

'Good Reasons for Believing in God'

... was the title of Dan Dennett's very entertaining talk to **LSH** on Wed. 17th Aug. - [sadly] not in the flesh but delightfully engaging nevertheless.

This was of course one of the presentations to the Sept. 2007 AAI Convention in Washington DC* – [other speakers: Richard Dawkins; Sam Harris; Christopher Hitchens; Ayaan Hirsi Ali; J. Anderson Thomson; Eugenie Scott; Matthew Chapman & Edward Tabash]

He began by explaining how people can quite rationally 'believe' things in the absence of absolute knowledge; giving as examples Mount Everest [*most people couldn't pick Mount Everest out from pictures including other, similar sized, mountains*] and a statement of fact written in Turkish by a friend [*the meaning of which Dennett remains (deliberately) ignorant*]. But in both examples 'believing' something revealed to you by someone who has consummate knowledge of it is perfectly acceptable – in fact it would be patently unrealistic to go around verifying for yourself every single piece of knowledge. You have to trust the specialists in many cases. "*We'll do the believing – we'll leave the understanding to the experts*".

But compare those scientific examples with religion ... In religion, even the experts claim not to understand: in fact they don't confess they don't understand – they insist they don't. They make a special, marvellous glory of the fact that the central propositions of their faith are incomprehensible 'even to the experts' ... "which is just bizarre!"

Dennett wanted to examine how and why this strange state of affairs arose in the first place. Starting from the inarguable proposition that there are no good

for believing that God exists and plenty of good reasons for believing that God does not exist ... 'BUT' ... There are several reasons for 'declaring' a belief in God!

- There are plenty of unreflective people who believe that '*whatever the priests say*' is truth. It doesn't bother them – they just accept it on the authority of their religious leaders. And most people are too busy living their lives to be very reflective.

- Then there are reflective people who can see [as clearly as we can] that there are no good reasons for believing in God. However; they think that belief in God is somehow obligatory ... so they contrive to "believe" in God. [*And it was that phenomenon Dennett wanted to examine*]

He talked about intelligent people who profess a belief in God (although he preferred the term 'Declarers' to 'Professors').

Those who believe out of Fear – not simply fearing a vengeful God; more the fear of a catastrophic collapse of consensus; and the danger of that leading to a Failed State.

Then there is Love – where the desire to not hurt, or disappoint, or enrage those we love is so strong that many people become trapped in the pretence. Indeed; if we push too hard we may find ourselves no longer able to respect those we previously thought well of.

There is also Guilt – those religious leaders who know very well that they do not believe what they profess to believe from their pulpits; but they pass-the-buck to their congregations and allow them to police themselves ... Believers don't have to listen to the leaders; they get all the instructions on how

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they should believe from their family and friends who are all invested in forcing the pretence of believing too.

There is The Concorde Fallacy – those people who've invested so much in their belief that they deem it [almost] impossible to stop now!

And finally simple Embarrassment – the difficulty of admitting you have actually been wrong all these years; and not wanting to admit you are wrong is a very powerful human emotion.

So there are more people who 'Believe in Belief in God' than there are people who 'Believe in God' – simply because those who 'Believe in God' must also 'Believe in the belief in God' too!

Dennett thought about how words might help in breaking these cycles of myth – giving as an example the word Gay and

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Eat Your Sins – 'follow-up'

Source - www.parentdish.co.uk

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More details have merged concerning the 'Eat Your Sins' story featured in last month's Newsletter.

When seven-year-old Luis Mullen came home from Ainderby Steeple primary, Northallerton he asked his mum "...why do I have to say 'sorry'?" Assuming he'd done something wrong at school, she encouraged him to explain what had happened. He described how he, and the rest of his class, was made to write the word 'Sorry' on a piece of paper – and eat it – so as to repent their sins!

Unbeknown to parents, the evangelical New Life Baptist Church had been invited into the school as part of their 'Kidzone Roadshow'; described as '... the Big Prayer Experience' - designed to explain the purpose of prayer – the need for adoration of God - and to ask God for help.

Part of the lesson-plan notes Luis' mum found described the purpose of the project thus:

"... We confess when we say sorry for something wrong. Today we are going to say Sorry to God. We will write sorry on a piece of paper and eat it".

The New Life Baptist Church's website describes its visits to local schools as '... an exciting programme of drama, music and games' - and New Life Baptist church as '- a lively evangelical, charismatic church'.

Celia Mullen, 46, was horrified. She sent her son to the local Church of England primary hoping for a traditional education but it is not the first time she has had cause for concern. On another occasion Luis was sent home with an adult Bible having been told that it would 'make him good'.

At home Luis refused to sleep in his room and presented his mum with a picture he'd drawn – of the Devil with horns, tail and a trident fork. Then he drew an angel.

Celia complained to head-teacher Fiona Sharp over making pupils eat their 'apologies to God', written on rice paper, but was told: 'That is what we do.'

Withdrawing Luis from Ainderby Steeple; Celia has asked her MP [William Hague] to investigate, and has found him a place at another local school.

To her horror, she has discovered the same church group make monthly visits there too but says 'I had no choice but to accept. There aren't any other schools around here they don't go into, but I've insisted that he must not attend these sessions.'

Another concerned parent who has asked not to be named has also switched his children's schools to avoid the prayer sessions.

He said: 'I have my religious beliefs, I have my faith, but this is indoctrination of young minds on an *unprecedented scale.'

The school's board of governors is investigating the incident.

*Unprecedented? - Sadly not – [Ed]



From
The
Committee
Room

Next **LSH** Committee Meeting 09.30am Sat 1st Oct. 2011
Meeting Room – Great Eccleston Village Centre
All 'paid-up' **LSH** members welcome

Please indicate your intention to participate and [attending or not] be sure to submit any items for discussion as soon as possible and, in any case, at least seven days beforehand [i.e. Sat. 27th Sept.] so an agenda can be circulated thereby allowing time to reflect on the issues under consideration.

The agenda will be published in the next Newsletter.

And speaking of agenda's ...

October is our **A.G.M.**

7.30pm Wednesday 19th October 2011

Item 5 of the **LSH** constitutions states:

An Annual General Meeting shall be held before the end of October in each year.

It shall receive financial accounts and the reports of the Executive Committee for the year ended the previous 31st August.

It shall elect the Honorary Officers of the Group and the members of the Executive Committee.

At least 21 days' notice of the meeting shall be given to all members.

Nomination of members who have prior approval (duly seconded by fully paid-up members) and notices of resolutions must be received by the Secretary at least seven days before the meeting.

Any member whose nomination for Honorary Office does not lead to election shall be considered as a nominee for ordinary membership of the Committee.

This item is to be considered as fulfilling that obligation to provide at least 21 days notice of the **LSH A.G.M.** - no other notice will be given.

Please be aware:

All notices of resolutions must be received by the secretary at least seven days prior to the A.G.M therefore no items received after midnight Tuesday 12th October will be eligible for inclusion in the agenda.

Subsequent items can only be considered under A.O.B. and may therefore be deemed unsuitable for decision without a fuller debate and further consideration.

In seeking to comply with our Constitution - and in the interest of fairness to those who have submitted resolutions in the proper way - there can be no exceptions.

The final programme of events now confirmed and included below.

NWhumanists

united on purpose

'What the world most needs at this moment is a means of convincing human beings to embrace the whole of the species as their moral community. For this we need to develop an utterly non-sectarian way of talking about the full spectrum of human experience and human aspiration. We need a discourse on ethics & spirituality that is every bit as unconstrained by dogma and cultural prejudice as the discourse of science is' Sam Harris

Announcing our inaugural regional conference

(Organised by Lancashire Secular Humanists, Liverpool Humanist Group & Greater Manchester Humanists)

'Humanism For The 21st Century'

*Saturday 8th October – Sunday 9th October 2011

St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester M12 6FZ

The Conference Objectives are:

- To enrich the knowledge and commitment of new and existing members.
- To develop links between local Humanist Groups – particularly those in the North West.
- To develop links with other like-minded groups in the North West.
- To help participants move forward in living their lives as Humanists.
- To enthuse participants with the message that we have something really worthwhile to offer.
- To help promote the value of Humanism to the wider Public.

Want To Be A Guinea Pig?

We've been contacted by Kate Sheals: an undergraduate research intern in the School of Psychology at the University of Central Lancashire.

Kate is working under the supervision of Dr Sarita Robinson and Dr Gayle Brewer, who are currently undertaking research into the impact of the everyday world on the physical and psychological health & wellbeing.

One of the areas of research currently being focused on is the positive or negative impacts that religious affiliation can have on the health and wellbeing of individuals, and to understand the mechanisms which may govern these effects (such as the role of social support).

They hope their research findings will be able to provide a better understanding of the role of religious beliefs (or lack thereof) and observance in physical and psychological health & wellbeing in the modern world.

In order to carry out our research they'd like to make contact with **LSH** members to ask about their current health status & wellbeing as well as their theological beliefs.

The data for the study will be collected using anonymous questionnaires.

All questionnaires will be printed, delivered and collected at the expense of the researchers and your convenience.

We are assured that the research project and questionnaire have been approved by the School of

Programme

3 Friday 7 October*: Evening Pre-conference entertainment
(showing film of interest to Humanists)

Saturday 8 October:

From 9.00 am Registration

9.30 am Opening of conference - Ian Abbott

9.45 am Keynote address by Andrew Copson, CEO of BHA - Coffee - then break-out groups and plenary discussion

1.00 pm Buffet lunch on site

2.30 pm Panel discussion (*The Big Question format*)
Chair: Guy Otten - Evan Harris, Ray Tallis, Carole Truman, Andrew Copson.

3.50pm Coffee Break

4.10pm Panel discussion (*Question Time format*)
Chair: Guy Otten - Evan Harris, Ray Tallis, Carole Truman, Andrew Copson.

5.30 pm Close

Evening: *Informal dining - various locations (facilitated get-togethers)*

Sunday 9 October:

9.30 am Why more equal societies almost always do better Kathryn Busby, *The Equality Trust*

11.00 am "Why Bother?" - with so many apparently insoluble global problems ...
Marilyn Mason - *Humanists for a Better World (H4BW)*

12.30 pm Conference close - Ian Abbott

Tickets: £42 including lunch and refreshments (*Limited number of discounted tickets available for Students)

For further information, or to book a place, contact:

John Coss: tel: 0161-430-3463

email: secretary@gmh.humanist.org.uk

For up to date information visit: www.gmh.humanist.org.uk

Psychology Ethics Committee and the guidelines of the British Psychological Society will be strictly adhered to.

Gayle, Sarita and Kate are happy to introduce this study directly to **LSH** members - or they'll provide a set of questionnaires for us to distribute between ourselves.

If you'd like to participate in this research either contact the Dr(s) Brewer / Robinson direct [see below]

– or me [ian@lancshuamnmism.org.uk]

and I'll request the appropriate number of questionnaires and send them to you

Dr Gayle Brewer:

gbrewer@uclan.ac.uk

Dr Sarita Robinson:

srobinson1@uclan.ac.uk

Come on - Might be interesting [Ed]



It's been a long time coming but at last we've updated the [LSHWebsite](#).

Helen and I have taken on board suggestions from some of you, in particular Peter's suggestion to carry more current information on

the front page and also Ian's fundraising ideas, so it's now ready for your inspection.

WE'RE ASKING FOR YOUR HELP!

If you have Internet access please visit the site and explore all the options there and then let us have your feedback.

If you have a Smartphone then let us know how easy/difficult you find it browsing the site on that tiny screen. We may consider creating a separate mobile site if it is found that the main site is difficult to access in this way.

If you are not comfortable with the computer in general and/or browsing websites in particular then please let us know your areas of difficulty and we will try to include this in our training/demo session next month.

We believe the website is a valuable asset to members and so we want to help you get the most out of it.

We are very proud to have won the BHA Website of the Year award last year and so we're inspired to do even better this year.

Your feedback will help us to fine tune it.

You can access the site at www.lancshumanism.org.uk or simply type Lancashire Humanists into Google and you'll find us.

NEW THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

- "Latest News" item on the home page is our response to Peter's request for current info
- EasySearch and EasyFundraising are in response to Ian's suggestions
- Another brand new feature is the Members' Library with a list of available books/dvd's
- On the home page we provide a link to better directions how to find us
- We provide access to Facebook and Twitter AND...tell you what they are and how to join!!
- We have an LSH Bookshop hosted by Amazon.
Buy books and other things here <#>
- And the forum now opens in its own window, hopefully making it less confusing

So please help. Send your feedback by email preferably to david@davidbrindley.co.uk and I'll liaise with Helen & Ian to consider all suggestions for improvement.

Thank you in anticipation.

Best regards . . . DAVID (B)

You may feel some of these books are not appropriate for an [LSH](#) bookshop.

If so please also let us have your views on this along with your general comments on the site.

Crem-encounters

Having my gast well and truly flabbered.

"... and as I explained on the phone; humanist ceremonies can have no religious content. No references to god: or hymns or prayers & suchlike"

Just part of my usual preamble at a recent family visit as we prepared to discuss the funeral ceremony for their much loved mother.

"Oh no – mum didn't believe in any of that nonsense" – came the reassuring response -

"She had no time for God and Vicars or Church ... the only thing she believed in were her Guardian Angels!"

[There are times when you just want to scream!!!]

"I refuse to prove that I exist" says God, "For proof denies faith, and without faith I am nothing."
– Douglas Adams

Should one continue to base one's life on a system of belief that--for all its occasional wisdom and frequent beauty--is demonstrably untrue? - Charles Templeton, former right-hand man to Billy Graham in Farewell to God.

Reasons For Believing in God ... Continued from Page 1

... how it eventually led to the [general] acceptability of homosexuality.

He suggested 'Bright' might be the same thing for atheists but worried that the opposite of bright - Dim – may then be inferred.

"But" he said "the opposite of Gay is Glum" however that's not the word gay people use – it is instead the perfectly acceptable [positive] word 'Straight'.

He proposes that a non-bright could therefore be referred to as 'Super' – those who believe in the supernatural ... and toyed with the concept of a world full of 'Supers' and 'Brights' ... but suggested there was possibly another genre of non-brights too: 'Murkies' ... people who don't want miracles and supernatural phenomenon; they want to keep it murky and vague.

Dennett finished with the tantalizing prospect that – in [possibly] not too many years the Vatican may be 'The European Museum of Roman Catholicism' and Mecca – 'Disney's Magic Kingdom of Allah' ... and in case anyone thinks that is too fanciful ... The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul started off as a Church; then became a Mosque - and now? ... It's a Museum.

*The AAI [Atheist Alliance International] 2007 Convention DVD is in our [\[LSH\]](#) library.

Phase II of our website www.lancshumanism.org.uk 5

is well under way thanks to all the hard work put in by David & Helen – If you've not visited us there lately be sure to do that soon.

On page 4 we featured David's appeal for your help in developing the website you'd like – instead of simply the improvements he thinks would work. This admirably pro-active approach relies on your participation – the more feedback he gets the more those improvements will reflect how you access and use 'your' website.

One recent addition to the drop-down menu on our 'Campaigns' tag is a reflection of our continuing support of Dignity in Dying and their admirable crusade to make assisted dying available to anyone who is terminally ill and believes it should only be they – and not others – who have the final say in how, when and where their life should end.

That page is copied below - but it is accessible and interactive through the above mentioned link our website ... another good reason to visit.

We support the "Campaign for Dignity in Dying" CampaignforDignityinDying.org

CampaignforDignityinDying.org is an interactive campaign website, created to help you campaign to change the law on assisted dying.

By keeping you updated on what to do and when, and providing the necessary facts and figures to argue the case for assisted dying, **this site will help you to become a key part of one of the most important campaigns of the twenty-first century** . . . Click the link above for access . . . It's divided into sections to help you access the information you need as easily as possible.

WHY

Features key information on the case for assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent adults. You can browse statistics and evidence on assisted dying from both the UK and overseas, and use this information to challenge misconceptions about a change in the law.

HOW

Will equip you with all the tools you need to become an active campaigner for Dignity in Dying. This section features Dignity in Dying's most up-to-date and urgent appeals for action on the campaign for assisted dying. You can currently use the links here to write to your MP, write to your local newspapers, and to email friends and family.

BLOG

This is where you can see the most up-to-date news and information on the campaign to legalise assisted dying. This section will tell you what needs doing when, and you'll hear from supporters across the country about things they've been doing to help change the law on assisted dying.

JOIN

Allows you to sign up for regular updates from the site, ensuring any important assisted dying news is delivered straight to your inbox.

By joining Campaignfordignityindying.org information can be tailored for you, for example: what's happening in your local constituency.

So let's make an assisted dying law a reality.

Click the link to find out even more Campaignfordignityindying.org



Now 'That's' Intelligent Design!

" ... I want to live my life backwards. You start out dead and get that out of the way. Then you wake up in an old people's home feeling better every day. You get kicked out for being too healthy, go collect your pension, and then when you start work, you get a gold watch and a party on your first day. You work for 40 years until you're young enough to enjoy your retirement. You party, drink alcohol, and are generally promiscuous, then you are ready for high school. You then go to primary school, you become a kid, you play. You have no responsibilities, you become a baby until you are born. And then you spend your last 9 months floating in luxurious spa-like conditions with central heating and room service on tap, larger quarters every day and then Voila! You finish off as an orgasm!"

... Woody Allan

GAS LAND

Can you Light Your Water On Fire?

FREE SCREENING

presented by
Central Lancashire Friends of the Earth

This Oscar-nominated film exposes the impacts on communities of gas shale exploitation and 'fracking' - now being tested in Lancashire.

Monday 12 September, 7.30 pm
(doors open 7pm)

The Continental, South Meadow Lane,
Preston, PR1 8JP

more info at: www.newcontinental.net
www.foe-centrallancs.co.uk

'Cuadrilla Resources' are drilling for gas on the Flyde, using a system called fracking.

This uses water and chemicals to crack the rocks and release the gas . . . It's possible that there could be gas in the ground as far as Bowland.

To make the people of Lancashire aware of the issues, Friends of the Earth are showing a film that shows the environmental concerns in America, where fracking has already taken place.

There will be a discussion after the film

Next Meeting

The time / date / place of our next **LSH** meeting is:

7.30pm – Wednesday 21st September 2011

Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High Street, The Square, Great Eccleston, Nr Preston. **PR3 0YB**

'Discovering Humanism on the web'
'From toe dipper to surfer in one evening!'

Using our own website we'll discover how to meet, and discuss issues with, fellow humanists.

LSH Web-master David and our Internet Marketing guru Helen will provide simple hints on how to access our **LSH** website and deliver on-screen demonstrations of how to get the best out of the site. They'll also be on hand to give individual advice attention for those who are new to the web.

So: if you want to:

Access the members' library - Navigate the bookshop - Use EasySearch and EasyFundraising to support the group or Participate in the Forum

This is the place to be.

It will be as non-technical as possible and definitely NOT aimed at those already very familiar with websites ... but will still be of interest to them because

....Continued ►

6 ... **'Discovering Humanism on the web'** ... continued

... they'll have an opportunity to see the new features and ask questions of their own.

Using the very excellent Great Eccleston Village Centre facilities there will also be a hands-on computer workshop in the IT Suite as well as the main presentations in the usual meeting room.

There'll be all the usual literature – what's-on notices – refreshments and raffle too.

See You There

Ocean: "A body of water occupying two-thirds of a world made for man - who has no gills."
~Ambrose Bierce

What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To

Cumbria Humanists e-mail - oldcodger2@btinternet.com
Sadly Cumbria Humanists is currently dormant enquiries can be directed to George Weston at the above e-mail address.

Isle of Man Freethinkers www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk

7.30 Sunday 11 Sept. - **Election Focus** - Discussion & Debate - Questions for would-be MHKs

12.00 Thurs 15 Sept. - 'Lunch' Alessandros, Castle St, Douglas

Liverpool Humanists <http://livehum.org>

No details posted yet - for update see website

Greater Manchester Humanists <http://gmh.humanist.org.uk>

7pm Wed 14 Sept: Friends Meeting House, Mount St, M2 5NS
Jan Ferguson [Humanist Celebrant] - Hatch, Match & Dispatch

South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists
www.humanists.org.uk

12.30 Sat 11 Sept: Picnic - Bring your own picnic [tea & coffee will be provided] At the home of Tricia & Chris

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire
www.wyhumanists.org.uk

7pm Thus 8 Sep: **Summer Pub Social** - Join us for a drink and a meal at The Adelphi, 1-3 Hunslet Road, Leeds, LS10 1JQ

Lytham St Annes & Blackpool Amnesty
www.amnesty.org.uk/lytham

7.30pm Mon 1st Aug: Church Rd Centre Methodist Church; St Annes. FY8 5PX

LSH Meetings - The Small Print

Lancashire Secular Humanists is a group for free-thinking individuals living lives informed by **Logic, Science & Humanity**

All **LSH** meetings are 'open' meetings. Anyone is invited to join in our discussions regardless of whether they are humanist – secularist – religious - undecided - or [just] interested.

We are people who enjoy participating in intelligent discourse between ourselves and with others about wide ranging subjects on the understanding that the only common denominator will be that nobody resorts to dogma in defence of a contention.

Being freethinkers there are many things we secular humanists will not agree on between ourselves, but there are matters on which we do take a firm and unanimous stand ...

We do not condone discrimination of any sort - nor do we hate religious people ... Such views are entirely contrary to any humanist philosophy and we reserve the right to exclude any person promoting them!

Don't Forget - If you have trouble parking at Great Eccleston for our meetings you can use The Farmers Arms Car Park

* With apologies - the **hyperlinks** are for those reading this 'on-line'