



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

Dorset Humanists

June 2014

A PARTNER OF THE
BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

■ **Saturday 14th June 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW

Buddhism and Humanism

A talk by Sally Bannister and Kelsang
Lekchog (Claire Bannister)

Claire and Sally Bannister were raised in a secular family by atheist-humanist activist parents, yet independently of each other they developed an interest in Buddhism, with Claire eventually being ordained as a Buddhist nun. In this presentation Claire and Sally will explain various aspects of Buddhist teachings and beliefs, and explore whether they can be compatible with a Humanist worldview, despite the many obvious differences. Join us for an enlightening introduction to Buddhism and discover whether any of its philosophy may



have relevance for secular Humanists.

■ **Wednesday 25th June 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, 4 Grove Road
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

The Case for Agnosticism

A talk by Kate Holden. The “God Question” is perhaps the most important question there is, as not only does it have enormous implications for our understanding of our existence, our morality and our purpose, but billions of people live their lives according to ancient religious texts. Theists and atheists often regard agnostics as ‘undecideds’ who’ve failed to properly consider the evidence, but Kate Holden has extensively examined atheist and theist positions and believes there are good grounds for rejecting both. She will be exploring both philosophical and evidential perspectives including the nature of God, the apparent conflict of science and religion, the nature of truth, and the difficulty of proving God’s existence.

■ **Every first Thursday of the month**
Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ

Dorset Humanists Social evening



Our next social evening will be at Moon in the Square on Thursday 3rd July. Join us for an interesting chat over a drink or two and get to know other like-minded people. See you there!

☎ Dean 07713 858773

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

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■ **Saturday 12th July 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW

Organised Religion: The Biggest Global Threat to Human Rights?



Peter Tatchell

Described as 'a national hero' by the Sunday Times, and 'a modern-day prophet' by former bishop Richard Holloway, Peter Tatchell has been campaigning for

human rights, democracy, LGBT freedom and global justice for nearly half a century. He believes that 'all human beings everywhere have human rights and that no political system or faith should be allowed to undermine them'. Organised religion almost invariably promotes sexist and homophobic discrimination in law, and religious fundamentalism seeks to thwart equality and human rights around the world. Our own Anglican, Catholic and Muslim leaders tried to block same-sex marriage, and most faiths exclude women from senior leadership roles, with some also seeking to deny them contraception, abortion and fertility treatment. While acknowledging some religious groups' positive contributions to social justice, Peter will be presenting the case that organised religion is currently 'the greatest global threat to human rights; especially to the human rights of women and gay people'. He will also highlight the sectarian violence many religions have caused by provoking religious hatred and persecuting minority faiths in the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Pakistan, Burma, Somalia, and previously in Northern Ireland. Join us for a thought-provoking examination of the religious threat to human rights by respected veteran campaigner Peter Tatchell.

■ **Thursday 17th July 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, 4 Grove Road
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

Science and Pseudoscience

**A discussion with science journalist
Peter Hadfield**

In these times of almost unlimited information and disinformation, media hype, and chequebook journalism, how do reasonably intelligent people ensure we are accurately informed about science? What sources are trustworthy and what are the relative merits of newspapers, books, websites, scientific journals and government committees? With a particular focus on the topical issue of climate change, science journalist Peter Hadfield and Chair of Dorset Humanists David Warden will be discussing how credible information is gathered, how to spot bogus information, and how to debunk mythmakers who are constantly telling us the experts have got it all wrong. Peter regularly debunks pseudoscience and conspiracy theories on his YouTube channel, Potholer54, which now has approaching 90,000 subscribers.

■ **Wednesday 23rd July 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, 4 Grove Road
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

Life on Mars then and now

James Fradgley FRAS. Serious searches for evidence of life on Mars began in the 19th century and for many years it was believed there were canals on the planet's surface. Astronomer Percival Lowell, even suggested they were built by an intelligent civilisation, but famed British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace severely criticised his claims and concluded that complex life on the planet was impossible. However, the search for life on Mars is far from over and continues today via astronomical observation and exploratory space missions. Distinguished astronomer James Fradgley will recount the fascinating history of the search for life on our planetary neighbour, and explain our current knowledge of, and future plans to increase our understanding of this most intriguing red planet.

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Other local events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 11th June 7.30pm**
Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub at The Brunswick, Charminster, BH8 8PX
Free entry

Smashing Physics

News from the Energy Frontier

Professor Jonathan Butterworth

The discovery of the Higgs boson made headlines around the world. Two scientists, Peter Higgs and François Englert, whose theories predicted its existence, shared a Nobel Prize. The discovery was the culmination of the largest experiment ever run, the ATLAS and CMS experiments at CERN's Large Hadron Collider. But what really is a Higgs boson and what does it do? How was it found? And what will the LHC do next? Professor Jon Butterworth (University College London), a leading member of the ATLAS experiment at CERN, will help us understand the mysterious world of subatomic particles and why it matters. He has a new book out which will be available to purchase during the event, entitled 'Smashing Physics - Inside the World's Biggest Experiment', an inside account of the CERN experiments and why they are important to us.

Jon has kindly offered to do the event absolutely free of charge, so we'll be offering free entry to all guests at this event, but any donations towards our promotional and incidental expenses will be gratefully received.

🌐 bournemouth.skepticsinthepub.org
☎ Chris 01425 673477

■ **Thursday 26th June 7.30pm**
West Dorset Humanists at the Wessex Royale Hotel, 32 High Street, Dorchester
Entry £3.00

Thomas Hardy and the Poetry of Unbelief

A popular and highly engaging talk by John Hubbard. John teaches English at Bournemouth School for Girls.

■ **Sunday 15th June 7.30pm**
Café Philo at The Grasshopper,
Bournemouth Road, Parkstone, Poole,
BH14 9HT

Is happiness a choice?

Most people would probably prefer to be happy rather than unhappy. However, alongside great happiness we all see much sadness in the world. What do we understand by happiness in the first place? Notwithstanding depression or other biological factors, can we choose to be happy? Psychological research suggests that we all have a happiness "set-point" that determines our well-being, and that we can learn to be happy. Does free will allow us to choose our level of happiness? Is it a question of attitude, or are some people simply happier by nature than others?

<http://www.meetup.com/Cafe-Philo-Bournemouth/events/184316692/>

■ **Sunday 29th June 7.30pm**
Café Philo at The Richmond, 153
Charminster Road, Bournemouth

How can we tell right from wrong?

One of the biggest, most profound philosophical conundrums for this conversation! What do we understand by the concepts of right and wrong? Is there any such thing as objective morality? People of faith may argue in the affirmative, but how should non-believers answer? Is a subjective, culture-based, morality a more viable option? Why are some acts and behaviours (such as rape) almost universally seen as wrong while others are open to much debate? Who are the best people to decide what's right and wrong, and how should we enforce the rules?

<http://www.meetup.com/Cafe-Philo-Bournemouth/events/186944102/>

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Dorset Humanists at Bishop Wordsworth's School

Report by Terry Milton

Terry represented the Dorset Humanists Schools Education Project at Bishop Wordsworth's Multibelief Day on 21st May to explore prejudice, discrimination, ethics and Humanism with Year 10 pupils

The sessions went well and the pupils actively participated with often quite probing questions on the subject of Humanism. During the 75-minute lessons I gave a general definition and a background history of the subject and then focused on some specific areas, in particular on morality. In keeping with the Multi-faith Day themes of prejudice and discrimination I pointed out how tolerance is a key element in humanist philosophy, a quality that is not necessarily found in other belief systems. I quoted the writer Meera Nanda who described rural villages in her native India as "... a smorgasbord of back-to-back religious communities, each with a chip on their shoulder."

As one might expect most of the pupils (average age 15 years) don't have a great deal of interest in religion, being more occupied with their social life, their studies, sport and music. But more than once in the four classes I talked to I was asked what humanists had as their focal or meeting point "... the way religions have their churches and mosques." I mentioned our regional humanist societies and the weekly talks we present but that seemed to fall short of what they would like to have heard.

Then there was the question (twice) of " If there are so many humanists how come we haven't heard of it (humanism)?" It would be nice to refer, for example, to Humanist Charity Shops like those of the Salvation Army and to other practical charity work that humanists do in the wider community. In fact rents for empty high street shops are low these days and running charity shops would not only accord with humanist principles but give our movement the exposure it has been lacking. It would also provide an outlet for members in the area of charitable work!

Britain: A Christian Nation?

Dorset Humanists in discussion with the Bishop of Sherborne and a former Mayor of Poole

On Friday 6th June, David Warden spoke at a lively event organised by Reverend Paul Bradbury, Pioneer Minister for Central Poole (Poole Missional Communities). The aim of the event, at the Customs House in Poole, was to give space for people to listen to varying views on this live topic, to have a chance to ask questions of the speakers and to discuss the issue themselves. The two other speakers were the Rt Reverend Graham Kings, Bishop of Sherborne and Councillor Philip Eades, former Mayor of Poole and Parliamentary candidate for the Liberal Democrats. Each speaker had five minutes to present their opinions on the subject, followed by 20 minutes of questions from the floor and the discussions around tables. At the end of the evening, each speaker gave a two minute summary, drawing on what they had heard from each other. See *Chairman's View* for David's speech.

Human Trafficking and Slavery in the UK

'£6 to buy a child from the Haitian disaster... child slaves can be put to work from 6am until 11pm in places close to home like Southampton and Bath.'

Dr Mel Semple gave us a grim but fascinating insight into human trafficking and slavery at our evening meeting in May. She told us there are 30 million victims globally and that 136 nationalities are being trafficked. 113 countries have enacted legislation against this trade in humans yet they seem impotent to halt its growth. Mel indicated that the trade is now more profitable than the global drugs trade. It creates an 'invisible labour market' beyond the reach of legal protection.

Mel framed the topic in terms of universal human rights - we are 'inalienably free'. No

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one grants us freedom - freedom is our birthright. It has nothing to do with politics or ideology. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights prohibits slavery but *it isn't working*. Mel asked why there has been a reluctance of states to offer protection. She suggested it is bound up with the globalised economy, deregulation and a high demand for cheap labour. Someone has to do the cheap jobs and this 'opens the door'. There are huge rewards for traffickers. Sex trafficking alone is worth \$40 billion.

Mel also revealed that some people freely consent to be smuggled, believing that they are only being transported, but on arrival at their destination country they may discover that their passport has been taken. This creates huge problems for border authorities in distinguishing genuine from bogus cases. The majority of victims are women and children often as young as seven or eight. Child slaves can be put to work from 6am until 11pm in places close to home like Southampton and Bath.

In many places immigration officials and police turn a blind eye and accept bribes. It is a hugely lucrative business. Mel said that what we need to do is shake states up to recognise the link between corruption and trafficking.

Mel mentioned the work of Professor Liz Kelly, Director of the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University. Professor Kelly has written about trafficking in women for sexual exploitation in the UK and she has just completed a project looking at trafficking of persons for both labour and sexual exploitation in Central Asia.

<http://www.antislavery.org>

Tolpuddle Festival

We have booked a stall for Dorset Humanists at the Tolpuddle Festival for Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 July.

Come and support us! <http://goo.gl/asRpA>

Resurrection debate

Ninety people packed Moordown Centre for our lively debate with lecturers from Moorlands College of Christian Theology. Dean Warden and Dean Robertson spoke against the motion and Chris Sinkinson and Seidel Boanerges in favour. Chris is a pastor and lecturer in Old Testament and Apologetics. Seidel is an associate minister at Rosebery Park Baptist Church. Results:

	Did rise	Did not rise	Undecided
Before	24	44	4
After	23	46	2

■ The debate is now live on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhrERY7WZUI>

For a transcript of the DH speeches email David Warden.



Letters & Emails

Write to Dorset Humanists, 58a R L Stevenson Avenue Bournemouth BH4 8EG or email chairman @dorsethumanists.co.uk

From Lewis Wedgwood about our debate on the resurrection of Jesus

Once again, it was really interesting to watch on Saturday. It was an eye-opener to hear the gospels being put in their literary context, so thank you very much for that. I look forward to seeing you at another event soon - I'm particularly looking forward to the Buddhism talk we've got coming up. Before coming along on Saturday, I was really looking forward to seeing all the DH people, not just because of the content of the things discussed by them, but because of the warm welcome you can always expect to get from the people there. It's really the most pleasant company to be in. So thanks for leading DH, and giving us all somewhere like this, which connects us with a really upliftingly friendly crowd. Much appreciated.

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Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
June 2014



This is the text of my speech at the Customs House in Poole, in debate with the Bishop of Sherborne and a former Mayor of Poole on the topic of "Britain: A Christian Country?":

The Prime Minister David Cameron recently described Britain as a 'Christian country'. This was immediately attacked by many of my fellow atheists and humanists as divisive and sectarian. The Archbishop of Canterbury defended Mr Cameron saying "It is a historical fact (perhaps unwelcome to some, but true) that our main systems of ethics, the way we do law and justice, the values of society, how we decide what is fair, the protection of the poor, and most of the way we look at society... All have been shaped by and founded on Christianity." He said the criticism of Mr Cameron was "baffling". Well let me try and un-baffle the Archbishop.

If I were to describe Britain as a white country I hope that all of you would find this outrageous and offensive. Yet it's true that Britain, historically, has been white, and the majority of Britons today are white and so on. Similarly, if I were to describe Britain as a heterosexual country some of you, I hope the majority, would also find this offensive. Yet it's true that the majority of Britons are heterosexual and always have been. Now the plain facts of the matter are this. In terms of ethnicity and colour, Britain is a diverse country. We have embraced diversity, perhaps less visibly in Dorset, but our great cities are now melting pots of ethnic diversity and this has undoubtedly invigorated our cultural and economic life. In a similar way, the majority of people in Britain now accept that being gay or bisexual is part of the spectrum of normality.

So my contention is this: if it's wrong and anachronistic to describe Britain as a white country or a heterosexual country why would anyone think it right and acceptable to describe Britain as a Christian country? It's clearly obvious that Britain is now a diverse country in terms of religious and philosophical beliefs. And so the correct definition of Britain, when it comes to religion and belief, is simply to acknowledge that diversity.

I also want to challenge some of the claims made by the Archbishop of Canterbury. He said that "our main systems of ethics, the way we do law and justice, the values of society, how we decide what is fair" and so on "have been shaped by and founded on Christianity". It's simply wrong and inaccurate to make such exclusive claims for one tradition. Many of the values we live by today were shaped by the humanist tradition. Traditional Christian doctrine holds that non-Christians will be destroyed by God. This is a totalitarian doctrine which we have utterly repudiated in this country. Traditional Christian doctrine holds that gay people will be destroyed by God. It was David Cameron, God bless him, who forced same-sex marriage onto the statute book and he was right to do so. The Church is still dragging its heels on gender equality. Human rights were not invented by the church. Human rights and human liberty were championed by secularists like Tom Paine and John Stuart Mill and won in the teeth of opposition from the Church. So my contention is this. Britain is a diverse country and it is simply an affront to common sense and diversity to make exclusive claims in respect of one tradition. *David Warden*

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