

Monthly Bulletin — October 2021

UPDATE ON THE NEH COMMUNITY FUND BY MIKE TURNER

The NEH sub-committee overseeing this Microgrant Fund has been very busy processing 20 applications from all over the North East. Of the 19 that we have fully processed so far, we have given grants to five organisations for projects that met our selection criteria. These were:

1. North Tyneside Disability Forum were awarded £380 to buy a disability-friendly hair dressing chair.
2. Jesmond Library were awarded £448 for a display case and books for improving the health of the community.
3. Ninebanks Church and Community Hall Group were given £449 to purchase a new oven and hob for their kitchen refurbishment.
4. Linskill Community Centre in North Shields was awarded £500 to purchase new equipment for their Sensory Room for children and young people with special or additional needs.
5. Horden Community Welfare Football Club was given £500 to buy some new equipment to improve their training facilities.



So, having earmarked £5000 for the Community Fund, we have now spent 45% of it (£2277) on good community projects that we can be proud to have supported. After an initial rush, the applications have now slowed considerably. We still have four months before the fund closes, but we need your help to publicise the fund.

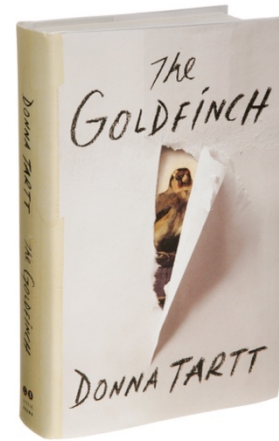
Do you know any small groups who could benefit from this kind of grant? Is there a community group near you that needs funds for an improvement project? Please help us spread the word! Share our [Community Fund](#) page via social media or make personal contact with the group and tell them about our microgrants. Further details, and FAQs about our grants can be found on [our website](#).

RECAP OF RECENT NEH EVENTS

Virtual Book Club by Jan Mole

The NEH Zoom book club members held their first meeting after the summer break on Tuesday 21st September. Our book for discussion was [The Goldfinch](#) by Donna Tartt, an epic novel of nearly 800 pages which kept us busy alongside our holiday and summer activities.

Apart from one member of our group who enjoyed the book, the overall consensus was a thumbs down for this one. It was agreed that the quality of writing was very good, and the novel was likened to *War and Peace* or to a Dickens novel in its scope and number of characters. However, it was overly long, and the group tended to scan sections where the story dragged. It was difficult to identify with any of the main characters and the philosophical summary at the end of the book was felt to be an unnecessary explanation.



Our next choice of book for discussion is [*English Pastoral*](#) by James Rebanks. This is a *Sunday Times* Nature Book of the Year and a new bestseller from the author of *The Shepherd's Life*. *English Pastoral* is the story of an inheritance: one that affects us all. It tells of how rural landscapes around the world were brought close to collapse, and the age-old rhythms of work, weather, community, and wild things were lost. And yet this elegy from the northern fells is also a song of hope: of how, guided by the past, one farmer began to salvage a tiny corner of England that was now his, doing his best to restore the life that had vanished and to leave a legacy for the future.

It was agreed that our meetings would continue in future on the 4th Tuesday of each month as opposed to the 3rd and so our next Zoom meeting will be on 26th October at 7:30 PM. If you are interested in joining, please contact Jan Mole at 0132 535 6029, 0780 466 7390, or janet.mole@ntlworld.com.

Outreach to the Public by Jan Mole

Darlington High Row, Saturday 25th of September 2021

It was another lovely September day, just perfect for setting up our stall and talking to the residents of Darlington about Humanism. The interest from the public compared favourably with other areas visited by the committee, and Kate, Moira, Mike, and I certainly enjoyed catching up. We had the convenience of a cracking coffee shop in one of Darlington's famous 'yards' and we were questioned by, among others, a lady of 93, who was definitely not ready to arrange her funeral yet, a Lycra-clad cyclist, and a conspiracy theorist. However, we were also able to offer advice to a lady with a daughter who was dying and two young gay lads. Reg and Jean who are friends of the Cattell's were also happy to chat.



*** Next stop Tynemouth Market, 9:00AM to 3:00PM, Saturday October 9th ***

Please come and visit or join us sometime on that day if you can. We will be planning more such occasions in different parts of the region, so please make suggestions for venues or events in your locality too.

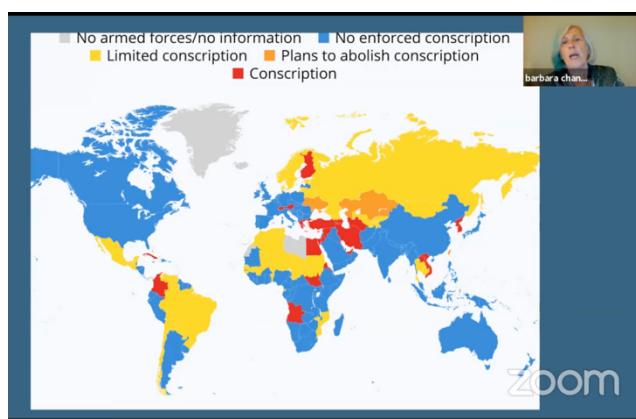
Reminder for All Young Humanists!

As we said in last month's bulletin, our member Rebekka Hill is a [Young Humanist Ambassador](#) for Humanists UK. She is keen to start a group for those aged 18-35 within NEH and would love to hear from interested members. To join in or share ideas on what this group can do, you can contact Rebekka by email at rebekkahill@hotmail.co.uk.

Public Lecture — Pacifism and Remembrance

On Thursday, September 23rd, we held our first event with an in-person element since February of 2020. This talk featured the engaging Barbara Chandler who is an accredited Humanist celebrant and represents Humanists UK on the organising group for the London International Conscientious Objectors Day. Barbara's well researched talk was full of interesting facts about the history of military conscription and conscientious objection, the role religion has played in conscientious objection, and how Humanism has fit into this, including the current approaches to this issue by some Humanist organisations.

Military conscription has a very long history. From Babylon to the Roman Empire, from feudal Europe to tsarist Russia, men have been forced (and sometimes asked) to serve in the military during war and in other circumstances where the state deemed service necessary. In the Middle East, conscription included forcing child and adult male slaves to serve, whereas in the Roman Empire slaves could volunteer to serve and thereby earn their freedom. Modern conscription varies around the world with several countries like South Korea and Colombia still having compulsory military service for men. Barbara shared a nice map of the world to depict the current state of affairs for this.

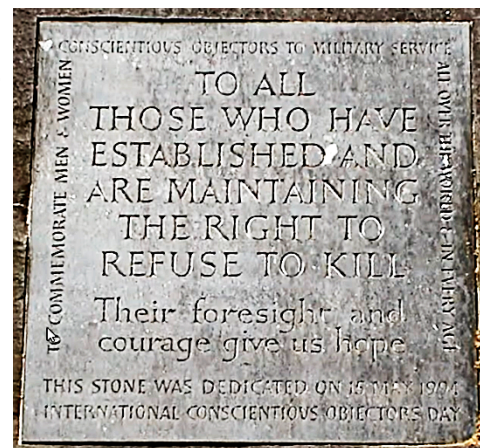


Going hand-in-hand with this, it is also a fact that *avoiding* military service has a lengthy history. Apart from the perhaps obvious reluctance to serve because of the personal dangers faced (i.e., death, leaving one's family), people have long objected to the killing and maiming of other people, and the destruction of land and property. Barbara proposed three categories for these types of conscientious objection: *absolute*—no cooperation on the part of the objector; *relative*—the objector would serve, but not in a fighting capacity (i.e., in the medical corps); and *selective*—the objector is opposed to a specific war or particular circumstances. Here, she noted Muhammed Ali as a prominent example of selective objection. In his case, this was to the Vietnam War because of the capitalist motivations and racist dimensions. Ali's

objection was eventually honoured and, according to Barbara, most upheld conscientious objections have been similarly selective. A vast majority of these upheld conscientious objections were on specific religious grounds. The prominent pacifist or non-violent religions such as Christian Mennonites, Baha'i, and Jainism are the most notable in this context. Overall, Barbara thought that non-religious objections have been given short shrift.

Yet, with the evolution of human rights, the grounds for conscientious objection have widened. For instance, Barbara noted that Article 18 of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights now recognises *belief* in addition to religion. Similarly, in France, religion and *philosophy* are grounds for objection. Interestingly, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 33/165 in 1978 widened conscientious objection to include opposition to acts by government agencies *other* than the military (e.g., those who enforce apartheid).

Barbara ended by tying this all to Humanism. She gave several interesting examples of Humanist conscientious objectors, including Bertrand Russell (who was evicted from Cambridge University's Trinity College for his objection), E.M. Forster, Fenner Brockway, and Peter Hunot. The Irish author and activist Francis Sheehy-Skeffington was also a conscientious objector. He is one of the martyrs of the 1916 Easter Rising where he tried to stop people from looting, but he himself ended up being arrested and executed. His son, Owen, went on to help establish the Irish Humanists. The Humanist and secularist Edna Mathieson was instrumental in the establishment of the 15th of May as International Conscientious Objectors' Day and in erecting the Conscientious Objectors' Commemorative Stone in Tavistock Square.



Humanist organisations around the world seem to have different stances to conscientious objection. Barbara highlighted a few of the official statements:

- American Humanist Association: “While humanists generally do not take a ‘peace at any cost’ view, we do recognize that just wars have been extraordinarily rare in human history.”
- Humanist Society Scotland: “Humanists emphasise the importance of a careful and reasoned consideration of all alternatives to war and believe in the need for international cooperation to prevent the escalation of conflict and violence.”
- Humanists UK: “There is...no universally agreed humanist perspective on war.”

The rather lacklustre stance by HUK suggests to Barbara that the formation of a Peace Network made up of Humanist members from across the UK (akin to the Humanists Climate Action group) is unfortunately unlikely.

During the questions, members asked whether conscientious objection had evolved with Christianity. But as Barbara noted, objection has a long history and not all sects of Christianity recognise pacifism, such as the Church of England. Other members wanted to know about the White Poppy, and if it is common for events about conscientious objection to receive negative comments, as happened with the advertising for this talk. Barbara didn't know the origin of the White Poppy** and

was unsurprised there was some negativity towards the talk, which seems a typical occurrence.

Overall, this was a successful blended event, due in no small part to a great speaker who sparked an interest in conscientious objection and perhaps some trips to the Conscientious Objectors' Commemorative Stone. For those who wish to view this talk in its entirety, it is now [available on YouTube](#).



***According to Wikipedia, the White Poppy has its origins in the No More War Movement and were first sold in 1933 by the Cooperative Women's Guild. The Red Poppy is sometimes viewed as political, particularly in Northern Ireland, in that it can be interpreted to honour only British military dead. The White Poppy, on the other hand, honours all those killed in all wars. (Some opponents claim the Red Poppy already does this.) The White Poppy Movement hopes for a future without war.*

UPCOMING NEH ACTIVITIES

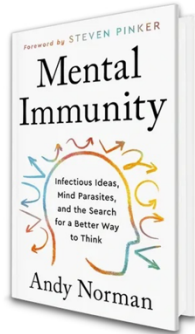

Mass Irrationality? There's a Science for That!

The Story of Cognitive Immunology by Andy Norman

For too long, we've indulged the fiction that teaching critical thinking is enough to protect us from outbreaks of mass irrationality. Recent years have underscored the inadequacy of this view: the critical thinking approach is simply not doing enough to prevent the spread of dangerously unhinged worldviews. But what's the alternative? In this talk, Andy Norman will argue that an emerging science of mental immunity offers far better tools for combatting viral nonsense. He calls this science "cognitive immunology" and his research institute—the Cognitive Immunology Research Collaborative (CIRCE)—is coordinating the efforts of leading thinkers to develop and apply its findings. By understanding bad ideas as mind-parasites, and the mind as having an "immune system" that protects us to one degree or another from bad ideas, we gain powerful new ways to promote wisdom. If cognitive immunology impacts humanity at anything like the scale immunology has, we can anticipate a day when the worst forms of cognitive contagion are contained.



**Mass Irrationality?
There's a Science for That!
The Story of Cognitive Immunology.**



A Public Lecture by Andy Norman, Thursday, October 21st from 7 to 9 PM

Andy Norman is the award-winning author of *Mental Immunity: Infectious Ideas, Mind-Parasites, and the Search for a Better Way to Think*. His work has appeared in *Scientific American*, *Psychology Today*, *Skeptic*, *Free Inquiry*, and *The Humanist*. He has appeared on The Joe Rogan Experience, NPR, The BBC's Naked Scientist, and The Young Turks. His research illuminates the evolutionary origins of human reasoning, the norms that make dialogue fruitful, and the workings of the mind's immune system. He champions the emerging science of mental immunity as the antidote to disinformation, propaganda, hate, and division. He is the founder of the Cognitive Immunology Research Collaborative (CIRCE), a global think-tank leading the effort to inoculate humanity against cognitive contagion.

Who: Dr Andy Norman

When: Thursday October 21st at 7:00 PM

What: 45-minute lecture plus plenty of time for interactive Q&A afterwards

How: Zoom opens at 6:45 PM. You can register using the Eventbrite link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-story-of-cognitive-immunology-tickets-180174676307>

If you prefer not to use Eventbrite, you can send an email to Susan Walker at northeasthumanist@gmail.com and she will send you a Zoom link directly.

This talk will also be available to watch live on YouTube at the following link: <https://youtu.be/n1kwG2GakOo>. Viewers there can post their questions in the chat.

Anyone is welcome to our online events. Whilst we do not charge for joining these, we are a registered charity that you may donate a few pounds to by using [the button at the bottom of our homepage](#). We suggest £3 for these donations but all amounts are greatly appreciated.

OTHER HUMANIST NEWS

From QAnon to Anti-Vaccination, We Face a Scourge of “Mind Parasites”

For a preview of next month's talk, see this [interview with Andy Norman](#) that was published on Salon.com in late-September.

We are in the midst of an ignorance outbreak. QAnon's account of global politics, despite being both irrational and implausible, has enraptured thousands. Specious anti-vaccine rhetoric abounds even among the educated. Everywhere we turn, bad ideas are spreading like a, well, virus.

Author Andy Norman takes that problem literally. In his provocative book *Mental Immunity*, the director of the Humanism Initiative at Carnegie Mellon University and founder of the Cognitive Immunology Research Collaborative reveals a growing scourge and explores what we can do to fend it off. As he explains why thinking for yourself is a poor strategy and why everyone is not, in fact, entitled to their own opinion, Norman offers a compelling case for a regimen of mental resistance. Salon talked to the author recently about how to survive an era where misinformation is more common than the flu, and why “humility is a really important, under-appreciated cognitive virtue.”

Salon: When you say that bad ideas are mind parasites, you mean just that. Tell me about that, because that is hard, especially for those of us with a philosophical bent to get our heads around.

Andy Norman: It's certainly stretching the concept of a parasite in a new direction, right? Words evolve as people find analogies or metaphors that are useful. One way to get used to the idea is to acknowledge that I'm stretching the concept of parasite into a new domain. It doesn't have to change our concept of a bad idea; it's another way to look at it. Parasites require a host; bad ideas require a host. Parasites often compromise the health of their hosts. Bad ideas can also compromise the mental wellbeing of their hosts. Parasites can leap from body to body. Bad ideas can leap from mind to mind.

[<<< Click here to read the rest of the interview at Salon.com >>>](#)

European Humanist Youth Days

The [European Humanist Youth Days](#) are back! The organisers of this event have personally asked us to share this information with our NEH members. If you know any budding young humanists, be sure to send this information to them. Europeans (this still means people living in the UK!) between the ages of 18 and 30 can join in during the month of October for online workshops and virtual ateliers. All workshops and ateliers are free to attend.

Workshops will be held on topics such as:

- Morality, moral dilemmas, and moral injury in a military environment
- Kung Fu with Confucius
- Prison break (breaching the prison walls)
- Enter the debate! (Brush up on your debating skills)
- Exercises in Critical Thinking and Argumentation
- Young, LGBT+ and Muslim? (In person)
- I-matter workshop (Identity, self-confidence, and social advocacy)
- Networking / applying for a job
- Surfin' with Epicurus
- LGBTQ Rights in Europe: a legal case study
- Saving lives: organ donation in Europe. Regulation, collaboration, and ethical challenges



In the virtual ateliers, small groups of 8 people will gather every Monday night of October to discuss a specific theme that's crucial for the future of Europe. The goal is to present findings to EU policy makers and the world during the closing event.

Ateliers will be held concerning:

- Gender Policy in the EU
- Climate Refugees in the EU
- Humanism vs. Nationalism in Europe

Info and registration: www.europeanhumanistyouthdays.org

Resurgence Festival of Wellbeing

As Humanists, we are especially concerned with the wellbeing of people around the world, so perhaps this event will be of interest to you as well. It is rather aligned with the recent launch of [Humanist Climate Action](#) and may be just the boost you need.

Widely-acclaimed and always hope-inspiring, this year's [Festival of Wellbeing](#), held on October 30th from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM, will bring together extraordinary change-makers and visionaries who will explore what is needed to "Care for the climate; Care for the earth; Care for the people." Join in for a day of thought-provoking and progressive talks from some of the world's greater thinkers and activists.



Resurgence is possibly the longest-running environmental magazine in Britain. When *Resurgence* started in 1966, it tackled issues that were only just filtering through to the mainstream debate. Articles were published on the endangered environment, renewable energy, and ecological economics. *Resurgence* continues to publish articles that are on the cutting edge of current thinking, promoting creativity, ecology, and frugality.

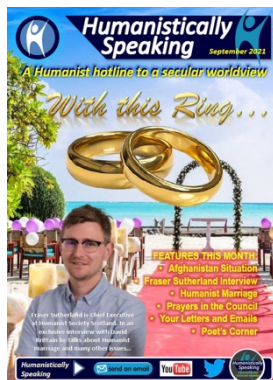
Speakers for this year's festival include:

- **Annie Lennox** who was named as one of the 100 Greatest Singers of All Time by *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Over the years, she has worked on behalf of countless organisations, including Oxfam, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, The British Red Cross, and Comic Relief. In 2011 she was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in recognition of her humanitarian work.
- **Russell Brand** whose career spans stand-up comedy, acting, broadcasting, and writing. He is the author of *Revelation: Connecting with the Sacred in Everyday Life* and he has a new weekly meditation podcast, *Above the Noise*.
- **Caroline Lucas** is former leader and co-leader of the Green Party of England and Wales. She served as one of the party's first MEPs and represented South East England until becoming the UK's first Green MP. A passionate campaigner, Caroline is vice-president of the RSPCA, vice-president of CND, and an ambassador for the Women's Environmental Network.

- **Vandana Shiva** has been described as an environmental hero. She founded Navdanya, a national movement to protect the diversity of living resources, especially native seeds, the promotion of organic farming, and fair trade.
- **Dara McAnulty** is the teenage author of *Diary of a Young Naturalist*, which explores his deep relationship with Nature, environmental campaigning work, and the everyday challenges and joys of being autistic. He has worked with Chris Packham, the RSPB, the National Trust, and The Wildlife Trusts.
- **Satish Kumar** is an activist and former monk who has been inspiring global change for over 50 years. Renowned for his peace-pilgrimage for nuclear disarmament, Satish has devoted his life to campaigning for ecological regeneration, social justice, and spiritual fulfilment. He co-founded Schumacher College and The Resurgence Trust.

This event is being held online, so you can join wherever you are. Tickets are £20 per person or £10 concessions. [<< Click here to purchase tickets >>](#)

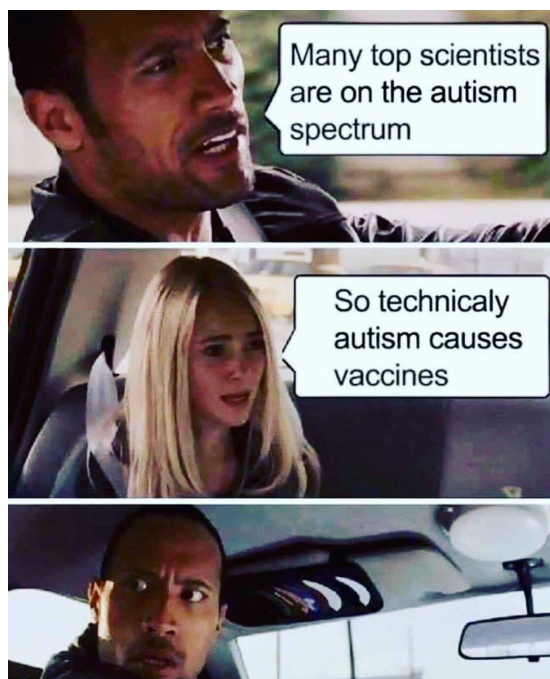
Latest Issue of Humanistically Speaking



North East Humanists are affiliated with *Humanistically Speaking*, which is a monthly magazine that has been published since 2019 by members of the South Central England Humanist Network. You can subscribe to this free magazine and view all previous issues at [their website](#). Their latest [September](#) issue has a particular focus on Humanist marriage and includes features on the Afghanistan situation, prayers in the Council, an interview with Fraser Sutherland (Chief Executive of Humanist Scotland), your letters and emails, Poet's Corner, and much more.

ALWAYS LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING

Surprise! Conspiracy thinkers may just have it backwards.



CONTACT US FOR MORE

North East Humanists

All of the latest information about North East Humanists is available on our [website](#). You can also follow us on social media via [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#). Interacting with us there is a great way to help spread the news about Humanism so we can grow and accomplish even more.

Please consider a membership with us if you do not already have one. You can join NEH for as little as £6 per year by visiting [the membership page of our website](#). Our fees are very low, but they really do support so much local grassroots work, as we hope you see in these bulletins. This month, we are excited to welcome John Sargent and Mark Lloyd to NEH!

The monthly bulletin is free for members and supporters of North East Humanists. If that's more of a commitment than you can make, just [sign up to our email list](#). For NEH members without email, the bulletin is printed by Mike and Moira Turner and sent by post. Contact them at 0191 272 8376 to arrange this if you need it.

Durham Humanist Group

This local house group is run by Susan Walker. Contact her at 0191 384 1432 or susan.humanist@gmail.com if you would like to attend events here.

Teesside Humanist Group

If you would like to join this group, please [contact us](#) for more details. You can also follow them on Twitter [@Teeshumanists](#) or like the [Teesside Humanists Facebook Group](#) run by Terry Waites and Ben Collier.

Humanist Funerals, Baby Naming Ceremonies, and Weddings

Anyone who wants advice on how to organise these should contact Les Milne at 0795 267 1533 or go to www.northeast-humanists.org.uk/ceremonies.html.