearted. Because non-religious ceremonies are legislated for by Federal Government, Humanists are expected to support independent secular celebrants and consequently are deprived of the profitable recruiting activity that is so beneficial to us.

I found the fervour of some for legalising recreational drugs puzzling. Surely there are worthier and more positive causes to support in furtherance of Humanism? But they have taken humanitarian causes to heart and raised money for midwifery in Papua New Guinea, the Atheist Centre's tsunami relief work in India, and educational provision for Liberian refugees in Ghana. They also encourage public debate of contemporary issues through a national essay competition.

If you are going down under do get in touch - you can contact them via their website ([www.users.on.net/~rmc/hsosfa.htm](http://www.users.on.net/~rmc/hsosfa.htm)). ■

# A CLASH OF TITANS?

by Cathy Crawford

Last autumn **Professor A C Grayling** of Birbeck College, London, and **Professor John Haldane** of the University of St Andrews debated the topic 'Preserving the Values of Secular Europe in a Time of Religious Turbulence'



**I** am not sure if as Humanists we are any more believers in ancient pagan gods such as Titans, but as a metaphor I use the image of two huge figures battling it out at the Royal Society of Edinburgh on a wet evening last September. Of course, coming as I did with an inclination to support Grayling's view, I may not be the most objective judge, but to me it was hardly a battle of equals: even in the style of delivery Grayling clearly had the edge. I felt there was really only one Titan, and that was the Humanist, Grayling.

To put briefly the central points: Haldane claimed, after a historical review of the last five hundred years, that whatever anyone professed the very fact that a European had lived in the Christian culture of Europe meant that his ethics grew out of and were of that culture. In contrast, Grayling, when he had his chance to respond, suggested that anyone who had arrived at a secular Humanist point of view had thought carefully about his or her beliefs, and not simply continued without examining the foundation of ideas. The Humanist was

thus in a stronger position to resist any Christian cultural pressure exerted by the historical strength of the Church and religion. The Humanist ethical position was therefore more strongly rooted.

Both speakers had something to say about perceived and real threats to Europe, and the extent to which they were related to religious faith.

It was a quick but insightful dash around a range of topics: from the European constitution to the dangers – not of Muslims – but in Grayling's terms 'Islamicists' (who have a very loose connection with the religion), and on to the basis of science. I am glad to report that our hero, Grayling, managed to knock down his opponent's arguments every time.

The subject is far too big for an hour's debate to do it justice, but it was heartening that the majority of the audience's questions were along the lines of Humanism, and challenging to Haldane's position. When a final question was taken on the speakers' views with regard to the French decision to ban the hijab in schools, Haldane

started to speak about people's faith not being an individual's choice, but of it being somehow out in the space beyond them – and thus not being a question of toleration. It was at this point that Grayling became even more animated, but sadly the argument had to be left out in the space where one presumes Haldane keeps his concept of faith. The evening ended at this point, where so much more needed to be said, as it raised all kinds of questions – such as how far it is possible to be tolerant.

It is fortunate that we as Humanists have such an articulate and able spokesperson for our views. I felt very fortunate to have had the chance to hear him represent mine and stimulate my thoughts. So I am very glad that he is to be our sponsored speaker at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August. I for one will make sure I have a chance to hear him speak again, and it will be all the better for not having to share the platform with someone who was simply unconvincing. ■

*Cathy Crawford is an EG and NEC member*

## WIN TICKETS TO HEAR A C GRAYLING

The HSS and BHA are sponsoring A C Grayling at this year's **Edinburgh International Book Festival** event, due to take place at 1.30pm on 18 August. We have four tickets to give away. For your chance to win them, just answer the following questions and post your entry to: **Alex Scott, 51 Inveroran Drive, GLASGOW G61 2PJ**. Please include your name, address, telephone no., and email address (if applicable). The first four correct entries drawn on **11 August** will receive the tickets.

- 1 A C Grayling's first name is:  
a) Archibald b) Andrew c) Anthony
- 2 The humanist and educational psychologist Margaret Knight caused a furore in 1955 with her BBC broadcast lectures 'Morals without Religion'. At which Scottish University was she working at the time?  
a) Aberdeen b) St Andrews c) Edinburgh
- 3 In 1994 a leading Humanist coined a term to describe the Humanist non-theistic life-stance. What was this term?



# A HUMANIST YEAR

## Part 2: June, July, August



JOAN GIBSON continues her series on the Humanist calendar with a look at the summer

**T**his year brings the two gravest issues facing the planet to our attention: global warming and poverty. These issues are of great concern to Humanists because we are totally committed to Human Rights and justice:

'Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfilment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.'

– *Humanist Manifesto III*

In contrast, some religionists are so focused on the next life that they see no need to act on these issues. Indeed, they might be deflecting God's will for the earth, e.g. by supporting the Kyoto Protocol.

### June

Named after the Roman goddess Juno, the month of June contains the summer solstice – which marks the first day of summer – and a few days later, on the 24th, the mis-called mid-summer day, which in fact marks the mid-point of our calendar.

The summer solstice is often referred to as 'the longest day' because it marks the northern-most point of the Sun's range at the tropic of Cancer; thereafter it moves southwards as we head for winter and darker days. This is an important day in the solar calendar, and has great significance for Sun worshippers and followers of New Age religions, and revivalists of an ancient religion such as Druidism.

However, for Humanists 21 June has greater significance, as it is the one day of the year dedicated to the celebration of Humanism around the world: International Humanist Day. We often feel aggrieved because Humanists can seem

to be an invisible part of the population. If we do not make ourselves visible on this one day of the year then we will deserve our lack of recognition.

### July

This is the one month that I have no special day for Humanists to mark. Around the country throughout summer there is a rolling programme of ridings, sea festivals, galas and Highland games. These events are rooted in history and are associated with local traditions. There is bound to be such an event happening near where you live.

This year the G8 leaders meet at Gleneagles and there are several opportunities to join with others demonstrating for Humanist values.

### August

This month brings an opportunity to make the anniversary of David Hume – a significant day for Humanists and Free Thinkers and all Scots. Born in Edinburgh on 26 April 1711, David Hume does not enjoy the recognition he merits in his native country, and it is perhaps not too early to begin thinking about how the 300th anniversary of his birth could be marked in Scotland. Meantime, we could establish the anniversary of his death, 25 August, as David Hume Day. Our philosopher surely deserves equal standing with the Nation's Bard.

*The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* describes Hume as the 'most influential thoroughgoing naturalist in modern philosophy', and Russell considers him to be 'one of the most important among philosophers'. Kant claimed his mind was 'awakened from dogmatic slumbers' by Hume, and his categorical imperative was his response to Hume's belief that

the foundation of ethics was aesthetics. Hume published his 'Treatise of Human Nature' in 1739. In it he claimed 'Reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions' and most of his subsequent philosophical writing reworked and amplified his empirical approach to the human mind. Also an essayist and historian, most of the acclaim he enjoyed in his lifetime related to his achievements in these fields. He died in Edinburgh in 1776, and the 'honest atheist' is buried on Calton Hill.

A. Herman in his history *The Scottish Enlightenment* maintains that Scotland, the first literate nation, laid the foundations of modernity and shaped the Britain, Europe and America we know today. David Hume was a major player in the Scottish Enlightenment. He believed, 'It is impossible for the arts and sciences to arise, at first, among any people unless that people enjoy the blessings of a free government', and that government should combine 'liberty which preserves society, and authority which preserves society'. Hume believed we learn from history and can make progress and become enlightened.

The most appropriate way to mark David Hume Day on 25 August would seem to be with a 'Le bon David' dinner, such as he frequently enjoyed. It must have three essential ingredients: good food, good wine (claret) and good company; with philosophical conversation, this was a recipe for Hume's idea of perfection.

I heartily recommend Roderick Graham's recently published life of David Hume, *The Great Infidel*, for an in-depth exposition of the life of Britain's greatest, and modernity's first great philosopher. ■

*Joan Gibson is an EG and NEC member*

# AIDS in Africa

## A Humanist Issue

**Dr. Alan Ferguson** is programme manager for the AIDS Control Project in Sub-Saharan Africa, and is a Scot currently based in Nairobi. **Hugh Hill** and **Cathy Crawford** were given the opportunity to interview him about the AIDS pandemic.

**HUGH:** I've just recently got back from Sri Lanka and clearly there is a potential AIDS problem around the corner. The government denies AIDS even exists in Sri Lanka, but I have it from a reliable and informed source that there is an AIDS problem out there. I feel we should never allow the AIDS pandemic to disappear over the horizon by denying it in this manner. How do you view the AIDS figures for Asia?

**ALAN:** Yes, it's true that South Asia is sitting on a huge epidemic. The prevalence rates are pretty low, but the populations are so high that the numbers of infected people are very large.

**HUGH:** Do you think the spread of AIDS is under control in Africa? If so, how has it been controlled: if not, what could be done to bring it under control?

**ALAN:** In terms of the numbers of new infections, no, HIV is not under control yet. There are a few promising signs however. In several African countries, HIV prevalence has turned down in recent years, Uganda being the most spectacular example. There are many ways in which control is being attempted, including promotion of condoms, partner reduction and abstinence. However, HIV persists because of ignorance and the underlying inequalities found in sub-Saharan Africa – e.g. income inequalities, lack of empowerment of women. In terms of HIV control, therefore, this is a development problem in the same way that poverty is a development problem. In the long run, the social and economic disparities need to be fixed. In the shorter term, application of proven and culturally acceptable prevention, care and support mechanisms make a difference.

**CATHY:** In what ways do you see AIDS affecting life in Africa?

**ALAN:** HIV/AIDS affects almost all aspects of life in Africa. In fact, you can sometimes see an 'AIDS landscape' where traditional crops have been replaced by other crops that have less labour requirements or where grass roofs are no longer repaired because it is a man's job in some cultures and the men have all died. In economic terms, AIDS takes a bite out of the most productive age groups, particularly young women, and men aged 30-40. The extended family system provides some kind of safety net, with orphaned children being brought up by aunts and uncles, but many kids fall through the net and life is made tougher for the foster parents. HIV patients often take up over half the beds in hospitals in Kenya and other badly-hit countries. Many studies have documented decreased domestic and workplace productivity through AIDS-related causes – days off from sickness, absenteeism, lower capacity for work, etc. AIDS tends to encourage fatalism, which is, in itself, fostered by poverty and the preachings of fundamentalist religions which seem to be more and more prevalent.

**HUGH:** Given the greater awareness of AIDS in recent years, do you think that Asia will become as heavily infected as Africa?

**ALAN:** It's hard to say, but I think not. Thailand made a rapid and successful move to halt the epidemic there in the 90s and I believe that India and China will eventually do the same, just as they did with family planning. The main problem to be overcome is the denial of the problem at high political levels. Once that barrier has been breached, I believe there will be a swift and effective response.

**HUGH:** Given that governments, for whatever reasons, are inclined to play down the degree of AIDS infection in

their region, what can be done to provide accurate figures for the various regions of the world?

**ALAN:** Actually, there are only a few countries where HIV data is considered inadequate or inaccurate. WHO, through UNAIDS, publish annual statistics about the epidemic, usually based on reliable sources. Interestingly, however, last year a fairly respectable NGO in Uganda challenged the official figures and warned that the country was slipping back. Another point to make here is that the most commonly-used indicator of HIV is the prevalence rate – i.e. the percentage of a population or group which is HIV+ at a given point in time. This is reasonably easy to measure and compare. However, the prevalence rate may be affected by forces acting in opposite ways. For example, in the high-mortality phase of HIV (where many African countries find themselves at the moment), prevalence could fall if the numbers of HIV+ people dying exceeds the numbers of new infections. To really check on the epidemic, therefore, we need to conduct studies of new cases to calculate incidence rates. These are many times more expensive to measure than prevalence rates, however, so we have to rely, on the world scale, on the former.

**HUGH:** How do we counter the religious propaganda that seems to be obstructing the preventative measures being promoted by the UN?

**ALAN:** Certainly, early in the epidemic, nearly all the churches in Africa used HIV/AIDS as a convenient subject for moralising and marginalising HIV sufferers. Gradually however, all the mainstream churches, in East Africa at least, have adopted a more practical viewpoint. Many are running very good prevention, care and support programmes. The Catholic church in East

Africa, being on the conservative end of this spectrum, does, of course, still oppose the use of condoms. In practice, however, Catholics in Kenya are just as likely to use condoms as non-Catholics (and to use hormonal birth control methods too). For me, the source of most worry on this question is the conservative/religious right controlling the US government. Like it or not, the US contributes most of the anti-AIDS funding in Africa. The chunk of cash presently coming in for anti-retroviral drugs comes with various conditionalities about promoting abstinence and playing down other preventive measures. Also, poverty, desperation and AIDS have allowed myriad small indigenous churches to form in Africa. These, as a whole, are counter-productive in the struggle against AIDS. How do we counter propaganda? People in this region often suffer from ignorance, but they're not stupid. If we promote consistent and effective counter-measures, then people will adopt them eventually, no matter what else they are being told to believe.

## TREATMENT

**CATHY:** What part do you feel treatment will play in conquering the disease?

**ALAN:** ARV treatment will not conquer the disease, because it cannot (at present) offer a cure. However, it is a key advance in that ART will preserve longevity and maintain or increase quality of life for the infected and affected. Ironically, prevalence rates may even rise in the face of an effective national programme of ART because people who would otherwise have died are still alive and still HIV+. This is important to take in because it makes prevention even more important. We're in danger of being blown away by ART as 'flavour of the year' and forgetting the prevention basics that are still being painfully diffused. In African countries, there's a risk that people will, in fact, see ART as a 'cure' and resort to high-risk behaviour. Another problem is an impending probable increase in resistance to ARV drugs if the tough regimes they require are not adhered to.

**CATHY:** Do you think free access to ART treatment is essential?

**ALAN:** Yes, but it is just not going to happen here!

**CATHY:** What has been your experience of the WHO's 3x5 treatment initiative and do you see it reaching its target?

**ALAN:** WHO has coined the initiative, but it has no resources to use to attain the

goal. The continued reduction in ART costs is a good thing, but the logistics and practicalities of getting 3 million people on ART are very tough, so I don't believe this goal is attainable. At the moment, only an estimated 20% of those eligible for ART in Kenya are receiving the drugs. The target is 75% by 2010.

## STIGMA

**CATHY:** Do you feel stigma surrounding the disease still exists in Africa and other parts of the world. If so, how would you set about breaking it down?

**ALAN:** Absolutely. Stigma and discrimination are still major problems. In areas most affected by HIV, however, this seems to be less so. Leaders like Museveni and Nelson Mandela have shown a way to counter stigma by going public. Unfortunately, most African governments are run by old men who are the least likely to confront this problem, so the lesser leaders and the people take their cue from them.

Solutions? More leaders like these two, more affirmative action by AIDS activists, advocacy, more understanding of the disease.

## THE FUTURE

**CATHY:** What are your views on there being a cure for or a vaccine against AIDS in the foreseeable future?

**ALAN:** There are a lot of very clever people working on this. At the same time, HIV is a very awkward virus to deal with, so there has been little success so far. I think a partially-effective vaccination is likely soon, but I'm less optimistic about finding a total cure.

**CATHY:** What basis do you have for thinking that a vaccine is coming soon?

**ALAN:** There's a vaccine initiative group working here with us, part of the loose collaborative group working on HIV centred in the University of Nairobi Medical School. Although they haven't been successful so far, they have plenty of ideas and are constantly finding out more about the nature of the way the virus works, so THEY are optimistic. Since I know diddly-squat about medical microbiology, my own optimism stems from these guys!

Latest Kenyan forecasts predict a fall in HIV in the general population from 6.9% in 2003 to 3-4% in 2007, even assuming a high uptake of ART, which of course maintains the duration of life in the HIV+ population so they stay in the 'numerator' of the calculation.

**HUGH:** Until there is one or the other of the above, what do you feel should be

the world's response to AIDS?

**ALAN:** Well, if the basic prevention measures are all followed, the epidemic may just die out eventually without resort to vaccines or cures. We need to concentrate more on helping the most vulnerable regions/groups (e.g., Africa, E. Europe, S. Asia, sex workers, truckers, young vulnerable women, refugees, orphans, etc.) We need to keep awareness of the AIDS disaster in Africa on the front pages in Europe and not let fatigue set in. (By the way, the tsunami is going to be an indirect African disaster if funds are channelled away to S. Asia!) We need to persuade the Americans to elect a more caring and intelligent president next time! We need to increase the resources available and facilitate their utilisation for HIV/AIDS, and we need to see HIV as a gender issue and a development issue.

**HUGH:** Do you feel the British government could be doing more to help, and if not, what can organisations like the Humanist Society of Scotland do to bring pressure on governments?

**ALAN:** Obviously, there's always more that Governments can do. I feel the UK government, with poverty reduction as its development goal, has not done too badly in the fight against HIV in Africa. It has certainly made quite effective use of resources and hasn't become side-tracked from its set goals.

I'm pleased, and impressed, that the Humanist Society of Scotland cares about this issue. Firstly, be informed and be aware of the dimensions of the problem, then pass on to others what you know. When I am back in Scotland, I find it hard to talk about my work as it's hard for people to associate with what I have to say, or to imagine the sort of scenarios that are the cause and the result of HIV in Africa. To have a body of concerned Humanists who can inform others and create awareness about this tragedy is very important. As an organisation, I would monitor government policy closely and look for any back-downs or detrimental shifts (e.g. as in the US case noted above). Petition your MPs and MSPs about HIV/AIDS if you think the issue is being ignored. Have professionals advise you when you need to counter any detrimental propaganda – either technical or social – and articulate your points directly and in the media.

**HUGH:** Is there any question you feel we should have asked you but haven't?

**ALAN:** Yes. What would you like to drink? ■

*Cathy Cranford is an EG and NEC member  
Hugh Hill is a Glasgow Group member*



# RELIGION AND THE LAW

STEUART CAMPBELL reports from the Edinburgh Group

**Colin Munro**, Professor of Constitutional Law and former Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Edinburgh, spoke in May on the state of the law (both in England and Scotland) concerning blasphemy, religious aggravation and religious hatred. He had addressed the Group on the same subject in 1992.

**T**he common law offence of blasphemy remains on the books but has fallen into disuse; it was last used in Scotland in 1843. Professor Munro reviewed several notorious cases in England, where the crime has been judicially modified to one of gross offensiveness. These were private prosecutions, which are not possible in Scotland. Because the law is discriminatory (it applies only to established Christianity), there have been calls both for its abolition and extension to other religions, although, in the latter case, there is difficulty in defining 'religion'.

In 2003, the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act introduced religious aggravation as a factor to be taken into account in sentencing (there was a similar Act in England in 2001). Unfortunately 'religion' is not defined in these Acts. Questionable novelties in them are that the defendant's motive is relevant and

that only one witness (the accuser) is required. In England, there have been, on average, about ten cases per year, mostly involving Muslims. In Scotland, there have been about 450 cases in 15 months, mostly in West and Central Scotland and involving Catholics and Protestants.

More recently both Westminster and Holyrood have proposed to create an offence of incitement to religious hatred. In Westminster, attempts to do so failed both in 2001 and 2005 due to imminent general elections. During Holyrood's Hate Crime Consultation, the HSS objected to the idea early last year and this objection was accepted. However, Westminster later proposed to add the crime to its Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill. This clause was subsequently withdrawn, but proposals for the introduction of such an offence may yet return in England, Scotland or both. ■

*Professor Munro has written on the thalidomide case, censorship of television and the Scotland Act 1998. He has a particular interest in media law and sits on the Advertising Advisory Committee and the Council of the British Board of Film Classification.*

Since this talk was given the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill has passed through its final stages in the House of Commons. It will go for consideration to the House of Lords after the summer recess. However, it would appear that the bill does not apply to Scotland. Provisions on offences aggravated by religious prejudice are already included in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act, 2003.

## Onward Humanist Soldiers

by GORDON ROSS

THE recent fiasco round the BBC's transmission of *Gerry Springer – The Opera* made me realise just how well organised the religious right is when it comes to making its very *small* voice heard.

Why ain't we as good at this? We need to organise.

For example, every broadcaster (TV and Radio) has a 'duty office' where comments and complaints are recorded and circulated around senior management – seriously, they are. I know: I worked for the BBC's 'duty office', and for a TV producer; so I saw complaints being both recorded and acted upon (or not acted upon), but definitely noted by senior management.

So when the BBC does something we

disapprove of, or even approve of, we can make our voice heard. It's so easy. You just call 08700 100 222 and talk to the person in the 'duty office', who will record your comment on the 'duty log', ready for general circulation to management.

I put the name in inverted commas because every broadcaster now calls the office something different – at the BBC it's now the 'Information Office' – but they all do the same job as the old duty offices.

We need to get together with the BHA, GALHA and the NSS to create a common email list of activists which can be circulated when issues arise. These people can act to register our feelings as quickly and effectively as the religious right. ■

### HOW TO MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

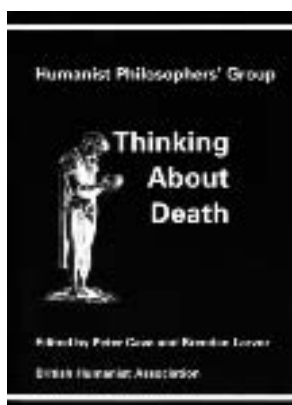
Here's a list of telephone numbers to keep for future reference:

**BBC all TV & Radio**  
08700 100 222

**ITV all regions**  
0870 600 6766

**Channel 4**  
0207 306 8333

*Gordon Ross is HSS Treasurer*



# NO ROOM FOR AFTERTHOUGHTS

**Thinking About Death**, edited by Peter Cave and Brendan Larvor  
(British Humanist Association, ISBN 0901825239, £4.50)

## A review by Des Fik

*THINKING About Death* contains an introduction from the editors, a collection of ten short essays, and as an epilogue a letter relating to the death of David Hume penned by Adam Smith in 1776. The booklet is based on a Humanist Philosophers' Group conference held in London in 2002. The essays are very short (the whole volume only runs to sixty-one pages) and they are clearly based on papers intended for presentation at conference, where they could be discussed, criticised, defended, expounded upon and so on. If you were to buy this expecting a highly polished discourse on philosophical thought about death through the ages, therefore, you would be disappointed. What you get is a mixed bag of ideas, mostly robust and well evidenced, some less so, presented in a variety of styles.

The first essay, 'Intimations of Mortality' by John Harris, sets out some of the potential dilemmas posed by predicted technologies which may greatly increase the length of the human life span, for some. The piece fails to give sufficient weight to problems of social justice, and the implications of medical resources being available only for a privileged few. Complex issues are oversimplified and an underlying assumption conveyed that 'market forces' will dictate such matters with no place for ethical, social or political debate and decision-making.

'Six Months to Live' by Tim LeBon explores what the discipline of philosophical counselling can offer through the hypothetical case history of 'Alex', a terminally ill atheist who 'feels the urgent need to take stock of her life'. A stimulating piece, which highlights that there is a wide-ranging philosophical 'toolbox' available to us when we try to find value and meaning in our lives when confronted with pain and suffering.

'Voluntary Sex' is a satirical dialogue

which dissects 'slippery slope' arguments against euthanasia by exposing said arguments to ridicule. I found this contrived and laboured rather than entertaining or funny. For me, a few well written paragraphs of plain English would have made the points better; however I fully acknowledge that this is a matter of subjective personal taste and others will no doubt enjoy the piece.

Suzanne Uniacke, in 'Is There a Right to Die?', points out that building a case for euthanasia on the premise that suicide is no longer unlawful would be mistaken. Assertions about the legal position seem to hang in the air somewhat, and at times the arguments presented could have been made clearer. A utilitarian position (pp25-1) is attacked as a philosophical 'slippery slope' without explanation either of the position or the reasoning behind objections to it. I am pretty sure the position referred to relates to work by Peter Singer, but this remains educated guesswork. While there are sources of more information in the 'Further Readings' section, proper referencing would have helped.

In 'How Should We Treat the Dead?' Piers Benn examines the idea that as we can be harmed without knowing it when living, the interests of the dead can also be harmed. Peter Cave in his essay 'Dead People' approaches the same area by making the statement, 'We should treat people well: therefore, we should treat dead people well' – then discussing objections to the statement. Well written and thought provoking pieces.

Richard Swinburne's 'The Possibility of Life After Death' offers 'evidence' for the existence of a soul in the form of a thought experiment where a human brain is divided, and each half implanted into a new body. Swinburne argues that one of the half brain people must still be

the original person and that the decisive factor in this would be the presence or otherwise of the soul. In his 'Reply to Richard Swinburne', Hugh Mellor challenges the assertion that one of these beings 'must' still be the original person, and points out that nothing in the experiment evidences the possibility of a disembodied consciousness, mind or soul. Anthony Flew's 'A Disembodied Life' provides some historical background to the last fifty years or so in the development of British philosophy, and again refutes Swinburne's position.

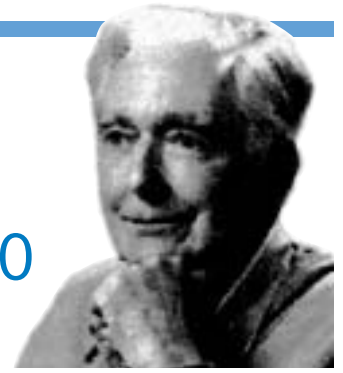
In 'The Gamblers Argument; Blaise Pascal', Nigel Warburton constructs a delightful dialogue between an agnostic on their deathbed and a concerned friend who tries to convert them to belief on the basis of Pascal's argument, a sort of latter day cost-benefit analysis that it makes sense to believe in God because it does not cost us anything to do so, and we risk eternal damnation if we do not. The dying agnostic reminds the friend that being true to oneself is a better way to live and die, and that an all knowing God may be a tad miffed at one's expedient last minute conversion.

The epilogue, Adam Smith's account of David Hume's demeanour as he neared death, is eloquent testimony to a man who died with integrity and died well. This account has importance not just in showing how Hume died, but in demonstrating clearly to all that a person can die in dignity, at peace with their own self and with humanity, without the emotional crutch of religious belief.

*Thinking About Death* delighted more than it frustrated, and certainly never bored. I happily recommend it to you with the hope that the Humanist Philosophers' Group may at some future point consider producing a larger, more comprehensive collection on this most fascinating, and inescapable of subjects. ■

*Des Fik is a Glasgow Group member*

# NIGEL BRUCE'S *RADICAL READING* NO. 40



## When is War Ethical?

**S**ome readers may respond to this question with an absolute 'Never', and I respect that point of view. It is a view shared by Buddhists and by the Quakers and has a proud history. Presumably Jesus of Nazareth would have shared it. The early Christian Church, once established in Rome, wrestled with this issue and eventually produced a middle way, which came to be known as the theory of the Just War.

This doctrine said that war was inherently evil but could be justified if the circumstances satisfied five criteria. With some over-simplification, to be 'just', a war must 1) be defensive, not aggressive; 2) be authorised by legal authority; 3) be confined to military targets; 4) be a 'last resort', only after all peaceful methods had failed; and finally 5) the means employed must not be out of proportion to the merit of the ends being pursued.

### The Iraq War

The invasion and occupation of Iraq by American and British troops could not be justified on any of these five criteria, which explains why a vast majority of Christian leaders world-wide condemned it. Supporters of the aggression tried to argue that historical changes had made the principles of the 'just war' anachronistic and irrelevant. That stance, however, revealed ignorance of how these principles had been given new life in the Charter of the United Nations, whose classic Preamble calls upon all nations to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'.

### The UN Charter

Article 1 of the Charter calls for 'effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of

**The invasion and occupation of Iraq by American and British troops could not be justified on any of the five criteria of the 'Just War'**

justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.'

### Kofi Annan's Initiative

The present Secretary-General of the United Nations, painfully conscious of the damage done to the authority of the United Nations by the aggressive leadership of President George W Bush, with the support of his acolyte, the British Prime Minister, called together in 2003 a 'High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change', with full authority to consider which aspects of the 1945 Charter required to be brought up-to-date in the light of the present international balance of power and the current wave of tribal, communal and cultural violence within national borders.

Published in 2004, the report of this Panel is entitled 'A more secure world: Our shared responsibility'. The chair of the Panel was the Thai statesman, Anand Panyarachun.

### The Reports on Threats, Challenges and Change

The report provides a comprehensive review of all the organs of the United Nations, but in this article I must confine myself to the sections which tackle the question of legitimacy in the use of military force. These sections include the highlighting of five basic criteria, thereby consolidating and updating the tradi-

tions of international law. 1) The use of military force is legitimate only if it is in response to a clear and serious threat to State or human security, and if 2) halting or averting such a threat is genuinely the primary purpose, and if 3) it is a last resort, after all peaceful methods have failed, and if 4) the means employed are proportional to the ends pursued, and if 5) the consequences of action are not likely to be more damaging than the consequences of inaction.

Kofi Annan has called a special summit meeting of heads of state in New York in September to authorise implementation of the report. He is also recommending that the Panel's guidelines for the authorisation of the use of military force should be embodied in declaratory resolutions of both the

**Are the nations of the world willing to acknowledge the primacy of international law and put an end to imperialism?**

Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations.

This will be a historic year for the United Nations. Are the nations of the world, at this critical time, willing to acknowledge the primacy of international law and to put an end to imperialism? ■

*Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice.* Department of Information, United Nations, New York.

*A more secure world: Our shared responsibility. Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change.* Department of Information, United Nations, New York. ISBN 92-1-100958-8

*Nigel Bruce is an Edinburgh Group member*



Editor: Alex Scott, 51 Inveroran Drive, Glasgow G61 2PJ

editor@humanism-scotland.org.uk

The editor, *Humanism Scotland*:

## Earth Charter caveats

I understand why the HSS endorsed The Earth Charter. However it should be aware of some of the consequences. For example, in section II on Ecological Integrity, Principle 6 about preventing harm (abbreviated in the Autumn/Winter 2004 issue) calls for the application of 'a precautionary approach' to environmental protection 'when knowledge is limited'. This does not mean taking precautions; it means 'do nothing that could cause harm' or 'as a precaution against what you intend causing harm, even when you do not know what that harm could be, do not do it!' This becomes clear when one examines the five clauses of Principle 6.

Clause 6a calls for the avoidance of 'the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive [my italics]'. I do not know what the authors of the Charter had in mind here, in fact I am not sure what this badly-written clause means, but I would hesitate to put limits on scientific enquiry. Perhaps the intention is to prevent activity which might cause harm, even though we do not know what it is. The stupidity of this must be evident, but the next clause takes much the same line.

Clause 6b places the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity 'will not cause significant harm'. David Hume could have pointed out the flaw in logic here. It is impossible to prove a negative and, in this case, impossible to prove that a proposed activity will not cause harm. The burden of proof is on those who argue that a proposed activity will cause harm and they must produce evidence for this. Asking everyone who proposes something to prove that what they propose will not cause harm would have prevented almost every technological advance, including the discovery of fire, which does actually cause harm.

This contrasts with the reasonable requirement that proposers should demonstrate that they have taken every precaution against causing damage or harm. However, this can only be done where there is an expectation of damage or harm. No one can be expected to take a precaution against *unknown* damage or harm, yet, in effect, this is what Principle 6 asks for. Even if some damage or harm (cost) is known to occur (as with fire), it does not follow that the proposed activity should be abandoned. Costs have to be weighed against benefits. We value our electricity supply, yet it can kill, and its generation and distribution equipment can be seen as environmentally damaging. Perhaps that is not 'significant harm'. Clearly, 'significant' needs to be defined. In Principle 6, it is not defined.

Clause 6c merely calls for all decisions to be taken in the light of their 'cumulative, long-term, indirect, long-distance, and global consequences'. Fine, but we would need to be omniscient! I doubt that any mortal could possibly know what these universal consequences would be.

Clause 6d calls for the prevention of pollution and insists that build-ups of radioactive, toxic or other hazardous substances should not be allowed. If instituted, this requirement would cause the collapse of all those industries which involve the concentration of hazardous substances. In fact, it would prevent the operation of most manufacturing industry, and cause the collapse of the world economy. Perhaps what is intended is the 'build-up' of such substances in the environment, outwith factories. In that case, the clause needs to be rewritten.

The final clause (6e) calls for the avoidance of military activities that are damaging to the environment. Since one cannot engage in military activity without some environmental damage, the effect of this clause is to prevent all military activity. Is that perhaps the intention and are we now a pacifist movement?

The precautionary principle is a well-meaning but naive attempt to halt environmental damage. However, the mere presence of human civilization threatens the environment. While our civilization lasts, the planet will be vulnerable. The proper course of action should be by the institution of effective environmental protection organisations (like SEPA in Scotland). A balance has to be struck between protecting the environment and allowing progress and development. Preventing harm through the precautionary principle would in effect prevent progress and development.

The three other Principles in this section of the Charter are, on the whole, similarly naïve, utopian and impractical. Indeed, the whole Charter is hopelessly ill-informed and simplistic. I have commented on the environmental section merely as an example. The HSS may subscribe to the Charter, but I do not.

Stewart Campbell,  
4 Dovecot Loan,  
Edinburgh ■

## 50/50 CLUB WINNERS

### FOURTH QUARTER 2004

**First Prize:** John Watson  
Ardnamurchan, Argyllshire

**Second Prize:** John Ferguson  
Bothwell

**Booby Prize:** Alan McLellan  
Netherlee, Glasgow

### ANNUAL PRIZE

Mary Luck, Perth

### FIRST QUARTER 2005

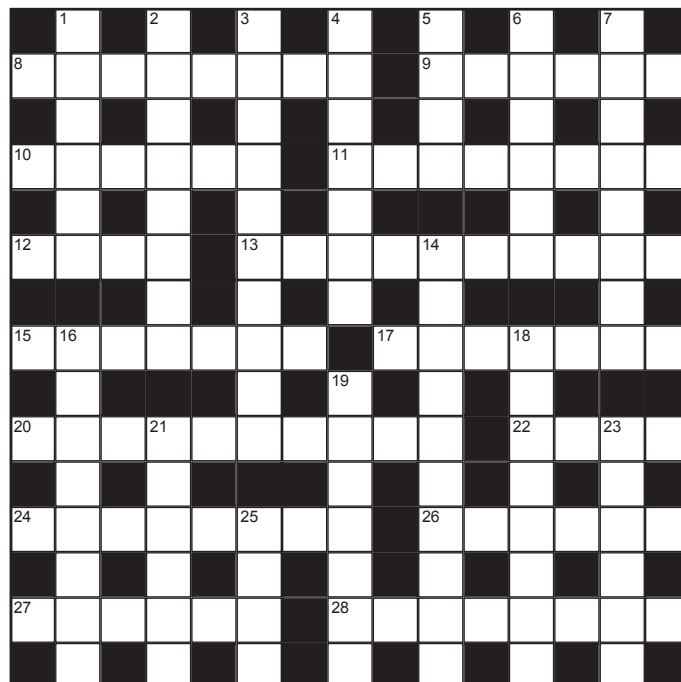
**First Prize:** Joan Gibson  
Dunfermline

**Second Prize:** Alan McLellan  
Netherlee, Glasgow

**Booby Prize:** Marilyn Jackson  
Edinburgh

# Humanist Crossword No. 4

Compiled by Nigel Bruce



## ACROSS

- 1 Bedlam. (8)
- 9 Traffic in unison. (3-3)
- 10 Outspoken woman in publishing. (6)
- 11 A sin which is mutually forgivable. (8)
- 12 The deity, when addressed objectively. (4)
- 13 Final book of the New Testament. (9)
- 15 Philanderer. (7)
- 17 Aquatic fowl, solving the riddle of 'which came first?'. (7)
- 20 Christian believer, but not acknowledging **5 down**. (10)
- 22 Emperor, famous for persecuting the early Christians. (4)
- 24 The late **5 down**. (4-4)
- 26 Specific component of the curriculum. (6)
- 27 Evil aforethought. (6)
- 28 Observant. (8)

## DOWN

- 1 Representative on earth of Muhammad. (6)
- 2 Summer visitor from the sky. (8)
- 3 Jokers, occasionally confused with Humanists. (10)
- 4 Celebratory. (7)
- 5 Representative on earth of Jesus. (4)
- 6 Blessed home of the 'cupper'. (6)
- 7 Conscientious Roman Catholic (4-4)
- 14 Sanctioned by law or custom. (10)
- 16 Aromatic plant, used for seasoning. (8)
- 18 Newly-elected **5 down**. (8)
- 19 Doctrines superimposed on the Jesus story. (7)
- 21 This court too is a scene of adversarial contests. (6)
- 23 Yield, seemingly about a period of fasting. (6)
- 25 Son of Adam and Eve, murdered by his elder brother. (4)

Solution on the inside back cover

# A Humanist View

Since the beginning of history, questions about our origins and existence have been asked. There have been people who maintained that, by means of the study of life on the planet and our relationship with it, rational and acceptable answers to such questions have been available. This we believe to be a Humanist attitude to life.

In the past, primitive knowledge and lack of sophisticated modern means allowed other answers, based on mythology, superstition and religion to gain credence. People were too busy staying alive to have time to stop, think and learn. Especially if these answers were delivered by soothsayers, witch doctors or priests; rival explanations did enough to satisfy the needs of most questioners.

In these early years of the 21st century we have a wealth of knowledge about the evolution of our planet and of the history of its various species, especially that of *Homo sapiens*.

The evidence that we, like other life-forms, are a product of the self-perpetuating process of evolution is overwhelming. There is no suggestion that we have been created by any other means than this process or that we exist for any instinct other than survival and reproduction. Purpose is something we put into our lives.

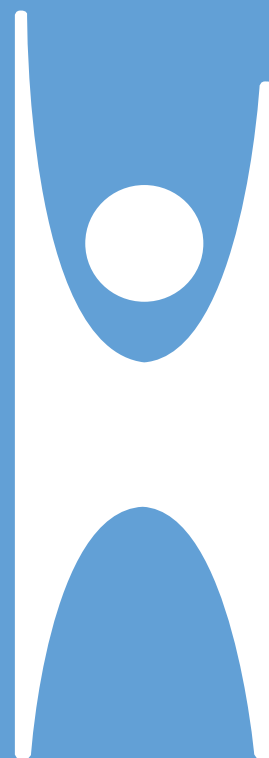
## What is the Humanist Society of Scotland?

The Humanist Society of Scotland (HSS) seeks to represent those who adopt a non-religious, but ethical life-stance based on enlightened self-interest. It aims to build a better human world without reliance on supernatural forces.

The Society is active in many fields in its aim for a better secular world. At present, the Society's main efforts are in helping to bring about secular schooling and a secular Scottish State, and in the development of its increasingly popular range of Humanist Rites of Passage, particularly Humanist funeral ceremonies. The Society is opposed to religious privilege that permits state-funded denominational schools to continue to exist, and to compulsory religious observance in state schools.

We publish a quarterly magazine, *Humanism Scotland*. We also provide trained and experienced officiants, literature, guidelines and practical help for those who prefer non-religious weddings, baby-namings and funerals.

The Humanist opinion is increasingly voiced in the media – most frequently on moral issues such as euthanasia, abortion, equal opportunities and minority rights. We are opposed to religious indoctrination. We believe thinking on moral and ethical issues is best isolated from a religious context – so enabling it to keep pace with the growth of knowledge and social change.



## Ethics and Morality

As there is no real evidence that we as individuals will live after our deaths, Humanists accept that this is our only life and that we should try to make it as worthwhile and happy as possible for ourselves and for others. We believe that we must face the opportunities and problems of the world with human co-operation but without supernatural help.

We are concerned with right and wrong. We believe that morality is a product of upbringing and developing thought and that it has to do with how we treat other people, ideally with kindness, consideration and unselfishness. We accept the importance of the rights of people throughout the world. The principles of morality enshrined in the declarations, covenants and conventions of human rights as promulgated by the United Nations are too little known in this country. There is need for a human moral code if we, as humans, are to live peaceably together.

## Social Issues

Humanists co-operate with other people, including many with religious beliefs. But co-operation is not always possible. On some issues, Humanists are pressing for a rational and humane approach to end the harmful results of some religious attitudes.

### Examples of changes Humanists want to see

- abortion available when necessary
- legal voluntary euthanasia for adults
- women valued as highly as men
- greater tolerance towards minority groups
- contraception available to all
- better distribution of the world's resources



# Joining the Society

You can become a member of the Humanist Society of Scotland either by joining just the Society or by joining one of the local groups as well. Membership of a group entitles you to attend its meetings, where you can engage with other members. If you wish to attend any group meeting before joining, you will be made very welcome. Whichever type of membership you take, you will receive our quarterly magazine, *Humanism Scotland*, and all the other membership benefits. Simply fill in the attached form and return it with your subscription.

## Distinguished Supporters of the Humanist Society of Scotland

■ Claire Rayner OBE

■ Iain Banks

■ Professor Richard Dawkins

■ Stephen Fry

■ Sir Ludovic Kennedy

■ Polly Toynbee

■ Professor James Lovelock

## Further information

Visit our website at [www.humanism-scotland.org.uk](http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk), or contact the Secretary:

Ivan Middleton, 26 Inverleith Row, Edinburgh EH3 5QH Tel. 0131 552 9046 [secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk)



## Application for membership of the Humanist Society of Scotland

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership (includes magazine)

☐ Life (£200)

☐ Family (two or more individuals at the same address) (£20 p.a.)

☐ Individual (£15 p.a.)

☐ Individual – low income (£10 p.a.)

If you wish to also join a local Group please tick the appropriate box:

☐ Aberdeen

☐ Ayr

☐ Dundee

☐ Edinburgh

☐ Glasgow

☐ Highland

☐ Perth

### Magazine subscription only

☐ UK (£7.50 p.a.)

☐ Overseas (£9 p.a.)

**Donation.** Please consider giving an extra donation to our funds (all donations are anonymous): £ \_\_\_\_\_

If you wish a copy of the HSS Constitution and Standing Orders and Group Constitution, please tick here: ☐  
(automatically sent to new members)

**Gift Aid tax relief.** If you pay UK Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax, and would like details on how we can increase the value of your subscriptions and donations *at no extra cost to you*, please tick here: ☐ *giftaid it*

**I/we wish to apply for membership/magazine subscription as indicated, and I/we agree to these details being held on computer.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Total enclosed: £ \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Cards are sent with the next issue of the magazine, but if you wish a separate receipt, please tick here: ☐

If you have any interests or skills (e.g. in education, fundraising, public speaking, journalism) that we can call upon, please note them here: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate where you heard of the Humanist Society of Scotland: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form, with a cheque or PO made payable to 'Humanist Society of Scotland', to the Membership Secretary:

**Alice Atkinson, Flat 28, 11 Sandbank Crescent, Glasgow G20 0PR Tel. 0141 945 5699**

For HSS use only

Database updated

Expires


# HSS TALKS & EVENTS

## Edinburgh

**Venue:** Quaker Meeting House, Victoria Terrace, EDINBURGH EH1 2JL (Just off the Royal Mile).

**Meetings start at 7.30 pm. Tea and coffee available at the interval.**

Sunday 16 Oct	Filmhouse Screening (to be confirmed)
Tuesday 8th Nov	The Rôle of the National Secular Society in Scotland – Keith Charters, NSS-Scotland Convenor (to be confirmed)
Monday 5 Dec	Yuletide Gathering

## Glasgow

**Venue:** Unitarian Church Centre, 72 Berkeley Street, GLASGOW G3 7DS.

**Meetings start at 2.30 pm, with tea/coffee and biscuits from 1.45 pm.**

Sunday 18 Sept	Why I am a Humanist
Sunday 23 Oct	Ian Haworth, Cult Information Centre
Sunday 13 Nov	The Brights
Sunday 18 Dec	Yuletide Gathering (venue TBA)

## Dundee

**Venue:** Dundee Voluntary Action, 10 Constitution Road, DUNDEE DD1 1LL.

**Meetings start at 5.30 pm. Coffee/tea/biscuits at the interval.**

Events to be announced

## Highland

**Venue:** Beaufort Hotel, 11 Culduthel Road, INVERNESS IV2 4AG.

**Meetings start at 2.00 pm.**

Events to be announced

## Perth

**Venue:** The Gateway, North Methven Street, PERTH PH1 5PP.

**Meetings are held from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm.**

Events to be announced

## Aberdeen

**Venue:** Aberdeen Arts Centre 33 King Street, ABERDEEN AB24 5AA.

**Meetings start at 7.30 pm.**

Events to be announced

## Ayr

**Venue:** Loudoun Hall, AYR.

**Meetings start at 6.00 pm.**

Events to be announced

## HSS Annual Conference

**Sat 22 & Sun 23 October.**

**Venue:** Isle of Skye Hotel, Perth.

**Speakers to be announced.**

### The Bell Pettigrew Museum

### A Victorian Natural History Collection

Open Tuesday and Friday  
afternoons 2–5,  
early June until mid September.

Entry is free.

School of Biology, Bute Medical Buildings,  
University of St Andrews

<http://biology.st-and.ac.uk/sites/bellpet/index.html>

Readers are advised to check the website to confirm details, or contact the relevant Secretary.

**Crossword solution** Across: 8. Madhouse 9. One-way 10. Virago 11. Trespass 12. Thee 13. Revelation 15. Amorist 17. Eggbird 20. Protestant  
22. Nero 24. John-Paul 26. Module 27. Malice 28. Noticing Down: 1. Caliph 2. Wheatear 3. Humourists 4. Festive 5. Pope 6. Teapot  
7. Mass-goer 14. Legitimate 16. Majoram 18. Benedict 19. Pauline 21. Tennis 23. Relent 25. Abel

A wise man proportions  
his belief to the evidence  
*David Hume*

# Humanist Society of Scotland

A secular voice in Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC026570



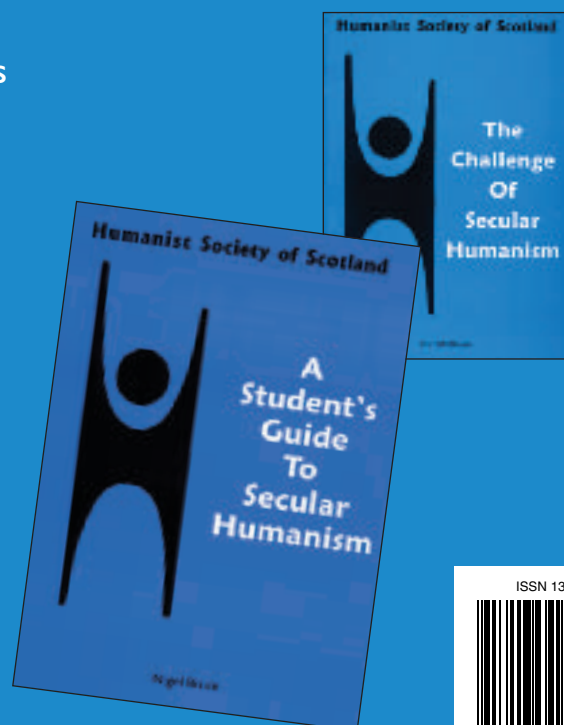
The Humanist Society of Scotland produces leaflets and booklets on a range of issues and subjects, including introductions to Humanism and information on ceremonies and funerals.

For further information contact the HSS Secretary:

**Ivan Middleton**  
**26 Inverleith Row**  
**Edinburgh EH3 5QH**  
**0131 552 9046**

[secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk)

[www.humanism-scotland.org.uk](http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk)



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