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International  
Humanist and  
Ethical Union



# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

■ **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March 1.15pm buffet lunch followed by AGM at 2.15pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Annual General Meeting

At our AGM we celebrate the highlights of the past year, and renew and refresh our sense of belonging to a stimulating and engaging community group. And most importantly, the meeting also enables our members to determine the future growth and development of Dorset Humanists, so please do come along and take part.

We hope you will also be able to join us for a complimentary lunch for our subscribing members at 1.15pm prior to the meeting beginning at 2.15pm (non-members are also welcome to join us for the meal, but there will be a small charge of £3 to help with costs – or you can become a member on the day). This year's AGM business will include discussing and voting on three resolutions, including one on our future event entrance pricing, so do join us to have your say. Further details inside this bulletin. (Please note that everyone is welcome to attend the AGM, but only subscribing members may vote on resolutions. Dorset Humanists Annual membership costs £15).

*"I'm so grateful that groups like yours exist, especially in times like these when so much of the world seems to be turning away from reason entirely. Secular groups like Dorset Humanists are improving individual lives and society in general."* Dr Michael Price

■ **Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX



## A Sceptic's Guide to the Origins of Christianity

It is becoming increasingly well known that the story of Jesus was very largely written from re-imaginings of Hebrew scriptural stories which were thought to be prophetic. But it is less well understood that the Gospel authors also borrowed from Greek literature such as the epics of Homer. Peter will show how Persian religion merged with brands of Judaism to produce the first Christian sects. He will challenge the early dates traditionally given to the New Testament writings and argue that critical scholarship is now moving their composition into the 2nd century. In the final part of his talk he will demonstrate that Christ is a 'composite construction' which combines supernatural elements with known historical persons.

Peter Marchant graduated in Ancient History from Manchester University and has been studying Christian origins for twenty-five years. He worked for the Council for British Archaeology and has given many talks to Isle of Wight Humanists. His book *3 Peter: A Sceptics Guide to the Origins of Christianity* is available on Amazon.

Send bulletin updates to [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk) or phone 07910 886629



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Dorset Humanists



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## Jane Bannister Appeal



Our Winter Appeal in memory of former Chairwoman Jane Bannister has raised £1072.75 for our chosen charities Mosaic and Michael House. A massive thank you to our generous donors.

### ■ Sundays 10.15am



## Sunday Walks

March 19th. Mudeford and Highcliffe. A comfortable, fairly level walk of about 7 miles on beaches and clifftops, with excellent views from the higher points to the Needles in one direction and Hengistbury Head and the Purbecks in the other. Because there are several pleasant cafes to stop at on the route, the walk could be shortened if desired.

April 23<sup>rd</sup> (4th Sunday, to avoid Easter): Tadnoll and Winfrith Heath nature reserve. 6 miles.

May 21<sup>st</sup>: Studland peninsula. 7 miles of harbour, beach and heathland including Agglestone Rock.

Please check [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for further details and any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions.

Phil ☎ 07817 260498

■ **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



## Pub socials

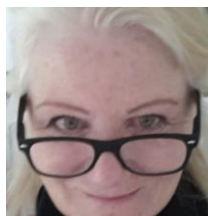
Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our pub social evening. Look out for the Dorset Humanists signs on the table. We warmly welcome regulars and newcomers.

☎ Dean 07713 858773

### ■ Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Memories of a Former Cult Devotee



Our speaker Alice Herron spent twenty-seven years as the devotee of the Indian guru, Sri Chinmoy. In this talk she describes how as an idealistic young woman she joined a

meditation group and how this group grew and changed over the subsequent years, developing all the features of a classic cult. She tells of the guru's increasingly outrageous ambitions and why she eventually left. She reveals how after leaving the cult she discovered the dark secrets the guru hidden from most of his followers. This talk is an insider view of life in a Hindu-based cult in the later part of the 20th century, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of such groups.

Alice is a retired business studies lecturer. After leaving the Sri Chinmoy group she studied psychology of religion at Heythrop College, University of London, where her master's dissertation was entitled 'Psychological Factors in the Emergence of New Religious Movements'. She is currently a psychology PhD candidate at the University of Surrey, researching atheists who claim to have had some kind of mystical-type experience.

### ■ Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March 8.00pm

## BHA President Shappi Khorsandi



*Lyn Glass writes...*

We are delighted that Shappi Khorsandi is bringing her latest stand-up tour 'Oh My Country' to Lighthouse, Poole. If you have already paid me for a ticket, please corner me at the AGM so that I can now give you a proper ticket to

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get in on the night. If you can't attend a DH event before the 25th then look out for me at the entrance to the Sherling Studio on the night. If you have reserved a ticket but not paid me yet, please again ensure you see me at the AGM at the latest to pay for and receive your ticket/s. I still have 5 tickets available so email me now if you want to try and secure a seat. We will be 35 Humanists attending in total and I have asked Lighthouse if we can reserve the left hand side section of the Studio so that we can all sit together.

***I am also thrilled to tell you that Shappi has said she would 'love to' meet up with us after the show for a chat & drink.***

[lyn.glass@btinternet.com](mailto:lyn.glass@btinternet.com)

### **Future dates for your diary:**

■ **Weds April 26<sup>th</sup> April 7.30** Green House Hotel 'First Brexit, then Trump: how did we end up here and where should we go?' Steve Laughton

■ **Saturday May 13<sup>th</sup> 2.00** Moordown 'A walk with our Ancestors: Human Evolution and Archaeology' Emeritus Professor Norman Maclean

■ **Weds May 24<sup>th</sup> April 7.30** Green House Hotel 'Humanism and Feminism' BU lecturer Frances Hawkhead

■ **Saturday June 10<sup>th</sup> 2.00** Moordown 'Tolpuddle – a radical, revolutionary and religious Dorset village' David Nunn

### **Other events of interest...**

■ **Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm** Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham BH20 4LT. Free entry – small donation appreciated 'Out of the Box' presents:

## **Marriage and Same Sex Relationships**

*Humanist and Christian perspectives*

Church of England clergy recently rejected a Report from the House of Bishops which

recommended that the church should maintain its traditional view of marriage – that it is between a man and a woman. In their pastoral response to this setback the Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote, 'We need a radical new Christian inclusion in the Church... based on a proper 21st century understanding of being human and of being sexual'. They also called for 'a large scale teaching document around the subject of human sexuality'.

Humanists welcome the fact that there has been radical social change on this issue with same-sex marriage now enshrined in UK law. This is because humanist moral philosophy is based on principles of human flourishing without additional considerations arising from sacred texts and theology.

Can Christians and Humanists reach common ground on this divisive issue? Will the church eventually modify its stance on same-sex marriage? Come along and join the conversation!

'Out of the Box' is a dialogue group for Humanists and Christians. The emphasis is on listening, learning and respectful discussion.

## **Death Café**

Thursday March  
23rd, 9.30-  
11.30am Death  
Café at Soulshine  
Café, 76 South  
Street, Bridport. Hosted and facilitated by  
Max Mackay-James and Johnny Payne.



No need to book, just turn up. Drink coffee, eat cake, talk about death - caring & compassionate conversations about everything to do with ageing/death/dying. For everyone – no matter where we are on our life journey – this is a place for sharing our stories, and finding out more about 'Dialog' support group activities. 'We are open, honest and upbeat - beginners welcome'.

How to start a death café:

<http://deathcafe.com/how/>

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## 2017 AGM Proposals

These proposals will be discussed and voted on at Dorset Humanists 2017 AGM:

1. Dorset Humanists to become a partner of the LGB&T Dorset Equality Network. The LGB&T Dorset Equality Network exists to combat discrimination against LGBT people.
2. Suggest/request visitors to our events to donate £3 and suggest/request paid-up members to donate £1. This is to reflect a reasonable and affordable event contribution and the fact that paid-up members have already made a £15 contribution through their subscription. We hope this will encourage more visitors to become members in order to give Dorset Humanists a stronger voice (see 'Membership 200' notes below).
3. Add this wording to our Vision Statement: "Dorset Humanists is an inclusive and welcoming community where people with humanist beliefs and values are supported in identifying themselves as humanists and in expressing those beliefs and values in their lives."

Members can vote by email or post if unable to attend the AGM. Deadline 10/3/17. Contact details below.

## Membership 200

One of our aims is to 'Increase paid-up membership of our group'. For some years our membership has hovered around the 150 mark. With your support, the committee would like to really focus on increasing this to 200. Increasing our membership numbers is of great benefit to all local humanists as it helps us raise our profile in the area, allows us to have more influence in matters of concern to humanists such as limiting the proliferation of faith schools, and helps facilitate our being able to represent the sizeable regional non-religious population at civic ceremonies.

If you are a regularly renewing member – thank you so much for your support. If you enjoy Dorset Humanists but haven't yet

joined, or if your membership has lapsed, you can help us by paying a regular direct debit subscription of just £15.00 per year which is incredible value for what Dorset Humanists offers. Paying by direct debit is a massive help to us because it eliminates needless administration and cost in having to send out annual reminders. It eliminates uncertainty for you as well – you can be confident that your membership is always up to date unless you choose to cancel. Our direct debit provider is Go Cardless which is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. You can subscribe by completing a simple form on our website or simply provide your details on paper and we'll do the rest. Our treasurer, Simon Whitlock, will be on hand to help at the AGM.

### ***Why join Dorset Humanists when I can attend most events for free?***

The committee is proposing that we end 'free entry' to our meetings and replace this with a two-tier suggested donation of £3.00 for visitors and £1.00 for members. Our entry payment system will continue to operate on a trust basis as it does now. You may be someone who generously donates at meetings or in other ways – if so, thank you! But the average donation per head at our meetings is £1.00. We think the new suggested donation structure is more realistic and we also hope it will encourage more people to become full supporting members. Members also benefit from discounted prices for special events and evening courses.

## Review of Aims

Our mission, vision, aims, and values were adopted in 2013. Our 2016 'Review of Aims' report takes stock of where we are now and outlines some fresh proposals. We can't implement all of the ideas and proposals at once but the report provides a base for current and future developments. The report was drafted for initial consideration by the committee on 13th December 2016. The committee has agreed some proposals for immediate implementation as listed below. Others will be discussed at the AGM as detailed in this Bulletin.

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1. We have expanded the wording of our aims to improve clarity. These will be presented at the AGM.
2. We have appointed Susan Bryson and Cathy Silman to a 'Meet & Greet' co-ordinator role to ensure that visitors feel welcomed at our meetings. This role will be developed and implemented after the AGM.
3. We have appointed Susan Bryson and Cathy Silman to implement our new pastoral aim. Cathy and Susan will say more about this at the AGM.
4. We have created but not yet filled a role to lead on publicity and marketing with a remit to improve awareness of Humanism and Dorset Humanists. (See next page.)
5. We have created but not yet filled a diversity role to advise on how we can improve the diversity of our membership - particularly with regard to age, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. (See next page.)

The full 'Review of Aims' document is available by email and we welcome comments. Please request a copy via email (or post if you don't have email).

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## BHA Convention

The British Humanist Association Convention 2017 will be hosted in Cambridge over the weekend of 9–11 June. It promises to be the most open BHA Convention to date, with a limited number of tickets from just £39 for students, and £89 for BHA members. The initial line-up is the



largest ever for a BHA Convention, with twelve speakers announced, including BBC science broadcaster Helen Czerski (left), social psychologist Karen Douglas, human rights and counter-

extremism activist Sara Khan, environmentalist Mark Lynas, along with theoretical physicist Jim Al-Khalili and BHA Chief Executive Andrew Copson, with more

to be announced. For full BHA Convention information and tickets, please visit [humanism.org.uk/bha2017](http://humanism.org.uk/bha2017).

## World Humanist Congress cancelled

*An exciting one day international conference in London will take its place*

The World Humanist Congress scheduled to take place in São Paulo, Brazil in August has had to be cancelled. Changes in the Brazilian economy have made it difficult to market the Congress and find sponsors. In addition, there is uncertainty over changing visa requirements (especially for those who would need to pass through the USA).

These and other factors have made the Congress impractical and unviable. The



International Humanist and Ethical Union will, however, be supporting the Secular Humanist League of Brazil to

host a regional conference in the near future.

In place of the World Humanist Congress, IHEU is working in partnership with the British Humanist Association to organise a one day international conference on the global challenges of nationalism, populism, religious extremism and illiberalism and the need to defend and promote democracy and human rights in response. This conference will take place in central London on Saturday 5 August. The General Assembly of the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation (IHEYO) will be on Friday 4 August, and the IHEU General Assembly on Sunday 6 August.

Together with the British Humanist Association, IHEU is offering humanists from every country the chance to come together to explore these challenges, and discuss the best way to organise in the face of them in an effort to assert once again the humanist and universal values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, liberalism, and internationalism.

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## Join our friendly team!

The success of Dorset Humanists is wholly reliant on its people – members, supporters and volunteers.

Many of our members commit a few hours a week to help us to be a great humanist group. Some join the committee, others join the schools team, while others perform key roles in relation to ceremonies, our library, sound system, publicity, and festival appearances. With your help we'd love to build on our success and there are some key roles we need to fill. Please have a look at the current vacancies below and think about whether you could help – maybe as a job share. If you have, or would be prepared to acquire, the relevant skills and would like to become part of our team, then please ask me for a full role description – my contact details are shown at the bottom on the page. I'm sorry we can't pay a salary but the satisfaction you get from being part of our friendly team is a reward in itself! Thanks for making Dorset Humanists a wonderfully friendly and effective voluntary group. *David Warden*

### Treasurer

Our current treasurer is stepping down and Dorset Humanists urgently needs to fill this vital and prestigious role. This role would be ideal for someone who enjoys administration and using an Excel spreadsheet. Numeracy, IT skills and a methodical approach essential. Full training will be given to the successful applicant.

### Diversity

Dorset Humanists has recently adopted the aim to improve the diversity of our membership, especially in relation to age, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. We would like to appoint a person or persons to help us achieve this aim. Some experience in or knowledge of equality and diversity would be an advantage. We would particularly welcome applications from people in the target groups, for example a

younger person or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic.

### Membership Development

Dorset Humanists has recently adopted a 200 membership target. We would like to appoint a creative, optimistic, and resilient person who can help us achieve this goal. Must be goal-focused and have the personal attributes to work in a team.

### Marketing & Publicity

Dorset Humanists is seeking a person or persons to help us co-ordinate our marketing and publicity. This would suit a creative person with excellent design and IT skills and an excellent standard of written English. Some experience in marketing and/or publicity would be an advantage.

## Religious schools campaign

The Accord Coalition, supported by the British Humanist Association, campaigns for inclusive education and against religious discrimination. Accord unites a wide range of member groups and individuals who want all state funded schools to be made open and suitable for all children, regardless of their or their parents' religious or non-religious beliefs. By registering for the activists' bulletin you can keep yourself fully informed about Accord's campaigns locally and nationally. Sign up [here](#).



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## Darwin Day at the BIC



Popular philosopher and writer **Julian Baggini** spoke engagingly at our Darwin Day lunch on the philosophy of science. He cautioned against elevating scientists like Charles Darwin

into 'secular saints'. He argued that the theory of evolution can be overused. For example, he thinks that evolutionary ethics is interesting but ethics is 'more than just a survival strategy'.

Julian argued that there is a temptation to see science as offering the model for all types of reasoning but he thinks this is a mistake. Science is not everything that reason is and there is no such thing as 'the' scientific method. Science doesn't conform to the idea we have of it and scientific practice is not a neat linear process. It's often rough and ready and full of mishaps. Julian cited numerous examples of eminent scientists whose methods seem to call into question the common sense view that science is a strictly rational process. For example, theoretical physicist Paul Dirac wanted his equations to have elegance, simplicity and aesthetic appeal – in short, to be beautiful. From a strictly rational point of view this seems outrageous – we cannot even define what beauty is! It sounds suspiciously like 'intuition' and 'gut feeling'.

Einstein seemed to challenge the view that theory has to fit observation. Einstein said on one occasion that 'It is the theory which decides what we can observe' although later he contradicted this view. Einstein even used to talk about his 'inner voice' and the mathematician Henri Poincaré was quoting as saying 'The idea came to me... with suddenness and immediate clarity'. Julian suggested that the relationship between theory and observation is a 'loop' which cannot be codified. You have to use your judgment. Furthermore, new scientific truths do not triumph by force of rationality alone. Physicist Max Planck observed that

new ideas triumph 'because their opponents eventually die'.

Julian offered us four guiding principles:

1. Scientism is false. In other words, we can't address all human problems by the methods of science. It's a false choice to imagine that all problems have to be empirically and rigorously tested OR that they are merely opinions. Our fear that the only alternative to scientific truth is prejudice and opinion is misplaced. The subjective/objective choice is problematic because they are not polar opposites. When you are arguing rationally you are trying to offer reasons which are not dependent on your subjective point of view, but it's impossible to escape fully from one's own perspective. Even a 'God's-eye-view' is a view from God's perspective. Science has, however, reached a very high degree of objectivity which is why science is the same wherever in the world you go – unlike philosophy which is 'embarrassingly parochial'. Julian disagrees with the argument put forward by Sam Harris in *The Moral Landscape* (2012) that science can determine ethics. Ethical reasoning can have an objective weight but this does not amount to 'scientific truth'.
2. Science is particularly suited to reason but reason itself is not particularly scientific. Reason is not modelled on science and science is not the highest form of reason. We can say, however, that science is the optimum *application* of reason.
3. Reductionism is a research programme, not a metaphysical commitment. For example, you cannot do biology as it were from the 'bottom up' from subatomic physics.
4. Science isn't normative. Science can tell us what is the case but it cannot tell us what ought to be the case.

Julian's 'take-home message' was this: Science is reasonable. But reason is something broader than science. He recommended Thomas Nagel's book *The View from Nowhere* (1989), *Quantum: Einstein, Bohr and the Great Debate About the Nature of Reality* (2009) by Manjit Kumar, and of course his own book *The Edge of Reason: A Rational Skeptic in an Irrational World* (2016).

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Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's View**  
March 2017



One of the themes to emerge from our 'Religion in Schools' debate at the Green House was the difficulty of pinning down the boundary between education and proselytization. Church schools worker Hilary Bond stated that, even in church schools, she is not allowed to proselytize and that she is very careful to express Christian beliefs as something which she believes rather than as fact. She reassures parents that 'We're not going to tell children what to believe'. On the face of it, this is no different from the approach of humanist visitors which is to 'share their personal experiences, beliefs, and values and explain what being a humanist means to them'. The Church of England, however, does have a clear evangelistic purpose in schools. A 2010 Report stated that 'The Education Division is committed to enabling every child and young person to have a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ' (*Going for Growth: Transformation for children, young people and the Church*). How can this be reconciled with the apparent restraint practiced by its schools workers? The ban on proselytization sounds reassuring but if Christian workers present the alleged 'claims of Jesus Christ' to children, which is what schools worker Dave Pegg aims to do, it's hard to see how this differs from what would occur in an evangelistic rally. Children are being informed 'this is what Christians believe' but it amounts to an existential choice: believe this too or you will be punished forever.

Should this be permitted in school? It can be, but unsettling information of this nature should be provided in the context of RE where children are also being equipped with the critical skills and comparative information to evaluate such claims. For example, if children were informed simultaneously what Muslims believe, which is that 'unbelievers', usually thought to include Christians as well as atheists, will go to 'the Hell', then they will be in a better position to decide for themselves whether to take such religious threats seriously. What should concern us is the apparent willingness of local schools to allow evangelical Christian workers to go way beyond occasional educational visits to become an established presence on school premises. However, we warmly welcome our visitors' willingness to collaborate with us on school visits.

For further information on what's happening in schools you may want to read *Evangelism in State Schools: The role of external visitors in publicly funded education* (2013) published by the National Secular Society.

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