



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

# Dorset Humanists

## November 2014

A PARTNER OF THE  
BRITISH HUMANIST  
ASSOCIATION

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

Dorset Humanists, Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Create your own Cult

### *The Scientology Way*



Scientology has been described in the United States as “ruthless, litigious and lucrative” and in this country as “corrupt, sinister and dangerous”, yet it has gained the approval of many A-list Hollywood celebrities, and

accumulated enormous quantities of money. Thanks to the internet, it now faces unprecedented global opposition, but how did it all begin? Martin Poulter has been keeping a close watch on L. Ron Hubbard’s secretive cult since 1995 when he was threatened with legal action over Scientology material he had posted online, and in this presentation he’ll be analysing, with humour and insight, its beginnings and development. Martin will reveal its recruitment methods and many of its disturbing secrets, and will also provide us with a checklist of useful points to keep in mind if you ever decide you’d like to create your own successful and highly lucrative cult!

Martin has a Philosophy and Psychology degree from Oxford University and a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Bristol. He is a key figure in Bristol Skeptics and his current main interest is in promoting critical and scientific thinking. He also gives talks on cognitive and social psychology.

### ■ Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm

Dorset Humanists, Green House Hotel, 4 Grove Road Bournemouth BH1 3AX

## The American Nightmare

### *Heroic Failure in the drama of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller*



A talk by John Hubbard. Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller are arguably the greatest American playwrights of all time and in this presentation John shares his passion and enthusiasm for their work

and explores the themes and characters that have made their plays so popular with audiences worldwide. John will suggest they used the elusiveness of idealised personal success to depict a deeper and more complex humanity than that allowed for in the 'American Dream' and that the fatally flawed nature of many of their characters, as measured against American aspirational culture, makes them rounded tragic figures with whom we can fully sympathise. We’re expecting a highly enjoyable evening for devotees of these playwrights, as well as a great introduction for those coming to them for the first time.

John is a course tutor for the U3A and has taught English and Drama at Bournemouth grammar schools over the last twenty-five years. He’s a member of Dorset Humanists and has given us memorable talks in the past on Thomas Hardy, George Eliot and E M Forster.

---

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

Website: [dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk) Twitter: @dorsethumanists Facebook: Dorset Humanists

■ **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm**  
Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



## Social Evening

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our latest pub social evening. There is no fixed agenda so if you have any interesting topics or ideas you want to share and chat about in a friendly atmosphere then this meetup is for you. ☎ Dean 07713 858773

■ **Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> November 10.57am**

War Memorial, Bournemouth Central Gardens.



## Remembrance Day Service

*Please come along to support David Warden who will, for the second year running, represent Humanists and non-religious people in the armed forces by taking an active part in this important civic event.*

**Advanced notice...**

■ **Thursday 12th February 5.30pm for talk starting at 6.00pm**

Dorset Humanists' Darwin Day at Bournemouth Natural Science Society, 39 Christchurch Rd, Bournemouth BH1 3NS

## The Difference That Darwin Has Made



Professor Anthony Grayling will address our 2015 Darwin Day celebration on the topic "The Difference That Darwin Has Made". This will be an early evening

start followed by light refreshments. Limited seating! DH members £2.00; Non-members £4.00; On the door (subject to capacity) £5.00

☎ Lyn 07802 558923

■ **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2.00pm**  
Dorset Humanists, Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Humanist Schools in Uganda

A talk by Steve and Hilary Hurd. A third of Uganda's population live in severe poverty. Belief in witchcraft, demonic possession and pseudoscience is widespread, and the country has been identified as the world's most dangerous place to live if you are gay. Against this backdrop of superstitious beliefs and religious bigotry, the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust was established to support three secondary schools offering liberal secular-humanist education in impoverished rural communities, providing otherwise-unattainable education for children growing up without electricity, sanitation, or running water, many of whom are orphans. The schools aim to provide an education that respects freedom of thought and expression, rational scientific enquiry, human rights, gender and racial equality, and that attains high levels of achievement and social responsibility. Join us to discover the remarkable story of these inspirational schools and their achievements.

*Other events of interest...*

■ **Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm**  
Milborne St Andrew Church

## Science and Religion are not compatible?

A debate between Eric Austen (Christian) and David Nunn (atheist). Eric Austen is a mediator, a teacher and a banker and David Nunn is a government scientist and atheist. Both have attended our *One Life* course in Dorchester. The debate will be chaired by Paul Taylor, Archdeacon of Sherborne. Audience questions invited. No charge but donations welcome. Coffee tea, wine and nibbles.

☎ 01258 837213

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

Website: [dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk) Twitter: @dorsethumanists Facebook: Dorset Humanists

■ **Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm**  
Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub at The  
Brunswick, Charminster, BH8 8PX  
Free entry (donations appreciated)

## Citizen Science for Skeptics

A talk by Alice Sheppard. Astronomy has been the subject of wonder and speculation for as long as historical records exist. As with all science, people got some things right – and, even with the best methods available, other things wrong. Since 2007, Alice Sheppard has run the Galaxy Zoo Forum, the discussion area for an online astronomy project with 300,000 members worldwide. Alice takes us through some of the best and worst of astronomical history, and what ancient and modern mistakes are made today. We also take a look at citizen science in general, how Galaxy Zoo taught large numbers of people to understand and use science, and explore what this might mean for skepticism. Alice is currently studying for an MSc in Astrophysics.

📧 [bournemouth.skepticsinthepub.org](mailto:bournemouth.skepticsinthepub.org)  
☎ Chris 01425 673477

■ **Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm**  
West Dorset Humanists at the Wessex  
Royale Hotel, 33 High St West, Dorchester  
£3.00 entry

## Making Good Medical Choices - Do We Need God?

A talk by Professor Roger Higgs, Institute of Medical Ethics and Retired GP. When it comes to those difficult decisions with doctors about euthanasia, abortion, or what to tell and who decides, does it feel as if there is Someone Else in the consulting room? Medical ethics as a respected discipline is forty years old but have the decisions just gone Upstairs? Roger, one of the founders of the *Journal of Medical Ethics* and a doctor from South London looks at practice and policy, the aches and the arguments when patients and their doctors get stuck.

☎ 07921 311518  
📧 [westdorsethumanists@hotmail.com](mailto:westdorsethumanists@hotmail.com)

■ **Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> November 1.30pm**  
Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London,  
WC1R 4RL



## National Secular Society AGM

Members are requested to arrive by 1pm when registration starts. Tea and coffee will be available before the meeting. We hope that as many members as possible will come along and meet the Council, staff and other members. We particularly welcome anyone who has not been to an AGM before. Dorset Humanists is an affiliate of the National Secular Society and we will be sending a representative.

📧 [admin@secularism.org.uk](mailto:admin@secularism.org.uk)  
☎ 020 7404 3126

■ **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> November 11.00am**

The Brunswick Pub, 199 Malmesbury Park Road, Charminster BH8 8PX



## Sunday Assembly Bournemouth

Free entry (donations appreciated). Please note the different venue while Rooper Hall undergoes a minor refit. Sunday Assembly Bournemouth is one of more than 60 Assemblies worldwide which have sprung up since the first one opened in London less than two years ago and these new communities are for everyone who wants to 'Live Better, Help Often and Wonder More'. Their mission is to celebrate life and be a force for good in the world. At their monthly Assemblies they meet together to be inspired, sing songs, listen to talks, readings and poems, and they finish with an enjoyable chat over tea and cake. November's theme will be 'Wonderment'. They'll be collecting food for a local food bank again this month so, if you are able to, please bring along any long-life dried or tinned food you can spare and they'll ensure it gets to families and individuals who need our help.

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

Website: [dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk) Twitter: @dorsethumanists Facebook: Dorset Humanists

# Jane Bannister Winter Appeal



We are delighted to launch our 2014 Jane Bannister Winter Appeal in support of New Forest Night Stop and Refuge. Last year we raised £1700 for these two charities. This year,

an anonymous donor has already pledged £250 if other members match this sum.

Jane Bannister (1944-2013) was a former Chair of Dorset Humanists and very supportive of these charities. Cheques made payable to 'Dorset Humanists (Winter Appeal)' can be passed to David Warden or our treasurer Simon Whitlock.

✉ [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk)

42 days  
left

*The clock is ticking! A member of Dorset Humanists has pledged £250 to our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal if all other members together match this sum by 20<sup>th</sup> December.*

newforest  
nightstop \*

New Forest Nightstop provides the only emergency overnight accommodation for homeless 16-24 year olds in the homes of trained and approved host households around the New Forest. New Forest Nightstop was established in 2003 and is a team approach to homelessness.

The primary aim of Nightstop is to enable homeless young people to access safe, free, emergency accommodation in our host households at the beginning of their homelessness when their need is most acute, then to support them into longer term housing through local housing providers. The support given by Nightstop improves not only young people's self-esteem but

also their life chances, and their outcomes for employment, training, health and housing are much improved.

Nightstop is a unique and integral service in a multi-agency approach to youth homelessness. Nightstop is temporary emergency accommodation when needed at the point of crisis.

We support young people through the Supported Housing Panel where those with the highest needs are allocated appropriate accommodation if available. There is a shortage of suitable accommodation for this age group, and some young people may return home if appropriate, following mediation. Our Nightstop support volunteers give practical advice and support, helping young people who are not successful through the Housing Panel when their only option is to find accommodation in the private rented sector.

✉ [newforestnightstop.org.uk/aboutus.html](http://newforestnightstop.org.uk/aboutus.html)



Refuge is committed to a world where domestic violence is not tolerated and where women and children can live in safety. Refuge aims to empower women

and children to rebuild their lives, free from violence and fear.

They operate a three-pronged approach which involves:

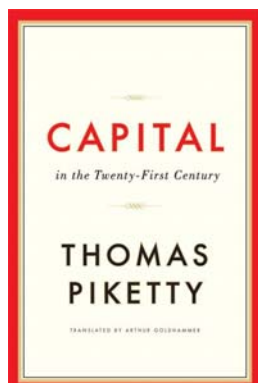
- Providing a range of high quality services for abused women and children. Its national network of services supports women and children to regain control of their lives and move forwards in a positive way.
- Advocating for improvements to domestic violence policy and practice, and the implementation of legislation to meet the needs of abused women and children.
- Helping to prevent domestic violence through campaigning, education, training and research. We work in partnership with other agencies to raise awareness of domestic violence, its causes and solutions.

✉ [Refuge.org.uk](http://Refuge.org.uk)

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

Website: [dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk) Twitter: @dorsethumanists Facebook: Dorset Humanists

# Inequality: “Things can only get worse”



*Nearly ninety people attended our October evening meeting to hear Douglas Lock speak about Thomas Piketty's book 'Capital in the Twenty First Century'. These are some edited and rearranged highlights from the talk.*

We recognized in the 1930s that left to itself capitalism produces some crummy results. Our society works in a way that concentrates wealth and leaves a lot of people poorer than they need be with the productive capability that the system possesses. This is the first documented proposition since Marx that says the way we are operating the world means that it is going to get worse.

It's being suggested that the financial crash of 2007/8 was a product of inequality. Two American professors were talking recently to Robert Peston saying their analysis of the crisis starts with inequality in America. They said we have an American dream where people want the things that the consumerist society can provide and above all they want homes. Governments have to respond to some extent to those expressed aspirations. If the aspiration is for a home but the pay level is not sufficient then you have a problem. That underlies the crisis – repayment of mortgages was unsustainable on their pay level. So we get a whole lot of household debt not backed by an income flow that can support the mortgage. What we have also seen is the dominance of a philosophy which we can call neoliberalism which is in favour of the least regulation. And we have a weak labour movement which derived from inequality.

There's increasing interest and concern about the growth of inequality in the industrialised world and around the globe. We've been treated over the last five years or so to a number of very important works which are focused on particular aspects of

inequality and the impact that inequality has such as *The Spirit Level* (2009) by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Price of Inequality* (2013) by Joseph Stiglitz and *The Body Economic* (2014) by David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu. The World Economic Forum put the rise in inequality at the top of its list of global risks – not population or war.

People have been wondering if there are important changes in the way capitalism works that generates inequality and this is where Piketty scores because he has concentrated minds on the system of capitalism. I believe, as he does and as many do, that inequality is unfair, so there's an ethical dimension. It's also very inefficient because it fails to produce the sort of life that we want with some adequate quality of life and a positive role for the state. It creates discord. Inequality sets people apart. It creates a situation where inequality leaves people unable to buy the goods that a capitalist system can create in abundance. Politically it's a threat to democracy because it divides the community into some that are very rich and powerful and a mass of others who are not rich or powerful and easily seduced into accepting a story into how the system works. Stories that bear no relation to reality if you look at them in depth.

For Piketty the first fundamental law of capitalism is that inequality is an inevitable outcome from the relationship which he has found to exist in America, France, Britain, and the Anglo-Saxon countries. Because it exists across the board it must be some kind of fundamental law. The return on capital seems to be fairly consistent in the long run. And capital returns, where they exceed the growth rate of the economy, will give us rising wealth for some and smaller income for others. So income from capital will grow faster than income from labour. If you are an unlucky worker on low pay you will stay there. A small proportion, say 10%, are going to be taking a larger proportion of the wealth that is being created and that is the problem. The capitalists are not spending their wealth. They are saving it and buying assets that provide income. So when they buy a mansion or stocks and shares, or whatever they buy, on that rise in capital they will get a bigger return. So while

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

Website: [dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk) Twitter: @dorsethumanists Facebook: Dorset Humanists

there may be a rise in labour incomes it won't be in proportion to the rise that we otherwise see.

Piketty writes about two forces in society. Convergence is where differences get smaller. He says this is possible when education and skills are enhanced which increases the bargaining power of labour. Convergence can be a powerful force. But the other force is divergence and this is much more powerful. What has been happening to the real incomes of labour is that they have been falling and the real incomes of the wealthy elite have been rising. Divergence is more likely in unregulated domestic and global markets and this can be threatening to democratic societies.

Most of the criticism and dismissals come from the political right. One argument against the book is the familiar idea that 'a rising tide raises all boats' coupled with the other idea called 'trickledown economics'. It is quite clear that rising wealth does not necessarily trickle down at all. It needs to be taken away and handed out but that raises arguments about 'living on welfare'. Another criticism is that inequality creates incentives. I am not sure that inequality provides incentives. We need opportunities and avenues to do that. These criticisms skirt around the subject and some are so bad that the commentator starts by saying 'I haven't read the book but...'. I'm not having that! From the political left you also get criticisms. People were expecting an update on *Das Kapital*. They are looking at the book as though it ought to be a Marxist treaty. Piketty says he's dealing with different issues.

The book is a social commentary as well as economic and political commentary. We need to see economics in a social and political context. There are far too many economists who have a vested interest in preserving and maintaining the financial and economic system. When the banking crisis in 2007/8 occurred it was obvious that those who ought to have been critics were apologizing for it and advising the government about quantitative easing without condemning the financial structure. Many of the advisors were professional economists but they were also directors of

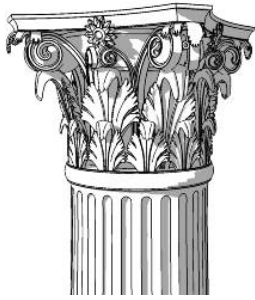
hedge funds and banks. This is called the 'capture' of the financial system and the 'capture' of the economic profession. They are a small elite group of very wealthy people.

One of Piketty's prescriptions is making taxation more progressive with the rich paying more. He suggests a tax on wealth – not just a tax on income but also on assets, a bit like mansion tax. But many people don't want all that money taken from the rich and given to those who have an alleged 'welfare lifestyle'. So if you have a lot of money and don't like the tax rates where you are you put your money where you do like the tax rates. So he recognizes that the changes he suggests are utopian. I think we are in a growing debate which recognizes that economics by itself will not provide the answers that will move us forward.

The book concentrates attention on capitalism as a system and asks if it is working for all of us. Piketty says 'No, it's not'. That's the key conclusion that I would draw. His book provides a warning about the consequences of an uncontrolled global economy. My conclusion is that inequality has got to be approached from several standpoints. I'm puzzled by the lack of concern. I can't see why so many people are more interested in how to bake a cake than are interested in the politics and economics of the life we lead.

In response to Aaron's question: "How would you fix it if we sent you to Downing Street?" Douglas said "In 2010 I said there were three things that the government ought to be promising. First, that they would build a million houses and bring people into work building the houses. Second, get back the £30 billion pounds of tax avoidance money that would solve the deficit in three years. And third, educate people with no fees so that we educate people to a higher level of productivity. This government is going the wrong way and if they go on that way this next five years will be dreadful."

Thank you very much. I am passionately interested in the subject and was wondering if anyone would be here, so I am really pleased that so many of you are here this evening.



# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

*From Swami Manavatavadi*

Our humble Namaskars to you all there. Everybody and especially our children are happy to have new computers – especially the touch-screen tablets. All our children thanked their Uncles and Aunts in England for their generous help. I shall send you photographs soon.

■ Dorset Humanists recently provided 7 laptops and funded 20 desks for Swami Manavatavadi's Humanist school in northern India.

*From Henry Schachter, after his talk on escaping from the Nazis*

Thank you for the kind invitation to speak to Dorset Humanists. There is an ill wind gathering over Europe I'm afraid. Not many see it because it has not affected them yet but I am sure it is coming and it will not be pleasant. Hence, by talking to the next generation I try to widen their perspective and to put them on their guard against unwarranted racism and prejudice. Thanking you once again and for your kind gift.

*From Paul Entwistle*

A brief note to say 'Excellent' on your Chairman's View this month – it is good to hear an unambiguous view on this from a position of influence! I've seen a lot of economic theory supporting the equity and effectiveness of land taxes. I believe it would do a huge amount for our housing market (and of course land usage generally) and incidentally ensure some gentle rebalancing of our spectacular inequalities of wealth. It's a shame that political parties shy away from this in the UK – very difficult to see how we could change their minds!

*From Ken Fagg*

I am glad that you have started and encouraged the debate (*Chairman's View*,

October). But we must proceed cautiously. We need to avoid the extremes of unregulated wealth (and 'to hell with the poor') and communism ('the rich are evil'). Neither are fair or viable long term.

The rich have access to expert advice. Very few will pay an 80% tax rate. There will be ways to avoid it. Even if only a few can find better places to emigrate to and take their expertise with them, it may discourage brilliant scientists, technicians, and entrepreneurs from immigrating.

Some older people do have empty bedrooms, but they need them to attract visits from their children, grandchildren and friends. Moreover, moving house is a real hassle that they can do without. Retirement is a time to relax, socialise and enjoy life in a home that they have at last got organised the way they want it.

*From Martin Brennan, following a discussion on Secularism at our One Life Course*

I fear that we, as humanists, might be in trouble if we try to embrace tradition in a sentimental way whilst seeking to eliminate religion from our world-view. Tradition may well be a toxic brew. Historically it has been an amalgam of monarchism, nationalism, militarism and religion. These things are very tightly bound together and it might not be possible to remove one and retain the others. In fact, trying to do that leads humanists to be timid and incremental. They just want to join the existing club as representatives of another sect – for example a few humanists in the House of Lords or a humanist monarch. I would prefer us to be a lot bolder. In order to advance humanism we may need to have a much wider and deeper agenda which involves a critique of traditional institutions. I think humanism will become very attractive to more people if it is seen in this context.

*From Douglas Lock, after his talk to us*

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about Thomas Piketty and the associated issues. Great audience and a very enjoyable evening. I am really pleased that the talk attracted such a good attendance.

---

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

Website: [dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk) Twitter: @dorsethumanists Facebook: Dorset Humanists



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



**A**ccording to Thomas Piketty (*Capital in the Twenty-First Century*) the forces of divergence (increasing inequality) are more powerful than the forces of convergence (decreasing inequality). Put simply, this is because the return on assets and wealth over the long term is greater than economic growth. Does this matter? Yes, if it means that a small elite of super-wealthy people will continue to increase their wealth whilst the majority faces a stagnating and harsher economic future – especially the younger generation. Here's an example: wealthy people can pour their spare money into assets like property and this pushes up housing prices for everyone. So here's a direct relationship between growing wealth of the rich and impoverishment for the many. There are many ways in which this situation might be tackled including new forms of wealth tax, land tax, property tax or a reform of council tax. These taxes would not hit entrepreneurs and job creators. They are nothing to do with envy. They would simply help to reverse an entirely arbitrary and unjust flow of wealth from the many to the few. They would help to fix the public finances, put the UK back onto a firmer economic footing, and help to create a fairer society. ● *We are planning an evening meeting to discuss more 'humanist manifesto' ideas just before the general election in May. Please share your views with the Bulletin.*

**J**ohn, a Christian minister on our *One Life* course, has thrown down the familiar challenge that atheism is itself a 'faith'. I'm afraid this is a common fallacy. Atheism is not susceptible to proof but it's based on the very reasonable principle that we should not believe in entities for which there is practically no evidence. Religious faith is based on the opposite principle which is that we should believe in a stupendous entity called God despite the weakness of the evidence. This is why it's called 'faith'. Faith is an act of will which runs counter to the evidence, allegedly because God doesn't want to force his presence on us. It's sustained by the pious habit of looking at everything through a theistic filter – a habit which generates copious amounts of spurious 'evidence' through answered prayer and so on. If you remove the God filter God disappears. This is how I became an atheist at the conclusion of my theological studies. I discovered that the reality of God was in the eye of the beholder.

*David Warden*

---

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

Website: [dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk) Twitter: @dorsethumanists Facebook: Dorset Humanists