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Ethical Union



November 2015

# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

■ **Saturday 14th November 2.00pm**  
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation  
Avenue, BH9 1TW

## Beyond the Syringe: the Secrets of Alternative Medicine Exposed

**Dr Richard Rawlins**



Since time immemorial humans have been concerned about their health and well-being. For early civilisations it seemed obvious that the gods, spirits and stars were the cause of illness and

disease. The Age of Enlightenment ushered in more critical analysis and we now expect medicine and healthcare to be evidence-based. Despite this, a third of the UK population indulges in alternatives to evidence-based medicine, and at least £500 million is spent every year on implausible treatments. There is no satisfactory way of differentiating between a sincere practitioner of complementary or alternative medicine, a dissembling quack, and an out and out fraudster. In this presentation Richard Rawlins reviews how conventional, orthodox, mainstream medicine has evolved from esoteric, hermetic, and arcane origins and now provides the best possible care in the light of current knowledge and understanding. Dr. Richard Rawlins is a former lecturer in Anatomy, King's College, London, Clinical Director of Surgery and Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at Bedford Hospital and Chairman of the UK Consultants Conference.

■ **Wednesday 25th November 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

## Is 'Goodness without God' Good Enough?

**Debate with Moorlands College of  
Christian Theology**



One of the core claims of Humanism is that we can be 'good without God', basing our morality on empathy, compassion, reason and science, rather than deriving it

from ancient 'sacred' texts. While most Christians agree that humanists are capable of being good without God, many claim we are living off the moral capital of Christianity and that without a religious foundation questions of right and wrong ultimately collapse into relativism and subjectivity. A frequent accusation levelled against atheists is that 'without God all things are permitted'! So, is a firm foundation for ethics without God simply a hopeless quest? Join us for this exciting debate between Dorset Humanists and Moorlands College as we consider the question: 'Is God Required for Morality?'

Local philosopher Jonathan MS Pearce and Dorset Humanists committee member Dean Robertson will be representing Dorset Humanists, and we welcome people of all beliefs to attend. This meeting is likely to be packed so please ensure you come along early to secure a seat.

Send bulletin updates to chairman @dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629



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■ **Sunday 8<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 third year running, represent Humanists and non-religious people in the armed forces by taking an active part in this important civic event.*

■ **Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



## Social Evening

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our 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

■ **Saturday 12th December 2.00pm**  
**Inside AA: Can a Non-Existent God Really Cure Alcoholism?**



Jonathan Stewart

Alcoholics Anonymous has become a widely accepted and media-approved treatment for problem drinkers. Yet while AA's social worth is rarely challenged its efficacy rate, estimated to be as little as 5%, appears comparable to that of spontaneous remission. Can a non-existent "Higher Power" really offer meaningful solutions to the debilitating and frequently fatal condition of alcoholism? If so, what happens to all those alcoholic atheists and skeptics? How did AA become the go-to treatment modality for one of the great social health scourges of our age? It's the twenty first century, is this really the best we can do?

Jon Stewart was co-founder, guitarist and co-songwriter for platinum-selling Britpop band Sleeper, with whom he enjoyed three UK Top 10 albums and eight UK Top 40 singles. He subsequently played on albums by K D Lang and Mel C, and contributed to feature film and documentary soundtracks including *Trainspotting* and *Telstar: The True Story of Joe Meek*. Jon currently lectures in cultural history at BIMM Institute, Brighton, on programmes validated and awarded by University of Sussex. He is also a PhD researcher at University of Southampton. Author of a long-running column in *Guitarist* magazine, Jon has published a wide range of research in peer reviewed journals and collections of academic essays. An active and sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous for 14 years, Jon quit the fellowship in early 2014. His blog "Leaving AA, Staying Sober" is at <http://jonsleeper.wordpress.com>

*Advanced notice...*

■ **Saturday 13th February 12.00 lunch followed by 2pm talk**

Dorset Humanists present Darwin Day at the Bournemouth International Centre

## Predatory Dinosaurs and the Evolution of Birds



Dr Darren Naish. There is no longer any serious doubt among scientists that birds are descended from small predatory dinosaurs that

lived about 160 million years ago during the Jurassic period. Recent fossil discoveries have revealed a wealth of feathered dinosaurs and early birds that totally blur any supposed distinction between birds and other kinds of dinosaur. Birds really are just one lineage among the dinosaurs, albeit the only lineage that survived the mass extinction event 66 million years ago. This talk will also look at spinosaurs, allosaurs and tyrannosaurs, as well as the behaviour of the remarkable scythe-clawed therizinosaurs and sickle-clawed dromaeosaurs.

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629



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Darren Naish is a vertebrate palaeontologist currently based at the University of Southampton. His published technical work is mostly on theropod (beast-footed) and sauropod (lizard-footed) dinosaurs, but he's also worked on pterosaurs, marine reptiles and marine mammals. His books include *Walking With Dinosaurs: The Evidence* BBC Worldwide and *The Great Dinosaur Discoveries* University of California Press.

Tickets £20 each (£10 students/UB40)

12.00 noon welcoming glass of wine or soft drink followed by 3-course Italian buffet lunch in the BIC Purbeck Lounge.

Talk only at 2pm £3.00 includes coffee or tea on arrival. £1 for students / unemployed

☎ Lyn Glass 01202 558763

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

### Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm**  
Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub,  
Brunswick Pub, Malmesbury Park Road  
BH8 8PX

## Paradoxes: The Limits of Logic

This talk by Colin Beveridge examines some of the most famous historical paradoxes, from Epimenides ("All Cretans are liars") to Gödel ("The statement encoded by G is not provable in the theory T") via Zeno (the arrow doesn't move!) by way of Hilbert (what happens when a guest shows up to an infinite and fully-booked hotel?), and explores how their resolutions led to mathematical revolutions.

Colin Beveridge returns to Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub following his previous talk on the statistical games many politicians used during the UK General Election 2015. He is the author of *Basic Maths For Dummies* and the *Flying Colours Maths Blog*.

■ **Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm**  
West Dorset Humanists at Wessex Royale Hotel, 32 High West St, Dorchester £3.00.

## Islam: Prospects for Liberal Reform

In this illustrated and optimistic presentation, David Warden will trace the history of Islam and show that liberal voices have always been present in the Islamic tradition. He will remind us of the glories of Islamic civilization which flourished in the period we erroneously call 'the Dark Ages'. Engaging with liberal Islamic scholarship and the recent work of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, David will explore how it might be possible to formulate a liberal, humanistic version of Islam which could provide a viable alternative to radical Islam. David is chair of Dorset Humanists and he studied theology at the University of Kent in Canterbury.

✉ [westdorsethumanists@hotmail.com](mailto:westdorsethumanists@hotmail.com)  
☎ 07810 360700 or 07411 077058

■ **Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm**  
Urban Beach Hotel, 23 Argyll Rd, BH5 1EB

## Bournemouth Book Club

Dorset Humanist member Jane Russell-Smith is the organiser of this new book club. Jane is open to recommendations but the authors she has enjoyed recently include Julian Barnes, Patrick Gale, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Markus Zusak.

[Click here for meetup link](#)

## Dorset Humanists: Time for Change?

Do you have any inspiration for how we can further build on the success of Dorset Humanists? Any ideas for increasing membership or improving what we do? Skills and time to contribute? Do you have any proposals which you'd like us to discuss before the next AGM? Please contact David or any committee member with your ideas so that we can consult as widely as possible.

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



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## Dorset Humanists 'Jane Bannister Winter Appeal'

At our meeting on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> we voted to select two charities to support via our Winter Appeal. The votes were as follows:

- 31 New Forest NightStop
- 22 Mosaic (bereaved children - Dorset based charity)
- 11 Refuge (domestic abuse)
- 9 Dorset Mind (mental health)
- 7 Survival fund for refugees
- 1 Refugee Council

Based on these results your committee has decided to recommend that we support New Forest NightStop and Mosaic this year. We hope you will give what you can to these two very worthwhile local charities.

Dorset Humanists has raised thousands of pounds in previous years for worthwhile charities. The appeal is named in memory of Jane Bannister who was Chair of Dorset



*Supporting bereaved children*

Humanists for many years.

Mosaic is a Dorset-wide charity offering a pathway of support to bereaved children, young people and their families. We also work with young people who are facing the death of a loved one.

Mosaic provides individual, family and group support. Every child has the opportunity to attend our residential weekend programme where they can meet others and share their experiences.

The charity receives 30% Local Authority funding allocated to support for bereaved children in Dorset. All other money has to be raised through applications to The Big Lottery, Children in Need etc., Charitable Trust grants, fundraising, corporate sponsorship, individual support, and donations from local groups.

## 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 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.

There is a shortage of suitable accommodation for this age group, and some young people may return home if appropriate, following mediation. 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.

*giftaid it*

Please consider gift aiding your donation. Forms available at our meetings or from Simon 07786 318863. Please donate at our meetings or send a cheque made payable to 'Dorset Humanists Winter Appeal' to Simon Whitlock 47 Western Road, Flat 3 Park Court, Poole BH13 6ES.

Send bulletin updates to chairman @dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629



# The Happiness Course

**Exploring the philosophy, psychology, science and skills of happiness, wellbeing and flourishing**

*"First class course – really enjoyed the stimulating sessions" Barry*

*"Very well run course, extensively prepared and researched, professionally presented." Paul*

Dorset Humanists has just successfully completed its first, fully-booked Happiness Course. In the first session we tried to define what we mean by happiness. The Greeks spoke about 'eudaimonia' which literally means 'having a good indwelling spirit'. Humanists don't literally believe in 'indwelling spirits' of course but we were happy to talk about experiences and activities which are 'good for the human spirit'. There are different models of what we mean by happiness. It can be helpful to think about it on three levels: Level one is the absence of unhappiness – a resting state of general contentment. Level two is occasional euphoria – the icing on the cake. And level three is a sense of fulfilment with your life as a whole.

Achieving these three levels of happiness can be a huge challenge not least because the human brain is such a contraption. On the course, under the expert guidance of Dorset Humanists member and psychologist Phil James, we learned about the different layers of the brain which have evolved over hundreds of millions of years. We share its deep structures (the limbic system) with the reptiles and it's our reptilian brain which is often unruly and prone to catastrophise. The bit of our brain which makes us more human and rational is the prefrontal cortex (PFC). On the course we learned about some techniques which can help to stimulate the PFC in positive ways and to reduce the arousal of the limbic system. We also learned about the cocktail

of chemicals sloshing around in our brains and how to stimulate production of the happy chemicals such as endorphins and oxytocin. One of the most enjoyable experiences on the course was the Chocolate Meditation.

We tackled the age-old question as to whether money makes you happy. We discovered that, yes, it can but the happiness effect of money is greater if you are poor than if you are already rich. The more you have, the less marginal utility accrues to gaining yet more money. Happiness, to some extent, depends on keeping your desires in check and not allowing them to become inflamed by advertising and social comparison. If they do, then you will be enslaved to the 'hedonic treadmill'. We also heard that materialism – defined as wanting money and material goods much more than, say, fulfilling relationships – is toxic to your happiness.

One of the sessions focussed on the work of Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced 'chickshentmehigh') and his concept of 'flow' – a euphoric state achieved when you are engaged in the masterful exercise of skills in a challenging activity. Examples of 'flow' included dancing, rock climbing, and being a surgeon. But you can also experience 'flow' in more mundane activities such as washing up as long as you pay attention to the sensory data being stimulated by the activity. One of the participants enthused about the flow experience she gained from being absorbed in spreadsheets!

Other guides (though not in person) included Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky who has written two excellent books on happiness, and philosopher of religion Don Cupitt whose book *The Way to Happiness* recommends 'simple animal pleasure in life, in being alive... pleasure in our continually changing sense experience ... an exhilarated, selfless enjoyment of, delight in and gratitude for just the flow of daily experience, the movement of life itself, and the endless self-renewing variety of the human world'.

We will no doubt further develop and run this course again next year.

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# Women's Equality Party

*"Nowhere in the world do women enjoy full equality. This represents a shameful waste of potential, for women and for the countries that fail to harness their talents and the societies living at odds instead of in mutual respect. This also represents a huge opportunity. WE believe England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should not lag behind other countries but instead should take the lead and be the first countries in the world where all genders are equal."*  
From the WE Policy Document

We know of at least two local humanists who have become founding members of the new Women's Equality Party so we thought we'd find out what it's all about.

The Women's Equality Party was formed in March 2015 and fully launched in October at Conway Hall – the historic home of ethical humanism in London. Journalist Catherine Mayer and comedian Sandi Toksvig are the co-founders of the party and journalist Sophie Walker is its leader. It has already attracted 45,000 members and set up 63 local branches including Bournemouth and Poole.

According to the party's mission statement: "Equality for women isn't a women's issue. When women fulfil their potential, everyone benefits. Equality means better politics, a more vibrant economy, a workforce that draws on the talents of the whole population and a society at ease with itself".

The party's six core objectives are as follows:

1. WE are pushing for equal representation in politics, business, industry and throughout working life.
2. WE expect equal pay and an equal opportunity to thrive.
3. WE are campaigning for equal parenting and caregiving and shared responsibilities at home to give everyone equal opportunities both in family life and in the work place.
4. WE urge an education system that creates opportunities for all children and an understanding of why this matters.



5. WE strive for equal treatment of women by and in the media.
6. WE seek an end to violence against women.

Sophie Walker has called for a gender quota system to select MPs at the next two elections so that equal representation can be achieved in the House of Commons by 2025.

The WE policy document says it's perfectly happy for other parties to steal their ideas. They just want to see their policies implemented.

Local Branch Officer, Sue, announced that the formal policy launch of the Women's Equality Party 'was marked by a small celebration in Southbourne which was well attended by existing and new members... the key, to me, is the work that we need to do locally to spread the word and encourage more people in Dorset to get engaged with the principles and objectives of the party. In order to do this, we will be calling a meeting early in November to explore the ways that volunteers can get involved' for example by 'attending meetings and contributing to discussions, to getting involved with other local organisations such as schools, businesses, and voluntary groups'.

■ Jo Adams, a founding member of WE and former Chair of West Dorset Humanists, will speak to us on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January about Women, Religion and Humanism.

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629



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## Pavan Dhaliwal

*'A cracking talk – the BHA is looking increasingly businesslike and effective.'*  
John Davison

Our distinguished speaker at the Green House Hotel (October) was Pavan Dhaliwal who is Director of Public Affairs and Campaigns at the British Humanist Association and Vice President of the European Humanist Federation. She's an equalities and human rights expert and she is responsible for the BHA's campaigns covering 21 policy areas including issues as diverse as FGM and 'Thought for the Day'. She spoke engagingly and fluently about four of these areas and how the BHA seeks to change the law through 'strategic litigation' in the courts, including the Supreme Court. She works closely with Labour MP Clive Lewis and Conservative MP Crispin Blunt – both of whom are members of the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group which has 130 members.

The first topic Pavan covered was **religious education**. The coalition government was poised to include Humanism in the RE GCSE syllabus so that pupils will have the option of studying a non-religious philosophy but it appears that a personal decision was taken by Minister of State for Schools Nick Gibb to exclude Humanism. The BHA has been working with three sets of parents in order to challenge this decision under the Equality Act 2010 which imposes a duty of impartiality and neutrality on the government. The High Court hearing is on November 10<sup>th</sup>. Pavan said the outcome very much depends on which judge hears the case but she is hopeful.

Pavan's second topic was **assisted dying**. According to opinion polls, 82% of the public support a change in the law but the last time this was debated in the House of Commons 74% of MPs voted against change. The BHA supports doctor assisted dying for people who are terminally ill and incurably suffering. In June 2014, Paul Lamb, who was paralysed in a car accident 20 years ago and is in constant pain, and the widow of Tony Nicklinson lost their

appeal in the UK Supreme Court over the right to die. Nine judges had to decide whether the UK ban on assisted suicide is incompatible with the rights to dignity and a private life. The judges ruled against by seven to two. However, five judges said it was within the court's jurisdiction to 'issue a declaration' of incompatibility and two of them stated that if a similar case comes before the court they will do so. This in itself would not change the law but it would send a strong signal to Parliament that the law should change. The BHA is now working with fifteen new claimants with a variety of conditions such as Motor Neurone Disease in order to get this issue back to the Supreme Court but it needs to raise £500,000 in order to do so.

Pavan's third topic was access to **non-religious pastoral care** in the NHS and she said that Church of England gatekeepers will 'do anything' to block access to patients. 98% of chaplaincy services are accessed by religious people but only 12% of patients are religious. The BHA threatened the NHS with legal action for not complying with the Equality Act. They simply caved in and changed the guidelines. The BHA's Head of Pastoral Support David Savage is rolling out training for humanist pastoral support volunteers. A number of people in the audience indicated that they would be interested in attending such training in the future.

Pavan's fourth and final topic was **humanist marriage**. The change required is for humanist celebrants to be able to legally marry people – as is the case for rabbis and quaker ministers. (The situation for the CofE is that church *premises* are licensed for marriage.) Since humanist marriage was legalised in Scotland awareness of the word 'humanism' has gone up from less than 10% of the population to 70%. A year ago, No. 10 blocked an amendment to the Marriage Act which would have legalised humanist marriage. The BHA is now trying to influence the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice Michael Gove who can exercise an 'order making power' in our favour but this is 'very difficult' especially as the CofE will be lobbying hard against the change.

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Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's View**  
November 2015



**M**y holiday reading included *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now* (2015) by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Many of you will know Hirsi Ali from her gripping autobiography *Infidel* (required reading for all humanists if you haven't read it yet!). She grew up as a Muslim in Somalia and Saudi Arabia before absconding to Holland to escape an arranged marriage. In Holland she was amazed at the freedoms and privileges of those living in an enlightened country and she gradually gave up her belief in Islam. She is now an outspoken critic of Islam and has been called an 'Islamophobe' – a word which is now employed by some to silence all criticism of Islam.

*Heretic* is a shocking catalogue of the horrors being perpetrated by jihadists. Hirsi Ali is critical of those, including President Obama, who regularly intone that jihadism has 'nothing to do with Islam'. She claims that this fails to deal with the root of the problem. She argues that jihadism draws sustenance from certain core doctrines of Islam which need to be challenged and reformed. Chief among these are the infallibility of Muhammad and a literalist reading of the Qur'an.

Hirsi Ali frames the opposition to jihadism/militant Islam in terms of a global moral struggle against apartheid. The 'apartheid' she has in mind is the apartheid which makes second-class citizens of women, homosexuals, Christians, Jews, humanists, freethinkers and moderate Muslims. She believes that this apartheid can be confronted and defeated, as racist apartheid was in South Africa. Her optimism is based on the impact of information technology, the impact of Western norms on Muslim immigrants, and the emergence of a political constituency for religious reform in countries like Egypt (President Sisi has called for a 'religious revolution') and the United Arab Emirates whose government has called for a sustained international effort to confront the 'transnational cancer' of extremism.

With my background in theology and debating with Christian fundamentalists, I'm interested in how you can go about challenging the theological foundations of militant Islam. Is it possible to formulate a kind of benign, liberal Islam along the lines of liberal Christianity? Or is such a project doomed from the outset? I'll be exploring this intriguing question in my next talk on Islam for West Dorset Humanists in November.

*David Warden*

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