



A partner of
Humanists UK

national
secular
society



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 9th March - Lunch at 1.15pm
followed by AGM at 2.15pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW



Members' Annual Lunch followed by AGM

- Humanist of the Year 2019
- Young Humanists Ambassador for Dorset
- Delicious lunch served by our members (chicken curry, vegan curry, or chicken casserole options)

In an era of increasing social fragmentation, Dorset Humanists has been a stable community hub for over twenty years. We aim to meet the needs of non-religious people whilst welcoming everyone to our events. We have established ourselves as a respected voice for reason and humanity, and Humanists UK has recognised that we are one of its most successful partner groups. None of this would be possible without the loyalty and support of our subscribing members and so, as a 'thank

you', we are once again providing a complimentary lunch prior to our AGM. Visitors are also very welcome to attend but we respectfully request a £5.00 donation for lunch – or why not join Dorset Humanists for just £15 and start enjoying the benefits of membership. Our AGM is a sociable, enjoyable, and sometimes controversial event. Come along and have your say about the future of Dorset Humanists.

■ **Wednesday 27th March 7.30pm**

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX



Bring Present: How to cultivate a peaceful mind

Author and speaker Darren Cockburn provides practical insight into how to cultivate a peaceful mind, live skilfully, and nurture a connection through the power of the present moment. Darren will explain how simplifying life where possible will also bring a better understanding to all types of existing addictions, including harmful thought patterns, providing precious breathing space for our overly busy minds. In addition, he shows how a stable practice of mindful presence can enhance the quality of communication with others, be it with family, with friends, or at work.

www.darrencockburn.com

www.facebook.com/darrencockburnauthor

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227



dorsethumanists.co.uk



@dorsethumanists



Dorset Humanists



meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists

■ **Thursday 7th March 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 17th March 10.15am

Nine Barrow Down and Corfe Castle. An 8 mile walk with magnificent views all around, and especially of Corfe Castle. The Sandbanks ferry is operating again, with a reduced (half hourly) service.

Sunday 14th April 10.15am

Ringstead Bay, White Nothe and Osmington.

Sunday 12th May – Bluebells in Roydon Woods near Brockenhurst.

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 19th March**

7.30pm Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

Jordan Peterson and the Perils of Political Correctness

Love him or hate him, Jordan Peterson has made a name for himself as a 'global intellectual' with millions of followers on YouTube and as the author of a best-selling book '12 Rules for Life'. Peterson excoriates

what he describes as 'postmodern neo-Marxism' and he has a lot to say about the so-called crisis of masculinity in the modern world.

Simon Whipple and David Warden will present their short talks on Jordan Peterson with a particular emphasis on political correctness, feminism, and gender roles.

Each talk/presentation is around 20 minutes followed by questions and discussion. See Meetup for further details.

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

Bob Sharman



We are very sad to announce that Robert (Bob) Sharman has died. Bob had a lively and enquiring mind, he was a loyal member of Dorset Humanists for many years, and prior to retirement had a career as a lawyer specialising in cases of misrepresentation.

Bob left his body to Southampton Medical School but unfortunately they declined to take it because of the nature of his final illness (advanced prostate cancer).

Bob left instructions not to have a ceremony and therefore there was a private family dinner in his honour after his body was cremated. His remains are at Portchester Crematorium in Portsmouth. He died on 22nd November 2018 and he leaves a wife and five children.

Thanks to Bob's friend Helen Barclay and his son Andy Sharman for this information.



Future dates for your diary...

■ **Saturday 13th April 2.00pm Moordown**

The Good Delusion: What's The Closest We Can Get to Objective Ethics?



In this brand new talk for Dorset Humanists, Alex J. O'Connor offers a means to ground ethics in a way that allows us to determine what people should and shouldn't do as a matter of fact, whilst dispensing with terms like 'good' and 'bad.' The concept of good may be delusory, but ethics does not have to be. Alex is the owner of the Cosmic Skeptic Blog and YouTube channel. He is an ex-Catholic, atheist, science enthusiast and advocate for political and educational secularism. His YouTube channel currently has more than 240,000 subscribers and he is a first year student at the University of Oxford, reading theology and philosophy.

■ **Wednesday 24th April 7.30pm Green House**

Barrister Eva Anderson will talk about the work of Transparency International.

■ **Wednesday 3rd April 7.30pm**

Dorset Room, Colliton Club, Colliton Park, Dorchester DT1 1XJ. West Dorset Humanists present:

(Almost) Seventy Years an Atheist

A talk by Geoff Kirby. In 1951, Geoff had a 'Road to Damascus' moment – but in reverse – when he suddenly gave up all belief in gods. But the 1950s was not a time for a pre-teenager to publically declare his disbelief in gods. Geoff has degrees in physics and environmental sciences. See his letter to our Darwin Day speaker in *Letters and Emails*.

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 6th March 7.30pm**

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

Ingredients of a Good Person

An interactive discussion facilitated by Aaron. Full details on [Meetup](#).

Young Humanists Ambassador for Dorset



Ronnie Barr, probably our youngest member, has taken up the role of Young Humanists Ambassador for Dorset. Ronnie will be supported in this role by the Young Humanists section of Humanists UK.

Around two thirds of young people in the UK are not religious but this age group is extremely under-represented in local humanist groups around the country. As an Ambassador, Ronnie will liaise with Dorset Humanists, Humanist Students societies, and other relevant groups to ensure that the needs of 18-35 year old non-religious people in the local area are met.

Activities might include putting on events with a view to getting younger people involved such as pub quizzes, campaign work, family-friendly events like coffee-mornings or Sunday brunches, litter picks or picnics, and advising us on how to put on events that will get young people involved.



Ronnie, who is very excited at taking up this new role, said: "I love being part of Dorset Humanists and I hope I'll continue to contribute all I can in future."



Re-brand for international humanism

'Humanists International' is the new operating brand of the International Humanist and Ethical Union based in London. The new name and brand

aims to refresh the global humanist body, which has operated since 1952 when it was set up in Amsterdam by Harold Blackham, Julian Huxley, and others active in the humanist movement at the time. Now, with over 160 members in 80 countries around the world, it is the democratic world union of non-religious people.

The change was discussed and agreed among the membership, including Dorset Humanists which is an associate member. Chief Executive of Humanists International, Gary McLelland, said, "Our organization has a long and proud history, as well as an impressive scope of work with impact well beyond that of comparable organizations our size. Many in the movement have known for a while that the name 'International Humanist and Ethical Union' was too long and sounds old-fashioned. We're very excited to be re-launching as Humanists International with a fresh look, along with ongoing progress in our structure and strategy as the global humanist non-profit. In recent years our organisation has grown our funding income, hired more staff and recruited new dedicated volunteers. We are proud of this trajectory of growth, which is enabling us to do more and more to support humanist organizations in the developing world, as well as individuals at risk around the globe. Our new look gives Humanists International, and our family of members around the world the best chance to extend our impact and pursue a humanist vision for the world.

This report is from Bob Churchill, Director of Communications & Campaigns at Humanists International. Bob has spoken to Dorset Humanists in the past.



Autism and Asperger's Awareness

50 people attended our 'short talks' event on

Understanding Asperger's and Autism. A visiting psychotherapist said "I was spell bound listening to the two presenters." The speakers were Trish Jubb and Dr Rachel Moseley, researcher in Social, Cognitive, Clinical and Affective Neuroscience at Bournemouth University.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental and genetic condition. It is widely understood as a condition of 'altered brain connectivity'. A lot of social communication requires 'mind reading' (theory of mind). For autistic people, a number of scientific studies have shown atypical connectivity within and between areas that contribute to this process. In adolescence and adulthood, these studies suggest that reduced connectivity leads to poorer social skills. Difficulties with planning and organisation have been traced to atypical connectivity between the prefrontal cortex and the rest of the brain. When autistic people report sensory sensitivity, studies have shown that sensory regions of the brain are activated to a greater extent by normal noises and autistic people are unable to 'switch away' from sensory details.

Autism is very real. Its features have a brain basis. Your perception and experience of the world arises from your brain – so autistic people experience the world in a very different way. Understanding brain differences may help reduce the stigma that autistic people face, and help scientists develop novel ways to support (not cure) them. After all, autistic scientists, due to their fantastic ability to focus, are bringing a lot to the table themselves!

The cause of autism is unknown but various differences that can be seen in the brains of infants, such as hypertrophy (brain overgrowth), less well-developed connections in visual and auditory areas,

and extra cerebrospinal fluid, can predict an autism diagnosis.

Asperger's syndrome is a form of autism, clinically explained as a form of autism where the individual has an IQ in the average range (i.e. no intellectual disability). It is therefore often misleadingly described as 'mild'. Like autism generally, it is not itself a mental health issue or a learning disability issue. It may *co-exist* with learning disabilities like dyslexia, dyscalculia (difficulty in learning or comprehending arithmetic) or dyspraxia (clumsiness), Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and other conditions like Tourette's, physical difficulties and allergies. Mental illnesses, including anxiety and depression, are very common for autistic people (including those with Asperger's). Without suitable and often minimal support there can be a downward spiral into depression and ill health.

People with Asperger's can be academically very able, but the difficulties they experience in everyday life can rob them of independence and happiness. Different perceptions can lead to unique problem-solving. Different understanding of people and interactions can lead to misunderstandings when assumptions are made about ability and knowledge. Some people (but not all) may have special abilities – for example in computing or in recall of statistical and factual data.

At first you may not realise a person has autism or Asperger's – it's hard to spot in some people, subtle yet complex. It varies from person to person and autistic people can be more individual than their neurotypical counterparts. They may appear to be too quiet or even completely non-verbal. It can be frustrating and it requires patience and understanding. They may be unable to handle physical contact or proximity. They may be overly sensitive to sensory input such as noise, light, and pain. They may be late, disorganised, forgetful, lost, and clumsy. Or the opposite of all these!

Other people sometimes react to autism in unhelpful ways. They may say things like:

- You should try harder
- You're just lazy

- You're naughty/badly behaved/rude
- It's easy
- You aren't listening
- Relax and be yourself!
- Try and fit in

Autistic people may be thought rude when in fact they may unintentionally be lacking in tact. They may have high levels of anxiety and be unable to let go of a worry until it's resolved. They need structure and consistency. They may have a sudden shutdown (lack of speech) or a meltdown (outburst of emotion) when overwhelmed by demands, sensory stimulation, anxiety or other triggers. They may be literal-minded and seem to be pedantic. They can be very interested in detail and most concerned that rules and facts are exactly adhered to. They may have unusual or inappropriate styles of dress. They may practice 'stimming' (self-stimulatory behaviour) such as the repetition of physical movements, sounds, or words, or the repetitive movement of objects, rocking, swaying, spinning, flapping hands etc. and have difficulties with touch, sound, and light. They may experience difficulties with personal space and touch,



'Stim' toys for adults with autism

eye contact, and facial expression. They may develop obsessions with items or subjects and be unable to concentrate on others. They can be hardworking and keep to rules if and when they are understood.

People with autism or Asperger's may have poor daily living skills such as dressing, planning, personal care, finance, household crises, eating and drinking. They may have trouble with "easy" tasks such as posting a letter. They may be dependent on others for travel and be unable to cope with unstructured time such as tea breaks, have difficulty fitting in (may seem left out, unsettling others), and their volume of speech can be unregulated – too loud or too quiet.

Many of the things most people take for granted may be very difficult or incomprehensible, akin to being an alien or a foreigner. However hard they try many things don't come easily. They often have high levels of anxiety, feel exhausted from coping and severely lacking in confidence from continued failure leading to loneliness, isolation, depression, a feeling of not fitting in, and that their difficulty is invisible. Some people use Spoon theory to describe this (having a limited number of 'spoons' of energy on any given day).

Autism and Asperger's is only recently becoming widely recognised. You may have come across many unidentified cases in the past. We don't know precisely how many people are autistic: a recent estimate is 1 in 68, in America. People with Asperger's (defined as having IQ in the average range) are perhaps roughly half of this group. Many are undiagnosed, especially women who learn to mimic social techniques and internalise problems which can lead to other problems like anorexia. Often, symptoms can be identified in family members. The causes are unidentified, but they can be genetic and/or environmental. The autistic brain develops differently from the neurotypical brain of non-autistic people, with a different distribution of neurons.

The right support can help a person with autism or Asperger's lead a fulfilling life. Unsuitable support can make things far worse but often apparently minor support can make a great difference. Understand what is difficult – even if you think it is easy. 'Obvious' things may need to be explained, shown, and demonstrated. Make sure they are not saying they understand when they don't. Encourage aids to concentration – doodling, MP3, stim toys. Offer practical help such as fetching their coffee, giving extra time, taking notes, giving help with forms, and giving reminders.

■ Click here for [Dorset Adult Aspergers Support \(DAAS\)](#)

■ Further Reading: *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome* (2008) Tony Attwood

■ Dorset Humanists donated £112.00 to Dorset Adult Asperger's Support.



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Richard Scutt

Unfortunately, after careful reading, I regard Philip Nathan's '52 Humanist Principles' to be a hotchpotch of ambiguity and with too much emphasis on self. I have always felt that our basic aim should be the wish to "make things better" for those around us and humanity in general and if compromising our individual aims and wishes is called for then so be it. In other words I tend towards less "me me" and more "us us" or even, sometimes "them them." Like most things in this world it is of course it is a complex subject and I cannot go into a line by line analysis now but I was frequently feeling that what he had written did not stand up to scrutiny. Perhaps a debate might be a good idea?

■ 'Living Humanism: A Guide to Personal Conduct and Action for the 21st Century and Beyond' is a new book by Philip Nathan. We published an extract in last month's bulletin.

From Dave Haith

In answer to your *Chairman's View* about 'pseudoscience' in the last Bulletin, Wikipedia is widely accepted as inaccurate in these areas because of a group calling themselves 'Guerrilla Sceptics' who recruit debunkers to give pages makeovers. So I would suggest that the Wikipedia view of pseudoscience and listings of topics unworthy of consideration for discussion is severely warped. Or do you consider, for instance, that acupuncture, chiropractic, hypnosis and hypnotherapy, psychoanalysis, NLP, subliminal advertising – all on Wikipedia's list – should be shunned? How strange that Dorset Humanists featured a meeting in February with James Brown who teaches hypnotism! And what about parapsychology and



ufology – also on the list – which are studied at universities and accepted by the US Government which has spent millions of dollars researching them?

The scepticism you applaud seems to be more dismissal and debunkery when the word actually derives from the Greek *skeptomai* which means ‘to think or consider’. It’s not about drawing lines between beliefs, but thinking and researching as did scores of scientists over the years who have evidenced the paranormal which include Nobel Prize winners and natural evolution pioneer Alfred Russel Wallace. Did these people practise pseudoscience?

Finally, a quote from the great codebreaker Alan Turing: ‘These disturbing phenomena seem to deny all our usual scientific ideas. How we should like to discredit them! Unfortunately the statistical evidence, at least for telepathy, is overwhelming. It is very difficult to rearrange one’s ideas so as to fit these new facts in.’

I’m not suggesting that humanists should embrace any or all the above but simply have the humility to accept that current understanding is not the end point of science and should not be the end point of discussion.

From Geoff Kirby to our Darwin Day speaker Diana Fleishman

Your talk on evolutionary morality was brilliant and stimulating! During the audience participation session the question came up of humanity’s empathetic attitudes towards their fellow creatures, in particular the insect world. This reminded me of a short piece I had published in New Scientist magazine on 28th October 1989. It was obviously a tongue-in-cheek article but it resulted in a huge response in the media – I appeared on National Television and BBC Radio programmes and received a huge amount of mail from all around the world. I was surprised to find how many people wanted join my spoof ‘Insect Liberation Front’. Many told me of the huge efforts they go to, for example, by organizing ‘worm patrols’ which save worms struggling to cross busy roads, etc. A charity in New Zealand told me about its work saving a

particular species of snail trapped in an industrial estate.

There was an exchange of letters in the columns of New Scientist following my article where philosophical issues were raised such as whether it is ethically justified to kill E.Coli and MRSA whilst allowing other bacteria and viruses to live simply based on their interactions with humans. Such was my fame at the time that a letter from Australia addressed simply to “Mr Wiggly Worm, BBC, London” found me!

Wanted: Women for (supporting other) women in Dorset

Are you confident, motivated, calm, non-judgemental, supportive and optimistic? Do you also have some regular free time to volunteer? In collaboration with Dorset Police, the Footprints Project is trying to stop sending Dorset women to prison. If you would also like to help women stay out of custody, we would like to hear from you!

This pilot project, funded by the Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner, will run from April 2019 for twelve months. Dorset police will refer vulnerable women who have committed an offence and received a caution to us for rehabilitative support. Our service aims to build rapport with these women and help them to plan and manage their vulnerabilities by enabling them to engage with the services they need. We are seeking volunteers who can mentor these women in their journeys to move their lives forward.

Ideally, you will be able to offer around a day a week for a year and be available to attend an induction training session in the last week of March in Bournemouth. We particularly welcome women with access to a vehicle. All expenses will be covered. If you have further queries about the role, please call Jo on 07824 332227, or send a CV and some information on your availability by email to jo.wells@footprintsproject.co.uk before 15 March 2019 and we will meet you to arrange next steps.





Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

March 2019

Not far beneath the surface debate on Brexit there's an interesting and deeper debate about nationalism vs transnationalism. Nationalism is sometimes considered to be a synonym for extremism and xenophobia. But it can also be a legitimate aspiration for national self-determination. The 35 Scottish Nationalist MPs in the House of Commons, for instance, seem to fall into this more positive category. One of the things driving disaffection with transnationalism is the belief that democracy functions most vigorously at the national level. We claim to loathe all politicians but we are fascinated by the bear-pit of Parliament and we soak up the news about goings-on in the Westminster village. The European Parliament, which shuttles expensively between its two homes, inspires almost no interest. I had to look up the name of its President, Antonio Tajani, for this article. And that's a worrying thing for democracy, if its proceedings are so boring that no-one takes any notice.

I agree with Dave Haith (*Letters & Emails*) that humanists should 'accept that current understanding is not the end point of science and should not be the end point of discussion.' Our April speaker, Alex O'Connor, has gone to the trouble of investigating the claims of the Flat Earth Society in this [video](#). Our February Green House speaker, James Brown, entertained us with a stunning demonstration of magic and hypnosis and explained how both worked, by exploiting the brain's limitations as well as the power of the mind over the body. Atheists and humanists are discussing, debating, and sometimes 'debunking' (i.e. refuting) controversial claims.

I did say I would only serve for five years as Chairman of Dorset Humanists. Sorry, I broke my promise. I am now coming up to my tenth anniversary in the role. Every year, I make it clear to our hardworking committee that they are at liberty to nominate someone else for the role who can then be duly elected by the members. Until my successor emerges, I'll do what I can to serve one of the best humanist groups in the country. I'm proud of our links to Humanists UK and Humanists International as well as the National Secular Society. These institutions link us globally and root us historically. I'm also proud of the values we try to live up to such as rational thought, peaceful co-existence with other views, and trying to make the world a better place in so many different ways. The world needs the sane voice of Humanism more and more in these unsettling times. Please join us if you haven't done so already.

David Warden

