



A partner of
Humanists UK

national
secular
society



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 11th April 1.30pm** Join us online at 1.30pm to get settled in. Talk commences at 2pm. Register with Zoom beforehand to make it easier on the day. <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/579005594>
Meeting ID: 579 005 594



Do Animals have a Theory of Mind?

Juliane Kaminski

Human sociality appears to be unique throughout the animal kingdom in its complexity as well as its impact on our lifestyle and environment. At the centre of human sociality is our ability to make inferences about other people's attention, beliefs and knowledge. This is widely referred to by the term 'theory of mind'. One goal in comparative psychology is to investigate to what extent these social cognitive capacities are uniquely human or shared with other species such as the great apes and our closest animal companion – domestic dogs.

Our speaker Dr Juliane Kaminski is Director of Dog Cognition Center and Lecturer at the University of Portsmouth. She has made a number of exciting discoveries about how dogs solve problems. Most famously, she was the first to show that a dog named Rico learns words in a similar fashion as human

infants. She is widely recognized as a leading expert on dog cognition and has been recognized in National Geographic, Discovery News, and the special documentary film "Dogs Decoded" broadcast on American public television.

Dorset Humanists goes online!

Dorset Humanists remains 'open' throughout the current crisis. Please take this opportunity to join our page on 'Meetup' where we post details for all of our online events. We may not be able to deliver all of our scheduled events but we are doing what we can to maintain our planned programme and we're creating new opportunities to meet online including a weekly virtual coffee morning.

Please also take this opportunity to register with Zoom so that you can easily join our online events. You can sign up for free.

www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists

<https://zoom.us/>

Dorset Humanists Pastoral Team

A big thank you to all of our members who have volunteered to help deliver food and/or medicine to vulnerable members.

Please contact our pastoral team if you need help or would just like a friendly chat.

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227



dorsethumanists.co.uk



@dorsethumanists



Dorset Humanists



meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists

Our pastoral team members are:

Cathy Silman – Secretary of Dorset Humanists and a Citizens' Advice Bureaux advisor. Tel: 07817 695615

Susan Bryson – A member of Dorset Humanists committee and an experienced therapeutic counsellor. Tel: 07980 276234

David Warden – Chairman of Dorset Humanists and a qualified therapeutic counsellor. Email: Mobile: 07910 886629

■ Virtual Coffee Morning

7th April Tuesday 31st March 11.00am and every Tuesday online until further notice. Register with Zoom beforehand to make it easier. Join Zoom Meeting <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/270924305>
Meeting ID: 270 924 305



Enjoy stimulating conversation over tea or coffee at our online coffee morning. Pour yourself a cuppa from the comfort and safety of your own home, click

on the link, and start chatting!

☎ David Warden 07910 886629

■ Virtual Pub Social

Thursday 2nd April 7.30pm and every first Thursday online until further notice. Register with Zoom beforehand to make it easier. Join Pub Social: <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/410412657>
Meeting ID: 410 412 657



Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our online pub social evening. Pour yourself a beer or a glass of wine from the comfort and

safety of your own home, click on the link, and start chatting! ☎ Dean 07713 858773

Short Talks

We would like to restart our Short Talks programme before too long (via Zoom). Please let us know if you would like to present a 20-minute summary of some idea or experience to fuel an online discussion at some time in the next few months.

Phil@dorsethumanists.co.uk

☎ Phil 07817 260498

AGM cancelled in response to pandemic

Dorset Humanists' committee took the difficult decision on Saturday 14th March to cancel, at short notice, our members' lunch and AGM. A big thank you to Cathy Silman, Dean Robertson, and Angela Joynson for all the food that they had already prepared for the event. We are assured that the food did not go to waste! We will reschedule our AGM as soon as possible.

Hawkridge Singers debut postponed

Dorset Humanists Choir, recently renamed *The Hawkridge Singers*, were due to sing at our AGM after practising hard for several weeks. They hope to perform as soon as circumstances allow. The reason for the change of name is that Christine Hawkridge, who died last year, was one of the original members of the choir and her generous legacy enabled us to buy a portable Yamaha piano. The choir voted in support of the name change as a way to remember Christine.

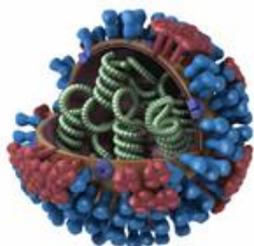
Greg Atkins is named Humanist of the Year



We are delighted to record that Greg Atkins is our Humanist of the Year 2020. Greg taught virology at Trinity College Dublin before retiring to Somerset. He was one of the presenters on our

science course last autumn and he's given his talk on evolutionary ethics to Dorset Humanists in Bournemouth and Dorchester. He debated the existence of God with Professor Keith Fox at Moordown last year. But most importantly, and the reason for this award, is that Greg is a member of our schools team. He's extremely proactive in

getting invitations to schools and in the last year he's made about 23 visits to schools in Dorset and surrounding counties, and he's spoken to well over 1,000 students about Humanism – mostly in small GCSE classes. He says he does it because he enjoys it! But that doesn't diminish his achievement in any way. We have dedicated space in this edition of the *Bulletin* to his informative and extremely timely talk on emerging virus infections.



Emerging Virus Infections

*31 people attended
our first online event*

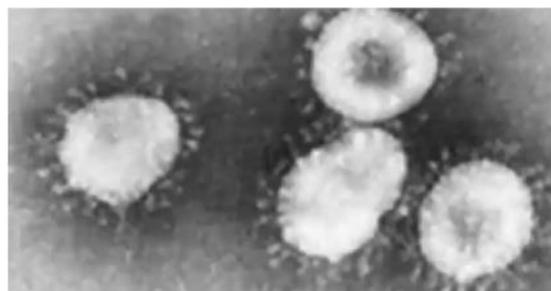
*at which we listened to Professor Greg
Atkins give his informative talk on viruses.
This is an edited version.*

A number of pathogenic microorganisms cause illness including parasites, fungus, bacteria, and viruses. Most bacteria have an independent existence and don't cause disease. A typical bacterium is one micron in size which is a thousandth of a millimetre. Viruses are much smaller – typically 50 nanometres which is 50 millionths of a millimetre. Coronavirus is large for an RNA virus, having a diameter of 120 nanometres. But that's so small you can't see it in a light microscope. Viruses infect most kinds of life. There are animal viruses, plant viruses, and viruses that infect bacteria.

Because viruses have to infect living things one of the questions that gets asked is 'Are viruses alive?'. They have some properties of living things. They reproduce themselves but they multiply in a different way from living cells. Cells divide in two. Viruses synthesize the components of lots of virus particles and then assemble them altogether into a very large number of virus particles which are then released from the cell. They also have some properties of non-living substances. Some viruses can be crystallised and some of them form a solution. So you can't really answer the question whether they're alive or not.

Examples of DNA viruses include herpes, pox, papilloma, and hepatitis B. Examples of RNA viruses include measles, mumps, rubella, polio, flu, Ebola, norovirus, HIV, and corona. The most common method of transmission is by aerosol which is the many thousands of droplets in the air when you breathe out and those small droplets can contain virus particles. They are vastly increased when you cough or sneeze but you're doing it all the time. Also transmitted in food and water (e.g. polio), touch (e.g. Ebola), venereal (e.g. herpes and HIV), vectors (e.g. malaria transmitted by mosquitoes), and contaminated blood transfusions.

Viruses have very simple structures. The nucleic acid (genetic material) is contained in the middle of the virus particle and it's surrounded by a coat of protein. The structures may be polyhedral (20-sided) or helical (a coiled spring). Some virus particles are surrounded by an additional layer called an envelope which often has spikes, like the coronavirus. The envelope is made of lipid (fat) which means that if you wash with soap or detergent you destroy the fat and you inactivate the virus.

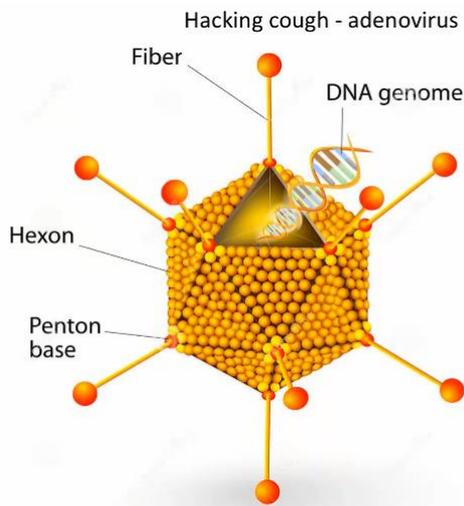


**Coronavirus with its distinctive 'spikes'
causes 20% of common colds**

The wavelength of light is too long to be able to visualise such a small particle. So what you need is an electron microscope. This works like the old televisions with a cathode ray tube. The electrons penetrate the virus and they show the outline of the virus and to see this you have to have a fluorescent screen like a television or a photographic plate or computer screen. You can also use a stain which stains everything apart from the virus particles. Viruses are often coloured for illustration purposes but this is totally artificial. The electron micrograph is always greyscale.

Coronavirus causes twenty percent of common colds. The reason it's called coronavirus is because it's got this envelope which looks like a corona [crown] with spikes sticking in it. So we've all been infected with coronavirus before now. They infect animals as well as humans.

A recent pandemic was caused by the hacking cough adenovirus. The reason it didn't get much publicity is because it doesn't kill people.



Where did viruses come from? Three ideas have been put forward. They might be a form of life before life as we know it was based on DNA. Another idea is that they might be renegade cellular organelles, like mitochondria. Or they might be derived from bacteria. There's evidence for all these ideas, so there probably isn't a single origin for viruses.

Cold sores are caused by herpes type 1 viruses which are latent in the nerve cells of your face. The type 2 herpes virus is venereal. The common cold is caused by rhinovirus (over 200 types), coronavirus (4 types), and a whole load of other viruses. Colds are a real mixture of different kinds of viruses. Flu is usually quite severe. A dry cough is common with Covid-19 but not a runny nose. If you've got white spots or streaks in your throat that's strep throat which is a bacterial infection. If you've got redness in your throat it could be hacking

cough or Covid-19. Viruses can also cause cancer and they can also be used as therapy agents to treat cancer.

In Victorian times 40% of children used to die before their fifth birthday. The proportion now is very much smaller [the graph indicated about 5% or lower]. The difference is due to the elimination of infectious disease and viruses are a bit part of that. A whole range of bacterial diseases used to kill people including bubonic plague, TB, typhus etc. And some still do such as septicaemia and pneumonia. Smallpox virus used to kill 20% of people it infected. Many viruses are less common but rotovirus and norovirus are still big killers. There are 680m cases of norovirus per year with 100,000 deaths, of which 50,000 are children under the age of five, mostly in developing countries. [By way of comparison, on 26 March, the day after this talk, more than 21,300 deaths worldwide had been attributed to COVID-19 (Wikipedia).] Measles is making a comeback. Hepatitis is still around, particularly Hepatitis C. The reason most viruses are less common is due to improved sanitation, the chlorination of water, and vaccines. Two viruses have been almost completely eliminated by vaccines: smallpox and rinderpest, a cattle disease. Polio is nearly eradicated, except areas controlled by the Taliban who won't allow vaccination.

Threats still posed

New disease-causing agents like coronavirus and vaccine denial and hesitancy – people just not getting vaccinated. HIV/Aids is still with us. It made a sudden appearance in the 1980s. It came from chimpanzees, possibly through being eaten as food. Another virus which has emerged recently is Ebola, prevalent in West Africa, and which caused 11,000 deaths. It was 40% lethal. The Wellcome Trust rushed through a vaccine in less than a year. When 40% of people are dying you can cut out a lot of regulatory barriers. We were all scared it was going to spread but it didn't, mainly because it's spread by touch (e.g. touching corpses) rather than by aerosol. Ebola came from a fruit bat and

probably by being eaten as food. The flu virus H1N1 killed 50 million people just after the First World War. We know exactly how new forms of influenza are formed. Pigs and birds are involved in the process. The flu genome is in eight segments and it can pick up new segments from animals, usually from birds, to create a new strain. Pigs can be infected with human flu and bird flu and that's where the genetic mixing takes place. It only needs to happen once and we have no immunity against this new strain. This is called antigenic shift and it's what causes pandemics. It can also change by mutation (antigenic drift) and this is the reason why we have to have a new flu vaccination every year. It's possible that the coronavirus could mutate. Coronavirus has a very large genome and it can break and rejoin very easily. New flu strains are absolutely possible because there's a huge number of different kinds of flu that infect birds. There have been scares and they nearly always start in China, possibly because the Chinese keep a lot of pigs. Four new strains have arisen in recent years but haven't yet spread very far. If they did they could probably cause enormous mortality. The last Olympics were nearly called off because of Zika virus, spread by mosquitoes, but it's nearly petered out. It caused small heads in children (microcephaly).

Measles

In 2017 there were 110,000 deaths from measles, mostly among children. It can be mild for some but not for everybody. It can be severe. A vaccine was introduced in 1968 and caused a big drop. The MMR vaccine was introduced in 1988 and nearly eliminated measles. In 1998, I was on a committee set up the UK government to look into a claim published in The Lancet by Andrew Wakefield which claimed that measles vaccine was linked to autism. His findings were virtually fraudulent, his experimentation was unethical, and he ended up being struck off the medical register. Five very large studies which show that there's no connection between autism and measles vaccine. Autism often manifests itself at the time that children get their second MMR vaccination but there's

no connection between the two. Wakefield still has his followers and there's a mythology being perpetrated in social media that measles vaccine is linked with autism. It's had an effect. The uptake of measles vaccine has been slowly dropping off. 95% coverage is needed to eliminate infection and we're still below that so we're still getting cases. There have been several outbreaks in Europe and the US. One was in the orthodox Jewish community in New York. So this is caused by stupidity, not by a virus suddenly appearing.

The current coronavirus outbreak

The virus is called SARS-CoV-2 and the disease is called Covid-19. It's related to SARS [severe acute respiratory syndrome] and MERS [Middle East respiratory syndrome which came from camels]. It didn't come from Wuhan market because the earliest case the Chinese have traced went nowhere near Wuhan market. It's a hybrid from bats and pangolins [scaly anteaters]. Pangolins are traded for their meat and their scales which are supposed to have medicinal properties which of course they don't. We don't know how this adapted virus got to humans – it could be through another animal. Age and underlying health conditions are major factors for mortality. Twice as many men than women die. There are two strains, S and L, and the strain which is prevalent in Europe is the S strain.

There are probably a large number of cases which are so mild those infected are just shrugging it off. The good news from this is that mortality is probably a lot lower than we're measuring (case mortality is typically between 2-4%). But then there's infection mortality and if there are a large number of cases which are not coming to light it means that the mortality is much lower. The bad news, if there are a large number of undetected cases, is that the disease is probably spreading much faster than we think. Government policy may not be helping because they've stopped testing. We need to test for the virus genome and antibodies or immunity. There are a lot of unknowns at the moment.



Conclusions

There has been a lot of progress in the control of infectious disease but probably not enough. One thing we can do is counter anti-vaccine pseudoscience. But what do we do in current situation? The government seems to have given up on monitoring and identification and I think that might have been a bad mistake. They've given up testing against WHO recommendation (they are testing only people who've got symptoms). We've seen models by Imperial College and Oxford which come to completely different conclusions. If they're not based on real figures what conclusions can you draw?

Answers to questions

- Blue face masks made out of paper are fairly useless. They take out 80% of the aerosol but you can still be infected with the remaining 20%.
 - Two metres distance away from others should be fairly safe. Gravity pulls the particles down and the concentration would be very low at that distance.
 - There is a cure for the common cold – beta interferon. But it costs £3,000 a shot.
 - Alcohol works against coronavirus but only above 70% (higher than vodka).
 - People experience different severities of illness because of human variation - not variation in the virus itself.
 - We don't know whether a bigger dose of coronavirus makes any difference to the severity of the illness.
 - You can't tell much from symptoms which could be caused by one of the many hundreds of cold viruses. You don't know for sure unless you do a test if someone has been infected with the current coronavirus.
 - Incubation period is usually 5-7 days but could be as high as 10 days.
 - As far as I can see there's complete recovery for people who do recover.
- The full lecture can be watched here. Lecture starts at around 8:20: [Zoom](#)



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Sally Hawksworth on Greg's talk

It was a really excellent and informative lecture and question session, and the technology seemed to work very well once lecturer and listeners had got their heads round how to manage it.

From Peter Connolly, responding to feedback to his talk on 'Revenge'

It was nice to read some dissenting views to counterbalance the agreement that people tended to communicate to me at the end of the talk - one woman didn't have a bar of chocolate but she gave me a packet of biscuits as I had changed her mind about revenge.

A couple of brief responses to the letters:

To Aaron - I do see revenge as a civilised trait that belongs in the humanist tool box. We are, I think all humanists would admit, animals. Retributive justice is the civilised response to the deliberate infliction of harm on another, though I admit that it requires further measures in order to do the job properly. I am always curious when people slip evaluative terms like 'higher' into their claims without justifying that judgment. It often means something like 'my personal preference is different,' which chimes well with Aaron being guided primarily by his feelings - useful when making moral judgments but hardly sufficient.

To John Coss - at the heart of revenge is the restoration of the moral balance between the perpetrator of a harm and the victim. My argument was that when the state can do this well victims will tend to be content, but when it cannot then it is moral for victims to do it for themselves. As with Aaron's comments, I noticed the insertion of some evaluative terms into the text, e.g. 'a better approach,' 'we should aim for'. I did



not see any justifications for these judgments, yet it is the justifications for moral judgments that carry weight in moral deliberations and debates. Like John, utilitarians tend to argue that punishment should always be administered with an eye to future benefits and only imposed if such benefits are forthcoming. Yet, to be an effective deterrent for many crimes punishments would probably have to be more severe than the actual offences warrant. Moreover, rehabilitation needs to be handled with care, especially where it involves some kind of hospitalisation - people may be deprived of their freedom for far longer than they would under a retributive system. Who decides when rehabilitation is complete? 'Experts' can get this wrong (consider the supposedly de-radicalised terror plotters who were released and went on to commit terror offences) and people can end up being institutionalised for much of their lives (consider the case, exposed a few years ago, of 'morally degenerate' women who became pregnant out of wedlock and institutionalised for years).

As John states, the three main justifications for punishment are retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation. I would argue from a Humanist perspective that all of them have a role to play. To throw out retribution and rely on deterrence or rehabilitation alone could a) result in a fair amount of injustice or be ineffective, and b) leave many perpetrators at large and free to harm others, as well as leaving many victims feeling that the system had not delivered justice to them.

From Aaron Darkwood

As a young child, when I was in bed, I would imagine various characters from Star Wars and other leading sci-fi series: Luke Skywalker, Commander Koenig, Buck Rogers - they would be there in my bedroom, and their imaginary presence would be comforting. I guess like most children, I didn't like the dark. I don't recall talking to them, although I may have done, but they did keep me safe and I felt I wasn't alone. I would get into bed, perhaps have some anxiety and then just imagine them all there sitting around me. Around this time

my mother had her stint at being a Jehovah's Witness. I remember trying to pray, I tried hard. I closed my eyes, put my hands together as the instruction manual seemed to indicate, but nothing happened. I recall returning to my imaginary friends, I knew they were fake, but their presence was more real than any god.



Thought for the Day

“What a strange planet this is. Carl Sagan called it the pale blue dot... but to have such a variety of life, to be able to hear so many different noises, see so many different colours, to know that every time we look out of a train window we see more life framed in that window than there is in the rest of the known universe is something utterly remarkable. I think it's important on a daily basis to at least have a few moments when you think 'This is rare, this is odd'.”

Robin Ince speaking at Dorset Humanists' Darwin Day in February 2020.



Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

April 2020

Before the world was brought to a standstill by a virus so small it cannot be seen in light it was not uncommon to hear people say that the planet would be better off without humans. Since the start of the crisis, I've not heard this depressing anti-human sentiment. Instead, we have witnessed the uplifting spectacle of people coming together to help each other and defeat a common enemy. It's too early to say whether our psychology will permanently be changed by this experience. We live on a dangerous planet and our faults are the result of an unguided process of natural selection. We are doing our best to live meaningful and dignified lives. On an evolutionary timescale, we have only been here a short while and we'll go extinct in due course, like all other human species before us (e.g. *Homo neanderthalensis*). In the meantime, I hope we will value our existence as a species and re-evaluate our relationship with the blue dot we call home.

What would Liam Byrne have said? "I'm afraid there is no money". What would George Osborne have said? 'Sorry, we've maxed out the credit card'. What would Theresa May have said? 'Sorry, there's no magic money tree'. Thank goodness we now have a Chancellor who has no time for such 'ideology' and is prepared to put the government and its central bank to work to save our nation. Economics will never be the same again.

If humanists value democracy should we not show at least a modicum of respect towards those who seek to govern and lead wisely? They are not above criticism and satire of course, but the relentless carping of some media coverage, including social media, eats away at our faith in democracy and our institutions.

The cruellest aspect of coronavirus is that those who are most susceptible may have to be alone when they most need the comfort and support of family or pastoral care. Our Winter Appeal raised £500 for 'End of Life Companions' but Royal Bournemouth Hospital has had to take the very difficult decision to temporarily step down all volunteers in clinical areas on the wards for their own protection. As any one of us could face this situation is there any way we can prepare ourselves emotionally? Existential threats tend to heighten our sense of connection to others and we have an unusual opportunity to strengthen those links in the days ahead, if not by physical contact then by telephone, screen, and old fashioned letters. People are even saying hello to strangers in the streets, from a safe distance.

