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Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 14th April 2.00pm** Moordown
Community Centre, Coronation Avenue,
BH9 1TW



Learning to Live Well Together

Dr Allan Hayes

Taking his title from a recent book on interfaith diversity by Tom Wilson and Riaz Ravat, lifelong humanist Allan Hayes is concerned that, at a time when we need to bring people together, we are dividing children by religion, allowing the divisions between science and religion to deepen, and failing to promote a shared understanding of humanity. What can we do? Allan will highlight some of the ways in which we can all engage constructively with diversity. He will also address how religious education can be reformed.

Allan was a Church of England choirboy but he became a humanist at the age of 14. He has taught maths at Massachusetts Institute for Technology, Purdue University Indiana, and at the University of Leicester. He has served on the boards of the British Humanist Association, the Sea of Faith Network, All Faiths and None, and Leicester Secular Society.

■ **Wednesday 25th April 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX



Face to Faith: Christians and Humanists in Conversation

John Macdiarmid was brought up as a Catholic. He went through a brief phase of being an atheist and then converted to evangelical Christianity as a student. David Warden was an evangelical Christian in his teens and studied theology with a view to becoming a priest. But he left university as a confirmed atheist. John and David are friends and they have much in common, including playing the piano, but on the biggest question of all they remain firmly in opposite camps. Tonight we bring them together with compère Dean Robertson to discuss their respective worldviews in front of a live audience.

David is keen to challenge John's claim that 'atheism requires a massive leap of faith' and that atheism, ultimately, is based on 'moral rebellion against God' rather than lack of evidence. For his part, John is interested to find out what Humanism has to say about sexual ethics and where humanists get their moral compass from. Both will outline their objections to each other's worldview but they will also be challenged to say something positive about the worldview they oppose.

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

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■ **Thursday 3rd May 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



Pub socials

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our pub social evening. Look out for the Dorset Humanists signs on the table. We warmly welcome regulars and newcomers.

☎ Dean 07713 858773



Sunday Walks

15th April – Bluebells in Roydon Woods. About 6 miles around the nature reserve, which is near to Brockenhurst in the New Forest. With luck this should be at the right time to see the bluebells.

Sunday 20th May – Hill Forts in the Stour Valley.

All walks are between about 6 and 9 miles and usually have an optional short cut.

Please check [Meetup](#) for further details and any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions. Phil ☎ 07817 260498



Short Talks

■ **Tuesday 17th April 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

Truth and Knowledge

Short talks this month are by Peter Connolly and Chris Street. Chris will provide an overview of 'street epistemology' and Peter will concentrate on relationships between language and the world, providing an overview of three influential theories of knowledge: correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic. Peter will highlight problems with each of these theories and suggest a way forward.

Preparatory reading: a good philosophical overview is Simon Blackburn's *Truth: a guide*; a spanner in the works is Jeremy

Campbell's *The Liar's tale: a history of falsehood*, and a brief and provocative piece is Richard Dawkins's 'What is true?' in *A Devil's Chaplain*.

Each talk is around 20 minutes followed by questions and discussion. See [Meetup](#) for further details.

Future dates for your diary...

■ **Saturday 12th May 2.00pm Moordown**
Debate: Is theism or atheism the best explanation for everything? With Greg Atkins and Keith Fox.

■ **Weds 23rd May 7.30pm Green House**
Brexit, the Media, and the Future of Democracy. Jonathan MS Pearce and David Warden.

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 2nd May 7.30pm**
Sandford Heritage Hall, Sandford Rd, Nr Wareham, BH20 7AJ (Next to Pine Martin Grange Care Home) 'Out of the Box' Humanist/Christian dialogue group presents

Lost Gospels

A presentation and discussion led by David Warden. To what extent does the existence of the New Testament Apocrypha, a body of works composed largely in the 2nd century and widely recognised as legend, fable, and fabrication cast doubt on the reliability of the New Testament itself?

■ **Wednesday 11th April 7.30pm**
Skeptics in the Pub at Brunswick Pub, 199 Malmesbury Park Rd, BH8 8PX. £3

Anxious, Stressed, Depressed? Our Mental Health Confusion

A talk by psychotherapist Tashi Maibach.

■ **3rd – 23rd April**
Bournemouth Library (Triangle). Amnesty International presents:

Photography Exhibition

The main focus of the exhibition is the historic plight of refugees and will feature 30 photographs taken by photographers from the Magnum agency over the past 70 years.



■ Friday 11th May – Sunday 13th May

Weekend Retreat

Dorset Humanists member Sue Thomas has been invited by the Othona Community, near Burton Bradstock, to run a retreat reflecting upon our online lives and our place in nature. It is inexpensive to attend and bursaries are available. More information [here](#)



Humanist of the Year

Phil Butcher received a well-deserved Humanist of the Year award at our AGM in March. David Warden

presented him with a framed certificate and a bust of Charles Darwin. Phil has taken over planning and leading our monthly walks programme. He also leads our popular Short Talks programme which provides members and others an opportunity to give informal talks and presentations.

Humanist pastoral care

Dorset Humanists has a pastoral support service. Please contact Susan Bryson on 07980 276234 or Cathy Silman on 07817 695615 if you ever need help with a small task, or help with transport, or just someone to talk to. If Susan or Cathy are unavailable or unable to help they will endeavour to find someone who can.

Homeless: can you help?

Scott, 23-year-old single male in Bournemouth/Poole. If you have a room or could offer help, please contact Aaron to arrange to meet.

Email: Aarondarkwood@hotmail.co.uk

Dorset Humanists AGM

Members enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch prepared by Susan Bryson and Cathy Silman with assistance from Angela Joynson and Frances Usher before this year's AGM. We are also very grateful to David and Elaine Stott and Dean Robertson who helped to clear up.

Reports were presented by treasurer John Kingston, Vice Chair Lyn Glass, and Susan Bryson. David Brittain, chairman of the South Central England Humanist Network and chair of Basingstoke Humanists, spoke about the new network's aims. Members voted against the proposed addition to our vision statement pending further discussion.

In his report David Warden highlighted the fact that Dorset Humanists has raised £1119 for charity this year and presented Humanism to 1146 school children. In his assessment of how we're doing he said we're doing well at providing opportunities for learning and knowledge – 46 talks last year and we're doing well on 'critical mass of activities' – 8 per month if you add in kindred groups like Skeptics in the Pub. Numbers-wise we're stable – not declining but not growing either. There are 545 Humanists UK members in the BH postcode area so we need to find ways to attract them. We will also be working with the South Central England Humanist Network to help support groups in the region including seeding new groups. We are developing our 'Life School' concept which ran evening courses on happiness and friendship. David shared feedback received during the year, including this from Penny Jacques, Oxford Humanists: "Your programme is impressive with so many meetings and other events. You must have a very committed and hard working committee."

The elected committee members are David Warden (Chair), Lyn Glass (Vice Chair), Cathy Silman (Secretary), John Kingston (Treasurer), Chris Street (Website), Phil Butcher (walks and short talks), Dean Robertson (social nights), and Susan Bryson (pastoral role). Simon Whipple was elected for the first time. There is currently one vacancy on the committee.



The Day After Tomorrow: Our Oceans and Climate Change



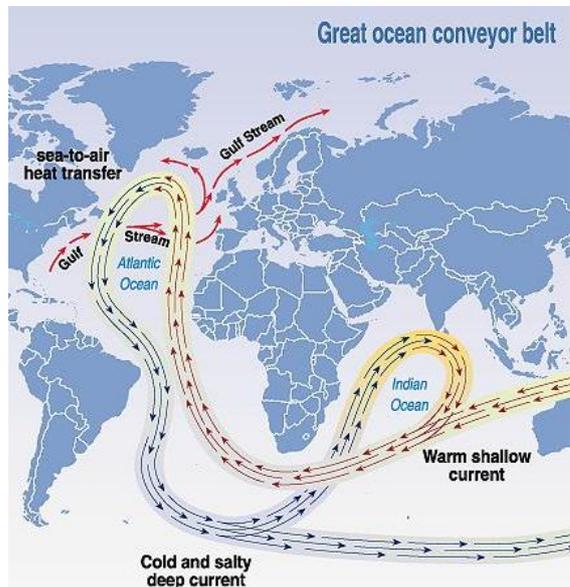
Professor of Physical Oceanography Meric Srokosz spoke at our February Green House meeting. He coordinates the *Rapid Climate Change* programme looking at how changes in the North Atlantic

circulation will affect UK and northwest European climate.

The top three metres of the ocean contains as much heat as the entire atmosphere because water has a high thermal capacity. Without the oceans the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) we have put into the atmosphere would have raised the temperature of the planet by several degrees by now. The average depth of the oceans is four kilometres so you can distribute that heat into the ocean and not notice the temperature rise so much. The ocean modifies the climate over long periods of time because it interacts with the atmosphere – it exchanges heat and moisture in the atmosphere and the ocean circulation moves that heat around. The North Atlantic releases a petawatt (that's 10¹⁵ watts of heat) continuously into the atmosphere which is why we get our mild climate. That's 30,000 times the output of all UK power stations.

We can look at the CO₂ record in Antarctica over the last 400,000 years by drilling ice cores which gives us a kind of paleo-thermometer. Present day CO₂ is about 400 parts per million (ppm). In Greenland we can go back about 100,000 years. There's evidence that climate can change on very short time scales – as little as ten years and that's quite concerning. What we are doing now is conducting a global experiment by pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The pre-industrial level was about 280ppm. In the film *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) the North Atlantic current stops and they have an ice age within a few

days. There are serious concerns that global ocean circulation may be vulnerable to shutdown. The question is, is the ocean circulation vulnerable in the way portrayed? Would melting disrupt the North Atlantic current?



The Great Ocean Conveyor Belt (also known as the Meridional Overturning Circulation): This is an over-simplified model but warm salty water is heading north up the west coast of Africa and as the weather systems cross the waters cool, colder water is denser, and so the water sinks. If you start warming the planet first of all the water stays warm so it may not sink. And secondly, Greenland starts to melt, freshwater goes into the sea, the high latitude atmosphere warms, the atmosphere holds more water, more water means more rainfall and more freshwater going into the oceans which makes the water less dense. So it's possible in principle if you add enough freshwater, if you melted the whole of Greenland instantaneously, you would definitely shut down the circulation. It's not going to happen like that but Greenland is melting and it is adding more freshwater into the ocean.

The benefit to us of the Meridional Overturning Circulation (MOC) is that it carries heat northward in the North Atlantic. We are about ten degrees warmer on average than continental landmasses. That's why Norway also stays relatively ice-free as well.



Most of the world is getting warmer but if we now look at the changes in surface temperature from 1901 to 2012 we can see that there seems to be a cooling in the North Atlantic. Before we move on I want to make a general point about average global temperatures. People think that because something might get colder locally somehow we've overcome global warming but that's not true. If the world could be split into two hemispheres and we cooled the northern hemisphere by six degrees and warmed the southern hemisphere by ten, ten minus six which is four divided by two because there are two hemispheres, that equates to two degrees of global warming which is what is predicted over the next 100 years. So if you're in the minus six or the plus ten, your experience of global warming would be very different. The idea that two degrees is nice and good for us and that we will have vineyards in southern England is a complete misunderstanding of how global warming works. So we mustn't get complacent.

The Rapid Climate Change Programme which I'm responsible for measures temperature, salinity, density and flow changes in the North Atlantic. We head off in a ship and we lower an instrument all the way to the bottom of the ocean, typically five or six kilometres. The instruments stay there for a year in unforgiving conditions. In 2009-10 we found a 30 per cent drop in circulation although it recovered. If you put a line through the graph it's decreasing over ten years. 2009-10 was a very severe winter when the whole of the UK was at one point covered in snow. This is a rare event and the decrease in circulation contributed to this. The other thing is that if you don't transport the heat north then you trap the heat in the south where it contributes to the intensity of hurricanes. Also, if you stopped the circulation completely you would get a change in sea level rise of tens of centimetres over ten years. This compares to a 3 millimetre per year increase in ocean levels due to climate change. And this is consistent with what we found in 2009-10 although it's recovered since. The observational record is too short to determine the long term trend.

So what will happen the day after tomorrow? Not an ice age, global warming will continue, the ocean will affect where heat goes, and that will have effects in terms of our climate.

The talk of a hiatus in warming is just not there. The last four years have been the warmest years on record. The world is warming. There's no doubt about that. Not everywhere, there are places where it is cooling, but on average.

The other factor we need to think about is that the oceans absorb 26 per cent of the carbon dioxide that we're putting into the atmosphere. 43 per cent stays in the atmosphere and the terrestrial biosphere (trees and plants) absorbs the remainder. Some of the CO₂ dissolves in the ocean and some is taken out by algae. When CO₂ dissolves in the ocean you are acidifying the ocean – the pH change doesn't sound very much but it's on a logarithmic scale. This is a major problem for organisms which build shells from calcium carbonate. It's like dissolving their shells in acid.

The oceans are absorbing 93 per cent of the heat. If the oceans weren't there we'd be in real trouble. The consequences are hurricane intensity, sea level rise from water expanding and ice caps melting, the distribution of plankton and fish species. Corals are also under threat. Corals are symbionts – they are home to algae. If they get too hot they expel the algae and the algae is what gives them the colour which is why it's called coral bleaching. The corals are also made from calcium carbonate.

It's true that sea level is not rising everywhere. It's like stirring a teacup – the rise is not uniformly distributed. The consequences are quite severe. If you live in Bangladesh you are looking at a one metre rise in sea level in the next 100 years. This will displace 10 million people in the low-lying fertile lands. Sea ice is also decreasing significantly which affects the hunting grounds of polar bears.

Projected temperature rises of 4-7 degrees shown in the climate models, if we carry on with 'business as usual', is a very scary scenario.





Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Revd Hugh Maddox

Thank you for your response to my talk on Christian Humanism. I am grateful that you clarified subsequently that you do not think that I, personally, am 'old fashioned and arrogant' but only my belief in the role of the Church of England. Yes, I do find it sad that the dear, muddled old C of E cannot quite so easily stand on behalf of everybody, non-believer, Muslim, Hindu, or whatever.

I couldn't help chuckling at the thought of my Christian belief being 'a phase' which I ought to grow out of! Yes, my talk was too much about suffering and not enough about living the full life but unless I see God as suffering in all His creation he is a detached tyrant. Fifty years as a parish priest has meant that I have often been alongside people I have loved at times of acute and prolonged agony. Even so, I balance this with the Resurrection – in other words that good can come out of any evil if we respond wisely. I hope I live life to the full, laughing a lot, drinking a lot, loving a lot, and encouraging others to do the same. For example, this Lent I have given up giving up things for Lent! So go on laughing and loving, however you describe the source of all such enjoyment of a full life. Personally, I am helped to 'go the extra mile' by my belief in daily prayer, offering myself for God to work through me.

From Dave Haith

I met a Christian woman in a cafe yesterday who invited me to a 'happy clappy' church tonight. "I can't take the dogma," I told her, "too narrow and fearful in outlook". Not at all, she said, they've broadened out a lot before adding that she was going to a trance demo at the local Spiritualist church that night. Blimey, I thought, they must have

broadened if they now allow their flock to "dabble with the Devil". So off I went to St Swithun's Church in Bournemouth tonight to check it out - it's been many years since I went to my Pentecostal minister father's church where they preached the gospel of salvation for those who believe and Hell for those who don't.

I got quite a shock when entering the traditional looking place of worship. Gone were the pews and organ, the floor was open with a lighted stage and a café where there might once have been an altar. Somebody was playing with a bouncy ball in front of a lighted LOVE motif and kids were playing on a pile of beanbags as a rock band did sound checks. A lovely sweet lady called Angela welcomed me in and over a cup of coffee explained her faith. "Who's in charge here?" I asked. "Jesus" retorted a preacher man who was passing. I explained that I couldn't accept a God who sent people to hell if they didn't believe something but Angela's argument was that the scriptures gave people a choice - accept or reject. But what if you do neither I argued - like half the world's population? They skirt a little reluctantly around the 'hell' word but they mean the life hereafter ain't pretty! It sounded exactly like the same old same old - my café friend was obviously misinformed or had been 'lovebombed' or brainwashed.

I settled in to the service which had catchy 'worship' songs with the lyrics displayed on lighted screens. The atmosphere was emotional with much swaying and arm waving so from the back I tried to get a couple of photographs. A man with a baseball cap - who later turned out to be the preacher giving the sermon - ordered me to quit taking pictures. "He's a bit bossy" said a woman next to me, "He stopped me using the camera once". Mr Baseball Cap began his sermon with Bible quotes displayed on the screen....and I recalled long hours as a child being forced to hear preachers drone on...and on. My brief flirtation with the Jesus crowd had lost any appeal so I crept out and home to salvage my few 'illegal' photos to share with my hell-bound infidel friends!



From George Broadhead, Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists

The following quotes by Professor Stephen Hawking are taken from Wikipedia:



“There is a fundamental difference between religion, which is based on authority, [and] science, which is based on observation and reason. Science will win because it works.”

In an interview published in *The Guardian*, Hawking regarded the concept of heaven as a myth, believing that there is "no heaven or afterlife" and that such a notion was a "fairy story for people afraid of the dark".

In 2011, when narrating the first episode of the American television series *Curiosity* on the Discovery Channel, Hawking declared: “We are each free to believe what we want and it is my view that the simplest explanation is there is no God. No one created the universe and no one directs our fate. This leads me to a profound realization. There is probably no heaven, and no afterlife either. We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe, and for that, I am extremely grateful.

In September 2014 he joined the Starmus Festival as keynote speaker and declared himself an atheist. In an interview with *El Mundo*, he commented: “Before we understand science, it is natural to believe that God created the universe. But now science offers a more convincing explanation. What I meant by 'we would know the mind of God' is, we would know everything that God would know, if there were a God, which there isn't. I'm an atheist.”

Why then did he have a funeral in an Anglican church and why were his ashes interred at Westminster Abbey?

■ Stephen Hawking (1942 - 2018) was Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge and author of *A Brief History of Time* (1988), *Black Holes and Baby Universes* (1993), and *The Universe in a Nutshell* (2001).

From Roger West

Dorset Humanists can get a bit philosophical for me but the principle of keeping any religion away from decision making is something I agree with. They are only beliefs. No child should be indoctrinated at school.

You organised a great debate on Brexit in 2016. I am now going to suggest that you or some of your members might like to think about corruption which almost inevitably happens with party politics. We have a representative democracy but when the person elected gets into power, the voters are forgotten and the party is paramount.

I am attaching the Model Code of Conduct (2007) which the Minister at the time said everyone should comply with. It is an excellent document which includes the principle that ‘Members should not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned’. However it was dropped by the Localism Act (2011). I am also attaching six ‘Rotten Borough’ articles in *Private Eye* which draw attention to conflict of interest allegations against the leader of Bournemouth Council which are being investigated by the police.*

I have recently signed the declaration which enables me to get newsletters from *Transparency International*. Perhaps Dorset Humanist members would also be interested in signing. I think this could be a very interesting project for those of your members who, like me, want a better society.

My pneumonia has left me a bit weak physically but my intellect seems to have been sharpened. I can see a synergy between Humanism and a non-corrupt society. A start could be that all those elected should be as transparent over their income as the MPs were forced to be.

[Transparency International UK](#)

[Corruption in the UK: Overview & Policy Recommendations](#)

[Transparency International UK Membership Form](#)

* Attachments available on request.





Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

April 2018

Doubling the concentration of carbon dioxide (not carbon, which is soot) in the Earth's atmosphere since 1850 means an increase from 0.028% to 0.056%. We are currently at around 0.040% (sometimes expressed as 400 parts per million). In discussions on climate change there's an important distinction between equilibrium climate sensitivity (ECS) and transient climate sensitivity (TCS) to such a doubling. ECS is the amount of warming that is likely to occur *over the long run* if the concentration of (CO₂) doubles. TCS, on the other hand, is the amount of warming that is likely to occur *when the CO₂ has doubled*. 'Over the long run' means hundreds of years. This is the warming we are 'committed to' given a doubling of CO₂. 'When CO₂ has doubled' means around 2050, at current rates. The ECS average atmospheric temperature rise range associated with such a doubling is between 1.5°C and 4.5°C and the TCS temperature rise range is between 1°C and 2.5°C.¹ This important distinction gives us a window of opportunity to engineer a soft landing for climate change.

One piece of good news is that modern energy sources, such as shale gas, emit less CO₂ than older sources such as wood, coal, and oil and so we shouldn't be too squeamish about fracking. If we want to get our energy from renewables then by 2050 we may need to cover an area the size of the United States with windmills and solar panels – not an attractive prospect. Alternatively, nuclear power stations would require a tiny fraction of that land space. Steven Pinker, in *Enlightenment Now* (2018) suggests that, in the future, low-CO₂ nuclear plants 'could be mass produced like jet engines'. In addition, the basic technology for taking CO₂ out of the atmosphere – forests – has existed for a billion years. Pinker writes that 'we should recruit as many [CO₂]-hungry plants as we can by encouraging reforestation'. Doubling CO₂ to 0.056% commits us in the long run to a temperature increase of up to 4.5°C, let alone any further doublings, and so we should be planning to engineer a reversal of this trend. With 69% of Americans being in favour of limiting greenhouse gas emissions, Pinker is cautiously optimistic that we will succeed. By 2075, we will in all likelihood have the technology to manage the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere.

¹ Rebecca Lindsey (2014) 'How much will Earth warm if carbon dioxide doubles pre-industrial levels?' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (US) <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/climate-qa/how-much-will-earth-warm-if-carbon-dioxide-doubles-pre-industrial-levels>

