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IHEU  
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Humanist and  
Ethical Union



December 2015

# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

■ **Saturday 12th December 2.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation  
Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Inside AA: Can a Non- Existent God Really Cure Alcoholism?



Jonathan Stewart

Alcoholics Anonymous has become a widely accepted and media-approved treatment for problem drinkers. Yet while AA's social worth is rarely challenged its efficacy rate, estimated to be as little as 5%, appears comparable to that of spontaneous remission. Can a non-existent "Higher Power" really offer meaningful solutions to the debilitating and frequently fatal condition of alcoholism? If so, what happens to all those alcoholic atheists and skeptics? How did AA become the go-to treatment modality for one of the great social health scourges of our age? It's the twenty first century, is this really the best we can do?

Jon Stewart was co-founder, guitarist and co-songwriter for platinum-selling Britpop band Sleeper, with whom he enjoyed three UK Top 10 albums and eight UK Top 40 singles. Jon currently lectures in cultural history at BIMM Institute, Brighton. Jon has published a wide range of research in peer reviewed journals and collections of academic essays. An active and sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous for 14 years, Jon quit the fellowship in early 2014.



## 3.30pm Mince pies and mulled wine in support of our Winter Appeal

Do join us after the main meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December for our traditional festive mince pies and mulled wine with some musical recordings provided by our speaker Jon Stewart. These refreshments are provided free but please give generously to our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal in aid of the New Forest Night Stop hostel and Mosaic – see inside for full details.

■ **Saturday 9th January 2.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation  
Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Women and Humanism



Jo Adams

All of us deserve the opportunity to be educated, to work, to be healthy and to participate in all aspects of public life. Yet throughout history, women have been denied many of these rights and religion has played a major part in this oppression and discrimination. So what role does Humanism have to play in advancing gender equality, and what part do women play in modern Humanism?

Jo Adams will examine these issues, discuss ways in which women can be equally represented in a truly egalitarian Humanist movement, and present a compelling case for actively supporting and promoting worldwide gender equality. Jo was chair of West Dorset Humanists. She is

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a member of the Women's Equality Party and was formerly chair of the National Sex Education Forum and an Adviser to the Department of Health on Sexual Health and Teenage Pregnancy. She is also the author of a number of books relating to self-esteem and positive sexual health.

■ **Thursday 17th December 7.30pm**  
Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ.



## Festive Social Night

An end of year drinks and chat night *in addition* to our regular social night on the first Thursday – 3<sup>rd</sup> December. Our social secretary Dean invites all our Happy Humanists to one (or three) final drinks to see out this year and celebrate the birth of Santa. If you've been thinking about coming along this is your ideal opportunity! We may also have a meal. Please indicate your attendance on Meetup in case we need to book a bigger table. There's no fixed agenda so if you have any interesting topics or ideas you want to share and chat about in a friendly atmosphere then this meetup is for you. We'll put out some leaflets or a sign so you know it's us.

☎ Dean 07713 858773



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■ **Wednesday 27th January 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

## Post-Capitalism: a Guide to the Future

Economist Douglas Lock will present a fascinating talk which speculates on three possible economic futures. The first, a pessimistic view following dire predictions by the Club of Rome in *Limits to Growth* (1972), envisages of a total collapse of the global economic system by 2050/60. The second future envisages a resumption of a higher degree of corporate welfare capitalism and an uneasy truce between capital and labour. The third, a more

optimistic vision, would see a peaceful transition to post-capitalism based on the digital revolution and the growth of a global free goods and services economic system. We could see a world where greater equality and abundance could lead to leisure replacing work, and tolerance and co-operation replacing conflict and greedy self interest.

Douglas will include a brief review of the evolution of capitalism from the time when the feudal system gave way to mercantilist capitalism, followed by the period of industrial capitalism to monopoly capitalism and imperialism, and finally to the latest variety of neo-liberal financial capitalism. He will provide an analytical account of the present state of neo-liberalism highlighting the weaknesses of this system which seems to have lost the capacity for change and which is leading to long-run secular decline. In conclusion, he will say that the choices we make now will lead either to a utopian or a dystopian future. To do nothing is not an option.

■ **Saturday 13th February 12.00 lunch followed by 2pm talk**

Dorset Humanists present Darwin Day at the Bournemouth International Centre

## Predatory Dinosaurs and the Evolution of Birds



Dr Darren Naish. There is no longer any serious doubt among scientists that birds are descended from small predatory dinosaurs that lived about 160 million years ago during the Jurassic period. Recent fossil discoveries have revealed a wealth of feathered dinosaurs and early birds that totally blur any supposed distinction between birds and other kinds of dinosaur. Birds really are just one lineage among the dinosaurs, albeit the only lineage that survived the mass extinction event 66 million years ago. This talk will also look at spinosaurs, allosaurs and tyrannosaurs, as well as the behaviour of the remarkable scythe-clawed therizinosaurs and sickle-clawed dromaeosaurs.

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Darren Naish is a vertebrate palaeontologist currently based at the University of Southampton. His published technical work is mostly on theropod (beast-footed) and sauropod (lizard-footed) dinosaurs, but he's also worked on pterosaurs, marine reptiles and marine mammals. His books include *Walking With Dinosaurs: The Evidence* BBC Worldwide and *The Great Dinosaur Discoveries* University of California Press.

Tickets £20 each (£10 students/unwaged)

12.00 noon welcoming glass of wine or soft drink followed by 3-course Italian buffet lunch in the BIC Purbeck Lounge.

Talk only at 2pm £3.00 includes coffee or tea on arrival. £1.00 students/unwaged.

☎ Lyn Glass 01202 558763

✉ [lyn.glass@btinternet.com](mailto:lyn.glass@btinternet.com)

### Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 7.30pm**  
Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub,  
Brunswick Pub, Malmesbury Park Road  
BH8 8PX

## Skeptical Philosophy - the Case against God

Philosopher and writer Jonathan M.S. Pearce will skilfully guide us through a range of arguments for and against the existence of God, including some novel arguments that challenge the concept of an omniscient, omnipotent, omni-benevolent God.

■ **Sunday 31st January 2.00pm**  
Bournemouth International Centre

## Holocaust Memorial Day 'Don't Stand By'

The speakers will include two Holocaust survivors, one who has not told his story before and a young Syrian Christian.

Tickets are free – please ask David Warden if you would like one.

## Dorset Humanists in local school

Committee member and former teacher Cathy Silman gave three Humanist Assemblies for children at Bearwood Primary School on 25<sup>th</sup> November. The teachers all thought that the children listened well and understood what was being delivered.

The assemblies introduced the idea of being 'Good without God' as well as the concept that Humanists rely on rational and logical thought to explain mysteries of physical life. We concentrated on the Golden rule 'do as you would be done by'; many children seeming surprised that it was quoted by Confucius 500 years before Jesus introduced the same idea. An activity showing how the peppered moth evolved from white with grey spots, to mostly black and then back to white and grey again was used to illustrate evolution, alongside pictures and a mini video.

■ Dorset Humanists has a dedicated project to assist schools in the local area teach children about Humanism. Please contact us if you would like to join the team. Also, if you have contacts in any local schools who would be interested in having Humanist assemblies or lessons do let a committee member know.

## British Humanist Association RE victory

On 25<sup>th</sup> November the High Court ruled that the UK Government's subject content on GCSE Religious Studies in English schools is unlawful. The ruling was as a result of a case brought by three humanist families, with support of the British Humanist Association (BHA). It reflects the views of 90% of respondents to the earlier consultation on the subject content, as well as the Religious Education Council and a wide range of RE academics, consultants, advisors, professors of philosophy and religious leaders.

What the decision has done is firmly established the fact, based on the European

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Convention on Human Rights, that Religious Education (and not Religious Studies), outside of faith schools, must be neutral, impartial, objective and pluralistic. RE must treat the principal religious and non-religious worldviews in this country equally (other than Christianity, which could have a greater share of coverage). If a syllabus has a certain level of coverage of Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism, and Buddhism, then it must now give similar priority in its level of coverage of Humanism. This clearly has big implications for agreed syllabuses, schools, and Academy chains in setting their RE curriculum content.

*Richy Thompson, BHA*

## Dorset Humanists Committee and AGM

Jemma Hooper has stepped down from the committee because of family pressures. We thank Jemma for serving on the committee and we hope she will continue to give us the benefit of her experience and knowledge. We send Jemma, Nat and baby Zoe our very best wishes.

Do you have any ideas or inspiration for how we can further build on the success of Dorset Humanists? Any ideas for increasing members or improving what we do? Do you have any proposals which you'd like us to discuss before the next AGM? Skills and time to contribute? Please contact David or any committee member with your ideas so that we can consult as widely as possible.

## Dorset Humanists in Echo over cinema prayer advert

Religious representatives 'hit out' at a decision to ban an advert featuring the Lord's Prayer which was due to run in cinemas across the country. Bournemouth town centre rector Rev Dr Ian Terry and Rabbi Maurice Michaels, of the Bournemouth Reform Synagogue, criticised Digital Cinema Media (DCM) for 'banning'

the 60-second film showing people from all walks of life. It featured a line from the Lord's Prayer, ending on the tagline 'Prayer is for everyone' and encouraged people to use the hashtag #justpray. Leaders of the Church of England said the move would have a chilling effect on free speech, describing it as "plain silly". Rabbi Michaels called it "aggressive secularism" adding: "They seem to have forgotten that we live in a Christian country."

DCM has a strict policy of not accepting political or religious advertising content in its cinemas. It said in a statement that "some advertisements - unintentionally or otherwise - could cause offence to those of differing political persuasions, as well as to those of differing faiths and indeed of no faith," and that "in this regard, DCM treats all political or religious beliefs equally".

David Warden, chair of Dorset Humanists, said: "The advert is fairly inoffensive but this kind of advertising could open the floodgates to intrusive and unwelcome religious and political advertising. "It's not about limiting free speech or about people being offended but about being sensitive to place and context and not forcing religious messages on a captive audience."

## 2015 Freedom of Thought Report launch

The International Humanist and Ethical Union has announced the official launch event for the 2015 edition of the IHEU Freedom of Thought Report. This is the first time that the IHEU has marked the publication of its flagship report with a physical launch event. It is being hosted by the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief at the European Parliament in Brussels. The Co-Chair of the Intergroup, Dennis de Jong MEP, will be present, as will the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt.

*Bob Churchill, Director of Communications  
International Humanist and Ethical Union*

■ Dorset Humanists is an associate member of the IHEU

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## Dorset Humanists 'Jane Bannister Winter Appeal'

Our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal this year is in support of New Forest NightStop and Mosaic this year. We hope you will give what you can to these two very worthwhile local charities.

Dorset Humanists has raised thousands of pounds in previous years for worthwhile charities. The appeal is named in memory of Jane Bannister who was Chair of Dorset Humanists for many years.



*Supporting bereaved children*

Mosaic is a Dorset-wide charity offering a pathway of support to bereaved children, young people and their families. We also work with young people who are facing the death of a loved one.

Mosaic provides individual, family and group support. Every child has the opportunity to attend our residential weekend programme where they can meet others and share their experiences.

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 etc., Charitable Trust grants, fundraising, corporate sponsorship, individual support, and donations from local groups.

## newforest nightstop\*

New Forest Nightstop provides the only emergency overnight accommodation for homeless 16-24 year olds in the homes of trained and approved host households around the New Forest. New Forest Nightstop was established in 2003 and is a team approach to homelessness.

The primary aim of Nightstop is to enable homeless young people to access safe, free, emergency accommodation in host households at the beginning of their homelessness when their need is most acute, then to support them into longer term housing through local housing providers. The support given by Nightstop improves not only young people's self-esteem but also their life chances, and their outcomes for employment, training, health and housing are much improved.

Nightstop is a unique and integral service in a multi-agency approach to youth homelessness. Nightstop is temporary emergency accommodation when needed at the point of crisis.

There is a shortage of suitable accommodation for this age group, and some young people may return home if appropriate, following mediation. Nightstop support volunteers give practical advice and support, helping young people who are not successful through the Housing Panel when their only option is to find accommodation in the private rented sector.

*giftaid it*

Please consider gift aiding your donation. Forms available at our meetings or from Simon 07786 318863.

Please donate at our meetings or send a cheque made payable to 'Dorset Humanists Winter Appeal' to Simon Whitlock, Flat 3 Park Court, 47 Western Road, Poole, BH13 6ES.

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# Beyond the Syringe

*Dr Richard Rawlins' talk*

At our Saturday meeting in November orthopaedic surgeon Richard Rawlins 'exposed the secrets of alternative medicine'. He informed us that somewhere in the region of £1bn is spent in the UK every year on alternative therapies which are no better than placebo. He lamented that this represents a massive waste of resources, a 'flight from science' and the offer of false hope. At worse, belief in such therapies can be life-threatening such as the claim of the Abha Light Foundation – a Kenya-based charity – that homeopathy can cure AIDS. Closer to home, MMR vaccination in Totnes, Devon ('twinned with Narnia') is down to 70%.

Richard graded alternative therapies into three categories: those which are professionally organised such as osteopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture, homeopathy and herbalism; a second level of therapies are 'better established' such as reflexology, shiatsu and the Alexander Technique; a third level of traditional therapies such as yoga and traditional Chinese medicine; and a fourth level including crystals, reiki and even 'angel therapy' and 'chakra balancing'. Many of these techniques are based on non-scientific notions such as 'energy' and 'vital force'.

Richard noted several connections between alternative medicine and the royal family. The Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health, for example, promotes such techniques as 'cranio-sacral therapy' which 'attunes subtle rhythms in the cerebro-spinal fluid by gently moving the bones of the skull'. Ainsworth's homeopathic remedies carry a Royal Warrant, and Duchy Herbals Detox Tincture, a 'food supplement', is available in Boots and Waitrose.

Scientific medicine is subjected to rigorous tests such as randomised double-blind placebo-controlled trials and meta-analyses of such trials whereas belief in alternative therapies often based on nothing more than anecdotes. For example, Richard admitted

that if you put a copper bracelet on you may well feel better. He even suggested you could put one on the other wrist 'to stop yourself going round in circles'. But this is anecdote – not science.

Richard acknowledged that conventional medicine is not perfect and that pharmaceutical companies engage in 'publication bias'. He acknowledged that alternative therapies 'work' but only on the basis of patients' physiological and psychological reactions to the therapeutic relationship.

■ See the whole talk on You Tube (recorded in 2014 for Skeptics in the Pub Bournemouth). Just search for Dorset Humanists.



## Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

*From Geoff Jones, who has been receiving treatment for lymphoma cancer in Southampton Hospital*

I was really moved that you should think of me considering I haven't attended any Dorset Humanists meetings for quite a long time. It has always been in my heart though and when I'm recovered I intend to return as a regular member. I have really missed the debates and guest speakers who always seem to provide interesting talks.

■ Geoff Jones has twice served as a member of Dorset Humanists Committee

*From Simon Whipple*

Gus Summersgill's letter in the October bulletin, taken together with the article relating to the European Humanist Federation, raises the question as to how the Humanist community should respond to the refugee crisis.

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The European Humanist Federation assumes that it has a mandate, on behalf of all the Humanists within Europe, to demand that both refugees and migrants are given unrestricted access to Europe. I presume that this claim is based on a belief that Humanists are charitable people who want to help others who are in distress.

Gus Summersgill's case is that a large influx of Muslim migrants will threaten the freedom of existing Europeans to exercise their own religion – or to have no religion at all – and accordingly that Humanists should not become involved in the immigration debate. In fact it follows from Gus's statement is that Humanists should oppose immigration, unless it can be guaranteed that it will not lead to a decline in our freedoms to refrain from following a religion.

And so it is possible for a humanist either to oppose or to support immigration, dependent on whether he or she gives a higher priority to religious tolerance or to offering charity to our neighbours.

The pros and cons as to whether Europe should accept both genuine refugees and economic migrants on a permanent basis are multifarious. Dorset Humanists is a lovely organisation which could provide a forum to enable its members (who come from all political hues) to debate the issues and exchange their views.

I applaud the fact that the British Humanist Association seeks to ensure that within Britain anyone is free to enjoy life to its full without being forced to follow a religion. In short, atheists should not be subjects of discrimination. But that should be the extent of the BHA's political ambitions.

*From Paul Beckett*

The lecture by Dr Richard Rawlins on Alternative Medicine was the most bigoted load of rubbish I have ever heard. He ridiculed practices, many of which are forms of preventative medicine, against the option of being treated by him or his fellow doctors with very expensive drugs (all having potential horrendous side effects, if you read the leaflet in every drug you are ever

prescribed) – just shows the man's utter ignorance.

He played on the fact that these alternatives charge extortionate prices, but ignored the massive fortunes that the drug companies make from these drugs prescribed by doctors. The major drug companies are making billions a year, so they wouldn't want preventative medicine to be too successful would they?

He ridiculed Yoga, saying "of course you will feel a bit better, after a few stretches". The man obviously doesn't know or understand anything about the depths of Yoga (I have been a practitioner for 35 years).

He ridiculed hypnosis, but I have witnessed incredible addictions completely cured as a result of hypnosis. He said "If a lady came to me with a bad hip, I can give her a metal one and she is cured". He failed to mention that as the metal wears, the metal ions can build up in the body causing inner muscle tissue to turn black and die, or can cause horrible skin rashes.

I have my own doubts as to whether the potions of homeopathy, chemically and physically actually affect the body, but if there is a placebo effect and it works, why not? After all, we are all free to spend our money as we wish and it certainly wouldn't cost you as much as one of his privately done operations.

He warns that chiropractic treatment can cause strokes. Well I had a TIA (a mini stroke) after having a metal hip replacement.

I thought that modern man was developing a more open mind. Just shows how wrong I can be.

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## Notices

Congratulations to committee member Chris Street who has just gained an MSc in medicinal chemistry.

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Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's View**  
December 2015



**O**ur debate with Moorlands College of Christian Theology revealed one of the main fault lines between Christianity and Humanism. Christians imagine there to be a dimension of reality in which capital 'T' Truth and capital 'M' Moral Law reside. Without this, they believe, everything falls into chaos, relativism, and subjectivity. This is a bit like believing that without the gold standard money ceases to have any stable value. We came off the gold standard in 1931 and money has been working tolerably well since then, despite the odd financial crisis. If we went back to the gold standard we would simply entrench economic depression. I made the argument that humanists don't simply make up morality as we go along. Morality is 'objective' in the sense that its publicly negotiated and reasonably stable over time. Of course there are moral catastrophes, such as the Nazi belief that the human race could be improved by the elimination of certain groups of people. But secular societies continue to make moral progress towards greater freedom and respect for human dignity. These values are 'objective' in the sense that they are universal human desires, although they are not always easy to reconcile with other values such as the desire for order and security. Moral debate is nothing if not complex. But we should resist calls to go back to any kind of 'gold standard' in morality which usually means going back to regressive, patriarchal moral codes set down centuries or millennia ago.

**I**'ve learned a huge amount about Islam this year in preparation for my debate with Jonathan MS Pearce and my talk for West Dorset Humanists. It's become clear to me that Islam has much greater similarities with Judaism than with Christianity. Like orthodox Judaism, classical Islam regulates human life down to the minutest detail. Christianity, although ostensibly an offshoot of Judaism, has much more in common with the Greek mystery cults. A common observation about Islam is that, unlike Christianity, it hasn't gone through a 'Reformation'. The Christian Reformation gave birth to fundamentalist Bible-based Christianity so it's hardly a progressive stage. However, there are many thinkers, writers, and academics doing serious intellectual work on how Islam can be reformed from a religion which merely 'imitates' the past ('taqlid') to a progressive religion which applies critical reasoning ('ijtihad') to the Quran in order to extract and apply its putative humanistic ethical principles. Humanists should at the very least recognise these progressive efforts.

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