



A partner of  
Humanists UK

national  
secular  
society



# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

■ **Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> December 7.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation  
Avenue, BH9 1TB

*Dorset Humanists Choir present:*



## Nine Secular Lessons & Carols

Dorset Humanists Choir will perform at our 'Nine Secular Lessons & Carols' evening. We have a great line up of festive tunes and seasonal readings. Complimentary wine, mince pies, and nibbles will be served. Please give generously to our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal on the night.

■ **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation  
Avenue, BH9 1TB



## “Unholier Than Thou”

The Non-Believing  
Religious Studies  
Teacher, Kevin Precious.

Kevin is a stand-up comedian, Master of Ceremonies, promoter and former teacher. He has performed his stand-up comedy routines at top venues all over the country. This show, performed at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2018, combines his experiences as an RE Teacher and his orientation towards Humanism. Join us for complimentary mince pies after the show.

■ **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 7.30-9.15pm**  
'Out of the Box' at Sandford Heritage Hall,  
Sandford Road, Near Wareham, BH20 7AJ  
Free entry – all welcome – donation of  
£2.00-3.00 appreciated.

## Live from Bethlehem



'Out of the Box' employs the latest quantum wizardry to beam a quartet of New Testament characters into the present to be interviewed live by chat show host 'Aaron Showblazer'. Join us for this cosmic event to encounter Mary, Joseph, a Wise Man and King Herod (subject to availability). This unique event promises to solve many ancient mysteries which have puzzled biblical scholars for centuries. Did Mary and Joseph really travel to Bethlehem? Why did the Romans insist that everyone had to travel to their ancestral homes for a census? Did the Wise Men really navigate by a star? Please bring some nibbles to share with angels and shepherds.

'Out of the Box' is co-hosted by Dorset Humanists. It is a dialogue group which aims to overcome prejudice and promote understanding between different faiths and worldviews. Please RSVP via [Meetup](https://www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists).

Send bulletin updates to [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk)

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227



[dorsethumanists.co.uk](https://www.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 5<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm** and every first Thursday at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ

■ **and festive special on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm** at Poole Hill Brewery, 41-43 Poole Hill, BH2 5PW



## 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.



## Sunday Walks

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December** - Gather at 10.15 for 10.30 start

Parkstone Woods. 6 miles exploring the hidden woods and viewpoints of Lower Parkstone, Branksome and Canford Cliffs.

Please check [Meetup](#) for further details and any changes, for example last minute cancellations owing to weather conditions.

☎ Phil 07817 260498

■ **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TB

## Conservation Ethics



A talk by Dr Rebecca Nesbit. The Earth hasn't seen an extinction on the current scale since the demise of the dinosaurs. While money pours in for rhinos, tigers, and gorillas, many plants and insects are going extinct before they are even discovered. It's time to question some of the fundamental beliefs of conservation ethics. Rebecca Nesbit writes fiction and non-fiction about science and the ethical questions it raises. She trained as an ecologist, studying butterfly migration for her PhD, and currently works with the science Nobel Prizes. She explored the risks and benefits of GM crops in her book *Is that Fish in your Tomato?*

■ **Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel, Grove Road

## Heading for Extinction and What to Do About It

A talk by Councillor Chris Rigby. Recently elected to BCP council representing The Green Party, Chris is a long time environmental and social justice campaigner, Greenpeace volunteer and co-ordinator of Extinction Rebellion Bournemouth.

## Dorset Humanists speak to over 1,000 students

Cathy Silman gave a humanist assembly to 350 pupils at Ocean Academy. David Warden presented Humanism to over 500 students at schools in Weymouth, Wimborne, and Poole as part of a multifaith/worldview panel. Greg Atkins presented Humanism to 90 Students at Crypt School in Gloucester, 150 students at Malmesbury School, 30 students at Salisbury Sixth Form College, and 60 students at Pilton Community College, Barnstaple. He also gave an evening talk to 120 people (students and their parents) at Lytchett Minster School.

## Sodom & Gomorrah

On Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November, David Warden attended an interfaith service at Bournemouth Reform Synagogue. The biblical text for the day was the Genesis story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the Reverend Ian Terry gave an interesting sermon on this topic.

## The Science of Happiness

On 21<sup>st</sup> November, David Warden gave his 'Science of Happiness' talk to Reading Humanists. Reading Humanists is a relatively new group which has received support from the South Central England Humanists Network.



## How does money work?

Prue Plumridge and Deborah Harrington from the Gower Initiative for Modern Money Studies spoke to us about Modern Money Theory at our Moordown meeting in November. This is an edited transcript of the talk.

Following the 2010 election we were told that, owing to financial mismanagement by the previous government, there was no alternative to public sector spending cuts. The money system was compared to a credit card and we were told that, like Greece, bankruptcy was just around the corner if we did not get our finances under control. This narrative is based on a false understanding of how money works. Both sides of the political divide have adhered for decades to a false narrative of how money works and the argument at election time has revolved around who is the most fiscally prudent. Our view is that rather than fixating on the state of the public accounts in terms of deficit and debt as a measure of economic competence, we should consider instead the effects of government economic policy on the nation and its citizens.

Let's imagine for a moment that an election has been called and let's imagine that political parties present substantial spending plans. What will they be asked by journalists? You got it: "How are you going to pay for it?"! For decades, the public has been seduced by an idea of how money works. We could call it the household budget model.



*"There is no such thing as public money. There is only taxpayers' money". Margaret Thatcher*

Margaret Thatcher promoted this model and it has been accepted as a universal truth. Deficits and debt have become public enemy number one.

Modern Money Theory (MMT) comprehensively challenges this prevalent public understanding of how money works. In simple terms, it's a description of how the money system works in reality. It has its roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century chartalism [the theory that money is a ticket or a token that can be accepted as payment, but does not have intrinsic value] and in the work of J M Keynes. MMT has been revived and developed by a number of contemporary economists including L Randall Wray and Stephanie Kelton. But we don't have to be economists to grasp the essentials of MMT, nor to understand how it could help to build a better society for all.

In a nutshell, it challenges two prevalent ideas: 1) that the government doesn't have any money of its own, and 2) that unemployment is necessary to keep inflation down. It then goes on to explain the *real* constraints to government spending and it demonstrates that unemployment is a government choice – not something which is determined by markets.

It's important to know a bit about the Gold Standard and the post-war Bretton Woods system which collapsed in 1971. Before 1971, the pound was pegged to the US dollar which was convertible into gold. This meant that the UK's policy options were constrained meaning that the number of pounds in circulation were restricted by the amount of gold and dollar stocks. The money supply had to be more or less static and this had implications for government spending. So when Bretton Woods collapsed, the pound was no longer pegged to the dollar and sterling became a fiat currency, unconnected to any commodity like gold or a foreign currency. This means that the currency is legislated into existence. The pound in your pocket is simply an IOU. Money represents a social means of account. It has no intrinsic value or worth. So under this system, the policy constraints that existed under the gold standard and a fixed exchange rate no longer apply. However, the politicians, the economists, the institutions, and journalists, carried on behaving as if nothing had changed and this persists right up to the current day. The debate is still framed in the



simple metaphors of household budgets which leads us to believe that governments are just like us and that they can only spend what they can tax or borrow. This leads to common political tropes such as 'We need to tighten our belts' or 'We must pay our way in the world'. These beliefs persist on both the right and the left. The shadow chancellor said he was going to bring the magic money tree back from the Cayman Islands to pay for public services! Politicians persist in repeating these false economic narratives which stifles any meaningful debate.

*"In short, a government that is monetarily sovereign has no financial constraints."*

What do we mean by a monetarily sovereign country? This refers to a country which issues its own currency which floats freely on international markets, imposes taxes in that currency, and never borrows in a foreign currency. This includes the UK, the US, and Japan and these countries have a range of economic tools to achieve their goals such as interest rate policy and fiscal policy to influence demand and the level of economic activity. With interest rates persistently at rock bottom, fiscal policy is becoming more popular as a lever to counteract recession. So, in short, a government that is monetarily sovereign has no financial constraints. The government pays for things simply by spending the money into existence. There aren't any magic money trees or printing presses. Quite simply, the central bank creates the money electronically by keystrokes on a computer keyboard which then become entries on a balance sheet and transferred to the reserve accounts of banks. It's as simple as that. Such a government cannot default on its debt repayments or become insolvent.

What do we mean by debt and deficit? And why are these not the bogeymen they are presented as? The deficit is the difference between tax receipts and government spending. It's simply another name for the flow of money from the government sector that created it from nothing via the central bank which ends up in the non-government

sector. The national debt just represents an accumulation of annual deficits held in savings. It's nothing more than a record of the UK pounds the government ever issued to the people and has no more significance than that. If you have a pension or premium bond you hold part of the national debt. Even the £10 note in your pocket is part of the national debt. Deficits in themselves are neither good nor bad. We should worry less about the size of the deficit and more about its context such as economic cycles, levels of employment, and infrastructure, aimed at ensuring a healthy economy and the wellbeing of citizens.



*"I believe that if you borrow too much you just build up debts for your children to pay off." David Cameron*

Politicians tell us that future generations are going inherit this national debt burden in the form of higher taxes. But if the government fails to plan and spend adequately now the future burden will be one of lower living standards and wellbeing. Not spending enough will also have serious implications for the climate crisis. The idea that we cannot provide decent public services or even save the planet's species because there is 'not enough money' is a worrying deception. When it comes to war or bailing out banks money always seems to be no object.

Deficits are normal and necessary. We have run them continuously, almost without exception, since the Bank of England was founded in 1694. And in all that time we haven't gone bankrupt, not even after the Second World War when our National Debt stood at 248% of GDP and the government of the day built social housing and the NHS. In 2010, National Debt stood at 75% of GDP and in 2018 it stood at 86%. This suggests that we might have been a little bit misled by predications that bankruptcy was around the corner.

The government 'borrows' by issuing bonds but it has no need to issue bonds to cover

its spending because it is the currency issuer. Nobody could even have purchased a bond unless the government had spent the money into existence in the first place. The fact that bonds are issued at all is just a throwback to the time of the gold standard when bonds were issued to defend the currency. These days, bond sales are just equivalent to savings accounts. Its function is just to allow the central bank to meet its overnight target interest rate. In reality, bond sales do not constitute government borrowing although on paper it is presented as such.

Neither borrowing nor taxes fund government spending. So why do we pay taxes? When we pay our taxes they are quite simply extinguished. In the US, where you can pay your taxes in cash, the cash is actually burnt. But taxes play a vital role in managing the economy. Taxes 'drive' the currency. In order to pay our taxes we have to have a job to earn money in the first place. Taxes legitimise the currency and ensure that it is accepted by vendors when we want to buy things (because they need money to pay *their* taxes). Tax is also one of the mechanisms for controlling inflation. It is also a way to ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth. Tax can also drive behavioural change such as taxes on sugar or fossil fuels.

We have been told that the government must be prudent and 'put aside money for a rainy day'. In fact, this just means that the government is withdrawing money from the economy. Recessions are often preceded by government surpluses. Labour ran surpluses for four years. We were told that every pound we spent on deficits was one pound less we could spend on the NHS or vital public services. The UK was then on the crest of a wave of consumption built on household debt which ended in a global financial crash. This was caused by out of control financial institutions but also by a government running surpluses which pushed debt instead of savings into the private sector. We need to understand that one person's spending equals another person's income. If a government creates surpluses, spending less than its tax receipts, then the private sector's net

financial wealth will be negative. It's impossible for both sectors to run surpluses at the same time.

What about inflation? Won't spending too much lead us to a Zimbabwe situation? MMT economists recognise that all spending carries an inflation risk. It's not the money creation in itself that creates inflation. The lesson from Zimbabwe is that if you destroy the supply side (the ability of the economy to produce real goods) and then print loads of money you will push spending far beyond the productive capacity of the nation and create inflationary pressures. So it's the job of good government not to 'balance the budget' but to spend enough money into the economy so as to utilise the nation's productive capacity to its optimum level.

*"The UK is a nation rich in real resources and we have a currency-issuing government that can mobilise those resources for the common good."*

The last piece of the MMT jigsaw is that the Bank of England is a nationalised institution acting on behalf of the Treasury, even though it has a degree of operational independence. The government as the sole issuer of the currency authorises the central bank to act on its behalf. It doesn't need to borrow cash or reserves from the private sector. The government is the original source of cash and bank reserves. Although private banks also 'create' money when they issue loans they are dependent on the government in order to do this. Their IOUs are promises to deliver the government's currency on demand to their customers. The key distinction is that the government is the currency issuer and banks are currency users. All bank credit sums to zero. Savings can never come from bank loans.

*Prue also spoke about MMT's recommended 'job guarantee' policy which would act as an automatic stabiliser whenever there is an economic downturn.*

■ Gower Initiative of Modern Money Studies  
<https://gimms.org.uk/>



## Jane Bannister Winter Appeal

Our Winter Appeal has raised thousands of pounds in previous years for a diverse range of charities including Refuge

for Women, New Forest Nightstop for homeless young people, Michael House hostel, and Mosaic for bereaved children. The appeal is named in memory of Jane Bannister who was Chair of Dorset Humanists until 2009.

This year, following discussion at one of our *Talkback* meetings, Dorset Humanists committee has selected two charities for our Winter Appeal this year. We hope you will give generously to the appeal.



## Hurting to Healing

Supporting Adult  
Survivors of  
Childhood Abuse

**Hurting to Healing** is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation that was formerly called Dorset Action on Abuse.

Its mission is to relieve the enduring suffering and distress of adult survivors of all forms of childhood abuse. This includes physical, emotional, psychological or sexual violation, financial abuse, deprivation and neglect of a child's human rights and needs. H2H provides a range of therapeutic services including one-to-one counselling, therapeutic and well-being groups, and creative therapies programmes.

Ongoing cuts in NHS services continue to raise numbers of referrals from clients with chronic complex difficulties. A surprisingly large number of H2H clients have been diagnosed by the NHS with serious mental health conditions, yet, some of its clients have struggled for decades to get help to overcome their symptoms and distress. Clients report that compulsory PIP assessments, often followed by drastic cuts or threats of cuts to their benefits, are

increasing their feelings of hopelessness and suicidal risk. H2H services provide much needed, safe, reparative, therapeutic relationships.

*"I had felt hopeless for a very, very long time. The future, given the way I was feeling and the thoughts I was having, was terrifying. I felt desperate. There was long term extreme lack of sleep and my GP was not able to give me more medication for this. The counselling I received may have actually saved my life and saved my family from much suffering also. I will be eternally grateful. I am now usually living with a sense of hope."*

Hurting to Healing is a recipient of the prestigious Queen's Award, 2012. This award recognises volunteer-led organisations providing services that meet the needs of people living in the community.

Three members of Dorset Humanists volunteer for Hurting to Healing.

<https://hurting2healing.org.uk/>

## End of Life Companion Volunteers at Royal Bournemouth Hospital

The End of Life Companion service was established at Royal Bournemouth Hospital in 2017 during Dying Matters Week. With the ethos that no-one should die alone, the volunteer companions are there to support patients in the last days of their life, especially those who may have no relatives or visitors able to be by their side.

The companions, already long-serving volunteers at RBH, also provide support for patients' families and loved ones, offering comfort, reassurance and a listening ear to those in need.

Your donations could help fund a comfy chair, a collapsible bed for relatives, a portable music player for patients' favourite music or relaxing tracks, boxes of tissues, or a fund toward taxi fares late at night for volunteers who do not have transport.

Watch a short video here: [Hospital volunteers](#)





# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

*From Dave Haith*

I was saddened and disappointed by David Warden's article in last month's Bulletin. He said "aspects of the environmental movement" resemble apocalyptic religion, being told to "repent of our evil ways for the end is nigh". But if the green movement "resembles" apocalyptic religion, it doesn't mean it IS apocalyptic religion. He recommends the Humanist approach of science and rationality – but it is indeed the vast majority of rational scientists who are warning of an apocalypse. As I write, the Guardian headline screams: 'Climate Crisis: 11,000 scientists warn of "untold suffering"'.

Putting "desecrated the Earth" in quotes, as if it is some cult slogan, David says children are being traumatised by the belief that they have no future which he unfairly labels "religious and misanthropic". But it's correct that children – and many adults do fear for the future – because of the warnings given by the science in which David puts his faith. The UK Government has officially declared a Climate Emergency and environmentalists, including local Humanist members of Extinction Rebellion, urge action to cut carbon emissions by 2030. Positivity is admirable but David's simple "we should be careful" to avoid an inhospitable hothouse, is pretty weak in such dire circumstances where many are already being displaced and turned into refugees because of sea level rise. It's ironic that the religious sandwich board preachers are no longer around, when it may be, in reality, that "The End is Nigh".

*From Meg Rolfe*

Thank you for e-mailing the Newsletter regularly. Even though we don't get over to the meetings I'm always interested in

reading the articles and keeping in touch with what's happening 'over there'.

The 'Chairman's View' last month I thought gave such an independent, well-balanced view. I won't go through it point by point, but it seems to me that promoting doom and gloom has almost become fashionable lately, and so good to know there are some of us who can be positive and hold on to optimism and so avoid extremes!

If only your article could be printed on the front page of every newspaper and put on social media. It deserves a wider audience!

*From Sophy Robinson*

I enjoyed reading *Chairman's View* last month and found much to agree with. I also feel politically 'non binary' and frustrated that none of the parties in the forthcoming election are occupying this space, and that the usual antagonistic campaigning is going on. I find the anti-capitalist underpinnings of Extinction Rebellion alarming, and think many people fail to see what underlies the rhetoric. To quote: 'ecomodernists argue that technological innovation and universal human development hold the keys to an ecologically vibrant future'.

■ 'Ecomodernism: technology, politics and the climate crisis' (2019) by Jonathan Symons.

*From a teaching assistant at Budmouth Academy (visited by David Warden as part of a multi-faith panel)*

I had the privilege of taking part with visitors of different faiths and their Q and A session. The year 8's were amazed by the openness of the visitors and the questions answered included things such as incest, abortion, LGBTQ, transgender and all sorts of other subjects. The visitors were so honest in their answers and this gave some students the confidence to give their own opinions on some subjects. It was a fantastic session with a class of students that engaged, respected the visitors but also took on a great deal about embracing others no matter what their religion, faith or culture. This could only be achieved, I feel, because the visitors were absolutely amazing and knowledgeable about their particular faith.







## Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

December 2019

**M**y recent short talk for Dorset Humanists proposed that humanists should be calling for everyone, including politicians, to build 'the Good Society'. I quoted the *Observer* columnist Will Hutton who, in his 2012 book *'Them and Us'*, wrote that 'What is possible is the Enlightenment project to create a good capitalism and a good society.' The 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, based on non-religious ideas of knowledge and progress, is one of the foundations of modern Humanism. There is little mystery about what we mean by the Good Society. It means a society based on an ethos of the common good in which everyone has a chance to flourish. The Good Society is ill-served by a one-sided emphasis on the right or the left. We need a private sector in which people can create thriving businesses, compete, and make fair profits and we need a balancing public sector based on ideals of public service. But the private sector can go wrong. It can break loose from any sense of social responsibility and end up waging war on employees and customers, creating precarious working conditions and eroding trust in business. It can decimate pension schemes and the long-term interests of capitalism itself. It can undermine democracy and the nation state. The public sector can also go wrong if it becomes bloated, overstuffed, and uninterested in efficiency, innovation, and customer service. When it seeks to abolish capitalism it can wreck economies entirely. There is no ideologically pure Utopian fix for creating the Good Society on the left or the right. We need both private and public sectors working within an overall ethos of the common good. I hope that our readers will critically appraise the various political manifestos now on offer to see which party, if any, comes closest to a programme for the Good Society.

**M**odern Money Theory is obviously true. Its basic tenet, that states with their own sovereign central bank can create money *ex nihilo*, has been acknowledged by perhaps the world's greatest authority on money, the 13<sup>th</sup> Chair of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan. In a clip you can watch [here](#), he admitted: "There's nothing to prevent the federal government from creating as much money as it wants and paying it to somebody." So why do politicians and journalists continue to frame the political debate in terms of a household budget in which government spending is constrained by tax revenues plus borrowing? Is it because humans find it almost impossible to believe counterintuitive truths, especially when they have been indoctrinated for so long to believe the opposite? Belief that money is real, like belief in God, is hard to dislodge.

