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Humanists UK

national
secular
society



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 13th July** Meet in Lower Gardens at 10.00am. Text David on 07910 886629 to tell us you're coming.

Join us this year at Bourne Free!



Bourne Free is one of the opportunities we have each year to express solidarity with communities that have come under increasing threat around the world.

LGBT+ is a human rights issue and Humanism has always been at the forefront of promoting human rights. We invite all of our members and supporters, regardless of sexual orientation or gender, to consider joining us on the march this year. It's colourful, it's fun, and it shows Bournemouth that humanists support human rights for all.

We will be marching behind the official LGBT Humanists UK banner as illustrated above.

 The march is wheelchair accessible.

RSVP [here](#)

■ **Sunday 14th July 5.00-9.00pm**
109 Burley Road, Brangsgore, BH23 8AY



Brangsgore Barbecue

This year, instead of a barbecue on the beach, we will have a barbecue in a country garden. Committee member Simon Whipple invites all Humanists and their partners to a barbecue in his garden in Brangsgore, which is a village three miles from Christchurch on the edge of the New Forest.

Stuff to bring with you: Bring your own alcoholic drink and meat to cook. Simon will provide jacket potatoes, salad, and water. If you want to ensure you have a seat to sit on, please bring a camping chair.

RSVP: not obligatory, but please register on Meetup so that we have an idea how many will come.

Travel: Car share could be a good idea. If you want a lift or are willing to offer a lift in your own car, please state what you need when you register on Meetup.

Car parking is not available on site. Park in the village hall car park (100 yards away, on the opposite side of Burley Road.)

Wet weather plans: None.

Queries or cancellations: Telephone Simon on 07740 432159.

RSVP [here](#)

■ **Wednesday 24th July 7.30pm** Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

Living a Humanist Life



In this talk, Philip Nathan will discuss the key relevance of Humanism and Humanist ideas to our everyday lives, what it means to live a Humanist life and what it means to live in a manner consistent with Humanism values and Humanist thinking.

Philip is the author of *Living Humanism*, a guide to Humanist personal conduct and action (published 2018). He is a former chair, media and education officer for North East Humanists. Philip started his professional career as a research biochemist/molecular biologist but shifted profession to teaching and the area of applied linguistics. He is currently Head of Master's programmes at Durham University's Centre for Academic Development.

■ **Thursday 4th July 7.30pm** and every first Thursday 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

■ **Sunday 21st July** New Forest. Rhinefield and Reptiles. Fairly flat 8 miles, with possible shortcut of about 5 miles. We may even see some reptiles this time if the weather is hot. (They are well enclosed so no risk.)

■ **Sunday 18th August.** St Aldhelm's Head and Winspit from Worth Matravers. Clifftop magnificence - 5 to 8 miles depending on wishes.

All walks are between about 6 and 9 miles and usually have an optional short cut. Please check [Meetup](#) for further details and any changes, for example last minute cancellations owing to weather conditions.

☎ Phil 07817 260498

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 3rd July 7.30pm**

Sandford Heritage Hall, Sandford Rd, Nr Wareham, BH20 7AJ (Next to Pine Martin Grange Care Home). 'Out of the Box' presents:

"Is there anybody there.....?"

At this event we will explore beliefs and questions about the paranormal, communications from beyond the grave, ghostly phenomena, out of the body experiences, ESP, angelic visitations, spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and more. Do come along and give us the benefit of your opinions and anecdotal evidence.

'Out of the Box' is a dialogue group for people who subscribe to different world views. We aim to attract a balanced mix of Christians, Humanists, Agnostics, and people of all faiths and none. Everyone welcome! Free entry (donations appreciated).

■ **Wednesday 10th July 7.30pm**

Dorset Room, Colliton Club, Dorchester. West Dorset Humanists present:

Tolpuddle and its Martyrs

A talk by David Nunn. How did a small Dorset village come to be internationally recognised as the birthplace of modern British Trade Unionism? And how did six agricultural workers, with nothing more than their labour to offer, come to challenge the might of the British Empire, the Church, and powerful land-owners, causing the government of the day to back down? Six brave men and their families helped change the balance of power, and their influence resonates down to the present day.



■ **Saturday 10th August 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre

Secularism: politics, religion and freedom



Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK

In this talk for Dorset Humanists Andrew Copson will explain that secularism is an increasingly hot topic in public, political, and religious debate across the globe. In his new book, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom*, Andrew tells the story of secularism, taking in momentous episodes in world history, such as the great transition of Europe from religious orthodoxy to pluralism, the global struggle for human rights and democracy, and the origins of modernity.

Andrew is Chief Executive of Humanists UK and President of Humanists International.

This event will also include a performance by Dorset Humanists Choir and a Summer Cream Tea.

■ **Weds 28th August 7.30pm Green House**

Belief: How should we regard it?

In this talk, John Richards will argue that we need to re-evaluate the concept of 'belief' today. He will delve into the history of how the concept of belief has been used in the past and contend that definitions of belief place unreasonable emphasis on its association with truth.

John Richards is chair of Worthing Skeptics in the Pub and publications director for Atheist Alliance International. He is also a former science teacher and politician, and an experienced campaigner for critical thinking.



Dorset Humanists Science Course

You don't have to be an Einstein to enjoy this course. It has been designed to make science accessible to anyone with an enquiring mind. One of the aims of Dorset Humanists is to promote the public understanding of science. This course does exactly that.

Our course leaders are our own members: **Chris Street** has a master's degree in medicinal chemistry and is a science tutor, **Phil Butcher** studied physics at Cambridge and has had a career in the nuclear industry, **Greg Atkins** has doctorates in genetics and virology, subjects he taught at Trinity College Dublin and **Graham Marshall** studied physics at Birmingham and Nottingham universities and had a career in science.

1. **Mon 2nd Sept** Scientific Method & Pseudoscience *Phil*
2. **Mon 9th Sept** A Universe From Nothing? *Graham and/or Chris*
3. **Mon 16th Sept** How Did Life Begin? *Chris*
4. **Mon 23rd Sept** Why Evolution is True *Chris*
5. **Mon 30th Sept** Quantum Physics & Relativity Made Relatively Simple *Phil*
6. **Mon 7th Oct** Atoms & Chemicals *Phil*
7. **Mon 14th Oct** How to Catch a Virus *Greg*
8. **Mon 21st Oct** Emerging Infectious Diseases *Greg*
9. **Mon 28th Oct** Our Last Century? The Future of Science *TBC*

All sessions 7.30pm – 9.15pm at Moordown Community Centre Coronation Avenue, Moordown BH9 1TW. £30 for non-members; £20 for paid-up DH members. Concessions available for students and unwaged. Pay cash on the first night. Figures quoted are the total amount for the whole course. *Book early to avoid disappointment – limited number of places.*

✉ chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk
☎ 07910 886629



Peter Atkins on the ‘sword’ of science and the awesome power of the human intellect

At our June meeting, eminent scientist and Patron of Humanists UK Peter Atkins spoke to a packed audience about the power of science and the redundancy of religion. This is a partial transcript of his talk which can be watched in full on our [YouTube channel](#).



I intend to argue in favour of the view that our current conventional science is the only route to understanding the world and that it must beat off all contamination by sentiment and religion and any other pretender to the truth. I shall argue that religion has had its day and that science has taken wing. It's the only reliable mode of investigating the world. Science is built on error. That is the source of its strength. When its errors are exposed that's a measure of its progress.

The deepest driving force of contemporary science is the belief that the world is simple. The perceived complexity of the world, wonderful as it is, simply bubbles out of that underlying simplicity. Scientists are hewers of simplicity out of complexity. Simple events are linked together in an awesomely complex network. Scientists stand in awe at

the wonder and glory of the world but their awe is not directed at complexity itself; it is directed at the realization that simple, underlying, fundamental phenomena can have ramifications of grandeur. Scientists burrow beneath the amazing, delightful, and sometimes terrible phenomena of the world and discover that they are the outward show of an inner simplicity.

Modern physical science began with Galileo's carefully considered experiments and Newton's extraordinary discovery that observed phenomena could be mapped onto mathematics. Unfortunately, Newton's success, great as it was, became deeply ingrained in the hearts and minds of physicists and they came to think that anything that conflicted with it was somehow paradoxical. In particular, when quantum mechanics was formulated about 100 years ago its failure to map perfectly onto the expectations of classical physics led to the view that somehow it was incomplete.

“One ghost, one virgin birth, one molecule of wine from one molecule of water, one levitation, one inexplicable phenomenon, is enough to destroy the whole edifice of modern science.”

The central purpose of science is to identify fragments of the world and to subject those fragments to close and careful scrutiny. Such scrutiny must take place in as public a way as possible because truth must transcend prejudice. This is one of science's most glorious gifts to the human condition. Although scientists strip off the wings the better to inspect the butterfly in a process we call reductionism it's an essential part of the task of science to patch together the fragments that have been elucidated and attempt to reassemble the whole. Reductionism has too often been misinterpreted and called naïve. How can the butterfly be appreciated, say its critics, in terms of its individual atoms? But pure dissection is not the aim of a scientific reductionist. Scientists are in fact better regarded as assemblists. It's essential to understand first the function of each

component. The holistic understanding must be built on firm foundations. It may be that assembling is much more difficult than discovering the underlying simplicities themselves.

“There’s no point wasting time on meaningless great questions however important they might seem to some people.”

One of the sources of confidence in science as a mode of understanding is its consistency. There is no geological fault line that has emerged in one branch of science when placed alongside another branch. We are increasingly seeing that concepts which has been developed in one region of science are needed to elucidate another, seemingly remote, part of science. The best example is the current need for cosmologists to study elementary particle physics to account for the properties of the entire universe. The rivers of the very great and the very small do not clash when they meet but prove mutually supportive. This consistency is a sign that modern science must be close to the bedrock of truth. It also provides a sound basis for disbelief in miracles of all kinds. Science is such a mutually dependent body of ideas that a bomb going off anywhere among its concepts would inescapably destroy the entire edifice. One ghost, virgin birth, one Gadarene swine, one molecule of wine from one molecule of water, one levitation, one inexplicable phenomenon, is enough to destroy the whole of modern science.

Can science illuminate everything? The so-called great questions of being are the very stuff of religion. I’d like to argue that science is capable of answering all the great questions of being. We have to be careful though to distinguish real questions from inventions that lead nowhere. There’s no point in wasting time on meaningless great questions, however important they might seem to some people. Such questions occupy the religious and because they have no answers they result in increased admiration for the inscrutability and unknowability of the mind of God. Such questions result from people’s anxiety about their own annihilation. Is there a hell, is

there a heaven, is there a God, is there a purpose? These are not deep questions about the nature of the universe. They are windows onto individual minds, not serious questions about physical reality. Such questions might worry an individual a lot but they are not profound questions. They are general worries stimulated by the surrounding culture. A truly great question is where it all came from. What was the nature of the events that took place at the inception of the universe? Scientists have to admit that we cannot yet explain how the universe came into existence. The religious can of course – it was made by God. But this is not really an answer. It’s an admission of defeat. It seems to be a simple answer but it’s really a slogan that points to an unknown entity of extraordinary complexity and a monumental act of unspecified fabrication of colossal proportions. In short, it’s a sneaky lie that looks positive but is in fact empty. Scientists cannot do much better at the moment but they can at least avoid the misrepresentation of their ignorance. They are beavering away and can trace the history of the universe to within fractions of a second after its inception. It’s a monument to the awesome power of the human intellect that we can trace the story back so far. There is no reason to think that we need give up at this stage.

“I believe that science will have failed unless it can show us how the universe came into being from absolutely nothing.”

Scientists are not without speculative thoughts about what actually went on at the event we call the creation. You might object that my belief that science will come up with an explanation of the intervention-free, spontaneous origin of the universe is just a matter of faith. I would agree. However, I see no sign that science has ever encountered a barrier to progress and I base my view of its competence on its extraordinary success so far. Compare the progress that has been made by science over this question over the last 100 years with the complete lack of progress that has been made by religion over 10,000 years.



The answer that science will find will be publicly testable whereas the religious answer will be comprehensible only when you are dead. I prefer knowledge this side of the grave and I prefer an attitude that respects not scorns our collective human intellect.

I believe that science will have failed unless it can show us how the universe came into being from absolutely nothing. Not even empty space-time. If it finds that it came from a tiny seed the size of a proton then science will have been defeated. The only acceptable version of cosmogenesis must in my view involve an initial void. No space, no time. All the fundamental forces and particles must emerge without intervention because intervention is death to science.

■ Peter Atkins is an emeritus professor of physical chemistry at the University of Oxford and a fellow of Lincoln College. He is the author of over 70 books, which include university-level textbooks and books on science for the general reader, including *On Being: A scientist's exploration of the great questions of existence* (2011) and *Conjuring the Universe: The Origins of the Laws of Nature* (2018).

Dorset Humanists Schools Team speaks to 350 Cub Scouts

Cathy Silman and David Warden were invited to speak to 350 cubs about Humanism at the All Bournemouth District Cub Scouts Annual Town Camp at Butcher's Coppice, Kinson. They compared the Christian and Humanist Cub Scout promises, spoke about Darwin's voyage on the Beagle, and explained how humanists aim to live a good life and make a difference in today's world.

David Warden and Ronnie Barr, Young Humanists Ambassador for Dorset, gave an assembly for 180 pupils at Parkstone Grammar School on Humanism and Culture. David also gave an assembly to 90 children at Child Okeford School and two joint Humanism/Christianity lessons at Parkstone Grammar.



Sally Hawksworth at Wimborne Minster Folk Festival. Sally was not representing Humanism on this occasion but we greatly admired her splendid costume!

Dorset Humanists at Wimborne Minster Folk Festival

Dorset Humanists committee and volunteers erected our 'Humanist Tent' at Wimborne Minster Folk Festival. This is the first time we have been back to the festival for a number of years. We had a steady stream of visitors and we were congratulated on providing an alternative to the strong church presence.



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Aaron Darkwood

In last month's *Chairman's View* David Warden wrote this: 'People are unlikely to be attracted to a group which seems to exist for the purposes of moral improvement... They are more likely to be attracted to a group which offers support, friendship, wisdom, learning, and discussion about how to live flourishing lives in these stressful times'. I agree with the second part of this quotation but I see nothing at all wrong in promoting 'moral improvement' as an aim or a stated outcome from membership. After all, each of David's successful 'Life School' courses were based upon this. There is a vast array of self-help books, psychology courses, YouTube videos and more that are very popular with the sole purpose of improving us as people. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid the ultimate goal is self-actualization. Standing at the top of the pyramid without your 'moral improvement badge' would mean you haven't yet reached your destination.

I think Humanism is all about moral improvement. Some people arrive with that pre-installed, others perhaps absorb it via osmosis from attending talks, doing courses or just speaking to people with ethical viewpoints. Equality, fairness, understanding and compassion are not in every individual in society. We know people work better when these values exist. Although I wouldn't state 'joining us will lead to moral improvement' I certainly wouldn't shy away from having that in the text as members 'grow' from the learning opportunities that Humanist groups provide.



Humanists International, the worldwide membership body for humanist and secular groups, has launched the **Protect Humanists at Risk** crowd-funding campaign for 2019. Humanists International are contacted all the time by humanists facing prejudice or even threats to their life and liberty from their own families; humanists who want to speak out but fear reprisal; and those who have spoken out and now face death threats from extremists or prosecution as "blasphemers".

The campaign launched on 21 June 2019, to coincide with World Humanist Day.

Chief Executive of Humanists International, Gary McLelland, writes:

"The appeal to Protect Humanists at Risk raises money for some of the most important parts of our work. In particular it supports our work with individuals who get in touch with us almost every day needing advice or support, in some cases needing urgent security or help with relocation. Our team is continually advocating on behalf of persecuted humanists, atheists and freethinkers, supporting asylum claims where necessary, and sometimes giving emergency grant-funding to people at immediate risk. I urge humanists wherever you are around the world to support this work if you can by donating and sharing the campaign for others to see."

Last year the campaign raised just over £20,000.

You can donate at <https://gofundme.com/humanists2019>.





Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

July 2019

Reducing and eliminating carbon dioxide emissions is a challenge for humanity but we do know what needs to be done. Other environmental problems seem more intractable. Most importantly, how can we reduce our impact on the planet and other species when human population is likely to peak at ten billion by 2050 and many of those billions are gradually climbing the prosperity ladder? I can think of four possible solutions:

1. Reduce world population
2. Stop the world's billions of people moving up the prosperity ladder
3. Exercise restraint – consume less, reduce travel, go vegan, stop using plastic
4. Dematerialise our lifestyles ('stuff' is increasingly streamed, virtualised, and combined into products like smartphones)

Solutions 1 and 2 can be eliminated immediately. Short of establishing an authoritarian world government, neither of these things are going to happen. In any case, we know that increasing wealth and particularly education is an effective way of reducing the rate of population growth. As regards number 3, we should all consider ways in which we can exercise restraint and live responsibly. 'Doing our bit' is unlikely to be enough on its own but if the Amazon rainforest could be saved by eating lentils instead of burgers then this simple change in our diet could have a massive impact.

Dematerialising our lifestyles, number 4, is already happening although we will always need some material stuff like furniture and clothes. I'd like to continue this discussion throughout our 2020 programme so please let the committee know what topics you want to learn about and if you know of any good speakers.

I value Aaron's critique of last month's *Chairman's View*. Humanism is about living a good life: maintaining good relationships, living by a code of ethics which includes moral integrity, courtesy, diligence, kindness and so on. But you don't need to join a humanist group in order to live by a code of ethics. All groups, families, communities, schools, organisations, and nations have embedded codes of ethics, otherwise they wouldn't function, just as a game of football cannot be played without rules. This is one of the insights of humanism, that humans don't need morality to be injected from the outside and taught by a caste of priests and popes. But humanism can and should be a moral community which pays particular attention to evidence, rational thinking, dialogue, and helping people to live flourishing lives.

