



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

# Dorset Humanists

## April 2014

A PARTNER OF THE  
BRITISH HUMANIST  
ASSOCIATION

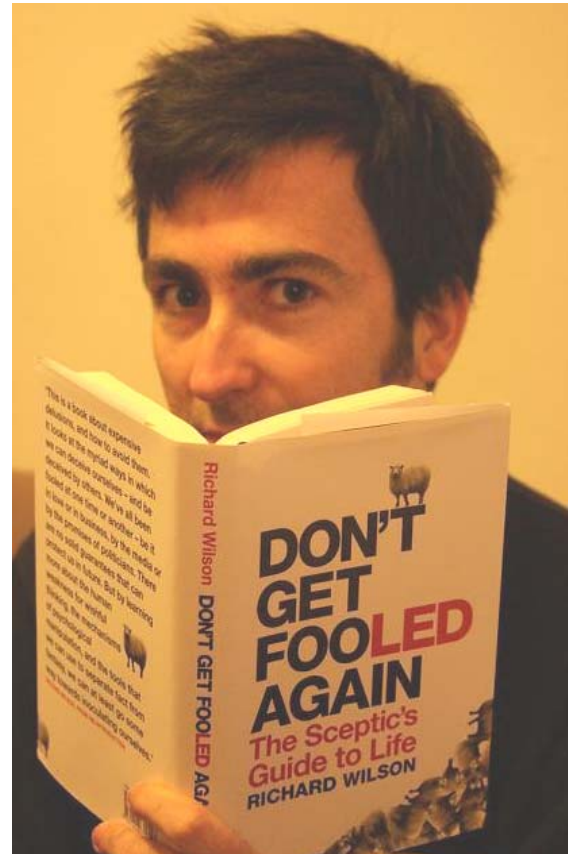
■ **Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation  
Avenue, BH9 1TW

## The Paradox of Scepticism

### and the Dangers of Bogus Sceptics

A talk by author Richard Wilson (pictured right). Many people are distrustful of much of what we read in the media and hear from politicians. Yet they are also tired of the baseless paranoia peddled by conspiracy theorists of various shades. Richard's book *Don't Get Fooled Again* explores the territory between naivety and paranoia, highlights the extent to which we are all vulnerable to deception and delusion, and tries to put forward some practical rules of thumb to minimise the risk of being fooled in future. In this talk for Dorset Humanists Richard explores the paradoxical idea of 'bogus scepticism'. He will argue that people who disseminate 'corporate pseudo-science' and 'paranoid conspiracy theories' have appropriated the language of rational inquiry with disastrous results. He will identify the hallmarks of bogus scepticism and how to distinguish it from the genuine article.

Richard is a writer and activist with a particular focus on scepticism, corruption, human rights and freedom of expression. He studied philosophy at University College London, and has written for the *New Humanist*, *New Statesman*, *Prospect Magazine* and *Comment is Free*. His first book, *Titanic Express*, recounts his search for the truth about the death of his sister.



■ **Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel 4 Grove Road  
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

## An Intelligent Voter's Guide to Austerity and Economic Beliefs

A talk by Douglas Lock. Why do politicians tenaciously maintain their economic beliefs even in the aftermath of massive, systemic failure? Is there a similarity between economic beliefs and religious faith? In this fascinating talk Douglas will explain how he believes the Coalition Government's

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austerity policy is irrational, has cost us billions in lost wealth, and has hit the poor hardest. Douglas is a retired university economics lecturer and Chair of Christchurch & East Dorset Constituency Labour Party.

■ **Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?



A debate with Moorlands College of Christian Theology. In the last couple of decades Christian evangelists have revived literal belief in the resurrection with increasingly sophisticated arguments. Can the 'empty tomb' be rationally explained? Is the resurrection really 'one of the best-attested facts in history'? In this debate, Dorset Humanists will go head to head with students from Moorlands College in what promises to be an extremely lively event. Arrive early to get a good seat.

■ **Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm**  
West Dorset Humanists at the Wessex Royale Hotel, 32 High St. West, Dorchester DT1 1UP £3.00

## Bombs, Bloomsbury & Bertrand Russell

A talk by David Warden. Bertrand Russell was undoubtedly one of the greatest rationalists of the twentieth century. Grandson of a Prime Minister, he did pioneering work in mathematics and philosophy as well as campaigning for women's suffrage and against nuclear war. He was twice imprisoned for his activities and married four times. David will explore this extraordinary life.

■ **Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> May 7.30pm**  
Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



## Dorset Humanists Social evening

Our next social evening will be at Moon in the Square Join us for an interesting chat over a drink or two and get to know other like-minded

people. See you there!

☎ Dean 07713 858773

■ **Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm**  
Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub at The Brunswick, Charminster, BH8 8PX

## Inside Scientology: The Church of Fear with John Sweeney

Tickets £3 via website:  
📄 [bournemouth.skepticsinthepub.org](http://bournemouth.skepticsinthepub.org)  
☎ Chris 01425 673477

## That's Humanism! Campaign Launch

The British Humanist Association launched



a new publicity campaign called That's Humanism! Featuring four

animated videos narrated by Stephen Fry, this campaign aims to increase the wider public understanding of Humanism. The BHA will be posting humanist images and quotations on Facebook and Twitter and will be asking Distinguished Supporters to promote the videos. Click on the links below or visit the BHA website.

[How do we know what's true?](#)

[What should we think about death?](#)

[What makes something right or wrong?](#)

[How can I be happy?](#)

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# Dorset Humanists at Bournemouth University

Chris Street did us proud on 24th March giving a well-constructed and detailed response on 'Common Misconceptions about Atheists & Humanists' at Bournemouth University. The hour long session was part of a series of lunchtime discussions hosted by BU Christian Union. Chris was ably assisted by Lyn Glass and John Davison in handling follow-up questions and comments from around 30 students and DH members.

## AGM and new committee

### *Decisive vote in favour of affiliating to the National Secular Society*

At our delicious lunch and lively AGM in March the following members were elected to run the affairs of Dorset Humanists:

- David Warden – Chair and Editor (Bulletin)
- Cathy Silman – Secretary and Membership Secretary
- Chris Street – Website, Education and Campaigns
- Dean Robertson – Social Events
- Jemma Hooper – Publicity and Marketing
- Lyn Glass – Vice Chair and Speaker Finder
- Simon Whitlock – Treasurer, Publicity and Summer Festivals
- Susan Bryson – Publicity

There are two vacancies remaining. Please consider joining us to help spread the load if you have skills in writing, administration, organising, publicity, designing, marketing and campaigning and can work as part of a team.

At the AGM there was a decisive vote in favour of Chris Street's proposal for Dorset Humanists to affiliate to the National

Secular Society, founded in 1866. This will not affect our Partnership with the British Humanist Association.

Dariusz Andersen, our outgoing treasurer, won our Humanist of the Year Award. Many thanks to Dariusz for all his hard work. There was also a special Lifetime Humanist Award for Joanna Cole who for many years organised a fantastic Saturday programme for us.

## Eric Barnes 1915 – 2014

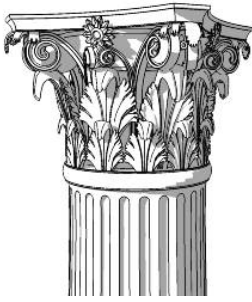
Our oldest member, Eric Barnes, has died at the age of 99. Eric was born in Coventry – one of five children. He was one of 12,000 troops sent to the Greek Islands during the Second World War. They were all captured by the Germans and 'death-marched' to a camp in Austria. Eric didn't let on but he could speak fluent German because, before the war, he had cycled all over Germany. He was also blessed with blond curly hair and blue eyes. He used his Aryan looks to obtain privileges.

After the war he stayed on in Vienna as a driver for VIPs attending the peace conference. After being demobbed he continued as a chauffeur for a well-off family in Sandbanks. He also worked for Regent Petroleum for many years with.

He married Eileen in 1942. Their son Tony completed their small family but Eileen died suddenly in 1972. Eric met his second wife Rina and they were together for nearly 40 years. They moved to a lovely thatched cottage in Northamptonshire where Eric pursued his passion for bee keeping. When grandchildren arrived they decided to move back to the Bournemouth area.

The Greek POWs were belatedly honoured by the Queen at Buckingham Palace. Eric was no Royalist but he went along for the cucumber sandwiches.

Eric came to our meetings when he was already into his nineties. He was extremely lively, friendly and enthusiastic about life and our group. After suffering a stroke he was unable to get to our meetings but he always appreciated receiving the Bulletin.



## Letters & Emails

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

*From Joanna Cole on hearing news of her Lifetime Humanist award*

Wow! that's a surprise. I am really thrilled to get the award, and am just sorry that I was not at the AGM to enjoy my moment of glory. I have just picked up your message, because as you guessed I am travelling at the moment and am not bothering too much with such mundane things as emails (though this is one it was a great pleasure to receive). I have just got back to Kuala Lumpur after a visit to Singapore and tomorrow my daughter and I are off to Bali so its go-go-go!

*From Dariusz Andersen on hearing about his Humanist of the Year Award*

I'm speechless when it comes to the award, I was never expecting it! I'm totally surprised, but very happy obviously, and the certificate will hang in the honourable place on the wall in my home. Thank you very much for this!

*From Gareth Longden, Glyndŵr University*

I am conducting a PhD research project examining the beliefs, attitudes and worldviews of British Humanists. In order to explore these issues I have developed, in collaboration with the British Humanist Association, an online questionnaire. The response so far has been fantastic. Would you be willing to pass on information about the survey to the members of your group? The survey is completely confidential. Simply follow the link below. If any of your members would prefer a paper copy I am very happy to send them one. They would just need to email me with their request. I would be very happy to come to your group to present the findings.

<http://tinyurl.com/britishhumanistsurvey2014>

Email: [g.longden@glyndwr.ac.uk](mailto:g.longden@glyndwr.ac.uk)

*From Ken Fagg*

In *Chairman's View* you commendably stick to the English spelling of 'sceptic'. The notice of the talk by Richard Wilson spells the word (or its derivatives) twice with a k and twice with a c. The k's make several more foolish appearances in the Bulletin. This invites ridicule. As editor could you please insist on the English spelling as far as possible?

*From Cathy Broad, Librarian of the Humanist Library & Archives at Conway Hall*

Would your members be interested in visiting Conway Hall to see what we have to offer the researcher and the ordinary reader? We can take groups of up to 20, and a visit would include a tour of the building with our Chief Executive Officer and a small exhibition in the Library, with a talk on our history and collections by myself and our Honorary Archivist.

Conway Hall Ethical Society is renowned as a hub for free speech and independent thought. The Hall was opened in 1929 and named in honour of Moncure Daniel Conway (1832-1907), anti-slavery advocate, out-spoken supporter of free thought and biographer of Thomas Paine.

The Hall now hosts a wide variety of lectures, classes, performances, community and social events. Our Library holds the Ethical Society's collection, which is the largest and most comprehensive humanist research resource in the United Kingdom, as well as the collections of the Rationalist Press Association and the National Secular Society.

We have family history records, archival material, books for loan, serials, and a large photographic collection. The Library is a quiet and comfortable place in which to study or read, and we would be very pleased to see you and show you how we could help your members. If you would like to arrange a visit, please contact me by email. Cathy Broad, Librarian Humanist Library and Archives  
[library@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:library@ethicalsoc.org.uk)

■ Please contact David Warden if you would like to organise a trip for Dorset Humanists.

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*From Peter Hadfield in response to last month's 'Chairman's View'*

One of your members passed on details of a talk you gave at Dorset Humanists in 2009 on the subject of climate change. I run a YouTube channel with 85,000 subscribers debunking 'creation science' claims, now expanded into debunking a lot of myths about science. More recently I was sent the March edition of Dorset Humanists and was disappointed to see more advocacy of your position on climate change. I think you are sincere in your quest to read what you see as 'both sides' of the climate change story, but I think you are placing too much faith in the veracity of your sources. Reading books can be, but is not always, the best way to understand science.

The main problem is that the authors on your reading list are political commentators, historians, economists and a pot pourri of 'experts' with no training or research history in climate science – even when they claim it. Robert Carter, for example, is described on the jacket of one book you read, *Climate: the Counter-Consensus* as 'one of the world's leading palaeoclimatologists'. Not only is he NOT a paleoclimatologist, he's not even world-leading in his actual field, which is stratigraphy. Carter's knowledge of paleoclimatology is so lacking that one of his key pieces of 'evidence' is a famously doctored graph that originated on the Internet. Of the only two professional climate researchers on your reading list, James Hansen and Roy Spencer, Spencer is a creationist whose research is now so out of whack he recently resorted to paying for it to be published in online 'vanity' journals. And the claim you quote from Hansen about climate change leading to 'boiling oceans' is equally unsupported by published scientific research.

I think we both agree that it would be absurd for me to try to understand 'both sides' of the 'debate' about evolution by reading *The Greatest Hoax on Earth* by Jonathan Safarti, and *Evolution Exposed* by Roger Patterson. Both authors are creationists and also qualified biologists, but it is dangerous to assume that what they write must therefore be factually accurate.

We no longer live in the 16th century, and science is no longer advanced by opinion

and arguments published in books. It is advanced through research published in respected, peer-reviewed journals. The books that best summarize this research are educational textbooks, which – unlike the books you cited – have to be written by experts and fact-checked. Even the Guardian, which you feel is an inferior source to the books you read, makes an attempt at fact-checking and publishing corrections.

I would be delighted to publicly debate this subject when I am in the UK this summer if you would be interested in weighing the claims in these books against my understanding of climate science. I have not read any books on the subject – not one – but I have enough faith in science to pit the evidence they present against the evidence shown in peer-reviewed papers published in respected scientific journals. I certainly want any debate to be friendly. We are, after all, on the same side of putting evidence ahead of belief. I have done some videos about climate change on my channel, and from the start I refused to use the word 'denialist' to describe those who dispute climate science, since that implies there is some immutable truth that is being denied. I have opted instead for the term 'climate critics'. I am also at pains in my videos to correct mistakes by those who exaggerate climate change as well as those who try to minimize it. So perhaps 'debate' would be too strong a word for what I hope would be a civil exchange where you can lay down the evidence against textbook climate science and I will lay down the evidence in favour, and each can then question the other. We can also take questions from the audience. I will be free from June 17 to the beginning of August, most of the time in neighbouring Hampshire. So it will be no problem for me to come to a venue of your choosing, big or small.

■ Peter Hadfield is a geologist-turned-journalist, a former correspondent for New Scientist magazine, and a contributor to the BBC's Science in Action and the ABC's Science Show. His YouTube channel is called Potholer54.

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*From Mat Coussell*

I take issue with some of the points raised in last month's *Chairman's View*. 'Climate denialists' do exist and are a concern, in the same way that evolution denialists are. Their attempted use of science as a means to back up their stances tends to be as highly questionable as that of anti-evolutionists. Thankfully, these people are the equivalent in number to the overzealous doomsayers of anthropomorphic climate change (typically well-meaning but badly informed activists).

Also, I take issue with the idea of scientists being too concerned or worried to question or publicise anything that is counter to the current scientific stances. In reality there are thousands of scientific papers and studies carried out independently all over the world. All these papers get reviewed and distributed among the scientific community. This is exactly why there are counter-arguments and why there are books both for and against the suggested scale of anthropomorphic climate change.

Ultimately, the science is all that matters, and that is showing overwhelmingly that humans are causing climate change. The sooner that issue is tackled the less drastic the changes will need to be, in order to protect future generations from the damages that such changes will bring.

*From Paul Entwistle*

With regard to 'climate denialists' (Chairman's View, March 2014) I felt you may be interested in *Climate Change: Evidence and Causes* which is a recent joint report by the Royal Society and the US National Academy of Sciences. I appreciate that your comment was mainly about the process of challenge and debate in a scientific world and not directly about the issue itself. However, there did not appear to be a recognised scientific voice amongst the various sources which you list. Surely as Humanists it behoves us in the first instance to take notice of the sources which have directly engaged in (supposedly) objective science on our behalf? Many of us do not do this, and it is often easier to quote the views of less qualified commentators such as Nigel Lawson or George Monbiot. Robert Carter's comments on the IPCC

would appear to endorse this view, i.e. that we should look to science and not to politicised or processed conclusions.

Any international body such as the IPCC is bound to be politicised. The climate challenge is obviously a global challenge, and warrants a consensus international view – however flawed – as a basis for any co-ordinated action. Such a view is bound to be a compromise (though there remains considerable common ground). Like the UN, it certainly isn't perfect but it is what we have got, and I would argue it is much better than nothing. It seems disingenuous to criticise the IPCC for lacking qualities it could never conceivably have! If we thereby lament the absence of an objective international scientific body with a consensus view, perhaps this report by the cream of US and UK scientists is as close as we will get. The scientific consensus – and I make no apology for using the word – appears to me fairly clear.

If, however, the suggestion is that all our top scientists are deluded, or indeed forced by peer pressure and the grant system to toe a particular line with which they do not actually agree, I think this is a subject of even more pressing concern than climate change, since it has fundamental implications for our culture and society. It does not seem to me very likely though, for two reasons. First, in a country where (I understand) only about half of us 'buy into' the global warming story, the ones who do not are hardly a persecuted minority. Second, a recent US university study finds that over half a billion dollars were channelled into 'climate change denial' from 2003-2010 and no doubt this continues in various forms. This sure beats the funding available to the Met Office!

<http://royalsociety.org/news/2014/climate-change-evidence-causes/>

<http://royalsociety.org/policy/projects/climate-evidence-causes/>

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/dark-money-funds-climate-change-denial-effort/>

■ David Warden cited two 'contrarian' scientists in his column last month: Robert Carter and Roy Spencer. Carter, author of *Climate: the Counter Consensus* (2011), is

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claimed to be a geologist and palaeontologist and Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand. He has served as an expert witness on climate change including in the UK High Court. Before retirement, he was professor in the School of Earth Sciences and research professor at the Marine Geophysical Laboratory at James Cook University. He was also a visiting research professor in geology and geophysics at the University of Adelaide. He is one of the lead authors of a 980-page report *Climate Change Reconsidered II* (2013) issued by the Non-Governmental International Panel on Climate Change. Roy Spencer, author of *The Great Global Warming Blunder* (2010), is a climatologist, Principal Research Scientist at the University of Alabama and has served as Senior Scientist for Climate Studies at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center.

*From Ruby Coote*

I work for a television company called Wall to Wall - we make programmes like *Who Do you Think you Are?* and *Long Lost Family* and we're now working on a new prime-time series for BBC One provisionally called *The Gift*. The concept of the series is all about resolution and reconciliation – helping people to make amends for something that they have done which has affected their life in a really profound way. Many people in the UK shoulder some form of regret which they'd like to make amends for. But what happens if that person is unable to do so because the regret relates to someone who they are unable to make contact with? It doesn't take a lot to lose touch with someone important, and even with the advent of social media some people are still hard to find.

*The Gift* will help people who would like to locate an important person from their past to finally say 'sorry' where they've not had the opportunity before. With a team of professional mediators, psychologists and experts in tracing people, we aim to put these people in touch, help them find a gesture or gift that represents their feelings, and support them through a meeting.

We are currently looking for people who might need our help to say 'sorry'. I am

aware that Humanists encourage a rational approach to resolution, and an end to discrimination and intolerance, and therefore I wondered whether you or any other members of Dorset Humanists might know of anyone who wants to be reconnected with someone from their past? I am aware that this opportunity won't be for everyone, but I would be incredibly grateful if you were able to forward some information out to the other members of your group, or anyone who you think might be interested in the concept of the programme so that they could get in touch with me if this is something they'd like to explore.

Any help would be greatly appreciated, please don't hesitate to get in touch should you have any thoughts or need any more information from me. I can be contacted on 020 3301 7871 or via email at [ruby.coote@walltowall.co.uk](mailto:ruby.coote@walltowall.co.uk). I have also attached a poster to this email, and I can also easily send hard copies in the post to you if that would be of use. Thank you very much for your time, and I hope to hear from you soon.

## Is there someone you need to say sorry to?

**We can help find them.**

Is there something you regret saying years ago? Did you fail to step in and help when you should have done? Have you made a mistake you still feel guilty about?

From the makers of '*Who Do You Think You Are?*' and '*Long Lost Family*', a heart-warming new series will reunite people whose paths once crossed and give them the chance to say 'sorry'.

If you can't find the person you need to make amends with, we can help you.



[thegift@walltowall.co.uk](mailto:thegift@walltowall.co.uk)  
0207 424 7703



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Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's View**  
April 2014



I welcome the emails I have received on the subject of climate change – especially the one from Peter Hadfield who is undoubtedly a well-informed science journalist. I'm particularly pleased that Peter avoids the word 'denialist' which is what triggered this latest exchange! I'm worried by his suggestion, however, that the only type of book one should read on science is a textbook. When I studied management at Bournemouth University textbooks were considered to be the lowest form of pre-digested learning. We were encouraged to read academic journals of course but also to read 'real books'. Books on climate science, some by journalists and some by scientists, are a compromise between sensational media reports and academic journals. Academic journals may be the gold standard but who, except dedicated students and lecturers in the field, has the time to read hundreds or thousands of academic papers? This situation raises difficult questions about how educated people are supposed to inform themselves and the trustworthiness of political bodies and internet sites which claim to represent an 'authoritative consensus'. We all know that paradigm shifts occur in science and we have seen disturbing evidence in the so-called 'Climategate' scandal of how scientists themselves can be tempted to suppress inconvenient research findings. It's also claimed by some, including James Lovelock, that 'peer review' can be an exercise in eliminating new ways of looking at things. Claims and counterclaims also swirl around about the proper credentials of scientists. The 'climate debate' is as much about the philosophy of science and how science is practised and communicated to the wider public as it is about the science itself.

It's sometimes claimed that Humanism is a 'belief' but not a 'faith'. The word 'faith', of course, is highly ambiguous. In religious terms it can mean belief in a supernatural entity in the absence of sufficient evidence. At the level of religious practice, however, it means 'putting your trust in God' as opposed to trusting yourself. My decision to start 'believing in myself' in this sense preceded my intellectual conversion to atheism by several years. I'd like to argue that it's this existential decision to *believe in yourself* and your own capabilities which is the fundamental difference between a religious attitude to life and a humanist one.

*David Warden*