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Humanists UK

national
secular
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Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 14th September 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TB

The Human Brain



With over 100 billion nerve cells, each with between 1,000 and 10,000 interconnections, the human brain is the most complex structure in the universe. In this talk

Norman Maclean will discuss its structure, the different functions of its distinct parts, the roles of the left and right hemispheres, and how it performs in sleep. He will also talk about brain operations by neurological surgeons, and what goes wrong in diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, epilepsy, and brain tumours.

Norman Maclean is Emeritus Professor in Genetics at Southampton University and a Patron of Humanists UK. He has written or edited a number of books including *Silent Summer: The State of Wildlife in Britain and Ireland* (2010) Cambridge University Press.

■ **Saturday 14th September 3.50-4.30pm**

Talkback

Why not come along to our popular 'talkback' session after the refreshment break? Chairman David Warden would like to hear your ideas for our Winter Appeal.

■ **Wednesday 25th September 7.30pm**

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

Evolutionary Psychology and the Blank Slate



A talk by Johan Nayer

Continuing our series on the brain, evolutionary psychologists see the brain as an evolved entity that has been shaped over millennia

but they have come into direct conflict with social scientists who believe that we are born as 'blank slates' and that all information about our minds is placed on us by our society. Cultural Marxists take this even further by stating that we are defined by our race, class, and gender, and that we must add up our 'oppressor points' and our 'victim points' to give us our place in society. Johan will explore how these ideas conflict, including the work of thinkers such as Steven Pinker and Jordan Peterson.

Johan Nayer has a Masters in Evolutionary Psychology and he is the author of *The Creativity Manual: The book for right-brained thinking in a left-brained world*. Johan had a 'life-changing' backpacking trip to India at the age of nineteen. Since then, he has travelled extensively through South America and Asia and developed his skills as a writer and musician. This is his first talk for Dorset Humanists.



■ **Thursday 5th September 7.30pm** and every first Thursday 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 15th September – Stour Valley 7 miles, mostly along the beautiful River Stour, with herons, kingfishers and otters in (possible) abundance. Starting point: Kingfisher Barn.

Please check [Meetup](#) for further details and any changes, for example last minute cancellations owing to weather conditions.

☎ Dean 07713 858773



Short Talks

Short Talks is taking a break but we are hoping to be back on Tues 15th October.

■ **Saturday 12th October 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TB

Surveillance Capitalism – who owns our privacy?



A talk by Henri Ruff. 'Surveillance capitalism' may be the latest mutation in the evolution of capitalism in the digital age. It's a form of market capitalism that transforms

human behaviour and experience into digital data which is then used as a free source of raw material for commercial exploitation. It raises a number of concerns,

- The 'top-down' (rather than horizontal) nature of the surveillance, with the

prospect of a high degree of centralisation and concentration of the digital data leading to monopolistic behaviour and the concentration of wealth in this form of capitalism

- Increasingly, surveillance is surreptitious, unknown to those being monitored
- Even where consent is obtained, it's coercive or based on the illusion of consent

Digital data is not merely a marketable product but arguably a manipulative tool to influence and even determine customers' behaviour. So who are the main players? What's new about surveillance capitalism and what's not? What's the problem and what are the possible solutions?

Henri Ruff is an economist and a member of Dorset Humanists. He has worked as a tutor for the Open University Business School and since moving to Dorset he has been leading a weekly U3A discussion group on 'Everyday Economics'. This is his second very interesting talk for Dorset Humanists.

■ **Wednesday 23rd October 7.30pm** Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

Music: a Humanist Perspective



Our speaker Teddy Prout is a classically trained musician and he was the director of performing arts at a large academy in West London for many years. He is now the Director of Community Services at

Humanists UK, but continues to write and perform music. Teddy will be exploring the concepts of music, how it works, and how humans use it to create meaning in our lives. The talk will explore the common themes that music from a variety of cultures covers, and if there is such a thing as 'humanist music'. Using well known, and not so well known, examples of music, it is hoped the talk will be as entertaining as it will be informative.



Secularism

A Very Short Introduction

Ninety people packed into Moordown Community Centre to hear Andrew Copson talk about his new book. This short report is based on notes from his talk and the book itself.



Andrew made an important distinction between the secularism of George Holyoake, the 19th century founder of secularism, and the secularism of today. Holyoake's use of the word 'secularism' was more akin to the current meaning of the word 'humanism' – a non-religious worldview. The United States, however, still leans towards Holyoake's definition.

Andrew's working definition of secularism was based on the work of contemporary French sociologist Jean Baubérot. It has three main components:

1. Separation of religious institutions from the institutions of the state and no dominance of the political sphere by religious institutions;
2. Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion for all, with everyone free to change their beliefs and manifest their beliefs within the limits of public order and the rights of others;
3. No state discrimination against anyone on grounds of their religion or non-religious worldview, with everyone

receiving equal treatment on these grounds.

Andrew described three very different types of secularism as practised in France, the United States, and India. In the book, he also writes about Turkish secularism. In France, the main understanding of secularism is *protecting citizens from state religion* and as such it has a pronounced 'anticlerical' or anti-religious bias. Chirac, for example, on the question of religious symbols and dress in school argued that school should be a 'safe space' – safe that is from religion which is 'out to get you and your children'. United States secularism has the opposite bias which is to *protect religion from the state*. The emphasis here is on individual liberty and secularism has an anti-state edge to it. Indian secularism is different again. India has experienced hyper-diversity in religious matters throughout history and secularism is mostly about *protecting everyone from everyone else*. The Indian state may interfere if necessary but in general it keeps a principled distance. Indian secularism is however under threat from Hindu nationalists.

"In France, secularism protects citizens from religion; in America, it protects religion from the state; and in India, it protects everyone from everyone else."

Andrew considered a number of different arguments against secularism. These included the theocratic, as espoused by the Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Iranian revolution of 1979. A second argument is that established religion can be welcoming to people of all religions and none. This argument was put forward by the Queen in a speech at Lambeth Palace in 2012. The role of the established Church, she said, 'is not to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of other religions. Instead, the Church has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country... gently and assuredly, the Church of England has created an environment for other faith communities and indeed people of no faith to live freely'. A third argument against secularism was described by Andrew as Romantic

conservative, after the Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-97) who thought that all Englishmen should be Anglican, all Frenchmen should be Catholic, and so on, according to the religion of the state. He did not mean by this that the state should be theocratic but that adherence to the established religion was part of what it meant to be a citizen. A fourth argument against secularism can be described as 'multiculturalist'. In the Netherlands and Belgium for example, a number of different religions and Humanism are accorded state recognition and this is called 'pillarization'. Andrew's fifth example of an argument against secularism he called 'the myth of neutrality' and he acknowledged that this is the most difficult to argue against. It is argued that secularism is loaded with cultural assumptions such as Enlightenment rationality and therefore it cannot be thought of as state neutrality towards religion. An example of this would be a Mormon wishing to practice polygamy on religious grounds and finding that a secular state will not permit it. Andrew acknowledged that secularism is not 'neutral full stop... It's not perfect, but it's better than all the alternatives'.

■ *Secularism: A Very Short Introduction* (2019) Oxford University Press by Andrew Copson. Copies will be available for purchase at forthcoming Dorset Humanists events and a copy will be donated to our library. Andrew is Chief Executive of Humanists UK and President of Humanists International. This was his fifth visit to Dorset Humanists since 2008 when he was education officer for the British Humanist Association.



Dorset Humanists Science Course

This course is now full and we regret we cannot take any further bookings. Please contact David Warden if you would like us to run this course again in the future.



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Jonathan Crozier

The news of Christine Hawkridge's death has come as a sudden shock to us all. I was at the Dorset Humanists talk at the Green House Hotel on July 24th when the announcement was made. It was in that very room that the paths of Christine's and my own life crossed. We were on the *One Life* course together in 2016.

Although I did not get to know her that well, I had come to respect her highly, and much like her. At her funeral I was hoping that we would get a meaningful biography, and so we did. In addition to which we were shown an album of photos of her which appeared on the screens facing us at the crematorium. These were accompanied by a piece of Schubert's music (transcribed for piano) which I had never heard before, and it was very beautiful and very conducive to quiet reflection.

It came about that Christine and I often found ourselves waiting at the bus stop together after Green House talks. I will miss the interesting chats we had, but even more I will miss the vigorous waves she gave me through the bus window, accompanied by her beaming smile (her bus usually came before mine).

Whenever I hear that Schubert piece I will remember Christine – with gratitude that her life touched mine, however briefly.

■ The Schubert song for voice and piano was *Sei mir gegrüßt* (I Greet You) in B-flat major D.741, composed in 1822.

■ The *One Life* course is Dorset Humanists' evening course on Humanism.





Extinction Rebellion: What is it?

Extinction Rebellion, often abbreviated to letters 'XR', is an international climate change protest movement. It was launched in the UK in October 2018 by fifteen activists including Roger Hallam and Dr Gail Bradbrook. At the end of October, it declared itself to be in 'open rebellion' against the UK government. Its 'Declaration of Rebellion' states that 'this is our darkest hour', that 'the bonds of the social contract [are] null and void' and that people have not only a right but a 'sacred duty to rebel'. In November it blockaded five bridges across the River Thames and in April 2019 five prominent sites in central London were occupied (Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Circus, Marble Arch, Waterloo Bridge and the area around Parliament Square). The protests cost London tens of millions of pounds and over a thousand activists were arrested. XR was quickly invited to meet senior politicians from all the main parties. In response to pressure, the UK government became the first to declare a state of climate and ecological emergency.

Extinction Rebellion wants to rally support worldwide around a common sense of urgency to tackle climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, and the risk of social and ecological collapse. It goes beyond tactics such as peaceful marches and polite letter-writing campaigns which change nothing. Inspired by the suffragettes, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Bertrand Russell it espouses non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to force governments to act.

It has three key demands:

1. The government must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change

2. The government must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025
3. The government must create, and be led by, the decisions of a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice.

Extinction Rebellion has published a handbook called 'This is Not a Drill' (2019) with contributions from a broad cross-section of people including economist Kate Raworth (author of 'Doughnut Economics'), Green MP Caroline Lucas, Labour MP Clive Lewis, and former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams.

One of the chapters in the handbook draws attention to the Alliance of World Scientists network which claims there are 'many ways that we can act to intervene in the catastrophic trajectory that civilization is taking in terms of the unfolding climate crisis... we refer to these actions as 'interventions' since we cannot 'solve' many of these problems but we can intervene to improve them.' MP Clive Lewis draws attention to the Green New Deal bill being championed by US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Relating this to the UK, he writes that 'at least £500 billion of investment in new low-carbon infrastructure is required to transform the UK economy'. He continues, 'We know it can be done, because it has been done before when, single-handedly and almost overnight, President Roosevelt dismantled the globalised financial system known as the 'gold standard'. This freed up his administration from the shackles of Wall Street and enabled the US government to mobilise on a massive scale to tackle the ecological crisis that was known as the 'dust bowl'.

Find out more at our forthcoming meetings:

Out of the Box has invited XR speakers to its meeting on 2nd October 2019 in Sandford.

Dorset Humanists has invited an XR speaker to its Green House meeting on Wednesday 22nd January 2020.





We Have a Dream! Dorset Humanists Choir perform three songs at our August meeting at Moordown Community Centre. From left: John, Mike, Sally, David, Elaine, Simon (obscured), Pat, David (obscured) Katie, Phil. Matthew played piano and Josie turned the pages. Photo credit: Aaron. If you would like to join our choir please get in touch with Mike. Email: mdgoodman@hotmail.co.uk

Christine Hawkrige

“A teacher and treasured friend to many”



There was standing room only in the large chapel at Bournemouth Crematorium for Christine Hawkrige’s funeral. Maggie Pepin conducted the ceremony and there were moving contributions from family members, friends, and members of

U3A and Dorset Humanists. Her former husband, Mongkol, had flown all the way from Cambodia to be present.

Christine was born in Edinburgh in 1940. At school she was an enthusiast for music, drama, and languages. At the age of eighteen, she went to Queen Mary College, London to study German and French. After graduating, she took teaching jobs in Germany, Oslo, Vienna, London, and Paris. It was through teaching English as a foreign language that she met her future husband, Mongkol. Mongkol was unable to return to

Cambodia because of the brutal Khmer Rouge takeover and so they settled to family life in Ashford in Kent. Mongkol was an engineer and an orchestral oboe player. Years later, when the political situation in Cambodia improved, Mongkol was keen to return to Cambodia to help rebuild the country. Christine tried to resettle in Cambodia but, now in her early sixties, found it too difficult and after an amicable separation from her husband she returned to Edinburgh. In Edinburgh, she volunteered for a number of organisations including Amnesty International, Victim Support, the Alternatives to Violence programme, and Freedom from Torture. She also led and took part in many U3A groups including Buddhism. She loved music and was a knowledgeable companion at concerts and the opera. She practised Buddhist mindfulness and followed the precepts of Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh.

Four years ago, at the request of her son Morn, Christine moved to Bournemouth to be closer to her grandchildren. She was reluctant to leave her beloved Scotland but she soon developed new friendships and routines in Bournemouth. She continued as

a volunteer for Victim Support to help victims of crime in Dorset and became a campaigner for the rights of prisoners. She developed a long-lasting friendship with a prisoner on death row in America with whom she corresponded every month for sixteen years. One of the groups she discovered was Dorset Humanists and she wrote this about us:

“Having moved to Bournemouth from Edinburgh six months ago, I am delighted to find such a friendly, welcoming and intelligent group. I enjoy the talks which are lively and stimulating. I look forward to lots more. Before I joined I was afraid you might be militant undergrad iconoclasts, but I feel right at home with you.”

Maggie’s valedictory words for Christine including the following: “May her pioneering spirit continue to inspire your daily life. Be glad that she lived; be proud that you knew her, and let her go in peace.”

The following poem, *Wild Geese* by Mary Oliver, was read at her funeral by Carolyn Gardiner.

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting - over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

The wisdom of Dorset Humanists

Paul Smale suggests we compile a ‘book of wisdom’ based on the collective life experience of our members

This idea came to me as a result of attending Dorset Humanists’ Existentialism Course and listening to the pearls of wisdom people had to share as well as listening to people at other meetings like my namesake Paul repeating his mantra of “You’ve only got today”. This can often be a useful thing to remind yourself of when dwelling too much on the past or future.

Dorset Humanists have quite a bit of life experience - even I’ve got half-a-century! I thought it might be fun to ask all paid up members of Dorset Humanists if they’d like to contribute to a little book called “The Wisdom of Dorset Humanists 2020”.

Members could contribute either words of their own wisdom (maybe a word limit of 500 per person), a poem, an essential book to read, or a simple quotation of what they would consider good advice or wisdom to pass onto their fellow human beings/humanists. Each piece would be acknowledged with the contributor, either with their full name or first name and initial or even anonymously if they wished. If people were prepared to share their rough age (not to be published) then we could say the advice represented, for example, 400 years of life experience.

The committee could act as final editors and if successful it could be printed using one of the online book printing services. If unsuccessful then what contributions we did get could just be put into a PDF document to share. It would be a snapshot in time too of what advice Dorset humanists would share with other humanists.

If you would like to get the ball rolling please send your contribution to David at chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk. There’s no deadline as yet - we’ll see what response we get.





Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
September 2019

There is much debate and concern about resurgent nationalism and populism. George Orwell claimed that 'nationalism is inseparable from the desire for power and prestige' and Einstein described nationalism as an 'infantile disease'. The European project was inspired by a desire to supersede the militaristic nationalisms that caused two world wars. Nationalism is often bracketed with xenophobia, racism, the far right, fascism, populism, and isolationism. To some, its only acceptable form is a mild patriotism defined as sentimental attachment to and pride in one's own country, given relatively harmless expression through football, cricket, and the Queen. But what are the alternatives to nationalism? Positive suggestions may include internationalism, cosmopolitanism, universalism, and supra-nationalism. There are darker alternatives too: imperialism, colonialism, superpowers, globalised capitalism, and global elites. How, then, do we steer a middle course avoiding both extremes? There is, I believe, a form of nationalism which is compatible with the ideals of humanism. We can call it moderate, civic, or liberal nationalism, as suggested by centre-left writer David Goodhart in his book *The British Dream* (2014). This is a form of nationalism which recognises the existence of nations defined (roughly speaking) as geographical units with shared or overlapping stories, languages, cultures, religions or beliefs, myths, and rituals. They do not always enjoy self-government (Scotland, for example) but there is a natural and legitimate desire for such a nation to preserve or aspire to self-government. The government of such a nation has a social contract with its citizens which requires a commitment to good governance and prioritizing the interests of its citizens. In return, it requires adherence to certain norms of citizenship, including the payment of taxes and obeying the law. This type of nationalism forms the basis of international co-operation in bodies such as the EU and UN. Citizenship is not dependent on any particular ethnicity or skin colour – you can be White British, Black British, Asian British and so on. And this type of nationalism is compatible with moderate levels of immigration and integration. The 2016 referendum was, arguably, a pent-up reaction against a perceived breach of this social contract and too much supra-nationalism at the level of the EU, which has led to an angry counter-reaction against what is perceived to be xenophobic nationalism. With so much energy focussed on deals, deadlines, and an increasingly fractious constitutional war we still haven't had an informed debate in this country about what it means to be a nation in the modern era. A richer analysis of the options available would be a good place to start.

