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# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

■ **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation  
Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Science as King



A talk by Emeritus  
Professor Peter Atkins

In this talk, Peter Atkins will explore whether science can provide answers to all the great questions. That task involves deciding which great questions are real

questions and which are merely projections of human angst. He will then consider the answers that science provides and is likely to provide to the real questions, arguing that it is the only reliable way forward and that its power is unbounded. 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* and (most recently) *Conjuring the Universe: The Origins of the Laws of Nature*. He is a patron of Humanists UK.

■ **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June 3.50-4.30** Moordown

## Talkback

Why not come along to our popular 'talkback' session after the refreshment break to continue the discussion or get something off your chest.

■ **Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June 7.30pm** Green  
House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

## Is religion really the reason for the problems in Northern Ireland?



Gerard O'Boyle was raised in Northern Ireland and after graduating in Irish Studies and History he voted with his feet to leave this troubled province. Since then he has lived and worked in

four countries on three continents and is now able to view the Irish situation dispassionately. Having spent several years in the Irish Republic and England he can see it through the lenses of all the participants. He will explain the history in an engaging and intelligible way. Before moving to Barton-on-Sea, Gerard was a member of North Devon Humanists.

## Dorset Humanists Choir

Matthew Fairman, who is a professional musician and was our pianist at the Nine Lessons and Carols concert last December, has agreed to become Leader of the Dorset Humanists Choir. Our next concert will take place on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August when our guest speaker will be Andrew Copson,

Send bulletin updates to [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk)

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227

[dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk)

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

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

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

Chief Executive of Humanists UK. We will sing a selection of songs celebrating the pleasures of summer. Rehearsals will be held weekly in Westbourne on Tuesday evenings from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm. The charge will be £5 per session. The first rehearsal will be on 9<sup>th</sup> July. If you wish to join our choir please contact Mike Goodman on [mdgoodman@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mdgoodman@hotmail.co.uk)

■ **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June 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 16<sup>th</sup> June** Tadholl and Winfrith Heath. 6.5 miles of nature reserve near Winfrith nuclear site and Moreton (Lawrence of Arabia's grave). Shortcuts possible (3 to 4 miles).

■ **Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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



## Short Talks

■ **Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00

donation requested.

## ‘Why I am Not a Christian’ & ‘Why I am Not a Humanist’

*Two short talks by David Warden and Dave Pegg.*

David Warden and Dave Pegg have formed a successful working partnership whereby they go into local schools to inform students about Christianity and Humanism and to ‘model’ how to respectfully disagree on fundamental matters. Dave tells students about the fundamentals of evangelical Christianity and David describes how he left evangelical Christianity and became an atheist and then a humanist. Neither of them espouses a fuzzy relativism. They are clear that if one is right about the existence or non-existence of God then the other, logically, must be wrong.

David and Dave are friends but their differences run deep. In his talk, David will set out why he is not a Christian, partly on the grounds that it is based on ‘magical thinking’, and in his talk Dave will set out why he is not a humanist, partly on the grounds that he thinks it is ultimately a self-centred creed. Please join us for a fascinating head-to-head between two people who have come to a deep knowledge of each other’s views.

**Calling budding speakers!** Do you have a short talk up your sleeve? Contact Phil Butcher if you would like to discuss your idea for a short talk.

✉ [ph.butcher@gmail.com](mailto:ph.butcher@gmail.com)

■ Short talks takes a break in July but we’ll be right back on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August with short talks by Gus Atkins and Chris Street on ‘How humanists escape from cults’.



## Future dates for your diary...

■ **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> 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 annual opportunities Dorset Humanists has to express solidarity with communities that have come under increasing threat around the world. In Brunei, for example, being gay was already illegal and punishable by up to 10 years in prison but the Sultan of Brunei has introduced new laws which make same-sex relationships sex punishable by stoning to death. In the UK, we are seeing protests against schools which merely inform young children, in an age appropriate way, that same-sex parents exist.



LGBT+ is a human rights issue and Humanism has always been at the forefront of promoting human rights. We invite all of our members, 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.

## Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 7.30pm**  
Sandford Heritage Hall, Sandford Rd, Nr Wareham, BH20 7AJ (Next to Pine Martin Grange Care Home). 'Out of the Box' presents:

### Christianophobia

There has been a dramatic rise in violence and discrimination against Christians worldwide. Out of the Box investigates this worrying phenomenon and places it alongside similar persecution of atheists and humanists. Out of the Box is a dialogue group for people who subscribe to different worldviews. The group aims to attract a balanced mix of Christians, Humanists, Agnostics, and people of all faiths and none. All welcome – free entry – donations gratefully received.

■ **Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> July 7.30pm**  
Dorset Room, Colliton Club, Dorchester.  
West Dorset Humanists present:

### Tolpuddle and its Martyrs: Radicals, Revolutionaries, Religion, Humanism?

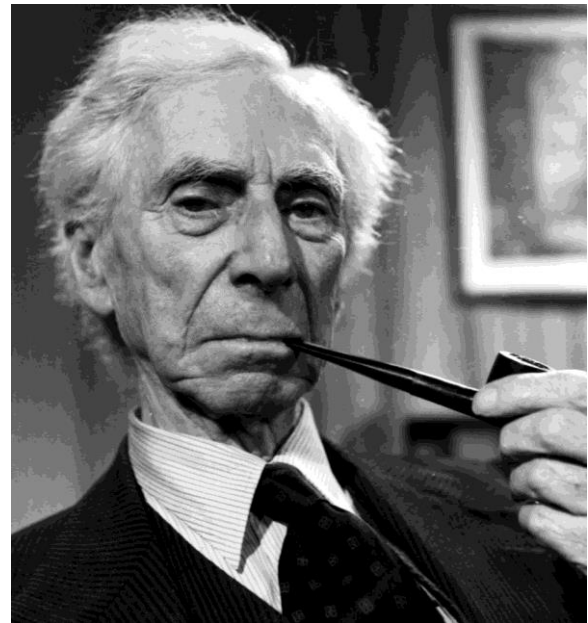
A talk by David Nunn. How did a small Dorset village come to be internationally recognised as the birthplace of modern British Trade Unionism? And how did six agricultural workers, with nothing more than their labour to offer, come to challenge the might of the British Empire, the Church, and powerful 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.



# What Would Bertrand Russell's timeless Ten Commandments!

In today's febrile political culture with regular accusations of denialism, racism, fascism, fake news, political correctness, identity politics, xenophobia, and Marxism, often deployed to shut down dissent and free debate, humanists would do well to revisit Bertrand Russell's guidelines for freethought and intelligent disagreement.

1. Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.
2. Do not think it worthwhile to proceed by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.
3. Never try to discourage thinking for you are sure to succeed.
4. When you meet with opposition, even if it should be from your husband or your children, endeavour to overcome it by argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.
5. Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.
6. Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for if you do the opinions will suppress you.
7. Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.
8. Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent than in passive agreement, for, if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.
9. Be scrupulously truthful, even if the truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.
10. Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for only a fool will think that it is happiness.



**Great Humanists: Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)** produced work on mathematical logic which laid the foundations for the development of the computer. He was a courageous freethinker, rationalist, and humanist and he went to jail twice for his uncompromising views.

## “Islamophobia Definition Threatens Civil Liberties”

The National Secular Society's chief executive Stephen Evans was one of a diverse range of 44 campaigners, academics, writers and other public figures who signed a letter to Home Secretary Sajid Javid on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019 to raise concerns about a Parliamentary definition of Islamophobia. The signatories to the letter included representatives of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, the Network of Sikh Organisations and Christian Concern. NSS honorary associates Richard Dawkins, Pragna Patel, Maajid Nawaz and Peter Tatchell were also among the signatories.

Background: The All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims was launched in 2017. This cross-party group of parliamentarians is co-chaired by Anna Soubry MP and Wes Streeting MP. The Group was established to highlight the aspirations and challenges facing British Muslims, to celebrate the contributions of Muslim communities to Britain and to investigate prejudice, discrimination and hatred against Muslims in the UK. The



APPG on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia has now been adopted by the Labour Party, the governing body of the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, the Mayor of London, and several local councils.

*Letter addressed to the Home Secretary Sajid Javid (extract):*

According to the APPG definition, "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness".

With this definition in hand, it is perhaps no surprise that following the horrific attack on a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, some place responsibility for the atrocity on the pens of journalists and academics who have criticised Islamic beliefs and practices, commented on or investigated Islamist extremism.

The undersigned unequivocally, unreservedly and emphatically condemn acts of violence against Muslims, and recognise the urgent need to deal with anti-Muslim hatred. However, we are extremely concerned about the uncritical and hasty adoption of the APPG's definition of Islamophobia.

This vague and expansive definition is being taken on without an adequate scrutiny or proper consideration of its negative consequences for freedom of expression, and academic and journalistic freedom. The definition will also undermine social cohesion – fuelling the very bigotry against Muslims which it is designed to prevent.

We are concerned that allegations of Islamophobia will be, indeed already are being, used to effectively shield Islamic beliefs and even extremists from criticism, and that formalising this definition will result in it being employed effectively as something of a backdoor blasphemy law. The accusation of Islamophobia has already been used against those opposing religious and gender segregation in education, the hijab, halal slaughter on the grounds of animal welfare, LGBT rights campaigners opposing Muslim views on homosexuality, ex-Muslims and feminists opposing Islamic views and practices relating to women, as well as those concerned about the issue of

grooming gangs. It has been used against journalists who investigate Islamism, Muslims working in counter-extremism, schools and Ofsted for resisting conservative religious pressure and enforcing gender equality.

Evidently abuse, harmful practices, or the activities of groups and individuals which promote ideas contrary to British values are far more likely to go unreported as a result of fear of being called Islamophobic. This will only increase if the APPG definition is formally adopted in law.

We are concerned that the definition will be used to shut down legitimate criticism and investigation. While the APPG authors have assured that it does not wish to infringe free speech, the entire content of the report, the definition itself, and early signs of how it would be used, suggest that it certainly would. Civil liberties should not be treated as an afterthought in the effort to tackle anti-Muslim prejudice.

The conflation of race and religion employed under the confused concept of 'cultural racism' expands the definition beyond anti-Muslim hatred to include 'illegitimate' criticism of the Islamic religion. The concept of Muslimness can effectively be transferred to Muslim practices and beliefs, allowing the report to claim that criticism of Islam is instrumentalised to hurt Muslims.

No religion should be given special protection against criticism. Like anti-Sikh, anti-Christian, or anti-Hindu hatred, we believe the term anti-Muslim hatred is more appropriate and less likely to infringe on free speech. A proliferation of 'phobias' is not desirable, as already stated by Sikh and Christian organisations who recognise the importance of free discussion about their beliefs.

Current legislative provisions are sufficient, as the law already protects individuals against attacks and unlawful discrimination on the basis of their religion. Rather than helping, this definition is likely to create a climate of self-censorship whereby people are fearful of criticising Islam and Islamic beliefs. It will therefore effectively shut down open discussions about matters of public



interest. It will only aggravate community tensions further and is therefore no long term solution.

If this definition is adopted the government will likely turn to self-appointed 'representatives of the community' to define 'Muslimness'. This is clearly open to abuse. The APPG already entirely overlooked Muslims who are often considered to be "insufficiently Muslim" by other Muslims, moderates, liberals, reformers and the Ahmadiyyah, who often suffer persecution and violence at the hands of other Muslims.

For all these reasons, the APPG definition of Islamophobia is deeply problematic and unfit for purpose. Acceptance of this definition will only serve to aggravate community tensions and to inhibit free speech about matters of fundamental importance. We urge the government, political parties, local councils and other organisations to reject this flawed proposed definition."

■ The APPG report is available [here](#).

## Vatican and University of Kent host major atheism conference

A multidisciplinary research programme led by the University of Kent has mapped the nature and diversity of 'unbelief' across six countries including Brazil, China, Denmark, Japan, UK and the USA. The research was supported by a £2.3 million grant from the John Templeton Foundation which funds research into science and religion.

Researchers asked participants about their attitudes to beliefs such as life after death and astrology, whether the universe is 'ultimately meaningless', and what values matter most to them. They used internationally recognised terms to identify unbelievers – *atheists* (people who 'don't believe in God') and *agnostics* (people who 'don't know whether there is a God or not, and don't believe there is a way to find out').

Key findings from the research include:

- Unbelievers exhibit significant diversity both within, and between, different countries
- In all six countries, majorities of unbelievers identify as having 'no religion'
- Relatively few select 'atheist' or 'agnostic' as their preferred (non) religious or secular identity
- Popular assumptions about 'convinced, dogmatic atheists' do not stand up to scrutiny
- Unbelief in God doesn't necessarily entail unbelief in other supernatural phenomena and the majority of unbelievers in all countries surveyed expressed belief in one or more supernatural phenomena
- A common supposition – that of the purposeless unbeliever, lacking anything to ascribe ultimate meaning to the universe – does not bear scrutiny
- Most unbelievers endorse 'objective moral values', human dignity and attendant rights, and the 'deep value' of nature, at similar rates to the general populations in their countries
- Unbelievers and general populations show high agreement concerning the values most important for 'finding meaning in the world and your own life'. 'Family' and 'freedom' ranked highly for all

Dr Lois Lee, Senior Research Fellow in Kent University's Department of Religious Studies, is Principal Investigator for Understanding Unbelief. She said 'These findings show once and for all that the public image of the atheist is a simplification at best, and a gross caricature at worst. Instead of relying on assumptions about what it means to be an atheist, we can now work with a real understanding of the many different worldviews that the atheist population includes. The implications for public and social policy are substantial — and this study also stands to impact on more everyday interactions in religiously diverse societies.'

Full details [here](#).



# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

*From Carol-Mary Fraser, Norfolk*

I always look forward to reading the Bulletin, and the fascinating ideas aired. Having listened to Alex O'Connor's very well-presented talk on free will and ethical 'shoulds' and 'should nots', I was indeed impressed, as I am sure were your lucky Dorset people at the live event. May I offer a couple of observations, following your own and those of Simon Whipple?

Any ideas advanced for an ethical guidebook not grounded in religion or other particular ideology are to be welcomed, but Alex O'Connor's undoubtedly lucid and objective blueprint still left me with unanswered questions.

"If you could see this as I see it, you would realise your pleasure will be actually be maximised by not doing x." Surely Alex's claim that we do not have free will is called into question by the apparent assumption that the rapist can choose to look at the intended act in another way. True, Alex does acknowledge that some persons may genuinely obtain more pleasure by committing rape or some other crime than not, but he seems quite resigned to the fact that there is nothing to be done about this unfortunate state of affairs.

Well, actually we can do something: we can put psychopaths out of circulation so that they are unable to act in accordance with their desires. This is not done out of vengeance (although we can understand the need for such that may exist in victims or their families) but the criminal justice system necessitates a penalty for misdemeanours, whether seen as a deterrent or retribution.

On the matter of free will, my own leanings would be nearer Sartre than O'Connor. There seem to be way too many

opportunities for 'excuse-making' hidden within free will denial. I make no claim that free will is total; each of us is of course constrained by personal circumstances, attributes and capabilities, but most of us will still be able to choose between two or more actions in a given situation.

However, it was Alex's total focus on the pleasure metric that unsettled me. I picked up on this in David's critique when the latter observed that there was a lack of attention given the victims – those unfortunates paying the price for someone else's 'pleasure maximisation'.

Hume was right; an 'ought' cannot be derived from an 'is'. And yet it should not be too difficult to provide a template for the moral life. The ancient and elegantly simple Golden Rule can be a good starting point.

Rape is wrong, not because it fails, as an objective fact, to maximise the rapist's pleasure, but because it causes harm to the victim. FGM is wrong because it causes a lifetime of physical and emotional suffering to the victim; atavistic notions of tradition and 'purity' have no currency in an enlightened age. To speak of Nazi 'satisfaction of desires' when faced with the unspeakable horrors unleashed on millions of men, women and children in the death camps seems an obscenity; this was harm on a grand scale.

So, no way to get an 'ought' from an 'is' - but you can get a 'can' from an 'if'. Perhaps our moral code requires centring not so much on 'whatever gives the most pleasure' but 'whatever causes least harm to the other'.

Or, if I want to do x, can I do it without hurting someone or something?

I like to think humanity is progressing (albeit glacially); re-ordering and refining its understanding of psychology, sensibilities, attitudes, and alongside this, developing a commensurate understanding of what might constitute a good life.

A Bentham-style pleasure calculus and its resultant over-emphasis on self-interest seems to provide a less than adequate base for any secular, inclusive guidance on how we could achieve that good life.







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

June 2019

**T**he Humanists UK website includes a section called Defining 'Humanism'. It says that, roughly speaking, the word humanist has come to mean someone who:

- trusts to the scientific method when it comes to understanding how the universe works and rejects the idea of the supernatural
- makes their ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for human beings and other sentient animals
- believes that, in the absence of an afterlife and any discernible purpose to the universe, human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same.

I'm broadly in agreement with all of this except that our ethical lives have very little to do with reason. Our behaviour as human animals is mostly automatic and driven by unconscious needs for acceptance, attention, power and the internalised *mores* and *ethos* of our group. We learn to be moral in the same way that we learn language. Morality is the (mostly) unseen grammar of our lives as social beings in any given family, school, firm, community, or country. We rarely have to 'make ethical decisions' except when confronted with ethical dilemmas. This has important consequences for the stated purpose of humanist groups and organisations. A humanist group does try to uphold core principles of morality, such as respect, integrity, courage, and kindness, but this forms the background 'grammar' of being human rather than the active agenda of a humanist group. There isn't very much mileage in running a humanist group for the purposes of improving people morally. That would be what I call a 'post-religious' understanding of humanism and it harks back to our predecessors, the Victorian ethical societies, which mostly faded away a century ago. A more fruitful agenda for humanist groups is to pursue what I call the 'classical' understanding of humanism. According to the 2018 Freedom of Thought Report published by Humanists International, humanists are 'those who embrace a morality centred on human welfare and human flourishing that does not appeal to any supernatural or divine entities'. This formula indicates that humanism should be oriented towards a compelling goal. People are unlikely to be attracted to a group which seems to exist for the purposes of moral improvement, like an old-fashioned temperance society. 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.

