



Vice Chair of Dorset Humanists Lyn Glass at a previous Bourn Free event

Saturday 9th July 10-4pm Bournemouth Square

Humanists in The Square

LGBT Pride Festival

Humanism has always been in the vanguard of promoting gay liberation and more enlightened attitudes towards sex in general. After a break of two years, we're back in Bournemouth Town Centre supporting 'Bourne Free'. The main event is taking place in Meyrick Park but we're going to pitch our tent in the middle of the Square and we hope to inform hundreds of people about Dorset Humanists and our positive attitude towards gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. We've got a great team of helpers but if you'd like to join us please contact David Warden (contact details bottom left).

Wednesday 27th July 7.30pm Elstead Hotel, 12-14 Knyveton Road, Bournemouth BH1 3QP



Click the image of Daniel to RSVP to his forthcoming talk.

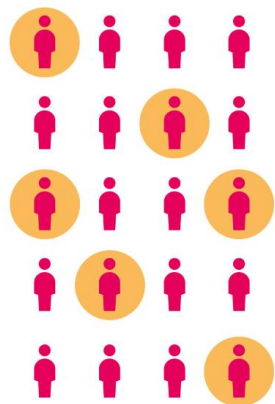
Artificial Intelligence and its effect on our lives

Artificial intelligence is set to impact almost every aspect of our economies and lives over the coming decades, with a reach far beyond self-driving cars and chatbots. This talk by Daniel Dancey looks not only at the dangers but also the beneficial possibilities of this incredible technology, as well as how our lives have already been transformed by AI in ways that you might not have noticed. Daniel is Treasurer of Dorset Humanists. His first talk for us in 2021 was entitled *Data for Sale – How Much is Your Information Worth?*

Saturday 13th August 2.00pm at Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW



Andrew Copson at Dorset Humanists in 2019. Click image above to RSVP to his forthcoming talk.



Humanists at Risk

Global Freedom of Belief and the Work of Humanists International

A talk by Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK and President of Humanists International

Not all humanists across the world can live freely, in accordance with their values. Many humanists and atheists around the world are forced to live their lives ‘in the closet’; the alternative being the risk of ostracism, discrimination, persecution, prison terms – or even death (be it from state-sanctioned punishment or vigilante violence).

Humanists International publishes the *Humanists at Risk Report*, which highlights the growing body of evidence of discrimination against humanists and atheists. Humanists International has also appointed the world’s only full-time ‘Humanists at Risk Coordinator’ to help humanists at risk to hire legal assistance, advocate on their behalf behind the scenes, relocate, or simply survive.

You can help humanists at risk around the world by attending Andrew’s talk at Dorset Humanists and by visiting the Protect Humanists at Risk page on the Humanists International website. Simply click the link below or the people graphic to the left.

Dorset Humanists is a partner group of Humanists UK and an associate member of Humanists International. Andrew has been a regular visitor to Dorset Humanists over the years and we look forward to welcoming him.

<https://humanists.international/get-involved/campaigns/humanists-at-risk/>

Dates for your diary

Saturday 9 th July 10.00-4.00pm	The Square	Our Dorset Humanists tent will be in the Square for Bournemouth’s Bourne Free weekend celebrating LGBT equality. There is no event at Moordown in July.
Wednesday 27 th July 7.30pm	Elstead	Artificial Intelligence Our speaker is Daniel Dancey, Dorset Humanists’ treasurer. This is Daniel’s second talk for us.
Sunday 17 th July 10.00am	New Forest	High Corner Inn walk and lunch. See Dorset Humanists on <i>Meetup.com</i> for more details.
Wednesday 24 th August 7.30pm	Elstead	Details to follow

Plus social events and more walks which will be announced on Dorset Humanists Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any venue changes. We respectfully ask you to take all reasonable precautions to ensure that you do not spread infection to others at our events. If in doubt, please stay at home. Videos are usually available later on YouTube.



Our Dorset Humanists walk in June took in the famous Agglestone Rock, in the middle of Godlingston Heath, Studland. From left: Aaron, John, David, Daniel, Carolyn, and Huw.



Arts University Bournemouth had three displays for World Humanist Day – a collaboration between the University and Dorset Humanists



Life coach Lorien Holiday gave us a very interesting talk on wellbeing at our Moordown event in June.

Click the image for the YouTube recording.

HOPE FOR FOOD

Dorset Humanists Annual Appeal in memory of Jane Bannister is now open

Dorset Humanists Committee has agreed to continue supporting the local foodbank *Hope for Food* through our Annual Appeal in memory of former chair of Dorset Humanists, Jane Bannister. Last year, we donated £2,594 worth of food and toiletries to Hope for Food.

Pauline Stevenson, treasurer of Hope for Food, informed us about a continual rise in the number of referrals both for food parcels and attendees at community meals and a decrease in donations of food and money. Hope for Food works on a referral system, and these are received from schools, social workers and healthcare workers for food hampers. Although predominantly these referrals are for families, the charity provides them to anyone for whom a referral is made. Their biggest concern for the coming year is ensuring they have access to sufficient food items to make the food hampers. They currently make up around 160 a week, and they have seen donations reduce significantly over the past few months.

Please contact David Warden for details about how to make a donation. Email: chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

Phone: 07910 886629



‘Drugs’: A Humanist Proposal

At our Elstead Hotel event in June, our friend John Coss gave us a very informative talk on the drugs problem and proposals for reform. John is Vice-Chair of Stockport Humanists and former Secretary of Greater Manchester Humanists. This is an edited version of John’s talk based on his slides and notes. Click image of John if you want to watch the whole talk.

Much of the drugs debate considers controlled drugs in the wider context of all psychoactive substances. A common argument is that their treatment should be consistent as to harm relative to alcohol and tobacco. There is however a counter-argument which is that existing patterns of usage within our society and social acceptance militate against prohibition of tobacco and alcohol but this is not a valid reason for legalising other harmful products.

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (as amended) classifies drugs as follows:

- Class A – heroin, cocaine, ecstasy etc.
- Class B – includes cannabis (was once Class C)
- Class C – includes most tranquillisers

Penalties are highest for Class A. You might think that controlled drugs would be classified according to their relative harms and perhaps take account of benefits, but there are inconsistencies. For example, it appears that ecstasy is much less harmful than heroin or cocaine. There was a fuss over cannabis classification. It went from B to C in 2004 and back to B in 2009.

David Nutt, who is Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology and director of the Neuropsychopharmacology Unit at Imperial College London, suggests classifying drugs according to relative harm:

- A) More harmful than alcohol
- B) Intermediate between alcohol and tobacco
- C) Less harmful than tobacco

The leading cause of death in young males is alcohol use whilst tobacco is the leading

Worldwide deaths by comparison

- Illicit drugs 0.75m
- Road accidents 1.25m
- Alcohol 3.0m
- Air pollution 4-10m
- Tobacco 8.0m including passive smoking

<https://ourworldindata.org/illicit-drug-use#direct-deaths-drug-overdoses>

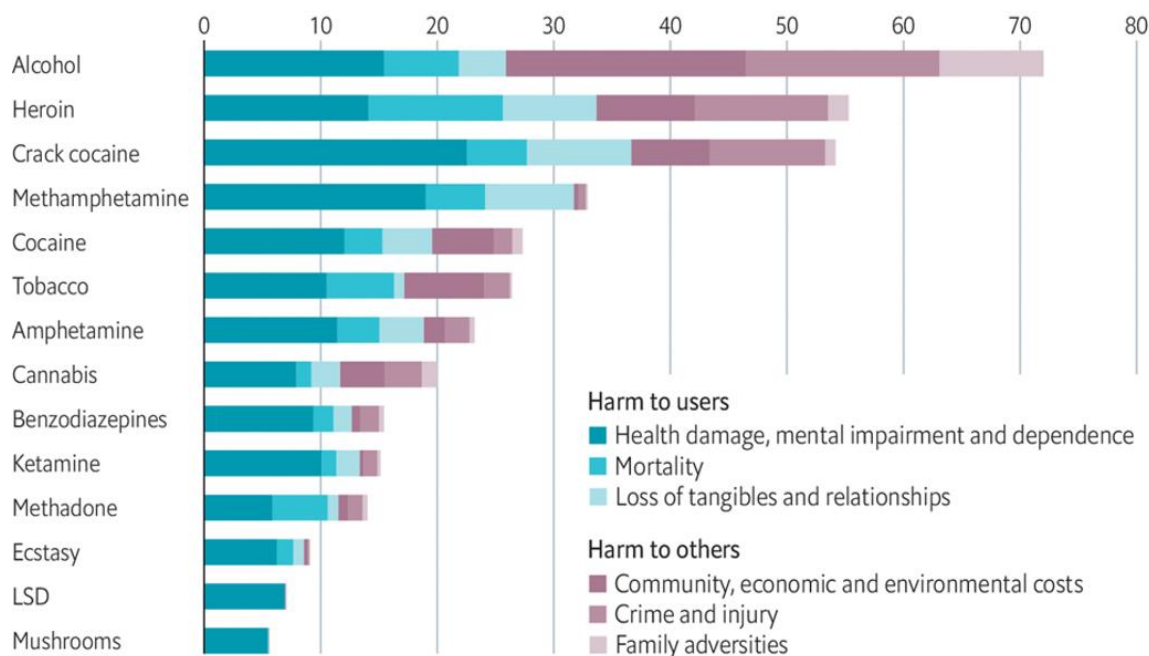
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/alcohol>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>

cause of preventable deaths worldwide. About half of lifelong smokers will die prematurely, losing about 10 years of life on average. The most widely used psychoactive drug is caffeine and there are currently no restrictions on use. In the US in particular, there is an epidemic of opioid use and overuse (painkillers). The medical use of cannabis in the form of the CBD compound which does not get you high has been legal in the UK since 2018 but very few prescriptions have been issued. The most commonly cited reason is the perceived lack of evidence from UK-based research into the efficacy of cannabis-based medicines.

The graph on the next page is based on analysis by David Nutt and others. It shows relative harms from the same level of usage – not the extent of usage. Alcohol and tobacco cause the most harm *in aggregate* in the UK. Although tobacco is now falling in overall impact, lower usage takes many years to work through to experienced harm. Should legal restrictions relate to *relative* harm or also reflect *aggregate* harm?

Britain, drug harm score (out of 100), selected drugs, 2010



Source: "Drug harms in the UK: a multicriteria decision analysis", by D. Nutt et al., *The Lancet*

The Economist

Harms from criminalisation

1. Unsure what you're consuming
2. Putting yourself in some danger to get supply
3. Illicit drugs may be more enticing because they are illicit
4. Putting money in the hands of criminal gangs involved in slavery, people trafficking, extortion
5. Increased difficulty in accessing the potential benefits of many illicit substances
6. The necessity for lies, secrecy, and deception
7. Reluctance to report adverse reactions and overdose, sometimes with fatal consequences
8. Provision of legal pretexts for the incarceration and exploitation of the otherwise inoffensive
9. The creation of more 'criminals'
10. Ignorance and myth regarding the adverse or beneficial effects of illicit substances
11. Promotes the development of ever new, untested, and often dangerous substances
12. Promotion of resentment towards and distrust of the forces of law

Source: Response to Health and Social Care Select Committee from Gleeson, B.A. Lic. T.C.M. Frank ([DRP0002](#))

Some possible benefits of recreational drugs

1. Induce an altered state of consciousness for pleasure by modifying the user's perceptions, feelings, and emotions.
2. Depressants (alcohol, heroin, cannabis) induce a feeling of relaxation and calm
3. Stimulants (amphetamines, cocaine and crack, caffeine, nicotine, ecstasy, khat) induce a sense of energy and alertness
4. Hallucinogens (LSD, magic mushrooms, ketamine) induce perceptual distortions

An individual claimed that drugs:

1. Help you relax
2. Help with stress relief
3. Act as an escape from all your current worries and issues
4. Can make you a better dancer
5. Let you savour entertainment mediums in a whole new way
6. Make food taste a whole lot better
7. Can increase confidence and self confidence
8. Can increase motivation
9. Can increase creativity
10. Can increase your mood

Definitions

Decriminalisation means the removal of criminal penalties for possession of small amounts of specified drugs for personal use; *legalisation* ends the prohibition of a substance, allowing production, availability and use to be legally regulated; and *regulation* relates to how government authorities intervene in the market to control price, potency, packaging etc. and aspects of production, transit, availability, marketing and use. Decriminalisation may be seen as the first step in reform of drugs policy.

Global Commission on Drug Policy

The Global Commission on Drug Policy was created in January 2011 by a group of high profile people from the Americas and Europe wishing to inspire better drug policy globally. Its commissioners include Kofi Annan, Richard Branson and Nick Clegg. Its purpose is to bring to the international level an informed, science-based discussion about humane and effective ways to reduce the harm caused by drugs and drug control policies to people and societies. This seems entirely consistent with a humanist approach although, of course, this doesn't mean their specific views and proposals are beyond criticism.

Its 2011 concluded that "the global war on drugs has failed, with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world.... fundamental reforms in national and global drug control policies are urgently needed. Vast expenditures on criminalization and repressive measures ... have clearly failed to effectively curtail supply or consumption. Repressive efforts directed at consumers impede public health measures to reduce... The harmful consequences of drug use. Government expenditures on futile supply reduction strategies and incarceration displace more cost-effective and evidence-based investments in demand and harm reduction."

The graph on the next page shows the relative harms from various approaches. I think this makes a great deal of sense in the

Global Commission on Drug Policy principles and recommendations

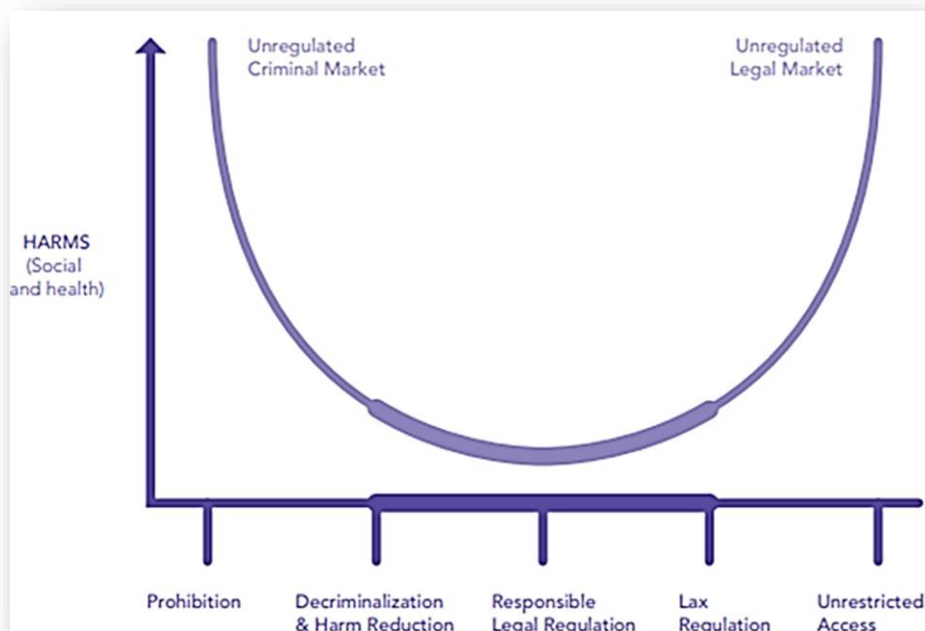
1. End the criminalization, marginalization and stigmatization of people who use drugs but who do no harm to others
2. Encourage experimentation by governments with models of legal regulation of drugs (especially cannabis)
3. Offer health and treatment services to those in need
4. Apply much the same principles and policies to people involved in the lower ends of illegal drug markets
5. Invest in activities that can prevent young people from taking drugs and those who use drugs from developing more serious problems
6. Focus repressive actions on violent criminal organizations
7. Begin the transformation of the global drug prohibition regime
8. Break the taboo on debate and reform. The time for action is now.

context of Western societies and it's the basis of the views I develop later as regards a humanist approach.

Other organisations calling for reform

Drugwise (set up by David Nutt) promotes evidence-based information on drugs, alcohol and tobacco. The purpose of its Knowledge Hub is to bring together international and internationally-relevant national reports and reviews.

Transform Drug Policy Foundation is an independent charity that works to change the way drugs are controlled. It says that for over 50 years, the war on drugs has harmed communities, increased the risk to individuals and gifted a multi-billion dollar trade to criminal gangs and networks. It claims that our drug laws are not fit for purpose. Transform promotes awareness of effective alternatives, provides new models of regulation, and supports those who are moving towards better approaches.



This graph illustrates the potential benefits of a 'middle way' on drugs reform – a kind of Goldilocks Zone.

Source: The Global Commission on Drugs Policy (2018)

The mission of the *LEAP* partnership is to reduce the harmful consequences resulting from our current drug policies and to lessen the incidence of death, disease, crime and addiction. They are advocates for evidence-based policies with a public health focus for drugs and mental health.

Harm Reduction International is a leading NGO dedicated to reducing the negative health, social and legal impacts of drug use and drug policy. It promotes the rights of people who use drugs and their communities through research and advocacy to help achieve a world where drug policies and laws contribute to healthier, safer societies.

Drug Science, founded by David Nutt and others in 2010, is an independent, science-led drugs charity, bringing together leading drugs experts from a wide range of specialisms to carry out ground-breaking research into drug harms and effects.

There are dissenting voices such as Peter Hitchens whose book *The War We Never Fought* claims we have not enforced prohibition at all.

The cross-party Health And Social Care Committee (October 2019 report) has also recommended a radical change from a criminal justice to a health approach. It has

noted that the UK, and in particular Scotland, has amongst the highest drug death rates in Europe and they conclude that UK drugs policy is failing. It recommends that “the Government should consult on the decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use from a criminal offence to a civil matter. The Government should examine the Portuguese system, where decriminalisation was implemented as one part of a comprehensive approach to drugs, including improving treatment services, introducing harm reduction interventions, and better education, prevention and social support. Decriminalisation of possession for personal use saves money from the criminal justice system that is more effectively invested in prevention and treatment. Decriminalisation will not be effective without investing in holistic harm reduction, support and treatment services for drug addiction. Doing so would save lives and provide better protection for communities.”

Attitudes to drugs

The *Prohibition* extreme: drugs are evil, so controlling them is a moral issue. Drug users are 'scum', 'junkies', 'parasites'. If the 'war on drugs' has failed, this is because it hasn't been fought sufficiently. Many of the adherents of this view seem to adopt an ▷

almost theological perspective, often based on terrible personal experiences – ‘my daughter died from taking ecstasy’.

The *Libertarian* extreme: people should be allowed to do what they want, subject perhaps to J S Mill’s harm principle. The War on Drugs is ineffective, unfair, and immoral, it should be ended. Drugs should be freely available. Commercial promotion is OK. The War on Drugs is ineffective at limiting access to dangerous drugs and, instead, empowers dangerous gangs that make incredible fortunes on the black market for these illegal drugs. It has imprisoned millions of non-violent people. This is unfair to these people and also uses up resources that would be better spent prosecuting and imprisoning people who are violent. It is largely responsible for the militarization of police forces in America. It has pitted police against citizens and this is unfair to both. Libertarians believe that it is immoral for the government to dictate which substances a person is permitted to consume, whether it is alcohol, tobacco, herbal remedies, saturated fat, marijuana, etc. These decisions belong to individual people, not the government. Because of all of these things, Libertarians advocate ending the War on Drugs.

The *middle* (rational and humanist?) course:

- Evidence-based policy
- Focus on harm reduction including harms arising from regulation
- Treat drug use primarily as a health issue rather than a matter for the law
- Respect the human rights of drug users
- End the criminalization, marginalization and stigmatization of people who use drugs but who do no harm to others (nor in many cases to themselves)
- Aim for legalisation with regulation for particular drugs commensurate with harms from their use
- Adopt a gradual approach

Conclusions

Exploring the literature has convinced me that legalisation is the right way forward, and consistent with Humanist principles although I acknowledge that not all humanists agree with my argument. As a first step, decriminalisation is more feasible and possible under the International Conventions. Also, it would be sensible to start with cannabis as the most widely used drug, where we can learn from other countries. This is the best way to reducing harms, both to users and society, including producers, and also the best way to enjoy the benefits? I’m not advocating a free-for-all, but rather sensible, evidence-based control and regulation, with consistency for the whole range of ‘drugs’.

As far as I can tell, Humanists UK take no position on drugs policy and practice. I think this is a pity and maybe humanists can take this matter up with them?

■ John also wrote about this topic in the April 2022 edition of [Humanistically Speaking](#).



View from the Chair

David Warden
Chairman of Dorset Humanists



I've just returned from a weekend in Belfast where Humanists UK's annual Convention took place. Speakers included A. C. Grayling and the new President of Humanists UK Adam Rutherford. I will give a full report in the next edition of *Humanistically Speaking* which will be issued at the beginning of August.

John Coss's talk on drugs is the first time we've tackled the drugs debate at Dorset Humanists. I recently listened to a fascinating interview on Triggernometry (a YouTube show and podcast) with a former drugs-busting undercover policeman. He explained that the 'War on Drugs' creates a Darwinian struggle in which violent and wealthy drugs cartels evolve, under environmental pressure, to become ever more adept at evading arrest and prosecution. Every time you hear on the news that the police have succeeded in another drugs-busting raid it doesn't mean that they are winning the war. It only means that a 'less fit' drugs gang has been eliminated. The more successful operators then move in to grab the vacated market share. The large drugs cartels have become so wealthy they can easily corrupt and infiltrate the police. In some African countries, they have become the de facto government. So I'm afraid those who think we should double-down on the War on Drugs are probably making things a lot worse rather than better. Drugs policy appears to be one of those areas of government which persists to make politicians look tough on vice rather than effective. From a humanist point of view, this kind of governance is not only irrational but harmful. John Coss told us about the many organisations and committees which are calling for reform and yet nothing seems to change, at least in this country. Humanists UK could take a position on this and lend its voice to the chorus of people calling for rational reform.

It's perfectly possible to experience intense pleasure without taking drugs. I can get this effect from going on a Dorset Humanists walk and experiencing the breathtaking scenery of the Jurassic coast, or from the sound of complex jazz chords whilst playing the piano, or from eating salted chocolate! Based on the table of relative harms, enjoying the odd Ecstasy tablet to enhance social or sexual pleasure might, in future, become as acceptable as drinking a glass of Chardonnay. But the escalator from Ecstasy to methamphetamines and other drugs could be hard to resist. Andrew Sullivan, a British-American commentator also interviewed recently on Triggernometry, said that hundreds of gay men are dying because of the popularity of drug-fuelled sex parties. The allure is very powerful and the dangers are very great. How would reform tackle this crisis? Public education and careful reform might lead to an increase human liberty and pleasure and a reduction in harm and organised crime, but the humanist community should not underestimate the risks from recreational drugs.