



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

# Dorset Humanists

December 2012

A PARTNER OF THE  
BRITISH HUMANIST  
ASSOCIATION

## Forthcoming events...

### ■ Saturday 8th December 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre,  
Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Humanist Support for Prisoners

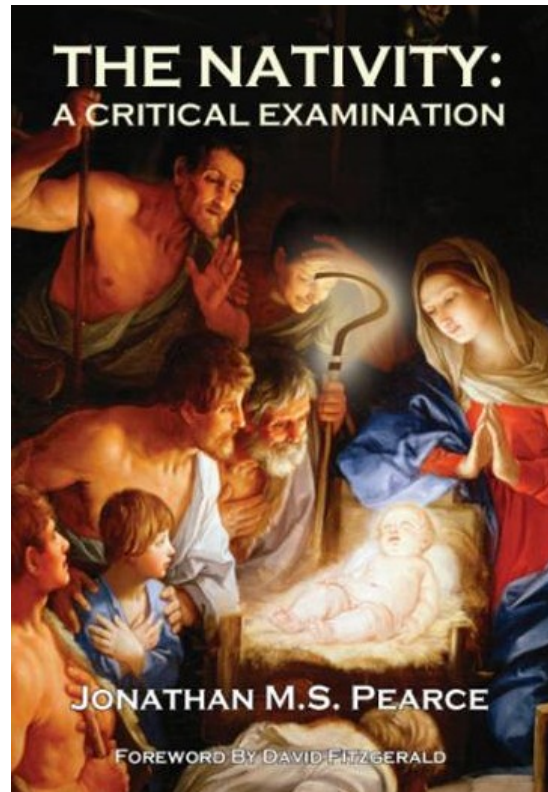
A talk by Amy Walden, Probation  
Officer HMP Winchester.

While in custody, religious prisoners  
are able to practise their religion.  
They benefit from chaplaincy support,  
time out of their cells, and a chance to  
form a network of friends. But what if  
you are one of around 40% of  
prisoners who are not religious?

Amy Walden is the inspiration behind  
a positive new pilot project, supported  
by the British Humanist Association,  
offering equivalent support to non-  
religious prisoners. In this presentation  
she considers the inequalities faced by  
non-religious prisoners, and explains  
how this new project seeks to address  
them.

### 4pm Grand Christmas Raffle

Don't forget to bring those unwanted  
gifts along to add to our first grand  
raffle to be held during mince pies and  
mulled wine. Raffle tickets 50p each or  
5 for £2.00.



### ■ Tuesday 18th December, 7.30pm

Green House Hotel, Grove Road,  
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

## The Nativity: A Critical Examination



A talk by Hampshire  
philosopher and author  
Jonathan Pearce  
challenging the biblical  
narrative of the nativity.  
Y Join us for yuletide  
mulled wine after the talk.

In this talk, Jonathan will set out the  
main problems with the historical  
reliability of the two infancy narratives,

showing that the accounts given in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were not historical events. Simply put, Jesus was not born in anything approaching the context reported by the Bible.

Jonathan Pearce's fourth book, *The Nativity: A Critical Examination*, looks in detail at the problems contained within the two Gospels, from a historical and theological perspective. They present the reader who is looking to defend their Christian faith on historical grounds with a severe headache.

Jonathan is a founder member of the 'Tippling Philosophers' and an advocate of casual philosophy groups meeting over pints of good ale. He has also written *The Little Book of Unholy Questions*, a set of questions directly asked to God which looks to show the incoherence of the idea of an all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful God. He is also a founder author for the Skeptic Ink Network (SIN), an online community of skeptic writers, bloggers, academics, thinkers and activists. <http://skeptick.com/tippling/>

★ Please note this event is at our new trial evening venue: Green House Hotel, 4 Grove Road Bournemouth BH1 3AX. The hotel can also be accessed from Gervis Road which is better lit and also has parking available.



## Human Rights Day

10 December is Human Rights Day. On 10 December 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has become a universal standard for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.

■ The candle symbol is the symbol of human rights organisation, Amnesty International.

■ Saturday 15th December 12.00pm

## Lunchtime Festive Feast

This is your chance to join other Dorset Humanists members for a celebratory festive feast on Saturday 15th December, 12.00 for 12.30 pm, at The Northbourne Toby Carvery, Wimborne Road, Bournemouth BH10 7BJ (01202 572433). Lunch consists of four courses, including tea/coffee for £14.50 (includes gratuity). There is a choice of turkey, beef, gammon, pork, salmon or mushroom and spinach lasagne. You can decide food choices on the day. Please send a cheque (payable to Dorset Humanists) to Jane Bannister, 63 Carbery Avenue, Bournemouth BH6 3LW by 8th December or pay at the Moordown meeting on that date.

■ Saturday 12th January 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre,  
Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## The Science of Discworld

A talk by Professor Jack Cohen

The Science of Discworld is a trilogy of popular science books written by Terry Pratchett in collaboration with mathematician Ian Stewart and biologist Jack Cohen. Each book combines a Discworld-based story by Pratchett interwoven with chapters on real world science by Stewart and Cohen. In this highly entertaining presentation, Professor Cohen will help us to view the science underpinning our world ('Roundworld') from a completely different perspective. This talk will appeal to everyone with an interest in science, as well as to fans of Pratchett's Discworld series.

## Dennis Bannister: Over £700 raised

*Jane Bannister*

Many thanks for all the generous donations to our chosen charities. I'm delighted to report that New Forest Nightstop has received over £400 and Cavendish Cancer, over £300. These sums can make a difference to small, struggling charities that are doing a marvellous job. Don't forget to watch the National Lottery Awards on BBC1 on 8th December at 9.30 pm, when Night Stop will know whether they are lucky enough to be the £2,000 winner in their category.

## Car Share Scheme

Please let us know if you can offer a lift to our meetings and if you need a lift. We'll do what we can to match people up if possible.

☎ Jane 01202 428506

## Special Interest Groups

Would you like to join or create a special interest group? Members have now registered their interest in the following topics:

Bridge • Acoustic Guitar • Solar Power Generation • Hybrid Cars • Yoga • UFOs • Animal Rights  
Parapsychology • Eco living • Films

Any member can put their name forward as a SIG contact for a particular subject. The secretary keeps a record of these members' names and telephone numbers and anyone showing any interest in their subject just rings them up for assistance with information, or to arrange a meeting, or to participate in the group's activities.

☎ Paul Beckett 01202 871010

## Christmas Raffle



*Unwanted gifts wanted*

We will be very grateful for any unwanted gifts for our Christmas Raffle to accompany our Mulled Wine and Mince Pie tea after the speaker on Saturday 8th December. Please contact Lyn Glass.

✉ lyn.glass@btinternet.com  
☎ 01202 558763

## A Happy Huddle of Hungry Humanists

Twenty Hungry Humanists gathered at Day's Chinese Buffet restaurant on 15th November for Convivial Conversation and Exceptional Eclectic Eating. We all agreed the quality and variety of morsels on offer was first class (it's no good, I can't keep up the alliteration!)... and at only £8 for a massive choice of 3 courses we will certainly be repeating the exercise in early 2013. Look out for details in the January Newsletter. *Lyn Glass*

## Dorset Humanists at London meeting

David Warden represented Dorset Humanists at the annual Humanist Groups meeting in London on November 17<sup>th</sup>. Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association Andrew Copson spoke at the meeting along with Vice-President Professor Richard Norman, Faith Schools campaigner Richy Thomson, and other BHA staff members. David Warden led a short session on 'increasing membership'. Dorset Humanists is one of the largest Humanist groups in the country so what's our secret? David suggested it was the quantity and variety of what we offer our members, together with a growing sense of community.

# Christmas Appeal



Following our November meeting about the St Paul's Nightshelter in Bournemouth, a member of Dorset Humanists has pledged to give

£200 to the shelter if other members will match this amount. If the matching amount is reached by 20<sup>th</sup> December then the original donation will be increased by a further £50. If this further amount is matched as well then we will have raised a grand total of £500 in time for Christmas. You can bring cash or cheques to our December meetings (8<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>) or pledge your amount by contacting David Warden (contact details at bottom of page). Cheques made payable to Dorset Humanists (Xmas Appeal). See *Chairman's View*.

## Majority against religious selection

*A new survey shows that the 'overwhelming majority' are against religious selection in schools. Geoff Jones asks "Is this good news for Humanists?"*

Nearly three-quarters of the British public (73%) agree that state funded faith schools should not be allowed to select or discriminate against prospective pupils on religious grounds in their admissions policy. But is this good or bad news for Humanists? I believe that if this becomes an agreed policy then paradoxically it is detrimental to atheism and Humanism.

At present all children who attend Church Aided schools gain admission because their parents were able to demonstrate they are practising Christians who regularly attend church. This implies such parents

may have adopted Christian practices in their homes such as regular prayers before meals and praying with their children on other occasions. In addition, they will probably have surrounded their children with a Christian ethos in the home and ensured their child regularly attended Sunday school at the local church.

My implication is that a continued regime of subtle proselytization within a Christian school merely reinforces similar practices in Christian homes, making it more likely that children from such families will become Christian adults. However, if such schools are no longer allowed to discriminate in favour of Christian families we may discover that far more non-Christian children will be awarded a place. Thus, we now have a situation in which non-Christian children may be subject to evangelisation from committed Christian school staff.

My guess is that with a likely continuation of Christian school practices under possible new regulations we have a net gain for Christianity. Children from Christian families who don't attend a Church School will continue to be wrapped in a Christian ethos at home, making it likely they will become Christian adults even without a state school Christian education. On the other hand, children from non-Christian homes who may now be accepted into a church school will be enveloped in a Christian ethos throughout their schooling. Regular acts of Christian worship every morning could be of a 'hard-sell' nature and prayer times in classrooms are likely to be regular and consistent with recurrent references to God and the Bible. In short, the general ethos in Church schools is more likely to result in children from non-Christian families becoming Christian adults, whilst children whose parents are Christian would probably become Christian adults anyway. This is a net gain for the Christian Church!!

<http://accordcoalition.org.uk/2012/11/12/>



## LETTERS & EMAILS

Write to Dorset Humanists, 58a R L Stevenson Avenue Bournemouth BH4 8EG or email chairman @dorsethumanists.co.uk

*From Will Dennick*

I say of the Scouts: 'It's their club, their rules', and those that complain that the Scouts don't take atheists miss the point of what is fair (ever tried joining the Masons as an atheist?). There's nothing stopping atheists from creating their own Scout-like organisation (I am a staunch atheist.) If organisations like the Scouts are to be singled out for not admitting non-believers then the likes of the Masons should also be targeted. And should we be campaigning to get the CofE to accept atheists?



## Dorset Humanists Library

*Frances Usher*

Our new Dorset Humanist Library should be up and running from the January meeting. From then on, we hope it will be there at every Saturday meeting at Moordown for you to browse through and borrow from if you like. It's planned to provide a range of books of Humanist interest. The library will receive a small grant from Dorset Humanist funds to start it off, and we've already been offered some books as donations. We'll be glad to receive others for consideration, so if you have a book in good condition to donate, do please contact me at a meeting, or by phone or email.

☎ 01258 858311  
✉ frances.usher@btinternet.com

## 'One Life' course success

We have just completed our first six-week *One Life* course exploring Humanism and Atheism. Around twenty people attended the course including members of Dorset Humanists and some non-members. At the end of the course:

- 100% agreed with the statement "the course deepened my understanding of Humanism"
- 90% agreed with the statement "the course presented Humanism as a coherent and attractive philosophy"
- 95% agreed with the statement "I would like to continue learning about Humanism"
- 90% agreed with the statement "I would recommend this course to others"
- "An amazing course – it's been fantastic!"
- "Very positive group interaction"
- "Fascinating"
- "Just what we need to introduce people to Humanism"
- "Helped enormously to clarify some of my thinking. Feel more confident to say what a humanist is all about!"
- "Thank you for organising this interesting series. I thought that it was well organised, well documented, and well delivered."

We aim to run this course at least once a year with some additional condensed versions at suitable intervals.

### 23% of EU atheist or agnostic

According to 'Eurobarometer', 7% of people in the EU are atheists and 16% are agnostics or non-believers – 23% in total.



Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's View**  
December 2012



**A**bout eighty people came along to Professor Richard Norman's stimulating seminar on how to think about ethics. A much smaller number came along to hear Nathaniel Major tell us about the work of the St Paul's Nightshelter in Bournemouth. But the second event is having a greater practical impact. A member of Dorset Humanists, who wishes to remain anonymous, has pledged to give £200 to the shelter if other members will match this amount. If the target is reached by 20<sup>th</sup> December then the original pledge will be raised to £250. If this higher amount is matched then we will have raised £500 for the shelter in time for Christmas. Let's do it.

The shelter is run by the BCHA charity. It was founded in the 1960s by churches in Bournemouth but now it's an entirely secular charity. There are dozens of hostels in Bournemouth but St Paul's is the only direct access nightshelter in the town. It can accommodate 40 people on a short-term basis for just £3.30 a night, including a meal. 500 people come through its doors every year. What sort of people? People who have experienced domestic violence and family break-up, people with chronically low self-worth and depression, people who are punishing themselves for some catastrophic mistake or memories of armed conflict, people who suffered childhood abuse including paternal rape, people with drug-related health problems including rotting teeth and deep-vein thrombosis. Even people with the First World War condition known as trench foot and people who have been people set alight by thugs. At St Paul's they can get a safe bed for the night, a shower, a meal, some clean underwear. They have access to medical and dental attention. After living 'like animals in the jungle' some of their humanity starts to return within 48 hours of care. St Paul's helps with basic life skills and resettlement. A special service, Winter Watch, operates from December to February to get people off the streets on the coldest nights. The shelter obtains local authority funding for its basic running costs but with volunteers and donations it can do so much more, such as 100 stockings for Christmas containing socks and toiletries.

With your generous help in the run-up to Christmas I know we can do this so easily. After all, our new slogan is '...for a better world'. Please come along to our meetings on 8<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> December, or contact me to pledge your amount. Contact details below.

*David Warden*