



A partner of
Humanists UK

national
secular
society

IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



December 2018

Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ Saturday 8th December 6.30pm

Bournemouth Natural Science Society, 39
Christchurch Rd, Bournemouth BH1 3NS



Nine Secular Lessons & Carols

Dorset Humanists
Choir and selected
readers

Unmissable world
premiere! The newly-
formed Dorset
Humanists Choir will
perform for the very
first time at our 'Nine
Secular Lessons &

Carols' evening. We have a great line up of
festive tunes and seasonal readings.
Complimentary wine, nibbles and mince
pies will be served.

We will also be launching our 2018 Jane
Bannister Winter Appeal on the night so
please be prepared to give generously to
these very worthy charities. Members voted
for Michael House for the homeless and
Mosaic for bereaved children.

■ Please publicise this event: [Poster](#)

■ Please note that the time and venue for
this event replaces our normal Moordown
meeting on the second Saturday of
December.

Photo credit: Bournemouth's 'Winter
Wonderland' by Aaron

Humanists at Poole Remembrance Service

For the first time this year, Dorset
Humanists were represented at Poole
Remembrance Service as well as
Bournemouth. Richard Scutt (pictured
below) laid a wreath at the Poole Service
and David Warden spoke at the
Bournemouth Service. We are grateful to
Cathy Silman for persuading Poole to invite
us this year and to Dean Robertson for
taking photos. See *Letters* page for more.



Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227

 dorsethumanists.co.uk

 [@dorsethumanists](https://twitter.com/dorsethumanists)

 [Dorset Humanists](https://www.facebook.com/Dorset-Humanists)

 [meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists](https://www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists)

■ **Thursday 6th December 7.30pm** and an extra Santamas date **Thursday 20th December** at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ. We'll probably take a break in January and be right back in February.



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

Sunday 16th December – Westcliff & Branksome Chines

An easy 7 mile walk starting from Pier Approach, sampling as many of Bournemouth and Poole's beautiful chines to the west of the town centre as we can manage. We will aim to gather in a town centre pub afterwards for a drink and/or lunch.

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

■ **3rd Tuesday of the month 7.30pm** Green House Hotel,

Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

Short Talks will take a short break until January.

Each talk is around 20 minutes followed by questions and discussion. See Meetup for further details.

Calling budding speakers! Do you have a short talk up your sleeve? Contact Phil Butcher if you would like to discuss your idea for a short talk.

✉ ph.butcher@gmail.com

Future dates for your diary...

■ **Saturday 12th January 2019 2.00pm**
Moordown

'Putting the non-religious into religious education.' Luke Donnellan, Head of Education at Humanists UK

■ **Wednesday 23rd January 2019 2.00pm**
Moordown

'A Secular Pilgrimage: Humanist responses to painting' John Hubbard

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 5th December 7.30pm**
Sandford Heritage Hall, Sandford Rd, Nr Wareham, BH20 7AJ (Next to Pine Martin Grange Care Home). 'Out of the Box' presents:

An interview with Noah

Last year 'Out of the Box' achieved a 'miracle' by teleporting three biblical authors to the present day to ask them first-hand about what motivated them to write the texts of the New Testament. This year we've got another spectacular miracle lined up for you. Aaron 'Showblazer' will be transporting Noah, his wife, and one of the flood victims to the present day to ask them all those questions we have often wondered about. The format is in the style of a chat show with guests being interviewed one at a time and then open to audience questions. This is a seasonal joviality we have come to enjoy and, although light-hearted, it also has deeper educational meaning relating to historic events that may or may not have taken place. Seasonal nibbles will be provided, but why not add to the festivities and bring along a cake, snack, nibble or something for people to share. Sign up on Meetup as this was fully booked last year.

■ **12th December 7.30pm Elstead Hotel**

Labour Party Women's Forum Talk and Discussion led by Lisa Dowry who is a Poole and Bournemouth domestic abuse/violence awareness trainer. This event is for women only.

☎ Lisa Lewis Forum Chair 07855 950182



‘Life School’ course on Existentialism

Twenty one people attended our six week course about existentialism. David Warden concluded the course by asking ‘What have we learnt about existentialism over the past six weeks?’.

I think we have learnt how to define existentialism. It was a reaction to ‘essentialism’. Essentialism is the idea that you are essentially predetermined. But why did the existentialists want to overturn essentialism? Partly because most of them were the intellectual descendants of Nietzsche who famously proclaimed the death of God in the late 19th century. In the old way of thinking, your human essence was determined by God. You were made in the image of God. But if there is no God then who’s to say what your human essence is? Why can’t you determine it for yourself/or ‘reinvent yourself’ to use modern jargon?

So the death of God and the spread of atheism was one thing. But the Second World War was another. The old world lay in ruins and the existentialists saw this as an opportunity to make the world anew from scratch. So existentialism was radical, iconoclastic, anti-bourgeois, and it was a philosophy of freedom. One of its key ideas was to live authentically.

But developments in evolutionary biology and neuroscience have challenged the core belief of existentialism. Evolutionary biology has shown that we are determined to a significant degree by our evolutionary inheritance. If we look at brain structure for example, we all know by now that the oldest parts of our brains were designed for reptiles. We are a ramshackle structure of old and new components. Neuroscience also appears to be challenging the very notion of freewill. According to Sam Harris, our brains know what we are going to do a few microseconds before we do – by which I mean our conscious minds. And yet we have to cling to the idea of freewill otherwise we face the grim thought that we are mere robots. Philosopher Julian Baggini has tried to rehabilitate the idea of freewill



Four existentialists: Clockwise from top left: Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Sartre, and Nietzsche.

by arguing that absolute freewill is absurd. Of course we are determined by our genetics, our neurological structures, our personalities and environmental influences. We are not monads floating about in space. (A monad is a kind of atom – coined by the philosopher Leibniz). We are not pure spirits in other words. We are our bodies in a particular space and time. Baggini claims that the kind of freedom that matters is freedom from coercion, freedom from hunger and disease, freedom from tyranny, freedom to pursue those projects we want to pursue in our lives.

But the existentialists did recognise this problem. Heidegger wrote about our ‘thrownness’ and Sartre about our ‘facticity’ (the given facts of our existence). The key thing, they said, was to ‘transcend our facticity’ in order to ‘become who we are’.

I don’t think Sartre believed that it was possible to live authentically in a pure or absolute sense. We’re all embedded in biology, culture, social norms and constraints, many of which are useful and we wouldn’t want to overthrow them. I certainly don’t believe that we should think in terms of inventing our own private morality from scratch. That would be a

recipe for complete madness and civilizational breakdown. Morality is to a large extent an evolutionary inheritance. We are a social species and morality is how the rules of the game are encoded. But I like the fact that the existentialists kicked against what we might call bourgeois morality – an encrusted social morality that supported an oppressive class structure. It needed to be challenged and to some degree overthrown.

So what else did the existentialists give us? They also encouraged us to cultivate a heightened awareness of our embodied human existence in much the same way that Buddhism and the mindfulness movement do today. Schopenhauer and Cupitt were both keen on Buddhism.

I particularly enjoyed Don Cupitt's explanation of Heidegger's concept of Being: "The wonder of the world's moment-by-moment streaming forth or outpouring. Being is pure groundless fleeting contingency, already passing away even as it arrives... pure transience." Cupitt teaches that if we can learn to live like that we will experience what he calls 'eternal joy'. Eternal not in the sense of everlasting but eternal in a qualitative sense. Pure heaven on earth. Just allowing ourselves to experience the rapture of sense experience. Trees, sea, sky – our miraculous 3D colour vision, so often taken for granted, and the sheer creativity and inventiveness of the human lifeworld. To be an existentialist is to take part and to make your contribution to the ongoing stream of life. And we need to get a move on. We only have a finite amount of time in which to make our unique contribution to the human world. And if we succeed in doing that, we can perhaps face death with a certain amount of equanimity. Death is not an abyss. It's just a candle being extinguished.

And what conclusions did we come to about the meaning of life? I think we have learned to drop the definite article. There is no universal meaning of life. There are only individual and social purposes which we pursue, abandon, or change, depending on a multitude of factors and circumstances. One of the worst existential crises that can

befall a human being is to entirely lose your sense of purpose or point in life.

Why is existentialism not better known? Perhaps it's because we are all existentialists now. It's penetrated invisibly into the zeitgeist. Would it help the world today if more people knew about it explicitly? Should it be taught in schools for example? It will never be taught in schools because it's inherently anti-establishment. It still has that edge of radicalism which is why it appeals to me.

Existentialism had a political aspect and Sartre thought that capitalism should be dismantled. I don't think capitalism should or can be 'dismantled'. But I do think we have made a Faustian bargain with capitalism. Capitalism produces an abundance of goods, services and entertainments but in the process it seems to have enslaved us to its values and demands and this process has intensified in the last 40 years. So we do need some radical reform in order to re-humanise the economy. Existentialism witnesses to a different set of values, values which can help us turn the tide against tyranny and dehumanisation. And as Sartre taught, existentialism is a type of humanism.

So how to be an existentialist:

1. Accept the basic facts of the human situation (mortality, temporality, absurdity, suffering, aloneness)
2. You are free to make of your life whatever you want – don't make excuses and don't fill your life with regrets
3. Experience the intensity of life in vision, sound, touch, smell, learning, love, football, fighting for justice or whatever turns you on and makes your life worth living

Further reading and watching

The School of Life has an entertaining series of videos on YouTube about existentialist philosophers including Sartre, Camus, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.

The most accessible introduction to the subject is 'How to be an Existentialist' (2011) by Gary Cox.





Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Carol-Mary Fraser

I could hardly believe my eyes when confronted with an apparent 'plug' for Professor Jordan Peterson in last month's bulletin. How a presumably enlightened Humanist group could draw attention to such a divisive figure is beyond my understanding. This man is undoubtedly an erudite and effective academic, but he is extremely biased and his conservative, almost biblical belief in traditional gender/familial roles, and constant attacks on what he sees as the creeping totalitarianism of the left, has the worrying potential to feed into the 'alt-right' agenda. I would be very wary of the effect of Peterson's skilled and persuasive messages especially on young, impressionable men. It may not be too much of a stretch to imagine them laying the ground for the kind of mental and emotional framework that has enabled Trumpism to take hold in the USA.

I am certainly no 'snowflake' and would be the first to admit that PC has at times gone a tad too far, but that does not mean we need reining in with the narrow, old-school dogmatism of Professor Peterson. The fact that he does not believe it is possible for morality to exist without a God or at least some 'transcendental' power, should surely give Humanists/Agnostics/Atheists/Freethinkers pause for thought?

There are plenty of other good minds which have dealt inspiringly with the art of 'listening'; you really do not have to resort to such a populist and contentious figure as Jordan Peterson.

From Joanna Cole

I was at the Bournemouth Remembrance Service. Unfortunately due to the crowds I

did not get near enough to see David Warden nor hear clearly what he said, but I read his contribution over the shoulder of the man in front of me. I agree wholeheartedly with the message. I was very pleased to be able to wear a white 'peace' poppy alongside the red one – I think the Peace Pledge Union should have our support.

■ David Warden read this secular message about peace to the thousands of people gathered near the Town Hall:

Peace begins with respect. If we cannot accept a world of human difference we will never enjoy a world of peace.

Peace needs humility. If we are willing to see our own faults then the bridges of trust can be rebuilt.

Peace needs co-operation. If we realise that most of what we desire cannot be secured by ourselves alone we will cultivate friendship.

Peace needs compromise. It needs a willingness to tolerate a world that is less than perfect.

Peace requires justice. We must be willing to share the world's resources fairly.

Peace is hard work. There are no laws of history that will guarantee its arrival.

So let our tribute to those of all beliefs who have suffered and died in conflict be our resolve to work for peace.

From Brian Hodgson, President, Watford Area Humanists

For several years, our Humanist group in Watford has laid a wreath at the remembrance ceremony. We are fortunate that the Watford ceremony is almost 100 per cent secular (the only reference to a god was in the national anthem). We were included in the "belief" section and laid our wreath immediately before the Quakers who had a wreath made up of white poppies and three red poppies - all knitted. Our Humanist wreath had 50 or so red poppies to which I added five white ones.



From Malcolm Rochefort (Chair, Ludlow & Marches Humanists)

We had no problem this year at the Ludlow peace memorial. We were able to lay the wreath as one of several local interest groups after our name was called out at 11:02 am, though annoyingly the introduction was still very much C of E dominated ('We are gathered together, under God'). Tony Mason, our former chairman and senior member (90 this year) laid ours at the same time as the Quaker and Muslim representatives, which seemed peculiarly appropriate. Although ours was different to most, I thought the Quaker wreath was particularly distinctive and something to bear in mind for future years, as it was purely white poppies and greenery.

From Andrew Bennett, Llanelli

As I am the Humanist Pastoral Supporter (in effect, the 'Chaplain') of our member Sian Caiach in her capacity as Chairman of Llanelli Rural Council, I was able to lay a Defence Humanists poppy wreath at the town war memorial in Llanelli. There were eighty-six people laying wreaths so it was done in groups of four after the various local authority leaders had laid theirs. Bizarrely, one of 'my' four was the representative of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, despite my having explained to the British Legion organiser that Humanism is NOT a religion. Interestingly, three people came to look for me in the crowd after the ceremony, with one having been to a funeral I conducted recently and the other two asking if I had a card and asking where they could find information about Humanism

From Antony Chapman, Chiltern Humanists

About five years ago I persuaded the British Legion, which runs the local Remembrance Day ceremony, to let Chiltern Humanists lay a wreath, which I did. It went off OK, but of course the C of E dominated. We have RAF Halton, the large RAF base primarily for recruits, as a contiguous village, and what really upset me was the fat, loud-mouthed Sergeant-Major marching the recruits up the High Street yelling his orders at the top of his voice. It was as if it was a celebration of

militarism. Neither Chiltern Humanists nor I have attended since. I am thinking of trying to get my local U3A to set up a group to come up with a much wider ceremony, covering the wounded, civilians and possibly even the enemy. Time will tell.

From Jeremy Rodell, Richmond

The ceremony here is out of doors at the war memorial, but in the form of a C of E service, preceded and followed by a parade through the town organised by the British Legion including military people, police, scouts/guides, and St John's ambulance.

We've laid a wreath for many years now and were welcome by the local British Legion people when we asked to be involved. For the past few years we've had a uniformed member of Defence Humanists do it – a nice message given he was one of the few people actually serving in the armed forces present. This year we found at quite short notice that we couldn't get anyone from Defence Humanists so I did it again, but using a Defence Humanists wreath, with the message: "In remembrance of all those who lost their lives in the wars of the past 100 years". I didn't join the parade (rubbish at marching and feel a fraud doing so). There was a big crowd - I reckon around 500 - reflecting the 100th anniversary of the Armistice. As usual, it was a moving event and I'm glad to be part of it.

We are also invited to attend the annual Remembrance service at the local synagogue, and our Secretary was invited to read a couple of Carol Ann Duffy poems at a special Armistice Service at Twickenham Parish Church - again CofE-led, but with contributions not only from us but also from reps of the Jewish, Catholic and Sikh communities - and some undeniably lovely music. So I think we're recognised as constructive players in the local community. Just need to make the formats a bit more inclusive.

■ After years of campaigning by Humanists UK and Defence Humanists, Chief Executive Andrew Copson joined religious/belief leaders at the Cenotaph event in London this year for the first time.





Dorset Humanists 'Jane Bannister Winter Appeal'

Votes cast in our poll were Michael House (22), Mosaic (9), Space Youth Project (7), Indian school (5), Ugandan schools (5), Malcolm charity (2), Humanists UK (1). We will therefore divide the appeal between Michael House and Mosaic and we hope you will give generously to these two very worthwhile local charities. Our Winter Appeal has raised thousands of pounds in previous years. The appeal is named in memory of Jane Bannister who was Chair of Dorset Humanists until 2009.



Mosaic is a Dorset-wide charity offering a pathway of support to bereaved children, young people and their families. Mosaic also works with young people who are facing the death of a loved one. The charity provides individual, family and group support. Every child has the opportunity to attend a residential weekend programme to meet others and share experiences. Dorset Humanists' donation last year went specifically to support this wonderful residential weekend at Leeson House near Swanage.

The charity receives 30% Local Authority funding allocated to support for bereaved children in Dorset. All other money has to be raised through applications to The Big Lottery, Children in Need, charitable trust grants, fundraising, corporate sponsorship, individual support, and donations from local groups.

MICHAEL HOUSE

Rebuilding Lives

Michael House is more than just a hostel; it's a home and our mission has always been to help anyone who is vulnerable. It offers supported accommodation to both men and women.

Michael's Mission

- To provide emergency and longer-term accommodation to homeless people and provide related day services.
- To provide encouragement, advice and support to our clients in an environment which enables them to gain a greater sense of self-worth and to move towards a more independent life.
- To work in co-operation and a collaborative way with the relevant statutory agencies and with other voluntary organisations.

£250.00 will provide care and support for one homeless person for one month.

Homelessness has been a major problem in the Bournemouth area over the last twenty years and we always operate to full capacity. Official Rough Sleeper Counts, which tend to minimise the situation, are consistently in double figures. Soup kitchens have been crowded throughout this period. By providing respect, care, and support to all residents, we aim to restore self-esteem, assist with life skills, access further education, facilitate training for employment to enable individuals to rebuild their own lives and reintegrate back into the community. Michael House is a place where our residents feel "safe, warm and inspired".

giftaid it

Please consider gift aiding your donation. Forms available at our meetings or from John 07766 473728.

Please donate at our meetings or send a cheque made payable to 'Dorset Humanists Winter Appeal' to John Kingston, 90 Lowther Road, Bournemouth, BH8 8NS.

■ **Closing date end of February**





Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

December 2018

Our 'Out of the Box' multi-faith panel in November comprised a female Church of England curate, a young male Muslim who is studying economics at the London School of Economics, a female secular Jew, and me. We were invited by the chair, Mike Forte, to say how our belief or worldview diagnosed the human situation, what remedies it could prescribe, and also to say a word of appreciation about one of the other worldviews represented. Although he was a pleasant young man, I had least in common with the Muslim who said that the main problem with humanity is *the belief that this life is the only life we have*. His remedy for the world's problems was to obey God's will, as revealed by the Quran. The Christian representative explained that the main remedy for the world's problems was *relational* in the sense of recognising the dignity of others and treating them like human beings. She then went on to explain that the reason she believes this is because of the existence of the Trinity which, in Christian terms, means that God is three persons in one. It seemed a pity to muddy a good moral sentiment with 3rd century metaphysics. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the Jewish representative practised a form of cultural non-theistic Judaism so there was some solidarity at our end of the table. She spoke movingly about the 80th anniversary of Kristallnacht, a pogrom against Jews throughout Nazi Germany on 9-10 November 1938. She juxtaposed this evil event with the Kindertransport, an organised rescue effort that took place during the nine months prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. The UK took in nearly 10,000 predominantly Jewish children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Free City of Danzig.

One of the 10,000 'Kinder' children whose lives were saved by individuals, communities and councils in the UK, was Lord Alf Dubs. Lord Dubs is a Patron of Humanists UK and he was recognised as Humanist of the Year in 2016. Today, 80 years after the Kindertransport, he is calling on the government to honour that legacy by committing to the UK resettlement of 10,000 unaccompanied and vulnerable child refugees from Europe and global conflict regions over 10 years. The initiative is called the 'Our Turn' Safe Passage child refugees UK placement national initiative. Dorset Humanists has been invited to become a local signatory and to join the Bournemouth, Poole & Christchurch deputation committee. I will provide further details in future bulletins.

