

Welcome

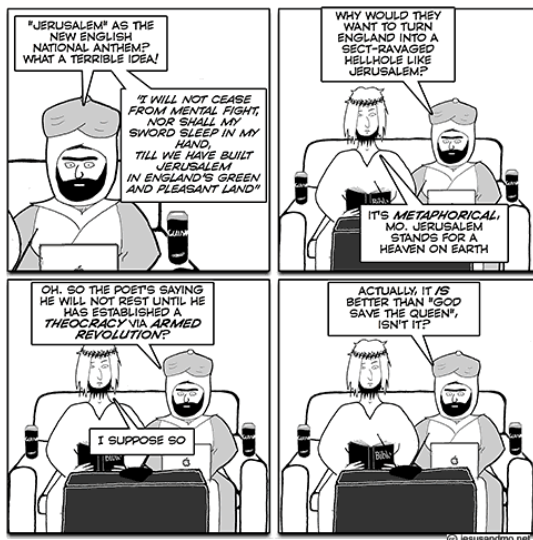
It's February, it's the shortest month of the year, and it's the month with two notable days: Valentine's Day and Darwin Day. Whether or not you celebrate Valentine's Day is entirely up to you but I do hope you can join us in celebrating Darwin Day – see opposite. And even if you can't make the talk please consider visiting the stalls and exhibits which include those from local schools and colleges who've been encouraged to get involved in this celebration of Evolution.

This Month's Joke

This month a quick gag:

You'll never see a church with free Wi-Fi.
I guess it's because they don't want to compete with an invisible power that actually works.

And a Jesus & Mo:



Courtesy of www.jesusandmo.net

Help Wanted

You will see herein the details of the Darwin Day Celebration on Friday 12th February, which replaces our normal Wednesday meeting. To help publicise the event more widely, and especially among University students, we're arranging some leafleting at the Universities as follows:

Monday 8th Feb @ 11 am – Manchester Universities leaflet distribution - on the steps of the Manchester Students Union building, Oxford Road, M13 9PR.

Tuesday 9th Feb @ 11 am - University of Salford leaflet distribution - meeting site to be confirmed.

Darwin Day Celebration – 12th February

Religion, Cooperation and Pro-Sociality - Are Religious People More Cooperative? by Dr Suzanne Shultz

If you've not booked already there are still some tickets available for this event at the Manchester Conference Centre, 78 Sackville Street, Manchester, M1 3NJ.

Starting at 6pm there will be stalls and exhibits displaying such things as 3D art, geology of the solar system, the universe and the relationships between art and science. This part of the evening is available to everyone to come in and browse for free.

Then at 7.30 pm our distinguished speaker, Dr Suzanne Shultz, will give her talk. Tickets are required for the talk and can be obtained from Eventbrite at a cost of £5 waged and £3 unwaged, plus a booking fee, using the link below -

<http://www.eventbrite.com/e/darwin-day-celebration-2016-tickets-20739906619>

Please note: the booking fee is imposed by Eventbrite, not by GMH.

Note also that this event replaces our 2nd Wednesday meeting at Friends Meeting House.

If you can help with this please get in touch with David Milne at - events@gmh.humanist.org.uk, or on 0781 696 1684.

Book Review

In a break with convention and in the interest of a good laugh, I'm going to recommend a book that has nothing to do with humanism or secularism. The book, which is in fact a novel, is called the **The Rosie Project** and it recounts the approach taken by the lead character Don - who has Asperger's and is highly intelligent yet lacking in empathy and social graces – to get a wife.

Written in the first person, it's funny because it tells you what he's thinking as he sets about, in a purely logical and methodical yet totally impractical way, to find his partner for life. So, as an example, he draws up lists of ideal characteristics (all practical/functional), then creates questionnaires for prospective partners, sends them out, and scores their responses (those who bothered to respond) in a spreadsheet. That's just one example and there are many more equally



bizarre approaches he tries out. The writer cleverly weaves into the tale several other interesting characters not least of which is Rosie herself. It's hard, without giving any spoilers, to say why this book is so funny but it is. After I'd read it, my wife read it and I could hear her laugh-out-loud responses to the same passages that had me chuckling away. So if you're looking for some light hearted reading and a good old laugh in a sometimes gloomy February then this is your book.

And when you've finished that, the sequel *The Rosie Effect* is, believe it or not, even funnier.

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## In the Media

The picture shows GMH vice –chair Guy Otten (on the left) at the *That's Manchester* studio when he was a guest with Heather Fletcher (centre) of the Muslim Jewish Forum on the Daily Rundown' programme on 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, presented by Fiona Fox (right in the picture).



## Meetings

### Last Month's GMH Meeting



Last month Professor James Crossley gave a talk on Religion and the Bible in Contemporary Politics. Here is a brief summary of the talk:

The 1960s were crucial to the understanding of religion in politics – British politics that is. It is then that Britain started to see a serious decline in church attendance which has carried through to the present day. But this decline was not accompanied by an equal decline in religious affiliation as nostalgia for a religious past persisted. At this time there were 4 distinct understandings of the bible:

1. The cultural bible – seen as something of a work of literature, part of the British heritage.
2. The liberal bible – seen as a source of democracy, tolerance and the rule of law.
3. The radical bible – seen as a source of socialism in the radical tradition (Tony Benn wrote a lot about the bible in this context at this time).
4. The neoliberal bible – used to highlight all that is good for right thinking people (examples given of some American bible in this vein were:

The team bible for girls, The team bible for boys, The team bible for soldiers, etc.).

#### Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher was a conservative revolutionary who rediscovers her Methodism. She starts talking about 'freedom' and 'individuality' with reference to biblical texts and their applicability to the country in terms of entrepreneurialism, a minimal state, free will and such like. She sees the good in Judaism and how it supports the entrepreneur, how Jews support each other and the fact they are not reliant on the welfare state. Later on in her career though, she saw it as a failing that her policies had not made people more charitable, i.e. in the sense of giving, as opposed to judging others leniently.

#### Blair

Tony Blair inherits Thatcher's template of individualism and non reliance on the welfare state. Many of Blair's speeches had subtle references to biblical learning that went unnoticed by Blair's PR guru Alistair Campbell. Blair was unable to see religion as a bad thing: there were good Muslims and bad Muslims but only good religion. His speech at one Labour Party Conference had many allusions to the bible. The press didn't pick up on them but it's expected that many of his supporters would have done. Blair believed the origins of Islam show a picture of a good religion with democratic values.

#### Cameron

David Cameron talks about the bible as though it's everything we like; Michael Gove also. In 2012 the government sends a bible to every school in Britain probably knowing people wouldn't read it, but liking the image it creates.

#### Radical Bible

The main exponents of this bible were outside mainstream politics, people like Peter Tatchell, the Occupy movement, Russell Brand and through his influence, Ed Miliband (to a lesser extent). Corbyn doesn't reveal himself as a true Christian, but he did reference the good Samaritan in his leadership speech where he talked about 'not walking by'. This reference is well worn by other politicians including Cameron, who also believes that 'true Islam' is peaceful, tolerant and non-violent.

American politics is different, there are over 200 million Christians, so religion is very important and affiliation to it is openly demonstrated. In English politics though there does seem to be a need for politicians to defer to a higher authority, however subtly, for the state to function.



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/GMSkeptics/vents/>

## Bolton Meeting

The inaugural meeting of the Bolton Group was held on 20<sup>th</sup> January at which organisational roles and an approach to running future meetings were agreed. A second meeting was held on 4<sup>th</sup> February at The Mercury Hotel (bar) in Westhoughton involving introductions, a book review and lively discussion. The books were:

- Now is the Time by Melvin Bragg
- The Demon Haunted World by Carl Sagan
- Longbow by Patrick Cornwell
- The Alchemist by Paul Coelho
- Nine Lives by William Dalrymple
- The Glorious Heresies by Lisa McInerney
- The Coral Thief by Rebecca Scott
- Wolf Hall and Bring up the Bodies by Hilary mantel
- The Story of God by Prof Robert Winston
- 12 Years a slave by Solomon Northup
- Room by Emma Donoghue
- Death of a Prophet by Stephen Shoemaker
- The Cambridge Man by Brian Stanyer

## Upcoming GMH Meetings

### 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Due to the focus on the Darwin Day event a speaker for this date has yet to be finalised – suggestions welcome.

### 13<sup>th</sup> April 2016

**AGM** followed by an interactive discussion on the subject of **An Issue of Culture**.

### May 2016

An evening ‘armchair discussion’ between the Bishop of Manchester, David Walker, our very own Guy Otten and the Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association, Andrew Copson.

This event will be open to the public and will take place on either Monday 16<sup>th</sup> or Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup>.

Date and venue to be confirmed nearer the time.

## Other Events of Interest

### The Magic of Science

Greater Manchester Skeptics Society is hosting this event (which was cancelled last month) on 11<sup>th</sup> February at The King’s Arms, 11 Bloom Street, City of Salford, M3 6AN. See here for details -

## Humanist Discussion Group



The Humanist Discussion Group now meets on Tuesdays. The regular meeting date is the third Tuesday of the month, however the February meeting will be held on the fourth Tuesday – 26<sup>th</sup> February. 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 February meeting is Moral and Cultural Relativism - continuing from the January meeting. The notes prepared for the January meeting are available [here](#). Additional notes for the February meeting will be added before the meeting date.

## Exploring Humanism Course

The next presentation starts in April and will run on Monday evenings at 7pm for seven weeks starting on Monday April 4<sup>th</sup> and ending on Monday May 23<sup>rd</sup> (excluding the Bank Holiday on Monday May 2<sup>nd</sup>). The venue will be Room F15 at the Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS, behind the Central Library. The cost will be £20, with an ‘early bird’ reduced price of £17 for applications received before Monday March 7th. For details of how to enrol please go [here](#).

## 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). The next meeting is on 17<sup>th</sup> February when the speaker, Stephen Pennels of Global Justice (formerly World Development Movement) will talk about **“People before Profits or Global Injustice due to the sell out to Transnational Corporate power grabbers by governments - food, NHS, lipstick, media, and life as you know it!”**

They also have regular social meetings on a Wednesday afternoon (this is always at 2.30pm on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month) at Rhode Island



Coffee Bar, 2 Little Underbank, Stockport, SK1 1JT (upstairs).

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

## Links

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

Satanic Temple's 7 Tenets superior to 10 Commandments - <http://thesatanictemple.com/about-us/tenets>

How religious schools led to the decline of Arabic science - <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/epiphenom/2016/01/how-religious-schools-lead-to-the-decline-of-arabic-science.html>

Why Evolution is True - <https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/>

## Membership

We now have:

- 78 paid up members
- 674 supporters on our email list
- 261 Meetup Group members
- 515 Facebook Group members

Current annual subscriptions are £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 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.

## 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/>



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



[@gmhumanists](https://twitter.com/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