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BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

national
secular
society

IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ 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 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.

■ Part Two meeting at 3.50 - 4.30pm

Tracy Mack-Nava, Training & Development Co-ordinator with Mosaic, one of our Winter Appeal charities, will show us a short film about its work. Please stay for this if you can.

■ Thursday 21st January 7.30pm

Suncliff Hotel, East Overcliff Drive, Bournemouth, Dorset BH1 3AG. Free entry but please buy drinks from the hotel bar.

Intervention vs Non-Interference

Big Questions Night

A panel of Dorset Humanists will debate the pros, cons and moral dilemmas of military intervention. This promises to be a very lively evening with plenty of audience participation including table discussions. So come along and have your say!

■ 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

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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.

■ **Thursday 7th January 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



Social Evening

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our pub social evening. There is 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. ☎ Dean 07713 858773

■ **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.

Darren Naish is a vertebrate palaeontologist currently based at the University of Southampton. His books include *Walking With Dinosaurs: The Evidence* BBC Worldwide and *The Great Dinosaur Discoveries* University of California Press.

Tickets must be booked in advance with Lyn Glass £20pp (£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

Other events of interest...

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

Skeptical Philosophy: the Case against God

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**
Tregonwell Hall, BIC

Holocaust Memorial Day

Hear the story of a young Christian Syrian woman and the Holocaust survival story of a Bournemouth resident. Includes music from Wessex Chorus Community Choir. Free tickets are available at Pavilion Dance Ticket Office or by calling 0844 576 3000.

More info [here](#)

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■ **Wednesday 3rd February 7.30pm**
Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham
BH20 4LT. Free entry - small donation
appreciated. First Weds of the month.



Out of the Box

'Out of the Box' is a successor to Purbeck Open Lectures (POL). It has been set up by a small group of POL supporters in collaboration with Dorset Humanists. This launch is for a trial period of 4 months. 'Out of the Box' will be a forum to explore the journeys that different people make to arrive at a set of beliefs or worldview. It will provide opportunities for people to share their journeys with others rather than try to convince them that their destination is the only right place to be.



At our first meeting on February 3rd we will hear Ruth Haydock's story about leaving Christianity and discovering Humanism. Christianity had a massively negative

influence on Ruth's life and she set up the first 'Recovering From Religion' group in Scotland. This helped those who are in the process of giving up on a belief in a higher power and people who are dealing with the emotional scars resulting from believing in a god. Ruth is a member of Dorset Humanists and she is also Chair of the Board of AHS which is the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies.



At our 2nd March meeting we will hear the story of John MacDiarmid. John was born into a strong Roman Catholic family. On leaving school he went on a journey of initially being lukewarm about his faith,

travelling through various forms of agnosticism and pitching camp for a while at atheism. As a student he re-evaluated his beliefs, in the light of his travels and became an evangelical Christian, a position he still holds. John is Minister of Poole Christian Fellowship and he has attended our 'One Life' course.

Notices

Our **AGM** will be held on March 12th at Moordown Community Centre. Please ensure that any formal proposals and/or committee nominations are received no later than 31st January.



We are very sad to announce the death of **Jo Chesney** who had been suffering from Alzheimer's. Jo was a staunch member of Dorset Humanists for many years and she was an enthusiastic

distributor of our posters and leaflets. Jo was born in Palestine and she married a British engineer with whom she had six children. At one stage he was posted to Burma to help rebuild the railway and Jo travelled there by boat with her first child. In later years Jo lived in Bournemouth and ran a women's group for the U3A (University of the Third Age). She also taught a Hebrew class. By then a widow, she met Dr Aubrey Weinberg who was chair of Bournemouth U3A. In the late 1990s they spent a year together in New Zealand staying with Jo's daughter. In 2003 Aubrey, also a member of Dorset Humanists, gave a talk to us on the subject of 'Humanistic Judaism'. He and Jo lived together in Manor Road until his sudden death in 2004. Jo subsequently moved to an apartment in Kinson but when she became ill went to live in a residential home in Weston-super-Mare.

Dorset Humanists at Queen Elizabeth School

Report by Terry Milton who is a member of our Schools Education Project

Dorset Humanists were invited to join the Christian Union Group, mainly Year 10 students, of Queen Elizabeth School, Wimborne on 15th December for a debate on Creationism vs Evolution.

I opened with an introduction on the creation vs evolution question: 'Were we created ready-made by a purposeful

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intelligence or did we evolve randomly?' However when I mentioned I was a humanist several students asked me to elaborate, and at the bequest of Sophie, their religious teacher, I did so.

Back on the subject of evolution I mentioned the irrefutable evidence of ancient fossils and of our many similarities with the great apes. Also the fact that most denominations, apart from some fundamentalists in the SE United States, now accept some form of compromise between creation and evolution theory.

Several times during the session students asked further questions about my humanist beliefs in general, but mindful that this was excluding their House Chaplain, Andy, from the debate I steered back to the main topic. But then, after they had been allowed some discussion among themselves, their spokesperson posed another unrelated question: "Aren't you worried that when you die, you find there is a God after all?" The students fell silent in anticipation of my reply and I felt that my usual response to an awkward question – humour – or even mentioning Pascal's Wager, would have been inappropriate here. I said that, assuming for a moment I was faced with God, he would probably be as depicted by Christians, i.e. all-loving, compassionate and just, and I am sure therefore he would not judge me solely on the fact that I wasn't a card-carrying member of his flock, but more on my efforts to lead a moral life, to be kind, tolerant and to spread happiness whenever I could. Therefore: No, I'm not worried.

On the whole the group seemed very interested in our non-religious worldview and were grateful to have a humanist come to the school and answer their questions on the subject. Depending on their policy Dorset Humanists will hopefully get further invitations to QE School.

Sophie Forster emailed Terry: 'I can't thank you enough for coming into QE school today. The students really gained a lot from hearing your perspective and I'm sure you'll agree the session went well.'

THE FREEDOM OF THOUGHT REPORT 2015

The 2015 edition of the International Humanist and Ethical Union's *Freedom of Thought Report* was launched on 10th December to coincide with Human Rights Day. The launch event took place at the European Parliament and was hosted by Dennis de Jong MEP, chair of the parliamentary Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The event included UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and Belief, Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, and the editor of the report Mr Bob Churchill (IHEU Director of Communications), as well as a victim of persecution from Bangladesh.

The Freedom of Thought Report is a global report on discrimination against humanists, atheists, and the non-religious and their human rights and legal status. It shows that persecution of the non-religious has escalated in the past year. There has been a rise in extrajudicial violence, and in several states harsher judicial sentences have been handed down for crimes such as "blasphemy" and "apostasy".

The report draws attention to a string of murders in Bangladesh and the case of Raif Badawi in Saudi Arabia. It also highlights less well-known cases, such as Egyptian student Sherif Gaber. In February 2015, Gaber was sentenced to a year's hard labour for "contempt of religion" (he had declared his atheism on Facebook) and for promoting "debauchery" (he had challenged a lecturer who said that homosexuals should be "killed in the streets").

Read more [here](#)

■ The International Humanist and Ethical Union is the worldwide democratic body for Humanist, atheist, rationalist, secular, ethical culture, and freethought organizations. Its mission is to represent and support the global Humanist movement, and to build a world in which human rights are respected and all can live a life of dignity. Dorset Humanists is an associate member of the IHEU.

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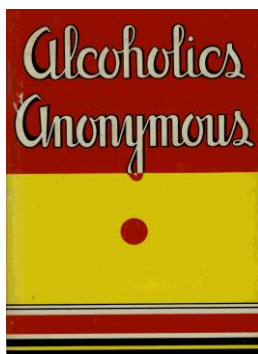


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Alcoholics Anonymous



'AA saved my life... but it's based on outdated information which drowns out other methods and potential cures'

At our December Moordown meeting former rock guitarist, lecturer and ex-

alcoholic Jon Stewart gave us a fascinating insight into the philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous. He stressed several times that he was 'not here to knock AA'. He said 'it's a horrendous condition...AA saved my life. It works but it's based on outdated information which drowns out other methods and potential cures... AA was cutting edge mental health technology in the 1930s'. The book *Alcoholics Anonymous* is revered as a divinely-inspired text and therefore it cannot be updated. But it's increasingly anachronistic. AA continues to dominate the recovery discourse and refuses to endorse any alternative evidence-based treatments such as SMART Recovery based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) or the successful Sinclair Method which uses an opiate blocker to cut off the craving for alcohol.

Jon is now an atheist but he attended 2,000 AA meetings and prayed to God every day for 14 years. In answer to the question 'Can a non-existent God cure alcoholism?' Jon said 'Yes – by outsourcing faulty self-control mechanisms'. He said it's very difficult to be an atheist in American AA meetings. It's less difficult in the UK but he thinks it's better not to go to AA if you're an atheist. Jon also posed the question 'Is AA a cult?'. He said 'No, but it uses thought control tools and thought-terminating clichés'. AA brainwashes people but Jon confessed 'My brain needed a good wash'.

In his blog (see link below) Jon writes about the dangers of leaving AA in that 'the fellowship's disease model of alcoholism and its associated dogma of powerlessness can become a catastrophic self-fulfilling prophecy'. Therefore 'Quitting AA is not a

decision to be taken lightly'. He adds that '...while the fellowship helps separate many alcoholics from their immediate source of discomfort, its programme of recovery doesn't always encourage sound long term mental health. Instead, for some, AA simply replaces one form of dependency (alcohol) with another (the meetings, the programme, your higher power). Jon writes that more up-to-date, evidence-based treatments like CBT 'do not ask participants to declare themselves powerless and insane before praying to a higher power'.

AA was founded in 1935 by Bill Wilson and Dr Bob Smith. Bill Wilson, author of the twelve steps, was a dedicated spiritualist who became sober after a moment of 'divine inspiration'. His methodology was largely drawn from the tenets of The Oxford Group – a long forgotten evangelical Christian movement. Smith wrote: 'If you think you are an atheist, an agnostic, a skeptic or have any other form of intellectual pride which keeps you from accepting what is in this book, I feel sorry for you.' *Alcoholics Anonymous* (4th edition, p181).

In response to such condescending comments, Jon writes 'We desperately need accessible, rational, reliable and safe alcoholism and addiction treatment. Methodologies [which can be applied] by anyone, not just those willing to believe in a higher power. Fortunately, several effective non-faith based alternatives to AA are gradually gaining ground... including the LifeRing secular recovery program based on the idea of 'empowering your sober self'.



Jon's full talk is on Dorset Humanists YouTube channel [here](#)

This video converted Jon to atheism: [Why We Believe in Gods](#)

If you want to know more about the Sinclair Method Jon recommends the documentary film [One Little Pill](#) available on Vimeo.

Read Jon's blog here:

<https://jonsleeper.wordpress.com/2014/09/30/leaving-aa-staying-sober/>

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Winter Appeal breaks through £1,000 barrier



Our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal this year is in support of New Forest NightStop and Mosaic. We've already raised more than £1,000 so please keep those donations coming in! The appeal will remain open

until 31st January. 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.

Mosaic is a Dorset-wide charity offering a pathway of support to bereaved children, young people and their families. It also works 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 a residential weekend programme where they can meet others and share their experiences. The charity receives some Local Authority funding but all other money has to be raised from alternative sources including donations from local groups. A representative from Mosaic will speak at our Saturday 9th January meeting.

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.

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.



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Jon Stewart (our January speaker on Alcoholics Anonymous)

I just watched your YouTube recording on the Alpha Course. I'm fascinated by this subject as my AA sponsor and his best friend in recovery actually took the Alpha Course while I was in AA and, when I saw a documentary on it, I was horrified. I couldn't believe the nonsense involved.

I'm very anti-Alpha, actually, I see it as actual brainwashing. Possibly unjustly, but the "history" in Nicky Gumbel's introductory lecture is total bunk (bad history makes me cross, pun intended) and the phenomenon of speaking in tongues has been so discredited it has less respect than Scientology – at least in my view.

So it's great to see people such as yourself taking this on. I was thinking of attending my local AC, I have two within a short walk, as a "respectful atheist" who just asks logical and calm questions – but decided I don't have the time so I'm glad to see that someone else did it for me. Many congratulations on that. I think it's a space where Humanists can make a genuine contribution. When you look at it uncritically, Alpha can be very convincing.

Thanks again for a lovely session the other week. I look forward to it going online. I've done around ten of those talks but none has made it on to YouTube yet so that will be an exciting day.

From Revd Dr Richard Warden, Mill Hill School, London

Given the current debate, I thought you would be interested to see the aims and objectives of the Religious Studies GCSE syllabus as it stands at the moment. Although the clue to the subject matter content is in the title of the subject (i.e. it is

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about the study of religion) it has always contained elements of challenge to religious beliefs from atheism and humanism. The new revised GCSE to be taught from September next year spells it out more specifically. (See below.)

The A-level has always looked at challenges to religious belief in incredible depth, requiring study of Russell, Freud, Jung, Wittgenstein, Hume, Ayer, Wiles, Darwin, Dawkins, Kant and many others as well as the classic challenges to religious faith from the problem of evil, religion and science, religious language, miracle and religious experience.

When I speak to parents I always ensure that they know that at both GCSE and A-level the subject is called RS and not RE; indeed, you cannot get either a GCSE or an A-level in RE! I tell them that we are not 'educating their children to be religious' (which is implied in RE, and to my mind is an unfortunate and misleading term) but we are enabling them to 'critically study religion' (which is implied in RS), and of course requires an understanding of all the challenges to religious belief.

Welsh Joint Education Committee Eduqas GCSE in Religious Studies – Aims and Objectives:

- develops learners' knowledge and understanding of religions and non-religious beliefs, such as atheism and humanism
- develops learners' knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs, teachings, practices, and sources of wisdom and authority, including through their reading of key religious texts, other texts, and scriptures of the religions they are studying
- develops learners' ability to construct well-argued, well-informed, balanced and structured written arguments, demonstrating their depth and breadth of understanding of the subject
- provides opportunities for learners to engage with questions of belief, value, meaning, purpose, truth, and their influence on human life

- challenges learners to reflect on and develop their own values, beliefs and attitudes in the light of what they have learnt and contributes to their preparation for adult life in a pluralistic society and global community.

Read more here: [BHA response to DfE](#)

From Aaron Darkwood

As I watched the House of Commons debate on the Syrian crisis I reflected on what a Humanist approach to the crisis would be. With each day that passes more people die, more damage is done in Syria and more refugees are created. Standing by, watching, and doing nothing doesn't seem an approach that a caring and considerate Humanist would take.

■ Dorset Humanists will be debating 'intervention vs non-interference' at the Suncliff Hotel on 21st January. Come along and have your say about what a Humanist approach might be. See events listings.

Quote... Unquote

'I was born in 1972 and didn't hear the word "humanist" until I was in my early thirties. I was aware that I didn't believe the religious instruction I was given at my community primary school and Catholic secondary school, but I didn't have a name for what I did believe, and no way of identifying other people who held similar beliefs. Like many people, I was brought up to not mention the fact that I didn't believe in God, in case it offended someone who did. I wasn't encouraged to have confidence in my identity as a non-religious, critical thinker.'

From evidence to the commission in *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good* (2015) (Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life).

Did you know?

Dorset Humanists bulletin is deposited every month in the Bishopsgate Institute Humanist Archive in London for the benefit of future researchers.

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Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
January 2016



In September 2013 the Woolf Institute in Cambridge convened an independent commission to undertake, over a two-year period, the first systematic review of the role of religion and belief in the UK today and to make policy recommendations. Its report *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good* was published on 7th December. Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association, was one of twenty distinguished commissioners. The report recognises the rapid increase in the number of people with non-religious beliefs and identities (49 per cent according to the British Social Attitudes Survey) and it gives considerable support to many humanist policy positions including a call for humanist representation on Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*, equitable representation for humanist chaplaincy in hospitals and prisons, the reduction of selection of school pupils and staff on grounds of religion, and the repeal of the requirement for collective worship in schools in favour of inclusive times for reflection. Its recommendations include the following:

- A national conversation should be launched across the UK by leaders of faith communities and ethical traditions to create a shared understanding of the fundamental values underlying public life which foster the common good
- Voluntary organisations should promote opportunities for interreligious and inter-worldview encounter and dialogue
- Much greater religion and belief literacy in every section of society
- All pupils in state-funded schools should have a statutory entitlement to a curriculum about religion, philosophy and ethics that is relevant to today's society, and the broad framework of such a curriculum should be nationally agreed

Dorset Humanists can play its part in fulfilling all such recommendations. In particular, I would like us to hold an event during Inter-Faith week (3rd week in November) and I would like us to strengthen our schools education project. We will also continue to arrange talks and evening courses to improve religion and belief literacy. I was pleased that the Bournemouth Echo included our humanist message on Christmas Day alongside religious messages and we have become a regular participant in the Bournemouth Remembrance Service. Please have a think about how you, as a member of Dorset Humanists, could help us to fulfil these aims. *David Warden*

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