



A partner of
Humanists UK

national
secular
society

IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 9th September 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

CND and Labour's Nuclear Conflict

A talk by Chair of London Region CND
Carol Turner



The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was founded in the late 1950s, at the height of the Cold War, to non-violently campaign to rid the world of nuclear weapons and other

weapons of mass destruction. Carol Turner will provide an overview of CND's aims and objectives followed by a critique of the arguments for and against Britain's nuclear defence capability. Political support for nuclear disarmament has usually come from parties on the left of the political spectrum and Carol will consider the impact of having CND Vice-President Jeremy Corbyn as Labour's leader.

Carol Turner is Chair of London Region CND, a national officer of Stop the War Coalition, and the author of *Corbyn and Trident: Labour's Continuing Controversy* (2016).

■ **Wednesday 27th September 7.30pm**

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

The Joys of being a Volunteer Companion at the End of Life



A talk by Mandy Preece of Macmillan Caring Locally

No one should face the end of their life alone. Macmillan Caring Locally has a team of specialist volunteer end of life companions who sit

and support patients and their families. Unlike medical staff who may be very busy, or friends and family who may be overcome with emotion, the end of life companions help by listening to people come to terms with their death and enable them to find peace in their final moments. Mandy Preece, founder of the role, will be giving an uplifting and inspiring talk about the joys of sitting with people. She will share the laughter and the tears, and speak honestly about how sitting with the dying also helps the volunteers gain a deeper appreciation of their own lives. As one volunteer said, "I don't worry as much. I live much more for the moment and I've learnt to truly respect people. It is simple, it's all about listening." Donations to Macmillan Caring Locally will be gratefully received.



■ **Thursday 5th October 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

17th September – Poole to Bournemouth via Lilliput and Sandbanks. 7.5 miles mostly flat.

22nd October – New Forest Rhinefield. 8 miles fairly flat.

19th November – Portland Bill. 9 miles with some hills.

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

Phil ☎ 07817 260498



Short Talks

■ **Tuesday 19th September 7.30pm** Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

How do reasoning and moral judgement develop in children?

Two talks by members Phil James and Phil Butcher on child development. Their emphasis will be on the early learning of reasoning and experiments to determine how early in their development children can be said to have a sense of right and wrong and how that sense manifests itself - what are their judgements like?

Phil James will give a very brief history of four psychological theories of child

development and Phil Butcher will base his talk on "Just Babies" by Prof Paul Bloom of Yale University:

We will be aiming for each talk to be about 20 minutes long followed by plenty of time for questions and discussion.

See [Meetup](#) for further details and links to YouTube videos if you would like to do some prep before the talks.

Future dates for your diary:

Tuesday 10th October 7.30pm

Riverside Centre, Newport, PO30 2QR
Bombs, Bloomsbury and Bertrand Russell. A talk by David Warden for Isle of Wight Humanists.

Saturday 14th October 2.00pm Moordown 'Faith to Faithless' with Imtiaz Shams from Humanists UK

Wednesday 18th October 7.30pm Colliton Club Dorchester DT1 1XJ

Understanding Islam. A talk by David Warden for West Dorset Humanists.

Wednesday 25th October 7.30pm Green House 'Astounding Science and our Genetic Legacy' A talk by Graham Marshall

Saturday 11th November 2.00pm

Moordown 'Finding a Path' a talk by former BBC Nature documentary producer Jane Atkins.

Other events of interest...



■ **Wednesday 6th September 7.30pm** Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham BH20 4LT. Free entry – small donation appreciated.

Worldviews and the Future of our World

A discussion led by Professor Meric Srokosz. The secularisation thesis holds that religion has no future and that the secular worldview is the only rational one to adopt, but on a global scale this seems not to be what is happening. In the UK it is undoubtedly true that religious observance has declined, but many people still see



themselves as having a spiritual aspect to their lives. So is the UK a secular or religious or spiritual society? Given the major environmental problems that society faces such as climate change and plastic pollution of the oceans does it matter which worldview is adopted in responding to these challenges to humanity's future on the planet?

Meric Srokosz is professor of physical oceanography at the National Oceanography Centre (NOC), Southampton and a member and trustee of Christians in Science.

'Out of the Box' is a dialogue group for Humanists and Christians.

■ **Thursday 7th September 7.30pm**
Bournemouth Reform Synagogue
53 Christchurch Road BH1 3PA

Dr Kathy Durkin talk on 'The Ambiguity of the Balfour Declaration'. £3.00 admission to include refreshments.

■ **Wednesday 13th September 7.30pm**

Skeptics in the Pub at The Brunswick Pub
199 Malmesbury Park Road, Bournemouth,
BH8 8PX £3 suggested donation

I'd Like to be Immortal But...

A talk by Professor Richard Aspinall. Immortality has held us fascinated throughout history and there are many examples of individuals searching for the elixir of life or the fountain of youth because they wished to live forever. There are even reports that some, like the Comte de St Germain, have succeeded!

More recently the goals have been modified or even shifted slightly with reports that rather than being immortal we will soon be able to live to be 1000 years old - that's if we start treating the body like a machine and replacing those bits that wear out with time.

Professor Richard Aspinall is a recognised expert in the area of age associated immune deficiencies and issues concerning vaccination in older people. He is a member of the British Society for Immunology, the British Transplantation Society and the British Society for Research on Ageing.

Dorset Humanists Working Groups



Do you have the ideas, skills, and energy to get more involved with the success of Dorset Humanists?

In addition to our highly successful schools education group, which has spoken to 2,600 children about Humanism in local schools over the past 12 months, we have outlined some potential opportunities for members to get more involved with helping Dorset Humanists build on its success.

Dorset Humanists is currently run by a small committee and several hard-working volunteers who manage all of our events, edit this Bulletin, liaise with other local Humanist groups, attend national conventions, stage our festival appearances, manage our marketing, publicity and online presence, build relationships with other like-minded groups and more. Would you like to volunteer your skills and energy to help us?

Following our Development Day in May, when members generated dozens of ideas to help build on our success, we have now outlined four potential 'working groups' for members to get more involved in helping the existing committee and volunteers.

These working groups are:

1. **Diversity** – improving the diversity of Dorset Humanists to better reflect our local community
2. **Fund raising** – looking at what we need and how we can raise extra funds for special projects or good causes
3. **Marketing and Publicity** – looking at how best to promote what we do
4. **Communications** – looking at how we communicate internally and outwards to the wider world

Several people have already indicated their willingness to join these groups but we need more people to make them viable.

Interested? Please email David Warden to find out more about what's involved.

 chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk



Land Value Tax – could it solve the housing crisis?

Carol Wilcox, Secretary of the Labour Land Campaign, stimulated a lively discussion about Land Value Tax at our Green House meeting in July. This article is based on and quotes extensively from Jerry Jones' booklet 'Land Value for Public Benefit' (2008) published by the Labour Land Campaign and a paper written by Jerry Jones and Carol Wilcox entitled 'A strategy for replacing council tax and business rates with a land value tax: a first step towards a more equitable tax system'.

Land Value Tax (LVT) would be an annual tax payable by all owners of land in proportion to its value. It could replace Council Tax and other taxes such as income tax which tends to penalize enterprise and economic activity – the more one works, the more tax one has to pay. The whole point of introducing LVT is not to increase taxation but to substitute other taxes that have adverse social or economic consequences. The underpinning argument for LVT is that society's investment in various economic activities and services are responsible for rising land values and that, therefore, a significant portion of this gain should be reclaimed for the benefit of society rather than landowners profiting freely at the expense of other people. In Britain, it is the 200,000 or so families who continue to own some two-thirds of Britain's land by area, including some of the most valuable land in cities, who have benefited the most – at the expense of the rest of the population. Banks have also gained billions from rising land values. An enormous amount of revenue, potentially around £200bn, could be collected for public purposes through LVT. LVT would establish a mechanism that would bring to an end the constant escalation of property prices – which not only hugely benefits the banks at the expense of everybody else, but also forces homeowners to lay out a major part of their earnings on mortgage repayments, and puts home ownership beyond the reach of young people without help from older relatives.

Valuing land is less complicated than valuing buildings and could be based on factors such as location, planning permission, and local amenities. As these factors change then land valuations could be updated. LVT could be based on the rental value or the capital value of the land. LVT would be cheap to collect and, unlike most other taxes, it is impossible to evade because land cannot be hidden in offshore tax havens.

LVT would end the wastefulness of derelict land and decaying buildings standing empty for years on end that blight neighbourhoods. Taxing land values benefits the environment because it stimulates the development of brownfield sites. It will tend to lower the market value of land making business premises and homes more affordable so that more money will be available for investment and consumption which would boost economic growth.

Many large landowners, including house builders, have been withholding land from the market in the expectation of making higher profits later when the land was eventually sold. In some areas of the country it is reported that land banks are likely to last until 2050. LVT would end such speculation because LVT would have to be paid on the land whether or not it was being used optimally. In addition, it was estimated in 2008 that there were 750,000 properties standing empty in Britain. An artificial shortage in the supply of housing has been created. The shortage of affordable rented accommodation, caused by governments and local authorities selling off public sector housing at subsidized prices, has also pushed up house prices and led to private sector landlords charging exorbitant rents. LVT would have the effect of increasing the supply of land for productive use and therefore tend to dampen its price. Lower land prices would make it more affordable for local authorities and housing associations to acquire land for social housing, thus increasing the supply of accommodation at affordable rents which will also tend to have a downward pressure on private sector rents.

In their paper, Carol Wilcox and Jerry Jones propose that the average rate of LVT could

be set at approximately 0.85 per cent of capital value for principal owner-occupied residential properties so that each local authority would collect comparable revenue to that currently collected by Council Tax. This rate may have to be lower for cities like London where land values have increased enormously so that owner-occupiers do not end up with an LVT bill massively in excess of Council Tax. Retired people could be given the option of deferring (or rolling over) the payment of LVT, either wholly or in part, until the property was sold or transferred. For the low-paid, some form of benefit could be introduced similar to the Council Tax Reduction scheme that operates now. Replacing Council Tax with LVT at less than one per cent would mean that only people in houses worth more than about £600,000 would end up paying more. People in small houses would pay less and if they were in rented accommodation they would not pay LVT at all. Landlords can only charge what the market will bear and that would determine the rents they could charge. This would limit their capacity to pass on the cost of LVT.

A higher rate of approximately 3 per cent of capital value would be applied to commercial and industrial properties, landbanks, second homes, buy to let properties, and land occupied by homes that have remained empty for more than one year. Large country estates (except National Trust owned) would also be liable for the 3 per cent rate. Over a period of 10-20 years the concessionary rate of 0.85 per cent would be phased out and the standard rate would be raised to 4-5 per cent with the aim of collecting all uplifts in land value for public benefit and enabling LVT to achieve its full potential, including reducing or phasing out other taxes such as VAT.

If, in the first instance, LVT were merely replacing Council Tax, owner-occupied residential property prices on average, other things being equal, would not decline. The concessionary rate of LVT for owner-occupiers is not only to prevent a sudden rise in tax liability but also to prevent a sudden drop in the market price of houses.

<http://www.labourland.org/>

Atheism UK: Challenging Religious Faith



Chris Street, President of Atheism UK, explained the thinking behind this relatively new organisation at our Moordown meeting in August.

Some may question why Atheism UK is needed when we already have Humanists UK and the National Secular Society. Chris explained that until 2009 there had been no distinctively atheist organisation in the UK which was why Atheism UK was founded. The aims of Atheism UK are to advance atheism and to challenge religious faith. Its ultimate goal is the end of religion and religious faith – the false and irrational belief that God exists. Atheism UK's position on faith is that it is 'belief without evidence'.

The key principles of Atheism UK include the following points (abbreviated):

- Humans have fabricated religion.
- Religious texts must be criticised, challenged and, where appropriate, satirised or denounced.
- Religious organisations and communities must not receive privileges and immunities, such as tax benefits and protection from criticism or satire, which are denied to the non-religious population.
- Although atheism is not in itself a source of morality, it frees morality from corruption by religion.
- The religious indoctrination of children corrupts their morality. Children are not born with any religious beliefs or affiliations; these are imposed.
- Religion inhibits rational thought and it is based on irrationality, superstition and unsubstantiated beliefs.
- Religion encourages and perpetuates prejudice, ignorance and intolerance.
- Religion inhibits critical thinking, discourages scientific enquiry and restricts human progress.



Chris presented a number of quotations which assert that we have become too reluctant to challenge religious faith:

Dan Dennett: "The religions have contrived to make it impossible to disagree with them critically without being rude."

Sam Harris: "I think we're all encountering the fact that religion is held off the table of rational criticism even by our fellow secularists and atheists."

Susan Blackmore: "A really clever trick is to make the rest of us feel that we ought to respect people for believing impossible things on faith, and that we should not laugh at them for fear of offending them. In a society that strives for honesty and openness, that values scientific and historical truth, and that encourages the search for knowledge, this is outrageous – and it's scary that we still fall for it."

In a presentation given at the July 2011 World Atheist Convention in Dublin, 'Accommodate or Confront?', Atheism UK founder Richard Green said that no matter how reasonably or politely atheists challenge religious faith they are accused of being hostile, argumentative and confrontational – and this comes not just from theists but also from atheists and humanists. He said that to 'accommodate' means to 'refrain from confronting' and that 'confronting' means 'challenging religious faith'. Richard also argued against 'moral realism' – the belief that morality 'exists' in some sense external to our moral intuitions and emotions.

Distinguished supporters of Atheism UK include Darrel Ray, author of *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture* (2009) and founder of *Recovering from Religion*, author PZ Myers, Maryam Namazie, founder of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, and Professor Alex Rosenberg, author of *The Atheist's Guide to Reality* (2011).

■ Dorset Humanists challenges religious beliefs via friendly but robust debates with Christians and local theology students. We also co-run a dialogue group with Christians in Wareham to explore common values where these exist. Dorset Humanists is not affiliated to Atheism UK. [Atheism UK](http://AtheismUK)

Life School



Dorset Humanists 'Life School' will run a variety of short courses in the future focusing on how we can live good and fulfilling lives. Participants will be invited to study and critically reflect on the best scientific resources available. A great way to meet people and develop friendships.



This coming autumn, Life School will focus on the work of Sonya Lyubomirsky who is Professor of Psychology at the University of California, and author of the bestselling books *The How of Happiness* and *The Myths of Happiness*. Each week over six weeks we will look in-depth at two of her twelve 'happiness-building strategies' and how to apply them effectively in our daily lives:

1. Nurture relationships
2. Develop the habit of expressing gratitude
3. Do things for other people
4. Cultivate optimism
5. Savour life's pleasures
6. Take care of your body
7. Commit to lifelong goals
8. Develop strategies for coping with adversity
9. Avoid ruminating and social comparison
10. Practise forgiveness
11. Spend time on engaging activities
12. Practise 'spirituality'

This course runs for six consecutive Mondays from Monday 2nd October to Monday 6th November 7.30-9.15pm. All at Moordown Community Centre.

A £15 non-refundable deposit secures your place on the course (£10 for members).

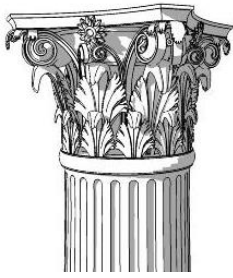
The course facilitator is David Warden, Chair of Dorset Humanists. Email chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629. *Book now - limited spaces.*

■ Feedback from our 2015 Happiness Course:

"First class course – really enjoyed the stimulating sessions" Barry

"Very well run course, extensively prepared and researched, professionally presented." Paul





Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Penny Jacques, Oxford Humanists

I was so pleased to have the chance to visit another local Humanist group. I am deeply envious that you have so many members and meet in such a salubrious venue with alcohol upstairs! We now have only 70 members (down from 120) and only about 20 max ever come to formal meetings although a few more turn up for parties and outings.

Your programme is impressive with so many meetings and other events - some held in different towns. You must have a very committed and hard working committee.

I think the challenge we face is to balance what I tend to call the 'looking in' with the 'looking out'. Obviously we need to offer our members a sense of community but at the same time find as many ways as we can to make our voice heard out in the world.

With so few active members, and most of those (including me) being ancient or frail we try our best to bring Humanism to the attention of the community. We have a gazebo and stand which we take onto the pedestrian shopping centre among the various religious and weird groups who are there regularly. We provide all the leaflets etc that you had on your table at your meeting. We are very cheered by the number of people who, while not signing up for membership, express their relief and pleasure that we are there.

Oxford attracts so many foreign visitors and we have some fascinating discussions with people who come from countries where to be a non-believer is impossible or dangerous. Also a number of local people tell us how going to a Humanist funeral was an eye-opener for them.

We have a representative on the local SACRE and we have just managed to get a member onto the local hospital Chaplaincy team. She has done the Humanists UK training and is a retired GP so should be able to make a positive contribution. We have a few members willing to talk to schools and adult groups. Three of our members keep an eye on the Oxford Times and thoroughly enjoy debating on matters of religion through the letter pages. We get invited to take part in TV debates such as The Big Questions, and Radio Oxford regularly asks for someone from our group to make a contribution on air. We suspect there may be a closet humanist on the staff at radio Oxford.

I think our most significant coup has been that we now take a full part in the annual Remembrance Day service along with all the representatives of the religions in this community. Dan Snow is still trying to have a humanist representative at the Cenotaph in London so we are quite proud of this success due entirely to our current Chair, John White, networking and making friends with local C of E dignitaries who are in charge of this event.

I wonder if you experience the same split we have between the members who want to meet with people from faith groups and those who definitely do not want to do this.

Oxford, being a cathedral city with umpteen colleges all with chaplains and choirs, has a lot of religion going on. Also we have four mosques and a huge department for Islamic studies - funded by Saudi Arabia - as well as synagogues and temples etc.

Our presence on social media is entirely due to the efforts of two of our very few somewhat younger members.

From David Moon

I was delighted that I and my sister Penny Jaques were able to attend your meeting on Wednesday at The Green Hotel on the question "Is Humanism a Religion?". It was a very interesting talk and lively discussion.

■ We will feature a report on the talk "Is Humanism a Religion?" in our October Bulletin.



Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
September 2017



Land Value Tax has an excellent humanist pedigree. It was proposed as long ago as 1797 in *Agrarian Justice* by humanist hero Tom Paine. Paine was influenced by philosopher John Locke who believed that in a state of nature all property is held in common. Paine developed this into the idea of landowners paying a ground rent for the benefit of the community. He even proposed that this would fund a capital sum of £15 to be paid to everyone when they reach the age of 21. Adjusted for inflation, imagine how that could help transform the lives of young people. Today we burden them with gigantic student debts (or 'graduate tax'), unaffordable homes, and the prospect of ever-receding pensions.

Land Value Tax can be understood, then, as a kind of community ground rent. It would capture the uplift in land values associated with infrastructure improvements to such an extent that infrastructure improvements would become self-financing. It would penalise derelict properties and land banking. It would bring more land into use at lower cost and help councils to build social housing, thus bringing down rents and house prices more generally. It would act as an asset price stabiliser and help to prevent house price bubbles. It would be almost impossible to avoid because land cannot be parked overseas. If ownership were opaque the tax would be imposed on the tenants to pass on to the owners. By some estimates LVT could raise £200bn. It could replace Council Tax and reduce the need for other taxes such as VAT and Income Tax. Perhaps it could even help to finance a citizens' dividend as suggested by Paine. It would help to reduce inequality and reverse intergenerational injustice. There are problems, however. In some ways the horse has already bolted. We have already had massive house-price inflation caused by excessive bank credit and LVT would fall suddenly on the winners. LVT at 1% on a 5-bed house in Westbourne would be affordable (£6,000) but on a £6m house in Sandbanks the tax could reach £60,000 or £180,000 as a second home. LVT at 3% on rented accommodation could kill the buy-to-let sector, flood the market with properties, and cause a general house price crash trapping millions in negative equity. It may even incentivise people to build on their gardens if LVT is applied to gardens! To avoid creating gigantic waves, LVT implementation would have to be thought through very carefully. The 2017 Labour Party Manifesto did at least say that they would 'consider new options' such as LVT. We may be in for a long wait.

■ Further reading: *Time for Land Value Tax?* (2005) Institute for Public Policy Research.