



A PARTNER OF THE
BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

national
secular
society

IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Wednesday 22nd July 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, 4 Grove Road
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

Global problems – why bother?



A talk by Marilyn Mason –
Chair of Humanists for a
Better World. Marilyn
Mason taught for 20 years
before becoming the
British Humanist
Association's first ever
Education Officer in 1998.

Since her retirement in 2006, she has
become heavily involved in community and
environmental concerns in her home town
of Kingston upon Thames. She founded a
(secular) community choir and Kingston
Philosophy Café, and is on the steering
group of Transition Town
Kingston and chair of the
environmental forum that
liaises with the local council.



**Humanists
for a Better
World logo**

In this talk Marilyn will say
that although so many
global problems – war,
human rights,
global poverty, hunger and
exploitation of the poor –
are complex and appear
insoluble, humanists are the
exactly the people who
should get involved. There

are things we can all do – individually,
communally and politically – and this will be
a focus of the discussion.

■ **Saturday 8th August 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW

The Enigma of Nature and Nurture



Eminent geneticist
Norman Maclean will be
exploring the dual
influences of heredity and
the environment on our
behaviour, intelligence and
personality. The nature or
nurture debate is one of

the oldest in psychology, and has particular
relevance for topics such as crime and
punishment; as whether someone has a
genetic predisposition to behave in a certain
way (nature) or has learned criminal
behaviours (nurture) affects how much
personal responsibility they should bear for
their actions.

The debate also profoundly affects
educational theory and practice. Should we
encourage our children to study, and invest
significant resources in their education,
assuming that learning and intelligence is
mainly nurture, or is intelligence chiefly
inherited so the talented will always do
well?

Rare cases of identical twins separated at
birth and reared separately have helped
move these debates forward, but how close
are we to solving these psychological and
biological mysteries? Find out in this
fascinating talk! Norman is an Emeritus
Professor of Genetics at Southampton
University, and has written many popular
books on nature and genetics.

Send bulletin updates to chairman @dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629



dorsethumanists.co.uk



@dorsethumanists



Dorset Humanists



meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists

■ **Thursday 6th August 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

Wednesday 26th August 7.30pm
Green House Hotel, BH1 3AX

Being Human

A talk by Dr Fiona Coward. What does it mean to 'be human', and what is it that makes us unique as a species? Fiona is Senior Lecturer in Archaeological Sciences at Bournemouth University.



Dorset Humanists Membership Benefits

At Dorset Humanists we strive to create a welcoming and stimulating community for humanists, atheists and agnostics in the local area, while also working to ensure our society is guided by sound values based on reason, evidence and compassion. In recent years we have doubled the number of entertaining and informative presentations in our events programme, gained representation for non-religious people at Bournemouth's Remembrance ceremonies, succeeded in getting secular, non-religious philosophies such as Humanism into Dorset's RE syllabuses, developed engaging educational courses, and instigated a range of additional regular social events.

We are entirely funded by voluntary donations from our members and visitors, and we hope you will wish to help us continue and further expand our activities

by paying our annual membership fee. Growing our membership also helps us to increase our influence on local policy in areas like education, religious privilege, and gain representation in policy groups and at civil events. At just £12 a year our membership offers great value and joining really demonstrates your support for our aims, values and community. Please note that the £12 offer runs out on 1st October, after which we'll be implementing our first increase for many years to £15, so it's worth joining soon to beat the increase if you haven't joined already. Membership will still offer excellent value and our members get exclusive discounts to special events such as Darwin Day lectures and educational courses (including our forthcoming multi-week course on happiness - more details below) as well as enabling you to participate in determining future group activities, vote on constitutional issues, and elect committee members. If you're not sure whether your current membership is up to date you don't have to worry because we'll send you a reminder. If you haven't joined us yet we'd love to welcome you as a new member. Just pick up a membership form at one of our meetings, phone 07910 886629, or see our website. Many thanks for your continuing support!



Happiness Course

This Autumn we will be running a brand new 6-week evening course exploring the science of happiness – also referred to by psychologists as 'optimal human functioning'. A modest charge will apply to cover costs with a substantial discount and priority booking for members. Green House Hotel starting Tuesday 8th September. David Warden and psychologist Phil James will be your course leaders. Please contact David to get your name on the list. Further details will follow over the summer.

Congratulations!

Huge congratulations to Nat and Jemma on the birth of their baby daughter Zoe. Many congratulations also to Barbara Fogg on her recent 99th birthday.

Send bulletin updates to chairman @dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629



dorsethumanists.co.uk



@dorsethumanists



Dorset Humanists



meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists



Doing the Happy Human?!

Dorset Humanists at Bourne Free

Reports by Aaron

The sun was shining, the mood was high and Dorset Humanists' first appearance at this year's Bourne Free event was set to be a good day.

Nine Happy Humanists assembled at the 'Command Tent' and, leaving behind a rear guard crew of two, the strike team headed up the hill to the parade start point. The East Overcliff was abuzz with activity as explosively-coloured costumes and vehicles assembled on the start line ready for the parade through town. We found our assigned spot, took up formation and plastered cheek-to-cheek smiles across our faces as we represented Humanism to the good people and holidaymakers of Bournemouth.

This year's parade was far bigger than previous years, proving a year-on-year growth in the event, and going by the crowds lining the streets who turned out to see us, equally popular with the spectators. A truly winning spectacle!

Upon return to the stall we conversed with hundreds of interested parties, as happy humans were turned one-by-one into happy humanists. Quite often three of us were engaged in three conversations at once as so many were keen to find out what we were about, and then realising they too had so much in common with us.

Even the appearance of a twelve foot high Jesus was unable to stop the onslaught of Humanism across this great land.

I think it is safe to say that we achieved a great thing on the day and that the combined efforts of so many kind persons came together to support a cause that half of them did not personally identify with. The LGBT community working side-by-side with straight colleagues for a common goal – if only the rest of the world could follow this example and see just how easy it is.

For more photos of this event please see our Meetup page.

Joint walk with South Hants

In June we shared a delightful Sunday lunchtime in the New Forest with South Hants Humanists. The scenery was truly remarkable, the sun was out, the temperature warm, the flies not too bothersome and green and pleasant land in abundance. We managed to cover the three mile route in around an hour and half, with a few pauses for photos and catch ups.

Upon crossing the finish line we tucked into sizable plates of gorgeous-looking food whilst comparing notes on what each group gets up to. This was a marvellous opportunity to meet another Humanist group and to build bridges with our county neighbours. I would strongly encourage other groups to meet up and do the same. It was a very rewarding experience.

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629

Biggest-ever BHA Conference in Bristol

Nine of us represented Dorset and West Dorset Humanists at the excellent British Humanist Association Conference in Bristol – attended by nearly 450 delegates from around the country.

Expert in parapsychology Dr Caroline Watt led the first session on Saturday with a fascinating talk on ghosts and near death experiences. Her work suggests that the prevalence of superstitious beliefs is at least partially explained by people's desire to exert (illusory) control over their environment through such means as lucky charms and prayer. Dr Watt was followed by Tim Whitmarsh, Professor of Greek Culture at the University of Cambridge, who explained that atheism was relatively unproblematic in ancient Greek and Roman times because religious pluralism and diversity embraced a multitude of gods – including the option of no god. He informed us that polytheism flourished alongside political decentralisation. But as soon as you get imperial powers wanting to bind disparate communities together then monotheism is the most effective (but also the most violent) religious model to adopt. He said what we need now to avoid dangerous clashes is a new 'global polytheism' to include atheism on equal terms.

On Saturday afternoon we were entertained by Greater Manchester Humanist Choir. Their repertoire included the classic freethought song *Die Gedanken Sind Frei* (My Thoughts Are Free). Listen to a rendition of it [here](#).

During the day Andrew Copson explained the difficulty we face in getting humanist pastoral support into prisons: prison chaplains when faced with a Jewish inmate get hold of a rabbi; when faced with a Muslim inmate they get an imam; but when faced with a non-religious inmate their automatic response is 'Oh that's Church of England'. Amy Walden, BHA pastoral officer, said that the worst thing about prison is having your autonomy taken away



Chris Street, Simon Whitlock, David Warden and Lyn Glass in soft focus at the Gala Dinner

from you and that appropriate pastoral support can provide some respite from this.

Dr Phil Hammond's talk 'How to get the most from your one wild and precious life' was hugely entertaining. He explained that the purpose of life is that 'we're all slowly returning to room temperature'. On a more serious note, he recommended that the best way to live is 'to love and be loved'. He said that loving yourself is fundamental to happiness whilst recognising that some people have far tougher life circumstances than others. Nevertheless, provoking much audience amusement, he claimed we can all 'please ourselves in a safe sustainable way'. Other gems of wisdom included: 'We wake up a day older every day'; 'Nobody gets out of here alive – let's make it a good one'; 'Make sure you get 5 portions of fun every day, at least one of them outdoors'; 'For 90% of symptoms a dog is better than a doctor'; 'If something isn't fun you're not doing it right'; and finally that we should try to 'Widen our circles of collaboration and compassion'.

Richard Wiseman, popular writer and Professor of the Public Understanding of Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire, provided us with an equally entertaining session including magic tricks and advice on the science of sleep. He claimed that if you get less than 7 hours a night over the long haul then you are 'sleep-deprived' and this increases your chance of accidents, cancer, heart disease, and obesity. According to a recent poll 66% of the UK population is sleep-deprived. His tips included taking a nap during the day for 20-30 mins, drinking coffee before your nap (it wakes you up 20 minutes later), avoiding alcohol before you go to bed because it

Send bulletin updates to chairman @dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629

interferes with dreams and deep sleep, and avoiding using computer equipment in the last hour before sleep because it emits light at the blue end of the spectrum which disrupts sleep. If you find yourself awake in bed after ten minutes the best thing to do is to get up and do something for a while and then go back to bed again.



Humanist of the Year
Professor Alice
Roberts

Journalist and broadcaster Samira Ahmed interviewed TV scientist Alice Roberts who is Professor of Public Engagement in Science at the University of Birmingham. Alice made a plea for us to stop thinking that humans are the 'pinnacle of evolution'

and that 'we shouldn't put ourselves on a pedestal... We are part of nature and not separate from it... we are a twig on the bush of life'. Responding to the claim that we have removed ourselves from the process of natural selection she agreed this was true to a certain extent but not entirely. All animals, not just humans, change their environment to buffer themselves against the environment. She speculated that humans in a million years time might have changed into a different species but that we will probably look much the same – we can't grow wings or fins but we may lose toes. She defended the use of the word 'design' in evolution explaining that 'design doesn't have to imply a designer, just as evolution doesn't have to imply an evolver... design just implies something whose structure is well-fitted to its environment.' On sexism in science she recalled being denied promotion at one stage in her career on the spurious grounds that she 'lacked gravitas' – which meant, presumably, that she was unable to grow a beard. On creationism in schools she warned that this was a growing issue and an import from the United States. She demanded that we should not be teaching pseudo-science in schools and that parents had no right to demand this. On Richard Dawkins she said he 'goes in with the tanks' and that we also need guerrilla tactics. Alice received the BHA's 2015 Humanist of the Year Award at a gala dinner on Saturday night.

The conference ended with an impassioned address from Nigerian humanist Leo Igwe who told us about the horrifying effects of belief in witchcraft – not only in Africa but also in black communities in the UK. He also informed us that humanism has made great strides in Africa in the last ten years because of the internet revolution and also thanks to efforts by British humanists – in particular supporting Humanist schools in Uganda. Leo said that 'secular education is the best legacy we can give to generations yet unborn'. We also need humanist leadership programmes to spearhead a 'humanist enlightenment' in Africa. BHA board member Trisha Rogers reminded us that one of the ways we can help African humanists, many of whom are very isolated, is by supporting the International Humanist and Ethical Union to sponsor their attendance at the next World Humanist Congress in Brazil (2017). Dorset Humanists is an associate member of the IHEU.

Other presenters and entertainers included philosopher Julian Baggini, comedian Kate Smurthwaite and guitarist Jay Foreman, one of whose high-speed songs included the name of every station on the London Underground. Videos from the Conference will be coming out via YouTube in the weeks to come.

What we learned in Bristol

1. That a lettuce might be a quantum computer (Jim Al-Khalili)
2. That neutrinos are 'pointless' and that squarks, skeptons and higgsinos might exist (Jim Al-Khalili)
3. That a dignified home death is cheaper for the NHS than dying in hospital (Dr Phil Hammond)
4. That the vagina has almost as much erectile tissue as the penis (Professor Alice Roberts)
5. That the BHA intends to distribute Michael Rosen's new book on Humanism for children to every primary school in the country
6. That alcohol at night disrupts dreams and deep sleep (Richard Wiseman)

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629



dorsethumanists.co.uk



@dorsethumanists



Dorset Humanists

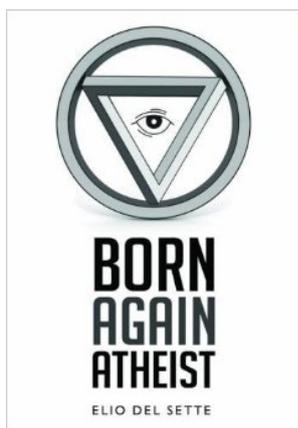


meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists

7. That the BHA has 21 policy areas of concern including homeopathy and genital mutilation of children (Pavan Dhaliwal, Director of Public Affairs and Campaigns, who is coming to Dorset Humanists in October)
8. That Church House is desperate to maintain the power of the Church of England (Andrew Copson, BHA Chief Executive)
9. That the BHA has 40,000 members and supporters, 17 paid staff, numerous volunteers and a turnover of £1m
10. That next year's conference will be in Birmingham

If there's a God in heaven what's he waiting for?

Born Again Atheist (2015) Elio Del Sette
Book review



Dorset Humanist **Elio Del Sette** has recently published a delightful book which recounts his journey from Catholic faith to 'born-again atheism'. Elio was born in Rome and brought up in a religious institution run an order of

nuns near Lake Garda. He became an altar boy and his mother visited 'once or twice a year'. He was bombarded with religion and the idea of becoming a priest remained on the back-burner. In adolescence, however, he moved to Holland and was enrolled in a school where no religion was taught. He came into contact with Lutherans and many different varieties of religious belief which broadened his mind and set him on a course of asking difficult questions. He vividly describes the process by which his faith was gradually 'capsized' after a long, emotional and very difficult period of discovery. He describes his faith 'falling apart like a sandcastle' and vanishing 'like a mist in the sun'. It was, he writes, 'like putting on a new pair of spectacles.

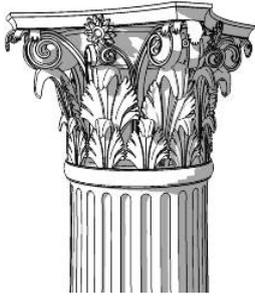
Suddenly my vision was crystal clear and I could see through all the religious fog... finally I could breathe freely'. Ultimately, he was left with no doubts - God is simply a figment of our imagination. 'If you repeatedly knock at somebody's house and there is no reply, you know there is no-one there'.

Elio's main problem with God is that he simply 'does nothing'. What human parent would stand idly by whilst his or her children underwent enormous pain and suffering? Religious people say that God cannot be held responsible for the evil unleashed by mankind but this argument doesn't wash with Elio. He reminds the reader of the many times God and Jesus fed people via miraculous means in the Bible and he asks why God does absolutely nothing to alleviate mass starvation in the world today? Elio knows people who lost parents in the Nazi extermination camps and writes that 'the Holocaust is a clear demonstration of God's non-existence'. God could have intervened - but he prefers to do nothing. On a lighter note, Elio asks why God, the ultimate CEO, doesn't present himself via satellite link to all of his followers on earth. A good CEO would show his leadership! Instead, what does God do? Absolutely nothing! On the subject of faith healing, Elio points out that there has never been any reported instance of a saint replacing an amputee's lost limb. Elio admits it is not possible to disprove the existence of God but he does claim it is possible to prove his 'total absence'.

Born Again Atheist is a grand tour through the world's religions and holy texts featuring an enormous cast of characters from Henry VIII and Martin Luther to Mother Teresa and Padre Pio whose 'stigmata' were apparently self-inflicted with carbolic acid. Elio has had hundreds of conversations with believers over the years and this book is primarily addressed to them. But it will be enjoyed by everyone with an interest in religion and the biggest question of all: Is God an illusion?

This book is now available to borrow from our Dorset Humanist library. Elio regularly attends our meetings and will also have signed copies for sale.

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Phil James



On the basis that I had an absolute blast at the World Humanist Congress in Oxford in 2014 I immediately signed up for the BHA's Annual Conference in Bristol on June

19-21 this year. I was not disappointed.

There are three main reasons I enjoyed myself. It's a very pleasant indulgence to chat with like-minded others about issues, so the social element is strong. The speakers were both thought provoking and highly entertaining. And finally, especially as Bristol is my hometown, it was good to revisit some old haunts and to enjoy the escape of being pampered in a nice hotel.

Meeting up with one or two people I had met at Oxford was a nice surprise. Of course, not entirely unexpected but nevertheless a treat to see some familiar faces and catch up. I always find too that queuing up for registration, going into sessions, and in the spaces between, rubbing up against people that I may never otherwise have talked with, to be highly entertaining. One startlingly attractive but seemingly highly agitated young lady turned out to be an artist – a sculptor. She was agitated because she didn't have a ticket for dinner and one of the organisers, who turned out to be a 'new boy' at his first conference, was rather officiously making her wait until 7 o'clock precisely until he solved her problem. Simply distracting her for a few moments proved enlightening and interesting and it is these brief moments that add to the overall conference experience.

I have to single out two speakers for sheer entertainment value. I have had the pleasure of seeing and meeting Professor Richard Wiseman on several previous

occasions and he never disappoints. A fellow, but needless to say much more eminent psychologist, he is also a magician. His party trick was to deconstruct sleight of hand with cards and coins but his speech was really concerning his new book, *Night School: The Life-Changing Science of Sleep*.

A surprisingly, for me, amusing speaker was TV's Dr Phil Hammond who talked about his new book *Staying Alive – How to Get the Best from the NHS*. I've since discovered that he styles himself on his website as comedian and GP – in that order! He is an exceptionally rapid-fire talker and manages to convey deep conviction and passion in a most engaging and humorous fashion.

The other main speakers, Professors Jim Al-Khalili, Tim Whitmarsh, and Alice Roberts and Drs Caroline Watt, and Julian Baggini gave fascinating presentations and were top quality but it isn't really fair to compare their talks to those of the two professional comedians. Their contributions though were thought provoking and fascinating and so hugely entertaining in a slightly different way.

Finally, the Thistle Grand Hotel is a lovely old hotel right in the centre of Bristol. All of the hotel staff were engaging, friendly, and helpful and the buffet breakfast I'm sad to report, given that my height is matched by my girth, was excellent and well managed. They even catered well for me, offering special bread for my gluten-free diet.

In summary, I laughed a lot the conference, always a good sign; met new and reinforced previous acquaintances, stayed in an excellent hotel, and was stimulated by talks from people with brilliant minds. It's hard to beat that!

Could you represent Dorset Humanists?

We're currently looking for volunteers to represent Dorset Humanists at Dorset Race Equality meetings and also the Bournemouth Older Person's Forum. If you'd like to give one of these a go please contact us.

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629



dorsethumanists.co.uk



@[dorsethumanists](https://twitter.com/dorsethumanists)



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



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



Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
July 2015



I bought Stephen Law's aptly titled book *Believing Bullshit: How Not to Get Sucked into an Intellectual Black Hole* at the British Humanist Association Conference in Bristol. Stephen Law is a senior lecturer in philosophy in the University of London and he was our Darwin Day speaker in 2009. Stephen describes eight strategies religious people use to immunise their beliefs against attack. A common one is 'playing the mystery card'. I experienced this when I went on an Alpha Course a couple of years ago. Whenever I asked difficult questions about the rationality of certain beliefs the stock response was 'Some things are beyond our understanding and we just have to accept them on faith'. Another strategy is called "But It Fits!". Stephen describes how someone committed to the view that 'dogs are spies from Venus' can manipulate every conceivable piece of evidence to fit this theory, for example by claiming that dogs have internal transmitters which human technology cannot detect. The same kind of move can be used by Young Earth Creationists who could claim, for example, that God miraculously shrunk the dinosaurs so that they could all fit on Noah's Ark. A third strategy is 'Going Nuclear' which entails challenging the belief that reason itself is a reliable route to the truth. Being aware of these and other strategies may not increase our success rate in 'de-converting' people (if that's your aim) but we should be promoting good thinking habits to help prevent others being sucked into intellectual black holes - especially children who are deliberately targeted by religious groups. Stephen's book *The War for Children's Minds* is also useful in this regard.

Another book you may find helpful in combating irrational belief is *The Improbability Principle* by David Hand. David recently spoke to Dorset Humanists about this topic. I never imagined maths and probability could be so entertaining! He writes about the 'law of very large numbers' (given enough opportunities very improbable things are certain to happen and therefore no supernatural agency is required to explain them), the 'law of selection' (we remember the evidence that fits our theory and forget about all the evidence which doesn't) and the 'law of near enough' (we widen the boundaries of permissible evidence to make evidence fit our theory). Religious people employ these strategies all the time, particular in areas like faith healing. Lourdes comes to mind where millions of people go hoping to be healed because a tiny number have been.

David Warden

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629