



## *Cumbria Humanist Group*

**Members' Soapbox Meeting. John Seed asks "Do Humanists have a Darwinian Advantage?" and Richard Speirs questions "Creationism in Science Lessons? Should Michael Reiss have resigned from his post as the Royal Society's Director of Education?"**

**Meeting at Morton Community Centre, Wigton Road, Carlisle  
on Wednesday, 19 November 2008 at 7.30 pm**

At the Members' Soapbox meeting of Cumbria Humanist Group at Morton Community Centre, Carlisle on 19 November, John Seed asked "Do Humanists have a Darwinian Advantage?" and Richard Speirs led discussion on "Creationism in Science Lessons? Should Michael Reiss have resigned from his post as the Royal Society's Director of Education?" Both subjects inspired lively debate.

John posed his question based on four statements of Humanist belief: 1) that there is no life before birth or after death; 2) that life has no inherent meaning but each individual should create meaning for themselves; 3) in living by the golden rule, i.e. behave to others as you would wish them to behave to you; 4) that humans are fundamentally different from animals due to our ability to use science and reason to control our environment. Typically among Humanists, there was not even a consensus on the truth of these statements, with the exception of the first, which all agreed to be a fundamental tenet of Humanism. The third is a principle shared with the teaching of most religions, but it was suggested that it might not always be appropriate even for survival, let alone Darwinian advantage. To the fourth statement, many examples were offered of the social and environmental adaptation and communication skills of other animals which would seem to match any human advantages of speech and intellect, so this assertion was also rejected.

When Michael Reiss resigned from his post in September following widespread criticism of his apparent support for teaching creationism in school science lessons, some felt that his views had been misrepresented by the media. In his introduction Richard quoted from an article by Reiss himself seeming to suggest that Reiss wanted teachers to be more proactive than – as claimed by his defenders – merely being prepared to challenge creationism if a student raised the subject in a science class. But even in this case, Richard queried whether, given the pressures of curriculum and timetable, the science class was the place for this. Members generally agreed that a more appropriate context might be philosophy or literature, and wondered why the Judaeo-Christian version of the creation myth was should have a greater claim than similar myths in Buddhism, Hinduism or the mythology of the Ancient Greeks.

If you are interested in Humanism, visit our website at [www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk](http://www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk) or telephone 01228 810592 or 01768 881245 for more information.

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(397 words)

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*Affiliated to the British Humanist Association*