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BRITISH HUMANIST  
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national  
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society

IHEU  
International  
Humanist and  
Ethical Union



# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

■ **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Blasphemy by the Back Door



Andrew Copson, President of the International Humanist and Ethical Union and Chief Executive British Humanist Association

Britain's antiquated blasphemy laws were widely believed to have been abandoned prior to their surprising revival for the Gay News trial in 1979, and a decade or so later, efforts to ban Salman Rushdie's 'The Satanic Verses' highlighted that our anachronistic laws only protected Christian beliefs.

It became increasingly clear that freedom of speech was a more important principle than protecting religious beliefs, and our blasphemy laws were finally repealed in 2008, but are we truly free to criticise religious sensibilities? In this lively talk, Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association (BHA) Andrew Copson will be considering how various rules and regulations still privilege religions in the public space and lead to opposing voices being silenced.

Join us for an entertaining and alarming exploration of Britain's de facto blasphemy laws.

■ **Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm**

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

## The Heart of Humanism: Thinking Clearly About Ethics and Human Flourishing



Estelle Goldie

The ancient Greek maxim 'Know Yourself' was inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Socrates explains that, in response to the

famous Delphic oracle which declared that there was no one wiser than Socrates, he began to question people, to see if they really knew what they thought they knew. He challenged them and invariably found that they had no more than superficial knowledge or beliefs inherited from somewhere but not fully thought out. 2,500 years later, his observation is no less relevant to current debates about what it means to be a human being and how to live a good and flourishing life.

Professor A.C. Grayling in his book 'Ideas that Matter – A Personal Guide for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' writes that 'Humanism in its current main sense denotes a family of views premised on a commitment to the idea that ethics and social policy must be based on our best understanding of human nature and the human condition. It is a concern to draw the best from, and make the best of, human life in the frame of human lifetimes, in the real world, and in sympathetic accord with the facts of humanity in the world. By

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immediate implication, therefore, it rejects transcendentalist claims about the source of value and morality, in particular those associated with religion. It is not the same thing as either secularism or atheism, but it has a natural affinity with both and especially the former. A humanistic view is a starting point, not a finished body of doctrine. There can be and indeed is much debate about what the human good is and how it can be attained, and that debate ranges from matters of ethical theory to practicalities of politics, with humanists voicing different positions across the range. What they have in common is the starting point that such debate is about humanity in the real world, not the supposed intentions and commands of supernatural agencies to which human nature must conform.'

The word 'humanism', Grayling writes, has had a variety of different senses and uses since its first coining in the Renaissance. But although the word has a relatively short and complex history, the main current of meaning applies to the great tradition stemming from classical Greek antiquity, older by half a millennium than Christianity, and older by a thousand years than Islam, and much richer and deeper than either of them.

Estelle Goldie, who has taught philosophy for many years, will take us on a journey of discovery to the heart of Humanism.

■ **Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



## Social Evening

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our pub social evening. There is no fixed agenda so if you have any interesting topics or ideas you want to share and chat about in a friendly atmosphere then this meetup is for you.

☎ Dean 07713 858773

## Future dates for your diary:

- Sunday May 1<sup>st</sup> Hengistbury Walk. Meet at Bournemouth Pier at 10.15am. See Dorset Humanists Meetup site for more details. Aaron 07851 239787
- Saturday May 14<sup>th</sup> 2.00 Moordown 'Ancient Stoicism & Modern Humanism' Professor Chris Gill
- Weds May 25<sup>th</sup> 7.30 Green House Hotel EU Referendum Debate: Five Humanist Views.
- Saturday June 11<sup>th</sup> 2.00 Moordown The God Confusion (Agnosticism) Dr Gary Cox
- Weds June 22<sup>nd</sup> 7.30 Green House Hotel 'Ten Ways the Universe Tries to Kill You' Astronomer Steve Tonkin
- Saturday July 9<sup>th</sup> Dorset Humanists at Bourne Free – Lower Gardens
- Wednesday July 27<sup>th</sup> 7.30 Green House Hotel 'Understanding Islam' David Warden

## Other events of interest...

- **Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm** 'Out of the Box' discussion group at the Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham BH20 4LT. Free entry - small donation appreciated. First Weds of the month.

## On Being a Humanist Today

An exploration led by David Warden, Chair of Dorset Humanists.

At our 6<sup>th</sup> April meeting Chair of Dorset Humanists David Warden will help us explore the meaning of Humanism today. What's the difference between Humanism and Atheism? Does Humanism have any overall purpose? Is there 'something missing' in Humanism's account of what it means to be human? David has a degree in theology and he was an evangelical Christian in his teens. Towards the end of his theological studies he concluded that he no longer believed in God, a position he has held ever since. In 2009, David was the first guest lecturer for Purbeck Open Lectures with a talk on the 'Alpha Course'.

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'Out of the Box' is a successor to Purbeck Open Lectures (POL). It has been set up by a small group of POL supporters in collaboration with Dorset Humanists. This launch is for a trial period of 4 months. 'Out of the Box' will be a forum to explore the journeys that different people make to arrive at a set of beliefs or worldview. It will provide opportunities for people to share their journeys with others rather than try to convince them that their destination is the only right place to be.

■ **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm**

Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub,  
Brunswick Pub, Malmesbury Park Road  
BH8 8PX

## Ask for Evidence: Sense About Science

Dr Claire Marriott

Every day we hear claims about what is good for our health, bad for the environment, how to improve education, cut crime, and treat disease. Some are based on reliable evidence and scientific rigour. Many are not. How can we make companies, politicians, commentators and official bodies accountable for the claims they make? If they want us to vote for them, believe them, or buy their products, then we should ask them for evidence, as consumers, patients, voters and citizens. The [Ask for Evidence](#) campaign has been successful in getting misleading and unfounded claims withdrawn. Come and hear what the campaign is going to do next and how you can get involved.

Dr Claire Marriott is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Brighton and has been involved in diabetes research for over 11 years. She has always had a passion for promoting science with the public and has been a part of the Voice of Young Science network since 2009. She has contributed to a number of VOYS publications and been an active campaigner for the 'Ask for Evidence' movement since it began.

■ **10-12th June, Birmingham**

## BHA Annual Conference

The British Humanist Association Annual Conference 2016 will be held in the busy and bustling city of Birmingham. Tickets are selling quickly, so make sure you get yours now! 2016 will be the biggest and best conference to date, with more than 500 humanists gathering for a busy weekend of lectures, plenaries, panel discussions, live entertainment – and more choice than ever before.

Tickets: £129 for BHA members, £149 for non-members, £89 for students.

 [Conference](#)  020 7324 3060



## Volunteers wanted to help develop Humanism in Nepal

Nepal is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Why not go there to help develop Humanism? Society for Humanism (SOCH) Nepal is a secular humanist organization based in Kathmandu, Nepal. SOCH Nepal was established in 2005 to promote humanism according to the 2002 Amsterdam Declaration. It promotes a humanistic way of thinking and advocates for basic human rights in Nepali society, particularly in marginalized communities.

SOCH Nepal has recently developed a volunteer program to allow humanists from all over the world to work in partnership with them. Volunteers will be provided with accommodation with a local family, adequate and hygienic food, opportunities to be involved in a variety of SOCH Nepal projects as well as opportunities to enjoy tourist activities. Please see flyer for more details.

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## Dorset Humanists AGM

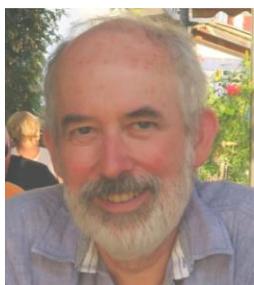
*"DH rocks. Today was like a reaffirmation. I'm a 10!"* (Comment on a member questionnaire.)

Fifty-one people attended our 2016 AGM – a record turnout. We enjoyed an excellent complimentary buffet lunch beforehand prepared by committee members **Cathy Silman** and **Susan Bryson**.



Our treasurer **Simon Whitlock** was given Dorset Humanists Humanist of the Year Award. Simon has done excellent work on our accounts as well as organising several of our appearances at the

Tolpuddle Festival in Dorset. Simon is always friendly, helpful, and reliable. This award is well-deserved! A bottle of wine donated by John Hubbard was given to Simon along with a framed certificate.



Your new committee was elected. The only changes since last year were that **Jemma Hooper** stood down owing to family responsibilities (a new baby and ageing parents) and **John**

**Kingston** joined the committee. John is a retired IT Project Manager. He has a degree in philosophy but he claims to have forgotten most of it! He has been an atheist since childhood, though he appreciates the importance of religious belief in the cultural development of our society and therefore thinks that religious belief is a fascinating subject for investigation. John feels enormously privileged to be elected to the committee of Dorset Humanists. He joined the British Humanist Association a few years ago having been impressed by their campaign against faith schools, a subject particularly important to him having a family background in Northern Ireland. He said he's 'extremely impressed' with Dorset Humanists and that it does 'brilliant work' at many levels, as well as containing some of

the nicest people he has have ever met. John would like to share in the work of keeping the group operating. In time he also hopes to be able to explore areas in which we could expand our influence further.

**Chris Street** was thanked for his excellent work on our schools project. He has now stepped down from the lead role in this project owing to work commitments.

**Joanna Cole** was thanked for keeping our library going. She has now stepped down from this role and **Josie Butcher** has kindly volunteered to take over. **Karen Preston** has stepped down from Poole SACRE (schools RE councils) but will continue to support our schools project. **Richard Dyer-Smith** continues to represent us on Bournemouth SACRE. **Chris Street** has stepped down from Dorset SACRE and **Cathy Silman** will step into this role. We thank all of them for their support in this vital area of our work. **Aaron Darkwood** was thanked for his work on our marketing image and for arranging a superb series of walks. **Dave Elleman** was thanked for being our sound technician. Dave also assists with poster and programme production. Humanist celebrant **Maggie Pepin** represents us superbly at Holocaust Memorial Day. **Dariusz Andersen** is stepping down from our printing and postal operations and **John Kingston** will take over this task. We thank Dariusz and his wife Anna for their invaluable support over recent years.

### Your 2016 committee

- David Warden – Chair, Bulletin Editor, Green House Programme, Schools lead
- Lyn Glass – Vice Chair and Saturday Programme
- Simon Whitlock – Treasurer, Festivals
- Cathy Silman – Secretary and Membership, also Dorset SACRE
- Susan Bryson – advertising and host for our committee meetings
- Chris Street – website
- Dean Robertson – social nights
- John Kingston – postal bulletins

*Our committee can go up to ten members.*

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## Improving the democracy of Dorset Humanists

No formal proposals or resolutions were received for this year's AGM. The main resolution from our 2015 AGM was to improve our democratic procedures to allow sufficient time for the whole membership to consider and vote on proposals. So we've made two changes to our Constitution: one is to move the deadline for AGM proposals to the end of December so that they can be published in the January bulletin and discussed at the January meeting. The second change is to formalise the facility for members to submit votes by post or email.

### Member Questionnaire

39 questionnaires were completed. All of our events were rated as excellent or good. We asked members to state what topics they would like to hear more of. The top five came out as philosophy, ethics, humanism, secularism and science. We asked members to state what they think our priorities should be this year. The top three came out as humanism in schools, public awareness of humanism, and supporting BHA campaigns. We will present the full results at a future 'Part Two' meeting. There will be opportunities for members who did not attend the AGM to complete one of these questionnaires.

### Chairman's review of the year

David presented the main highlights of the year including distinguished speakers, local civic and media recognition, and the fact that we raised over **£2000** for charitable causes. Our paid-up membership is **152** and average meeting attendance is **59**. In his talk about Humanism David mentioned the 2015 'Living with Difference' Report which called on voluntary organisations to 'promote opportunities for interreligious and inter-worldview encounter and dialogue' and a 'national conversation by leaders of faith communities and ethical traditions to create a shared understanding of the fundamental values underlying public life which foster the common good'.

■ Copies of AGM minutes and all related documentation is available for members on request.

## Thinking, Fast and Slow



More than seventy people packed into the Green House Hotel to hear Phil James's presentation on thinking and how our minds work. Phil's presentation was mainly based on Daniel Kahneman's book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011). Kahneman distinguishes between two types of human thinking: 'System 1' and 'System 2'. These are of course fictional constructs but they help us recognise two quite different cognitive processes. 'System 1' is fast, automatic, and intuitive whereas System 2 is slow, effortful, and logical. System 2 is also pretty lazy and it usually defers to System 1.

Phil noted the similarity between 'System 1' and 'System 2' and the Chimp/Human model in the work of sports psychiatrist Steve Peters (author of the best-selling 'Chimp Paradox' - 2012). Our 'chimp brain' is impulsive and emotional. He also cited Malcolm Gladwell's book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (2005). Gladwell argues that intuitive judgment can be developed by experience, training, and knowledge. He presents the idea of 'thin-slicing' – the process by which experts can make rapid but accurate judgments from limited information. We've all developed this kind of unconscious expertise in, for example, driving and monitoring our partner's moods.

Phil provided a simple arithmetical demonstration of System 1 and System 2. The sum  $2+2$  immediately invokes our System 1 brain. The answer is immediate and requires no cognitive effort. The multiplication task  $17 \times 24$  on the other hand will immediately cause our pupils to dilate as System 2 tries, effortfully, to solve the task.

A sobering example of the workings of System 1 is an experiment which shows that people are more inclined to contribute to a coffee honesty box if a picture of eyes is placed above the box rather than a picture of flowers. (Sadly, this even applies to humanists! We had to discontinue our coffee honesty box at the Green House Hotel!). This also gives some support to the

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idea that religious people may be more inclined to be moral because they believe that a supernatural entity is watching them at all times.

System 2 can become the 'slave' of System 1. We tend to make decisions with System 1 and then find reasons to justify our decisions. In 'trusting his gut', George W Bush was a System 1 person whereas Obama is more of a deliberative, System 2 type of person. Advertising also appeals to our emotional System 1 thinking. Sales people are adept at manipulating System 1. Their repertoire of tricks includes 'free gifts' and 'limited availability'. Robert Cialdini explains how we can be manipulated in his book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (1984).

Our thinking is also strongly influenced by the effect of 'priming'. To use a simple example, our reaction to the idea of a banana can be made quite unpleasant if the word 'banana' is juxtaposed to the word 'vomit'. In one experiment, students were asked 'How happy are you in your life as a whole?' and 'How many dates did you have last month?' Asked this way round there was no correlation between the answers but if the questions were switched with the 'dates' question put first the correlation leapt to .66 indicating the effect of 'priming' (thinking about their recent dating made the students feel happy or less happy). There is also the well-known 'halo effect' in which our judgments of a person are strongly influenced by first impressions. System 1 resists changing its mind once made up and is prone to making faulty judgments with high confidence.

System 1 is good at instant analysis but System 2 takes over when confusion arises. However, because System 1 'locks on' to its beliefs and interpretations it sometimes resists change. System 1 can be induced to believe something by repetition (hence the effectiveness of advertising and more insidious forms of political propaganda). System 1 is also inclined to prefer 'cognitive ease' (in other words, a coherent story is believed even if it's based on little or unreliable information). Kahneman presents this idea as 'What You See Is All There Is' (WYSIATI). In other words, System 1 has a

strong tendency to make confident judgments from unrepresentative data and small samples. It also suffers from 'decision fatigue'. Judges, for example, are more likely to refuse parole requests in the afternoon because this relieves their System 2 of more effortful deliberation as to the merits of each case. System 2 has finite processing capacity and it follows the 'Law of Least Effort' and is therefore only too willing to defer to the automatic judgments of System 1.

System 1 doesn't take statistics into account. For example, if we are asked to judge the likelihood of someone's occupation ('Is Steve a librarian or a farmer?') and the profile we are given seems to match 'librarian' we will go with that judgment even though, statistically, there are ten times as many male farmers in the UK as male librarians. System 1 always prefers the easy judgment and is often highly confident of its answers.

In summary, System 1:

- is an emotional, arrogant spoiled child – it confidently thinks it knows it all, and won't give up easily
- is devious - hides its processing from us
- is prone to bias and errors
- runs our lives most of the time

System 2:

- can be in control, is logical, calculating, and conscious, but it's lazy
- usually it simply endorses System 1
- requires hard work and effort
- is not without errors but we should use it more often to challenge everything!

■ Further reading in addition to books mentioned above:

Ariely, D. (2008) *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions*.

Foer, J. (2011) *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*.

Hand, D.J. (2014) *The Improbability Principle: Why coincidences, miracles and rare events happen all the time*.

Thaler, R. & Sunstein, C. (2012) *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*.

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# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

*From Margaret Hannibal MBE, CEO of Mosaic*

It was lovely to meet you yesterday. I would be grateful if you could pass on our thanks to all your members for their very kind donation of £757.44.

As you are aware, Mosaic provides individual, therapeutic support to bereaved children and young people and to those facing the death of a loved one. We also run twice-yearly residential camp weekends, activity days and social events for our families. These occasions help young people feel less isolated, make new friends who understand how they feel and find ways to express safely the overwhelming emotions grief can bring. The Humanists' donation will go towards one of these weekends and will really make a difference to the young people.

As I mentioned when we met, we would like to invite two or three of your members to attend the Closing Ceremony at our next weekend. This will take place at 3pm on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April at Leeson House Field Study Centre, Langton Matravers, near Swanage. I will not be attending this weekend but Tracy, whom you have met, will be leading the weekend. If you would like to come, please let me know so we can arrange for one of our volunteers to meet you when you arrive.

I would, again, like to thank you for choosing to make a donation to Mosaic – all our staff, volunteers and the families we work with are most appreciative of your support.



**David Warden presenting cheques to Margaret Hannibal of Mosaic (top) and to Jude Todd of New Forest NightStop (bottom). Photos: Aaron**

*From David Croman*

Thanks for sending me a copy of the very informative Bulletin. The synopsis you did of my 'Darwin' talk was thorough but I should point out a couple of errors: the Beagle voyage was planned to last two years (not five months) and Darwin is buried next to Sir John Herschel (astronomer and mathematician), not William.

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Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's View**

April 2016



**D**aniel Kahneman's analysis of 'System 1' and 'System 2' thinking, expertly presented by Phil James in his talk to us at the Green House last month, has an obvious application to religion. According to Kahneman, System 1 'infers and invents causes and intentions', 'suppresses doubt', 'is gullible and biased to believe and confirm', 'focuses on existing evidence and ignores absent evidence'. Religion exhibits all of these characteristics. Belief in God is a cognitive illusion which is sustained by the habit of inferring causation and intention behind all of the things that happen to believers. We all try to make sense of our lives and create a coherent narrative about it. Humanists understand this as intentional sense-making activity, whereas a religious person will view it as 'God's guiding hand'. Kahneman writes: 'We know that people can maintain an unshakeable faith in any proposition, however absurd, when they are sustained by a community of like-minded believers'. Faith is also maintained by the suppression of critical thinking. The Christian *Alpha Course*, for example, presents a simplistic view of Christianity which makes sense to millions of people. Kahneman explains: '...you will often find that knowing little makes it easier to fit everything you know into a coherent pattern'. Deconstructing evangelistic propaganda is an effortful, System 2 type of activity. Unfortunately, our System 2 brain is lazy and most people prefer to stick with their pious certainties. I'm proud of the fact that Humanism is an intentional, System 2 type of enterprise. Humanism encourages doubt, questioning, statistical reasoning, scientific knowledge, and freedom of conscience and belief.

**T**alking of freedom of conscience and belief, what do Saudi Arabia and the International Humanism and Ethical Union have in common? They are both represented on the United Nations Human Rights Council. Dr Elizabeth O'Casey, Director of Advocacy for the IHEU, bravely stood up at the UNHRC's 31<sup>st</sup> session and denounced Saudi Arabia's treatment of atheists who are legally defined as 'terrorists'. She drew attention to the case of Ashraf Fayadh, sentenced to eight years in prison and 800 lashes for 'spreading atheism'. She also drew attention to similar cases in Egypt. Elizabeth said: "We call on Egypt and Saudi Arabia to drop the convictions and charges in the aforementioned cases, and change their laws with urgency so as to fall in line with their international obligations." Dorset Humanists is an associate member of the IHEU and we are honoured and delighted to welcome Andrew Copson to our Moordown meeting on Saturday. Andrew is President of the IHEU.

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