

Members' Lunch & AGM 2024

Eat, drink, and have your say

Saturday 9th March ♦ 1.15pm Informal buffet lunch ♦ AGM at 2.00pm Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW. Please RSVP via Meetup or email.

Dorset Humanists is going from strength to strength. Our membership is growing and we regularly get good turnouts for our lively events. Not only that, but Dorset Humanists does a lot of great community work behind the scenes, speaking to thousands of schoolchildren about humanism, taking part in civic and interfaith events and so on. We are an important community organisation in the local area and a leading humanist group nationally.

This is all possible because of your support and your belief in humanist values. Humanist values include thinking for yourself (but not by yourself), living the best life you can, and contributing to the common good.

Our AGM is not a boring affair (well, there are a few boring bits but we get through those bits efficiently). It's an opportunity to look back, take stock, and look forward. We also mark the occasion by awarding one of our members with the coveted *Humanist of the Year* award!

So do join us for an informal buffet lunch at 1.15pm and the AGM at 2.00pm. Non-members are also welcome to attend but only members can vote.



AGM people and food 2023. Photos by Aaron.



Election 2024

Humanist Perspectives from the right of the political spectrum

Presentations by David Warden and
Aaron Darkwood

Please note our new evening venue - Bournemouth West Cliff Hotel, 7 Durley Chine Road, BH2 5JS. There are two car parks at the West Cliff Hotel but you must notify reception of your registration number before the meeting, or park in adjacent roads. Join us in the hotel bar after the main event.

Dorset Humanists is not politically aligned. Our members are free to support political parties left, right, and centre. The main thing we agree on is that politics and democracy should be about creating a society which works for the common good.

This is the second of two events exploring perspectives from the left and the right. In April, we will have a hustings event with the Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP and other Parliamentary candidates for the Bournemouth East constituency. We will grill them on how their party will create a society that works for the common good.

It is often assumed that humanism is more aligned with politics on the left rather than

the right. The left is associated with compassion, equality, welfare and so on and the right is sometimes associated with selfishness, rampant inequality, and prejudice against minorities. Our speakers will suggest that we can have a more nuanced and complex discussion about what is meant by the terms “left” and “right” and “liberalism” and “conservatism”. We also expect to find common ground between the two sides on such matters as the urgent need to address the housing crisis.

David has been a member of the Labour Party and the Green Party. He is currently a member of the SDP. Aaron has been a member of UKIP, the Conservative Party and the SDP.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 9 th March	Moordown	Members’ informal lunch and AGM. Everyone welcome to find out more about what makes Dorset Humanists tick.
Wednesday 27 th March	West Cliff Hotel	Election 2024: Humanist Perspectives from the right of the political spectrum
Saturday 13 th April	Moordown	Election hustings with local Parliamentary candidates including Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP
Wednesday 24 th April	West Cliff Hotel	The Ethics of War – Edward Hadas
<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.</i>		

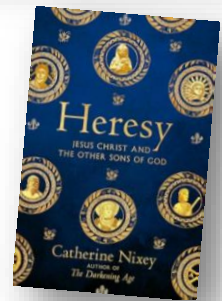


Darwin Day

More than fifty people attended our Darwin Day event with a superb lunch prepared by Cathy Silman, Dean Robertson and Corinne Hills, followed by our guest speaker Catherine Nixey who spoke about her new book "Heresy". We raised over £200 for LGBT refugees in Africa.

Contradicting the familiar opening lines of the gospel of John, Catherine said that in the beginning there was not one, singular 'word', or one single Christian message. In the first centuries of Christianity, there were instead many words, many voices – many of which disagreed with each other vehemently, and at times violently, on almost every aspect of the Christian story. In the earliest centuries of Christianity there were Christians who said that Jesus was meek and mild and gentle, but there were many other Christians who believed equally fervently in a saviour who blinded those who criticized him and even murdered those who annoyed him. For example, according to the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, a fascinating second century gospel, five-year-old Jesus makes live sparrows out of clay, and curses other little boys who annoy him, one of whom is withered and another drops down dead. Moreover, when his Joseph tells him off, the parents of one of the boys are instantly blinded.

For almost any aspect of Jesus that is 'known' in the West today, there were once



alternatives. One ancient telling of the Nativity, in the Infancy Gospel of James, includes a Mary whose vagina can, and at one point does, roast human flesh. Shortly after the birth of Jesus, a midwife called Salome arrives at the familiar Nativity scene, with its ox and its ass, and inserts her hand into Mary's vagina to test whether she really is a virgin. Salome's hand is immediately burned off. 'Woe,' says the woman, as well she might.



**Salome's hands
burnt off by Mary's
vagina.**

Catherine developed her theme of heresy, explaining how the Christian church came to persecute all those who deviated from the version of Christianity which triumphed in the West. *Heresy* will be published on 7th March.



Humanist perspectives from the left

More than thirty people attended the first of our election special events with six presentations on humanist perspectives from the left of the political spectrum.

Simon Bowden, secretary of Dorset Humanists, introduced the event as a snapshot of conclusions reached by a left-of-centre humanist discussion forum called the Practical Progressives. As a co-founder of the group, he would try to explain why he thought his views flowed naturally from humanism. He said he'd gone into current affairs journalism after encountering far-left student politics (Mao's *Little Red Book* etc.) at Oxford University and wanting to discover for himself how society worked. He followed his stepfather in going to Quaker meetings and appreciated their belief in the inherent worth of all human beings and aim of working for peace. When he started coming to Dorset Humanists, he heard that there had recently been a talk on Tom Paine and the *Rights of Man* [this was David Warden's talk in March 2007 at Moordown Community Centre], and it seemed an excellent starting point. Simon apologises for the fact that the over-ambitious event ran out of time for audience feedback and Paul Entwistle's closing remarks.



Simon Bowden, Secretary of Dorset Humanists

"I think humanism gives us an amazing gift of intellectual and moral freedom, and the question is, what are we going to do with that? Personally, I think most humanists are seeking to build a moral understanding and are naturally reformist in outlook, rather than mainly seeking to improve their own wealth and social position."

Simon Bowden

Since there was not space to include much detail about the Left Perspective ideas in this Bulletin, we plan to present them fully in the May edition of *Humanistically Speaking*, and Paul Entwistle's closing remarks will appear in next month's Bulletin. ►

Paul Entwistle's presentation was about Proportional Representation. He said that all voters should have an equal opportunity to affect the outcome of an election which our system most emphatically does not do, calling our First Past The Post system very much a British disease which "degenerates into a perpetual two-party system" and effectively crushes innovative new parties. There was unanimous support for PR in the Practical Progressives discussion group but support for the 'Single Transferable Vote' system preferred by the Electoral Reform Society was less secure.

Roger Mann presented some of Barry Newman's proposals for reform of the NHS. There was unanimous agreement in the Practical Progressives group for taking management of the health service out of the political arena and for joint management and funding of the NHS and social care provision to avoid the current bed-blocking crisis. There was a high level of support for the professionalisation of NHS management and a no-fault system of dealing with legal medical claims. There was rather less support for compulsory insurance payments to augment public tax money and very little support for token charges made for visiting your GP or going to A&E with a non-urgent injury.

John Kingston presented nine propositions about equality and democracy. There was a high level of support in the Practical Progressives group for regulation of digital targeting of political propaganda, digital voting, wealth taxes, stopping tax avoidance by big multinationals, and reversing recent laws which severely restrict the right to peaceful protest. The PP group agreed that health and social problems are generally worse in countries with higher inequality and that the financing of political parties should be reformed to make it fairer. There was slightly less support for the proposal that we should replace the House of Lords with a smaller second chamber, elected or independently chosen, and the proposition that Britain's elite are disproportionately drawn from private

schools, grammar schools and Oxbridge.

Steve Laughton provided a quick overview of Modern Monetary Theory. There was high support in the PP group for the proposition that banks should lend money to firms that produce goods or services rather than mainly lending for assets like houses that already exist, that the government should be free to increase the national debt to fund long term infrastructure projects and capital spending projects, and that there should be a balance between private money creation and government money creation and investment.

Dan Moore presented twelve of Cathy Silman's proposals on housing. There was high support in the PP group for scrapping the "hope" value given to landowners when their land is bought for development, sometimes building on the green belt to meet housing need, for light-touch rent controls, for public funds to build much more social housing, for severe limits on the 'right to buy' to council or social housing, for higher taxes on second homes and even higher when they are left empty for long periods, and a new tenants' charter to provide more rights and security for renters.

Finally, **Simon Bowden** presented the group's conclusions on Trade Union powers. There had been support for some limitations on the right to strike and for unions to be represented on company boards. Also for the new Labour Clause IV, calling for a community where "power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many and not the few." But a majority were against the old Clause IV, calling for a socialist command economy. Simon was pleased that the majority had voted for reformist rather than utopian ideas and for a flourishing mixed economy. He thought progress towards a fairer society needed to be based on a spirit of generosity, trust and cooperation, not class war! And since we share a common humanity with everyone – Jews, Muslims, Jamaicans, Albanians, even Jehovah's Witnesses! – we should utterly reject the politics that stirs up anger against any whole group of people.

Committee nominations

We have received 12 nominations for the 2024/25 committee. There are 12 vacancies and therefore members will be invited at the AGM to vote for the entire list. We are also indebted to the selfless service given by our volunteers.

Cathy Silman, John Kingston and George Askwith are standing down from the committee. Cathy was our secretary for many years and she is still a member of our pastoral team, school visiting team, and catering team. John was our treasurer and will continue to assist with our audio-visual equipment. George has moved to Peterborough but we hope to see her again later this year for another of her talks. We are hugely grateful to them all.

1. **David Warden** has been Chair of Dorset Humanists since 2009. He produces the bulletin and leads our pastoral team. He is an Honorary Member of Humanists UK, Editor of Humanistically Speaking magazine, and Humanist Advisor to the Faith & Reflection Team at Bournemouth University and Arts University Bournemouth. David is willing to stand again for election as Chair.
2. **Lyn Glass** has been our Vice Chair since 2013. She was also our 'Speaker Finder' for many years and she often hosts our pub nights. Lyn is a former Chair of Poole Arts Trust (Lighthouse), and board trustee director of BH Live.
3. **Daniel Dancey** is our Treasurer (since 2021) and Webmaster (since 2023). Daniel works in software engineering.
4. **Simon Bowden** is our Secretary. He is a retired journalist who worked mainly for the BBC in news and current affairs. He is a longstanding member of Dorset Humanists.
5. **Simon Whipple** is our lead on events programming. Simon is a solicitor specialising in Social Welfare Law.
6. **Phil Butcher** is our main audio-visual technician. He organised our walks and short talks programme for a number of years. Phil worked for over 40 years in the nuclear industry.
7. **Barry Newman** is the humanist representative on the Dorset Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education and takes the lead in our school visiting programme. Barry is also on our publicity sub-committee. He is a retired intensive care consultant.
8. **Sally Hawksworth** is on the BCP Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. Sally is a retired teacher.
9. **Dean Robertson** is one of our pub night hosts and he helps with some of the heavy-lifting at our events. Dean is an independent financial adviser.
10. **Steve Neel** was co-opted onto the committee in 2023 and he is our Membership Secretary. Steve is also on our publicity sub-committee.
11. **Sandra Lucie-Smith** is standing for election. Sandra organises our festive events at the Marsham Court Hotel and hopes to organise more social events for us.
12. **Roger Mann** is standing for election. Roger is one of our regular volunteers and he is also on our publicity sub-committee.

Dorset Humanists Impact Report 2023

Our recent events have been well attended by 40-50 people and we have been able to fill three vacancies on the committee.

Aim 1

Promote Humanism understood as a non-religious ethical worldview

Aim 1: Humanism is now a **mandatory element** in the local RE curriculum. Our **schools visiting team** has spoken to at least **2,600** pupils about Humanism in Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch, Salisbury, and further afield in Dorset. We take a leading role in producing an **online humanist magazine** with global reach. **371** people subscribe to our YouTube channel, **1,060** people subscribe to our Meetup site, and our monthly bulletin is sent to **791** subscribers.

Aim 2

Develop, and serve the needs of, the Humanist community in Dorset

Aim 2: We host **23 guest speaker events** every year on a wide range of topics. We held a picnic on the beach in June to celebrate **World Humanist Day**. Our **pastoral team** and **Hardship Scheme** are available to help members. **Simon Bull** continues to conduct humanist ceremonies. Our **walks programme** promotes fitness and friendship and our **social events** promote friendship and connection. Our **Dorchester humanist group** holds monthly discussion events.

Aim 3

Promote the public understanding of science

Aim 3: We continue to host events of scientific interest including talks on evidence-based nutrition, biodiversity, and cryptography.

Aim 4

Be a force for good in our local community and globally

Aim 4: We raised over **£2,800** for charities including **Hope for Food** foodbank, **Humanist Schools in Uganda**, and the **DEC Appeal for the Syria-Turkey Earthquake**. We supported Bournemouth **LGBT Pride**. David Warden spoke at the **Bournemouth Remembrance Service**, the Bournemouth & Poole **Holocaust Memorial Day** event and at an **interfaith vigil** for innocent victims of the Israel-Gaza conflict.

Aim 5

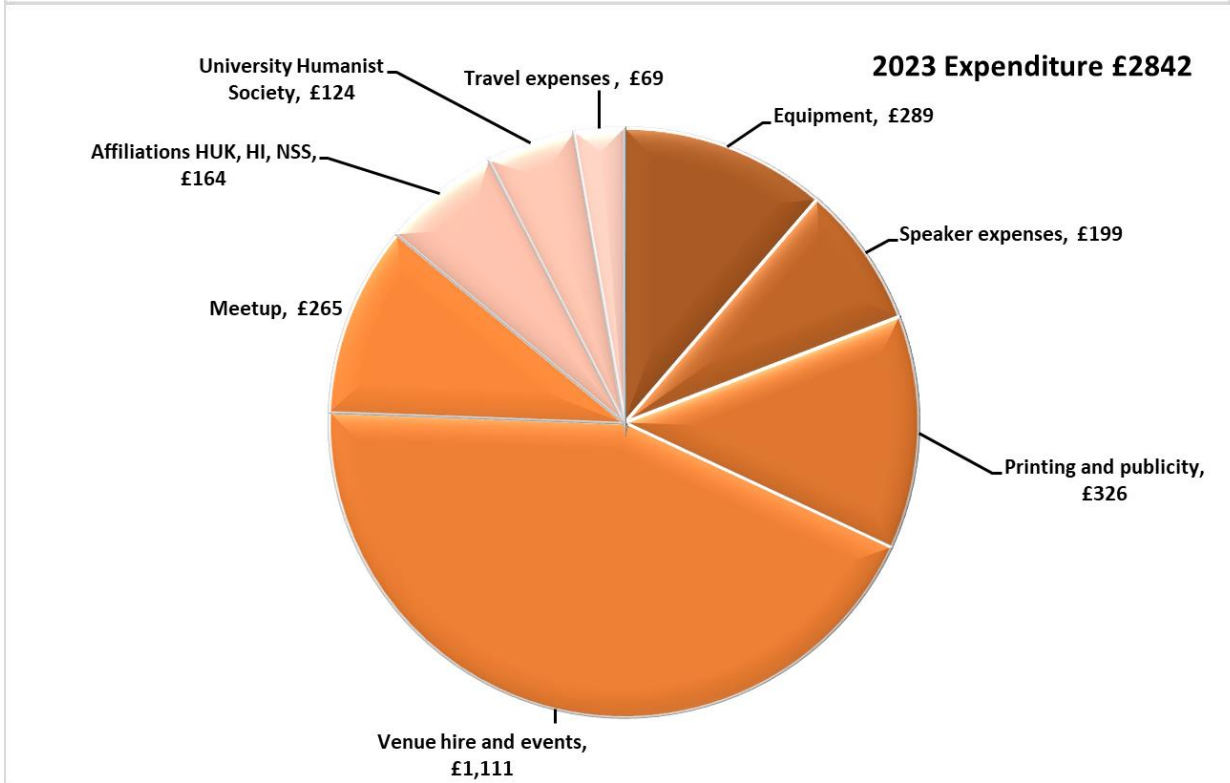
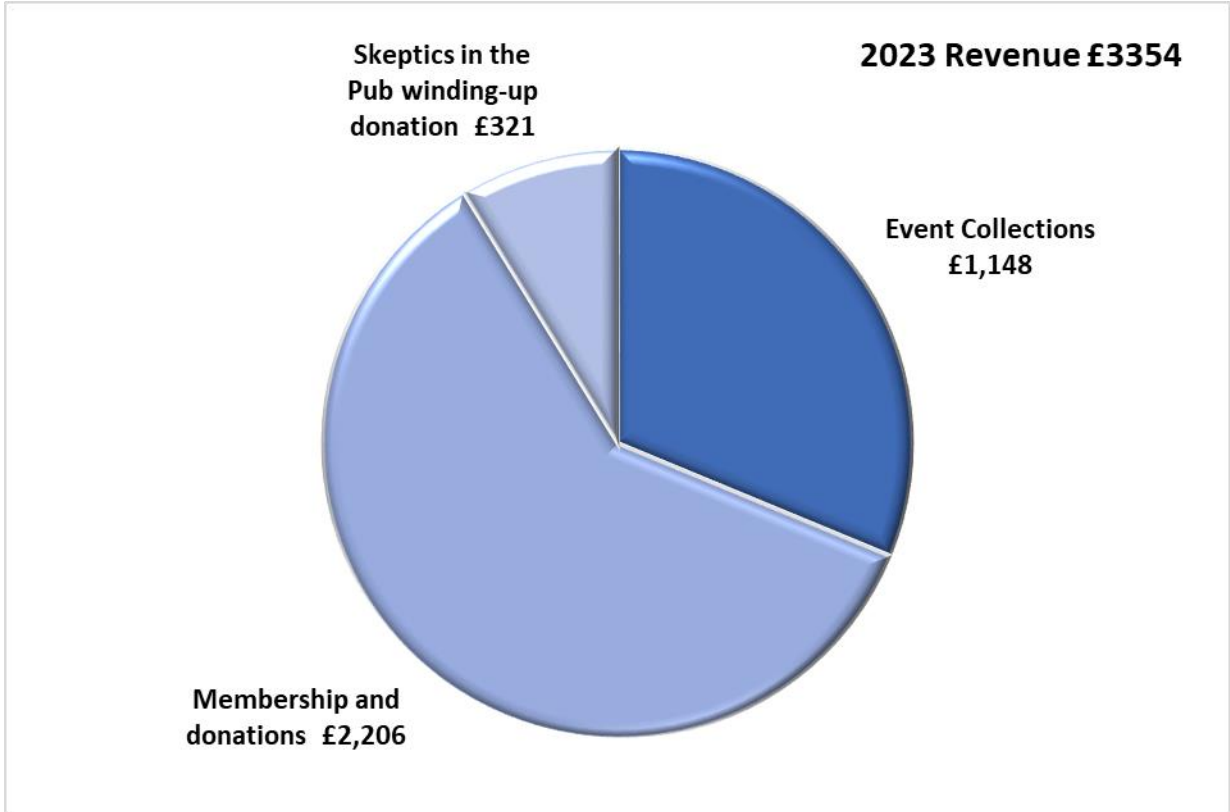
Support the work of our partners

Aim 5: Simon Whipple and David Warden attended Humanists UK's **Group Representatives Annual Meeting** in London and online meetings of the **Local Groups Working Together** initiative. David Warden attended the **World Humanist Congress** in Copenhagen and represented Dorset Humanists at the **Humanists International General Assembly**. One of our members, **Sophy Robinson**, serves on the Board of Trustees of Humanists UK. We pay subs to Humanists UK, the National Secular Society, Humanists International, and the South Central England Humanists Network.

If you like what we do, please show your support and solidarity by becoming a member for an incredible £15 a year. 189 of you already have – thank you!

2023 accounts at-a-glance

Our treasurer Daniel Dancey will present definitive accounts for member approval at our AGM on 9th March. These indicative graphs are for illustration purposes only. If you would like a copy of the formal accounts please email treasurer@dorsethumanists.co.uk





Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From the Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner David Sidwick to a member of the local Jewish Community who complained about the cancellation of David Warden's talk on Israel (shortened for space)

Thank you for contacting me regarding a planned meeting at the Orchid Hotel on the 31st January 2024, with guest speaker Mr David Warden, which was cancelled, citing security reasons for the cancellation. As you rightly note, this is a highly sensitive issue in the current climate and as such I sought further clarification from the Chief Constable in relation to Dorset Police's involvement with both the Meeting organisers and other parties involved in order to provide you with an informed response.

I can confirm that Dorset Police had no prior notice of the meeting having been arranged. The initial awareness was provided by the Pro-Palestine group who informed the Force of their intention to protest at the event, this information was received by the Force on the 30th January 2024. The Force team responsible for ensuring all parties are supported were in the process of planning for proportionate resources to be in place to facilitate both the protest and the event inside the hotel, however were informed by the protest group that the event had been cancelled and therefore they would no longer be protesting. Due to the timescales involved, Dorset Police did not have the opportunity to become actively involved in any discussions with the event organisers or the protest group and therefore had no involvement or influence over the event being cancelled.

I am in regular communication with the Jewish Community and the Community

Security Trust, ensuring that all points of view are obtained and used to support the peaceful nature of any such events and protests. There has been a well-documented challenge nationally concerning the legitimacy of the protests, and the appropriate authorities have confirmed that, within certain key parameters, they are indeed lawful at this time. The police role of neutrality and proportionate law enforcement is paramount.

The use of legislation and police powers to restrict, curb or indeed prevent peaceful assembly and procession is not something that is considered lightly and the Force's concerns need to pass a very high legal bar before using such powers – as can be seen in London. This situation is reviewed weekly both nationally and locally. All of this work and support will continue, with Dorset Police responding to changes in community tension and protest behaviour to keep the King's peace and maintain a Dorset that is safe for everyone.

As further reassurance, the Force have confirmed there is no police activity or interest in Mr David Warden, and have advised in relation to the comments you mentioned having been posted to Instagram that it would be advisable to report such matters direct to Instagram as inappropriate content. I would like to thank you again for raising your concerns with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and hope that the above information goes some way towards reassuring you that Dorset Police remain in constant communication with not only those overseeing the nationally recognised guidelines but also with key stakeholders within the community. I would also like to encourage all parties to ensure that any future meetings are notified to Dorset Police during the initial planning stages, in order that the Force are able to advise and plan where additional support and resources can be deployed to best support all parties in their right to meet without fear of intimidation from other groups.

From David Nunn

David, With respect to the cancellation of your "Challenging Progressive Myths about Israel" talk, I think some of the views from Dorset Humanists that free speech and democracy are being crushed, as some have suggested, is way over the top.

Perhaps this is more about the timing of the talk, and the perception (from the advertising of it) of a lack of balance? Perhaps the actual talk would have been balanced (we remain unclear about this), but the issue here is that words that publicised the talk were perceived to be far from balanced.

I'd be very interested in this talk - but at another time - detached from the fire that is currently engulfing the region that you wanted to discuss. Of course, even at more benign periods of time, this is a very controversial subject, likely to cause division no matter how sensitively you put your case. But even I was surprised that Dorset Humanists wanted to broach this subject right now. I was equally surprised that this talk was seemingly very one-sided - apparently only talking about the Israeli perspective of Israel, whilst ignoring the plight of the Palestinians, the UN defined "illegal occupations", the political ambitions of Netanyahu etc. Surely, Dorset Humanists should be striving for complete balance, particularly with such a volatile subject? Then again, why are Dorset Humanists entering into such political and global quagmires, at the worst possible time to do so?

I do not agree that free speech is under attack, nor that there is any semblance of totalitarian control over society, resulting from requests that this talk is postponed. I simply think this is not the right time for Humanists to start stirring up what is already a fractious subject. Absolutely, yes, in the future - but not right now.

I am equally shocked that some in Dorset Humanists took to some extreme views, suggesting that this had "closed down democracy" or was playing into the hands of

"incredibly biased pro-HAMAS supporters". So, do Dorset Humanists think that those who have sympathy with Palestinians currently being slaughtered in this mess, are "pro-HAMAS"? That is such an extreme and out of proportion statement. No matter who dies, whether they be Israeli or Palestinian - they are all tragedies. Asking for sensitivity for those dying on the Palestinian side is not being "pro-HAMAS" in the slightest. Far from it. It's views like this that cause the worst form of division.

Saying all that, the way Sarah Ward described you, David, as a "far right, divisive speaker" is equally extreme and totally untrue. That did not do Sarah any favours at all. I can see errors on both sides here. And let's be honest, errors on both sides is the least way to describe the issues in that war-torn region right now. Both sides of this conflict have made, and are still making completely atrocious decisions and acting them out for all to be disgusted at. Which is why it's probably best for Dorset Humanists to steer well clear of this subject until the dust completely settles. Ask yourself whether Dorset Humanists would have entered the debate about Northern Ireland just after Bloody Sunday in the early 1970s? I hope the answer would be "not on your nelly".

As we all know, freedom of speech goes so far, until it causes someone else harm or distress. Also, freedom of speech comes with responsibilities. So, one must use their freedom of speech responsibly. Whilst I would really like to hear this talk in the future, perhaps being far more balanced by including someone who can also provide a Palestinian perspective, I think cancelling this ill-timed (but still interesting) talk was Dorset Humanists' best move, demonstrating responsibility with their free speech. In the end, the right decision was made.

All the very best, David (PS - I would like you to publish this retort to some of the damaging rhetoric provided by some Dorset Humanists, of which I am a member, in the next bulletin - as a matter of balance 😊)



View from the Chair

David Warden

Chairman of Dorset Humanists

David Nunn has written a thoughtful response to our event cancellation saga (see *Letters & Emails*). David has played a leading role in our Dorchester humanist group for many years. David wrote that he was “surprised that this talk was seemingly very one-sided – apparently only talking about the Israeli perspective of Israel, whilst ignoring the plight of the Palestinians, the UN defined “illegal occupations”, the political ambitions of Netanyahu etc.” Humanists should always be open to discussion and disagreement but it’s not essential for opposing views to be expressed within a single talk. I had prepared a talk which set out the sequence of events which led to the creation of hundreds of thousands of refugees, both Arab Palestinians and Jews, as a consequence of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. We didn’t invite a speaker to present an opposing interpretation of the history on this occasion, but we did anticipate that contributions from the floor would have demonstrated that my own understanding of this tragic conflict is open to challenge. Towards the end of February I was invited by Professor Greg Atkins, a former Dorset Humanists *Humanist of the Year*, to speak at a discussion event in Somerset. Two opposing interpretations of the history of Israel/Palestine were presented and this was followed by a very civilised and informed discussion. There were no protesters and no disruption. This was a welcome demonstration of the possibility of having good quality discussions about emotive topics.

The latest turn in the national debate concerns the slippery concept of Islamophobia. Some clarity of terms is sorely needed. The religion of Islam involves prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage and so on and Muslims should not face discrimination, prejudice or hatred for being Muslim. That is the proper focus of the word Islamophobia. But Islamism is a different thing. Islamism (which can intersect with Salafism and jihadism) is a political ideology which seeks to implement Islamic principles and Sharia law in government and society. It is embodied in organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Qaeda, ISIS, Hamas and so on. It is not Islamophobic to be opposed to Islamism as a political ideology.

I was very interested to hear the outcomes of the “Practical Progressives” group at our evening event in March, particularly Simon Bowden’s view that humanist values include “concern for the welfare of others and the desire to make the world a slightly better, fairer place”, and that “...humanism gives us an amazing gift of intellectual and moral freedom, and the question is, what are we going to do with that? I think most humanists are seeking to build a moral understanding and are naturally reformist [rather than utopian] in outlook, rather than mainly seeking to improve their own wealth and social position.” I very much concur with all of that. It is rare, although not unheard of, for humanism to be turned into a political party but this does not mean that humanists cannot bring pressure to bear on politicians to mould their policies in order to improve the common good.