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BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

national
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IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ Saturday 12th November 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

The Evolution of Religion



Dr Michael E. Price, Senior Lecturer in Psychology. Is it adaptive to believe in a higher power? The consensus among evolutionary psychologists is that religiosity is a non-adaptive by-product

enabled by psychological mechanisms that evolved for purposes other than religion itself. However, a great deal of scientific evidence now suggests that religion offers survival benefits, and that being religious can actually increase your life expectancy. So, why is there a positive relationship between religiosity and survival, and does this relationship suggest that religiosity is in fact an adaptation? Addressing these issues can produce valuable insights for both the religious and non-religious alike.

Dr Michael Price is Senior Lecturer in Psychology, and Director of the Centre for Culture and Evolution, at Brunel University London. His research focuses on the evolutionary psychology of human social behaviour, morality, and religiosity.

■ 3.50 – 4.30pm

Part Two

We warmly welcome you to join us in the refreshment room for our Part Two discussion.

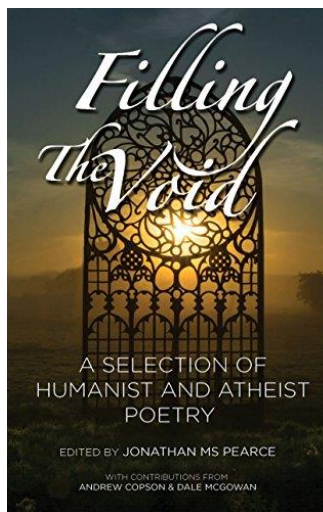
■ Wednesday 23rd November 7.30pm

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

'Filling the Void'

Incorporating our 20th anniversary celebration!

Join us for an inspirational evening of poetry and music with our special guests Jonathan



MS Pearce, who has edited a volume of poetry for humanists and atheists called 'Filling the Void', and Gareth Howells of award-winning folk band *Bemis*, with his son Louis. Jonathan and Gareth will deliver an eclectic selection of their favourite

poems from the book, and Gareth and Louis will provide the musical entertainment.



Later in the evening David Warden will present a brief review of some of the highlights of Dorset Humanists over the past 20 years, and remember those who made it possible. Complimentary wine and nibbles will be available for members.

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■ **Sunday 13th November 10.57am**
War Memorial, Bournemouth Central
Gardens.



Remembrance Day Service

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

■ **Sundays 10.15am**



Sunday Walks

Our popular walks are led by Phil Butcher.

6th November – Canford Heath and Broadstone incorporating a visit to the grave of Alfred Russel Wallace who is credited, along with Darwin, with the theory of evolution by natural selection. 5 miles.

20th November – Studland Peninsula
Postponed owing to the temporary closure of the Sandbanks ferry.

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

Phil ☎ 07817 260498

■ **Thursday 3rd November 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 10th December 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW



Human Rights Defenders

A talk by Marilyn Jarrett from
Amnesty International

Marilyn will begin her talk with a brief introduction to Amnesty and include some success stories – especially regarding political prisoners and individuals at risk. She will bring us up to date with the refugee crisis and individuals at risk such as Raif Badawi and his lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair, both of whom are imprisoned in Saudi Arabia. There will be an opportunity to send messages of hope to selected prisoners. Marilyn will also talk about human rights defenders – people who champion and fight for the human rights of other people, often risking their own lives to expose abuses and hold powerful people to account. They can be community workers, teachers, lawyers, journalists, or activists working for human rights change through their work or they may defend human rights in a voluntary capacity. Their activities include documenting abuses, raising awareness of abuses through public campaigns in the media, reporting violations to international bodies like the UN, putting pressure on perpetrators, lobbying people in positions of influence and power, pursuing legal avenues for justice, offering practical support to people, and educating people about their rights, teaching them how to defend them and empowering them to challenge those who deny them.

Marilyn became involved with Amnesty International in the 1980s whilst working in Brussels. Following a year volunteering in Nigeria Marilyn became Secretary of the Guildford group and has remained so since 2003. Before retiring, Marilyn completed a degree in Global Politics and Democracy from the Open University in order to reinforce her conviction of the fundamental importance of Human Rights.

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Advanced notice...

■ **Saturday 11th February 12.00 lunch followed by 2pm talk**

Dorset Humanists' Darwin Day at the Bournemouth International Centre



Julian Baggini 'Science without Pedestals'

Writer, journalist, and co-founder of *The Philosophers' Magazine* Dr Julian Baggini is our distinguished guest speaker for Dorset Humanists' 2017 Darwin Day.

Humanists and free-thinkers rightly celebrate the achievements of science. However, some go too far in their admiration, making science the model for all reason. In this talk, Julian will be arguing that science has to be put in its place. The scientific method cannot provide the template for reason, in part because there is no such thing as *the* scientific method. Most importantly, science cannot be the source of ethics and neither can it debunk it. By challenging some of the pretensions of those who would elevate science too high, we can better appreciate it for what it really is and also better understand what it means to value reason and rationality.

Tickets £25. **£5 discount for paid-up members if you book before Christmas.**

Includes 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.

☎ Lyn Glass 01202 558763

✉ lyn.glass@btinternet.com

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 2nd November 7.30pm**

Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham BH20 4LT. Free entry – small donation appreciated 'Out of the Box' presents:

Global Problems – Local Solutions?

Humanity faces a daunting array of inter-related problems: climate change, overpopulation, species extinction, resource depletion, migration. Meanwhile, it's politics and economics as usual with the pursuit of endless economic growth and our insatiable desire for consumer goods. Are we fiddling while the planet burns?

In response to our planetary problems, Christians can draw on a tradition of religious thinking which emphasises stewardship and sharing while humanists can draw on a tradition of thinking which emphasises humanity's ability to solve problems at the global level through technology, innovation, and co-operation. But have the problems become too big for us to fully understand? Have corporate interests taken over and obscured the urgency of the problems we face? Is there anything we can meaningfully do on an individual level to make a difference?

We'd love you to join the discussion and to explore common ground and possible solutions – at the same time as acknowledging and respecting our differences.

'Out of the Box' is an open discussion group both for people with religious and non-religious viewpoints. It's a successor to Purbeck Open Lectures (POL) and has been set up by a group of POL supporters in collaboration with Dorset Humanists.

■ **Sunday 29th January 3.00pm**
Winton Life Centre, Wimborne Road

Holocaust Memorial Day. Maggie Pepin will lead the Pledge and David Warden will speak about the homosexual victims of Nazi Germany.

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■ **Wednesday 9th November 7.30pm**
Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub,
Brunswick, 199 Malmesbury Park Road
Bournemouth BH8 8PX

How Violent is Islam Really?



A talk by Jonathan M.S. Pearce. This century has seen the emergence of Islam as a religion closely connected to violence and terrorism. With regrettable regularity the latest

religiously inspired terror attack fills the news broadcasts around the world, whether they be the work of ISIS, the Taliban, Al-Qaeda or other such group. However these events are also vociferously condemned by peaceful Islamic groups as being distinctly against the teachings of the Quran. Islam is a religion of peace and unity for many Muslims across the world.

To investigate whether violence is a part of Islam, and to what extent, Jonathan will examine in turn the Quran, the history of the prophet Muhammad, and modern day interpretations given by Muslims. Jonathan will also consider what role political expedience plays in accepting the narrative that fundamentalists are acting outside of the religion. It may be more desirable to accept a more moderate interpretation of Islam, even if it is less accurate.

Jonathan is a philosopher and author of several books of philosophy and theology. He is a founding member of both Tippling Philosophers and the [Skeptic Ink Network](#), and regularly blogs on the [Patheos website](#).

South Hants Humanists

If you live within striking distance of Southampton why not pay our sister group a visit? Details of their meetings can be found [here](#) and their website is [here](#). Also read their autumn [newsletter](#).

The Human Scale



John Hubbard presented a highly enjoyable and richly illustrated talk on our relationships to houses and homes at our October Green House meeting. He revealed that his interest in architecture from a young age was inspired by Lady Penelope's house in the children's puppet show 'Thunderbirds' which was modelled on Stourhead in Wiltshire.

We don't really conceive of our own homes as a manifestation of our animal nature though we use them in much the same way as birds and mammals, as platforms from which to launch the young into the world and to provide shelter. Our technological skill has, however, allowed our buildings' relationship to ourselves to be distorted in scale for the purposes of worship of gods, rank and power, or money. Grandeur has also ennobled secular human activity such as museums and town halls. Yet our use of these buildings forces a return to scale. Vast office blocks such as the Gherkin have interior spaces more in accord with the human body.

Until the end of the 16th century life was lived less privately. Before the technology of bell-pulls and wires family and servants ate together in the Hall, often using communal dishes and cups, and they even slept in close proximity at night. In the 1660s a night at an Inn meant sharing a bed with a stranger. Buildings of the 17th century and earlier had no corridors and you had to pass through many rooms to reach your own. Some of us are old enough to remember traipsing along hotel corridors to a shared bathroom and John recalled his childhood home which had no corridors. He explained the practical, non-sexist reason why ladies withdrew from the dining room after eating: so that the gentlemen could avail themselves of the chamber pot discreetly concealed in the dresser.

John spoke interestingly about homes as 'museums of the self' and he contrasted, without judgment, those of us who collect

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'amiable clutter' and those who prefer the 'effacement' of minimalism. Either style communicates something of us and represents the way in which we choose to assert our presence even when we are not there.



William John Bankes, exiled in 1841 for the offence of gross indecency with a guardsman, continued to transform Kingston Lacy from abroad including beautiful door decorations, leather wall coverings, statues,

niches, and Venetian wellheads. He made his way back to see all of his works only once or maybe twice. But this is not just a feature of the homes of the rich and powerful – we all do it.

When we are not inside our houses we carry within us in our mental and sometimes physical luggage the intimate and humanising changes that make the place a home. We enrich it with our travelled experience and it is our tracks in a much wider world than home that bring to architecture of any size its human scale.

Broken Trust, Damaged Minds



Psychologist Dr Peter Naish spoke about the neurological effects of sexual abuse at our October Moordown meeting. He said that 'abuse changes brains' although

some people are more vulnerable to stress and this variance is genetically determined.

Peter explained that the brain has two hemispheres: the right hemisphere is associated with 'the big picture' and it responds to danger and fear whereas the left hemisphere deals with fine detail. In all humans the two hemispheres are asymmetric in use – one hemisphere works harder than the other – but this asymmetry is more pronounced in abuse victims. There is impaired communication between the

hemispheres with less LH connectivity which leads to less rationality and high hypnotisability. People with post-traumatic stress disorder can be stuck in the 'right hemisphere mode'. Childhood abuse can be associated with psychosis, dissociation, and hallucinations – mental disorders in which thought and emotions are so impaired that contact is lost with external reality. The ability to 'escape' in a mental sense is likely to have developed as a defence mechanism. Abuse is associated with an elevated risk of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. It can result in a smaller hippocampus which can cause memory problems including false memory syndrome.

The effects give rise to a paradox: abuse victims can be more susceptible to false memories of abuse. Peter spoke about a woman called Mary who was arrested for stealing a purse when under the influence of alcohol. She claimed that, during the incident, she had been orally raped. Mary had been sexually abused from the age of seven. She had very low self-esteem, was an alcoholic, and she used cocaine which exacerbates neural effects. She was plagued by images of attacks especially when drunk. Peter acts as an expert witness in cases like this and can advise the court about the probability of the accuser's claims on the basis of psychological assessment. Some people, especially those with high vulnerability to false memory, claim to have been abused when the evidence suggests it cannot have occurred.

Even people who have not suffered from childhood abuse can have false memories. Some have had bad therapy and come to believe that they are childhood sex abuse survivors. They can have flashbacks which are not necessarily veridical. This situation can be enormously damaging – an adult response to something that never happened. Peter therefore posed the question as to whether the main harm from childhood sex abuse, whether real or based on false memory, occurs in adulthood.

Peter concluded that abuse does do real harm to victims but that, in the wake of the Savile revelations and because of the very real possibility of false memories and even lies, we shouldn't have a witch-hunt.

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'One Life' course tackles science

"Science is a mindset owned by anyone who approaches the world in a questioning, logical, and systematic way. Science has an amazing transformative power to change the way we live our lives."



Our 'One Life' course on Humanism arrived at its grand finale in October with a new module on 'Understanding Science' written and presented by Dorset

Humanist members Phil Butcher and Chris Street. Phil is a chartered physicist and worked for over 40 years in the nuclear industry, mostly in the field of safety assessment, and for 13 years in Russia and Eastern Europe. Chris is a science tutor and he has a BSc (Hons) in biochemistry and an MSc in medicinal chemistry.

Chris presented the results of a survey conducted by the British Science Association (BSA) which found that 52 per cent of respondents are interested in science whilst 27 per cent are not. The BSA wants to transition people from thinking 'science is not for me' to seeing science as part of their cultural identity and appreciating its value as something that shapes their lives. It wants to give everyone – especially non-scientists – a mandate to enjoy, engage with and challenge science.

The BSA says that 'Science is a human endeavour – a way of asking questions about the world and finding the answer by testing them out. It's not just a list of facts – it's a mindset owned by anyone who approaches the world in a questioning, logical, and systematic way. Science has an amazing transformative power to change the way we live our lives, and improve society. Imagine if that potential was opened up to a wider audience. We think that would create a fairer, and better world.

Science is not just for scientists. The BSA wants to create a broader community of people who are interested and engaged in

science and can help shape its role in society and culture. They believe that the way science progresses is so integral to our future that it shouldn't just be the scientific community who see themselves as responsible for shaping it – we all have a stake.

Chris and Phil gave a brief account of the history and philosophy of science and the reasons why the scientific method is an effective way of addressing questions about the world. They also considered why science issues are often badly reported by the press and how the process may be misused by those with an interest in the outcome.

One of Dorset Humanists' five aims is to promote the public understanding of science. We try to schedule talks on science in our regular programme, especially on Darwin Day in February. Julian Baggini will be our Darwin Day speaker in 2017 and he will be claiming, controversially, that there is no such thing as *the* scientific method.

■ Feedback from the *One Life* Course:

Around 20 people attended this year's *One Life* course. Subjects covered included humanism, secularism, thinking skills, ethics, happiness, and the good society. Satisfaction rating (excellent or good) averaged out at 93%.

"Just a note to say a special thank you for the latest batch of notes on ethics which I have now finished working through. Not since my seminary days have I been triggered to ponder so deeply. On several occasions I have had to put my highlighters down, lean back, close my eyes, and think."

"I have greatly benefited from having my knowledge refreshed and updated."

*"Through your *One Life* courses you must help more people than you realize to sail life's sometimes perilous seas. I am already finding that I can help myself and others better by applying what I have learnt."*

"It's been really interesting and fun."

"Science was a great addition - perhaps consider extending."

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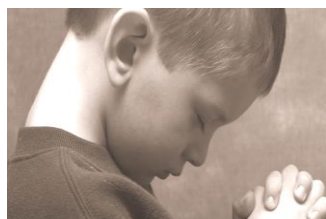


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Religion in Schools – Problem or Opportunity?



At our last 'Out of the Box' dialogue meeting with Christians in Wareham we discussed the topic of 'religion

in schools'. Cathy Silman presented the humanist view and Hilary Bond, a Church of England schools worker for the Purbeck area, presented the Christian view. Hilary clarified the difference between religious education (RE) and 'religion in schools'. She said that primary age children in the local area are taught about a variety of world religions and, in some places Humanism. Teachers are not allowed to teach in any way that could be construed as proselytising. The overall aim of religious education is to promote understanding and respect.

'Religion in schools', however, relates to a variety of things including 'collective worship'. Hilary regularly goes into three Purbeck primary schools to take assembly. She realises that many people contest the truth of Christianity and the place it gives to Jesus but she argued there is much of value in terms of moral and ethical teaching that can be taken from the Bible as a whole and the life and actions of Jesus in particular. However, she is very careful to say "This is what I as a Christian believe – you can decide what you think."

The main thing she does as a schools worker is to promote what she refers to as 'Christian values' such as friendship, trust, forgiveness, kindness, justice, responsibility, and creativity. She made an interesting distinction between a 'church school' (the type of school she goes into) and a 'faith school' which actively teaches the tenets of a particular faith as being 'right' such as a Catholic school teaching first communion or confirmation classes or a Muslim madrassa. She said this is not what happens in Purbeck and she would not support that sort of input as part of the school day.

Without more information it's difficult to know precisely what distinction is being made here between a 'faith school' and a 'church school'. Hilary appears genuinely to be trying to respect the autonomy of the children and they are learning about other religions, and possibly Humanism, in RE. But all the conditions seem to be in place for children to absorb the basic assumptions of Christianity by a process of unconscious assimilation: God is in his heaven, Jesus was his Son, and all of our values derive from the Christian religion. Overt proselytization is not required for these messages to be transmitted.

If the end result of this process is that the majority of children grow up to become cultural Christians who go to church at Christmas and Easter does it actually matter? Are Humanists recommending a kind of cultural vandalism in wanting such schools to be phased out? One of the problems, recognised by Hilary, is that in an area like Purbeck there is virtually no choice but for parents to send their children to a church primary school. A growing number of parents do not want their children to imbibe unconscious religious messages and then come home talking about God and Jesus. Yet there are also thousands of parents who will attend church just to get their children into the local church school because it has a better socio-economic intake and gives their child a better chance.

How are we to resolve these tensions and conflicts? Perhaps the only realistic solution lies in long-term social change. UK Church membership has declined from 10.6 million in 1930 to 5.5 million in 2010 or, as a percentage of the population, from about 30% to 11%. If current trends continue, membership in England will fall to 2.5 million by 2025 which is just 4% of the population.¹ This may not make a scrap of difference to the persistence of faith schools but how far does church membership have to fall before we recognise that the practice of transmitting unconscious religious messages into the minds of young children at primary school is simply wrong? *DW*

¹ <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html>

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Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

November 2016



I had a warm reception at Canford School when I spoke about Humanism to approximately 130 pupils in two groups. During the afternoon Q&A session a boy asked me whether I would still be a humanist if I met God. Great question! Recklessly perhaps I said yes, because the main difference between being Christian and being a humanist is that a Christian treats Jesus as her 'Lord and Master' whereas a humanist strives to be autonomous and self-directed. It would be interesting to know which orientation God most approves of.

I attended the 'Battle of Ideas' Festival at the Barbican at half-term. The festival slogans included 'Free Speech Allowed!' and 'Freethinkers Welcome!'. The aim of the festival is to 'shake up orthodoxies' and 'challenge conventional wisdom'. I attended an eclectic range of debates on populism, feminism, inequality, masculinity, social mobility, RE, dress codes, and a Julian Baggini seminar on Kierkegaard. I learnt some interesting new terminology including 'the snowflake generation' (students who cannot bear to be offended and who set up 'safe spaces' at University) and 'cisgender' (that's people who are comfortable with their biological gender). I heard journalist Joris Luyendijk speak in one of the debates and I have just read his absorbing book *Swimming with Sharks* (2016) about the world of bankers. Luyendijk dismisses the common cliché about bankers being 'greedy' as an inadequate diagnosis of the problem. He blames the amorality and perverse incentives of the entire system. He recommends four policy changes: banks must be chopped up into smaller units; they should not have activities under one roof that cause conflicts of interest; they should not be able to build or sell overly complex products whose risks few understand; and risk must not be outsourced to the taxpayer. The fact that no political party seems to be putting forward such a plan may be down to lobbying and campaign donations – otherwise known as political capture and corruption. But democracy is the only counterweight we have to this profitable but dangerous industry. We know how to deflect asteroids and we should be investing in the technology to be able to do so. The next financial crash could do comparable damage with far less warning and our best minds should be working on making the finance sector safe. Perhaps the UN should set up an International Panel on Finance Safety. *David Warden*

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