



A partner of
Humanists UK

national
secular
society

IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 13th October 2.00-4.30pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue BH9 1TW

Charles Darwin: the many faces of a remarkable man



A talk by Emeritus Professor
Norman Maclean

This talk will explore the life
of Charles Darwin as an
explorer, naturalist, and
family man, who went on to

change the ways in which people think of
themselves and the world in which they live.
It will outline his boyhood and early
education, his poor performance trying to do
medicine at Edinburgh University, his
thoughts of training to be a country
clergyman at Cambridge before his epic five
year round-the-world trip on the Beagle and
his subsequent long deliberation before
publishing his revolutionary findings.

Norman Maclean is an emeritus Professor
of Genetics at Southampton University. His
latest books are "Silent Summer" and "A
Less Green and Pleasant Land".

3.50 pm Members' Meeting

If you are a paid-up member of Dorset
Humanists please come back after the
refreshment break for a short members'
meeting to sign off our 2017 accounts and
also to have your say about this year's
Winter Appeal.

■ **Wednesday 24th October 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

Influence & Persuasion: How to get other people to agree with you



A talk by Dr Peter
Connolly

Peter will outline two
broad strategies for
persuading people
to accept that what

you claim is true. The first is persuasion by
evidence-based philosophical
argumentation. We construct arguments to
persuade others that a view or interpretation
of events that we are presenting is
plausible. What distinguishes the argument
method from most others is that it is based
on the provision of relevant reasons that are
presented in a coherent manner. The
second strategy is persuasion by rhetorical
argumentation. Rhetoric is the art of using
language and other non-rational devices to
persuade others. By the end of the talk you
should be able to make your own
arguments more robust and be able to spot
the flaws in the persuasive tactics of others.

Peter Connolly has taught Religious
Studies, Ethics, Indian Religions, and
Psychology of Religion at the University of
Chichester and the Open University. His
most recent book, *Understanding Religious
Experience*, is due to be published in
February 2019.



■ **Thursday 1st 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



Sunday Walks

■ **Sunday 21st October** – Portland Bill. Portland always surprises with its strange wildlife and dramatic views. It is up to 9 miles but there is a good short cut.

All walks are between about 6 and 9 miles and usually have an optional short cut. Please check [Meetup](#) for further details and any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions. ☎ Dean 07713 858773

☎ Phil 07817 260498



Short Talks

■ **Tuesday 16th October 7.30pm** Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

Quakers and Humanists Differences & Similarities

Few current-day Quakers are born into Quakerism. Most find a meeting and stay for a while or a lifetime. Quakerism is a movement that is evolving and changing with no formal dogma, inspired by all faiths and none. This event is an opportunity to speak to two local Quakers, and learn about what core principles guide their lives and work. Chris Gribble will be joined by Penny Estall to provide a short introduction and facilitate a discussion.

Following Chris and Penny's talk on Quakerism, David Warden will give a short talk on Humanism with a focus on drawing

out similarities and differences from the Quaker point of view. After the two talks, we will have what promises to be a fascinating discussion about these two related but different approaches to the big questions of life. Each talk is around 20 minutes followed by questions and discussion. See Meetup for further details.

Calling budding speakers! Do you have a short talk up your sleeve? Contact Phil Butcher if you would like to discuss your idea for a short talk.

✉ ph.butcher@gmail.com

Future dates for your diary...

■ **Saturday 10th November 2pm** **Moordown**

Ethics & Economics: Does it have to be either/or? Henri Ruff

■ **Weds 28th November 7.30pm** **Green House**

Transparency International: a talk on global corruption by Eva Anderson

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 7th November 7.30pm**
Sandford Heritage Hall, Sandford Rd, Nr Wareham, BH20 7AJ (Next to Pine Martin Grange Care Home). 'Out of the Box' presents a panel dialogue between representatives of Judaism, Islam, Christianity, & Humanism:

Faiths & Non-Faith in Dialogue

Tensions between the three Abrahamic faiths have existed for millennia. Tensions between religion and atheism have also come to the fore in recent decades. Our 'Out of the Box' dialogue group aims to model 'good dialogue' which means being honest about our disagreements but also open to the possibility of finding of wisdom in different traditions. This month, we invite our panel to state their diagnoses of the human condition and their solutions for how we can make the world a better place.



Steven Pinker: Making the Case for Progress

David Warden gave this short talk on Steven Pinker's 2018 book 'Enlightenment Now' at our short talks meeting in September. The text has been shortened for reasons of space.

Since the Enlightenment unfolded in the late 18th century, life expectancy across the world has risen from 30 to 71 and in the more fortunate countries to 81. When the Enlightenment began, a third of the children born in the richest parts of the world died before their fifth birthday; today, that fate befalls just 6% of the children in the poorest parts of the world. Their mothers, too, were freed from tragedy: one percent in the richest countries did not live to see their newborns, a rate triple that of the poorest countries today. In those poor countries, lethal infectious diseases are in steady decline, some of them afflicting just a few dozen people a year, soon to follow smallpox into extinction.

The poor may not always be with us. The world is about a hundred times wealthier today than it was two centuries ago, and the prosperity is becoming more evenly distributed across the world's countries and people. The proportion of humanity living in extreme poverty has fallen from almost 90% to less than 10% and within the lifetimes of many of us it could approach zero.

Catastrophic famine, never far away in most of human history, has vanished from most of the world and undernourishment and stunting are in steady decline. A century ago, richer countries devoted just one per cent of their wealth to supporting children, the poor, and the aged; today they spent almost a quarter of it. Most of their poor today are fed, clothed, and sheltered, and have luxuries like smartphones and central heating that used to be unavailable to anyone, rich or poor. Poverty among the elderly has plunged.

The world is giving peace a chance. War between countries is obsolescent and war within countries is absent from five-sixths of the world's surface. The proportion of people killed annually in wars is less than a



Steven Pinker, Professor in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University, Humanist of the Year 2006 (American Humanist Association)

quarter of what it was in the 1980s, a seventh of what it was in the early 1970s, an eighteenth of what it was in the early 1950s, and half of one percent of what it was during the Second World War. Genocides, once common, have become rare. In most times and places, homicides kill far more people than wars, and homicide rates have been falling as well. Americans are half as likely to be murdered as they were two dozen years ago. In the world as a whole, people are seven-tenths as likely to be murdered as they were eighteen years ago.

Life has been getting safer in every way. Over the course of the 20th century, Americans became 96% less likely to be killed in a car accident, 88% less likely to be mowed down on the sidewalk, 99% less likely to die in a plane crash, 59% less likely to fall to their deaths, 92% less likely to die by fire, 90% less likely to drown, 92% less likely to be asphyxiated, and 95% less likely to be killed on the job. Life in other rich countries is even safer, and life in poorer countries will get safer as they get richer.

People are getting not just healthier, richer, and safer but freer. Two centuries ago a handful of countries, embracing 1% of the world's people, were democratic; today, two thirds of the world's countries, embracing two-thirds of its people, are democratic. Not long ago half the world's countries had laws that discriminated against racial minorities; today, more countries have policies that favour their minorities than discriminate against them. At the turn of the 20th century, women could vote in just one country;



today, they can vote in every country where men can vote, except one. Laws that criminalise homosexuality continue to be stricken down, the last one just 12 days ago in India. Attitudes towards minorities, women, and gay people are becoming steadily more tolerant, particularly among the young, a portent of the world's future. Hate crimes, violence against women, and the victimisation of children, are all in long term decline, as is the exploitation of children for their labour.

As people are getting healthier, richer, safer, and freer, they are also becoming more literate, knowledgeable, and smarter. Early in the 19th century, 12% of the world could read and write; today, 83% can. Literacy and the education it enables will soon be universal, for girls as well as boys. Schooling, together with health and wealth, are literally making us more intelligent – by 30 IQ points.

People are putting their longer, healthier, safer, freer, richer, and wiser lives to good use. Americans work 22 fewer hours a week than they used to, have three weeks of paid leave, lose 43 fewer hours to housework, and spend just one third of their earnings on necessities rather than five-eighths. They are using their leisure and disposable income to travel, spend time with their children, connect with loved ones, and sample the world's cuisine, knowledge, and culture. As a result of these gifts, people worldwide have become happier. Even Americans, who take their good fortune for granted, are 'pretty happy', or happier, and the younger generations are becoming less unhappy, lonely, depressed, drug-addicted, and suicidal.

As societies have become healthier, wealthier, freer, happier, and better educated, they have set their sights on the most pressing global challenges. They have emitted fewer pollutants, cleared fewer forests, spilled less oil, set aside more nature reserves, extinguished fewer species, saved the ozone layer, and peaked in their consumption of oil, farmland, timber, paper, cars, coal, and perhaps even carbon dioxide. We may have reached peak stuff. Progress in technology allows us to do more with less. The cubic yards of vinyl and

cardboard that used to be in a typical record collection gave way to cubic inches of compact discs and then to the nothingness of Spotify downloads. The rivers of newsprint that used to flow through our homes has given way to digital news. And just think of all the plastic, metal, and paper that no longer go into the forty-odd consumer products that can be replaced by a single smartphone including a telephone, answering machine, phone book, camera, camcorder, tape recorder, radio, alarm clock, calculator, dictionary, encyclopaedia, Filofax, scanner, calendar, street maps, and torch. Digital technology is dematerialising the world so that in the sharing economy cars, tools, and bedrooms needn't sit around unused most of the time.

For all their differences, the world's nations came to an historic agreement on climate change, as they did in previous years on nuclear testing, proliferation, security, and disarmament. Nuclear weapons have not been used for 73 years. Nuclear terrorism has never happened. The world's nuclear stockpiles have been reduced by 85% with more reductions to come and testing has ceased except in North Korea. The world's two most pressing problems though not yet solved are solvable: practical long-term agendas have been laid out for eliminating nuclear weapons and for mitigating climate change. For all the bleeding headlines, for all the crises, collapses, scandals, plagues, epidemics, and existential threats, these are accomplishments to celebrate. The Enlightenment is working: for two and a half centuries, people have used knowledge to enhance human flourishing. It's time to retire the morality play in which modern humans are a vile race of despoilers and plunderers who will hasten the apocalypse unless we undo the Industrial Revolution, renounce technology, and return to an ascetic harmony with nature. Despite half a century of panic, humanity is not on an irrevocable path to ecological suicide. We can be conditionally optimistic.

Phil Butcher also gave an excellent complementary talk on Pinker's 2012 book 'The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity'.



‘Thought for the Day’ campaign takes off

South East London Humanist Group is calling for the BBC to open their flagship reflective slot *Thought for the Day* to humanists. This report highlights their campaign and the BBC’s apparently immovable position. The campaign launched with a demonstration on 12th June outside Broadcasting House and since then they have been holding monthly demonstrations.

South East London Humanist Group says:

Religion doesn’t hold a monopoly on ethical worldviews. There is another mainstream tradition as old as religion called Humanism. Humanism is a positive, everyday philosophy which encourages us to value ourselves and recognise that other people are as valuable as we are. That has deep implications for the way we treat each other and our environment.

The BBC is failing in its legal duty to treat non-religious beliefs equally with religious beliefs, ‘belief’ being defined as “a collective belief in, or other adherence to, a systemised set of ethical or philosophical principles or of mystical or transcendental doctrines” (Communications Act 2003).

The BBC is also failing its remit to reflect the diversity of beliefs of its audience and the wider population. Over half the British population do not belong to any religion and around half of those have a humanist

worldview. In Scotland where Humanist weddings are legal, more people choose them than ceremonies conducted by the Church of Scotland or any other denomination or faith. Amongst under-30 year olds in the UK, 70% have no faith.

To argue, as James Purnell (Director, Radio and Education, BBC) does, that non-religious views are sufficiently represented across ‘the whole of the BBC’s output’ is to miss the point – that Humanism is an equal partner in the ‘belief’ category.

We call on the BBC to address this injustice and include humanists, and holders of other non-religious beliefs, on *Thought for the Day*.

This is in fact the latest chapter in a campaign begun many years ago to include humanists on *Thought for the Day*. Evidence that it really is time for the BBC to remove its blinkers and see that half of us are ethical and non-religious.

This campaign is being supported by Greater Manchester Humanists and other humanists groups.

The BBC’s standard reply:

From the BBC Complaints Team

First and foremost, "Thought for the Day" is a unique slot on the BBC in which speakers from a wide range of religious faiths reflect on an issue of the day from their faith perspective.

In the midst of the three-hour "Today" programme devoted to overwhelmingly secular concerns - national and

international news and features, searching interviews and sometimes heated debate on issues of public policy - the BBC judges it appropriate to offer a brief, uninterrupted interlude of spiritual reflection, at a point in the morning when most of the audience are embarking on their day.

At its best the short talk plants a seed of thought, a spark of spiritual insight that stays with listeners during the day. At times of national event or crisis it also has the capacity to catch the mood of the nation and speak to it.

Although the number of UK church-goers has dwindled in recent decades, the policy remains in place because a significant section of the UK population, including increasing numbers from non-Christian faiths, claim a belief in God or describe themselves as "spiritual". Also, the level of attendance in religious activities among the Radio 4 audience is higher than the national average.

Broadening the brief would detract from the distinctiveness of the slot.

"Thought for the Day" has been a regular feature on BBC Radio for around 40 years and therefore the programme's remit and approach is very well known by listeners and we therefore feel the programme's title is appropriate and should remain.

The BBC believes that all licence fee payers have the right to hear their reasonable views and beliefs reflected on its output. Within "Thought for the Day" a careful balance is maintained of voices from different Christian denominations and other religions with significant membership in the UK. Speakers are expected to make brief references to their faith and its scriptures, but are not permitted to proselytise on behalf of their religion or to disparage other religions.

"Thought for the Day" speakers are not questioned or interrupted on air, but their choice of subject and the content of their scripts are subject to careful scrutiny and frequent re-drafting in collaboration with an experienced producer working to strict BBC guidelines on impartiality.

In addition, the mix of regular contributors to the slot represents a wide range of theological, social and political views to ensure further balance across a period of time.

Non-religious voices are also heard extensively across the general output. Occasional programmes give voice to atheist and humanist viewpoints. The vast swathe of general programmes makes little reference to religion, but approach the world from an overwhelmingly secular perspective: news, current affairs, documentaries, talks, science, history; which includes, of course, the other 2 hours 57 minutes of the "Today" programme. Outside "Thought for the Day", the BBC's Religion & Ethics output maintains a balance of religious and non-religious voices, through programmes such as "Sunday", "Something Understood", "Beyond Belief" and "The Moral Maze". In these programmes, atheists, humanists and secularists are regularly heard, the religious world is scrutinised, its leaders and proponents are questioned, and the harm done in the name of religion is explored.

We do not suggest that the only people with anything worthwhile to say about morals or ethics are religious people but that does not mean that the "Thought for the Day" brief is not a legitimate one for listeners of all faiths and those of none. Some of the programme's strongest support and most positive feedback comes from people who begin, "I am not a religious person but I do enjoy 'Thought for the Day.'"

And the irony is...Humanism IS included by local BBC radio stations!

From Simon Nightingale, Chair of Shropshire Humanists

I have been doing a regular 5 minutes humanist "Pause for Thought" (like Thought for the Day) about every 3 months for over 8 years on Radio Shropshire's Sunday morning religious affairs and ethics programme. The texts and audio-recordings are available from me if anyone wants to see/hear them and I don't mind at all if they



pinch my ideas – I probably pinched some of them from someone else.

From Chrissie Hackett, Chair of Bristol Humanists

I just read your message on returning from doing TFTD for Radio Bristol this morning, so I got straight on and wrote my complaint to the Beeb, following your very helpful guidelines. I added that if BBC Radio Bristol can welcome our views, frequently and with the same respect they afford to religious contributors, why can't they!

From Tim Stephenson, Secretary of Hull and East Riding Humanists

I have done 55 'Thought for the Day' broadcasts so far on BBC Radio Humberside and I upload them all to YouTube [here](#).

From Peter Gaskin, Chester Humanists

It sounds like many of us have been writing to the BBC over the years and we still seem to not be getting anywhere. Does anyone know what or who is really behind the continuing refusal? Perhaps we should now go to OFCOM. Is the step after that to go to law? What chance would we have? I would be prepared to contribute to a legal campaign based on equality and discrimination.

I hope that this initiative continues to gather momentum. I have submitted a letter and received the apparently standard response that everyone is receiving. This has incensed me further - there is a real feel that whoever is making decisions at the BBC believes that non-religious people cannot "reflect" on the same level as religious people - I find this singularly offensive. Whilst heartening to learn of greater success at local radio level (which undermines the BBC position further) this issue is one which whilst to some may seem trivial (it did to me some time ago) - is symbolic and has a greater importance that I first imagined.

From Jennie Johnson

The Today programme is the BBC Radio flagship News and Comment programme and it is insulting and upsetting that the BBC considers non-religious people can't provide thoughtful, stimulating, ethical reflection based on our beliefs, only religious people can. The BBC should either be more honest and call the slot "Religious TFTD" or, better of course, include non-religious thoughts.

What you can do...

1. You can add your name to the South East London Humanist Group statement.
2. You can write James Purnell, the BBC Director in charge of religious and ethical programming. It may help if you say that you have already seen their standard reply and disagree with specific points.
3. You can sign up for campaign updates.

All campaign details are [here](#)



Cathy Silman, Karen Preston, Ronnie Barr, and David Warden attended the excellent Humanists UK school speakers training course in Bournemouth on Saturday 29th September. They each had to present a five minute lesson explaining Humanism and then listen to critical feedback from one of the course leaders. Much more nerve-racking than actually doing it in front of children! But an excellent course overall. Please let David Warden know if you have the skills and aptitude to join our school visiting team. We have invitations in the pipeline to deliver lessons on Humanism to Swanage School and school assemblies at Ferndown Upper. Do you have a child or grandchild at school? Could you ask the school to contact us to visit the school and talk about Humanism? Ask David for guidance.





Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

October 2018

Steven Pinker's book '*Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*' (2018) is a wonderful corrective to the relentless doom and gloom of news media. Pinker's point is not that news is wrong but that it focuses on all the bad stuff that's happening right now and doesn't provide us an accurate picture of the progress that is being made over a multi-decadal timescale. Most people, therefore, are going around with an inaccurate picture of reality in their heads. The late Hans Rosling made the same point in his book '*Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About The World - And Why Things Are Better Than You Think*' (2018). Chimps do better than humans in knowing the true facts about the world because chimps' random answers to his test questions are more accurate than humans' unduly negative answers. Worryingly, Rosling found that global policymakers also do worse than chimps. Pinker and Rosling are not naïve optimists. Their view of the world is based on hard data. Neither are they complacent about the problems we still face. Their whole message is that we should keep on making an effort to solve the world's problems because we have made spectacular progress so far, despite all the setbacks along the way. I think this is a great humanist message.

When I gave my short talk on Pinker at the Green House last month I was given the following challenge in the Q&A: "Ah, but despite all this progress are we any happier?". I have been studying happiness data for some years in connection with my happiness course. The way in which happiness data is usually collected – typically a subjective score between one and ten – fails to track the progress we have made in objective wellbeing represented by improvements in child mortality, elimination of disease, eradication of famine and so on. What we do know, however, is that subjective happiness scores are much higher in prosperous, developed countries than in poor, chaotic countries. This cross-country comparison suggests that progress really does translate into more happiness.

Meanwhile, on the Greek island of Lesbos, a humanitarian tragedy is ongoing in the heart of a so-called civilised and wealthy continent. Médecins Sans Frontiers calls this refugee camp a giant open-air mental asylum owing to the overcrowding and dire sanitary conditions (*Guardian*, 4 October 2018). Minors are regularly trying to take their own lives in this hell-hole. Lesbos has been described as 'Alcatraz', and as a 'concentration camp' by Yannis Varoufakis. Refugees arrive traumatised, only to have their trauma exacerbated. An aid group, [Team Humanity](#), has provided some respite.

