



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

Dorset Humanists

October 2012

A PARTNER OF THE
BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

Forthcoming events...

■ Saturday 13th October 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre,
Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Science and Religion: Complementary or Contradictory?

*A presentation by government
scientist, David Nunn*

Since the enlightenment, science has relentlessly marched into territories formerly occupied by religion. In this interactive session, David Nunn investigates whether these apparently conflicting worldviews can be reconciled. He will consider the origins and evolution of both worldviews, and offer some fun approaches to resolving this problem. We hope this will produce interesting results, and perhaps even provide an answer to this age old dilemma!

■ Wednesday 24th October 7.30pm

Green House Hotel, Grove Road,
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

The Hunt for the Higgs Boson

Scientist Chris Street, who recently visited the European Centre for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, recounts the discovery of the Higgs



Science and Religion – don't miss our October events

Boson, and how it provides a giant leap forward in our understanding of the universe.

Chris will also explain the nature of the Higgs Boson, why scientists are so excited about it, and why it was called the 'God Particle', as well as providing us with key highlights of the fifty year search for the 'Holy Grail' of particle physics.

Chris is Chairman of Humanists4Science, and Education officer for Dorset Humanists.

★ Please note this event is at
our new trial evening venue
Green House Hotel, 4 Grove
Road B'mouth BH1 3AX

■ **Saturday 10th November 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre

Good Without God: Thinking about Right and Wrong

Vice-President of the BHA and former Professor of Moral Philosophy Richard Norman will offer suggestions for a rational approach to morality. A new edition of his book *On Humanism* was published this year.

■ **Wednesday 7th November, 7.30pm**

Black Bear, South Street, Wareham

Faith and Psychology: Is God an Illusion?

Purbeck Open Lectures: A talk by Michael Jacobs, author of a book on illusion and belief, followed by open discussion.

■ **Thursday 8th November 7.30pm**

An enquiry into some of the questions surrounding...

Assisted Dying

Facilitated by Persephone Arbour

This independently-organised event of great interest to Dorset Humanists will start with a reading of Sir Terry Pratchett's BBC Dimbleby lecture 'Shaking Hands with Death' – a beautiful, funny and exquisitely intimate piece of writing which addresses the question of assisted dying. The meeting will then break up into small discussion groups, finishing with an open forum.

Limited places – call Jackie Deakin on 01202 828786 to be sure of getting a seat and for venue details. There will be a charge of £3 to cover expenses.

Dennis Bannister



Jane Bannister writes...

Thank you to everyone who sent lovely cards, letters and messages, on learning of Dennis' death and for all the

support and kindness. The ceremony that Maggie Pepin led at Woodlands was marvellous. It meant a great deal to myself and family to celebrate Dennis' life in such a meaningful way, with people who knew and were fond of him. Many people (even Humanists!) commented that Dennis' personality was very much in evidence on the day.

I have had enquiries about donations to a charity in Dennis' memory. We chose two small ones that are desperate for funds.

★ New Forest Night Stop

which offers emergency accommodation to homeless young people. Cheques payable to Community First New Forest Nightstop. newforestnightstop.org.uk

New Forest Night Stop is a finalist in the Lottery Good Causes contest. Please vote for it on:

lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/vote/voluntary

★ Cavendish Cancer Care

which gives support to people diagnosed with cancer and the bereaved. Cheques payable to Cavendish Cancer Care. cavcare.org.uk

Cheques can be sent to the Woodland Funeral Directors: HPWBG, Wyndham Road, Walkford, Christchurch, BH23 7EJ.

Slogan result!

There was a decisive vote for a new Dorset Humanist slogan at our meeting on September 8th. The majority rejected slogans which included the words 'without religion' as too negative. The clear winner was 'Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World', coined by Richard Scutt, which says who we are and what we want. One member felt that the 'A' words are exclusive but we remain, of course, a welcoming group to all interested visitors and enquirers. Thank you to everyone who took part in this gruelling but fascinating exercise!

Filosophy 2

Lyn Glass reports

What another marvellous selection of interesting film scenarios put together by Mat Coussell for our second 'Filosophy' night in August. Until he highlighted the moral and ethical issues underlying these storylines I had never considered them. Mat must have put in a lot of work to make our evening so stimulating and enjoyable. I do hope that he will feel able to continue to identify further selections so that we can make this a regular yearly meeting topic.

Social Events

Our summer lunch events were well-supported and very enjoyable. If you'd like to keep them going why not offer to 'host' another lunch, maybe in a central location? Or maybe you'd like to organise a Christmas dinner dance, quiz night, wine tasting event, party night or a day trip? Let us know the details so that we can help with advertising and promotion. Contact details below.



Student Humanists & Atheists

Dorset Humanists helped support the Bournemouth Students' Humanist & Atheist Society (BSHAS) at Bournemouth University's Freshers' Fayre on Saturday 29th September. Dave writes, "We spent a really enjoyable day handing out flyers and talking to first year students about their beliefs. With an eye-catching stand featuring atheism alongside Humanism, we garnered considerably more enthusiasm than we had done previously under an exclusively Humanist banner. Our joint efforts resulted in a very successful day, with many students stating how pleased they were that BU has an atheist group. We look forward to hearing how the society develops during the forthcoming year."

Assisted Dying Consultation

A parliamentary consultation, Choice at the End of Life, is being run by an All Party Parliamentary Group in partnership with Dignity in Dying. The group believes that provided sufficient legal safeguards are in place, mentally competent terminally ill adults should have the right to an assisted death. Dignity in Dying is a non-profit campaigning organisation which supports the aims of the Parliamentary Group. A report on responses to the consultation will be published in Spring 2013.



Humanist songs?

Dorset Humanist member Ken Fagg suggests we should 'copy the best bits' of Christianity

Christianity has been around for some 2000 years and collectively is currently one of the largest organisations in the world. It must have been doing most things right to attract such a large following for such a long time. We should look carefully at how it has managed this and not be afraid to copy the best bits.

1. They have social events throughout the week. We have some. This enables participants to meet others, make friends, get to know them, and get into the habit of doing things with members. It builds up team spirit. There must be many people who are not too sure of the dogma or the veracity of the bible, but nevertheless suppress their doubts because they enjoy the social life – singing in the choir, helping at the church fete, assisting with the annual church outing, selling raffle tickets to raise funds – it's all good fun and they feel wanted and useful. No doubt the church will count these doubters as ardent supporters. If we do arrange social events (lunches, dinners, rambles, visits to places of interest, weekends away, tennis, competitions, quizzes, etc.) two things are essential: (i) for each event, there must be a core of well-known members, and they must be named in the Bulletin. New, occasional and prospective members are unlikely to attend if they feel that they may be there on their own with no one they know to talk to; and (ii) they need to be events where people can chat. Visits to the cinema are probably a waste of time. When you come out you feel, well I could just as easily have gone on my own.

2. They organise ceremonies. Organising humanist ceremonies was a major step forward. I was most impressed with the funeral service for Dennis. It was so refreshing to have intelligent words, not the usual mumbo jumbo. I am sure that many more people would use these facilities if only they knew about them.

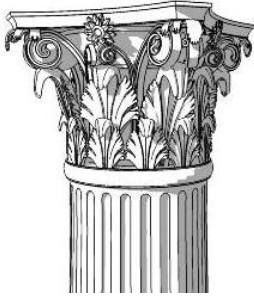
3. The one thing that is missing from our activities is audience participation in singing. People love singing en masse. Singing at the top of your voice is uplifting, inspiring and unifying. You feel part of a team. There was music at Dennis' funeral but no community singing. We must find some suitable music and frequent suitable occasions to sing. The tunes must be well recognised and popular. We need to build up a song book for regular use. Do we have any talented musicians who could take a lead on this?

In my opinion we should try to do a lot more of item 1. We need a full national campaign to publicise item 2. And we need to do something about item 3 – easy to say, not so easy to do. Can we learn from any other society (religious, secular or humanist) here or abroad? I welcome any comments.

■ Humanist, secular and ethical groups used to have 'Humanist hymns' in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Can we reintroduce singing to our meetings and events?

Can you help Dorset Humanists?

Two ways you can help and have fun at the same time: volunteer to join our leafleting teams. Also, could you be a greeter? We need personable people who regularly attend our meetings to look out for new faces and give them a friendly welcome and take contact details if appropriate. Contact David Warden (details below).



LETTERS & EMAILS

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

*From Jeremy Browne MP, Minister of
State at the Foreign & Commonwealth
Office*

We are concerned about individuals and groups, including Alexander Aan, in Indonesia who have been denied the right to freedom of religion or belief. We have raised the importance of the right to freedom of belief with the Indonesian government and continue to monitor the Indonesian authorities' policies towards these issues. Mr Warden may be interested to know that our Embassy in Jakarta has used project funds to support a dialogue between Indonesian civil society and police authorities on religious freedom run by the NGO Kontras Indonesia. With our European partners, we will continue to push for freedom of religion and belief to be included in discussions at the EU-Indonesia Humans Rights Dialogue.

■ Atheist Alliance International (AAI) has launched a scholarship fund for imprisoned atheist Alexander Aan to support his intention to study outside Indonesia after his eventual release. Aan was attacked and arrested in January 2012 after posting 'God does not exist' and articles and cartoons about Islam on Facebook. He was convicted by an Indonesian court on 14 June 2012, sentenced to two years and six months jail and fined \$10,000. Indonesia currently requires that all citizens identify themselves as belonging to one of six state-recognized religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Atheist Alliance International is continuing its appeal for funds to assist

with Alexander Aan's legal expenses and support his family while he is in jail. Donations for the legal defence fund and scholarship fund can be made at www.atheistalliance.org/support-aa/donate

*From Carol-Mary Fraser who is
moving to Somerset*

I shall certainly miss the company of good people in Dorset Humanists and myself only just getting to know some of them. I really enjoyed the stimulating meetings and discussions and feel they probably set the bar pretty high for other Humanist groups. I am looking into possible Humanist connections in the Bridgwater area. I will make contact with Taunton Humanists and am very interested in finding out about a philosophy group in Burnham-on-Sea. All the very best to Dorset Humanists - may you go forth and multiply! Go n-eirigh an t-adh libh! (Couldn't resist a bit of the old Irish - to wish you all good luck.)

■ *Go n-eirigh an t-adh libh* (pronounced 'go nary an taaw liv') is a popular Irish saying which means 'May luck/fortune go with you'.

From Will Dennick in response to Ken Fagg's letter on militancy

Because religion is a world-wide problem I believe that questioning people why they believe/do this/that is more effective than waving a placard/baton in their face as religious 'wars' are never won by physical aggression. Education is the key. Keep the verbal debating hot and on-going and get people (of all religions) to question themselves as to what they believe and why they think it right to impose their beliefs on others – peel the onion. A secular society is a fair society, and once we have achieved fairness let no-one suggest it was achieved through physical aggression.

■ Clarification: Ken said 'our objective – to defeat and convert them, not by invasion but by persuasion'.



Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
October 2012



What's the connection between Humanism and saving the tiger? This question arose from our September talk by John Berry from the International Fund for Animal Welfare. The wild tiger population has plummeted from 100,000 in 1900 to around 3,000 today, largely owing to the displacement effect of the human population explosion in China, India and other regions in Asia. Tigers are also threatened by human ignorance and stupidity – specifically the belief that ground up tiger bones are an effective remedy for impotence. This belief not only results in the killing of wild tigers but also the sordid spectacle of tiger farming. Saving the tiger, and other endangered species, is a challenge to human science, geography, conservation, education and diplomacy. It is a moral and intellectual challenge as well as a technical one – do we have the intelligence, wisdom, democratic will and know-how to be share this planet with other species? Or are we the helpless victims of demographic and economic forces beyond our control? Optimism or pessimism? Humanism is on the side of optimism. If the tiger goes it's not just a pity for the tiger. The human species, too, will be degraded and diminished.

Richard Scutt's winning slogan, 'Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World' is possibly a stroke of genius. We're not an 'exclusive sect' of atheists and agnostics of course. We welcome everyone to our meetings and discussions. But the slogan says who we are and, in the most general terms, what we want – our mission, if you like. So let's try out Richard's slogan and see what response we get.

Should atheists insist on the right to wear a piece of atheist jewelry at work and take their case all the way up to the European Court in Strasbourg? No, of course not. Work is work and religious symbols which are charged with evangelistic messages are out of place. Headscarves and turbans fall into a different category – these items of clothing signify identity and modesty rather than a desire to evangelise. Christians should give up their counterproductive legal battle to secure the 'right' to wear a cross at work and accept with good grace any reasonable restrictions an employer may wish to make.



David Warden