



**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> July at 2.00pm (Please do not turn up at Moordown Community Centre.)**

Join us on Zoom from 1.30pm for friendly meet and greet. Talk starts at 2.00pm.

Meeting ID: 844 6472 6963 Passcode: 356331 or click the image.



Julian Baggini at Dorset Humanists' 2017 Darwin Day at the BIC. His topic was 'Science without Pedestals'.

## Julian Baggini: What David Hume Can Teach Us about Being Human and Living Well

"Practice doing the right thing in every situation, trivial or important, and you will build the kind of character that tends to act well in all situations." David Hume (1711-1776)

David Hume is one of the most celebrated philosophers of the Enlightenment. Julian Baggini introduces us to an aspect of his philosophy which is rarely explored: his practical wisdom for living a good life. Julian is an independent scholar, philosopher, and writer. His latest book is called *The Great Guide: What David Hume Can Teach Us about Being Human and Living Well* (2021). This is Julian's third visit to Dorset Humanists.

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**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> July at 7.30pm**

Elstead Hotel, 12-14 Knyveton Road, East Cliff, Bournemouth BH1 3QP. Join us in the bar after the talk.



## Bertrand Russell: Philosopher and Philanderer

A talk by David Warden. Bertrand Russell was one of the most famous philosophers and rationalists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. His work in the philosophy of mathematics at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century laid the foundations for computing. He was imprisoned during the First World War for making disparaging comments about the Americans and imprisoned again in his 80s for civil disobedience over nuclear weapons. During the course of his long life he had four wives and many mistresses, some of whom he entertained at Lulworth Cove. David will give us a whistle stop tour of this fascinating life!

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> August at 2.00pm. Please join us for a complimentary cream tea after the talk.** Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW



## The Resurrection: A Critical Examination



A talk by Jonathan MS Pearce. Jonathan has been a regular visitor to Dorset Humanists over the years. He is an untiring writer, blogger, and polemicist against the claims of Christian evangelists. The breadth and depth of Jonathan's scholarship is impressive and his latest book is a decisive rebuttal of the Christian claim that the resurrection of Jesus is 'one of the best attested facts in history'.

Please join us at what we hope will be our inaugural event at Moordown Community Centre after our enforced absence. After the talk, Cathy and helpers will serve a complimentary cream tea in the café.

Jonathan MS Pearce *The Resurrection: A Critical Examination* (2021). Available to order from all bookstores and online



A gathering at the humanist Manavatavadi Institute in Kurukshestra, India, to commemorate the third anniversary of the death of Swami Manavatavadi (known to us as Swamiji – see inset photo). Our contact Sangharsh wrote: 'We feel that the best tribute we can pay is to follow the philosophy and teachings he imparted during his life. He was a great reformer and tried to instil confidence and decent living in the children without religious beliefs'.

Dorset Humanists has had a friendship link with this humanist institute and community school for children since 2003. Since the death of its founder, Swamiji, our link has been less strong but we are pleased to remain in contact. David Warden visited the school in 2004 and 2005 and Swamiji visited Dorset Humanists in 2004 and 2014.

## The Tragedy of Growth

*To protect wellbeing and avoid ecological disaster we must abandon GDP growth and transform our economic system*



PositiveMoney 

# The Wellbeing Economy & The Tragedy of Growth

*Thirty-eight people tuned in to listen to our speakers Lucy Thom and David Moon at our Saturday meeting in June. Lucy, an independent health researcher, mediator and conflict coach, spoke to us about 'the well-being economy' and David, a retired engineer, spoke about Positive Money's 'The Tragedy of Growth' report. They are both active members of Positive Money which is a non-profit financial reform organisation.*

### 'Tragedy of Growth Report' overview by David Warden

I must admit I found aspects of the Positive Money talk difficult to follow and so I'm going to start this report with an overview of the 48-page 'The Tragedy of Growth' report. It's quite technical and I can't do it full justice here. But I will try to cover the main points.

The Report was published in May 2020 and it was written by David Barmes and Fran Boait. David, the lead author, is an economics and psychology graduate and he is currently studying for a master's degree in socio-ecological economics and policy at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. Fran Boait is Executive Director of Positive Money and she has a PhD in Earth Sciences from the University of Cambridge.

The idea of a no-growth economy is not something I have studied or taken seriously until now. A book by Tim Jackson *Prosperity without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* (2011) has been languishing unread on my bookshelf for some years. Jackson's book was based on a study for the Sustainable Development Commission, an advisory body to the UK Government. I have read Kate Raworth's book *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (2017) but the Positive Money authors claim that her 'growth agnosticism' is insufficient.



**David Barmes and Fran Boait wrote the Tragedy of Growth Report**

The idea of a no-growth or steady-state economy is intuitively appealing. We've all heard the argument that you can't have infinite growth on a finite planet. But there are counter-arguments. The most compelling is the belief that billions of the world's people need economic growth to alleviate extreme poverty. Another common argument is that we can enjoy virtually unlimited growth as technology evolves to create a weightless and resource-light economy. But let's leave these arguments aside for now and look at what the Report is saying.

The Report takes aim against the 'growth paradigm' which is usually measured by the ubiquitous GDP indicator (the total value of good and services). It also takes aim against the whole notion of sustainable or clean, green growth. It's against growth full stop.

The proponents of growth claim that growth increases life satisfaction, alleviates ▶

poverty, and helps protect the environment. The Report claims that these are false promises and argues that increasing wellbeing and avoiding environmental disaster requires an end to economic growth. It claims that growth has a minimal, if any, positive impact on life satisfaction. It cites a research article which looked at subjective well-being in China in the period 1990-2010 when the country underwent dramatic economic growth. The 2012 article by [Easterlin](#) et al., published by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, finds that 'There is no evidence of an increase in life satisfaction of the magnitude that might have been expected to result from the fourfold improvement in the level of per capita consumption that has occurred... An initially highly egalitarian distribution of life satisfaction has been replaced by an increasingly unequal one, with decreasing life satisfaction in persons in the bottom third of the income distribution and increasing life satisfaction in those in the top third.' The article acknowledged, however, that other studies had reached different conclusions, including a 2011 study by the Pew Research Center which found a positive correlation between rising incomes and increasing life satisfaction. The Positive Money Report goes on to say that 'Growth does not deliver an increase in life satisfaction because it mostly goes to the world's wealthiest'.

This analysis is confusing. What the research seems to be suggesting is not that growth itself is the problem. The problem is unequal distribution and inequality. If GDP growth is being skimmed off by those who are already wealthy then of course there is going to be zero positive effect on those lower down the income scale. In this case, the problem is not GDP growth per se but inequality. But is growth itself somehow responsible for inequality?

### Economic imperialism

The Positive Money Report is sceptical about the benefit of economic growth even in low-

income countries because, it claims, growth has 'destructive consequences' and 'growth drives economic injustices, borne by the world's poorest'. An interesting claim is that 'Much of the GDP growth that low-income countries have seen in recent decades has been the result of shifts from informal to formal economic activity, rather than a reflection of any increase in the provision of new goods and services to the poor'. It says that 'Promoting this narrative [growth = development] encouraged the incorporation of more cheap labour and natural resources into global production chains, presenting greater profit opportunities for multinational corporations.' The Report describes this as a form of 'economic imperialism' and that even as low and middle-income countries have increased their share of global growth in recent decades, this has largely failed to improve the lived experiences of poor and marginalised communities. It argues that 'Alternative development models, free from the imposition of economic exploitation and based instead on strengthening democratic processes and achieving social and environmental wellbeing, would be a far better choice to alleviate poverty'.

### The smartphone in your pocket

Steven Pinker's book *Enlightenment Now* (2018) claimed that we are witnessing a 'de-materialisation' of the economy which is good for the environment. A host of material objects we used to purchase such as phones, cameras, Walkmans, newspapers, maps, dictionaries and so on are now handily compressed into one object – the smartphone. The Positive Money Report challenges this narrative by citing a comprehensive literature review in 2019 by the European Environmental Bureau which concluded that there is "no empirical evidence supporting the existence of a decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures on anywhere near the scale needed to deal with environmental breakdown". ▶

## Financialisation

A key concept in the Report is ‘financialisation’. This is quite a complicated concept, but essentially it means ‘making money from money’ rather than investing to develop the real economy. We’re familiar with this systemic problem with banks lending into the housing market to create profitable asset bubbles. When the bubbles burst, bankers hold on to their gains whilst the state picks up the tab for the financial devastation caused. The 1945-1975 period was an era of financial responsibility and high economic growth whereas the post-1980 period has seen financial deregulation and endemic financial instability. Many economists have called for a return to the high-growth, financially-regulated period but the Positive Money authors do not want this because they are against economic growth in principle. They argue that we need to combine financial stability with low or even negative growth.

## The problem with capitalism

Interest-bearing debt is a foundational element of capitalism and the authors argue that it has ‘deeply-embedded growth imperatives’. In simple terms, the economy has to keep growing in order to keep paying the interest on debt. When the music stops, the system crashes. Positive Money wants to reform the financial system so as to reduce our dependence on interest-bearing debt. I don’t fully understand all of its proposals but I will mention a few:

- Monetary financing – the government creates money instead of borrowing
- [Central Bank currency](#) – everyone has an account at the Bank of England instead of commercial banks, plus local currencies
- A universal basic income to provide an income floor for everyone
- An ecosystem of community-level, public banks to invest in the real economy
- Reformed tax system – more tax on wealth, land etc
- Debt jubilees (central bank issues money to households to pay off debt)

## A wellbeing dashboard

Another key concept in the Report is the replacement of GDP with a dashboard of well-being/ill-being indicators such as undernourishment, suicide deaths, life expectancy, greenhouse gas emissions, years of tertiary education. Many different models have already been developed such as the New Zealand Living Standards Framework dashboard which includes 43 indicators across 12 wellbeing domains. The Report claims that ‘Moving away from GDP toward a dashboard of social and environmental wellbeing indicators would significantly reshape economic policy goals.’

## Conclusion

200 years ago most people lived in abject poverty. Today, we are on the threshold of ending extreme poverty worldwide. For those reasons, I believe we shouldn’t demonise economic growth. But I agree that we need a ‘balanced scorecard’ approach to measurement and a reformed money system.

*The following sections briefly summarise the presentations by Lucy Thom and David Moon...*



**Lucy Thom**

Lucy spoke about what we mean by ‘wellbeing’ and she quoted from the 2009 report by the French government’s *Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress* by Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi: “The time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people’s wellbeing”. She also mentioned a recent book ▶

*Wellbeing Economics: The Capabilities Approach to Prosperity* (2018) by Professor Paul Dalziel (New Zealand), Professor Caroline Saunders (New Zealand), and Assistant Professor Joe Saunders (Durham, UK) but felt there is a hesitation to challenge the fundamental systems which underpin orthodox economics. Kate Raworth in *Doughnut Economics* (2018) doesn't precisely refer to wellbeing but the wellbeing of the planet as well as people is very much implicit in her work.

Fundamental needs are not being met. In January 2020, 4.3 million children in the UK were categorised as living beneath the breadline or poverty line even though three-quarters of those children were living in a household with at least one working adult. And even people with ample material resources are experiencing huge amounts of stress which is a major contributor to the six leading causes of death. In the UK, 828,000 workers are suffering from some form of work-related stress, depression or anxiety (Heath and Safety Executive Labour Force Survey 2019/20)



**David Moon**

David Moon said he found himself slightly uncomfortable with the title of Positive Money's Report *The Tragedy of Growth*. If you lived in Malawi for example, you might think that a bit of growth would not be a bad thing. He called it instead the 'Tyranny of Growth' because of its focus on GDP. David has been reading Robert Skidelsky's biography of John Maynard Keynes who believed that productivity improvements would lead to a future of less work and mass leisure for everyone. Why was his forecast wrong? Broadly speaking, David suggested

that it is our obsession with GDP and the valuation of everything in terms of price and money that is at the root of the problem, instead of valuing what really matters. He explained some of the technical details of GDP and reviewed key recommendations from the Report.

Referring to Modern Monetary Theory, he said that the only real constraints on human progress are resources, human labour and ingenuity – not money. We have it in our power to realise Keynes's vision of a life of much greater creative leisure for everyone. David also recommended a much greater focus on localism and local involvement instead of centralised power.

### Further reading recommended by David Moon

*The Tragedy of Growth Report* is [here](#)

*The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy* (2019) Mariana Mazzucato

*Rentier Capitalism: Who Owns the Economy, and Who Pays for It?* (2020) Brett Christophers

*The Meritocracy Trap* (2020) Daniel Markovits

*What We Owe Each Other: A New Social Contract* (2021) Minouche Shafik

*The Case For People's Quantitative Easing* (2019) Frances Coppola

*The Case for a Job Guarantee* (2020) Pavlina R. Tcherneva

*The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (1972)

### Video links

[The Tragedy of Growth](#) – Dorset Humanists full talk by Lucy Thom and David Moon

[The Tragedy of Growth Report Launch](#) With contributions from Caroline Lucas MP, Clive Lewis MP, Lord Deben (John Selwyn Gummer) and Professor Guy Standing.



Dorset Humanists' walks have resumed! Our Tyneham Ranges walk on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June was physically challenging but we stopped for regular breaks to hydrate and take in the spectacular views. With the hot sun beating down and boats gliding lazily across the glittering blue sea we imagined we were somewhere in the Aegean.

# Tyneham Walk

*By Bronwen Thompson (aka Julie Andrews)*

It was a gorgeous sunny June Sunday with blue skies, brilliant sunshine and “The Magnificent Seven” who met at Tyneham Village car park ready and raring to go on Aaron’s planned walk for the day. Although many of the walkers who usually participate in the Sunday walks were unable, for one reason or another, to join us, the enthusiastic team of seven were up for the challenge of the day.

Being a small group we were all up for doing the longer walk on offer rather than trying to split the group into two. We had no idea what the longer and more challenging walk involved and upon reflection it was probably best we didn’t know beforehand. Besides the great company and brilliant weather, the highlight of the walk just had to be the most stunning scenery. With the sun glistening on the beautiful crystal blue sea, secluded coves and beaches, little yachts bobbing on the calm sea, it was more of a scene from some Mediterranean destination, like the Amalfi coast, rather than on our doorstep Dorset magnificence.

A gentle breeze helped us on our way and we found ourselves climbing up some very steep inclines; miraculously we didn’t puff and pant

too much but certainly welcomed the ‘downward’ parts of the walk. Aaron was, as usual, the perfect group leader in his ‘Mr Motivator’ white outfit and made sure we had plenty of stop offs to admire the scenery and drink plenty of water. Climbing up one particularly steep hill, which was like something out of the TV series ‘SAS Who Dares’ and was testing to say the least, inspired David and me to embrace the moment and transport ourselves to the Austrian Alps with me giving a rendition of ‘The Hills Are Alive With The Sound of Music’ and David giving a sterling performance of ‘Climb Ev’ry Mountain’. The theatrical interlude lifted our spirits and gave us all the will to carry on.

Parts of the walk took us very close to the MOD firing ranges, with rusting tanks, huge number boards and signs saying keep out. Sadly there were no handsome soldiers running about or guns being fired which would have added another dramatic interlude to the day.

By the time we got to the last rather steep incline we were certainly hoping (and ‘praying’ in a Humanist way) that this was the last one of the day, which fortunately it was and the village of Tyneham and the car park were getting ever closer. As we made our way down into the deserted village we were greeted by the first shade of the walk by ▶



beautiful lush green trees and plants giving us a welcome break from the glorious sunshine. We popped into the historic school room and took our places ready for David to teach the lesson of the day. It was lovely to see how the school would have looked and the sort of things that were taught in schools back in the 1940s. We finally arrived back in the car park, happy to see our vehicles again. It really was a stunning walk and well worth the physical effort. As I looked on the app on my phone I was happy to announce to everyone that we had achieved 16,201 steps over a distance of 8.8km and our average walking speed was 4.5 kph. The app also calculates how many floors you've climbed and we had achieved the equivalent of 119 floors! I think we deserved Brownie points for this sterling effort.

I can't end my little piece without saying a HUGE thank you to both Aaron and Dan for organising the walk, making sure we were all safe with First Aid boxes to hand if needed and all the Health & Safety boxes ticked. It truly was a fabulous way to spend a glorious sunny Sunday, with great walking companions, spectacular scenery, lots of singing and laughter. Thank you to all my fellow walkers of the day for your wonderful company and companionship. Here's to the next instalment of the Dorset Humanists Hikers Guide to Dorset.

# Morality Explained

## The new science of right and wrong

At our June evening meeting, we watched a recording of Oliver Scott Curry's talk on the science of morality which he delivered earlier this year as the Darwin Day lecture for Humanists UK. Dr Curry is a Research Affiliate at the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford. He joined us for a live Q&A session on Zoom.

Dr Curry explained that seven moral values based on cooperation have been found in the scientific literature. They are:

1. Kinship (love your family, recognise a special obligation to kin, duty of care to children and elderly)
2. Mutualism (help your group, promote unity, solidarity, group loyalty and conformity)
3. Reciprocity (return favours, show gratitude, forgive others, punish cheats)
4. Heroism (be brave, generous, and magnanimous towards people lower down in the pecking order)
5. Deference (respect and obey your superiors)
6. Fairness (promote equity, compromise)
7. Possession (respect property rights, do not steal)

There is evidence for a 'general mechanism' or a set of genes that influences all of these moral judgements. There is also evidence for distinct sets of genes influencing each type of morality. We don't currently know the names of the genes or exactly where they are located, but it's only a matter of time until we find out. Experiments with babies strongly suggest that these cooperative instincts are innate, and an extensive review of accounts of ethics from across the world demonstrate that they are universal. So if you want to be moral, *cooperate*.

The video is [here](#).

# View from the Chair

David Warden  
Chairman of Dorset Humanists



What's the relationship between Humanism and liberalism? It depends what you mean by liberalism. I can think of at least four types. Intellectual and scientific liberalism is the gold standard. It refers to freedom of thought and expression. This kind of liberalism provides one of the foundations of the modern world including science. It's based on the principle of fallibilism (no beliefs are absolutely certain or final). This principle contrasts with Plato's idea that truth is the property of wise philosophers and that the public must be protected from error. Humanists should choose Popper over Plato. Karl Popper, a modern philosopher of science, was a champion of the 'open society' whereas Plato, in his work *The Republic*, is the founding father of totalitarianism. A second form of liberalism is social and moral. A liberal in this sense opposes strict controls on human sexuality and social codes of dress, gender roles and so forth. A social and moral liberal is likely to be pro choice rather than pro life in the abortion debate. Humanists are likely to be liberal in this sense as they perceive that moral and sexual conservatism comes from religion. A third form of liberalism is economic. It is the belief that government should not interfere with the workings of the economy. Left-leaning humanists who believe in a constructive role for government are less likely to be liberal in this sense. A fourth type of liberalism may be called globalist or utopian. It is the belief that all forms of constraint imposed by group loyalty and solidarity are chauvinistic and oppressive. A liberal in this sense dislikes the nation state and any positive readings of history, drenched as it is with imperialism and conquest, and looks forward to a borderless, rationally-managed future free from the democratic influence of the ignorant masses. There is certainly a strong temptation for humanists to be liberals in this sense, given our strong belief in reason and rationality. Bertrand Russell, for example, was a proponent of the idea of world government. The problem with this form of liberalism, however, is the hubristic assumption that our complex world can be rationally and benignly managed by technical experts. It tries to detach people from traditions and group identities and it invokes Margaret Thatcher's hyper-individualistic philosophy: 'There's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families.'

The first type of liberalism (intellectual) should always be defended by humanists against those who want to shut down debate. The second type of liberalism (social and moral) will generally be supported by humanists although there is room for debate about particular moral issues such as abortion. The third type of liberalism (economic) has been tested empirically. It looks very much as though unfettered economic liberalism is unstable and destructive and we need to find a better alternative. The fourth type of liberalism (globalist or utopian) goes against the grain of human nature (group identity, loyalty, and solidarity) and it cedes too much power to global elites. Humanists should, I believe, be wary of it.