

# Hastings Humanists *Newsletter* July 2009

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Our blog address is: <http://hastingshumanists.blogspot.com/>

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**Our Next Meeting, Thursday 9 July:** *Discussion on Religious Education.* There are two main aspects to this: 1) the teaching of Religious Education as a subject in schools and 2) the control of Education by religious organisations. The main emphasis of this discussion will be on the first of these, though anyone is free to bring up any issues or personal experiences relating to the subject. I intend to go to the East Sussex SACRE meeting in Eastbourne on 7th July as an observer and will report on that as an introduction.

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**Our Last Meeting, Thursday 18 June:** *Did God Survive Darwin?* by Dean Morrison went well. Lesley wrote an appreciation of Dean's presentation for our blog as follows:

Dean's talk was wide ranging, giving an historical perspective, and discussing how breakthroughs in scientific discovery have been received by religious organisations. He also described the evolutionary process in straightforward terms. Dean is clearly very knowledgeable on his subject, having obtained his science degree in Edinburgh and been actively involved in scientific groups ever since. However, he put across his argument in terms that the non-scientific of us could understand and provided pictures and statistics to demonstrate his points. In conclusion? God has survived Darwin, but is now seen very differently by most people. Although creationists still accept Genesis as a literal re-telling of history, many believers now see their god within the context of evolution (such as the provider of the "soul" or the being who started the whole process). The answer to the question posed, therefore, brought a wry smile to some of the members present. God has survived Darwin, but only by evolving!

I sent a report based on this to Hastings Observer for their "Around the Clubs" page, but it did not appear in the 26th June issue, although they did publish a short "Letter to the Editor" that I sent at about the same time. Perhaps it may appear in the 3rd July issue.

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**Consultations.** A government commissioned review of the National Curriculum taught in primary schools in England, led by Sir Jim Rose, is open for public consultation via the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA); deadline 24 July. The BHA is concerned that that the 'scientific and technological understanding' area of learning makes no requirement for pupils to learn about and investigate the concepts of natural selection and evolution.

On the same date the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) issued new draft guidance on the teaching of Religious Education (RE) in English schools for public consultation with the same deadline. The BHA is concerned that it fails to include the non-religious beliefs, or to allow humanists the same right to be full members of the local SACREs. "We want the government to use the Human Rights Act to make it explicit that references to 'religion' in the present law on RE should be read as references to 'religion or belief'. This would mean that non-religious philosophies such as Humanism would be included by right in the subject, rather than just as a recommendation, as at present."

There is also a consultation on Personal, Social, Health and Economic education, including Sex and Relationships Education.

See our blog or the BHA site for how to submit views.

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continued overleaf

**14 July, Hastings and District Interfaith Forum**, 6:30 - 9:00 pm. WRVS Meeting Room, South Street, St Leonards on Sea. (South Street is off London Road, opposite the Post Office). I've been invited to take part in a question and answer session on "A Week in the Life Of", in which a Christian, a Muslim and a Humanist (me) will speak for ten minutes each and then answer questions. I've not thought it possible to become a member of the Forum myself, since it does not specifically mention non-faith beliefs such as Humanism or Atheism, and its aims include "To influence decision making processes and promote the positive role of religious faith in community life, by engaging with statutory and voluntary bodies"; and this meddling is something we seek to avoid. (Plus the fact that there is a fee of £20.) Other Humanists I'm sure will be welcome to attend. There may be a collection.

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**Sarkozy and the Burqa.** The comments of President Sarkozy of France as reported in the Telegraph: "The burka is not a sign of religion, it is a sign of subservience," he told members of both parliamentary houses gathered for his speech. He added: "It will not be welcome on the territory of the French republic." This was illustrated by a picture of a burqa that includes a veil over the face. Huffington Post has the quote: "We cannot accept in our country women imprisoned behind netting, cut off from any social life, deprived of any identity. This is not the idea the French Republic has of a woman's dignity."

I occasionally saw women wearing this style of dress when I lived in Leicester, though most often they wore the niqab, which allows the eyes to show. In Hastings so far I have only seen women wearing the hijab which leaves the face clear. These comments revived the debate prompted by Jack Straw a couple of years ago. In this country we take a more free and easy approach, though personally I agree with Sarkozy about the face-masking clothes being a sign of subservience. Why should Muslim women be obliged to wear mediaeval clothing while, as I've often noticed, their husbands dress in UK style such as tee shirt and jeans?

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**Paganism.** According to the *Guardian* (G2, 22 June) Britain has become a nation of pagans. "There are said to be a quarter of a million practising pagans in this country, double the number of a decade ago." At Stonehenge 30,000 people were expected at the neo-Druids summer solstice celebrations. In Hastings we had the Jack-in-the-Green celebrations early in June, and Eastbourne apparently has a fashionable group of morris dancers, Hunters Moon. There is no reason why humanists cannot be "secular pagans" and celebrate Nature, in a rational environmentalist sort of way, but in my experience of pagan groups they also worship mystical god and goddess figures, like Gaia, or Herne the Hunter, and believe in magic and casting of spells as well as much other spiritual, astrological or new age nonsense.

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**The Pier.** The same G2 contained an appreciation of Piers, in the Arts section. They are said to be staging a comeback. Would that this were the case in Hastings! South End, Saltburn and Deal get approving mentions. The Eastbourne pier is up for sale at £5 million. The Felixstowe, Hastings and Swanage piers are said to be "in danger of being overlooked". There is a Quiz Night for Hastings Pier at White Rock Hotel on 3rd July, 7:30 pm.

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**Robert Tressell.** A play based on the book *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* can be seen at Concordia Hall, Church Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, on Saturday, 4th July at 7.30pm. Tickets £5. This is part of a two-day Festival. (<http://www.1066.net/tressell/>).

**Hastings Beer and Music Festival** is also on, in Alexandra Park 3 - 4 July.

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