

# Hastings Humanists *Newsletter* August 2009

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

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**Our Main Monthly Meeting.** This will continue to be on the second Thursday in the month at the White Rock Hotel, with the talk starting at 7 pm. However we will convene in the bar area from 6:30. If sufficient members come, enough to cover the cost of the Notley room, and it is vacant, we will go up there at 7 pm. Otherwise we will remain in the bar, and the talk will be more informal. I will only book the room in advance if we engage an outside speaker, or need to use a projector.

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**Social Meetings.** I'm proposing to reinstate the idea of a social meeting on the fourth Thursday in the month. This will be for discussion of anything that members want to raise, and just to get to know one another better. At present this will be at the White Rock Hotel though if anyone knows other venues we could try them. Also, if members would prefer to meet at some other day or time this is open for experiment. Would a weekend or morning meeting be preferred? Please let me know if you have definite preferences or proposals.

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## **Our Next Meetings.**

**Thursday 13 August:** *History of Humanism, Part 2.* This will be mainly about Positivism, Rational Religion and Secularism in the 19th Century, including such figures as August Comte, Robert Owen, G. J. Holyoake, Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant.

**27 August.** This is a social meeting as explained above. An issue that we need to decide is whether we make the group formal or carry on in an informal way.

**10 September.** *Annual General Meeting.* If we formalise the Group this will mean setting an annual subscription and electing a Secretary, Treasurer and Chairperson.

**24 September.** Another social meeting. We will need ideas for our programme for the future. Topics for discussion, Campaigns to set in motion, Speakers to invite.

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**Our Last Meeting, Thursday 9 July:** *Discussion on Religious Education.* Only two members, Lesley and Barry, turned up to this, no doubt everyone else being on holiday. I gave an account of my visit to the East Sussex SACRE meeting in Eastbourne on 7th July, which as I noted on our blog, was more memorable for the weather than the meeting itself. It was the day the rains came.

Many of the people at the SACRE were newcomers. The Councillors had to select a new Chairman since the previous one lost his seat at the local elections. Most of the time was devoted to debating the SACRE's response to the consultation on the draft "Non-Statutory Guidance" for RE issued by Ed Balls' Department, the DCSF. The main concern of the RE Consultant to the SACRE (Susan Thompson) seemed to be whether the phrase "Religion and Belief" used throughout the document had legal force. I think it does because of changes in legislation since 1994.

I suppose we should be happy that page 20 recommends that "there are opportunities for all pupils to study ... secular philosophies such as humanism" but this is only after they have studied Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, and possibly the Bahai, Jain and Zoroastrian faiths!

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**Hastings and District Interfaith Forum, 14 July, 6:30 - 9:00 pm, WRVS Meeting Room, South Street, St Leonards on Sea.** I was invited to speak to this Forum for ten minutes, alongside a Quaker and a Muslim, on "A Week in the Life of ...". The Quaker spoke first and told mainly of the way they hold their meetings by sitting in complete silence. Since I'd had quite a busy week I fortunately had plenty of experiences to draw on and began with my visit to the East Sussex SACRE.

As a one-line definition of Humanism I offered: **Humanists try to base their beliefs strictly on the objective evidence.** This means, for instance, that we don't believe in such things as angels and demons, or gods, ghosts and ghoulies. As a longer definition I offered the [2002 Amsterdam Declaration](#). In place of the ten commandments I offered the 30 articles of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

The Muslim speaker gave the impression that his life was almost completely given over to ensuring that he prayed five times a day at the right times and places.

In the question and answer session, the most difficult question I received was on how a Humanist would respond to someone who has suffered a bereavement. My reply was that all we could offer is sympathy, empathy, normal human warmth, and the traditional consolations of philosophy. No other humanists attended.

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**Meeting with Alexander and Rita Hellemans, 23 July.** I had an enquiry, by phone and email, from Alexander Hellemans, a Belgian now living in Battle, who is proposing to start up a [Cafe Scientifique](#) in Hastings. He is also a Humanist and interested in history of ideas. We arranged to meet at White Rock Hotel, and I sent an email (or a copy of the email by post) to all members who had attended at least two of our meetings. Linda and Dean came along. It looks as if the project could well get off the ground. Alex has experience of holding a Science Cafe in Antwerp. The first choice of venue is likely to be the Jenny Lind. Looking some way ahead, Dean pointed out that Alan Turing had connections with this area, and his centenary falls in 2012.

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**Belated Press.** On Friday 26 July the *Hastings Observer* at last published a report on our 18th July meeting - only five weeks after I sent it!

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#### **Future Events of Interest.**

**19 August - 9 October.** *A New World: The Life of Tom Paine*, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, London. (On **11 September** there is also a panel discussion.)

**18 September - 20 December.** *Inherit the Wind*. (Fictionalisation based on the 1925 Scopes Trial.) Old Vic Theatre.

**30 September.** *Should God be De-Radicalised?* Abrar House, 45 Crawford Place. London. Abdullah al Andalusi v Bob Churchill.

**3 October, BHA Groups Representatives Annual Meeting,** Conway Hall, London (BHA Members, two delegates per group only).

**19 October.** Intelligence Squared debate: "*The Catholic Church is a Force for Good in the World*". Anne Widdecombe and Abp John Onaiyekan versus Christopher Hitchens and Stephen Fry. Methodist Central Hall, Westminster (tickets £25).

**29 October.** *Does the Natural World Point to God?* Alister McGrath v Stephen Law. Conway Hall, London.

**31 October,** Evolutionary Theory, day conference, Conway Hall, London.

**11 November,** East Sussex SACRE in Lewes.

Note: Some of these are late London meetings that may present travel problems.