



A partner of
Humanists UK

national
secular
society

IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ Saturday 12th August 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Atheism UK: Challenging Religious Faith



A talk by Chris Street. The principles of Atheism UK affirm that humans have fabricated religion, that God and gods do not exist, that morality develops independently of religion, and, perhaps

most controversially, that religion inhibits rational thought! The group promotes an atheistic worldview and questions the whole validity of the concept of religious faith. Atheism UK supports the right of all non-religious people to have the same freedom of expression as their religious counterparts, and the organisation has assisted UK-based atheist ex-Muslims who have been threatened with deportation.

In this presentation, President of Atheism UK Chris Street will explain why we need to promote atheism as a worldview, and he will discuss the group's principles and activities. Atheism UK is the nation's only democratic, member led, campaigning organisation advancing atheism. Its distinguished supporters include Susan Blackmore, Maryam Namazie and PZ Myers.

■ Wednesday 23rd August 7.30pm

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

Is Humanism a Religion?



A talk by John Coss. Humanism is a worldview that rejects belief in gods and the supernatural, and relies instead on reason, science, empathy and compassion to both

guide our morality and inform our understanding of the world around us. Most humanists have long sought to disentangle ourselves from any hint of religiosity but have we thereby lost something of value? John Coss believes we have and he will explain that there is an important distinction between 'Religion1' (the standard dictionary sense involving supernatural beliefs) and 'Religion2' (a wider sense that also encompasses non-supernatural belief systems). Controversially, John will be proposing that Humanism is a religion in this wider sense, and he will suggest how this perspective has implications for what Humanism should be in the future.

John Coss is a former Secretary of Greater Manchester Humanists and a frequent summer visitor to Dorset Humanists.

■ See inside this issue of the Bulletin for further reflections on 'religion for atheists and humanists' as suggested in books by Don Cupitt and Alain de Botton.

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■ **Thursday 3rd August 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

6th August - Tyneham Valley and Worbarrow Bay. A short but rather strenuous 4 mile walk (with a 2.5 mile easier option) - a rare opportunity to visit the abandoned village (and museum) of Tyneham and the spectacular sweep of Worbarrow Bay. Some of the best Jurassic Coast views.

20th August - Circuit of Christchurch Harbour starting at Tuckton Bridge at 10.15am. About 8 miles taking in Hengistbury Head and the ferry to Mudeford Quay.

Please check [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for further details and any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions.

Phil ☎ 07817 260498



Short Talks

■ **Wednesday 16th August 7.30pm** Friends Meeting House 16 Wharncliffe Road, Boscombe, BH5 1AH. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

Mind, Body, Spirit

Three short talks aimed at enhancing our wellbeing. In the 'Mind' section, Aaron Darkwood will present various tools and wellbeing methods he has learnt from a wide variety of authors during his journey through depression. He will focus on how to improve your mental attitude. In the 'Body' section, Mel Mochan will talk about the importance of healthy living, dealing with

diet, weight, size and the health benefits that come with looking after yourself. Mel is a qualified Weight Watchers® coach. In the 'Spirit' section, Christine Hawkridge will draw on her extensive knowledge of Buddhism and other worldviews in order to discuss what 'spirit' might mean in a humanist context.

Future dates for your diary:

■ **Thursday 24th August 6.00pm**
West Dorset Humanists pub meet at Brewers Arms, Martinstown.

■ **Saturday 9th September Moordown Community Centre 2pm:** 'CND and Labour's Nuclear Conflict'. A talk by Carol Turner.

■ **Wednesday 27th September Green House Hotel 7.30pm:** 'The joys of being a volunteer companion at the end of life'. A talk by Mandy Preece of Macmillan Caring Locally.

Other events of interest...

■ **Friday 4th August 9.30-5.00pm**
International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization (IHEYO) General Assembly at Lift Youth Hub, 45 White Lion St, London N1 9PW. Free. IHEU website

■ **Friday 4th August 9.30-5.00pm**
Humanist Professionals Day at Lift Youth Hub, 45 White Lion St, London N1 9PW. £20.00. Training, Continuing Professional Development, and networking opportunities for all humanist professionals – celebrants, pastoral carers, school speakers – and those aspiring to become one. Limited number of tickets available. IHEU website

■ **Saturday 5th August 9.30-5.00pm**
Humanism 2017 Day Conference at the Royal Society. £29 (plus £60 for optional evening dinner). 'The Rise of Populism and its Threat to Secularism, Democracy and Human Rights' hosted by Humanists UK. IHEU website

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Anne-Marie Yonge

We are very sorry to announce that Anne-Marie Yonge has died after a brave battle with cancer. She had been enjoying life and said she had 'had a good life'. Anne-Marie grew up in Millau, Southern France and was a French teacher, mainly in private schools. She met her husband, Tony, in England when she was a student and they had a daughter, Veronique. After Tony died, about eight years ago, she made new friends at U3A. She loved philosophy, French philosophers in particular, and her confidence grew in presenting classes. It was through U3A she heard of Dorset Humanists and she enjoyed our talks programme. She will be greatly missed by family and friends. Her funeral will be at 12.30pm on Tuesday 8th August at Bournemouth Crematorium, Strouden Ave.

Dorset Humanists at Prejudice Free Dorset

Aaron Darkwood represented us at the July meeting of Prejudice Free Dorset. Prejudice Free Dorset is a partnership organisation that seeks to promote inclusive communities across Dorset. The group works together to challenge prejudice in Dorset so that all individuals can go about their daily lives safely and with confidence. Prejudice Free Dorset members include Dorset Police, Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner, Bournemouth Borough Council, Borough of Poole Council, Dorset County Council, Bournemouth University, Crown Prosecution Service, Victim Support, NHS and community groups. Last year nearly 600 hate crimes were reported although local and national trends indicate a decline in reporting. Dorset has one of the highest conviction rates for hate crimes at 92.5%.

- Visit Prejudice Free Dorset [here](#)
- How to report hate crime [here](#)
- App download [here](#)

Kimmeridge trip success

Dorset Humanists' Summer Trip to the Museum of Jurassic Marine Life in Kimmeridge near Wareham

On a sunny Saturday in July twenty-seven members and friends made the trip to Kimmeridge through spectacular Dorset scenery, enjoyed an excellent buffet lunch on arrival supplied by Clavells Restaurant, followed by an engaging and intimate guided tour of the museum by fossil collector Steve Etches MBE. Our group was slightly too large for everyone to see and hear everything clearly but we were all impressed by what one man's lifelong passion can lead to in terms of scientific discoveries of international importance. Only 10 per cent of the collection of 2700 items is currently on display but there are plans to extend the display area. Thank you to everyone who supported this trip.

From Heather

A lovely afternoon out at the Museum of Jurassic Marine Life – amazing exhibits and a stellar tour by fossil collector Steve Etches.

From Barbara

Thank you so much for organising the Kimmeridge trip. It was so interesting and has reawakened my interest in archaeology. A very enjoyable outing.

From Greg

A great afternoon and well worth the trip.

From Phil W

Interesting visit and talk by Steve Etches about some of his valuable lifetime collection he has generously donated to the nation. He is aided by Charlie Newman, owner of the Square and Compass pub in Worth Matravers, who studies microfossils and spotted the Ichthyosaur fossil with its belly still full of fish. The highly important Kimmeridge fossils were ignored by many collectors because they are hard to preserve.

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Chris Smith and Aaron Darkwood represented Dorset Humanists at the Humanists UK Annual General Meeting in July. Report by Aaron Darkwood.

The key focus of the AGM was the new 'Humanists UK' branding which was reinforced throughout the day. I have to admit not being a fan of the logo initially, but the clean, bright and fresh look has been growing on me.

Director of Community Services Teddy Prout detailed many of the gains of the past year. The pastoral care team has grown to 150 members with a quarter of NHS trusts now having their very own Humanist presence. Over 20,000 children have heard about Humanism in schools. Naming ceremonies grow in number each month. Humanists UK have extended into Northern Ireland where they now have nine celebrants in place.

The 'Understanding Humanism' website where educational resources for schools can be found received 20,000 downloads from its 16,000 visitors. This has proved to be such a huge success it is being translated into other languages and shared across the world as a global resource. 200 RE teachers have attended training courses on Humanism. 20,000 free copies of the 'What Is Humanism?' book for children by Michael Rosen and Annemarie Young have been distributed to schools.

A new MA in Existential and Humanist Pastoral Care, the first of its kind in the UK, will provide a much-needed pathway towards professional work in pastoral care and chaplaincy from a non-religious perspective. The provider is the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling in collaboration with Humanists UK and Middlesex University. The world's first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Humanism is also being developed. This is an entirely free online course.

Death Cafés have been another huge success. 4835 Death Cafés have been held

nationally. They are a way of talking about death in a comfortable and open setting, following guidelines as per the the official website. Bournemouth's last Death Café was in September 2012 so it's due a resurrection!

'Faith to Faithless', a Humanists UK section to support apostates and those leaving religion, has been a huge success. Dorset Humanists will have a talk on this from Imtiaz Shams at our Moordown meeting in October.

Public Affairs and Policy Officer Richy Thompson spoke about a Jewish school in Stamford Hill where pupils were not being taught any maths, English or science, and with no spoken English either. As a result of this kind of research by Humanists UK Ofsted has appointed more inspectors. And as a result of Humanists UK pressure, the government has introduced statutory relationships and sex education in all English schools. 4,300 Humanist marriages have taken place in Scotland, now outnumbering Church of Scotland marriages. In Northern Ireland the High Court found in June that a ban on humanist marriages having recognition is discriminatory. However, there will be a further Court of Appeal hearing in September. Assisted dying is being looked into with three cases working their way through the courts. Humanists UK has also won the right for women from Northern Ireland to have free NHS treatment for abortion but it can only happen in England. They are continuing to campaign for change in Northern Ireland itself.

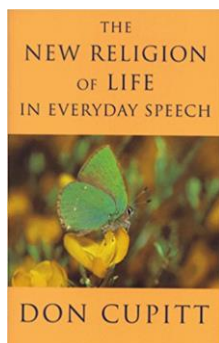
Humanists UK has grown to 65,000 members and supporters in the last seven years which has enabled them to grow their full time staff to 19 full-time equivalents.

For more information please read the full **Impact Report 2017**. I have placed a copy in our library - available at Moordown Community Centre. Please also consider joining Humanists UK. Dorset Humanists is a partner member of this extremely worthwhile and effective organization.

Join Humanists UK [here](#).

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Religion for Atheists and Humanists



At our Short Talks evening in July, David Warden presented Don Cupitt's ideas about a 'Religion of Life' and Margaret Pickford selected elements from Alain de Botton's 'Religion for Atheists' for us to discuss.

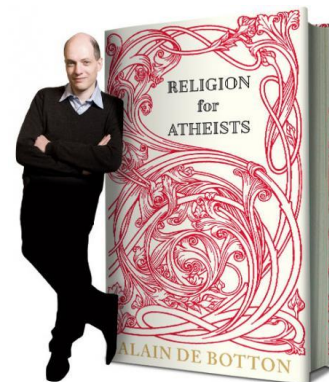
Don Cupitt, who taught philosophy of religion at Cambridge University for thirty years, started out as a young Church of England curate but by 1980 he had concluded that the word 'God' should be understood in a mythical rather than a literal sense. He rejected the term 'atheist' as he still believed that the word 'God' could be useful, for example as a personification of values such as compassion. More controversially, he insisted that 'religion' can be interesting and meaningful without supernatural beliefs. In a series of books he developed the argument that many, perhaps most, people in the West have spontaneously transferred what he refers to as their 'religious' feelings from God to life itself. The secularisation of society has been accompanied, he says, by a 'sacralisation of life'. People now love life, affirm life, and wish to 'live life to the full'. Cupitt says that we should 'live the way van Gogh paints' with expressionist intensity. We should 'put on a good show' and 'give it our best shot' because this life is all we will ever have. He also says we should train our senses to enhance our enjoyment of ordinary life, especially our visual field and transient life forms like insects.

Traditional forms of religion shielded us from anxiety and fear about our existential situation – mortal beings being shunted towards oblivion in a meaningless universe. Cupitt claims that traditional religion is now in a state of terminal collapse and yet we still face the same human situation. He believes that we can conquer the fear of death by forgetting self and by loving life right to the end. Death is nothing – we won't

be aware of being dead – so forget death and live as generously and affirmatively as possible while you can in order to leave your small corner of the world better than when you found it.

The 'Sea of Faith Network' was inspired by Don Cupitt's book of the same name and it promotes the idea that religion can still be meaningful and useful even if God is considered to be mythical.

Alain de Botton's book 'Religion for Atheists' starts from a similar premise. He writes that 'God may be dead, but the urgent issues which



impelled us to make him up still stir and demand resolutions'. He expresses nostalgia for certain elements of religion and the desire to rescue those bits of religion which seem to him to be 'beautiful, touching and wise' so that atheists can derive some benefit from religion. The purpose of the book is to 'identify some of the lessons we might retrieve from religions: how to generate feelings of community, how to promote kindness, how to cancel out the current bias towards commercial values, how to select and make use of secular saints, how to rethink the strategies of universities and museums, how to redesign hotels and spas, how to achieve perspective through the sublime and the transcendent, and how to use architecture to enshrine values'. De Botton, a declared atheist, writes about 'well-ordered souls' and 'the proper functioning of our souls' – clearly meant in a metaphorical rather than a literal sense.

De Botton questions the ascendancy of a form of libertarianism which refrains from providing adults with moral guidance and exhortation. Instead, he recommends a form of paternalism in which people are encouraged to behave well. Exhortations could be in the form of 'good' propaganda, on public billboards for example, to balance the enormous emotional pressure of

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commercial advertisers. He suggests that we should be encouraged to think about specific virtues such as honesty, integrity, compassion, forgiveness, wisdom, generosity, thoughtfulness, selflessness, and kindness. Should Dorset Humanists do more along these lines? Do you have any ideas as to how it could be done without being intrusive or patronising?

He describes the benefits of a Jewish Bar Mitzvah, both to adolescents and to their parents. Norwegian humanists have successfully created a humanist variant of the coming of age ceremony. Could we successfully create more humanist ceremonies in addition to namings, weddings and funerals?

De Botton praises the community aspect of the Catholic Mass and, as a secular alternative, suggests the idea of 'agapé restaurants' in which guests would be encouraged to mingle with strangers and be given guidance about suitably philosophical discussion topics such as fears, regrets, and forgiveness. Should Dorset Humanists provide conversational guidance when we eat together at the AGM or Darwin Day?

De Botton writes that 'venues ought to be attractive and inspiring enough to evoke enthusiasm for the notion of a group' and laments the appearance of community centres which 'confirm the inadvisability of joining anything communal'. Is this true of Moordown Community Centre? Should humanists invest a lot more capital in creating inspiring and attractive venues?

Religions have always recommended that their followers observe periods of solitude and de Botton writes that 'We require effective centres for the restoration of our whole being – new kinds of retreat devoted to educating our physical as well as psychological selves'. Can you imagine what a humanist retreat might be like, what we might do together, and where it could be held?

Alain de Botton's ideas inspired a 'School of Life' which runs a variety of programmes concerned with how to live wisely and well. Dorset Humanists will be running a 'Life School' along similar lines this autumn.

Life School



Dorset Humanists 'Life School' will run a variety of short courses in the future focusing on how we can live good and fulfilling lives. Participants will be invited to study and critically reflect on the best scientific resources available. A great way to meet people and develop friendships.



This coming autumn, Life School will focus on the work of Sonya Lyubomirsky who is Professor of Psychology at the University of California, and author of the bestselling books

The How of Happiness and *The Myths of Happiness*. Each week over six weeks we will look in-depth at two of her twelve 'happiness-building strategies' and how to apply them effectively in our daily lives:

1. Nurture relationships
2. Develop the habit of expressing gratitude
3. Do things for other people
4. Cultivate optimism
5. Savour life's pleasures
6. Take care of your body
7. Commit to lifelong goals
8. Develop strategies for coping with adversity
9. Avoid ruminating and social comparison
10. Practise forgiveness
11. Spend time on engaging activities
12. Practise 'spirituality'

This course runs for six consecutive Mondays from Monday 2nd October to Monday 6th November 7.30-9.15pm. All at Moordown Community Centre.

A £15 non-refundable deposit secures your place on the course (£10 for members). We may also invite small donations during the course to cover venue hire.

The course facilitator is David Warden, Chair of Dorset Humanists. Contact details are below. *Book now - limited spaces.*

■ Feedback from our 2015 'Happiness Course':

"First class course – really enjoyed the stimulating sessions" Barry

"Very well run course, extensively prepared and researched, professionally presented." Paul

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Science and Religion: Contradictory or complementary?



At our 'Out of the Box' dialogue meeting in June, Keith Fox, Professor of Biochemistry in Southampton University and Associate Director of the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in

Cambridge, spoke about being both a scientist and a Christian and how he sees 'no problem' in reconciling the two.

Keith rejected the polarized view of science as 'objective, rational, and quantifiable' and faith as 'subjective, emotional, and unprovable'. He said that 'science has more to do with understanding and belief than it likes to think and faith has more to do with objective and rational things than many people like to think'. Christian faith is 'not a leap in the dark' but, as with science, it proceeds on the basis of 'inference to the best explanation'. Science seeks to understand the universe but it doesn't say whether there's a God behind it.

Keith rejected the idea that God is merely an explanation for the things he doesn't understand. He declared that 'God of the gaps is dead! As a practising scientist I want to plug those gaps'.

Quoting theoretical physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne he said that 'Belief in God renders intelligibility intelligible'. In other words, belief in God provides answers to questions such as 'Why is science possible? Why does it work? How is it with our poor minds we can understand the world?'. He argued that scientific explanation is descriptive in that it provides answers to the 'how' questions whereas religion provides answers to the 'why' questions such as Leibniz's question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'. Both domains are seekers after truth but science cannot answer everything or sufficiently address questions about love,

joy, faith, consciousness, freewill, and morality.

Keith referred to the Kalam Cosmological Argument which states: 'Whatever begins to exist has a cause; The universe began to exist; Therefore the universe has a cause.' He said this is a reasonable argument and that 'nothing comes from nothing'. (This argument has been challenged by physicist Sean Carroll and by Jonathan MS Pearce in his 2016 book *Did God Create the Universe from Nothing?: Countering William Lane Craig's Kalam Cosmological Argument.*)

Keith also referred to the so-called 'fine-tuning argument' for the existence of God which points to the fact that if the fundamental constants of physics were changed by only a tiny fraction the universe would cease to exist. He accepted that there are three ways of accounting for this: chance, multiverse, or God. He claimed that the multiverse theory is compatible with belief in God but that it cannot be tested. (This claim was challenged in the question and answer session by Greg Atkins, former Professor of Virology at Trinity College Dublin, who is writing a book on science and religion.)

Keith claimed that on the basis of the scientific evidence alone you cannot make a choice between belief and non-belief. 'Science', he claimed, 'is agnostic'. He said we need more evidence to make a decision and he referred to evidence about Jesus – his life, death, and resurrection and, above all, his claims. He concluded with a quotation from Georges Lemaître, the physicist and Catholic priest who first proposed the expansion ('Big Bang') theory of the universe: "There are two ways of arriving at truth; I decided to follow them both".

Keith also referred to *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (2007) by Francis Collins who was head of the Human Genome Project.

■ For some critical reflections on this talk see *Chairman's View*.

■ 'Out of the Box' is a dialogue meeting for Humanists and Christians in Wareham. The next meeting is in September.

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Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
August 2017



At our dialogue meeting in June, Professor Keith Fox provided a reasoned and courteous defence of the view that science and religion are complementary ways of understanding the world. Humanism is often presented on the basis that humanists understand the world using science and reason implying that religious people understand the world on the basis of revelation, superstition, and faith. In many cases this is an unfair caricature. Professor Fox said that science itself is 'agnostic' about God. He declared that the 'God of the gaps is dead' and that, if there are any gaps, his job as a scientist is to try and plug them. Yet he was not entirely consistent about this. He hinted that the fine-tuning of the fundamental constants of physics might point to a God and he claimed that science cannot adequately address things like love, consciousness, freewill, and morality nor any of the 'why' questions. This looks like a reintroduction of the 'God of the gaps' by the backdoor. I'm sure that science can account for feelings of love by analyzing chemicals like oxytocin. Consciousness is arguably a more difficult problem but it's still a scientific one. Fox assumes that we have freewill and that science cannot account for it yet surely this is a philosophical debate rather than a scientific one. It has been admirably addressed by our Darwin Day lecturer Julian Baggini in *Freedom Regained: The Possibility of Free Will* (2016). The origin of morality, likewise, has been extensively covered in books like Frans de Waal's *The Bonobo and the Atheist: in Search of Humanism Among the Primates* (2014). As to the 'why' questions, they make the anthropomorphic assumption that there must be a 'reason' for the existence of the universe. To account for all these gaps and pseudo-gaps, Professor Fox infers that God is the 'best explanation'. His final plea was that scientists should study the historical evidence about Jesus before rejecting faith. A popular volume is *The Case for Christ* (1998; 2016) by Lee Strobel which has been answered by *The Case Against the Case for Christ* by Robert Price (2010).

Of course a reasoned, though not necessarily persuasive, case can be made by highly intelligent people for belief in God and Christianity and it is possible for science and faith to be kept in separate compartments. The deeper problem, it seems to me, is that once someone has crossed the Rubicon of faith they often feel at liberty to make all sorts of claims which go against reason, science, and humanity such as belief in reported miracles, the conviction that you can conduct a relationship with God inside your own mind, and the certainty that your church or sect knows the mind of God.

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