

To the Right Honourable Amber Rudd, MP

We write as members of the international community of academic philosophers, including many from the UK. We ask you to reconsider the decision to refuse Hamza bin Walayat's request for asylum on the grounds of his inability to answer correctly questions about ancient Greek philosophers (Plato and Aristotle). We are puzzled by the presupposition of the Home Office that knowledge of these philosophers is a requirement for authentic self-identification as a humanist.

In particular, we would like to draw attention to the following:

1. The Western philosophical canon is not the basis of the curriculum in all countries. To expect someone from Pakistan to know about Western philosophy is like expecting someone from Britain to know about Islamic philosophy. Indeed, Plato and Aristotle do not feature in the compulsory years 1-12 levels of the UK National Curriculum: one would have to study A-Level Philosophy or Religious Studies to encounter them. UNESCO reports that "The main goal of education in Pakistan is to develop citizens who live their lives according to the teachings of Islam as stated in the Quran and Sunnah but also to become true practicing Muslims" (RUSHAP 2010). This is obviously incompatible with the open inclusion of humanism.
2. The nomination of Plato and Aristotle as humanists has no scholarly basis. There are several operative senses of 'humanism' within modern Western intellectual history (see, e.g., Cooper 1999), none of which owe any distinctive debt to Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, one of the most important modern conceptions of humanism appeals to the 'naturalism' expressed in the modern scientific worldview - a development that only emerged in the last four hundred years (see, e.g., Kitcher 2011, Kurtz 1973). Moreover, the Home Office's claim that Plato and Aristotle could be considered precursor humanists makes no sense: Plato wasn't a "humanist" in the sense of that term

specified in this article by Humanists UK, namely this: "As a descriptive term, humanists can be someone who has simply rejected religious belief but holds some positive conception of human values." Plato does not "reject religious belief": he presents arguments for the existence of a divine creator and the immortality and transmigration of the soul. And there is scholarly debate about the extent to which he can be said to hold a "positive conception of human values": in many of his mature works he proposes a theory of Forms, which locates the source of value in a supernatural domain independent of the human world. Aristotle is also complex: he believes in an objective human good, but he also believes that this good is shaped by its relation to a divine Unmoved Mover. Humanists in past ages disagreed - often fiercely - amongst themselves about the relevance to their projects of Plato and Aristotle, let alone their status as precursors.

3. For someone to be a sincere atheist (or theist), they don't have to know very much about the philosophy of atheism (or theism). Many sincere adherents of many religions do not have an extensive philosophical or theological understanding of the doctrines and practices they profess (nor need they): what is primary is one's commitment to a set of values and convictions, expressed through one's life and conduct (see, e.g., Cottingham 2005). It is not necessary to be an intellectually engaged scholar of humanism in order to be classed as an authentic humanist. (By this absurd criterion, there would only be hundreds, not millions, of 'authentic' Christians in the UK, since intellectually sophisticated understanding of doctrines like the Trinity is confined to those with academic training in theology).
4. For someone to be persecuted, perhaps killed, for being a sincere atheist (or theist, or humanist), they need to know nothing about the philosophy of atheism (or theism, or humanism).

Therefore, we deem it unreasonable for the Home Office to make decisions about asylum on the basis of anyone's philosophical sophistication. The

decision concerning Hamza bin Walayat's asylum request should therefore be reconsidered immediately.

## References

Cooper, David E. (1999) 'Humanism and the scientific worldview', *Theoria* 93: 1-17.

Cottingham, John (2005) *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy, and Human Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Kitcher, Philip (2011) 'Militant modern atheism', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 28.1: 1-13.

Kurtz, Paul (ed.) (1973) *The Humanist Alternative: Some Definitions of Humanism* (London: Pemberton).

Law, Stephen (2011) *Humanism, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press).

RUSHAP (Regional Unit for Social and Human Sciences in Asia-Pacific (RUSHSAP) (2010) *Summary of the Teaching of Philosophy in Pakistan*, UNESCO Bangkok,  
[http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/shs/Philosophy/Country\\_summary\\_updated\\_Aug2010/Summary\\_of\\_the\\_Teaching\\_of\\_Philosophy\\_in\\_Pakistan.pdf](http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/shs/Philosophy/Country_summary_updated_Aug2010/Summary_of_the_Teaching_of_Philosophy_in_Pakistan.pdf)

Signed by

Dr. Helen De Cruz, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Oxford Brookes University

<http://helendecruz.net/cv.html>

Professor Christopher Bertram, Department of Philosophy, University of Bristol

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/school-of-arts/people/christopher-d-bertram/index.html>

Professor James Lenman, Department of Philosophy, University of Sheffield

<http://www.jimmylenman.com/curriculum-vitae.html>

Dr. Tasia Scrutton, Associate Professor, University of Leeds

[https://www.leeds.ac.uk/arts/profile/20042/958/anastasia\\_philippa\\_scrutton](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/arts/profile/20042/958/anastasia_philippa_scrutton)

Dr. Rebecca Roache, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Royal Holloway, University of London

Dr. Ian James Kidd, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Nottingham

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/Philosophy/People/ian.kidd>

Katherine Dormandy, DPhil (Oxford), Lise-Meitner Research Fellow, University of Innsbruck <https://katherinedormandy.com/>

Dr. Brendan Larvor, Reader in Philosophy, University of Hertfordshire

<http://researchprofiles.herts.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/brendan-larvor%28c13854a3-738d-4988-92cb-0411199682e2%29.html%20target=>

Liam Kofi Bright, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Logic, and Scientific Method, at the London School of Economics

<https://www.liamkofibright.com/>

Dr. Kate Kirkpatrick, Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Hertfordshire

[http://researchprofiles.herts.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/kate-kirkpatrick\(bdebcdf-e09c-4136-8cdd-276d3972b185\).html](http://researchprofiles.herts.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/kate-kirkpatrick(bdebcdf-e09c-4136-8cdd-276d3972b185).html)

Professor Angie Hobbs, Professor of the Public Understanding of Philosophy, University of Sheffield

<http://angiehobbs.com/>

Professor Jennifer Saul, Department of Philosophy, University of Sheffield

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/philosophy/staff/profiles/saul>

Dr. Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Sheffield

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/philosophy/staff/profiles/romdenh-romluc>

Dr. Jonathan Lanman, School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy, and Politics, Queen's University Belfast

[https://pure.qub.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/jonathan-lanman\(a665b5b5-768c-406c-a749-915760103031\).html](https://pure.qub.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/jonathan-lanman(a665b5b5-768c-406c-a749-915760103031).html)

Dr. Joseph Kisolo-Ssonko, Teaching Associate, Department of Philosophy, University of Nottingham

Dr. Chris Woodard, Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Nottingham

Dr. Zachary Hoskins, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Nottingham

Dr. Stephen Law, Reader in Philosophy, Heythrop College, University of London. Member of the Humanist Philosophers' Group and author of *Humanism: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP 2011)

Dr. Craig French, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Nottingham

Professor David Papineau, King's College London and City University of New York

<http://www.davidpapineau.co.uk/>

Dr. Matthew Duncombe, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Nottingham. I am a specialist in Ancient Greek philosophy. I wrote my PhD, awarded by the University of Cambridge, on Plato and have published extensively on the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/Philosophy/People/matthew.duncombe>.

Dr. Rebecca Bamford, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Quinnipiac University & Adjunct Professor of Philosophy, University of Fort Hare

<http://www.rebeccabamford.com/>

Dr. Kenneth L. Pearce, Ussher Assistant Professor in Berkeley Studies (Early Modern Philosophy), Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

<http://www.kennypearce.net/cv.html>

Dr. Mark Jago, Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Nottingham

Professor Bill Brewer, Susan Stebbing Professor of Philosophy and Head of Department, King's College London

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/philosophy/people/staff/academic/brewer/index.aspx>

Dr. Eleanor Knox, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, King's College London

Dr. Shaul Tor, Lecturer in Ancient Philosophy, King's College London

Dr. Ellen Fridland, Lecturer in Philosophy, King's College London

Dr. Sara L. Uckelman, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Durham University <http://community.dur.ac.uk/s.l.uckelman/>

Dr. Clayton Littlejohn, Reader in Philosophy, King's College London

Professor David E. Cooper, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Durham University

Dr Katharine Jenkins, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Nottingham

Dr. John Callanan, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, King's College London

Professor A C Grayling CBE, Master of New College of Humanities, Supernumerary Fellow of St Anne's College, Oxford, and Co-Editor of the *Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Humanism*. <http://acgrayling.com/>

Dr Nigel Warburton, Freelance Philosopher.

Professor John Harris, Professor Emeritus, University of Manchester and Visiting Professor in Bioethics Department of Global Health & Social Medicine School of Global Affairs, King's College London. <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/john.harris/>

Professor Kate Soper, Emerita Professor of Philosophy, London Metropolitan University. [https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_378601\\_en.pdf](https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_378601_en.pdf)

Professor Helen Beebe, Samuel Hall Professor of Philosophy, University of Manchester. <https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/en/researchers/helen-beebe>

[e\(6da7f62b-cee9-4fd6-bff3-ba30cbe339c7\).html](http://www.oxfordjournals.org/doi/full/10.1093/monist/111.1.1)

Dr Ardon Lyon, ex Lecturer at Durham and City universities.

Professor Janet Radcliffe Richards, Professor of Practical Philosophy,  
University of Oxford

<https://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/people/janet-radcliffe-richards>

Professor Eric Olson, Professor of Philosophy, University of Sheffield

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/philosophy/staff/profiles/eolson>

Professor Simon Blackburn, Professor of Philosophy, University of  
Cambridge

<https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/people/teaching-research-pages/blackburn>

Professor R A Duff (Emeritus), Department of Philosophy, University of  
Stirling <https://www.stir.ac.uk/people/11761>

Nick Everitt, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of East Anglia

<http://www.philbooks.eclipse.co.uk/>

Peter Cave, Lecturer in Philosophy for The Open University and City  
University, London and Chair of the Humanist Philosophers Group.

<https://oneworld-publications.com/peter-cave.html>

Professor Richard Norman, Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy,  
University of Kent

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/secl/philosophy/staff/norman.html>

Professor Peter Millican, Professor of Philosophy, University of Oxford

<https://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/people/peter-millican>

Dr Andrew Chitty, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Sussex

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/profiles/8678>

Julian Baggini, Associate Reader in Philosophy, University of Kent



The Revd Canon Professor Keith Ward, Regius Professor of Divinity Emeritus, Christ Church, University of Oxford

<http://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/staff/revd-canon-professor-keith-ward>

Dr. Eliot Michaelson, Lecturer in Philosophy, King's College London

Professor John Benson, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Lancaster University

Jonny McIntosh, Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Oxford

Professor Neil Levy, Senior Research Fellow, Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, University of Oxford

Dr John Tillson, Post Doctoral Teaching Fellow in Philosophy of Education, Liverpool Hope University

<https://info.hope.ac.uk/aps/index.php/Aps/ext/tillsoj>

Paul Reynolds, Reader in Sociology and Social Philosophy, Edge Hill University

Jack Symes, Teacher of Philosophy and Religious Studies, King Edward VI High School for Girls

Dr Hane Maung, Research Associate in Philosophy, Lancaster University

<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/ppr/about-us/people/hane-maung>

Dr Tuomas Pernu, Research Fellow, King's College London

<http://www.tuomaspernu.london>

Dr Peter Cheyne, Associate Professor, Shimane University, Visiting Fellow in Philosophy, Durham University

Dr. Lauren Ware, Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Kent. I am a specialist in Ancient Greek Philosophy, having written my PhD, and multiple publications, on Plato. <http://www.laurenware.me>

Professor Christopher Norris, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Cardiff University, Wales

Dr Graham White, Lecturer, School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science, Queen Mary, University of London  
<http://www.eecs.qmul.ac.uk/~graham/cvac.pdf>

Professor Richard Samuels, Department of Philosophy & Center for Cognitive and Brain Sciences, The Ohio State University, USA  
<https://philosophy.osu.edu/people/samuels.58>

Dr. Lucy Campbell, Stipendiary Lecturer in Philosophy, Exeter College Oxford; College Lecturer in Philosophy, St. Peter's College Oxford

Dr Tom Angier, Senior Lecturer, University of Cape Town  
University of Leeds

Dr. Michiel Meeusen, British Academy Postdoctoral Research Associate, Department of Classics, King's College London

Dr Martin Sticker, Research Fellow in Philosophy, Trinity College Dublin

Mijke van der Drift, associate lecturer, Goldsmiths, University of London

Prof Pekka Vayrynen, Professor of Moral Philosophy, University of Leeds  
<http://vayrynen.org>

Dr Sarah Sawyer, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Sussex  
<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/profiles/198219>

Dr. Luke Roelofs, Ruhr-University Bochum

Andrea Raimondi, Teaching Associate in Philosophy, University of Exeter

Dr. Beth Lord, Reader in Philosophy, University of Aberdeen

Dr. Elizabeth Irvine, Lecturer in Philosophy, Cardiff University  
<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/cy/people/view/99173-irvine-elizabeth>

Dr Jonathan Head, Lecturer in Philosophy, Keele University

Mr. Fionn O'Donovan, PhD Philosophy Student, University of Southampton  
[https://www.southampton.ac.uk/philosophy/postgraduate/research\\_student/s/fbo1g16.page#research](https://www.southampton.ac.uk/philosophy/postgraduate/research_student/s/fbo1g16.page#research)

L. Syd M Johnson, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Michigan Technological University

Joanna Smolenski, M.Phil, M.A., Adjunct Instructor in Philosophy, City University of New York

Janek Guerrini, Master student in Philosophy and Cognitive Science, École Normale Supérieure Paris

Professor Bob Brecher, Director, Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics & Ethics, University of Brighton

Dr. Richard Stopford, Teaching Fellow, Durham University

Dr. Mari Mikkola, Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Oxford  
<https://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/people/mari-mikkola>

Dr Ruth Wareham, Postdoctoral Research Fellow (Faith Schooling: Principles & Policies), Department of Politics & International Studies, University of Warwick

Dr. Boris Hennig, Assistant Professor for Ancient Philosophy, Ryerson University. <http://www.borishennig.de>

Dr. Ann Whittle, Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Manchester

Dr Andrea Christofidou, Lecturer in Philosophy, Worcester College, University of Oxford

Dr Peter J. King, Lecturer in Philosophy, Pembroke College, University of Oxford <https://oxford.academia.edu/PeterJKing>

Dr Brian Rosebury, Senior Lecturer (Political Philosophy) University of Central Lancashire:

[http://www.uclan.ac.uk/staff\\_profiles/dr\\_brian\\_rosebury.php](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/staff_profiles/dr_brian_rosebury.php)

Professor Sean Sayers, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Kent

Dr Heather Logue, Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Leeds

Frida Trotter, PhD Student at Université de Lausanne

Dr. Keith Begley, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Trinity College Dublin

Dr. Alex Davies, Researcher in Philosophy, University of Tartu

Josie M Moore, independent scholar.

Dr. Anca Gheaus, Researcher, Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona

Professor Andy Hamilton, Philosophy Dept, Durham University

Professor James Ladyman, Professor of Philosophy University of Bristol

Dr Luca Moretti, Reader in Philosophy, University of Aberdeen

Michelle Courria, visiting scholar, University of Missouri, St. Louis

Bastian Steuwer, Doctoral Student in Philosophy, London School of Economics

Dr Jula Wildberger, Full Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature,  
The American University of Paris, France  
<https://www.aup.edu/profile/jwildberger>

Prof Jonathan Gorman MRIA, Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy,  
Queen's University Belfast, <https://Qub.academia.edu/JonathanGorman>

Dr. Keith Hyams, Associate Professor in Political Theory and  
Interdisciplinary Ethics, University of Warwick

Dr. Thomas Szanto, Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Philosophy,  
University of Copenhagen

Professor Michael Morris, Professor of Philosophy, University of Sussex  
<http://m.sussex.ac.uk/profiles/1886>

Dr Christopher Jay, Associate Lecturer in Philosophy, University of York

Dr. Mark T Nelson, Professor of Philosophy, Westmont College, USA;  
formerly Senior Lecturer and Head of Department, Philosophy, University  
of Leeds, UK

Dr Anthony Faramelli, Associate Lecturer in Media and Communications,  
Kingston University

Dr Remco Heesen, Research Fellow in Philosophy, University of  
Cambridge

Zuhtucan Soysal, Research & Teaching Assistant, Middle East Technical University

Dr Luca Barlassina, Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Sheffield

Associate Professor John N. Williams, Associate Professor in Philosophy, Singapore Management University

Prof Anandi Hattiangadi, Professor of Philosophy, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

Dr Fiona Woollard, Associate Professor in Philosophy, University of Southampton

Dr Christoph Schuringa, Lecturer in Philosophy, New College of the Humanities London

<https://www.nchlondon.ac.uk/faculty/dr-christoph-schuringa/>

Dr Eileen John, Reader in Philosophy, University of Warwick

Professor Alison Assiter, University of the West of England - Bristol,  
<http://people.uwe.ac.uk/Pages/person.aspx?accountname=campus%5Cam-assiter>

Dr Ben Trubody, Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Gloucestershire

Dr. Conor McHugh, Associate Professor, Philosophy, University of Southampton

Dr Mary Leng, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of York.

<https://www.york.ac.uk/philosophy/staff/mary-leng/>

Dr Adam Rieger, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Glasgow

Dr Ben Davies, Teaching Fellow, University of Leeds

Dr Dana Mills, Lecturer in Philosophy, Oxford Brookes University