

SOUTH HAMPSHIRE HUMANISTS NEWSLETTER 151

MARCH/APRIL 2020



SHH A PARTNER OF HUK

WHAT'S COMING UP

SUNDAY 15TH MARCH, 2PM, PAVILION, RESIDENTS GARDENS, ABBOTTS WAY, SO171QU

AGM,

FOLLOWED BY

'A YEAR DOCTORING IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA. A WASTE OF TIME?'

CHRIS AND TONI ROLLES

Please support the AGM. We have one member retiring from the committee and we invite nominations for a new member, prepared possibly, but not essentially, to act as treasurer. We also welcome resolutions to be discussed at the AGM. Nominations and resolutions to be received by the secretary, tonirolles@yahoo.com by March 10th.

Toni and Chris worked in a remote health centre in the Western Highlands of PNG for a year after retirement. They will talk about their experience and hope to raise some issues of international aid and health care provision in such a situation for discussion.



THURSDAY 26 MARCH, 7.30PM, DISCUSSION GROUP, DETAILS OF VENUE TO FOLLOW

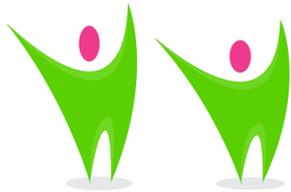
DO WE STILL LIVE IN A CIVILISED SOCIETY?

SUNDAY APRIL 19TH, WALK AND PUB LUNCH, DETAILS LATER

RECENT EVENTS

JANUARY 12TH, BREAKFAST AT TRAGOS

A cheerful dozen of us gathered for Sunday breakfast. A successful spur of the moment event.



JANUARY 19TH TALK BY LORD PLANT THE APPEAL TO HUMANITY.

For me, Lord Plant's talk was essentially a discussion about the conflict between personal freedom and the demands of a regulated modern society, functioning well for all its members,- and how Humanism fits into this conundrum. In one hour he was addressing fundamental philosophical concepts which have exercised the minds of such luminaries as Hegel, Marx and Sartre for generations! So perhaps it was not surprising that, personally, although I found the talk very stimulating (been doing lots of googling since), it raised, rather than answered lots of questions, and I got lost at some points.

He said that we are living in an era where subjective judgement, personal freedom and identity politics ("**a tendency for people of a particular religion, social background etc to form exclusive political alliances, moving away from the traditional broad- based party politics**") are dominant. He felt identity politics could be justified. There are enormous divergences of beliefs and ethical stances in our society- what some consider good and acceptable others find totally wrong and unacceptable. But we need collective action to run society-- so how do we reconcile these divergences, within a framework of law, while preserving

personal freedom. How do we "**reconcile the pursuit of individual freedom with the need for social institutions?**" It is probably not enough just to say- do what you like providing it doesn't harm anyone else.

There are many definitions of freedom, but essentially it is the ability to act or change without constraint. Our rights and freedoms are protected by legislation, the UN Convention on Human Rights, 1944; the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010. We are theoretically given the right to life, liberty, freedom of thought and expression, freedom from slavery, torture and degrading treatment, the right to public assembly and fair trial and no punishment without the law. But we see daily how these rights are bent and over-ridden and Lord Plant asked us to consider the subtle coercions and infringements to our freedoms which exist. Law, not always good or fair, and dependant on the value judgements of the law makers, can be seen as a form of threat or coercion; there are indirect threats posed to freedom by manipulation of opinion, by advertising, media and so on and by inducements to act in certain ways. Attitudes to rights evolve, but law often lags behind, legislators needing, some feel rightly, to be convinced by evidence. Elsewhere he stressed the importance of an independent judiciary acting as adjudicator

Lord Plant said he was not a Humanist but had always been interested in that philosophy. We might define humanism as "**a democratic and rational life stance that affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to shape their own lives**". Lord Plant said an old pop song summarised it for him, "**Be not too hard-for life is short and nothing is given to man**". He felt humanism was aligned to

Political Liberalism (**a political and moral philosophy based on liberty, consent of the governed and equality before the law**). He felt that Humanism, while relevant in a wider, universal, context, was more problematic when applied to the particular and to groups. At this point he started talking about Hegel. He lost me! But subsequent googling on Hegel produced the following which perhaps explains what he meant. **“we know nothing, see nothing, and can do nothing other than as part of universals which are social and historical products. We are in fact individuals only to the extent that we are socialised. We live in a human world, produced not by our personal thoughts, but by the community and we live and think and labour only as part of that community.....the way we get to know about universals is through particulars- people, groups, activities we get involved in.”** Was he implying that a humanist philosophy was too non-specific, too individualistic, to cope with this tension produced between the demands of personal freedom and the requirements of an efficient modern society?

You cannot manage a society of divergent views without a legal framework, however minimal. The philosophy behind this is fascinating and the problems thrown up enormous. Lord Plants lecture opened up all sorts of interesting avenues and I wish I could hear him again now that I have had to think about it to write this account!

TONI ROLLES

Like Toni I would like to hear this talk again. (Perhaps next time we have a philosopher as a speaker we should record it). Below are the

main points I noted, sadly without



main points I noted, sadly without the corresponding explanations and justifications which were quite complex.

Lord Plant seemed to be exploring the question of whether humanism has the breadth needed to provide a set of principles and values which are appropriate for all, today, when beliefs are so individualistic and varied and when humanists accept no higher authority.

At present, he argued, we put “right” before “good”. “Right” values individual liberty which is written into law and from there into the conventions of human rights both internationally and nationally. Caution though, because these laws are written by people based on their subjective values, influenced by the society from which the writer comes. “Good” in contrast is what we choose and this includes religions. I think Raymond was arguing that more attention needs to be paid to the values of the “good” so these values can also be incorporated into law. Can humanism provide a universal framework of values that provide for both the “right” and the “good”, he asked. His opinion was that humanism did not make sufficient account of the needs of the “good”.

LIZ MIZON

JANUARY 27TH BOOK GROUP

We had a good discussion on Shami Chakrabarti's book "On Liberty". We felt it was a good follow on from the concepts on Human Rights raised in "East West Street", which we read last time, and it opened our eyes to certain things going on in the political wrangling behind human rights legislation in the UK. I think we all felt fired up! We were slightly disappointed however with the book itself - not as clear and forceful as one might have expected from Shami's live verbal performances, when she seems to get to the nub of issues with great clarity. The book tried to be too many things - personal history, historical account of the development of human rights legislation, political gossip - but even so it was a valuable read.

Next time it's THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO. March 23rd. If you would like to come along please contact me.

TONI ROLLES

JANUARY 30TH DISCUSSION GROUP

Humanist Green Warriors. Nudgers Perhaps!

A New Year, a New venue for the discussion group. At the instigation of one of our younger members we met in a pub to discuss the state of our planet and our responsibilities towards it. We had all accepted that climate change is happening, largely as a result of human activities. The world's emission of greenhouse gases is increasing and to prevent a rise of more than 1.5 degrees C the emissions need to be 55% lower than in 2018. Action needs to be **NOW** and **DRASTIC** and **WORLDWIDE**. Inevitably this will change the way we live.

We concluded that everyone must contribute in a variety of ways. Our local humanist group could hold a series of **SAVE THE PLANET MEETINGS** to which we

could invite local politicians, councillors and MPs, so they understood our urgent concern. We could keep ourselves abreast of scientific progress and encourage the local community to join us in living more sustainable lives. Whether we have the man/woman power to do this is a moot point. **WATCH THIS SPACE.**

Meanwhile a few things we might do

- 1 Buy and use less. Reuse, mend, buy efficient goods and make them last (Good post war maxims) Recycle too but this is a less good alternative.
- 2 Eat less meat, eat local produce, waste less and compost waste
- 3 Unplug, turn down in the home.
- 4 Use the car less.
- 5 Fly less, particularly short haul.
- 6 Lobby and vote.

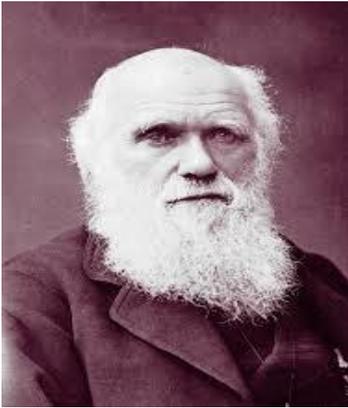
We knew all these things didn't we BUT CAN WE DO MORE?

LIZ MIZON



DARWIN DAY 2020

On Feb 8th ten members of SHH joined the Dorset Humanists at Bournemouth uni to hear **BRIAN INCE**. It was a great occasion. There was a non-stop, funny, thoughtful, stream of consciousness for an hour, and if you asked me, I couldn't honestly tell you what he talked about. Something to do with Darwin..... But it didn't matter- It was amazing.



But **THE YARROWS** went to the **DARWIN DAY LECTURE IN LONDON ON FEBRUARY 12TH. DARWIN'S ACTUAL BIRTHDAY.** Here is James' account.

- The 2020 Darwin Day lecture was given by the well-known naturalist and broadcaster **Chris Packham CBE**. This annual Humanist event, on Charles Darwin's birthday 12th February, has been increasingly popular in recent years and it was held, for the second time, in the large Troxy theatre, near Limehouse in London. As I am sure we all know, Chris Packham is a local lad from Portswood, Southampton and lives in the New Forest. But you may not know that he was taught some of his biology at Southampton University by our own Norman Maclean.

The introduction was by the delightful Alice Roberts, science writer, broadcaster and our BHA president. Chris began with a call for urgency "There is no time!" In the 1980s we knew something about climate change but there was no action. In the 90s it was clearly established but nothing was done. There have been missed opportunities ever since but not enough action. Now no one

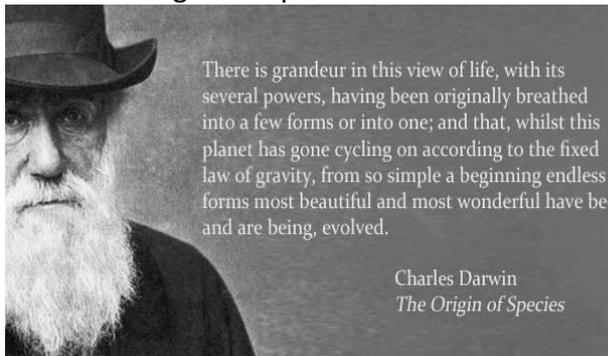
thinks we can put it off into the future – the time for action is now.

Chris mentioned the work of Gilbert White in 1789 with his meticulous, detailed observations of nature, then Darwin himself in 1836 with his fascination with the natural world and ground-breaking insights into natural selection. And Henri Fabre with his insect experiments in 1900. He talked of his own boyhood and being a bit of a misfit, his obsession with a kestrel and being an Angry Young Man who was "saved" by punk rock. But he became inspired with the natural world and found his niche in film making and broadcasting.

So we heard more about damage to the environment, melting poles and loss of wildlife. In other countries they have introduced lynx to control overgrazing by deer. Why not here? Some have tried to re-introduce red kites, goshawks and golden eagles but they are still persecuted now – grouse moors seem to take precedence. How much is a tiger worth? The value of one Cezanne painting is 7800 times more than we pay to conserve tigers! There are too many humans – for everyone to consume what most westerners consume now, we need two extra planets. The US consumes twice that. The poorest 50% of people on earth make only 10% of the carbon emissions. Of ALL the humans who have ever lived on earth, 7% are alive today. Chris said he doesn't like humans!

Chris visited Sumatra many years ago and encountered a tribe of people living in the

forest with their traditional way of life “in dynamic harmony with their habitat”. They were proud, beautiful, graceful and “close to perfect” according to him. But Sumatra has now lost 95% of its forest to palm oil plantations. He visited again quite recently and managed to find the same group of people. They are now living under plastic tents and



working on palm oil production. They are now often overweight through eating fast food and treated like gypsies by other locals. All so sad!

We need hope. What can we do? There is not much help in prospect from the likes of Trump, Bolsonaro and many other present world leaders. The world runs on MONEY and short term politics. The HS2 rail project will damage 700 wildlife sites. But if the world is really serious about action it is possible. In 1941 the US pulled out all the stops for the war effort and reduced car production from 3 million cars to only 341. We have to do everything we can from the grass roots by using less energy, eating less meat, electric cars and all that. But sadly that will still not be enough and we have to stand up and shout for action by the politicians.

There is no time!



THE EARLY DAYS OF SHH

- Having for a while been involved in the BHA (British Humanist Association) at national level, I turned my eye more locally. What about setting up a humanist Group based in Southampton? Accordingly, I advertised in the Daily Echo calling on people of like-minded views to let me know whether they would like to meet with the intention of forming a Group. The BHA also let me have names of members in the post code area. Very much to my surprise it emerged that a former humanist group existed in Southampton with a newsletter called Rationale. This publication was circulated widely across the south of England, and the Secretary was none other than Veronica Tippet. The members of this former Group included Hazel Khan and Malcolm and Jo Simmons also members of the current Group. It existed from 1963 until 1975 when it folded due to a variety of reasons.

In 1993 the current Group met in Anne and David’s house in Glenwood Avenue. I think there were about 10 attendees. We decided on a Chair, Bob Walton a GP from Shirley, and determined on the format of our meetings, very much the same as at present — the main meetings every other month, a Discussion Group and a Social in intermediate months. We decided on the title, embracing Bournemouth, Salisbury, Winchester, and Portsmouth as well as Southampton bearing in mind that there was a dearth of Groups in the south. As new groups

were formed we maintained links and sometimes had joint meetings with them.

Our activities were varied. They included:

Jointly with The Atheist Society from Southampton University, a debate addressed by the former Bishop of Oxford and Julian Baggini from The Humanist Philosophers Group.

Three of our members were Humanist Celebrants at Funerals, Weddings and Baby Namings

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We held joint meetings with the Unitarians.

Members used to attend the BHA Annual Conference, and we regularly sent representatives to GRAM – the BHA’s Group Representatives Annual Meeting.

After some negotiation we achieved representation on all local SACREs – Southampton, Hampshire and Portsmouth.

We held a one-day conference for an exchange of views with representatives from seven faith communities, including humanism.

We had a link with Berlin Humanists and exchanged visits, six of us attending humanist events in Berlin over several days in 1999, the most impressive of which was a secular – humanist – ‘Coming of Age’ ceremony for about 240 14-year-olds.

We were invited by Southampton Art Gallery to select paintings from the vast archive of paintings in the cellars, for an exhibition in one of their galleries for several weeks. ‘Selected by South Hampshire Humanists’ was on bold display.

I was invited by Liz Mizon to act as Humanist Chaplain during her time as Mayor of Southampton. This led to speaking and laying a wreath at Remembrance Sunday. This has become a tradition.

I was invited as a Humanist speaker to talk to sixth formers.

DAVID AND ANNE BOTHWELL

We have lots to learn from this account of SHH’s early days.....

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Humanists UK Celebrants

- Trained and Accredited by Humanists UK
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