



# NEWS & VIEWS



[www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk](http://www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk)

New Series

Number 38

May 2012

*Humanists are a large and growing population of ethically concerned but non-religious people. We are always pleased to welcome as new members those who believe we can live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs and who try to make sense of life using reason, experience and shared human values. Our group is affiliated to the British Humanist Association, the Gay & Lesbian Humanist Association & the National Secular Society.*

## Past events

### 'Just Suppose'

**On 16 April Mike Lawrence, who campaigns against faith schools, the religious indoctrination of children and the privileged position of religion in British society, gave us a preview of a film/presentation that he has made, and that he is still working on. The film is called 'Just suppose' and is a riposte to the argument often put by Christian apologists that we are 'historically a Christian society'.**

What if the story of Jesus, as told in the Bible and taught by the church, is not correct, the film asks. It explains the widespread acceptance of the Christian religion as the result of a series of battles and victories, starting with the Emperor Constantine. The main claim that the film makes is that there was no historical, 'literal' Christ. It draws on evidence from early documents (the first epistle of Clement and the epistle of Barnabas) to show that, long before the time when the historical Christ is supposed to have lived, there were stories of a mythical, allegorical Jesus, who was crucified and rose from the dead. The early church, the film says, set out to root out all worship of and references to the mythical Jesus – this accounts for early schisms in the church and much of the persecution of 'heretics' in medieval and pre-medieval times.

Following the showing of the film, there was an interesting discussion, which focused mainly on the 'tone' of the film, which some audience members felt would alienate those it was trying to convince.

More information about Mike Lawrence's campaigning work and a short slide show giving the main points of 'Just Suppose' can be found on the website <http://notori.co.uk>.

Suppose that today we have been unwittingly duped by the events of history.  
Suppose that the idea of a Christ figure is centuries older than the literal figure we know today.

Suppose that Jesus Christ was originally an allegorical figure, and today's literal figure is in fact plagiarised from this earlier allegorical version.

500 BCE      1 CE      30 CE      2010 CE

We might imagine that the allegorical Christ is in effect a myriad of different Christ figures followed by many diverse ancient Christian groups.

### AGM – contributions to buffet

The papers for the AGM are being sent out along with this issue of News & Views. We hope to see plenty of you there on 15 June. This is just a reminder to contact Jane Wynne Willson well in advance (at [janeww1@virginmedia.com](mailto:janeww1@virginmedia.com) or on 0121 475 6508) to let her know what food or drink you can contribute. Food will be available from 6.30. We aim to start the AGM promptly at 7.30 and get through the business as quickly as we can.

## Values Education for Life

On 8 May, David Rowse, who is the founder of the registered charity Values Education for Life, and who currently chairs the organisation, explained how the two schools run by the charity put into practice the principles associated with values education and the concept of the 'just community'.

David began by pointing out the mismatch that often exists in the value that people accord to the idea of 'education' and to that of 'school' – that is, most people, even including disaffected young people, rate 'education' as something of high importance, while they may have a very low opinion of 'school'.

He went on to outline the work being done by the Centre for Values Education for Life, which provides for young people who have been rejected by the education system. It caters for up to 40 young people at a time, most of whom have behavioural difficulties – they may be aggressive, violent and hard to get on with, reacting primarily to basic emotions such as anger. The school aims to help them by introducing them to a rational regime.

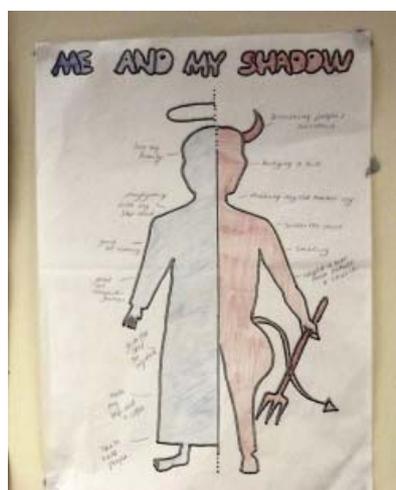
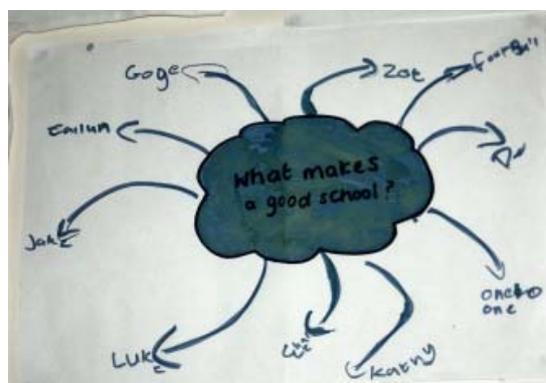
This is based on the ideas of the psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, who had a great influence on David when he worked with Lawrence at Roosevelt High School in New York on a programme to change the behaviour of students.

David explained Kohlberg's theory of cognitive/moral development, which sets out the following stages:

- 1 Being good because of the fear of consequences
- 2 'You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.'
- 3 Good boy/girl – the desire to be liked (most people reach this level)
- 4 Obedience to laws/social conventions – because these are necessary for a functioning society
- 5 Principled level – working out of one's own moral code, not necessarily coinciding with the laws of society, so a person may disobey rules inconsistent with their own principles.

The 'Just Community' projects that Kohlberg set up involved young people as part of the school community in a structured way – through community group meetings, for example, with votes on matters concerning the young people. The aim was to be democratic and open-minded – to listen to the young people's reasons for their choices. The 'Fairness committee', made up of staff and students, worked to resolve problems and disputes by talking through the nature of the difficulty. This could often be attributed to a mismatch in the stages of moral development.

The Centre uses similar methods, David said, to engage young people, and to get them to think about morality and values – it's about questioning, not providing answers.

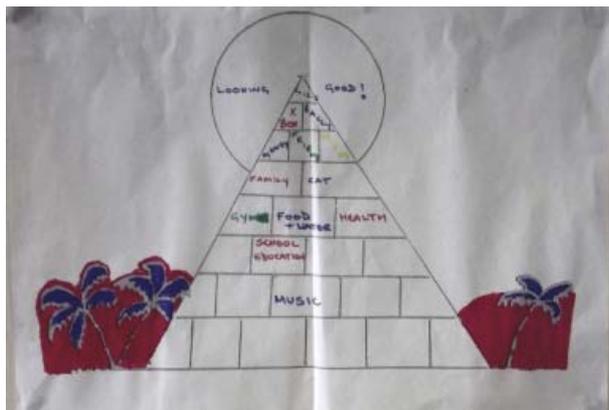


To give an example of this, he showed a film of an intervention with a group of students at a particular school, identified by teachers as 'naughty'. The session consisted of:

- a values exercise, where children looked at their own positive and negative characteristics
- a 'shipwreck' game – a version of the balloon debate, where each person has to argue the value of the character allocated to them
- reflections on what the students had gained from their involvement.

The film showed these 'naughty' students participating in a very positive way, and demonstrating a real appreciation of what they had gained from the session.

The illustrations shown here are taken from values exercises similar to those depicted in the film.



David pointed out the privilege experienced by middle-class young people, in terms of the consistent support available to them. Disadvantaged young people may find it very difficult to fit into structures, he said. Some very difficult kids, he said, are not able to operate at all in a group setting. At the Centre, such young people have a one-to-one relationship with a mentor, with whom they undertake a special programme of activities, before being put into a class.

The staff and volunteers at the Centre hope that the work they do will continue to influence young people for the rest of their lives – they would like to track students for at least five years after they leave, to see what happens to them. You can find out more about the work of the Centre at <http://birmingham.schooljotter.com/valueseducation>.

## Thanks to Victoria and Percy

We are sad to announce that two long-serving members of the committee have tendered their resignations and will be stepping down at the AGM.

**Victoria Denning**, who has worked tirelessly as the group's Secretary, is moving away from Birmingham to Bishop's Castle in Shropshire. We're delighted to know, though, that she will remain a member of Birmingham Humanists. She also tells us that, as a Humanist celebrant, she is happy to carry out any pre-arranged ceremonies, and any ceremonies that BH members wish her to conduct.



**Percy Lea** has been a member of the committee for many years and has served as the group's Librarian for much of that time. He's also the organiser of our stall at the Moseley Festival (see page 4). We are sorry that Percy is having to withdraw from the committee for health reasons and we hope that his health will improve. He certainly deserves to take things easier after all that he has done for Birmingham Humanists!

We send our thanks to Victoria and Percy for all their hard work, along with our best wishes for the future.

## Call for new committee members

With the resignation of two members of our current committee (see above), we are in urgent need of new committee members. We would like at least to maintain the size of the committee – it would be even better to increase it!

The meeting schedule isn't too onerous – about once every two months. We try to get through the boring bits as quickly as possible, so that we can focus on the important things like planning our programme and campaigning on issues such as the teaching of religion in schools.

So please consider standing for the committee, especially if you've got suggestions for interesting meetings and/or ideas about how we could make the group better. If you'd like to put your name forward (or nominate someone else!), please contact Adrian Bailey at [baileynagy@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:baileynagy@blueyonder.co.uk) or on 0121 382 8853 in advance of the AGM on 15 June.

## Have you renewed your membership?

It's that time of year again! While many of our members have paid their subscriptions promptly, there still a few renewals outstanding. If this is you (or if you are not sure of the current state of your membership), please contact Jan Woods at [janet.e.woods@googlemail.com](mailto:janet.e.woods@googlemail.com) or on 0121 449 0170. You can also renew your membership online at [www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk](http://www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk).

### Please help!

Could you spare a couple of hours on 7 July? We need some more people to help on our stall at the Moseley Street Festival, which is usually a lively and vibrant event (weather permitting!).

It's a rare opportunity to promote humanism to the general public and we'd like to make the most of it. We make a rota of helpers, so you won't have to stay all day! If you'd like to help, please contact Percy Lea at [percylea2@hotmail.com](mailto:percylea2@hotmail.com) or on 0121 427 8497.

## Summit of success

In the last issue of News & Views, we reported on two of our members who were climbing mountains in Africa in order to raise money for charity. Congratulations to Sanjay and John, who have both reached their targets – in getting to the tops of their respective mountains, and in raising the amount of money they were aiming for.

Here's what **Sanjay Chouhan** says about climbing Mount Kilimanjaro: 'The climb started on Sunday 18/03/12 and Uhuru peak was reached on Friday 23/03/12. Each day of the climb began at around 7.30 am after breakfast until around 6.00pm. It's probably fair to say that this is one of the hardest challenges we have ever done. We are proud of what we have achieved and would recommend this amazing experience to anyone, as long as the appropriate planning and training are in place. This trip was an adventure that we will remember for a lifetime.'

Sanjay's team set a fundraising target of £4,500 for Birmingham Children's Hospital. The amount raised so far on Just Giving is £4,962.

**John Edwards** says: 'My trip to Morocco to climb the highest peak in North Africa was very successful and I was one of 25 members of West Bromwich Mountaineering Club to reach the summit. We left Manchester Airport on the Wednesday, climbed to the hut at the base of the mountain on Thursday, came back down to Imlil on Saturday and were back in the UK at midnight on Monday.'

John aimed to raise at least £700 in aid of Ian Edwards Cancer Break Trust, which offers financial support to cancer sufferers who are having to spend long periods in hospital, to enable them to take a short holiday when they are not receiving treatment. So far he has raised £2,356, more than three times his target.

The picture shows the article which featured in the Birmingham Mail on St George's Day – the prominence of the flag may have helped!



### Congratulations to UB:ASH!

Each year the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies (AHS) holds an awards ceremony at its national convention, recognising the outstanding achievements of its member societies during the past year. This time UB:ASH (the University of Birmingham Atheist Secular and Humanist Society) won the Best Society award because they 'took part in Non-Prophet Week, held lots of diverse events, had a great committee and held their first Reason Week, which was a big success'. Well done, UB:ASH!