



The Twelve Logical Fallacies of Christmas

With free mince pies and mulled wine

Saturday 9th December 2.00pm Moordown
Community Centre, Bournemouth BH9 1TW



This entertaining talk by Daniel Dancey aims to equip you with the skills to recognise and dissect faulty reasoning in everyday discussions, debates, and media. Logical fallacies, often disguised as convincing arguments, can distort our perception of reality and mislead us into making poor decisions. This talk will delve into common fallacies like ad hominem attacks, slippery slopes, and straw man arguments, providing real-world examples to illuminate how they operate. Daniel is Treasurer and Webmaster of Dorset Humanists and he works in software engineering. He recently spoke to Farnham Humanists on the topic of Artificial Intelligence and his last talk to Dorset Humanists was on cryptography.

This event will include complimentary mince pies and mulled wine. If you can, please donate to our Annual Appeal in aid of Hope for Food foodbank and the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust.



Festive Dinner

Tuesday 19th December 7.00pm, Marsham Court Hotel, 3 Russell
Cotes Road BH1 3AB

Join fellow humanists for dinner at the Marsham Court Hotel –
contact Sandra Lucie-Smith on ☎ 07779 769108
or sandra.luciesmith@live.com for any late availability.

Dress code: Feel free to dress up in your fancy shirt/black tie/dress to impress etc., but this is not a requirement or an expectation. Please wear whatever feels right for you.





From left, David (Humanist), James (Christian), Lynda (Jewish), Tama (Muslim). Sali (Buddhist) was unwell but she is in the picture.

Interfaith Friendship

Four members of the *Many Faiths Together* school visiting team spoke at a Dorset Humanists event at Moordown Community Centre in November to mark Interfaith Week. The occasion was particularly poignant given the heightened tensions between the Jewish and Muslim communities at present. Click image to watch the video.

From Ron March
Thank you for arranging the interfaith event. I think I can say that all three of us felt it was worth the effort of getting there from Dorchester. I found James particularly refreshing in relation to the C of E.

Dates for your diary

Thursday 7 th December 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Humanists in the Pub – informal social night
Saturday 9 th December 2pm	Moordown	The Twelve Logical Fallacies of Christmas <i>Daniel Dancey</i>
Tuesday 19 th December 7pm	Marsham Court Hotel	Festive dinner
Saturday 13 th January 2pm	Moordown	Rethinking the NHS: A Clinician's Roadmap to Efficiency <i>Barry Newman</i>
Sunday 28 th January 2pm	Lighthouse	Holocaust Memorial Day, David Warden will take part as the humanist representative. Tickets required.
Wednesday 31 st January 2024	Orchid	Contested Histories: What Really Happened in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War? <i>David Warden</i>
Plus other social events and walks which will be announced on Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any changes.		

Dorset Humanists Pastoral Team

Dorset Humanists is a caring community and we appreciate all the informal help which members give to one another, such as going out of your way to help others get to our events or offering friendship. We also have a small pastoral team who are willing to respond to pastoral needs of our members (that's people who have paid an annual subscription to join). This might be the need for a listening ear, befriending, help with a financial difficulty, support after leaving a high control religion, a friendly visit or telephone call, or signposting to support services. We can only help if we know what our members need so you, our members, are our 'ears on the ground'. Our pastoral team will endeavour to help or find someone who can. Our pastoral team members are:

Cathy Silman – Former Secretary of Dorset Humanists and a Citizens' Advice Bureaux advisor. Tel: 07817 695615

Susan Bryson – An honorary life member of Dorset Humanists and an experienced therapeutic counsellor. Susan now lives in London but she can be contacted by phone. Tel: 079802 776234

David Warden – Chairman of Dorset Humanists and a qualified therapeutic counsellor. Email: chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk
Mobile: 07910 886629

An opportunity to join our team

We need more people to join our pastoral team. If you have relevant skills and/or experience, for example in befriending, and would like to help please contact any member of the current pastoral team to discuss what might be involved. You should be a paid-up member of Dorset Humanists and committed to our caring and inclusive ethos. Ability to drive in and around the BCP area is an advantage but not essential. A DBS check may be asked for.



Cathy Silman is a member of our pastoral team and a Citizens' Advice Bureaux advisor

Diversity and inclusion

Dorset Humanists is committed to fostering an ethos of diversity and inclusion. We are positive about people whatever their gender or gender identification, age, race or ethnicity, socio-economic background, disability, sexual orientation, offender background, and philosophical/political beliefs. We are aware of the particular needs of people with Autism and Asperger's. We support Bournemouth's LGBT Pride Festival and Holocaust Memorial Day.

Hardship Scheme

Occasionally, it's been brought to our attention that members of Dorset Humanists have been in need of financial assistance to get them through a difficult patch. For example, someone on benefits who has had to move home and cannot afford associated costs such as a removal van or someone who, temporarily, has no money for basic necessities. If such cases come to the attention of the pastoral team we may be able to assist through our Hardship Scheme.



Unlocking Masonic mysteries

Forty-four people attended our evening event at the Orchid Hotel to listen to our guest speaker Malcolm Williamson. Malcolm is a retired solicitor and a Past Master of Royal Alfred Lodge No. 777 – one of Guildford's oldest Freemason Lodges (warranted in 1859). He provided a short, biographical account of his involvement with Freemasonry over fifty years, which was followed by a lively Q&A session.

One of the sticking points, for a humanist audience, is Freemasonry's insistence that members have to confess belief in a deity. Malcolm explained that the Freemasons do not insist on a specific definition of what this belief means. The way he explained it, it sounded similar to the eighteenth century concept of deism (God as a remote architect) or possibly Spinoza's pantheism: God as a synonym for the totality of the universe. Perhaps its main purpose is to symbolise belief in some kind of universal moral order. Malcolm rejected the idea that Freemasonry is a religion, preferring to describe it as a charitable organisation, but clearly it does have some non-negotiable religious and

ritualistic elements. It is also segregated by sex – a feature which does not endear it to humanists – although there do appear to be some mixed-sex Lodges. Malcolm pushed back against questions which implied that Freemasonry is self-serving and nepotistic, providing examples of how contacts can have socially benign effects. He also said they collect a lot of money for charity. The latest published accounts show that about half of their donations are to Masonic members and dependants, and the remainder of some £12m annually are general grants to worthy causes. In the bar afterwards, we learnt about the secret handshake but we cannot possibly divulge this information! Visit [Humanistically Speaking](#) for a longer report and an article about the history of Freemasonry. Click [here](#) for the video recording.





Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism

By Roger Eede, a member of Dorset Humanists, following our interfaith event which included a short presentation on Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism

I was introduced to Buddhism in the late 1970s when I lived in Brockenhurst in the New Forest. I was in my mid 20s and struggling with career options having travelled extensively in Europe and Israel, and then embarking on an overland journey from Istanbul through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, finishing up living on a houseboat in Kashmir for quite some time.

On my return home, following several years of travel, I had enormous cultural questions and found myself agonising over the very meaning of life and just how and where I might fit in to this crazy human circus. Fortunately, one of my friends took me to a Buddhist meeting and introduced me to this ancient Japanese practice. I say practice, as I was told that it is not a religion but a practice where ritualistic chanting evokes the mystic laws of cause and effect which in turn can lead to clarity, peace, wisdom, courage, compassion, a sense of empowerment and inner calmness.

Nichiren Daishonin was a 13th century Buddhist priest who sourced the basic doctrine from the Lotus Sutra, claiming that sentient beings possess an internal Buddha nature capable of attaining Buddhahood in the current life. There are three essential aspects to the practice:

1. Faith in Nichiren's Gohonson (a sacred scroll inscribed with Chinese and Sanskrit characters and symbols)
2. Repetitive chanting of the phrase "Nam Myoho Renge Kyo"
3. Regular study of Nichiren's scriptural writing called the Gosho

When I entered the room, I was confronted by a pleasant fragrance and a lot of folk kneeling on small cushions, their backs upright and

hands together in front of them clasping small prayer books and prayer beads. They all faced towards a small shrine with burning incense, a small bell, a few flowers and trinkets and a wooden box mounted on the wall with its doors open revealing an ancient scroll. They were all intently chanting 'Nam Myoho Renge Kyo' over and over again. We quietly joined the back of the room and joined in with the chanting.

It was mesmerising and powerful and the fact that you participated on the same level as everyone else seemed very liberating. I soon adjusted my life to incorporate morning and evening chanting sessions and started to attend group meetings where we would chant and learn the teachings. If you chanted frequently and attended meetings regularly you could eventually obtain a Gohonson (a copy of the ancient scroll) and proudly mount it in your Butsudan (a box which you would mount on the wall) and open to reveal your Gohonson when you were chanting.

The whole thing was quite fantastic, and I soon found meaning and a certain level of clarity in my life. I think I might still be practicing Buddhism if I had not found the daily practice quite so time consuming. Once I got into regular work, I found it very difficult to maintain the practice and felt that I was not doing it justice, so consequently gradually phased myself out. However, I will always be grateful.

If I was not a Humanist, I think I would be a Buddhist and even now would love to attend a group once again and experience the sheer joy of chanting, reminding myself that it is an enlightening practice and not a religion.



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Roger Smith about Israel-Gaza

Regarding your "View from the Chair" last month, my wife Gill and I spent ten days in Poland in September, where we learned all about the Jewish uprising in Warsaw in 1944, its brutal suppression, and the suffering of the Jews under German occupation during the war. The worst excesses of the Holocaust were perpetrated on the Jews in Poland primarily and we had a one day visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau. It was of course a reminder of the terrible atrocities perpetrated against all Jews. Of course one feels overwhelming sorrow and deep empathy for the Jews.

BUT ... (and here I take off my humanist hat and put on my political one) I feel obliged to point out that the "centuries of vicious persecution, culminating in the Holocaust", to which you refer, were perpetrated on the Jews, not by the Palestinians or more widely by the Arab nations as a whole, but by the countries of western, and Christian, civilisation. After the war the victorious countries of that war agreed to the setting up of a Jewish state. Why? By what right? To salve their collective conscience of centuries? To right a long term injustice? The Palestinians and the Arabs never consented to this for the simple reason that to set up a Jewish state requires the existing population to vacate the land of their forefathers. That is wrong and the fact that it was agreed to by the United Nations does not make it right. Sometimes countries get things wrong and make mistakes. Here is a case of the UN getting it wrong and making a mistake.

The problem now is, that, like it or like it not, the state of Israel does exist, and we have to get to an arrangement that all states in the region can support, one that is agreed by the UN as a whole and one that no security council member, be it the US or any other superpower, can veto. That is a big ask.

It is not that we do not feel empathy for the Jews or the Palestinians. They are not conflicting empathies. But empathy alone does not cut the mustard. Action does.

Condemning terrorist action gets us nowhere. When armed militias conduct acts of terror, it attracts widespread condemnation. When states do the same thing, it is justified as self defence. Double standards?

You say "Humanity needs to be balanced with Justice". What does Justice need to be balanced with? "What is Justice?" was perhaps the most enduring of the many questions Socrates first posed. It is much easier to answer the question what is injustice, but it is a question that nobody cares to ask. Why? Because the answer may well prove unacceptable.

Let me conclude. I think a long term injustice has been dealt the Palestinians and until this is recognised as the underlying problem, no solution will materialise.

From Graham Marshall about critical thinking and pseudoscience

Thank you for your outstanding efforts to promote critical thinking. It has been fascinating to continue to study human gullibility during lockdown – a study triggered by links posted by followers on a particular Facebook page. I used to post scientific facts there but was banned from the site! However there are ways and means of seeing the posts still! They stimulate much further study!

My biggest observation is that the followers of the site show total lack of basic scientific knowledge and yet an unlimited appetite to believe in paranormal weirdness. ▷

They seem to not just want to believe but seem to actually NEED to believe in a separate world of pseudoscience.

Even Congress is being asked to pass laws forcing Department of Defense disclosure of more than twelve crashed alien space craft including their dead pilots! I so want that one to be true! It would be the biggest story of all history – but it seems to be all hearsay amongst the believer communities who are now to be found in Congress and the Department of Defense. Not a shred of hard evidence is in the public domain. Hence the conspiracy theories.

The biggest recent development is testimony by David Grusch who is now retired from a top secret post as a preparer of briefs for the President. For example, see this report on [YouTube](#). All the pictures of “craft” shown there are fully explained by technically-expert non-believers (please Google “Mick West” who is a British-American science writer and sceptical investigator). No mainstream newspaper has taken the story yet. Believers say that the CIA etc. controllers told them not to! There are now over five billion high definition cameras in people’s pockets but no flying saucer pictures of the quality anyone might take at an airshow.

But the Earth is a late arrival on the cosmic stage and there could be civilisations which have studied, and then engineered, physics for a billion years. Only 200 years were needed to go from horses to self-driving electric cars.

There are indeed some compelling witness accounts (for example, YouTube videos of journalist Ross Coulthart and James Fox, director of “The Phenomenon”). They may just represent the drop of beer in a glass full of froth. Perhaps.

So I think the subject is still worth keeping an eye on now and then, but can we really take seriously reports of craft which are advanced enough to travel millions of miles to get here and yet, when do, they crash twelve times?

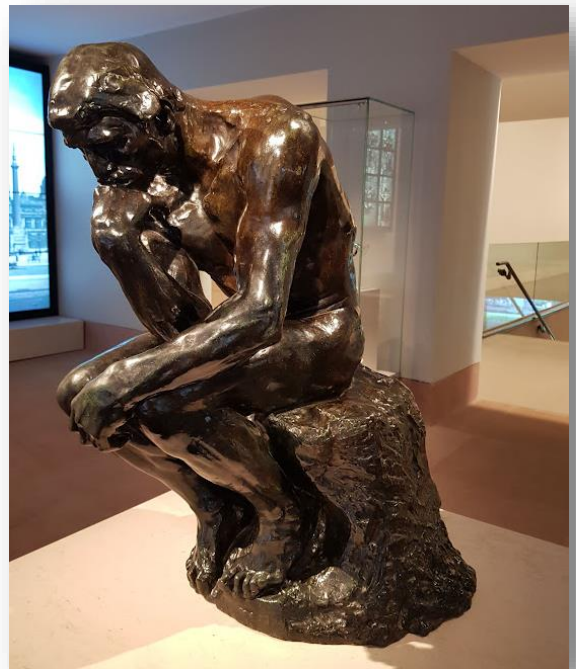
From Penny Jennions about our Interfaith event

It was very nice to meet you all. I used to come some years ago to Dorset Humanists, and have wanted to come back. I would like to thank you for all the time you give, and all the work you do for the Humanists.

It was amazing how you got people together from different faiths. It was very interesting to hear them tell us about their beliefs and practices. I certainly learnt from the Muslim and Jewish ladies facts I just did not know.

My only criticism is that the C of E clergyman was too dominating. I think we know, living in this country, a lot about the Church of England, and would have liked to have had the Muslim and Jewish ladies tell us a bit more. Also, it would have been better to have more time to question them.

But it’s easy to criticise, and nothing must be taken away from the achievement of getting the groups together. It must have been daunting for them to appear in front of people who so totally disagree with them.



The Thinker Auguste Rodin 1880-81
The Burrell Collection, Glasgow
Photo by David Warden



View from the Chair

David Warden

Chairman of Dorset Humanists

Many thanks to Roger Smith for responding to my *View* last month about the current Israel-Gaza war (see letters page). Roger and I have continued the discussion with an interesting and educational exchange of emails. Here's my response to four of his points:

1. *"After the war the victorious countries of that war agreed to the setting up of a Jewish state."* I think this gives a misleading impression. The proposal to partition Palestine and create the State of Israel was made through a formal resolution of the United Nations, General Assembly Resolution 181, also known as the UN Partition Plan for Palestine. 33 countries voted in favour of the resolution including the United States and the Soviet Union. 13 countries voted against the resolution, primarily Arab and Muslim-majority countries. 10 countries abstained from voting, including the UK and China. The resolution was adopted with a two-thirds majority, which was required for it to pass. In democratic terms, this was a decisive mandate and the State of Israel was declared the following year on 14th May 1948. And the alternative to democracy is...?
2. *"The Palestinians and the Arabs never consented to this for the simple reason that to set up a Jewish state requires the existing population to vacate the land of their forefathers."* The UN Partition Plan did not require population transfers. It divided the territory into three major parts: A Jewish State, which included regions with a significant Jewish population but also substantial Arab populations; an Arab State, which encompassed regions with a majority Arab population but also included areas with Jewish inhabitants; and an international regime for Jerusalem, encompassing the city and surrounding areas, due to its religious and cultural significance. We do not know how history would have played out had the Arabs accepted the UN Partition Plan but it did not require compulsory population transfers.
3. *"Condemning terrorist action gets us nowhere. When armed militias conduct acts of terror, it attracts widespread condemnation. When states do the same thing..."* Hamas is considered to be a terrorist organisation by the European Union, the US, the UK and other countries. Israel's military actions against Hamas can of course be criticised but it does not "conduct acts of terror". It takes military action to defeat terrorism.
4. *"A long term injustice has been dealt the Palestinians."* This is based on the faulty premise of point (2). The fact that large population transfers did occur in 1948 was a consequence of war which was declared on Israel by its Arab neighbours.

I'm currently preparing a talk for Dorset Humanists on the history of the 1948 war. History itself, even at the highest academic level, can be distorted by ideological and tribal loyalties. A humanist approach is to strive for objectivity and impartiality, however difficult this is. My talk is scheduled for 31st January at the Orchid Hotel.