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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

■ **Wednesday 26th August 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, BH1 3AX

Being Human

A talk by Dr Fiona Coward



What does it mean to 'be human', and what is it that makes us unique as a species? Is it even possible to identify a single, critical, and universal human

characteristic that explains the essence of our uniqueness? Charles Darwin's groundbreaking theory of evolution showed that we share common ancestry with other great apes, and the fossil record and archaeological finds clearly demonstrate that modern humans didn't emerge from ancestral apes in a single step, so when did populations along the way become distinctively 'human'? In recent decades scientists have been surprised to discover that many other animals demonstrate some of the skills we once thought were exclusively 'human', such as making and using tools, living together co-operatively in large groups, communicating in highly complex ways and even using and understanding symbols. In this thought-provoking presentation, Fiona Coward will discuss the implications of these findings on how we think about what it means to be human, and will explain when and how some of the most obvious characteristics and behaviours that distinguish us as a species evolved. Dr Fiona Coward is Senior Lecturer in Archaeological Sciences at Bournemouth University.

■ **Saturday 12th September 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Losing My Religion



David Walter and Lola Tibulu
from London Black Atheists

For social and historical reasons black societies tend to be very religious, often socially

excluding those who live their lives without belief in God. Even here in the UK, a census of church attendance in 2005 showed that black people accounted for nearly half of all churchgoers in London!

The mission of London Black Atheists is to encourage non-believers of all ethnicities, and particularly of the African Diaspora, to feel able to 'come out' as atheists. They provide a welcoming environment and offer support to anyone wary of receiving hostile reactions from family and friends (which could potentially leave them isolated with no one to turn to and nowhere to go). Founding members David Walter and Lola Tinubu will outline the group's activities and offer suggestions on how humanist and atheist groups can improve their ethnic diversity. London Black Atheists works with the British Humanist Association, London Atheist Activist Group, and Central London Humanists, and despite the name 'Black' welcomes atheists of all races. Lola has appeared on 4ThoughtTV and BBC's The Big Questions.

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■ **Thursday 3rd September 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

■ **Wednesday 23rd September 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, BH1 3AX

The Wrong Sort of Banker: Has Britain succumbed to the Finance Curse?

A talk by John Christensen, Director of the Tax Justice Network – a coalition of researchers and activists with a shared concern about tax avoidance, tax competition and tax havens.

Other local events of interest...

■ **Sunday 23rd August 11.00am**

Sunday Assembly at the Embassy Centre, Brassey Road, Bournemouth BH9 1PT

How To Be Happy: Part 2

A talk by David Warden – an excellent taster for his up and coming course on happiness. Plus the usual mix of poems, pop songs, thought provoking ideas and tea/coffee and cake. A chance to meet nice, thoughtful, fun people! We are still growing and evolving, so please come along, see what we are up to and maybe see what you can offer to help build a positive local community. Meeting 11am to 12.30. Tea and cake available from 10.30 onwards and also afterwards.

Notices

We send heartfelt condolences to Richard Dyer-Smith whose wife Sue died recently. See Richard's letter in this Bulletin.

Happiness Course



■ **From Tuesday 8th September 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, BH1 3AX

Places are filling up fast for our brand new 6-week evening course exploring the science of happiness. Sign up soon! Happiness is a core element of Humanism which is why the 'Happy Human' is our internationally-recognised symbol. Happiness is good for you and good for society. This course will invite you to create a happiness building programme which will benefit you for the rest of your life.

David Warden and psychologist Phil James will be your course leaders. Please contact David to get your name on the list. Indicative contents are shown below:

Tuesday September 8th 2015 Introduction to the philosophy and psychology of happiness

Monday September 14th 2015 Foundations for happiness – social and environmental factors.

No meeting in 3rd week of September

Tuesday September 29th 2015 Supporting your happiness system – physical and neurological factors

Tuesday October 6th 2015 Happiness habits – proven techniques to increase your level of wellbeing

Monday October 12th 2015 The science of happiness – looking at further research findings

Tuesday October 20th 2015 Pulling it all together and living your one life

All sessions 7.30pm – 9.30pm at Green House Hotel, Grove Road, Bournemouth BH1 3AX. £24 non-members £18 members £6 for students/concessions. Cheques or cash to David Warden – Covers 6 sessions.

Book early to avoid disappointment – limited number of places

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Dorset Humanists Membership Benefits



Beat the October subscription increase – if you've been thinking about joining us, now's the best time to do it!

At Dorset Humanists we strive to create a welcoming and stimulating community for humanists, atheists and agnostics in the local area at the same time as promoting more widely the humanist values of reason, evidence and compassion. In recent years we've doubled the number of entertaining and informative presentations in our events programme, gained representation for non-religious people at Bournemouth's Remembrance ceremonies, succeeded in getting secular, non-religious philosophies such as Humanism into Dorset's RE syllabuses, developed engaging educational courses, and instigated a range of additional regular social events.

We're entirely funded by voluntary donations from our members and visitors, and we hope you will wish to help us continue and further expand our activities by paying our annual membership fee. Growing our membership also helps us to increase our influence on local policy in areas like education, religious privilege, and gain representation in policy groups and at civil events. At just £12 a year our membership offers great value and joining really demonstrates your support for our aims, values and community. Please note that the £12 offer runs out on 1st October, after which we'll be implementing our first increase for many years to £15, so it's worth joining soon to beat the increase if you haven't joined already. Membership will still offer excellent value and our members get exclusive discounts to special events such as Darwin Day lectures and educational courses (including our forthcoming course on happiness) as well as enabling you to participate in determining future group activities, vote on constitutional issues, and elect committee members. If you're not sure whether your current membership is up to date you don't have to worry because

we'll send you a reminder. If you haven't joined us yet we'd love to welcome you as a new member. Just pick up a membership form at one of our meetings, phone 07910 886629, or see our website. Many thanks for your continuing support!

Dorset Humanists represented at 70th anniversary of VJ Day

David Warden represented Dorset Humanists at the Bournemouth service to commemorate the 70th anniversary of VJ Day. He was formally invited to be part of the Mayor's procession to the War Memorial and to the veterans' tea afterwards. The service included poetry and non-religious readings from force representatives as well as musical pieces in memory of the human loss suffered during the War.

Can Humanism include belief in God?

A recent Radio 4 'Beyond Belief' programme addressed this question. You can listen to it [here](#).

Is humanism by its very nature opposed to religious belief? Joining Ernie Rae to discuss Humanism are **Stephen Law** author of "A very short Introduction to Humanism; Nick Spencer, co-author of "The Case for Christian Humanism" and **Marilyn Mason**, former Education Officer for the British Humanist Association. Both Stephen Law and Marilyn Mason have given talks to Dorset Humanists. Marilyn visited us in July to talk about 'Humanists for a Better World'. The programme also includes an interview with **Rory Fenton** who has also addressed Dorset Humanists on the possibilities of humanist-religious dialogue.

Recent talk videos

Did you miss the Improbability Principle talk by Professor David Hand? Watch it [here](#) on You Tube. Also Marilyn Mason's talk Humanists for a Better World can be viewed [here](#).

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Humanist Action in Uganda



Agnes Ojera explains how humanists are making a practical difference to people in Uganda

Humanist Empowerment of Livelihoods in Uganda (HELU) is a Humanist

Community Based Organisation established to promote Humanism by reaching out to the vulnerable in Uganda with its first target area being Gulu (a district in Northern Uganda). Its initial beneficiaries are children, vulnerable girls (child mothers), rape victims, victims of domestic violence, returnees from rebel captivity etc. The programme hopes to grow to NGO status as times goes by.

The programme teaches skilled crafts, hair styling, tailoring, baking and confectionery, and animal husbandry in order to create incomes for its beneficiaries. These are mothers with little to no means to support their children, widows, rape victims, or older siblings taking care of brothers and sisters. Upon completion of training they are given the tools they need to start a business, start up money and a home. This is currently funded by the Norwegian group HAMU (Humanist Action for Human Rights). A nursery school is also in place thanks to several individuals who made donations through kidsheartkids.com

It requires a lot of resilience and courage to be a humanist in Uganda given the extremist nature of religious and traditional practices in addition to unfavourable government policies. But nothing diminishes our courage in promoting a life stance based on reason and facts rather than fictitious ideologies and indoctrination.

Vision and Mission

To empower vulnerable people through humanism. Creating awareness of humanism in our community.

Objectives

- A secular state professing a neutral life stance, the freedom to choose any life stance and respect for human rights in a diverse society of different customs, norms, traditions and beliefs.
- To offer members a social and organisational framework for life stance identity, fellowship and care services.
- To increase knowledge of humanism and the organisation's activities.
- To encourage moral excellence, positive relationships and human dignity in society.
- To contribute to the eradication of poverty.

Strategy

Sustainable community-based initiatives for development of the target group through vocational training, psychosocial support, health, economic and social development efforts.



Bob Churchill, Communications Officer for the International Humanist and Ethical Union, visited the HELU programme (that's a Singer sewing machine behind him!).

HELU is also supported by HAMU (Humanist Action for Human Rights) which is part of the Norwegian Humanist Association. It works to promote international development and human rights. HAMU has been active for more than 15 years and funds projects in India, Nepal, Uganda, Brazil and the Dominican Republic.

More information here: HELU

Email: aggie.kal@gmail.com

- Agnes Ojera is the Programme Manager

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Letters & Emails

It's your column...



From Richard Dyer-Smith

Four years or so ago I joined Dorset Humanists – my wife Sue and I having been humanists in all but name for many years. Through the many meetings I have attended

since joining Sue and I have come to have a deeper understanding of what Humanism is and have been inspired to read many of the books which are around and to follow some wonderful debates and presentations about Humanism which one can find on YouTube.

As you know last November my dear Sue was diagnosed with terminal cancer and she died a few weeks ago on the 15 July. During the eight months of chemotherapy treatment which followed the diagnosis, and the many visits to hospital, we found our humanist attitude to life, with the deeper understanding which we had gained over recent years, immensely reassuring and comforting. We were able to share in an open and honest way the thoughts we had about life and about death, about the nearly 50 years of happiness and love we had shared, and about what the future might hold for me and the family after she had gone. So Dorset Humanists has helped enormously. But what Dorset Humanists has also given me has been the chance to meet one of our wonderful celebrants Maggie Pepin. When Sue died I asked Maggie if she would orchestrate and conduct a Humanist Celebration of Sue's life at The Woodland Burial Ground at Hinton near New Milton. She agreed and between us we put together what was, despite much sadness, a truly joyous and uplifting ceremony on 30 July. 150 people attended the Celebration, and, immediately afterwards, and on many occasions since,

people have been saying to me 'what a wonderful way to say "goodbye"'. Without doubt a real interest in the Humanist approach to life and death has been sparked in many of those who came along. Sue would be so proud if the Celebration of her life was to encourage just one more person to follow the humanist way in the months and years ahead.

So my thanks to you David and Dorset Humanists for what you have given me and, most importantly, thanks to Maggie for all she has given me over recent weeks.



From Maggie Mills on the Nature and Nurture talk by Professor Norman Maclean (photo above by Dave Haith)

How do you manage to find such entertaining, charming and knowledgeable professors? We very much enjoyed Professor Maclean's talk ... like last time on animal rights as well. I loved the way he listened patiently to questions and never once put anyone down or appeared impatient, in fact genuinely seemed delighted to be challenged.

From Kelvin Hastings-Gordon

Thank you massively for supporting the Bourne Free Parade this year and for all the effort that was clearly put into your entries on Saturday. From those groups with floats to the individual person taking part you all looked amazing and your enthusiasm throughout helped to make this year our biggest and most enjoyable to date. I cannot thank you enough. We hope you can all join us again next year. [Video here](#)

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From Sonia Tomlinson – Bournemouth Borough Council 70th Anniversary Of VJ Day - Saturday 15th August 2015

Dear Mr Warden – We would like you to attend a service to commemorate the 70th Anniversary Of VJ Day as a representative of Dorset Humanists as your organisation is an integral element of our community. Although there would not be a part for you to play in service itself we would still greatly appreciate having you there as a representative of the Humanist Organisation. It would be a lovely opportunity to include your organisation and yourself in this significant community event and attend the tea after the service.



From Dr Antony Lempert, The Secular Medical Forum

As a fellow National Secular Society member, I'm sure you'll agree that patients should be confident that

their autonomy to choose the right NHS treatment and care for them will not be subverted by the personal religious views or agenda of others. Yet the right to autonomy of every one of us is under constant threat from those people who consider their own religious views to be far more important than the views and beliefs held by other people.

The Secular Medical Forum (SMF) exists because people are regularly subjected to certain treatments and denied others based on the religious beliefs of those providing care or due to inherent religious privilege in the decision-making process. There is evidence that some very religious doctors refuse even to discuss reasonable treatment options that may shorten life.

People consulting for contraceptive and sexual health advice or treatment risk receiving information or treatment coloured by the narrow focus of the healthcare provider's religious agenda. The result may be an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies.

Religious psychiatrists have offered Sexual Orientation Conversion Efforts (SOCE) - roundly condemned by the BMA as unethical and ineffective - to people *they* consider to have aberrant sexual orientation. Medically unjustifiable surgery on children's genitals continues to be performed by some NHS organisations hell-bent on satisfying the 'requirements' of religious adults.

Some doctors consider it their duty to proselytise to vulnerable patients in the consulting room and try to convert them to the doctor's religion. NHS-funded hospital chaplaincy, touted as a spiritual service for all, is unique in appointing only NHS staff with religious credentials who deliver a spiritual-cum-religious service paid for out of limited NHS funds.

Legislation for assisted dying for those suffering unbearably with no realistic prospect of relief, supported by 80% of the UK population, has been thwarted and contested by the minority view of Anglican bishops privileged with seats in our parliamentary chamber by dint of their chosen religious beliefs.

Changes to the NHS over the coming years will see an increasing number of our services delivered by outside, in many cases religious, groups. We need to be mindful of the increased risk this brings.

The SMF is wholly voluntary and run mainly by healthcare professionals who form the core membership. However, every one of us has some insight into the healthcare system and the SMF welcomes non-healthcare professional associate members. The SMF relies on members taking independent action to challenge some or all of the behaviours described above. Please join our ranks and help us to protect all of us when we are most vulnerable. For more information and details as to how to join, contact SMF chair Dr Antony Lempert antony@secularmedicalforum.org.uk

If you have any specific skills in IT or administration and would be willing to offer a bit of time to help the SMF continue its

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*From Andrew Copson,
Chief Executive of the
British Humanist
Association and
President of the
International Humanist
and Ethical Union*

Following our 2015 General Assembly in Manila, Philippines, I am deeply honoured to have been elected president of the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

I feel especially privileged to succeed such a wonderful IHEU President as Sonja Eggerickx. Since 2006 she has been the IHEU's passionate but calm and reasoned leader, and I've been working on the Executive Committee with her for over half that time. It has been an honour.

It's also been a busy time for IHEU. Right now we're concluding an extensive policy review, we have restructured our staff, and professionalised our United Nations representation. Through our Communications Director, Bob Churchill, we have built on our policy work by publishing the now annual IHEU Freedom of Thought Report, which is making a significant impact on the international discussion around freedom of thought and expression among human rights experts, lawmakers, and in the media. We have a new website, a growing volunteer pool, and this year, after the Charlie Hebdo tragedy, we are at the very centre of the new End Blasphemy Laws campaign, running the online presence and supporting coalition members to fight so-called 'blasphemy' laws in their own countries.

All in all, we have opened many new doors. Now we need to keep advancing through them.

The IHEU is the only global federation of humanist and like-minded organisations that

is democratic at every level, with more than six decades of tradition and experience behind it. But I don't want to be a custodian only. This is a fast-changing, vitally important time for the interests of Humanism. So we must continue to move forward, with more energy and more innovation.

I want to facilitate deeper interaction between Member Organisations and the IHEU head office, and between Member Organisations themselves. For this we need greater transparency, and to be not just an institution but a mutually supporting network. At the British Humanist Association I've worked to double voluntary income, strengthen member groups, and oversee the creation of new sections and areas of work. Although an international organisation is different from a national one, I believe we have lessons to learn from our national Member Organisations and I believe we can and must transpose many of your successful strategies to the international level.

Externally, we must continue to build on the Freedom of Thought report and the reputation boost this has given us. I want to continue to grow our presence in international institutions, and enhance our public and media profile — without compromising our reputation for being a balanced, sensible, authoritative voice. And I believe we can find new ways of representing and advocating the values and ideas of Humanism as a positive lifescape for all thinking people in the here and now.

Please feel free to contact me via andrew.copson@iheu.org with any thoughts, priorities or news you may have. I greatly look forward to working with you, the staff and volunteers with IHEU Member Organizations, as well as the IHEU staff and other representatives.

■ Dorset Humanists is an associate member of the IHEU as well as a Partner of the British Humanist Association and a member of the National Secular Society

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Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
September 2015



Most of the people who approached our Dorset Humanists tent at the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival in July were friendly and supportive. A small handful were hostile. One visitor told me that organised atheism was 'scary' because she believed that we would all end up believing and promulgating the same thing. She seemed particularly worried about assisted dying. I found this reaction puzzling - surely we should be more worried about fundamentalist religion promulgating rigid dogmas. The whole point of Humanism is to promote freedom of thought. Nevertheless, I do agree that we should be vigilant in avoiding 'groupthink' and the temptation to label skeptics as 'deniers'. Humanism should positively encourage heresy and iconoclasm.

Another visitor demanded one compelling reason why anyone should consider joining a Humanist group. I found it difficult on the spot to think of just *one* compelling reason. I spluttered out 'faith schools' and 'bishops in the House of Lords' but my interlocutor was unimpressed. Reflecting on this exchange later it occurred to me that perhaps the most compelling reason for joining a humanist group is for human fellowship with like-minded people. Not that we all think alike or have the same views on controversial topics but humanists tend to be inquisitive and we approach questions with an open, critical mind. We're also in the process of building up a very special community. When I read heartwarming emails like the one from Richard in our Letters column this month it makes me realise just how worthwhile our efforts are. We have a special responsibility to hand on the humanist tradition in good health to our successors, as it was handed to us by our forerunners. The fact that we are able to enjoy freedom of belief and freedom from religion in this country is due in no small part to the courageous sacrifices made by brave men and women - heretics, apostates and atheists - over hundreds if not thousands of years.

I was delighted to meet Agnes Ojera at the World Humanist Congress in Oxford last summer and I hope you will read about her excellent work in Uganda in this Bulletin. Norwegian Humanists have been supporting this programme. Maybe Dorset Humanists will consider supporting it too. Please let me know if you feel inspired to lead a fundraising effort to support Humanism in action. *David Warden*

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