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# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

## ■ Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

### The God Confusion



Dr Gary Cox. In this presentation philosopher Gary Cox will argue that the only credible philosophical position with regard to belief in God is agnosticism. He will explore conceptions of

God in an entertaining yet objective manner, and examine the strengths and weaknesses of the standard arguments for God's existence.

Gary Cox is a philosopher and the author of several books on Sartre, existentialism and general philosophy including '*The God Confusion: Why Nobody Knows the Answer to the Ultimate Question*'. He is an honorary research fellow of the University of Birmingham.

## ■ Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June 3.50-4.30pm

### Part Two Meeting

Do join us after the break for our Part Two meeting. This month David Warden will share a presentation on Humanism which has been developed to support our teaching in schools. This will be of particular interest to those interested in helping with our schools project, or presenting Humanism to other audiences. Everyone is welcome to come along and give feedback.

## ■ Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 7.30pm

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

### Ten Ways the Universe Tries to Kill You



Astronomer Steve Tonkin. As we go about our daily lives, it is easy to forget we are passengers on a small planet travelling at nearly 70,000 miles per hour

around a solar system that orbits the Milky Way at equally breathtaking speeds. We often hear from apologists that our universe is 'fine-tuned for life', but the vast majority of it is extremely hostile, with terrifying phenomena that could wipe out humanity in the blink of an eye if they ever come close enough. From gamma-ray bursts to asteroid impacts, and from supernovae to galactic collisions, it seems certain that the universe is out to get us! Steve Tonkin's light-hearted but scientifically robust review of potentially cataclysmic events will help us understand many fundamental cosmological processes and their potential effects on us.

Steve is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and has taught astronomy to adults and children for over 30 years. He has written books and articles on practical astronomy, and has a monthly column in the BBC's *Sky at Night* magazine. He is also a STEM (Science, technology, engineering and maths) ambassador with a special brief for astronomy.

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■ **Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July 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



## Walks

Our popular walks are on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays of each month throughout the summer. Join us on Meetup for further details.

### St Aldhelm's Head and Winspit from Worth Matravers

June 19<sup>th</sup> – 10:15 start from Square and Compass. Optional 5 or 8 miles. The views to the west are amazing, towards Chapman's Pool, Swyre Head and Kimmeridge

### Lulworth Cove

July 3<sup>rd</sup> – 10:15 start from Lulworth Cove car park, main entrance. 3+ miles, coastal walk.



Join us on [Meetup.com](#) for further details.

Meetup is a website we use in conjunction with our main

Dorset Humanists website. It's a kind of online diary which displays all of our upcoming events, sends you reminders, allows you to add photos, see past events and much more.

■ **Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June**

Dorset Humanists at Winton Carnival



## Winton Carnival

As part of our public awareness strategy, Dorset Humanists will this year be returning to the Winton Carnival. We would be delighted to see you!

■ **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July 11am**

Dorset Humanists at Bourne Free. Assemble East Cliff BH1 3AF at 11am.



## Dorset Humanists at the Bourne Free Festival

This year we are inviting all of our members, supporters, and friends to join us in the Bourne Free march. Great strides have been made in LGBT equality in this country in recent years, culminating in the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2014. The situation for LGBT people in many other countries, however, remains dire. In Nigeria, for example, the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act criminalises all forms of same-sex unions. The maximum penalty in the Christian south is 14 years imprisonment whilst the maximum penalty in the Muslim north is death by stoning. You may feel uncomfortable joining an LGBT march but the more we turn out in force the easier it will be! Last year there were about ten of us – both gay and straight. This year it would be good to double or triple that number. Let us know if you're coming and we'll get you a complimentary Dorset Humanists T-Shirt. We will also have a stall in the Lower Gardens after the parade.

■ **Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> July 7.30pm**

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX



## Understanding Islam

In this talk David Warden, Chair of Dorset Humanists, will argue that a Humanist approach to Islam needs a different

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emphasis from our more combative approach to Christianity. This is not about giving privileged treatment to Islamic beliefs but about recognising that there is an overriding need for ordinary Muslims to feel part of British society rather than a marginalized minority. David, who has a degree in theology, will seek to inform and educate about Islam's fascinating history and how extremism has developed since the 1920s. He will highlight moderate voices within Islam and assess the likelihood of reform.

■ **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Animal Journeys - Migration & Navigation

A talk by Emeritus Professor Norman Maclean.

Animal migration is one of the great wonders of the natural world, made all the more interesting by the fact that many mysteries remain about how animals do it. Present understanding suggests that, at least in some cases, the navigation required involves quantum physics. The phenomenon characterises many different species, ranging from mammals to insects, and astonishing journeys of sometimes many thousands of miles. Prepare to be astonished!

Norman is an Emeritus Professor of Genetics at Southampton University, and has written many popular books on nature and genetics. He is also Chair of South Hants Humanists.

### Other events of interest...

■ **14<sup>th</sup> May to 7<sup>th</sup> August**

Poole Museum 4 High St Poole BH15 1BW

## Alfred Russel Wallace

Free exhibition about the naturalist who arrived at the theory of evolution by natural selection independently of Charles Darwin.

More details [here](#)

■ **End of September – midweek date to be arranged**

## Visit Down House – The Home of Charles Darwin



Would you like to visit Charles Darwin's home Down House with a group of happy humanists?! Journey time around 3 hours

with a stop for a pub lunch on the way. Cost around £25. End of September – midweek date to be arranged if enough people show an interest. Look out for the sign-up sheet at our meetings or contact Cathy Silman direct.

 [catherinesilman311@btinternet.com](mailto:catherinesilman311@btinternet.com)

 01202 740550



## David Hunt

We are very sad to announce the death of David Hunt. David was a loyal member of Dorset Humanists for many years and a very generous benefactor of our India Fund. He was unusual in having a foot in both camps – Christian and Humanist. He was widely read and very interested in the 'Sea of Faith' network which values religion as a human creation without supernatural beliefs. He attended a number of their conferences. In his working life he was a nurse. He married and had children whom he visited in Australia. He leaves a close friend Joyce. His funeral is on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2pm at St Clement's Church, Parkstone.

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# Stoicism and Modern Humanism



*Emeritus Professor Christopher Gill spoke to us about Stoicism at our Saturday May meeting. This article is derived from the Stoicism Today website and his talk.*

Stoicism flourished long before Christianity at a time when philosophy, not religion, was seen as the main source of ethical guidance. It was one of the four principal schools of philosophy in ancient Athens, alongside Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Epicureanism. It flourished for around 250 years and was popular among the Romans, attracting admirers as diverse as the statesman Seneca, the ex-slave Epictetus, and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Although the philosophy of Stoicism as a whole is complex, embracing everything from metaphysics to astronomy and grammar, the works of the three great Roman Stoics focus on practical advice and guidance for those trying to achieve wellbeing or happiness. Core ideas include the following:

- Happiness (eudaemonia, flourishing) depends on virtue and an excellent, rational mental state. The four cardinal virtues are wisdom, courage, self-control/moderation, and justice/benevolence. Everyone is capable of acquiring these virtues and you can develop them by developing social relationships.
- External things such as money, success, and fame may or may not benefit you but if you have the virtues you will be happy even if you do not possess the external trappings of success. Pursuing them can in any case undermine happiness.
- Many of our negative emotions such as fear and anger are based on mistaken judgements. If you change the judgements you can change the emotions. (This insight is similar to modern cognitive therapy which holds that mistaken beliefs can give rise to

negative emotions.) Contrary to the popular understanding of the word 'stoical', the Stoic does not repress or deny her negative emotions; she simply doesn't have them in the first place because she has corrected her judgments and therefore eliminated some of her most troublesome emotions.

- The Stoics suggest we ought to live in harmony with nature. We should acknowledge that we are small parts of a larger, organic whole, shaped by larger processes that are ultimately out of our control. There is nothing to be gained from trying to resist these larger processes except anger, frustration, and disappointment. While there are many things in the world that we can change, there are many others we cannot and we need to understand this and accept it.
- The ancient Stoics did have a concept of God but this was not a transcendent person. It was conceived as a force in nature which permeated everything. It was the structure, order, and principle of physics. Theology was thus a branch of physics!

Marcus Aurelius advised: "Be like the headland, on which the waves break constantly, which still stands firm, while the foaming waters are put to rest around it. [Do not say] 'It is my bad luck that this has happened to me'. On the contrary, say, 'It is my good luck that, although this has happened to me, I can bear it without getting upset, neither crushed by the present nor afraid of the future ... Surely what has happened cannot prevent you from being just, high-minded, self-controlled, thoughtful, deliberate, truthful, self-respecting, [and] free..." (*Meditations* 4.49).

## Further reading

- Jules Evans *Philosophy as Life* (2012)
- W. B. Irvine *A Guide to the Good Life: the Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (2009)
- D. Robertson *Stoicism and the Art of Happiness* (2013)

[Stoicism Today website](#)

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## EU Referendum Debate

Around 100 people packed into the Green House Hotel for our exciting EU Referendum Debate. David Warden introduced the evening by stating that the humanist values which should have a bearing on the debate include rationality, democracy, and human flourishing. Are these values better served inside the EU or outside? This report presents some key points from the night.

### Aaron Darkwood (Leave)



- 12.5% of the EU budget (€145bn) is paid by the UK (£11bn net).
- The EU gives money back to charities, projects and wealthy landowners, including £1.2m to the Queen's Sandringham Estate in 2008/9.
- Decisions are made by the European Commission (where we have one vote out of 28), the EU Council where we have one vote out of 28), and the European Parliament (where we have 73 votes out of 751).
- The UK has opposed 72 proposals placed in front of the Council but these have gone on to become law.
- At the World Trade Organisation we have, effectively, one-twenty-eighth of a seat.
- The EU loves to regulate anything and everything including vacuum cleaners and window cleaners.
- 32,000 people (17%) living in Bournemouth are of a non-British background. Despite population growth we have had no new infrastructure.
- EU growth has been flatlining since 2003
- We can continue to co-operate with Europol (as 14 other non-EU states do) and on security and global influence we don't need the EU because we are a

member of NATO, the UN and the G8, G10 and G20.

- We are well-placed to secure a free trade deal with the EU.
- The UK has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe and one of the lowest corporate tax rates which encourages inward investment.

Aaron's slides [here](#) and closing [speech](#)

### Jonathan Pearce (Remain)



- The EU has given us jobs, growth, influence, investment, security, rights, and a better environment. It chimes with far more humanist ideals than the alternative.
- The Leave campaign are neoliberals who want to deregulate our society, our rights and equalities, and our working conditions.
- EU migrants, predominantly young and working age, are net contributors. Indeed, there are many claims that the NHS would fall apart without EU workers.
- I want to compromise our sovereignty, to have pooled sovereignty because that will ensure we do not make morally rash and bankrupt decisions.
- EU membership has had a profound impact on UK environmental policy. In the 70s and 80s the UK earned the reputation for being the 'Dirty Man of Europe'. Today, many of the most important UK environmental policies and priorities are those that have emerged via the EU.
- I want UK to be at forefront, influencing the direction of the EU and of all of Europe. I don't trust the UK government to deliver on the things that the EU has given us.
- In summary, Jonathan said that the EU has given us a huge number of benefits including support for democracy and human rights across Europe and beyond and science funding that has allowed the UK to be at the forefront of world science

Jonathan's blog is [here](#)

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### John Davison (Leave)

- The Parliament building in Brussels prominently displays the following quote by Philip Kerr (later, Lord Lothian) a former British civil servant and one of the leading advocates of both European unification and world government during the 1930s: "National sovereignty is the root cause of the most crying evils of our time and of the steady march of humanity back to tragic disaster and barbarism...The only final remedy for this supreme and catastrophic evil of our time is a federal union of the peoples."
- Now we have a new imperialism, the EU, and before it goes any further in consolidating, this country will set a trend in leaving, fully expecting our neighbours to follow suit and return us to the sanity of each state managing its own affairs.
- The empirical evidence that I have seen points to the concept of a democratic nation state as being the largest administrative unit to which loyalty of citizens is freely given.
- Working together does not require that we have the same government. No other bloc is even thinking about recolonising its neighbours or pooling sovereignty. Empires are so last century.
- "The most puzzling development in politics during the last decade is the apparent determination of Western European leaders to re-create the Soviet Union in Western Europe." Mikhail Gorbachev
- Leaving the EU presents Britain with an opportunity for real democratic and economic renewal, which could strengthen engagement with Europe and the wider world.



### Phil James (Remain)

- We have a unique partnership with the world's largest single trading market whilst exempt from the euro debt crisis, mass

migration (Schengen open borders), regulations we don't like, and future federalisation.

- The first 2-10 years [after Brexit] will cost the UK. The pound would fall further, prices will go up, and property values will fall. The only question is the degree and length of the downturn. It could look like the 'Nike swoop'.
- In 1973 the UK was the 'poor man of Europe'. By joining the EU we have grown our exports from 6% to 44% among EU countries.
- The EU has greater global negotiating power (500m people)
- The EU accounts for a quarter of World GDP, and the EU has 60+ trade agreements in place.
- Our credit rating will be downgraded if we leave the EU and this will push up the cost of servicing our £1.5tn debt.
- We have had warnings from Nissan, Honda, Toyota, Opel, BMW, VW, and TATA about the risks of leaving.
- Pooling of sovereignty can increase our influence.
- Brexit is a huge gamble and against the advice of all leading experts. The UK is stronger, safer and better off staying in the EU.



### Steve Laughton (Leave)

- The left has contracted out socialism to the EU for fear of the electorate preferring right wing governments in the UK. This is defeatism which implies we do not respect our own electorate.
- Large multi-national firms lobby the EU to make regulations that benefit them at the expense of small and medium size enterprises. In the UK 85% of jobs are in smaller companies that are getting squeezed out. This also squeezes out innovation and supports the whole "big business, low wage, slow growth rising inequality" system that has brought global capitalism to its current impasse.

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- Brussels has over 6,000 lobbying firms all acting on behalf of the big beasts
- All the experts who are predicting gloom if we Brexit have been wrong every time on the EU before but they go on believing they are right!
- 85% of the economic think tanks quoted by Remain were founded by Conservative Free Market anti-socialists
- Many predicted disaster if we left the ERM. Most predicted disaster if the UK did not give up the pound and join the Euro. They were proved totally wrong.
- Europe now faces stagnation. Millions upon millions are unemployed and many are coming to the UK in desperation.
- The Eurozone is the slowest growing trading bloc in the world. The closer our ties to the stagnating EU the more we are sucked in to their crisis.
- THE EU is a political project that has created a human and economic nightmare
- Large foreign investors in the UK such as Toyota and Nissan have declared they will stay in the UK whether we Remain or Leave.
- UK growth for the foreseeable future, until the Eurozone solves its stagnation problem, will come from increasing our exports to the rest of the world with whom we already have a trade surplus in goods.
- Europe, with twenty eight countries with different needs has been slow and singularly unsuccessful at striking trade deals. Brexit gives us back the ability to strike deals with the rest of the world and to do so more quickly and for less cost: we will not have to negotiate our way through the EU regulatory hoops which protect the large multi-nationals at the expense of all other businesses.
- For jobs, economic security, and growth we will be better off free of EU shackles.
- It's common sense that stopping or slowing the growth in uncontrolled EU migration will mean more jobs for UK workers and will mean that employers can't continue to keep wages artificially low.

- The UK was legislating for employee protection and anti-discrimination rights long before we joined the EEC/EU
- If the UK leaves the EU, the British people will once again be free to elect or throw out governments which can enact legislation in the best interests of British people.

[www.labourleave.org](http://www.labourleave.org)



### **Anna Andersen (Remain)**

- We have the third highest number of MEPs in the EU Parliament after Germany and France. Our influence is therefore proportional to our size. We could be more active in the EU Parliament by holding MEPs to account.
- Anna explained the EU legislative process with the Commission proposing legislation which then has to pass through the democratically-elected Parliament and the Council which is made up of democratically elected representatives.
- Individuals and organisations have the right to sue the EU for damages caused by its actions or laws.
- In 1997 the UK gained a special status within the EU giving us discretion over certain areas of EU law including asylum and immigration
- The UK will not join the euro; we will keep own border controls and will not be part of further European political integration; access to welfare for new EU migrants restricted; UK citizens enjoy rights to the free movement of people, goods and services across the EU including access to health care.
- In 2015 non-EU immigration exceeded EU immigration
- We have the power to block new members of the EU (has to be ratified by all existing members)
- Remaining in the EU gives us better security
- Online poll: Cast your vote [here](#)

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## Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

June 2016



**T**he six participants in our EU debate did a brilliant job of enriching our knowledge before we cast our vote on 23<sup>rd</sup> June and I thank them all for the hard work they put into their presentations.

According to Yanis Varoufakis (*And The Weak Suffer What they Must?* 2016) the European project was built on humanist principles: a commonwealth based on reason, democracy, respect for human rights, and a decent social safety net. And yet it has gone horribly wrong since the crash of 2008. The euro, described by Mark Blyth, Professor of International Political Economy, as a 'monetary doomsday device' was not built to withstand such a crisis and the young people of Europe's periphery have been paying a catastrophic price to prop up the banks ever since. Mark Blyth has called it 'an extortion racket' (*Austerity – the History of a Dangerous Idea* 2013). When we vote in our EU referendum on 23<sup>rd</sup> June we are not just determining the future of the UK. We may well be determining the fate of the EU itself which has been severely weakened by the euro crisis. But there's another consideration. One of the most salient points for me in our debate was when John Davison drew attention to the Parliament building in Brussels which prominently displays the following quotation by Lord Lothian: "National sovereignty is the root cause of the most crying evils of our time and of the steady march of humanity back to tragic disaster and barbarism...The only final remedy for this supreme and catastrophic evil of our time is a federal union of the peoples." This obituary for the nation state seems premature. It's not entirely farfetched, as Mikhail Gorbachev and others have done, to compare the EU to the Soviet Union. It's a supra-national government by bureaucracy with a modicum of democratic control. The *de facto* government of the EU, the Commission, is unelected and cannot be ejected from power by the peoples of Europe. If this is democracy, it's a democracy which levitates beyond the reach of the electorate. This does not bode well for the creation of a gigantic superstate. It may well be that the EU is an anachronism in terms of how we should run the world. If so, what we need is an orderly transition to something better – a common market perhaps. So we are suspended between Homer's monsters Scylla and Charybdis. A vote to Remain could be taken by the EU elites as an endorsement of their ruinous policies whilst a vote to Leave could lead to a chaotic unravelling of the EU project, or, more optimistically, to something better. Either way, it's a massive gamble. If you believe the EU project can be fixed, vote Remain and join the [Democracy in Europe Movement](#). If you believe it can't and that Brexit is a bold democratic lever to a better Europe, vote Leave.

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