



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

# Dorset Humanists

## March 2014

A PARTNER OF THE  
BRITISH HUMANIST  
ASSOCIATION

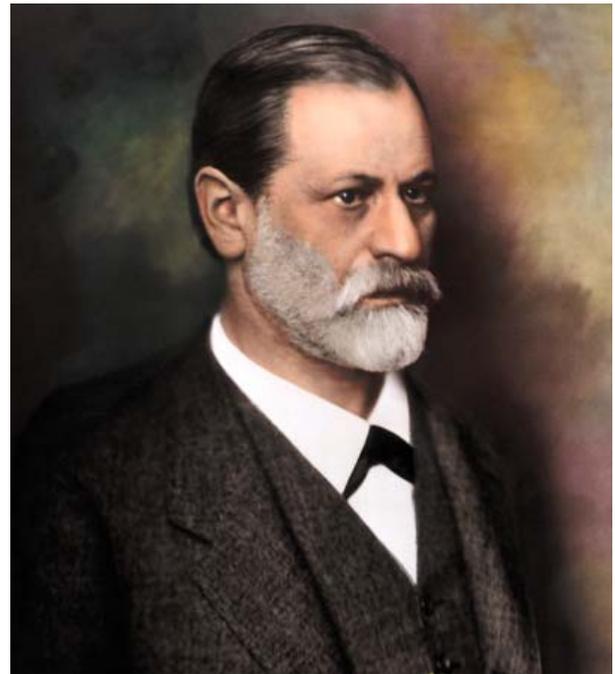
■ **Saturday 8th March – Lunch at 1.15pm**  
**AGM at 2.00pm** Moordown Community  
Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Informal Lunch & Annual General Meeting

Do join us for a simple, tasty lunch of jacket potatoes and sausages at 1.15pm prior to this year's AGM. Committee member Cathy Silman is very kindly organising this lunch for us and there will be vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free options. Lunch is free. Cathy regularly helps provide food for homeless people with 'Routes to Roots' – a Christian charity which seeks to serve the needs of homeless people of all faiths and none. You can make a donation but there's no obligation.

Our AGM is always an enjoyable meeting when members and visitors can contribute to debates about our aims and objectives. This year we will make a significant decision about whether or not to affiliate to the National Secular Society, founded in 1866 and still vigorously campaigning for a secular society. We will also review how our aims align with those of the British Humanist Association.

The AGM provides a great opportunity for all members to influence how Dorset Humanists grows and develops in the future, so please do come along and have your say. Only paid-up members can vote (you can join on the day).



■ **Wednesday 26th March 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel 4 Grove Road  
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

## Sigmund Freud: Are Belief Systems Based on an Illusion?

A fully illustrated talk on the life, ideas and legacy of the world's most famous psychologist by psychology lecturer and psychotherapist David Croman.

Freud's writings and therapy are based on views about the human mind that are extraordinarily influential, yet remain challenging and controversial even today. He was highly critical of the power and influence of religion and wrote extensively about his atheism and opposition to religious orthodoxy, offering psychological explanations for belief systems.

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The key periods of his extraordinary life will be covered and a clear outline given of his views on religions, human emotion, drives and sexuality.

■ **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> March 7.30pm**

Bakers Arms, 77-79 Commercial Rd,  
Bournemouth, BH2 5RT



## Dorset Humanists Social evening

Our next social evening will be in the cellar bar at the Bakers Arms. Join us for interesting conversations over a drink or two and get to know other like-minded people. See you there!

☎ Dean 07713 858773

■ **Saturday 12th April 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation  
Avenue, BH9 1TW

## The Paradox of Skepticism

A talk by author Richard Wilson

Skeptics try to take a rational, evidence-based approach to life, yet a cold appraisal of the evidence suggests that, for most human beings, rationality is a constant struggle.

Writer and activist Richard Wilson will be examining to what extent a life based on reason is possible, or even always desirable. If life itself has no ultimate meaning, does it even matter if some people choose to embrace false, yet comforting, delusions? Richard's activism has a particular focus on scepticism, corruption, human rights and freedom of expression. His book 'Don't Get Fooled Again: The Sceptic's Guide to Life' highlights the extent to which we are all vulnerable to deception and delusion, and proposes practical 'rules of thumb' to minimise the risk of being fooled in future.

*Another local event of interest...*

■ **Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March 7.30pm**

The Brunswick, Charminster, BH8 8PX

*Skeptics in the Pub Bournemouth launch*

## Simon Singh: The Simpsons and their Mathematical Secrets

Tickets £3 via website:

📧 [bournemouth.skepticsinthepub.org](http://bournemouth.skepticsinthepub.org)

☎ Chris 01425 673477

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## Introducing new committee members



*Jemma Hooper*

Jemma has been a Humanist since she was 11 but, like many people, did not know she was until she heard about the British Humanist Association about 10 years ago. She then worked for the BHA for over 3 years, adding to her experience in sectors as diverse as Publishing and Quality Assurance. Her main areas of interest are History, Science and Language. She brings to the committee insider experience of the BHA and skills in Marketing, Membership and Administration.

*Cathy Silman*

'I was brought up as a humanist and for me it has always been a way of life. I worked as a primary teacher in many roles, but especially enjoyed working with children who struggled at school whether because of behaviour or cognitive ability (either very high or low). I was a Volunteer with VSO in Namibia where I found the imposition of Christianity onto a still ongoing belief in ancestor worship interesting. I am happy to act as secretary to the committee, and would like to promote community work and hopefully start a Young Humanists Group. I am part of the Dorset Humanists education group and am actively contacting all first schools in the area.'

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# Getting West Dorset Humanists Up and Running



*West Dorset Humanists Steering Group reflect on the secrets of their success*

It's interesting to take a look at the four years which have elapsed between the first ever meeting, just in a front room, of seven people interested in setting up a Humanist Group in West Dorset to our current monthly meetings attracting an average of 30 members. While it is tricky to identify specific factors leading to the success of WDH, some (in no particular order) have been as follows:

There was a need! There are lots of like-minded people in the area, so tapping into this was easier than it might be in some more traditionalist and conventional places. Not that West Dorset is exactly whacky, but it has a liberal 'vibe' which has certainly worked in our favour.

*West Dorset has a liberal 'vibe' which has certainly worked in our favour*

Early on a few committed individuals opted in to the organisation and, though there has been lots of turnover in the Steering Group since the start, we still have two 'founder members'. We owe much to the continuing efforts of our great Steering Group members, past and present. The combination of a degree of continuity, and new ideas and enthusiasm coming into the Steering Group, has served us well.

We started our meetings in a cheery venue. But it wasn't central, it was a bit cold and parking was dreadful. Members fed back

they found this difficult – and when we identified a pleasant, town-centre venue with a good bar and easier parking, our numbers increased rapidly. Even more luckily, this has been free to us for the past three years – though we are now faced with charges, which is going to mean we have to give more thought to income generation.

The opportunity to meet like-minded people has been central to the group's development. The importance of 'fellowship' and of building good relationships between members, offering a warm and welcoming environment and keeping meetings relatively informal, has indeed been key in our thinking throughout.

Another way we have put effort and imagination into 'building fellowship' has been to have two socials a year in the place of the usual monthly meetings. These summer and winter socials, with food and drink, conversation and a raffle, have provided the opportunity to meet, chat and share ideas and values.

We have tried to plan a variety of talks, and in planning our programme we aim to be positive about Humanism and Humanist ideals, rather than being over-focused on knocking religion.

We have put great emphasis on publicity – and advertised our events via local press, a comprehensive e-mail list, an attractive website and volunteers occasionally spending time driving round local villages, putting up publicity flyers.

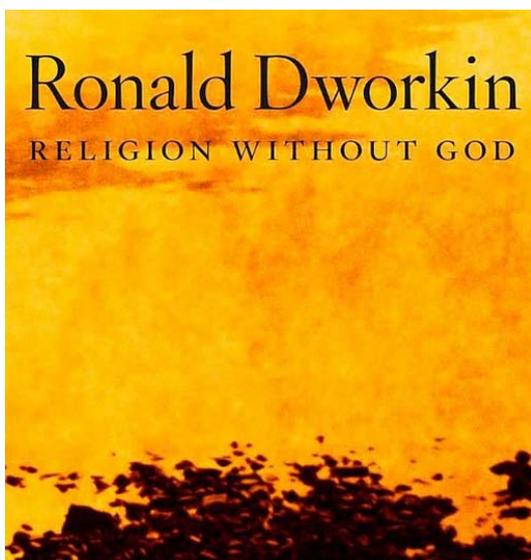
In order to find out how we were doing, we have run two member surveys to gather data on what people like and what they'd change. This has informed our development, ensuring we stay as in tune as possible with participants' wishes.

And finally, right from the inception of WDH we have been particularly fortunate to have the support and guidance of a mentor and 'Big Sister' organisation. Dorset Humanists has probably been one of the key factors in WDH flourishing and expanding to the extent it has. Our heartfelt thanks to them!

■ Pictured from left: Nigel, Jo, Annie, Roger and Hugh.

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## Book Review

### Ronald Dworkin *Religion without God* (2013)

Ronald Dworkin was Professor of Law and Philosophy at New York University until his death last year. He had planned to greatly extend his treatment of this subject but only had time to publish this rather slight and miscellaneous collection of lectures. I was expecting some new and interesting insights but Dworkin seems mostly unaware of the many and varied experiments in 'secular religion' ranging from Auguste Comte's 'Religion of Humanity' to Sanderson Jones's 'Sunday Assemblies'. There is nothing here about creating some kind of secular religion. What interests Dworkin is the possibility of 'religious atheism' – the kind of religious awe experienced by Einstein in relation to the "radiant beauty" of the universe. He maintains that 'the phrase "religious atheism" is not an oxymoron; religion is not restricted to theism' and explains that 'It was Einstein's faith that some transcendental and objective value permeates the universe'. I think this is muddying the waters – it takes the debate back nearly a hundred years. Dworkin rejects naturalism and seems to be entertaining some kind of mystical transcendental realism whilst rejecting the God of Christian theism.

His chapter on religious freedom is a useful commentary on the many vexed debates on religious symbols in public spaces, the teaching of creationism in schools, whether

Catholic adoption agencies can exclude gay couples and whether the Swiss were entitled to ban the building of minarets. Some of his conclusions support and some challenge the settled Humanist view.

His final, short chapter on death and immortality offers some support to those who argue that the possibility of life after death may one day come within the scope of science. He suggests 'We might try to imagine some mental stuff that is distinct to a particular human being that is constantly emanated by his brain into space, the sum of which, in countless independent quanta, survives the death of the brain - a bizarre but natural soul'. He admits these thoughts are fantastical but claims that quantum physics has become fantastical on its own.

I prefer his concluding remarks: 'The Romantic poets said we should try to make our lives into works of art – a life well-lived can be an achievement complete in itself and we can treat that as a kind of immortality'. DW

## 'One Life' course success in Dorchester

34 people signed up for our humanist 'One Life' course for West Dorset Humanists. This is what participants said about it:

*'A thoroughly enjoyable and thought-provoking series of meetings.'*

*'I have only the highest praise for the course!'*

*'Extremely interesting. Could have been far longer.'*

*'I was very reluctant to pigeon-hole myself but in fact the humanist philosophy is most aligned to my beliefs. It is important that the non-religious have a forum and have their voice heard.'*

*'In some ways perhaps Humanism is "harder" than religion: you have to figure out for yourself what is right, bit by bit, rather than simply accepting a pre-packaged job lot.'*

'One Life' will run again in October in Bournemouth

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## Letters & Emails

Write to Dorset Humanists,  
58a R L Stevenson Avenue  
Bournemouth BH4 8EG or  
email chairman  
[@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:@dorsethumanists.co.uk)

*From Andrew Copson, Chief Executive,  
British Humanist Association*

I wanted to update you on our plans to review the working of the BHA Local Groups Partnership Agreement.

We will conduct the review using a variety of instruments, including surveys of BHA staff, Local Group Officers and members, a review of all internal processes, and measurement of success against what was promised in the Partnership Agreement.

I hope to be able to develop the plans further in the spring and I will be in touch again with more information at that time.

■ Dorset Humanists will discuss our Partnership with the BHA at our AGM

*From Petra Schmidt, Hamburg Humanists*

How are your plans with your future young humanists going? We are quite busy with our young humanists. They come together in regular discussion groups for half a year at the moment. At the end they celebrate their symbolic 'step into adulthood'. This is called "Jugendfeier" (celebration of youth). Last autumn I took some of our young people to London on a cultural trip. Unfortunately, I will not take part in the World Humanist Congress in Oxford. Some other Humanists from our association will do though.

In one of your bulletins I read about your plans of taking humanism into schools. In Berlin, pupils already can choose a special subject called 'Lebenskunde' (knowledge of life), organized by the German Humanist Association (HVD). In Hamburg, we are trying to introduce this subject to schools, too, but this is very difficult because of our politicians. From the 4th 'til 6th of September 2014 I am going to be on

holiday in Bournemouth. Maybe there is a possibility to meet?

*From Amy Walters*

I am currently studying commercial photography at The Arts University Bournemouth. For my final BA project I am creating a documentary, portrait series on Atheism and Humanism. I am really interested to interview people about their beliefs and take a quick portrait to help me with my project. This is solely for my portfolio and degree. If anyone would be willing to help me I would be hugely grateful. My email address is [amywalters002@gmail.com](mailto:amywalters002@gmail.com) if anyone has any further questions. Thank you!

*From Hope Knutsson, President of the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association*

The year 2013 was an exciting, historic, and positive one for Sidmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association. Last May Sidmennt became a registered life stance organization with the same legal and funding status as religious organizations in Iceland. At that time we had around 300 members but by the end of the year our membership had more than doubled. It had grown to 773 in just 8 months! Just to put this into perspective: the total population of Iceland is only 325,000.

Along with the impressive growth in our membership there has been a major increase in the popularity of our secular ceremonies conducted by our 20 Humanist celebrants. The number of wedding ceremonies tripled after they became legal and funerals and baby-namings increased as well. Icelandic civil confirmations are now in their 26th year and the number of participants has increased by 45% just since last year. We have 304 teenagers in our ethical education program compared to 209 last year. That's 7.3% of kids of confirmation age. We are very pleased. This is a good time for Humanism in Iceland.



The World Humanist Congress in August is full but you can still register and get added to a waiting list. ☎ 020 7324 3060

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Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's View**  
March 2014



I was surprised that Crispian Jago used the loaded term 'climate denialists' in his Darwin Day talk. Five years ago I gave a layperson's talk to Dorset Humanists on climate change. I studied both sides of the debate – Monbiot, Lynas, Pat Michaels, Neil Lawson, Lomborg, Fred Singer, Roy Spencer, Robert Henson, James Lovelock and so on. It seemed to me at the time that those who were sceptical about the likelihood of human-caused climate catastrophe had the most persuasive arguments. Recently, I've read *Storms of My Grandchildren* by James Hansen, *The Great Global Warming Blunder* by Roy Spencer and *Climate: the Counter Consensus* by Robert Carter. Hansen is convinced that the climate is highly sensitive to minuscule increases of CO<sub>2</sub> from 0.00027 to 0.00054 of the total atmosphere (a doubling of CO<sub>2</sub>). He argues that if we continue 'business as usual' and burn every last drop of fossil fuel then melting of the ice sheets is inevitable and that an ice-free planet will result in a sea level rise of 250 feet. To put this into perspective, St Paul's Cathedral is only 365 feet high. The recent floods look trivial by comparison. Hansen also predicts that the Earth will end up like Venus with scorching temperatures and boiling oceans. Robert Carter's book is a devastating attack on climate alarmism. He argues that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a political advocacy group which has corrupted science. He writes that 'science is not concerned with authority, nor with consensus, but with testing hypotheses'. On scepticism, he declares that 'all good scientists are sceptics: that is their professional job... To not be a sceptic of the hypothesis you are testing means that you are committed to a particular outcome: that's faith, not science'. Roy Spencer, a former NASA climate scientist, similarly claims that 'the IPCC process for reviewing the science of climate change has been a peculiar perversion of the usual practice of scientific investigation. Science normally involves the testing of alternative hypotheses, not picking the first one and then religiously sticking to it'. Scientists who put a questioning head above the parapet risk committing professional suicide. This topic poses a peculiar dilemma for Humanists. On the one hand we want to live sustainably and 'save the planet'. On the other hand we want 7 billion people to have a decent standard of living and affordable energy. Neither of these objectives is well-served by adopting dogmatic positions in science and anathematizing those who dare to disagree. We should not be forced into a version of Pascal's Wager on the future of the climate.

*David Warden*

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