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Humanists UK

national  
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IHEU  
International  
Humanist and  
Ethical Union



# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

■ **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> January 1.30 for 2.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation  
Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Hidden Knowledge

**What we ought to know about  
adult sexual attraction to children**



A talk by Sarah Goode

There are a lot of unanswered questions about adult sexual attraction to children. Is it a sexual orientation? A psychological disorder? A

fetish? A genetic fault or the result of trauma? How many people feel this attraction and how many are likely to offend? If we want to keep children safe from sexual harm, then surely knowing what we're dealing with would be a good first step. Yet not everyone agrees. Many well-intentioned people would prefer us to remain in the dark.

Dr Sarah D Goode has done ground-breaking research in this controversial field. She refrains from demonizing the people who feel this attraction whilst insisting that knowledge, instead of ignorance, is what we need in order to keep children safe from harm. She is currently acting CEO of StopSO (Specialist Treatment Organisation for the Prevention of Sexual Offending) which trains therapists to work with actual or potential sex offenders or anyone worried about their sexual thoughts.

■ **Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

## Money and Banking

**Why the system is failing and a  
radical solution**

Lucy Thom and David Moon from Positive  
Money

The economy is not working for too many people with ever-growing inequality, rising house prices, private debt and environmental degradation. Lucy Thom and David Moon, members of Positive Money, will explain that commercial banks create new money when they make loans and money is destroyed when those loans are repaid. They will show how this is at the root of our current economic problems and make the case for major banking reform, removing the right to create money from the private sector.

Positive Money campaigns for the power to create money to be used in the public interest, in a democratic, transparent and accountable way, rather than by the same banks that caused the financial crisis. It's a not-for-profit research and campaigning organisation based in London. Its advisory panel includes economics professors, authors, entrepreneurs and people from the financial industry who know that something needs to change.

<http://positivemoney.org/about/>

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

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227



[dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk)



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[meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists](https://www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists)

■ **Thursday 4<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

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



## Sunday Walks

**21<sup>st</sup> January** – Mystery walk starting at the Pier Approach in

Bournemouth. We will explore some of the lesser known parks and tracks around Bournemouth and partly retrace the excellent first walk in this series led by Aaron almost exactly three years ago. We are keeping it a mystery so we can change it at the last minute to suit conditions.

Our February walk (Sunday 18th) will be based around Hardy's Cottage and Puddletown Forest. It is hoped that some of the Dorchester group will be able to join us.

All walks are between about 6 and 9 miles and will usually have an optional short cut. Please check [Meetup](#) for further details and any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions. Phil ☎ 07817 260498



## Short Talks

■ **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 7.30pm** Green House Hotel,

Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

### Should we eat other animals?

Our first speaker John Kingston will look at the ethics of our relationship with other animals. Most people think that it is wrong, except in very exceptional circumstances, to kill or impose suffering on human beings. But with the exception of pets, most of us do not oppose killing or causing suffering to non-human animals. Why is this? And if we would prefer to minimise animal suffering, does this apply equally to all

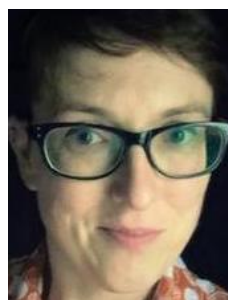
animals? If not, how should we evaluate the moral worth of different species? Our second speaker, Lucy Jenkins, will consider our use of animals in feeding ourselves. Her talk will consider the efficiency of using animals as a food source and the environmental impact of doing so as well as the moral issues around current farming methods.

In February we will continue this theme and look at further aspects of global agriculture and energy use, and population growth statistics.

Each talk is around 20 minutes followed by questions and discussion. See [Meetup](#) for further details.

■ **Saturday 10th February 12.00pm/2.00pm Ticketed Event**  
Dorset Humanists Darwin Day at Bournemouth International Centre

## What Next for Humans in an Age of Machines?



Celebrate Darwin Day in style once again with a delicious three course buffet lunch in BIC's Purbeck Lounge, followed by a thought-provoking talk from our specially invited guest Dr Kate Devlin.

We have become dependent on machines, and we already have robots outperforming us in complicated tasks. What happens if, or when, we become redundant, and where does life go next? Join us at our Darwin Day Celebration for an insider's view of what it means to be human in an age of ever-advancing machines.

Kate Devlin is a Senior Lecturer in Human Computer Interaction and Artificial Intelligence at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her talk at the Humanists UK Conference in Cambridge was on 'Sex Robots'. She was recently named as one of London's most influential people.



**Lunch & Talk Ticket (12.00pm start): £25** including welcoming glass of wine or soft drink, followed by a 3-course Italian buffet lunch.

**Talk only Ticket (2.00pm start): £3** includes coffee or tea on arrival.

Bookings: 📞 Lyn Glass 01202 767323 📧 [lyn.glass@btinternet.com](mailto:lyn.glass@btinternet.com)

■ **Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> February 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

## The Day after Tomorrow: Our Oceans and Climate Change

A talk by Professor Meric Srokosz who works for the National Oceanography Centre. He coordinates the Rapid Climate Change programme looking at how changes in the North Atlantic circulation will affect the UK climate.

### Other events of interest...

■ **Weds 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> Jan**  
First event: 10.00am Wednesday 3rd Jan at Middle Chine (by kiosk). Please confirm on Meetup to advise that you are coming.

## January Fitness Challenge

January is the month when you may have eaten too much, put on weight, and as the weather is less than inviting you may not want to go out and exercise. So for the month of January, Phil Butcher and Aaron Darkwood are inviting you to join them in a fitness challenge. Every Wednesday there will be an hour on the beach working out and doing fitness. Then on Sundays we will be doing a walk or a bike ride and this will run throughout January. If you are already fit, then come along and help encourage those who may not be. This is aimed at all levels, shapes and sizes.

If in any doubt, consult your doctor before any fitness activity. This is a member run initiative and Dorset Humanists cannot accept any liability.

📧 [AaronDarkwood@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:AaronDarkwood@hotmail.co.uk)



## Ken Fagg

We are very sorry to announce the death of Ken Fagg. Ken was a familiar face at our meetings and on our walks for many years.

He was a lively controversialist and published an anthology of opinions and inventive ideas: 'They've Got It All Rong' – available to borrow from Dorset Humanists library.

Ken's funeral ceremony will be on Wednesday 10th January at 12.30 pm. It will be held at Harbour View Crematorium and Burial Ground, Randalls Hill, Lytchett Minster BH16 6AN Tel 01202 630111. This is a new crematorium operated by Tappers. If you are approaching by turning off the A350 into Randalls Hill, you will need to go past the 'original' facility at the A350 junction and keep left down the hill for about a third of a mile and turn into the car park on the left.

■ See Letters and Emails

## New Testament author confesses gospel fiction

*Frances Usher reports on strange goings-on in Wareham*

Up until now the usual, quite acceptable, formula for our Wareham meetings of Humanists, Christians and others has been a speaker followed by questions. But in December we were treated to a chat show. And the three guests were none other than Peter, Luke and Mark (alias 'Akram') who bounded onto the set to be interviewed by host Aaron Showblazer, and to explain how their particular version of New Testament events was the really reliable one.

Mark (played by David Warden) explained how he'd drawn on Old Testament stories to write his allegory; Peter (played by Rev. Hilary Bond) maintained that his was the only first-hand account based on his time as a disciple of Jesus; while Luke (played by pastor John MacDiarmid) questioned Mark's



credentials and instead told us how he'd tracked down some elderly surviving participants in the gospels including Mary the mother of Jesus, and a shepherd, and heard their stories from their own mouths.

The audience soon piled in with comments and questions, and it was absorbing and fun. More such shows are promised in 2018. Who could resist, for instance, an interview with Noah, home from his cruise with some rather unusual fellow passengers?

*David Warden explains the scholarly thesis underpinning his role-play of Mark*

Early Christian gospels, of which there were about 100, not just the four which ended up in the New Testament, originally circulated as anonymous documents. The names 'Matthew', 'Mark', 'Luke', and 'John' were part of a marketing initiative to link these documents back to disciples of Jesus or their associates. To this day, Christians are taught to believe in this second century propaganda but New Testament scholars are much more sceptical.

We do not know who the author of Mark's gospel was. He may have lived in Syria and composed his gospel around the year 72. I felt at liberty, therefore, to choose a Syrian name 'Akram' (which, coincidentally, is an anagram of A MARK) and claimed that I was doing a Master's degree in creative writing at the University of Damascus.

Akram claimed that he wrote Mark's Gospel as a creative reinterpretation of stories and other narrative ingredients from the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament). This is particularly obvious when we look at the narrative about the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. All of the details about the piercing of his hands and feet, dividing his garments and casting lots for them, wagging heads, and the last words of Jesus from the cross 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' are from Psalm 22. There are other tell-tale signs that Mark was writing fiction, not history. For example, he reports what Jesus said in the garden of Gethsemane when the disciples had all fallen asleep. Mark is adopting the all-knowing stance of a novelist.

Mark also used symbolic names – not real ones. For example, the name 'Judas' is a symbolic name meaning 'the Jews'. Even the name Jesus is symbolic – it is the Greek version of the name Joshua who led the Israelites into the Promised Land and it means 'Yahweh saves'. Yahweh (or strictly speaking the letters YHWH) is the name of Hebrew God. Everything in Mark's Gospel can be explained in this allegorical way and linked back to stories in the Old Testament.

Well, you must decide for yourselves whether the gospels are fact or fiction, or a mixture of the two. There has been a debate going on for 200 years about the nature of the gospels and we enjoyed bringing the debate to life in front of a live audience!

■ Further reading recommendations:

'Gospel Fictions' and 'Who Wrote the Gospels' by Randel Helms - a professor of literature at Arizona State University. Includes the surprising thesis that Luke was a woman! Very readable books.

'The Mystery of Acts' by Richard Pervo which demonstrates by literary analysis that Acts of the Apostles is creative storytelling - not history.

'The Christ Myth Theory and its Problems' by Professor Robert Price which provides verse-by-verse analysis of the gospels showing how they correspond with stories from the Greek Old Testament. Quite technical but very interesting for the more ambitious reader.

## Wessex Humanists

David Warden attended a meeting at Humanists UK in London to discuss the vision and scope of a new regional network. David and Aaron Darkwood will attend another meeting of Wessex Humanists on 20<sup>th</sup> January to agree and refine the proposals. This is intended to be a network of humanist groups in the region including Dorset, Wiltshire, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight which aims to help support existing groups and to seed new ones.





'Life School' continues in the New Year with an exciting and ground-breaking new course on the topic of friendship.



## The Friendship Course

What do we really know about friendship? Do some people have hundreds of friends or do most people count their true friends on one hand? Is it possible to get by with no friends at all as long as you are a good friend to yourself and have a variety of rich and rewarding social connections?

*"Friendship: a lasting bond that transcends whatever accidental reasons brought two people together in the first place." A C Grayling*

Humanist philosopher A C Grayling in his book on friendship writes that 'We might need a variety of relationships, not all of them friendships, and not all of our friendships necessarily of the highest quality and intensity, to live fully human lives'.

Aristotle thought that friendship is an essential constituent of the good life and that a life without friends would be an impoverished one. If Humanism is about living a good life then friendship has an important part to play. But what exactly do we mean by 'friendship'? What are the skills of friendship and how can we avoid its pitfalls such as jealousy and possessiveness? All things considered, is it better to spend your time with books and pets than with people?

*"The one true constant and comforting relationship is with one's books." Montaigne*

Over six consecutive Monday evenings, this course will explore the philosophy and practice of friendship.

This brand new course is also in part a response to the 'Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness', which the MP set up before her untimely death in summer 2016, to shine a powerful spotlight on the millions of people who are lonely living in our communities. The Commission is a response to Jo's own experience of finding herself a fish out of water at university and experiencing deep loneliness, and later of seeing the devastating effects of loneliness in her constituency. Jo recognised that loneliness was a huge problem, that it could affect any one of us, and that its impacts were real and lasting. She wanted to bring new focus and attention to loneliness in our communities, and to encourage action. Jo would have said that what matters most now are the actions, big and small, that each one of us takes in our lives to improve the quality of our connections with people.

*"Our vision is of a future in which the bonds of common humanity are valued and strengthened." Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness*

The Dorset Humanists Friendship Course runs for six consecutive Mondays from Monday 5<sup>th</sup> February to Monday 12<sup>th</sup> March 7.30-9.15pm.

All at Moordown Community Centre.

A £15 non-refundable payment secures your place on the course (£10 for paid-up members of Dorset Humanists).

The lead facilitator is David Warden, Chair of Dorset Humanists. Contact details are below. *Book now - limited spaces.*

■ Feedback from our recent Life School on 'The Science of Happiness':

*"Really enjoyable – wish we could do it every week."*

*"Group discussions very uplifting"*

*"Very well thought-out course"*

*"A good positive atmosphere"*

*"I found the group friendly and supportive"*



## Dorset Humanists 'Jane Bannister Winter Appeal'

Members voted for 'no change' to our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal which will therefore be 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.



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".

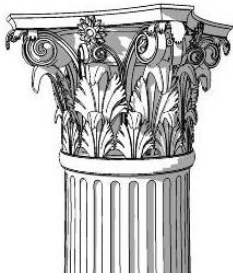
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Please consider gift aiding your donation. Forms available at our meetings or from John 07766 473728.

Please donate at our meetings or send a cheque made payable to 'Dorset Humanists Winter Appeal' to John Kingston, 90 Lowther Road, Bournemouth, BH8 8NS.

**Closing date end of February.**





# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

*From Jennie Holm*

The Dorset Humanists Bulletin is very good and easy to read - thank you – I am enjoying knowing what is going on. Obviously it has been a good year for our group and I am sure it will be the same in 2018. Enjoy the festive season!!

*From Aaron Darkwood*

It was with extreme sadness that I learnt of the death of one of our regular Humanist walkers Ken Fagg. Ken, who joined our walks from the start, took no hesitation on tackling ten miles over hilly terrain. His sarcasm could cut to the bone if you didn't know him. Always cheerful, he enjoyed our walks, partaking in the clowning around, and never too old (at 82) to tackle the strenuous events that younger members shrank from.

This past year he had experienced a decline in abilities and although still playing two hours of tennis twice a week he opted for some of our shorter walks. He was well known for taking his own routes, often disappearing without notice, to then join us later on, and for his regularly repeated sayings.

Ken was one of few members who actually led his own walk, and on this occasion he took us to Longham Lakes, where he had his very own bench. He had bought it and had it engraved and told us that he wanted to enjoy the bench whilst he was alive, a great idea I thought.

Ken was an inspiration of hope and example of fitness in later years, I can only hope to be that active in my last chapter. Ken died in his bed, having walked Hengistbury Head only the weekend prior, and was discovered by police on Tuesday December 12th. He will be missed.

## Enjoy Dorset Humanists? But haven't joined yet?



### Dorset Humanists with Humanists UK President Shappi Khorsandi at Lighthouse

Unlike many groups, Dorset Humanists doesn't artificially inflate its membership figures by counting online subscribers. This is because we highly value our subscribing members who, year after year, show their support for what we do and what we stand for by paying just £15 (concessions available).

For just £15 a year you can enjoy all the benefits of full membership of Dorset Humanists: a greater sense of belonging, knowing that your membership counts, the right to vote on how our group is run, and special discounts to events and courses.

*“Finding a group to belong to can be very difficult ... I felt the need in my life to carry on having interaction with people, and belonging to in a sense, yet the only options I knew about were churches. This is where for me the Humanist group comes in.” Nick*

Dorset Humanists is a charity funded entirely by member subscriptions and donations. If you haven't joined yet and would like to, pick up a membership form at one of our meetings or join online. It's really easy and you can help us even more by paying by Direct Debit. This cuts down enormously on our admin workload which is done entirely by volunteers. Together, we can make our Humanist voice heard in Dorset. Thank you!



Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's View**  
January 2018



**T**wice, during visits to local schools to talk about Humanism, I have been asked 'What is the meaning of your life?'. The question, from a 15-year-old addressed to a man in his late fifties, sounds impertinent but it demonstrates a philosophical mind at work. Sartre famously observed that, without God, life is absurd. A more positive humanist stance is that life is worth living just for its own sake. It doesn't need an ulterior purpose. In fact, it doesn't need a particularly grand interior purpose either. I could have said to my young inquisitors: 'The meaning of my life is to promote Humanism' but that is to accept the assumption behind the question which is that life, in order to be meaningful, has to have some kind of ultimate goal. But what if the meaning of life is just to live a good life, to live fully and well, and to accept death as the cessation of that life? This is the kind of answer that Aristotle would have given. Our task then is to unpack the ingredients of a good life. Friendship is certainly one of those goods and I'm excited about our new Life School 'Friendship Course' starting in February. The pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding would be another ingredient of a good life and this is why, month after month, our programme is packed with high quality talks and discussions which avoid spin and propaganda. On our 'Happiness Course' we also learnt that 'savouring' is an essential ingredient of a good life. We sometimes complain about the excess of Christmas but I enjoy the gustatory pleasures of the festive season, in particular the special foods and menus which have been created for the pleasure of friends and family. The most intense pleasure for me this Christmas, however, was musical: playing the piano with all of my mistakes drowned out by raucous singing by brothers, nephew, niece, and other family members. We have been doing this since time immemorial and now we do it partly in memory of departed parents who loved these times so much. Music, food, family, friends, laughter, memories of loved ones. What more meaning can life have than this?

**K**en Fagg, who died last month, thought we should sing during our meetings – he suggested *Land of Hope and Glory*. He insisted, rightly, that I should start our meetings bang on time as a courtesy to people already seated and also that I should insert the word 'unlikely' into my safety announcements. On our One Life course he set an ethics challenge to anyone who could argue convincingly that an out and out egoist could not also be entirely happy. Ken was incorrigible, irrepressible, politically incorrect, generous, inventive, adventurous, astoundingly fit, and always cheerful.

