

## Welcome

September already and there's the sense that the year is on a steady course to its conclusion. But that's not a bad thing as you'll see from our upcoming meetings we've got some good topics and speakers lined up for the future, including this month's from Anjum Anwar.

## This Month's Joke

This young lad wanted a new bike so he started to pray to God for it. After a while he came to the realisation that there was no way that a God could supply a bike. So instead he went out and pinched the bike of his choice and then simply prayed for forgiveness.

(Thanks to member, Len Lott, for that one.)

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## National Anthems

I have a real beef about the UK National Anthem. Not so much about the tune, which is OK, but about the words. The first three lines are the following:

*God save our gracious Queen!*

*Long live our noble Queen!*

*God save the Queen!*

My beef is not because I dislike the Queen – I don't, though I'm sympathetic to the case for republicanism - it's the 'God' word that I object to, along with the 'save' word. As an atheist I can't buy into anything to do with God, and I'm unclear about what is meant by the word 'save'. Save from what exactly? Doubtless it has some historical meaning like 'preserve', though not in any kind of cryogenic or mummification sense. And whatever the intent I suspect it will be lost on most people reading/ singing it today.

Then there's the second verse which hardly anyone knows:

*O Lord our God arise,*

*Scatter her enemies,*

*And make them fall:*

*Confound their politics,*

*Frustrate their knavish tricks,*

*On Thee our hopes we fix:*

*God save us all.*

This is rife with reasons to dislike it. There's the first line which kind of contradicts Christian belief in that it suggests God needs to arise when we are led to believe Jesus (God incarnate) had already risen. Then there's the terrible rhyme in the next

## Next Meeting – 9<sup>th</sup> September

### *The Right to Free Speech versus The Right to Insult – Anjum Anwar*

This talk will be about the right to freedom of speech, without which, Anjum believes, there is no human progress or growth; it's not what we say but how we say it. We also have the right to protect what we hold sacred to us, but how does one define what sacredness mean to different communities, how do we protect the sacredness of humanity and human life?

### Contributions

We need to meet the cost of room hire and providing refreshments out of the collection at meetings. So we ask for contributions as follows, except at the first meeting attended: members £2.50, students £1 and non-members £3.50. In addition, tea or coffee and a biscuit is available for £1.50.

line, followed by a request to do nasty things, Putin style. Enough said!

Now if you want an example of a good national anthem, lyrics wise, then the [Slovenian one](#) below has got to be up there with the best:

*Long live all the nations*

*that yearn to wait for the day to come*

*that everywhere the sun walks*

*the strife will be driven away*

*that every compatriot*

*will be free*

*and the man living at one's borders will*

*not be a devil but a neighbour!*

To me that comes across as an entirely humanist anthem.

## Meetings

### Last GMH Meeting

*Discussion: In 2115, what will our descendants condemn as our greatest moral failings?*

John Coss opened the meeting by summarising an article written by Stefan Klein and Stephen Cave entitled, *What will morality look like a 100 years hence?* The authors point out that norms and values change, e.g. in 1915 – sexism, racism, imperialism, anti-Semitism and homophobia were not just accepted, but expected, even required. The authors self-identify as 'progressive' and are glad that these attitudes are increasingly

unacceptable. But OUR values will also be supplanted – and not always in ways we will welcome.

What is the proper reaction to such change? A good start is to CONSIDER HOW OUR VALUES MIGHT CHANGE OVER THE NEXT 100 YEARS. Secondly, there is an idea of moral progress that can help us see how values might change in ways that we today could accept as FOR THE BETTER even though it may not be easy for us. This alerts us to the contingency and particularity of our own moral views. It pricks our illusion that we are at the pinnacle of moral progress. It is different from asking ‘what are you or I doing wrong’ which implies we are not living up to CURRENT moral standards. Instead, it addresses our moral IMAGINATION. Rather than speculation about future norms, we can look at underlying trends that are still unfolding, and ask where we are failing not individually but COLLECTIVELY as a moral community. In other words we can imagine a better world and in so doing may help to make it real.

As to what counts as moral progress, the authors argue that morality means giving common concerns or the wellbeing of others as much weight as one’s own self-interest. The tricky question then is: WHO COUNTS AS THE ‘OTHER’? They conclude that moral progress means including ever more people (or beings) in the group of those WHOSE INTERESTS ARE TO BE RESPECTED. In these terms we have come a long way. But there is room for improvement, and so a key aspect of moral progress is imagining HOW THE CIRCLE MIGHT WIDEN STILL FURTHER.

The authors claim that recent research supports the view that the more people feel connected with others, the more moral they are. Hence they hope that an increasingly globalised interconnected and interdependent world will also be an increasingly benevolent one, with ever more people (or beings) drawn into the circle of concern. But these changing values have a price. For many of us, they will mean sharing or giving up privileges that we have long enjoyed, admitting that our comfortable lifestyles are based on industries of exploitation, or otherwise recognising that we have in a hundred ways been wrong. This is not a message we rush to hear! But debating the question of what we will be condemned for in 100 years may be a way of easing the transition.

The authors then put forward four suggestions as to what they think we might be castigated for in 2115, which they regard as natural extensions of progress so far.

1. Rights for future generations, i.e. extending the circle of moral concern IN TIME. This will involve massive restrictions on our freedom of action, since current activities have impacts on people far into the future
2. Rights for other conscious beings: non-human animals feel pain and many other emotions
3. ‘Opening the floodgates’: in 100 years, our descendents may be impressed by current levels of welfare and prosperity in the developed world, but appalled that access to them depends on where you are born
4. Healing criminals: in 100 years, no one will believe in absolute free will or that anyone chooses to become a criminal but we will not find it easy to decide who to treat, how radically and when, nor to extend sympathy to those who commit the worst crimes

The authors acknowledge that there are many other changes they could imagine, and say they have barely touched on the question of INEQUALITY. For many who live through them, these changes will be extremely uncomfortable – but they will not be troubling for those who grow up with them .

John suggested that the discussion should focus on societal norms in modern technological societies and how these are likely to develop, assuming that civilisation develops continuously from the present but the position of humanity in 2115 is significantly less favourable relative to how things would have been if current environmental challenges had been adequately addressed in a timely manner.

A lively and healthy debate ensued. One of those present suggested at the conclusion of the discussion that we (GMH) should consider getting involved with H4BW - Humanists for a Better World, a BHA special interest group. See <https://humanism.org.uk/about/h4bw/>. The meeting was well attended, especially given that it was August, with a lot of new people in attendance.

### Upcoming Meetings at FMH

**Oct 14<sup>th</sup>** *Can Philosophy Provide Us with A Secular Account of The Idea of Evil?* - Dr. Eve Garrard

**Nov 11<sup>th</sup>** *Mark Twain Opera – a presentation about the opera and how it came about, including the connection with Richard Dawkins –* Kevin Malone



# Greater Manchester Humanists

## Holyoake Lecture 2015

**Nov 2<sup>nd</sup>** – This year the annual BHA sponsored Holyoake Lecture in Manchester will be given by writer, broadcaster and former comedienne, Natalie Haynes. Details of venue and topic are awaiting confirmation and will be circulated as soon as they are known.

## Darwin Day Talk - 2016

**Feb 12<sup>th</sup>** Save the date for what promises to be a very interesting talk by Dr Suzanne Schultz from the University of Manchester on a topic relating to evolution.



## Humanist Discussion Group

The Humanist Discussion Group meets on the third Thursday of the month. All are welcome; we meet at 8.15pm at The Waterhouse, 67-71 Princess Street, Manchester, M2 4EG. We are not booking a particular room but will aim to meet in a room at the far end of the building from Princess Street.

The topic for the meeting on **18<sup>th</sup> September** is *Effective Altruism*. An overview will be provided in a separate Discussion Group mailing. (No write up available re last meeting I'm afraid.)

## Exploring Humanism – Introductory Course

The next presentation starts in October and will run on consecutive Mondays from 5<sup>th</sup> October to 16<sup>th</sup> November.

The cost will be £20, reduced to £17 for bookings received by 7<sup>th</sup> September.

For details of how to enrol please go to –

<http://gmh.humanist.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/Exploring-Humanism-2015-booking-form.docx>

## Stockport Group Meetings

The group meets on the third Wednesday of the month at 7.15pm for 7.30pm, currently in the back room at the Boar's Head, 2 Vernon Street, SK1 1TY (near the Market Place). They also have regular social meetings on a Wednesday afternoon at Rhode Island Coffee Bar, 2 Little Underbank, Stockport, SK1 1JT (upstairs).

For precise details of upcoming meetings and socials please refer to the GMH Meetup - <http://www.meetup.com/Greater-Manchester-Humanists>

## Greater Manchester Humanist Choir



OK, you like singing. You'd love to sing in a choir but you're not sure about your ability. Well don't worry, everyone is welcome. So go on give it a go. What is there to lose?

For details of rehearsals, venues and performances please visit the Meetup page here – <http://www.meetup.com/GreaterManchesterHumanistChoir/>

## Links



Here are a few links I think you might find interesting:

How it really feels being an Ex Muslim in an Asian family - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW7wRfuSw0A>

Kidnapped for Christ (evangelical abuse) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxMxIVHog>

How atheists find meaning in a purposeless world - <http://www.buzzfeed.com/tomchivers/when-i-was-a-child-i-spake-as-a-child#.kr9wDL9Oo>

## Membership



**News:** our Meetup Group now stands at 245 as at 30/8/15; also our Facebook Group now has 475 members.

As noted in the report on the AGM, subscriptions for 2015/16 are unchanged at £15 waged; £10 unwaged.

If you'd like to become a member you can download our brochure which includes a membership application form from <http://gmh.humanist.org.uk/home/contact-us/>.

We now offer 18 months membership for your initial subscription if you take out a standing order. To take up this offer, please complete the membership application and the standing order form which can be downloaded from the same link, and return them both to us with your cheque for your first subscription (plus any additional donation). The date of the first payment under your standing order should be 18 months after the date on which you complete the membership application form.



# Greater Manchester Humanists

## Keep In Touch

For more about what's going on at GMH check out some of the links below.



<http://www.meetup.com/Greater-Manchester-Humanists>



<https://www.facebook.com/GreaterManchesterHumanists>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/5231173231/>



**Blogger**

[gmhumanists.blogspot.co.uk](http://gmhumanists.blogspot.co.uk)



@gmhumanists



<http://gmh.humanist.org.uk/>

## Feedback



If you would like to comment on this newsletter or send in suggestions for future content (jokes, articles, links, book reviews or whatever) please email the editor at:

[newsletter\\_editor@gmh.humanist.org.uk](mailto:newsletter_editor@gmh.humanist.org.uk)

*Graham Connell* – Editor and Chair of GMH