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BRITISH HUMANIST
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national
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IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 10th October 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW

The Consciousness Conundrum



Dr Peter Naish – Open
University

What is consciousness, and how do physical processes in the brain give rise to the subjective life of a conscious mind? Simple animals like the amoeba presumably have no such experience, since they have no brain or nervous system, yet they can react to their surroundings well enough to survive without it. Many of our own cognitive functions such as perceiving objects, making decisions, and even performing apparently voluntary actions can take place without consciousness intervening, but if we can function without conscious awareness, why should consciousness be there at all? Is consciousness just an accidental by-product of having a large brain, or has it been selected for by evolution because creatures with consciousness have improved prospects for survival? Historically, questions about the 'hard problem' of consciousness have primarily been a topic for philosophers, but advances in neuroscience are bringing us closer to a scientific understanding. Peter Naish, a senior lecturer in cognitive psychology at The Open University, will be revealing many of the latest developments in our efforts to unravel the mysteries of consciousness.

■ **Wednesday 28th October 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, BH1 3AX

Effectively Advancing Equality and Human Rights



Pavan Dhaliwal, Director of
Public Affairs and
Campaigns at the British
Humanist Association

Humanists have always been at the forefront of promoting a rational, secular approach to ethical issues in public policy, and the British Humanist Association (BHA) devotes much of its resources towards campaigning for equality and human rights. Pavan Dhaliwal will outline the BHA's current campaigns on issues such as assisted dying, religious education, and pastoral care in hospitals, and explain how we can most effectively use our limited resources for maximum effect. One such method currently being explored is the use of 'strategic litigation' which can bring about significant changes in the law, legal practice and/or public awareness by taking carefully-selected test cases to court. Pavan heads the BHA's public affairs team and is responsible for campaigns covering a wide range of issues including public services, equality law, ethical issues, religion and schools, and social cohesion. She is an equalities and human rights expert with a special interest in youth, criminal justice and education policy.

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■ **Thursday 5th November 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 14th November 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Beyond the Syringe: the Secrets of Alternative Medicine Exposed

Dr Richard Rawlins

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. Richard Rawlins reviews how conventional medicine has evolved from esoteric origins and which now provides the best possible care in the light of current knowledge and understanding. Dr Rawlins is a former lecturer in Anatomy, King's College, London.

■ **Sunday 11th October 10:30am**
Start from Lulworth cove car park – meet by car park entrance.

Lulworth Cove Walk

The time has come for this most scenic part of the county to be explored by Dorset Humanists, and although a much shorter walk than usual, the hills will make up for any loss in length. We will first explore the cove, walk around the bay, and capture some photos from the viewpoint, before we climb to the top of the hill and then drop down to Durdle Door.

Walk length around 3 miles, climbing to 136 metres above sea level, dropping to sea

level, climbing back up it again, so be sure to wear sturdy footwear.

Car sharing required on this trip, liaise via Meetup. There is no phone reception in Lulworth. ☎ Aaron 07851 239787

Other events of interest...

■ **Thursday 29th October 7.30pm**
West Dorset Humanists at Wessex Royale Hotel, 32 High West St, Dorchester

Dawkins, Hitchens & the Hidden Treasures of YouTube

Dean Robertson of Dorset Humanists will present an eclectic, enlightening and thoroughly entertaining selection of clips from the vast archive of atheist, rationalist, humanist and skeptical lectures and discussions now available on YouTube. Unmissable. Entry £3. Everyone welcome.

West Dorset Humanists Steering Committee is looking for enthusiastic people to join their team. Please get in touch to find out what's involved.

✉ westdorsethumanists@hotmail.com
☎ 07810 360700 or 07411 077058

■ **Saturday 28th November 1.30pm**
Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

National Secular Society AGM

Only paid up members and representatives of affiliated groups can attend. Dorset Humanists is an affiliated member of the NSS.

Dorset Humanists help Indian School

Water penetration caused by a damaged roof at Kids' Kingdom in Kurukshetra, India damaged supplies of children's study materials. Dorset Humanists has sent £300 from its India Fund to help purchase replacements in time for the Children's Function in October. Kids' Kingdom is affiliated to the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

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European Humanist Federation response to refugee crisis

The European Humanist Federation (EHF) has called on EU leaders to implement a coordinated and human-rights based response to welcome refugees and to initiate sanctions against Member States violating EU values.

As are many civil society organisations, the EHF is highly concerned by the lack of appropriate response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the numbers of refugees and migrants trying to reach Europe.



Pierre Galand, EHF President, said: "We are committed to the building of a more humane society through an ethical approach based on humanism. Refugees and migrants are first and

foremost human beings who hold human rights and should be treated as such. Refugees and migrants not only contribute economically and demographically to our societies, they also bring with them new cultures and traditions that contribute to a rich and diverse society. Only a clear separation between religion and politics can accommodate everyone, regardless of religion or convictions. We therefore strongly condemn countries that seek to discriminate on the basis of religion or beliefs."

We do not underestimate the practical difficulties but the EU needs a long-term vision on asylum and migration. The EU current policy has not only proved inefficient but also dangerous and costly in term of human lives: by blocking the legal ways to access Europe, the EU has reinforced the position of smugglers instead of weakening it. Europe must open safe access to its territory to all people claiming for protection.

The Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union convened an extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council on 14 September 2015 in Brussels.



The EHF takes this opportunity to call on Justice and Home Affairs ministers and European leaders to:

- Urgently open legal and safe access for refugees and migrants to Europe and fully respect the principle of non-refoulement [a principle of international law which forbids the rendering of a true victim of persecution to his or her persecutor] laid down in the 1951 Geneva Convention
- Organise a real European asylum and migration system based on solidarity between Member States to replace the inefficient Dublin Regulation
- Make sure that refugees and migrants arriving to Europe are treated in a decent way and respect their fundamental rights to life, health, to a private life and to circulate freely
- Help migrants integrate into society in the host countries and tackle populist and inaccurate anti-immigration discourses
- Make EU development aid dependent on human rights and conflict resolution instead of making it dependent on border controls and readmission agreements
- Initiate an Article 7 Treaty on European Union proceeding against Hungary and any other country like Cyprus and Slovakia that do not fully respect European values as laid down in the treaties.

EHF September 11th, 2015

■ The European Humanist Federation, based in Brussels, was created in 1991 and unites more than 50 humanist and secularist organisations from about 20 European countries. It promotes a secular Europe, defending equal treatment of everyone regardless of religion or belief.

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British Humanist Association reflects on year of success

'NHS England will now mandate hospitals to provide adequate non-religious pastoral support'

Members of the British Humanist Association (BHA) gathered at the Bishopsgate Institute in London on Saturday 11 July for the Association's 2015 AGM.

Attendees turned out in force and spent the morning learning about the BHA's work across ceremonies, pastoral care, and campaigns. Head of Ceremonies Isabel Russo was pleased to show data for the rising popularity of Humanist Ceremonies™ across funerals, weddings, and namings, while Head of Pastoral Support, David Savage, was able to announce that the BHA has trained over 40 volunteers who can deliver like-minded pastoral care to non-religious people in hospitals and prisons. Recent news that NHS England will now mandate hospitals to provide adequate non-religious pastoral support is expected to drive a surge in demand for non-religious pastoral support volunteers, and the BHA aims to train at least 60 more in the next year through its pastoral arm, Humanist Care.

BHA Director of Public Affairs and Campaigns Pavan Dhaliwal updated members on the BHA's policy and public outreach work. Delegates heard about the growing momentum of the BHA's 'faith' schools campaigns and the increased international focus of the BHA's work, highlighting its involvement in establishing the International Coalition Against Blasphemy Laws and its recent interventions before the UN Human Rights Council. Pavan also updated members on the BHA's discussions with the Law Commission in relation to its pending review of legalising humanist marriage, and announced that the BHA was exploring strategic litigation in relation to several of its core campaigns this year. She was also happy to report on the BHA's enormous



social media growth, including its sizeable Facebook page and Twitter account.

Delegates heard about the BHA's

expanding sections and community programmes including Young Humanists, Humanist Care, Defence Humanists and LGBT Humanists.

BHA Chief Executive Andrew Copson gave an address to the membership, discussing the whole of the BHA's activities over the previous 12 months. 'We are not just a campaigning organisation,' he told members, 'but a social and cultural movement that exists to do more than just influence government policy.' He gave thanks to the BHA's members and volunteers for their generosity and continued moral support, reflecting on sustained publicity around the BHA's campaigns, as well as successful events such as the Darwin Day and Voltaire Lectures, the World Humanist Congress in 2014, and its 2015 Annual Conference.

The formal business of the AGM was handled efficiently by Robert Ashby, now entering his 10th year as Chair of the Board. Members were delighted to hear from Treasurer John Adams of the BHA's good financial health, which has allowed the creation of three new staff posts to improve its capacity across campaigns, events, and the coordination of BHA groups and sections.

The day was rounded off with an informal Q&A session featuring most of the BHA staff. Highlights promised for the year ahead included greater integration of BHA groups and sections, with the offer of further skills training for volunteer group leaders; an even broader events programme; and exciting plans to reach more teachers than ever through the Humanism for Schools programme.

■ Dorset Humanists is a Partner of the BHA. Director of Public Affairs and Campaigns Pavan Dhaliwal is visiting Dorset Humanists in October (see events listings).

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What would Jane do?

Dorset Humanists 'Jane Bannister Winter Appeal'

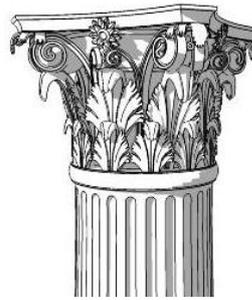
Dorset Humanists has raised thousands of pounds for local homelessness charities, including New Forest NightStop and Refuge, the national charity for women and children fleeing domestic abuse. We are currently deliberating about which charities to raise money for this winter. The appeal is named in memory of Jane Bannister who was Chair of Dorset Humanists for many years.

Some members have suggested we could raise money for refugees. One such charity is the Refugee Council, one of the leading charities in the UK working directly with refugees, and supporting them to rebuild their lives. The charity was founded in 1951 in response to the UN Convention for Refugees, which was created after World War II to ensure refugees were able to find safety in other countries. Since then, the Refugee Council has provided practical and emotional support to refugees from across the world to help them rebuild their lives and play a full part in society.

The Refugee Council receives funding from local, central and European Government to deliver some services, however it is reliant upon voluntary income – including grants from trusts and foundations, corporate support and donations from individuals – to deliver a range of specialist projects that support refugees. This includes: employment and move-on advice; therapeutic support; destitution services; support for separated children whose special needs are not covered by mainstream services; and work to achieve a fairer and more humane asylum system.

We will make a decision on or soon after our next Saturday meeting at Moordown Community Centre. Please come to our 'Part Two' meeting to have your say.

■ See *Letters* page for members' views



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Paul Stenning and others via Facebook about our Winter Appeal

There seems to be a growing homeless issue in Bournemouth, and there is a danger that with more donations and resources being diverted to refugee charities the existing (and probably underfunded) support for our own homeless will reduce. Perhaps we could support one refugee charity and one homeless charity? There will be some overlap in their work anyway.

From John Davison

I think there is much to be said for staying local given the small amount of money we can raise. Nightstop has also the option of being involved as a host. They are dealing with an enduring intractable social problem.

From Jemma Hooper

My preference would be for continuity. However, I ask myself what Jane would do and I strongly suspect she would choose the refugees. The only time I can remember disagreeing deeply with her was one time when she wanted DH to support a major charity drive and I felt we would better stay with the lesser known charities who we support. Such charities tend to lose out whenever there is a fashionable disaster. So, if this was my charity I would go for continuity, but as it is in memory of Jane and Dennis, I think we should support the refugees as that seems to me to be what they would have wanted.

From Mat Coussell

38 Degrees members have joined forces with Citizens UK and Avaaz to raise money for a Survival Fund – to give emergency help for refugees arriving in Britain. It'll make sure that our new guests have

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somewhere to sleep, something to eat and warm clothes to wear. It sounds like this is essentially helping to prevent a potential increase in the problem of people having nowhere to live. So I would certainly support at least splitting it between a local homelessness charity, and supporting refugees.

From Sally

Wherever we decide to direct our money, might we also give no longer needed clothes, sleeping bags and other items to the charity that Sunday Assembly supports, the Rucksack Appeal, for the local homeless? If as predicted it's going to be a cold winter they will particularly need help, and since it's gifts in kind of stuff people don't need any longer it doesn't cost anything to help, and what money they want to give to charity is still available for some other worthy cause.

From John McDiamid, pastor of Poole Christian Fellowship, after attending the Fiona Coward talk on evolution

I don't see why the committed Dorset Humanists community couldn't support paid staff at least part time to enable you to advance the cause. £15 a year doesn't really show a high level of commitment. You have a very committed core, and the whole feel of the group the other evening is of one that could really take off if there was someone who could give themselves to it full time. Churches all go through a phase where they bite the bullet and support someone and if they get it right, it can be a defining moment. The difference is, of course, that we are used to the concept of giving "big" to support our movement whereas it's not something that many of your folks would be comfortable with. I don't think it's that we are any more committed than you, it's just a cultural thing. And of course you can't tell people that they'll go to hell if they don't! A useful tool in the armoury.

From William Summersgill ('Gus')

I don't attend many meetings but still look forward to your bulletins and humanist news. As I get older I seem to be more political, especially with regard to

the current migrant situation. Why do we get involved in what is basically a Muslim war, Alawite against Sunni / Isis? I fear the do-gooders will allow this country to be overrun and eventually under Sharia law. If Muslim countries won't take the migrants why should we? There I have ranted!

■ What's your view? Is there a conflict between humanitarian assistance for refugees, regardless of religion, and concerns about the religious and demographic balance of European countries? Write to the *Bulletin*.

From John Davison via Facebook

It is unfortunate that Bournemouth civic leaders do not take a lead from their predecessors who constructed the Cenotaph without overt reference to religion. It is a simple civic memorial to those who lost their lives in the war.

The positive and cohesive effects of respect for civic duty and pride need to be shared by secularists even though the current cultural form is monopolised by the religious and the monarchy.

The annual Bournemouth civic Remembrance Day is usually an example of sound secular civic organisation encouraging all parts of the community to participate in 'remembrance' without it being monopolised by any one group. It is good to see humanists participating each year.

The Bournemouth civic VJ Day commemoration in August was overtly religious. I suspect because religious groupings are the only ones with the capacity to put on a show. In these difficult circumstances David Warden was an exemplar of probity on our behalf.



Missed a talk?

Don't forget you can catch up on our archive of talks on YouTube. Just type 'Dorset Humanists' into the YouTube search bar. There are now 24 videos available.

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From Kathryn Harries, New York

I just wanted to thank you for introducing me to the wonderful world of humanists! For those I didn't get an opportunity to meet, I was travelling through Dorset on a three-month trip from Australia. In Australia, I was a regular attendee of Sunday Assembly but for some reason I had never heard of the humanist movement. That all changed when I met Katie at Sunday Assembly Bournemouth.

After that I attended all the Dorset Humanist events I could while I was there: a great walk, talks, and even Cafe Philo and Skeptics in the Pub. It felt like I had finally found 'my type of people'.

I am now tracking down humanist events everywhere I go. I will attend a "Studying Humanism" meeting in New York and have already joined the humanists in Sydney and Adelaide via Meet-up. I hope they are somewhat similar to the Dorset Humanists. You have set a high bar :-).

I particularly wanted to thank Aaron for his warm welcome, energy and inclusive nature; Katie, Phil and family who I sat with at my initial meetings; John G; John D; and lastly to David for steering such a valuable ship.

What inspires you?



Aaron Darkwood, who is attending our Happiness Course, reveals how TV series, self-help books and Dorset Humanists have inspired him

1. John Rourke, lead character in *The Survivalist* series of novels, first inspired me with a 'never give up' attitude.

2. Eastenders first showed gay people as everyday characters in life and this made me feel more accepted as I was growing up.

3. Star Trek: The Next Generation and its sequels included science, morals, ethics and humanist values. Series creator Gene Roddenberry was raised a Southern Baptist but later converted to humanism.

4. Captain Nathan Bridger, a lead character in the American science fiction television series 'SeaQuest DSV', demonstrated that peaceful negotiations are always preferable to violent conflict.

5. The West Wing TV show helped me understand the difficult dilemmas faced by politicians. They have to weigh up the implications of actions demanded by the electorate.

6. The A team and many other films and series instilled in me the importance of teamwork – the collective whole working together to bring about great results.

7. Soldier Soldier dealt with many life issues of prejudice, cheating, marriage and communication.

8. The Secret, a best-selling self-help book and film written by Rhonda Byrne, was sensationalised but it was very positive and it granted me hope when I most needed it. I can see holes in it, but I don't erase the value it had in introducing me to other helpful resources such as Louise Hay.

9. Louise Hay is a very inspirational author who brought positive affirmations into my life. For example: 'All is well in my world.' I had a very negative, doom-laden style of thinking and Louise Hay switched this around. Her book and YouTube videos changed the way I understood my world and my upbringing, helping me to stop blaming my parents for things and helping me to explore guilt.

10. Dorset Humanists brought these things together. For many years I counted myself as an atheist but when an atheist takes on values of humanity, compassion, understanding and takes a personal interest in the upkeep and care of the planet, then that person crosses the line into Humanism. We don't need a bible or threats of hell in order to be nice. We can be nice people because it's just who we are, who we strive to be, and who we want to be.

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Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
October 2015



For many years, Dorset Humanists has been a forum in which concerns about inequality, homelessness, the environment and the state of British democracy can be expressed and discussed. We're not aligned to any particular party but it's natural for humanists to want a good society which values economic dynamism, prosperity, fairness, caring, wellbeing, and decent life chances for everyone - all delivered within environmental constraints and in the context of globalised hyper-capitalism. But can all of these goods be harmonised in one over-arching political programme or do they involve irreconcilable conflicts? John Gray, in his book on the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin, argued for the more pessimistic conclusion. Berlin expressed 'the disquieting thought that some ultimate values might be incompatible with one another, so that no solution could logically incorporate them all'. Gray added that 'for example, liberty and equality, fairness and welfare are recognised as intrinsic goods [but] Berlin maintains that these goods often collide in practice, that they are inherently rivalrous by nature, and that their conflict cannot be arbitrated by any overreaching standard'. He concludes 'If Berlin is right, we have in general no coherent conception of what the best state of affairs would be like' and that 'in political life, as in moral life, we are in the business of making trade-offs between conflicting goods and evils'...'Our lives abound in deep conflicts and hard choices' and we have to reject the ideas of a 'perfect society' and a 'perfect human life'. If John Gray and Isaiah Berlin are correct (and I think they probably are) then it's right that humanists should talk about the 'good' society rather than the 'perfect' society.

But far from being fatalistic or pessimistic, Berlin's viewpoint should be energising. If there can be no such thing as a perfect political settlement, but only conflict between rivalrous goods, this means that the economic consensus which has dominated British and US thinking for thirty-five years can and should be challenged. History has not ended. We don't have to put up with ever-increasing inequality, the complete sell-off of Britain's assets, an ever-worsening housing crisis, a shrinking public sector, a parasitical banking sector, trillions in off-shore tax havens, and poverty pay. Even George and Dave are prepared to adopt 'left wing' policies such as the Living Wage and giving 0.7% of our Gross National Income to overseas aid. We live in interesting times.

David Warden

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