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BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

national
secular
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IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 11th February 12.00 Italian buffet lunch (lunch ticket holders only) followed by 2pm talk**

Dorset Humanists' Darwin Day at the Bournemouth International Centre

'Science without Pedestals'



We will be celebrating Darwin Day in style with a delicious three-course buffet lunch in BIC's Purbeck Lounge, followed by a fascinating talk by our special guest writer, journalist, and co-founder of *The*

Philosophers' Magazine Julian Baggini. Humanists and free-thinkers rightly celebrate the many achievements of science, however some go too far in their admiration, and make science the model for all reason. Julian will argue that the scientific method cannot provide the template for reason, partly because there is no such thing as *the* scientific method, and most importantly, science cannot be the source of ethics nor can it debunk it. By challenging the pretensions of those who elevate science too high, we can better appreciate it for what it really is and more fully understand what it means to value reason and rationality.

If you haven't booked for lunch the talk only at 2pm is £3.00.

☎ Lyn Glass 01202 767323

■ **Wednesday 22nd February 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

Religion in Schools

Whether religion has any place in schools is a controversial question engendering strong feelings both from those who see it as a good thing and those who do not. Hilary Bond, Schools and Children's worker for the Parish of Wareham, Cathy Silman, retired teacher and member of Dorset Humanists Education Group, and Christian schools worker Dave Pegg will discuss the controversial and contested domains of religious education, worship in schools, and faith schools. Is there scope for Humanists, Christians, and people of other faiths to find common ground on the place of religion in our children's education? Come along and join this lively discussion.

Jane Bannister Appeal



Our Winter Appeal in memory of former Chairwoman Jane Bannister has raised more than £1,000 for our chosen charities Mosaic and Michael House. This appeal will close at the end of February so please

keep your donations coming in until then. A massive thank you to our generous donors for making this year's appeal a success. 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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■ **Sundays 10.15am**



Sunday Walks

Our next walk is on 12th February (Darwin Day itself). 5 miles – quite strenuous and muddy but with spectacular views from the ridge above Kimmeridge Bay. Optional visit to the new fossil museum (£8 entry).

March and April walks are likely to be Winfrith and Tadnoll Heath, and Studland peninsula but are not planned in detail yet. Probable dates 19 March and 16 April.

Please check [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for further details and any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions. Phil ☎ 07817 260498

■ **Thursday 2nd March 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



Pub socials

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our pub social evening. Look out for the Dorset Humanists signs on the table. We warmly welcome regulars and newcomers.

☎ Dean 07713 858773

■ **Saturday 11th March 1.00pm buffet lunch followed by AGM and talk 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Annual General Meeting

Please join us for a delicious complimentary buffet lunch at 1.00pm – a very sociable way to start the proceedings!

Dorset Humanists is one of the most vibrant and successful humanist groups in the country. Our AGM always has a celebratory feel and it's an opportunity to say thank you to the dedicated people who make our success possible and to renew and refresh our sense of belonging to a great community group. It's also an opportunity to make your voice heard to influence the way in which Dorset Humanists develops in the future. *See proposals on next page.*

Future dates for your diary:

- **Weds March 22nd 7.30** Green House Hotel 'A Sceptics Guide to the Origins of Christianity' Peter Marchant
- **Saturday April 8th 2.00** Moordown 'Memories of a Former Cult Devotee' Alice Herron
- **Weds April 26th April 7.30** Green House Hotel 'First Brexit, then Trump: how did we end up here and where should we go?' Steve Laughton
- **Saturday May 13th 2.00** Moordown 'A walk with our Ancestors: Human Evolution and Archaeology' Emeritus Professor Norman Maclean
- **Weds May 24th April 7.30** Green House Hotel 'Humanism and Feminism' BU lecturer Frances Hawkhead
- **Saturday June 10th 2.00** Moordown 'Tolpuddle – a radical, revolutionary and religious Dorset village' David Nunn

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 1st March 7.30pm**

Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham BH20 4LT. Free entry – small donation appreciated 'Out of the Box' presents:

Heart and Mind

Humanist and Christian perspectives with Frances Usher.

Frances, a member of Dorset Humanists, will tell us about her life's journey taking in Anglicanism, Quakerism, Community life, agnosticism, atheism, Humanism, and 'don't-knowism'. She will explore the different pulls of Christianity and Humanism, asking whether they *are* completely different. Perhaps they have more in common than many of us want to admit; perhaps, even, they're both parts of the same thing.

'Out of the Box' is a dialogue group for Humanists and Christians. The emphasis is on listening, learning and respectful discussion.

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AGM Proposals

These proposals will be discussed and voted on at the AGM:

1. Adopt an expanded vision for Dorset Humanists. Draft wording to be agreed by the committee to put before the members.
2. Increase event donation request and differentiate between members and visitors: £2 (members) and £3 (visitors). To be operated on a trust basis.
3. Become a partner of the LGB&T Dorset Equality Network.

Members can vote by email or post if unable to attend the AGM.

Membership 200

One of our aims is to 'Increase paid-up membership of our group'. For some years our membership has hovered around the 150 mark. With your support, the committee would like to really focus on increasing this to 200. Growing our membership is one of the best ways to promote awareness of Humanism in Bournemouth, Poole, and Dorset and a larger membership base gives us more influence over things like the expansion of faith schools.

You can help us reach our target!

If you are a regularly renewing member – thank you so much for your support. If you enjoy Dorset Humanists but haven't yet joined, or if your membership has lapsed, please help us reach our target by paying a regular direct debit subscription of just £15.00 per year which is incredible value for what Dorset Humanists offers. Paying by direct debit is a massive help to us because it eliminates needless administration and cost in having to send out annual reminders. It eliminates uncertainty for you as well – you can be confident that your membership is always up to date unless you choose to cancel. Our direct debit provider is Go Cardless which is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. You can subscribe by completing a simple form on our website or simply provide your details

on paper and we'll do the rest. Our treasurer, Simon Whitlock, will be on hand to help at the AGM.

Why join Dorset Humanists when I can come along for free?

The committee is proposing that we end 'free entry' to our meetings and replace this with a two-tier suggested donation of £3.00 for visitors and £2.00 for members. Our entry payment system will continue to operate on a trust basis as it does now. You may be someone who generously donates at meetings – if so, thank you! But the average donation per head at our meetings is £1.00. We think the new suggested donation structure is more realistic considering the quality of what Dorset Humanists offers month in, month out. So it makes sense to become a member and take advantage of the discount at every meeting.

Review of Aims

Our mission, vision, aims, and values were adopted in 2013. Our 2016 'Review of Aims' report takes stock of where we are now and outlines some fresh proposals. We can't implement all of the ideas and proposals at once but the report provides a base for current and future developments. The report was drafted for initial consideration by the committee on 13th December 2016. The committee has agreed some proposals for immediate implementation as listed below. Others will be discussed at the AGM as detailed in this Bulletin.

1. We have expanded the wording of our aims to improve clarity. These will be presented at the AGM.
2. We have appointed a 'meet and greet team' co-ordinator. This idea will be developed and implemented after the AGM.
3. We have created but not yet filled a committee role to lead a publicity and marketing team with a remit to improve awareness of Humanism and Dorset Humanists.
4. We have added 'improve our diversity' to our aims and created a committee or

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non-committee diversity officer role to advise on how we can improve this - particularly with regard to age, ethnicity, and socio-economic background.

5. We have added a pastoral aim to help meet the pastoral needs of our members and created a co-ordinator role.

The full 'Review of Aims' document is available by email and we welcome comments. Please request a copy via email or post if you don't have email.

✉ chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

Short talks by members

A suggestion for an additional Dorset Humanists Activity...

A book club has been suggested for Dorset Humanists' well-read membership but this might be difficult to organise to suit everyone. As a less formal alternative we are aiming to trial a series of short volunteer talks, up to about 20 minutes, by members, based on books, articles or essays that they have read, or their own ideas, followed by discussion. We can do two or maybe three on each evening, and these will be in addition to the main talks programme on a different night.

Please come forward with your suggestions and we will co-ordinate them, and announce them at least a month ahead of time so that anyone coming can read the material if they want. The likely venue will be the Green House Hotel in the room we normally use, but set out in informal style (like the *One Life* course), with a group size of up to about 25. There will be a small charge at each meeting to cover the cost of the room, which will depend on the number who wish to come (probably £2 or £3).

Please contact Phil if you would be interested in principle in coming to some of the talks (no commitment) so that we can judge numbers. Send suggestions for talks to Phil Butcher.

☎ 07817 260498 ph.butcher@gmail.com

Ethics working party

A suggestion for an additional Dorset Humanists Activity...

I suggest forming an ethics working party which would meet over the course of a year and explore the factors relevant to our understanding of post-religious ethics. This would include parts of psychology, sociology, anthropology and genetics as well as conventional philosophy. I believe that these are all relevant to our understanding of how ethical systems are developed, promulgated and evolve.

My aim would be that the working party would make a presentation summarising our work at a DH general meeting after a few months.

Simon Whipple

Accommodation wanted for one of our speakers

Could you offer accommodation to a visiting speaker from another humanist group? His name is Peter Marchant from Isle of Wight Humanists and he will be speaking to us on Wednesday 22nd March.

BHA Convention

The British Humanist Association Convention 2017 will be hosted in Cambridge over the weekend of 9–11 June. It promises to be the most open BHA Convention to date, with a limited number of tickets from just £39 for students, and £89 for BHA members. The initial line-up is the largest ever for a BHA Convention, with twelve speakers announced, including BBC science broadcaster Helen Czerski, social psychologist Karen Douglas, human rights and counter-extremism activist Sara Khan, environmentalist Mark Lynas, along with theoretical physicist Jim Al-Khalili and BHA Chief Executive Andrew Copson, with more to be announced. For full BHA Convention information and tickets, please visit humanism.org.uk/bha2017.

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Libertarianism

Arif Ahmed

At our January meeting in Moordown Cambridge philosopher Arif Ahmed defined libertarianism as the belief that ‘all individuals have the right to exercise sole dominion over their own lives, and have the right to live in whatever manner they choose, so long as they do not forcibly interfere with the equal right of others to live in whatever manner they choose’ (Libertarian Party of America). He distinguished libertarianism from Thatcherism by stating that it is socially liberal as well as economically liberal. Libertarianism says ‘Yes’ to private property, the rule of law, free trade, and immigration and ‘No’ to such things as censorship, national wage legislation, ‘crony capitalism’, drug prohibition, marriage discrimination, and military adventurism. Private industries should be allowed to fail. He conceded that no sensible politician can advocate completely free immigration.

Arif explained that libertarianism was a reaction to monarchical absolutism in 17th century England which originated in the philosophy of John Locke and popular movements such as the Levellers (a political movement during the English Civil War of 1642–1651). He also traced it back to the Enlightenment philosophies of David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Paine, James Madison, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Bernard Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* – the message of which can be rendered as ‘private vice results in public virtue’. More recently, it is associated with the economic theories of Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, and the public choice theory of James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock which promotes the view that public servants act chiefly in their own self-interests. He distanced himself from the extreme libertarian views of Ayn Rand.

Arif outlined how libertarianism works in the case of free speech. Referring to the work of John Stuart Mill he said that libertarianism does not seek to suppress false beliefs. It would be wrong, for

example, to suppress ‘climate change denial’. Public accusations in the press, pornography, and ‘hate speech’ should be permitted. Free speech can be curtailed to avoid harm but this should be interpreted narrowly, for example, to inhibit incitement of an angry mob. Arif said that objections to free speech in the UK come from political and social movements such as feminists who want to suppress pornography and Islam. He said that violent reprisals from Islam are ‘massively exaggerated’. Threats to free speech also come from the UK government, for example through the Public Order Act 1986, the Terrorism Act 2006, the Prevent strategy, and direct intervention by the Home Secretary such as when Sinn Fein were gagged. Libertarians would seek to repeal such laws.

On drugs legalization, Arif quoted the US Libertarian Party: ‘Individuals own their bodies and have rights over them that other individuals, groups, and governments may not violate. Individuals have the freedom and responsibility to decide what they knowingly and voluntarily consume, and what risks they accept to their own health, finances, safety, or life’. He stated that the cost of prohibiting drug use in the UK was estimated in 2009 at £17 billion per annum. He claimed that legalization would cause the price to collapse and allow regulation and taxation. He did concede however that drug use should perhaps not count as an exercise of personal autonomy and that decriminalization might be preferable to full legalization.

In economics, Arif explained that no one, including governments, has sufficient knowledge to know how and where to allocate capital productively. This problem is solved by the price signal which induces capital to move where it is most needed. So for example, during the Katrina disaster suppliers of basic goods were accused of profiteering but high prices induced people to supply the goods which were desperately needed.



You can watch Arif’s talk, and many others, on Dorset Humanists [YouTube](#).

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Recovering from Religion

At our January Green House meeting Ruth Haydock spoke about her traumatic experience

growing up with missionary parents. Ruth described herself as an 'ex-christian, former missionary kid, now evil atheist and blogger at Patheos'.

Ruth began her talk with a verse from Matthew's gospel: 'Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it' (Matthew 10 v 39). Ruth explained that this verse encapsulates a lot of what is wrong with Christianity – a radical message of self-denial.

Ruth was born in the Falkland Islands in 1988. Her early years were spent in Northern Ireland and her family were both Quaker and evangelical. When Ruth was 3



or 4 years old, her father believed he was 'called' to help local farmers in French-speaking Burkina Faso (left). The family

went to France initially in order to learn French. A year or so later the family moved to Burkina Faso and lived in a missionary compound. Ruth was taught to be afraid of many things including the local witch doctor, the local wood, and people and animals 'possessed by devils'. She was advised to stay within the compound which was 'protected by angels'. When the family returned to Northern Ireland she couldn't understand why normal people seemed unaware of the supernatural war going on between angels and demons. Ruth isolated herself and wouldn't have non-Christian friends because they were 'going to hell'. Catholics too were 'going to hell' and Barack Obama was believed to be 'the Antichrist'!

In time Ruth did make friends with non-Christians and she couldn't understand why God would send these amazing people to hell. She started to think that the things her Dad was saying sounded 'so wrong'. There

was no one pivotal moment when Ruth stopped believing but there was a growing awareness of many things that made no sense.

At the age of 18, in order to boost her flagging faith, Ruth went on a missionary trip to Mexico. She thought the trip would fix her. She mainly taught English, MS Word and Excel, and only evangelised indirectly. At the end of the trip she came away feeling flat. The only thing that made her feel proud was helping to build a road. She had discovered that it was possible to be a liberal Christian but her uneasiness continued to grow. At University she studied French and Spanish because she thought that 'God was telling me to do it'.

Half way through her degree, aged 22, she realised that she was an atheist. In 2010 her Dad died from a heart attack. She had believed that God can heal the sick and even bring people back from the dead. She felt that if she had been a better Christian she could have brought him back from the dead. She felt judged by her family as 'a bad daughter – the atheist one who brought evil into the home'.

Ruth finally decided she had had enough and she sought counselling to help her deal with anxiety and depression. She found Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to be one of the most effective methods to help her recover from religion.

At the University of St Andrews she discovered the AHS community (AHS is the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist, and Secular Student Societies). She had thought that atheists were bad people but in fact they were life-savers. She became Press Officer, then Secretary, then Chair of the Board.

Ruth said she is still figuring it out and that it's a long process of recovery but she's getting there.

Click [here](#) for Ruth's blog.



You can watch Ruth's talk, and many others, on Dorset Humanists [YouTube](#)

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The Men with the Pink Triangle

David Warden spoke at the 2017 Bournemouth and Poole Holocaust Memorial Day about the Nazi persecution of gay men. David told the story of Josef Kohout – a young Austrian man who fell in love with the son of a high-ranking Nazi official. It was only a matter of months before he was arrested. He spent the next six years in prison and in concentration camps where he witnessed the brutality and horrors of the Nazi regime. With thousands of other prisoners he wore a pink triangle to denote the nature of his offence. His pink triangle is now in the Washington Holocaust Museum – the only known surviving example. After the war, in West Germany alone a further 100,000 gay men were arrested until the law was changed in 1969. Since then, pink triangle memorials have been installed in many former concentration camps and cities including Berlin, Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, San Francisco, and Sydney.

David lit a candle during the Act of Commemoration and Humanist celebrant Maggie Pepin gave the Pledge.



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Arif Ahmed

It was a pleasure to meet you all on Saturday. Thank you very much for the invitation. I had a very enjoyable time and only wish I could have carried on discussing it with you for longer. I hope I get the chance to see you again soon – I'd be happy to speak to you again. Good luck with Dorset Humanists – it looks like a vibrant and thriving group and I hope this continues.

From Alan Mercel-Sanca, Convenor/lead officer, LGB&T Dorset Equality Network

It was very good to meet you on Sunday at the Holocaust Memorial Day event at the Moordown Life Centre. Your talk on the gay victims of the Nazi Holocaust was very moving, informative and compelling. I look forward to Dorset Humanists and the LGB&T Dorset Equality Network collaborating on any educational and other relevant initiatives.

From Jonathan Crozier

Just a few lines to express my appreciation of your contribution at the Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration on Sunday. In my experience, most people have little idea of the extent of the horrors to which homosexuals were subjected by the Nazis. Perhaps it is because they were so unspeakable that they are so seldom spoken of. The section of *The Men With the Pink Triangle* about that poor young man from Innsbruck being tortured, which you covered in your talk, has haunted me for years since I first read it. And it will continue to do so for the rest of my life. It suits religious homophobes to “forget”/ignore such atrocities, and they do so more often than not. What you had to say needed to be said, and I thank you for saying it.

From Chris Barker

I realise it is very late in the day but wanted to express my sadness and great respect for Tony Tiffany. He presided over funerals for both my parents, in 2012 and 2014, with great care and understanding. When my mother knew that she would not recover from cancer, she asked me to ask him to look after her service.

To anyone who would wish to know, I am sorry to hear that he has left us. He is still fondly remembered.

■ Tony Tiffany, who died two years ago, conducted thousands of humanist funerals in the local area. He ‘relaunched’ Dorset Humanists in 1996 and we consider this our founding date.

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Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
February 2017



Ruth Haydock's talk shows how hardline forms of religion can be very harmful to mental health. Research has shown that religions with uncompromising doctrines about hell undermine the happiness of believers. My own experience was less extreme but Christian fundamentalism did contribute to prolonged depression in my late teens and it took me years to rebuild belief in myself. The least harmful expressions of Christianity are those which have been improved by the influence of Humanism – accepting responsibility for your own life, living life fully now, and a commitment to secular human rights.

I was hoping to learn rather more about global Pentecostalism at our Wareham dialogue group meeting 'Out of the Box'. To be fair, we were told in advance that the speakers would be talking anecdotally about their own experiences. The most prominent theme was that of miraculous healing. One little boy they knew seared his finger on a hot grill – they heard the sizzling sound. An hour after prayer his finger was completely healed. Another young boy lost his tuck box key. After prayer, it turned up inside a book in the library. One of the speakers had been cured of migraines. A leading evangelist died prematurely of cancer despite thousands of prayers. They conceded that healings are rare and that the 'Holy Spirit' rushes around like the wind. I felt that all of this did God a disservice – miserly and inscrutable in the distribution of favours and refusing to be subjected to proper scientific trials. It all sounded exactly like the kind of universe you would expect if atheism were true.

The new President may be the worst thing since Genghis Khan but we shouldn't forget what put him in the White House: "...rampant economic insecurity that defines the lives of millions of Americans" according to Owen Jones in his 2016 Holyoake lecture sponsored by the BHA. This is partly to do with automation but it is also about a rapacious class of people who have subverted democracy and who gouge wealth for themselves at the expense of ordinary people. The Clintons and Barack Obama were passively complicit in this wealth-channelling to bankers and other *rentiers* and plutocrats. We do not yet have a clear and full understanding of what Trumpism is but it seems too incoherent and reactionary to provide the intellectual revolution that is required to rebuild a decent and humane society. We can only hope that the United States has enough wisdom and resilience in its institutions to temper the worst excesses of the new administration.

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