



## How can a humanist be a chaplain?

A talk by Dr James Croft

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue,  
Bournemouth BH9 1TW

James Croft is the first humanist to be appointed as Lead Chaplain at a UK university. How can a humanist become a chaplain? What does the work involve? And why is it important for humanism that more humanists take up roles traditionally associated with religion? James will answer these questions and more in this personal story of his journey to humanist chaplaincy.

James is from London. He studied drama and English at Cambridge and then Arts in Education at Harvard. Prior to his current role, he was a Teaching Fellow at Harvard and Senior Leader at the Ethical Society of St Louis, Missouri.

**This event will include complimentary cream tea but please donate what you can to our charity appeal supporting the Hope for Food Foodbank and the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust.**

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## Bystanders or heroes?

A debate by members of Dorset Humanists

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 7.30pm

Orchid Hotel 34 Gervis Rd, Bournemouth BH1 3DH

What would you do if someone was being attacked in front of you in broad daylight? Would you freeze? Would you record the incident on your mobile phone? Would you call the police? Would you pretend you hadn't seen anything and walk away from the scene? Would you intervene? Fortunately, this is not an everyday occurrence for most people. But as humanists, we should think about these hypothetical situations in case they happen for real one day. This event will help us to explore the morality, psychology, and consequences of being a bystander or a hero.





# World Humanist Congress in Copenhagen

David Warden represented Dorset Humanists and *Humanistically Speaking* magazine at the World Humanist Congress in Copenhagen, 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> August 2023. The congress was co-hosted by the Danish Humanist Society, the Norwegian Humanist Association, Humanists Sweden, the Union of Freethinkers of Finland and Humanists Iceland. 420 delegates attended from countries around the world including Canada, the US, Guatemala, the Philippines, Malawi, Nigeria, Italy, Spain, Germany, Scotland, Czechia and Hungary.

The Congress adopted a new declaration on *Democracy: A Humanist Value*. Dorset Humanists had a hand in editing this declaration during the drafting stage.

David voted at the Humanists International General Assembly on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August, casting his one vote on behalf of Dorset Humanists which is an Associate Member of Humanists International. He voted to elect board members and also on a motion regarding the war in Ukraine. See *Chairman’s View* for more details and more photos p7.

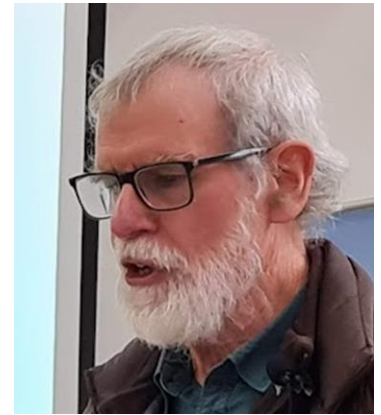
## Dates for your diary

Saturday 12 <sup>th</sup> August 2pm	Moordown	Humanist Chaplaincy – Dr James Croft. Plus complimentary cream tea. Please donate to our Appeal.
Wednesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> August 7.30pm	Orchid	Debate: Bystanders or Heroes? This event will help us to explore the morality, psychology, and consequences of being a bystander or a hero.
Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> August 10.15am	St Catherine’s Hill	Walk – see Meetup for full details
Saturday 9 <sup>th</sup> September 2pm	Moordown	The Great Awakening. David Warden and Daniel Dancey will help us to understand the phenomenon of ‘wokeism’.
Saturday 26 <sup>th</sup> August	Depart from Poole Quay	Swanage Cruise via Old Harry Rocks – see Meetup for full details
Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup> December 7pm	Marsham Court Hotel	Yuletide dinner – please hold the date in your diaries!

Plus other social events which will be announced on Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any changes.

# Humanist Politics for the 21st century: A response to Richard Norman

*By Simon Whipple. Simon is a member of Dorset Humanists committee and he is our programme organiser.*



**Richard Norman**

On February 10th 2023, as every year, Dorset Humanists held its Darwin Day celebration. Our format for Darwin Day consists of a celebratory lunch followed by a talk from a high-profile humanist speaker. This year, as your speaker organiser, I arranged for Richard Norman, philosophy professor and trustee of Humanists UK, to deliver the talk.

I asked Professor Norman to consider whether it is possible for there to be a Humanist Politics. I had in mind that if humanists analysed the politics of the major parties, they might make a judgement on their policies and support or condemn them. I probably did not pose the question sufficiently clearly, because to my regret Professor Norman did not deliver the talk I had hoped for.

Our speaker reviewed the campaigns of noted historical thinkers of the Enlightenment including Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, Nicolas de Condorcet, and the speakers at the Putney debates which took place just after the English Civil War. He also considered Percy Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the many British campaigners for the abolition of the slave trade. He stated that all these political campaigners played a leading role in establishing a consensus that all people are equal, that there should be no slavery, that women are entitled to as much respect and authority as men, that democracy should be exercised on the basis that each adult person is entitled to one vote in an election, irrespective of his or her wealth, and that civil

rights should not depend on a person's religious persuasion.

Professor Norman indicated that the values these reformers advocated are, in summary, the values of Humanism. They are now accepted by all political parties, and so Humanism has, effectively, now won its major battles. There remain a few issues where the established church retains an unfair advantage, such as the case of bishops sitting in the House of Lords. He expressed the view that all political parties aim to achieve the same goal: that is, to maximise human achievement and contentment. And he would say that the disagreements between the major parties relate to the best means of achieving that same goal that they all share.

Professor Norman told us the history of the British Enlightenment, but he conflated this with a history of Humanism in Britain. Many of the campaigns he talked of were run by people who had a religious belief. William Wilberforce, who led the British campaign to abolish slavery, was an evangelical Christian. The Chartists, who played a leading role in achieving the great reform Act of 1867, contained many dissenting Christians. It requires some mental gymnastics to label such political heroes as the forerunners of Humanism.

Once Humanist societies were formed (many of which were called Ethical Societies in the late nineteenth century) then their members did advocate on behalf of groups who ▷



were exploited. A notable campaign in the 20th century, which was supported by Bertrand Russell (a self-declared humanist), was the campaign to decriminalise homosexuality. But even then, many of the campaigners included Christians and people of other faiths.

Despite what our Darwin Day speaker said, I consider that Humanism continues to have an ethical message for our time. It is a message far stronger than that derived from the tradition of the radical thinkers who advocated the rights of man.

What originally attracted me to Humanism is the belief that societies have acquired ethical systems because without a set of moral rules which are broadly similar to those held by Western European countries, society would fail and descend into anarchy. In short, we can be 'Good without God'.

The theory of natural selection can be applied to the evolution of social rules, in the same way as Charles Darwin applied the concept of natural selection to the evolution of the physical characteristics of plants and animals.

A society which has adopted social rules which do not favour its survival can die out. As an example, the society of Easter Island almost died out because its social systems permitted its elite members to cut down all the island's trees. This made it impossible to build fishing boats, so that it became impossible to catch the fish which had been the islander's staple food, and starvation ensued.

Study of the many societies which have collapsed, including those in the Middle East and Latin America, may also reveal social customs which led to that society's failure.

Moral rules are, I consider, related to our feelings. They are deduced from a complex mixture of feelings of revulsion at the effects of certain actions which are considered bad, of a sense of guilt if we carry out actions which we have learnt are disapproved of, and

of a sense of anxiety that we should conform to others' expectations.

We can use our capacity to use reason to decide that it is in our best interests to override our feelings and so to perform an action which would formerly be considered wrong. Eventually, what was generally regarded as wrong will become considered to be right. And that is how moral rules change.

Humanists should not sit back and congratulate themselves that, now that the world has generally accepted that all people have equal rights, including the right to lead a secular life, there is very little further work for Humanists to carry out.

The challenge for Humanism now is to help the world to evolve its present set of social and moral rules. Moral rules have changed in the past – slavery used to be morally acceptable.

At present the following two rights are considered inviolable:

1. The rights of shareholders of fossil fuel companies to earn the maximum possible return from their shareholdings; and
2. The presumption that if a person can afford to buy something which is available for sale they should be entitled to make the purchase (such as to buy a round-the-world air ticket).

But, if society is to survive, the rules we live by must make it morally unacceptable to cause so much damage to the environment that it leads to the destruction of our planet.

If Humanists UK can use its influence to change the moral climate to one where neither of those rights are given such respect, then it will have formed a new, and literally life-saving, Humanist Ethics.

My response, then, to our Darwin Day Speaker, is that there **MUST** be a Humanist Politics for the 21st Century – but its details still need to be worked out.



Hobnobbing with the VIPs! Gary McLelland (Chief Executive of Humanists International), Debbie Goddard (Vice-President of American Atheists), and David Warden at the World Humanist Congress in Copenhagen.

## Understanding Humanism

These are **ten key points** which were suggested by David Warden in support of his talk on humanism on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at the Orchid Hotel. Click [here](#) for the YouTube video.

1. Religion and humanism are different 'software packages' for the human brain and they work in completely different ways
2. Humanists take responsibility for their own lives – they don't rely on God to run their lives for them
3. Humanists think that this is our one life and therefore we try to cultivate an intense appreciation of this life
4. Humanists try to think about death by using helpful metaphors, such as the 'cycle of life' and death as a natural process
5. Humanists try to cultivate good relationships based on toleration, patience, forgiveness, generosity, being agreeable, letting go of resentments and so on
6. Humanism can help to build your immunity against mind viruses by practising Enlightenment principles such as evidence, reason, debate, and discussion
7. Every human institution which is trying to make the world a better place for humans to flourish and live good lives which is not based on religion is implicitly humanist
8. Humanism is like the British Constitution in the sense that it is not written down anywhere. We learn about it by reading books, belonging to humanist organisations etc.
9. Humanists want to create a world in which everyone can flourish – we need a 'politics of the common good'
10. Humans are flawed apes, but humanists believe that we do have the capacity to live good lives and create good societies. It is a work which is always in progress.

### Suggested reading

*Understanding Humanism* (2022) by Andrew Copson, Richard Norman and Luke Donnellan.  
Available to borrow from Dorset Humanists library.



## Straight talk about gay relationships

At our event in July at the Orchid Hotel, David Warden rose to the challenge of talking frankly about growing up gay as an evangelical Christian in a 'heteronormative society' in the 1970s, and how he finally plucked up the courage to join the Gay Society when he went to university. He gave us a potted history of his attraction towards other boys and the male physique from early childhood to the sixth form, where some of the students were so winsomely handsome they looked as though they had just stepped off the set of *Brideshead Revisited*. He forgot to mention that, many years after leaving school, the principal pianist of the English National Opera contacted him to say that he'd had a crush on him in the sixth form at the same school. Being gay in the 1970s was very much something you had to keep locked away.

David explained that he did not have any role models to make sense of his feelings until, at the age of nineteen, he read an *Observer* article about 'coming out'. It was a massive relief to be able to identify as gay, if only to himself at first. He revealed that his first gay sexual experience at the age of 21 was followed, the very next morning, by the news that John Lennon had been shot dead in New York. He hastened to add that he did not see any cosmic connection between these two events.

He answered a number of questions about the topic including 'What do gay men do in bed?' which, he added, was his mother's question. He handled the subject with as much decorum as possible although some explanations were explicit. He revealed the location of the male G-spot for the benefit of anyone still looking for it (named after the German gynaecologist Ernst Gräfenberg). He should have added that, if God exists, this curious detail of human anatomy suggests that God does at least have a sense of humour.

He explained what the letters LGBTQIA+ stand for and how the Gay Pride movement has been somewhat overtaken by the trend to include more and more oppressed groups underneath an ever-expanding Pride umbrella.

David revealed (if it needed revealing) that gay men tend to have a lot of sexual partners but left it to members of the audience to judge whether this fact was to be deplored, envied, or celebrated. *Click image for video.*



**Gay Pride Parade in Bournemouth with Dorset Humanists, 2018.**

***Click either image above for the video recording.***





**World Humanist Congress**  
Robert Hamilton – Board  
Director of Street  
Epistemology International



**World Humanist Congress**  
Liviu Taran – Norwegian  
Humanist Association



**World Humanist Congress**  
Ariel Pontes – Brazilian  
Humanist living in Romania



**World Humanist Congress**  
With Jiri Muller –  
Czech Humanists  
and Andrew  
Copson –  
President of  
Humanists  
International



**World Humanist Congress**  
Nicole Shasha and Rebekka Hill – young  
humanists from the UK



**World Humanist Congress**  
Javan Lev Poblador – Humanist Alliance Philippines

# View from the Chair

David Warden  
Chairman of Dorset Humanists



The last World Humanist Congress was in Oxford in 2014. They are supposed to be held every three years, but the last two planned for Sao Paulo (2017) and Miami (2020) were both cancelled. So the Congress which has just been held in Copenhagen was long overdue.

It exceeded my expectations by a long shot. This is not so much because of the content of the lectures and workshops, which can vary in quality, but because the world humanist community really feels like a global family. It's like a massive and joyful family reunion. For example, I've known Leo Igwe from Nigeria for twenty years, and at the gala dinner on Saturday night I sat near Levi Fragell from Norway. Levi was President of Humanists International from 1998 to 2003, and I last met him at Conway Hall in London in 2009. Two other former Presidents were there: Sonja Eggerickx and Roy Brown. Roy Brown spoke to Dorset Humanists in 2007. They're all looking a little older, but then so am I. Babu Gogineni, a former Executive Director of Humanists International, also travelled from Australia to be present. I was sad to learn of the death of Jim Herrick, a founder of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association and author of *Humanism: An Introduction* (2003) which is in our library. Jim visited Dorset Humanists in 2006 and I last saw him in Oxford in 2014. As well as meeting up with old friends, the Congress is an opportunity to make new friends. I was flattered to be recognised by Jiri Muller, the charismatic young President of Czech Humanists, because he reads *Humanistically Speaking*, and it was good to meet Dooyum Dominic Ingye whose baby boy had the very first humanist naming ceremony in Nigeria. I could go on and on...!

I've always known that humanist confirmations for 13-14 year olds are popular in Norway but I discovered last week that humanist confirmations are also conducted in Sweden, Iceland and Germany. In Norway, there's been a strong tradition of confirmations for centuries. As the Christian tradition loses ground, the humanist alternative becomes more popular. So much so that Norwegian humanists are struggling to keep up with demand. They now account for around 20 per cent of all confirmations.

Another impressive humanist achievement are the 35 humanist centres in Belgium which provide free counselling from a freethinking and humanistic point of view. The type of counselling on offer is in the 'meaning of life'/existential tradition. But when I asked about funding, I was reminded that they are state funded.

Leo Igwe told me about the critical thinking education which he is pioneering in Nigeria. He trains teachers to use materials which stimulate children to ask questions about everything, instead of treating them as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge.

The next World Congress is in Washington DC in 2026. But if I have whetted your appetite, you could try the Humanists UK Convention in Cardiff next June.