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BRITISH HUMANIST  
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Humanist and  
Ethical Union



# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

## ■ Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW



## Human Rights Defenders

A talk by Marilyn Jarrett from Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of people who champion and fight for the human rights of other people, often risking their own lives to expose injustice and hold powerful people to account. Following a general introduction to Amnesty International's work, including some moving success stories, Marilyn Jarrett will bring us up to date on the disturbing plight of many 'Individuals at Risk' and 'Prisoners of Conscience' such as Raif Badawi and his lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair whom they are currently working to protect. She will also outline Amnesty's new global refugee campaign called "I welcome", which aims to ensure that refugees are protected, welcomed and their human rights are respected. We hope Marilyn can also update us on the government's proposals to replace the Human Rights Act in the UK with a "British Bill of Rights".

Marilyn became involved with Amnesty International in the 1980s whilst working in Brussels. Following a year volunteering in Nigeria Marilyn became Secretary of the Guildford group and has remained so since 2003. Before retiring, Marilyn completed a degree in Global Politics and Democracy

from the Open University which reinforced her conviction that human rights are of fundamental importance.



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

Do join us after the main meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> December for our traditional festive mince pies and mulled wine. These refreshments are provided free but please give generously to our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal – see inside for full details.

### Please bring cards!

During mince pies Amnesty will provide an opportunity for you to sign greetings cards to send to some of the prisoners they are focusing on this year - a hugely important action. **Please bring some general greetings cards** with images of the countryside, animals, flowers, etc., or photographs of children and holiday scenes. Please avoid any stars of Bethlehem, Christmas trees, Santa Claus and all religious symbols. We will slice off the inside part of the card and write on the back of the picture. This saves on postage as well as avoiding any inappropriate messages.

## Dorset Humanists help people of Haiti

We raised £160.00 at our October meeting to help the people of Haiti recover from Hurricane Matthew. The money was donated to the Red Cross.

Send bulletin updates to [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk) or phone 07910 886629



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■ **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> January 3.00pm**

Life Centre, 713 Wimborne Rd, Moordown BH9 2AU. Bournemouth and Poole HMD Committee presents:



## Holocaust Memorial Day

Dorset Humanists will this year play a full part in Holocaust Memorial Day. This year's theme is 'How Can Life Go On?' looking at life after genocide and how survivors and their families have coped. David Warden has been invited to light a candle during the Act of Commemoration and Maggie Pepin will give the Pledge. David will also speak about the gay victims of Nazi Germany. Homosexual prisoners in concentration camps such as Buchenwald were identified by pink triangles and assigned to gruelling and dangerous work. Heinrich Himmler, overseer of the concentration camps, believed that homosexuality was a symptom of racial degeneracy which would deprive Germany of children. When the Allies liberated the camps surviving gay prisoners were treated as criminals and made to serve out the remainder of their sentences. 100,000 more arrests were made up until 1969. In 2008 a pink granite memorial to the victims was unveiled in Berlin.

■ **Sundays 10.15am**



## Sunday Walks

Our popular walks are led by Phil Butcher.

**December 18<sup>th</sup> – Parkstone Woods**

A moderate walk (6 miles) around the footpaths, woods and chines of Parkstone, Canford Cliffs and Branksome, and alongside the harbour and sea front.

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

Phil ☎ 07817 260498

■ **Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December and Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> January 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ

## Pub socials



Wear a silly jumper to our December social. 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

■ **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Libertarianism



Arif Ahmed

Humanism and liberty are natural allies but is libertarianism a step too far? Are libertarians selfish egoists who are indifferent to community and the suffering of the poor and

who just want to protect big business? Libertarians tend to oppose welfare because they want to enrich the poor through high growth economies, not through handouts. But how can this work if, as is increasingly the case, all the proceeds of economic growth are captured by a tiny elite? Libertarians also tend to believe in minimal government but how can economies flourish without some form of strategic vision? Arif Ahmed will provide some answers.

Arif Ahmed is a senior lecturer in the faculty of philosophy at the University of Cambridge. He has held visiting positions at universities in Sydney, China, and Italy. He is an atheist and he has debated against William Lane Craig, Tariq Ramadan, Rowan Williams and others. His philosophical outlook is most closely allied with those of David Hume and Friedrich Hayek.

Send bulletin updates to chairman [@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:@dorsethumanists.co.uk) or phone 07910 886629

■ **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> January 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

## Recovering from Religion

Dorset Humanist members Jon Davies and Ruth Haydock will share their moving stories about how they left Christianity.

Jon's 'Damascus Road' experience in 2013 propelled him into the Humanist camp. His account of his journey from total trust to scepticism will look at the ways in which the church targets and 'lovebombs' certain groups of people and the tricks that are used to deceive the unwary. Christianity had a very negative influence on Ruth's life, and this led to her setting up the first 'Recovering from Religion' group in Scotland. Ruth is a previous Chair of the Board of the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies.

■ **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 12.00 lunch followed by 2pm talk**

Dorset Humanists' Darwin Day at the Bournemouth International Centre



### Julian Baggini 'Science without Pedestals'

Writer, journalist, and co-founder of *The Philosophers' Magazine* Dr Julian Baggini is our distinguished guest speaker for Dorset Humanists' 2017 Darwin Day.

Humanists and free-thinkers rightly celebrate the achievements of science. However, some go too far in their admiration, making science the model for all reason. In this talk, Julian will be arguing that science has to be put in its place. The scientific method cannot provide the template for reason, in part because there is no such thing as *the* scientific method. Most importantly, science cannot be the source of

ethics and neither can it debunk it. By challenging some of the pretensions of those who would elevate science too high, we can better appreciate it for what it really is and also better understand what it means to value reason and rationality.

Tickets £25. **£5 discount for paid-up members if you book before Christmas.**

Includes 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.

☎ Lyn Glass 01202 558763

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

### Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm**  
Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham BH20 4LT. Free entry – small donation appreciated.

'Out of the Box' presents:

## The True Meaning of Christmas

A Christian minister will explain why he thinks Christmas was a mistake, and a humanist will explain why he doesn't celebrate Christmas. Join us for festive mince pies. 'Out of the Box' is a dialogue group for Humanists and Christians. The emphasis is on listening, learning and respectful discussion.

■ **From Monday 9<sup>th</sup> January 7.30pm**  
**Buddhism & Humanism**

A discussion group led by Dorset Humanists member Christine Hawkrige. **Eight participants only.** First session planned for Monday January 9<sup>th</sup> 7.30 to 9pm near Cemetery Junction. Please email Christine **after 25<sup>th</sup> December** to book a place.

✉ [chawk@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:chawk@blueyonder.co.uk)

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## Obituaries

### Kathleen Parker



Kath Parker joined Dorset Humanists at the conclusion of our *One Life* course and was looking forward to attending John Hubbard's talk on architecture. We were

shocked and saddened to hear that she has died suddenly but painlessly of an aortic aneurism. Her daughter said she had been a lifelong humanist and how much she enjoyed the course. Kath was from Battersea. She used to live the 'good life' (self-sufficient lifestyle) but in later years decided she preferred the convenience of the supermarket. Her main passion was her children and grandchildren. She went on the Aldermaston anti-nuclear weapons demonstrations in the 1950s and 1960s. Kath was a diligent student on the course and she read all the notes with the aid of a magnifying glass. What a pity we have lost her so soon.

*From Christine Hawkrigde*

I am very sad to hear of the death of Kath Parker. I spoke to her a few times at the Humanist Course, and found her a charming lady with a lot of insight. What a shame I didn't have time to know her better. At least she had a swift and seemingly painless death. She will be missed. Condolences to her family.

*From Terry Scurr*

I was surprised at my emotional reaction to this news. I met Kath for the first time on the first day of the course and quickly learned to like her and respect the sharpness of her mind. We had a good chat on the last day of the course; she was one of the people I was looking forward to getting to know better. It's difficult to say that I will miss her, as I hardly knew her, but her death is a loss to the group.

*From Simon Peacock*

I enjoyed talking to Kath and found her to be sharper, brighter and more intelligent than many half her age. A really nice lady too.

### Richard Green (1954-2016) Vice President of Atheism UK



It is with sadness that we announce the death of Richard Green, Vice President of Atheism UK. Richard was a familiar face at Dorset Humanists and he spoke to us about atheism at Moordown Community

Centre in 2010. He was one of the founding members of Atheism UK and had been a council member since its inception in 2009.

A solicitor by profession he contributed a huge amount in being able to interpret legal documents, particularly government legislation on various aspects of faith and religion in relation to education policy, and secular equality issues.

Richard was also a keen scholar of philosophy and was able to pinpoint the essential issues in any discussions we had. He had a particular interest in morality as argued from a religious or an atheist point of view and this helped inform some of the key principles adopted by Atheism UK.

His knowledge of world religions was impressive and this, combined with his ability to simplify arguments by looking at them from an atheist viewpoint, was a great asset to the organisation.

Richard will be remembered for the many incisive blogs he wrote in support of the Atheism UK strapline 'challenging religious faith'; a strapline that was Richard's own suggestion. Richard posted over fifty articles for Atheism UK. Topics included marriage law, bishops in the Lords, education, Christianity, monarchy, God Virus, blasphemy laws, Sharia law, and free speech. He also wrote responses to government consultations. Richard's blogs, comments and articles can be found [here](#).

Richard had a sharp but gentle sense of humour and he will be greatly missed.

*Chris Street, President of Atheism UK and Dorset Humanists committee member.*

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## Dorset Humanists 'Jane Bannister Winter Appeal'

Our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal this year is in support of Michael House and Mosaic. We hope you will give what you can 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.



*Supporting bereaved children*

Mosaic is a Dorset-wide charity offering a pathway of support to bereaved children, young people and their families. They 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. 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. We are a dry house, offering supported accommodation to both male and female residents.

### 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 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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## The Evolution of Religion



At our November meeting in Moordown, Dr Michael Price, Senior Lecturer in Psychology and Director of the Centre for Culture and Evolution at Brunel University in London, explored the evolutionary origins of religion. Starting with William James's definition of religion as 'The belief that there is an unseen order and the necessity of adjusting to it' he explained that religion legitimises teleological thinking – the belief that the universe is purposeful and that it is heading towards some kind of goal. Belief in fate and that 'everything happens for a reason' is very appealing to humans. Because we are 'hyper-social organisms' religion also appeals to our inbuilt tendency to attribute agency and intention to the reality we experience but we go overboard when we attribute agency to the universe in general.

Religion does enhance survival. The data show that there is a 25-33% reduction in mortality which is attributable to religion. This is related to social support, reduced stress, and the psychological benefit which accrues to people who believe they have a personal relationship with the 'unseen order'. This is referred to as 'positive religious coping' – an improved response to stress, trauma, and ostracism. However, religious attendance is necessary in order for these benefits to be felt – particularly joining small groups. Solitary religiosity doesn't work. Belief in transcendent empowerment also leads to increased optimism which helps with motivation, perseverance, and goal attainment.

Dr Price asked whether naturalistic alternatives could ever hope to rival religion. He said that naturalism can provide a moral framework but it lacks the powerful essence of religion which is belief in the purposeful unseen order. Naturalism can provide meaning *in* life but it is believed by its adherents that religion provides the meaning *of* life. A study has found, however, that attendance at Sunday Assembly meetings has shown similar benefits to religion in terms of social support and wellbeing. See *Letters* next page.

## 'Filling the Void'

At our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting Jonathan MS Pearce performed poems from his humanist poetry anthology *Filling the Void* with lively musical interludes provided by folk rock guitarists and singers Gareth and Louis Howells. Chairman David



Warden cut two celebration cakes and was extremely relieved when the candle lighting didn't set off the hotel smoke alarm.

David gave a brief overview of the history of Dorset Humanists. One of the founding members, Jeff Goodwin, was present as was another member, Richard Scutt, whose



optimism saved Dorset Humanists from near extinction when in 2002 the group was at a low ebb. We are very grateful to important links in the chain including founder Tony Tiffany, early secretary David Croman (photo, above), and of course to Jane and Dennis Bannister. Vice Chair Lyn Glass (photo, below) thanked David Warden for his contributions to the success of the group since joining in 2002.



David has been chair since 2009 and he said that one of the key aims of the next twenty years will be, eventually, to find a replacement for him! He also said that the committee will shortly be reviewing the aims of Dorset Humanists to consider how we can best build on our success. He pointed out that there are at least three very successful churches within walking distance of the Green House Hotel and that one of his motivations is to 'compete for market share' in terms of the worldviews on offer to people.

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# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

*From Dr Michael Price, Senior Lecturer in Psychology and Director of the Centre for Culture and Evolution, at Brunel University*

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to Dorset Humanists. I'm very pleased and relieved you think the talk went over so well. You obviously have a great group, curious, open-minded and welcoming, and that made it a pleasure to speak there. It was the perfect environment to test out new ideas and see how they sit with a public audience (albeit an unusually enlightened one). Our family visit to Bournemouth and Poole was a great bonus (we especially enjoyed the aquarium, beach and Russell-Cotes).

I know that no man-made religion could be literally true of course, and I believe some aspects of religious culture are really insidious. Still, I try and keep an open mind about religion in the abstract (the concept of a purposeful unseen order) and I try to consider it as objectively as I can, because I'm mainly just curious about why this concept is so pervasive psychologically.

I'm so grateful that groups like yours exist, especially in times like these when so much of the world seems to be turning away from reason entirely. Secular groups like Dorset Humanists are improving individual lives and society in general.

*From Mary Ray, Humanists and Freethinkers of Cape Fear, North Carolina*

I have enjoyed all your bulletins and newsletters and hoped that I'd be able to see your group when I came to England. Thank you for being such an inspiration to all freethinkers. With the current political situation here I'd like to sell my house, pack my bags, and return to the place of my birth but I know that is not feasible at almost 80. Let's just hope that childish, thin-skinned

and crude buffoon won't stay long in the White House. There really are many decent, caring humans here - but obviously very many ignorant ones too. Good luck to all in the Dorset Humanists! Take care and best wishes.

*From Roger West*

What has just happened in America and before that in the UK is that through social media things can change. Your meetings over the years have been an eye opener. I particularly like Land Value Tax. I think we need a People's Party demanding change. It would be better led by a national figure who is not a politician. The overwhelming majority of our citizens do realise that we need to save the planet by reducing carbon emissions. We are also a very tolerant society where LGBT is not an issue. Our present system of democracy is not fit for purpose.

*From Aaron Darkwood*

I was pleased to see the re-emergence of our Part Two meetings on Saturdays at Moordown. This is an opportunity for members to voice some ideas, have a say and be a part of the future growth that Dorset Humanists has in its distant sights, a journey that the more of us are involved with, the better outcome it will deliver.

Dorset Humanists has attained national recognition for its work with the 'Out of the Box' inter-worldview dialogue sessions. These very interesting meetings are well worth attending if you haven't yet been to one. Topics such as religion in schools are looked at from Christian and Humanist perspectives, acknowledging both our differences and, more importantly, our similarities. I have suggested that we expand this with half a dozen other faiths and bring them into a collective meeting. Let's see if we can bring this about.

Our approaching AGM is where we can come together as a whole, look at what works, and what doesn't, and plan for an even better and brighter future for Dorset Humanists, maintaining and enhancing our reputation as one of the UK's most vibrant Humanist groups.

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Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's View**  
December 2016



I enjoyed Michael Price's thought-provoking talk on the evolution and psychology of religion. He argued that the powerful essence of religion is its belief in a 'purposeful unseen order' and that belief in transcendent empowerment leads to increased optimism which helps with motivation, perseverance, and goal attainment. People also derive therapeutic benefit from the belief that God loves them and that his Son died for them. Dr Price's talk would have been better balanced if it had also considered the harms and disillusionments which religion can give rise to. If you believe that God really loves you and cares for you the onset of personal disasters can lead to the distressing thought that you are being punished or abandoned. It can also lead to dependency and passively waiting for God to be the prime mover in your life. Dr Price argued that religion provides a strong 'Meaning of Life' set against the weaker naturalistic notion of meaningfulness in life. Maybe so, but is an eternity spent worshipping your creator any more meaningful than a mortal life lived fully? It certainly seems less noble. Humanism offers a perspective which helps people to grasp life now rather than passively waiting for post-mortem fulfilment. And Humanism does in fact have mass appeal. It's the default philosophy of most people in Britain. A group like Dorset Humanists helps to bring Humanism into focus as a conscious and life-enhancing outlook and it can provide the same social benefits as religion. In addition to our main meetings we offer social nights, walks, and smaller discussion groups. With your support we look forward to extending these activities in the future.

I would have celebrated the United States' first female president but as Naomi Klein pointed out in *The Guardian* Hillary Clinton was a neoliberal who cosied up to Wall Street. She was, allegedly, paid \$600,000 by Goldman Sachs for speaking fees. No wonder she lost. Ordinary Americans who have been abandoned by corporate America have instead turned to a billionaire demagogue. It seems unlikely that he will solve their problems or put an end to revolving door plutocracy. What America needs is a new social contract built on humanist values of fairness, trust, and the common good. If these values make no headway in the next four years what comes after Trump could be even worse. Our 2017 programme will include talks on libertarianism – a variant of which is arguably what got us into this mess – and a talk entitled 'First Brexit, then Trump: how did we end up here and where should we go?'. It's going to be an interesting year. *David Warden*

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