



The Great Awakening

A dialogue between Daniel Dancey and
David Warden

Saturday 9th September 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, Bournemouth BH9 1TW

What exactly does the word 'woke' mean and should humanists be more or less woke? When Daniel and David met up to plan this dialogue they discovered that they had quite different understandings of what this strange word means. They will attempt to shed light on this cultural phenomenon, exploring whether there's a generational divide between 'baby boomers' like David on the one hand, and Millennials/Gen Z like Daniel on the other, in terms of social attitudes and political values.

Daniel and David aim to conduct a dialogue rather than a debate, exploring common ground and tolerating differences.



Biodiversity Game Show

With Dr Tony Curran

Wednesday 27th September 7.30pm

Orchid Hotel 34 Gervis Rd, Bournemouth BH1 3DH

In this interactive show the audience will watch and take part in a series of games based on popular TV quiz shows: Tenable, Pointless, Only Connect, Family Fortunes, and the always popular 'Biodiversity Blockbusters'! Through the games they will learn about biodiversity loss, the threats many species now face, and how they can do their bit to protect nature.

Tony Curran is an environmental science communicator and a member of the Public Engagement with Research team at the University of Southampton. He is currently seconded to the Healthcare Improvement Studies Institute based in Cambridge.



ASSISTED DYING

A FRANK & OPEN DISCUSSION

Thursday 28th Sept
6:45pm - 8.15pm
Pavilion on the Park
1 Kingfisher Road, Eastleigh,
Hampshire SO50 9LH
Fully Accessible with Parking Available

What does it mean?
Why does it matter?
What are the challenges?
Is it immoral?
Is it your decision to make?
Will it become legal?

Panel members drawn from the arenas of politics, medicine, religion and disability will be facilitated in a discussion by Louise Papworth, of Dignity in Dying.

Whether you've already made up your mind, or not, please come along and have your say, as the question of assisted dying could affect any of us at any time





ATTENDANCE IS FREE!

To reserve your place, scan the QR code or visit www.assisteddyingdiscussion.co.uk



Dignity in Dying event

Members and supporters of Dorset Humanists are warmly invited to this public event in Eastleigh hosted by Dignity in Dying Winchester Branch. To reserve your place click the QR code above or visit www.assisteddyingdiscussion.co.uk.

Barry Newman and Richard Jones will be on stage with others presenting various aspects and viewpoints followed by Q&A.

A generous turnout will give a good impression as we expect it'll be reported in the local press.

Barry can offer a lift for up to three people.
✉ barry.newman@me.com

Dates for your diary

Saturday 9 th September 2pm	Moordown	The Great Awakening. A dialogue between Daniel Dancey and David Warden about the word 'woke'.
Wednesday 27 th September 7.30pm	Orchid	Biodiversity Game Show with Dr Tony Curran
Thursday 28 th September 6.45pm	Eastleigh	An open discussion about assisted dying.
Saturday 14 th October 2pm	Moordown	Apostasy in the UK. Dr George Askwith.
Wednesday 25 th October 7.30pm	Orchid	Nutrition science with Chloe Casey, lecturer at Bournemouth University
Tuesday 19 th December 7pm	Marsham Court Hotel	Yuletide dinner – please hold the date in your diaries!

Plus other social events and walks which will be announced on Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any changes.



From left: Aaron, Roz, David, Daniel and Roger

“Have-a-go humanist heroes” debate

At our evening event in August, four of our own members went head-to-head to debate the motion “Humanists should be have-a-go heroes”. David Warden chaired the debate. Aaron, one of the debaters, sent his script to the Bulletin and we asked ChatGPT to summarise his argument. This is how it responded:

- 1. Response to Theft:** Aaron discussed his approach when witnessing theft in a shop. He emphasised the importance of taking action, intervening, and confronting the thief. He expressed a desire to prevent theft, correct wrongs, and ensure justice.
- 2. Impact of Actions:** He acknowledged that his approach might vary, depending on the situation and the person involved. He mentioned using verbal warnings, engaging the thief, and attempting to make them reconsider their actions before escalating the situation.
- 3. Responsibility and Values:** He emphasized the importance of personal responsibility in addressing theft and criminal behaviour and argued that everyone has a duty to stand up against wrongdoing and protect others' rights.
- 4. Ineffectiveness of Legal System:** Aaron criticised perceived weaknesses in the legal system, pointing out that it might favour criminals and lack effective rehabilitation. He expressed scepticism about the responsiveness of the police and the criminal justice system.
- 5. Collective Action:** He encouraged collective action and intervention when witnessing theft. He suggested strategies like locking doors, blocking exits, using fire extinguishers, and seeking help from others to apprehend thieves.
- 6. Balancing Risks:** He acknowledged the potential risks involved in intervening, such as personal safety and inconvenience. He presented various options for responding to theft, including calling the police, providing descriptions, or using authoritative tactics.
- 7. Humanist Values:** He connected his approach to his humanist values, emphasising the importance of helping those in need and promoting positive change. He argued that intervening could potentially lead to a better future for the thief, who may be struggling or facing addiction.
- 8. Upholding Integrity:** Aaron concluded by discussing the significance of ▷

maintaining personal integrity, even in challenging situations. He asserted that taking action, despite potential negative consequences, aligns with his values and allows him to sleep at night knowing he played his part.

The case against the motion was presented by Roger and Daniel and it included the following arguments:

1. Individual Choice over Mandate:

Humanism values individual rights, suggesting that the decision to intervene should be up to each person's discretion rather than being mandated.

2. Potential Risks and Limitations: There are good intentions behind the desire to be a "Have-a-go Heroes" but we should consider the following:

- **Oppressive Countries:** Humanists protesting against the state could put their entire family at risk.
- **Motivation:** Is it 'heroic' to help someone if you enjoy helping?
- **Personal Safety:** Rushing into situations without preparation can endanger the interveners.
- **Lack of Training and Expertise:** Untrained individuals might lack knowledge needed in specific situations, leading to unintended harm.
- **Legal and Ethical Concerns:** There's a risk of acting outside legal boundaries or causing harm inadvertently.
- **Professional Response Systems:** Established emergency services and professionals are important; encouraging untrained intervention could undermine their expertise.
- **Unintended Consequences:** Well-intentioned actions could worsen situations due to a lack of understanding.

3. Importance of Independent Observation:

Sometimes it's more valuable for a bystander to record an incident, drawing a parallel to roles like war reporters.

It was proposed that instead of advocating for untrained interventions, the emphasis should be on supporting established response systems and trained professionals. This approach can lead to safer and more effective assistance in times of need.



Roz, in favour of the motion, spoke powerfully about how moral obligations arise naturally out of our identity as humanists. She stressed that 'having a go' did not necessarily mean engaging in physical force. An effective

intervention could be one of a range of actions including helping the victim, calling the police, providing information and so on.

Daniel spoke about 'hero syndrome' - a psychological phenomenon whereby an individual feels a strong need or desire to help others, sometimes to an excessive or self-sacrificing degree. This may even involve deliberately creating incidents, such as an arson attack, in which they can then intervene as the hero.

There was a discussion about whether members of the public have a moral obligation to intervene in shop theft when retail businesses themselves seem reluctant to take action or which may be seen as profiteering at the expense of the poor.

A member of the audience told a story about when he had intervened to stop a crime which resulted in him being rammed by a car. The criminal got off with a £60 fine. A visitor from Northern Ireland said that intervening in NI can be extremely dangerous.

Some people in the audience supported the motion, with a small number opposing it, but the majority were 'on the fence' both before and after the speeches, reflecting the fact that 'having a go' very much depends on the situation and which intervention would be most effective.

James Croft

Explaining the role of a 'humanist clergyman' and setting out a radical vision of the future of humanism

At our August event at Moordown Community Centre, Dr James Croft told us about his journey to being a kind of 'atheist priest', first as a leader of the Ethical Society of St Louis in Missouri, and currently as the lead chaplain at Sussex University. As a 23-year old secondary school teacher, James consulted a careers advisor in Canary Wharf and they wondered together about where he wanted to be in ten years' time and what he hoped to achieve with his life. "James," she said, "You should be a priest". James told us that he did become a priest of sorts: an atheist priest. The following edited transcript is mostly in James's own words.

Until recently, I was clergy for a congregation in St Louis, Missouri. I gave sermons on Sundays. I offered pastoral care and counselling for my 'flock'. And now I continue that work in a secular setting as University chaplain and Lead Faith advisor at the University of Sussex. I am the first humanist to be appointed to be a lead chaplain at any University in this country and one of the very few full-time humanist University chaplains anywhere in the world. Like chaplains of other religious traditions I represent a religious and philosophical perspective in public. I try and be an 'avatar' for my world-



view. I seek to serve the whole university community alongside a team of associate chaplains representing different faith traditions. And I do so while still trying to embody my own humanist beliefs. I never thought I would be doing this at the time of my meeting with the career advisor in Canary Wharf I was 23 years old, fresh out of University and working as a secondary school teacher. I was a staunch atheist, a devotee of Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris. I had never been a member of a church. I thought the idea of me as anything like a priest was ridiculous. But looking back I recognized that the advisor saw something in me that it would take me years to discover. My path to 'atheist priesthood' was a long one.

I have a complex relationship with religion. I was raised in a non-religious home by parents who never attended a church or profess belief in God. My father's mother was a believer and went to church until she died but she never attempted to pass her beliefs onto her grandchildren. Religion simply wasn't part of my family life. I did go to a Christian school however, founded more than five centuries ago by a former Dean of St Paul's Cathedral and vestigial elements of its religious founding still remain. When I joined the choir I had to sing for services on Sunday ▷



The distinctive building of the Ethical Society of St Louis

mornings, so once a month I'd get up outrageously early, don a cassock, and sit through the school's church service until it was our turn to sing although I was never once convinced that anything the vicar was talking about was real about God. I did enjoy the services. I found the sermons interesting and challenging. I liked being encouraged to think about how I was living. I enjoyed the quiet serenity of the chapel itself, a place set apart, and I found the ritual fascinating. Because I'd never been confirmed I couldn't actually take communion so at that point in the service when most of the choir approached the rail for their wafer, wine or blessing I stayed seated in the pews with the Jewish kids and the other atheists until one day, when my curiosity got the better of me. I made my way toward the altar and took my place in the row. I waited as the priest moved down the line. When he reached me he seemed to pause, looking intently into my eyes, then he placed both hands upon my head and intoned the magic words: "The blessing of God Almighty and Jesus Christ be upon you" and as he spoke he pushed his hands into my head with some force, pressing my head towards the ground as if he was trying to squeeze God into me. It didn't take, but I was struck with a sense that even though it meant nothing to me something important was happening for the participants and I realized that even though I was not religious I was fascinated by religion. So when I got to University and had a lot of time to read I decided I was going to read the foundational texts of all the great religious traditions of the world. I do not recommend this. It was a foolish decision. There are far too many scriptures in too many versions and translations for even the most dedicated undergraduate to read every single one. Through all this reading and religious exploration, I was never once tempted to embrace belief in God. Instead, I derived an incredibly simple truth which I'm sure all of you also recognize: religion is a human response to human problems. Human beings created religious stories, myths, rituals,



In 1876, at the age of 25, Felix Adler, son of a rabbi, created the Ethical Culture Movement in New York. It is the precursor of today's humanist movement.

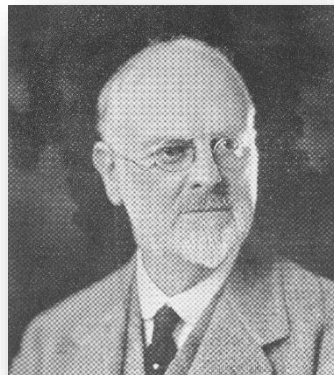
codes, practices and hierarchies in an attempt to answer the most profound questions of life. I am a very religious atheist. What intrigued me about religion isn't so much the trappings of religion but the heart of religion, the fundamental questions religions seek to answer, the questions about life and destiny. I realized back then as an undergraduate studying philosophy and reading about religion that I wanted to help people respond to these big questions. I didn't know exactly how I was going to do that. I tried teaching, I tried academia, until I discovered my current, very strange, profession but I always knew I wanted to chew on the big questions. Somehow, that career advisor had reached into my soul and plucked out the perfect profession for me: I would become an atheist priest. It took me many years to figure out how to do that out but eventually I found my way.

As David was telling you, Ethical Culture is a very strange phenomenon. It is a humanist religion founded toward the end of the 19th century in New York City by Felix Adler who was a philosopher and the son of a prominent rabbi. It is essentially an attempt to keep the good parts of religion, the sense of community, the opportunity to grow alongside others, the connection with something bigger than ourselves, without the bad parts – the dogmatism, the belief in unscientific ideas the encouragement to think of ourselves as broken, sinful, and wrong, and so Adler built something new: the New York Society for Ethical Culture which still exists today. It has a massive building just off ▷

Central Park – well worth visiting if you're ever in New York. His vision was that ethical societies would be dedicated towards pursuing ethical goodness itself. Over the decades, ethical societies became more explicitly humanist. You won't get any talk of God or prayer at an Ethical Society gathering. Today there are 24 or so remaining Ethical Societies in the United States. They are fully-fledged humanist congregations.

After completing my doctoral studies at Harvard, I became clergy for the largest one of them: the Ethical Society of St Louis. So for eight years I was a full-time humanist clergyman. I spoke on Sunday, I offered pastoral care and counselling to our 350 members, I officiated at weddings and funerals, I represented the community in public. I was in every respect an atheist priest. It was a fascinating life, living at the edges of the secular and the sacred, seeking to humanize religion and bring to everyday life a sense of reverence usually associated with religion. But I missed the intellectual life of my doctoral years. I wanted to get back into the classroom to teach, and frankly I wanted to escape the increasingly febrile political environment in the United States. So about a year ago I told my congregation that I would be leaving them and I began to look for jobs as a university chaplain here in the UK and that brought me to Brighton to the University of Sussex, and in a roundabout way to you today and so I'm very grateful to David for the invitation.

So today I'm a chaplain. Essentially, a chaplain is a member of the clergy who works in a secular setting. My role at the University of Sussex is to support the religious and spiritual life of all students and staff at the University just as I did when I led my congregation. I offer pastoral care and counselling to students and staff. I coordinate the work of 15 associate chaplains who represent different religious beliefs, and I create programming to promote the values of the University: kindness, inclusion, integrity, courage, collaboration.



Stanton Coit created the Ethical movement in England

David was saying a little bit about the history of ethical culture and its relationship to UK humanism and there is an interesting historical connection between the movement that I served in America and humanism in the UK today. In fact, organized British humanism in this country is directly descended from the ethical societies like the one that I used to lead because, while the founder, Felix Adler was alive he travelled across the USA and internationally and basically wherever he went ethical societies sprouted, including in the United Kingdom. A man called Stanton Coit, who was an aide to Felix Adler in the States, later moved to London where he became minister of what was then called the South Place Religious Society and he renamed it South Place Ethical Society. In 1929, it moved to new premises called Conway Hall in Red Lion Square and is now known as Conway Ethical Society - one of the most significant humanist cultural institutions in this country. It was once a fully fledged humanist congregation like my own Ethical Society. Stanton Coit is responsible for founding what became Humanists UK. After a few years of work in the UK, there were around 40 ethical societies across the country and a Union of Ethical Societies to coordinate their efforts. In 1963 it changed its name to the British Humanist Association, now Humanists UK, and it hired its first executive director Harold Blackham. You have some of his books in your library. He's known as the Father of British Humanism. So I would just like to say "You're welcome" – without us there may not have been a Humanists UK! ▷

I've seen first hand the importance of having professional trained humanists in positions that are traditionally taken up by religious people. There is a perception among many humanists that as our society becomes less religious the need for things like congregations and chaplaincies will likewise wane because they are viewed as altogether unnecessary in a secular society. My experience has shown me that this view is mistaken. Religion, in my view, is a human response to human needs and that means that when people stop being religious they don't stop having the needs which drove them to religion in the first place. The needs met by religion don't vanish when someone becomes non-religious. They just often go unmet. What are these needs? I like the phrase *Belonging, Becoming, Beyond* :

1. A sense of *belonging*, the deep relationships with other people and a sense of your place within a community
2. *Becoming*: the ability to learn and grow aspiring to live more in line with our highest values; and
3. A connection with something bigger than ourselves, a connection with something *beyond* ourselves.

I think a humanist approach to chaplaincy, and in fact a humanist approach to religion in general, is vitally important because if we could provide for the spiritual needs people have we would be much happier than we are today. We are as a society becoming more disconnected, dissatisfied and disillusioned and in response I think we need to create spaces of belonging, becoming and connection with something beyond ourselves, and humanist chaplaincy is one way to do that.

And that leads me to the final idea. I've come to believe that the humanism I grew up with that was popular when I was young in university is inadequate to face the challenges that we face today as a species, as a community, as a country. I think it's time to promote a new humanism, a deep humanism,

that embraces our whole humanity and has a different relationship to religion and spirituality than the humanism we so often present in our groups and magazines and at conferences. The humanism I grew up with was primarily concerned with all the ways it was different to religion, whether in the writings of the New Atheists which were so popular when I was a young adult. Humanism was fundamentally defined by its opposition to religion. It's doubtless true that religion is responsible for many grave evils and that it's frequently shielded from criticism by undue reverence. But the challenges we face today are not primarily down to religion. We face so many threats don't we? Political extremism, climate change, distrust in civic institutions, rising income inequality, the corruption and lack of principle in our politics, the mis-information pandemic, just the sense that we as a society are stuck, overwhelmed, unsure of how to deal with the future. These are problems which require I think a different sort of humanist response, a different humanism than the one championed by the new atheists and their acolytes.

What is the response I envisage? I want a deep humanism, a humanism rooted in a more expansive and complete idea of what it means to be human, a humanism that embraces our emotions, our desire for meaning and narrative, our love of art and music, a communal humanism that recognizes we're better together, we're not atomized individuals, we need each other and have responsibilities to each other. A humanism which recognizes that religion is a response to human problems, reincorporating religion into our natural history rather than discarding it as a relic of a different age. A humanism that prizes ethical values over religious beliefs, welcoming and working alongside everyone who shares our broad principles whether they are religious or not, a political humanism engaging proactively with the challenges we face as a species, offering positive and visionary proposals for change, a dancing, singing, joyous activist, prophetic humanism.



View from the Chair

David Warden

Chairman of Dorset Humanists

I've been fascinated for many years by the Ethical Society of St Louis and therefore it was a great pleasure and privilege to listen to a talk by James Croft who is one of their former leaders. I'm envious of their impressive modern building and the fact that their leaders are properly trained and paid a salary. Members of the society do not pay a tiny subscription to belong. They have to dig quite deep into their pockets to fund the society and maintain their premises. The interior boasts modern stained glass windows although the main auditorium looks rather too much like a windowless cinema.



We had about forty of these ethical societies in England around the year 1900 but few of them survived the disaster of the First World War. I'm not aware that many had such impressive premises, with the exception of Conway Ethical Society (formerly South Place Ethical Society) which still has a slab of valuable real estate in central London. In the 1940s and 1950s, most remaining societies changed their name and nature to what we now know as humanist groups which are rather more modest in ambition.

James's self-description as 'clergy' and 'atheist priest' may have been somewhat jarring to our humanist audience. The original conception of the Ethical movement was that it was a non-theistic religion based on Kantian ethics. It still has this aura of religiosity and James had the intensity and self-assurance of a Catholic priest without the Catholicism.

Whatever our view of the ethical societies, they did not take root in this country and even in America they are declining. Very few of them are as successful as the St Louis Society and most of them are tiny and struggling.

It is a depressing aspect of human nature that it is fundamentalist churches which thrive and all attempts to create a secular alternative seem to struggle. But humanism is bigger than its institutional form. Wherever there is science, philosophy, democracy, literature, poetry, art, human endeavour and creativity, and human attempts to live good lives, there too is humanism in the broadest sense. Humanism is all around us if we have eyes to see.