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The Seven Deadly Sins

A light-hearted
review

Saturday 14th December 2.00-4.30pm – free entry – all welcome
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW. Please RSVP via
Meetup. Complimentary mince pies & mulled wine. Please donate to our Appeal.

We've all heard of the Seven Deadly Sins. They're often regarded as a colourful, and rather old-fashioned aspect of Christianity, and not generally discussed nowadays. Not many people have heard of the Seven Heavenly Virtues, but at one time they were also a hot topic in Christian thought.

At this Yuletide event, Simon Whipple, one of our committee members, will offer a light-hearted and illustrated review of these concepts, and will suggest that they are just as worth considering as guides to life now, in our post-Christian world, as they have ever been.

 **Uganda Humanist Schools Trust**
Inclusive education based on reason, compassion, tolerance



HOPE

FOR FOOD

At the Seven Deadly Sins event we will be collecting money for our 2024 Appeal. A talk about the sin of Gluttony is the perfect opportunity! Please bring cash if you would like to make a donation.

In 2023, we raised £1617 for Hope for Food Foodbank and £993 for the Uganda Humanist Schools. Let's see if we can beat this record!

Click images for more information.



Is an exciting series of friendly discussions about humanist answers to some of life's biggest questions. Free entry – all welcome.



- 1. HUMANISM IN CONTEXT** Wednesday 22nd January 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
Understanding what humanism is in relation to other worldviews and philosophies
- 2. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS** Wednesday 29th January 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
“What’s the difference between atheism and humanism?” and other frequently asked questions
- 3. HUMANISM IN THE UK AND AROUND THE WORLD** Wednesday 5th February 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
What does the humanist movement actually do in this country and on other continents?
- 4. IMPROVE YOUR THINKING SKILLS** Wednesday 12th February 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
How to be more rational and avoid common pitfalls of bad thinking
- 5. IMPROVE YOUR HAPPINESS SKILLS** Wednesday 19th February 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
How to experience more bliss in your life
- 6. WHAT’S WRONG WITH US?** Wednesday 26th February 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
Understanding the weird psychology of human beings and how to be your own therapist
- 7. PROSPECTS FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL** Wednesday 5th March 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
The top six threats to human survival and how to stop worrying about them
- 8. WHAT IS A HUMANIST GROUP?** Wednesday 12th March 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
What’s a humanist group for and how can it become a magnet for all non-religious people?

Email David on chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk or text **07910 886629** to register your interest. This programme may be adjusted to meet the needs of participants – let David know what you would like to see included. Attend as many as you like but for the full benefit attend all eight! Details correct at the time of printing. Please check the latest bulletin and especially Meetup.com for any changes to this programme.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 14 th December 2.00pm	Moordown	The Seven Deadly Sins – a talk by Simon Whipple. Join us for mince pies and mulled wine.
Thursday 19 th December 7.00pm	Marsham Court Hotel	Festive Dinner. Contact Sandra Lucie-Smith on 07779 769108 for details and availability.
Thursday 2 nd January	Moon in the Square	Friendly pub social. Just turn up and look for us on the ground floor on the right.
Saturday 11 th January	Moordown	Is Humanism Fit for Purpose in the 21 st Century? A joint talk by Mike Flood (Chair of Milton Keynes Humanists) and David Warden (Chair of Dorset Humanists).
Plus other social events and walks which will be announced on Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any changes.		



Alfred Sisley: The Place of Light

At our evening event in November, John Hubbard outlined the biography of 'the English impressionist' Alfred Sisley while chiefly exploring his studies of tranquil urban landscapes. This report selects a few highlights from the talk. You can also watch the [video](#).

Sisley spent almost his entire life in France and he died in the picturesque town of Moret-sur-Loing in 1899 at the age of 59. He was dedicated to landscape work in the open air, deftly capturing the moods of the seasons, weather and time of day through his particular attention to qualities of light. His favourite subjects were riverside towns and villages surrounding Paris, but he also produced lively summer studies of the Thames.

In the painting above, the falling of light from between the buildings provides an interesting range of shapes and shadows that contrast with the geometrical regularities of the buildings (Rue de la Chaussée, Argenteuil, near Paris – 1870-72.)

In the story of Impressionism, Sisley is often somewhat sidelined, partly from his later social and geographical separation from his early companions, partly from an absolute dedication to landscape alone and a consistency in a personal viewpoint settled early. The human figure is so often present in his work... Yet beside this awareness of movement there is also a sense of absolute quiet and stillness – a suspended quiet you can still find today, perhaps surprisingly, in the same streets, rivers and locks by which Sisley first set up his easel over 150 years ago. Yet for a long time this perhaps purest of Impressionists was regarded as less noteworthy, compared disparagingly with his peers and even dismissed as a minor artist. He certainly did not meet with the lifetime success of Monet or Renoir and, like Pissarro, he was often in difficult financial circumstances.

Why the title 'The Place of Light'? Surely, you might argue, every artist is concerned in ►

their work with qualities of reflection, luminosity and radiance. I would suggest that with Sisley's insistent focus on broad landscapes with low horizons and arching skies, with water, with the most subtle changes of season and day as they reverberate in the most ordinary of street scenes too, Sisley's preoccupation with light is focal; from the brilliancy of high summer to the muffled hues of an overcast snowy day. The reflections of skies and buildings on the surface of water delighted him as much as the echo of sun or cloud in streets and open spaces.

Renoir's recollections of Sisley are of 'a delightful human being' – and one much given to flirting and chatting up young women. By the end of the summer of 1867 both Sisley and Monet had become fathers. Sisley's son Pierre was born to Eugénie Lescouzec, the woman who would share his life for the next thirty years and who was always known as Mme Sisley. In January 1869 a daughter, Jeanne, completed the family. But it appears that this 'irregular liaison' was the reason that his father may well have ended his allowance to him, leaving this rather elegant man sadly in very reduced circumstances. His work continued to be unjustly neglected and he is described at the end of his life as being 'bereft of all joys, except the joy of painting which never left him'.

The location of his paintings – Argenteuil, Bougival, Louveciennes, Sèvres, Marly – were all outside the city of Paris, but they were not 'suburban' in any way we'd understand it at present. If you leaf through the complete catalogue of his 1,080 authenticated works the vast majority are of the open countryside or riverside. Towns and villages feature significantly, and he clearly enjoyed the fascinating varieties of buildings and their order – yet reflecting waters, trees, meadows, paths and skies dominate.

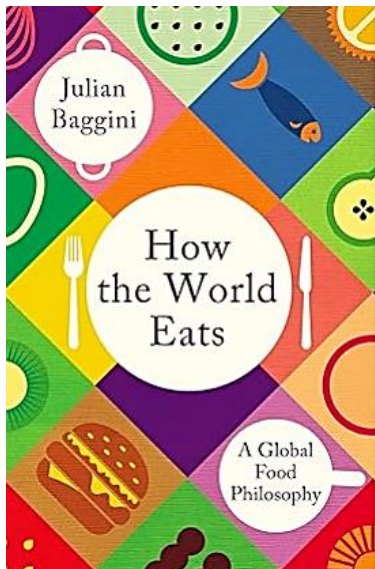
Eugene Maurer, a patron and writer esteemed Sisley above Monet, describing him as 'the most subtle of Impressionists...with the soul and brush of a poet'. And perhaps it is that



Snow at Louveciennes, 1878, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

sense of subtlety, restraint and detachment that helps him achieve his finest work. But there was also his unerring sense at other times of the innate vitality of what he saw before him. In a review of the Second Impressionist Exhibition (1876) the poet Stéphane Mallarmé expressed it like this: 'Sisley seizes the passing moments of the day; watches a fugitive cloud and seems to paint it in its flight. On his canvas the live air moves and the leaves yet thrill and tremble.' Tavernier, who gave the oration at Sisley's funeral summed him up as 'a magician of light, a poet of the heavens, the waters, of the trees – in a word one of the most remarkable landscapists of his day.'

Inevitably, I have only been able to share with you a fragment of the work of this finest of artists. If you are lucky as you pass through the art galleries of the world you will be able to see some two or three in many. The places in which he worked remain, for the most part, remarkably unchanged at heart, largely skirted by the motorised world rather than pierced by it, as attractive in appearance as they were when he lived there. And perhaps on an autumn afternoon, or a brilliant summer's morning, or a frosty day there, or wherever you are, you will be able to share and enjoy similar serene views and appreciate in them, as he most certainly did, the place of light.



Seven Principles for Transforming our Food System

Forty-five people attended Julian Baggini's excellent talk about his new book "How the World Eats". In 1997, Julian co-founded The Philosophers' Magazine which aims to make philosophy more accessible. He's written about 20 books including a very short introduction to atheism which you can find in our library at Moordown Community Centre.

This is a short summary of Julian's talk. You can also watch the whole event on [Dorset Humanists YouTube](#).

The way we produce and consume food today is deeply flawed, yet solutions are within our grasp if we approach the issue thoughtfully and pragmatically. This talk outlines seven guiding principles for a sustainable, just, and humane food system, drawing on history, science, and philosophy to address critical challenges. The principles—plurality, circularity, holism, resourcefulness, humane practices, justice, and food-centricity—form a framework for rethinking how the world eats.

The challenges of modern food systems

Our current food system often seems to prioritize everything except proper food. While it produces vast quantities of calories and ingredients, it increasingly fails to provide whole, nourishing food. This issue lies at the heart of many health, environmental, and social challenges.

The system's reliance on commodification has turned food into raw materials for industrial processing. Crops like soy, maize, and rapeseed are grown at enormous scales, processed into oils, starches, and additives, and then combined into highly processed foods. This approach distances consumers from whole, minimally-processed foods and contributes to a host of problems, including poor health outcomes, biodiversity loss, and exploitation.

Moreover, the modern food system perpetuates inequalities. Historically, inequalities began with farming itself. Settled agriculture created disparities as some individuals gained access to better land or accumulated landownership, while others became reliant on their labour. These inequalities have persisted and, in many cases, worsened over time. Exploitation, including slavery, has been a constant feature of food systems. Today, while traditional slavery has largely been abolished, modern forms of forced labour and severe exploitation remain embedded in global supply chains. Examples include the exploitation of migrant workers in southern Spain's greenhouses or Italy's tomato harvests, where people work under conditions that resemble bonded labour. Addressing this exploitation is critical, though it may lead to higher food prices—a trade-off we must accept for a just and equitable system.

Seven principles for a better food system

1. Plurality

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for food systems. The diversity of environments, cultures, and resources demands a plurality of approaches to food production. What works in one region may not work in another. For example, extensive grazing in the ►



Photo by Aaron

Argentine pampas is suitable for that environment, where grasses absorb as much carbon dioxide as livestock emit. However, this method isn't universally applicable.

Similarly, debates around organic versus conventional farming should consider context. Organic farming generally produces about 80% of the yield of conventional methods, which may not be viable for certain crops or regions. A diverse and flexible approach is essential to meeting global food needs sustainably.

2. Circularity

Successful food systems must be circular, relying on regenerative processes that minimize external inputs and waste. Historical examples, such as hunter-gatherer societies, operated in harmony with natural cycles, taking only what the environment could replenish. Modern systems often fail this test. Industrial agriculture relies heavily on synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and fossil fuels, depleting resources and creating pollution. Yet there are promising examples of circularity, such as extensive grazing systems where natural cycles of methane breakdown and grass regrowth maintain balance. Similarly, traditional mixed farms, where animal manure fertilizes crops and crop residues feed livestock, exemplify circularity on a smaller scale. Future food systems must expand this principle to broader, system-level exchanges, such as linking specialized farms for mutual benefit and recycling by-products into valuable resources like compost or animal feed.

3. Holism

A holistic approach requires considering the entire system's impact rather than focusing narrowly on individual practices or outcomes. While intensive farming methods may appear efficient, producing large quantities of pork or tomatoes, their external costs—such as deforestation for livestock feed or pollution from fertilizers—paint a different picture.

Even organic farming must be assessed holistically. For instance, its reliance on animal manure ties it to livestock systems, raising questions for advocates of both organic farming and veganism. A holistic view considers not just the farm but also the interconnected effects on culture, health, ecology, and economics.

4. Resourcefulness

Humanity's ability to innovate has always been its greatest strength. Throughout history, people have developed ingenious solutions to food challenges. For example, aquaculture, often seen as a modern development, has roots in ancient China, where farmers used fish-rice symbiosis to sustainably grow crops and rear fish. Such practices demonstrate the power of resourcefulness when combined with ecological awareness.

Modern examples include integrated aquaculture systems that raise multiple species, such as sea bream and shrimp, in ways that mutually support their growth. Moving forward, we must continue to embrace ingenuity while learning from past mistakes. ►

5. Humane practices

A humane food system respects the welfare of animals. Historically and today, many farming practices fail this test. Industrial systems subject animals to appalling conditions, such as pigs in gestation crates, chickens bred to grow so rapidly they cannot sustain their weight, or cattle confined indoors for their entire lives. These practices are indefensible on ethical grounds.

Even traditional societies, like the Maasai or Inuit, which exhibit reverence for animals, fall short by modern standards of humane treatment. For instance, Maasai ritual slaughter practices, such as suffocating cattle with honey, reflect cultural traditions but would not meet current ethical expectations. A humane food system can incorporate animal farming, but it must prioritize minimizing suffering.

6. Justice and equity

Fairness must extend to humans as well. Hunter-gatherer societies were perhaps the last truly equitable food systems, where food was shared and land ownership did not exist. Farming introduced inequalities, which have grown over time and continue to manifest in the exploitation of workers. Addressing these injustices is non-negotiable, even if it results in higher food prices. Justice and equity are essential for a food system that aligns with basic human values.

7. Food-centricity

The final principle is food-centricity—placing proper, whole food at the centre of the system. Our current food system prioritizes ingredients for processed products over whole foods. This shift, driven by commodification, has disconnected people from real food. Instead of focusing on producing nourishing, minimally processed food, the system churns out commodities like rapeseed oil and corn starch for industrial use.

This commodification is tied to the flawed concept of nutritionism, which reduces food



Julian Baggini

Fiona wrote: "Lots of food for thought! Sorry, couldn't resist the pun. It was great to get my brain engaged. A subject with many complexities and one of perennial interest to me as a vegetarian who grew up on a small farm. Thanks to Julian for his meticulous research, and sharing it clearly with us."

to its component nutrients—carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals—while ignoring the holistic nature of food. Highly processed products may have the 'right' balance of nutrients but lack the complexity and health benefits of whole foods. For example, eating a whole apple is metabolically different from consuming blended apple puree, even if the nutrient content is identical. Similarly, the health impact of red meat depends not just on the meat itself but also on how it's prepared and consumed, as seen in the Mediterranean diet.

A truly food-centric system would focus on providing whole, minimally processed foods, ensuring better health outcomes and reconnecting people with the origins of their food.

Conclusion

The seven principles—plurality, circularity, holism, resourcefulness, humane practices, justice, and food-centricity—offer a framework for transforming the food system into one that aligns with our values and addresses current challenges. Change does not require tearing down the entire system but rather recognizing the discord between our values and the system we have. By making targeted, practical adjustments, we can create a food system that nourishes both people and the planet.



View from the Chair

David Warden

Chairman of Dorset Humanists

Travelling with John Hubbard means that I get to visit a lot of art galleries. I'm not all that keen on Christian art which can be extremely tedious. It seems that for a thousand years, artists produced nothing but saints, angels, cherubs, crucifixions, and sentimental biblical scenes. Visions of hell can be quite entertaining as long as you don't believe you're actually going there. Fast forward to the twentieth century and it appears that, with some exceptions, a great deal of modern art can generously be described as pretentious rubbish. But sandwiched between these extremes there are paintings and sculptures which capture the humanist spirit. Humanist art, in the broadest sense, depicts human beings in ordinary settings. Before the age of photography, such art was the only way to expand your visual horizon beyond the immediate. Photography is now ubiquitous, but art preserves glimpses of what human life was like in previous times: fashion, food, furnishings, transport, industry, architecture, markets, warfare and so on endlessly. We can familiarise ourselves with the story of art through posters, prints and books. But coming face to face with an original of a famous Monet or Van Gogh can take your breath away. The Impressionists not only recorded what was in front of them. They transformed it into something of transcendent beauty. It can be difficult for us to see the world the way they saw it. Many of our towns are in a state of decay and disrepair and modern architecture has transformed some of our cities into visions of hell. Humanist rationality is partly to blame for modernity's worship of function and economy. We need to recover an older humanist tradition which connects with our senses of harmony, form and beauty. Visiting art galleries can be intimidating and sometimes boring and dispiriting. But John has taught me that it's OK to make a beeline for whatever takes your fancy, and ignore the rest. He's also patiently taught me to appreciate things I may otherwise have missed. Even Christian art can have its humanist movements. And the best way to appreciate a city is simply to look up and enjoy the architectural variety preserved above street level. The philosopher Don Cupitt said we must train ourselves to look at life the way Van Gogh painted. As I type this and look up, the bay trees in our garden are whooshing in the wake of Storm Darragh. A few dobs of bright red cling on to the otherwise bare smoke bush. A blackbird pecks at red berries, a wren darts about, and I shoo away a squirrel digging up our parsley. Three-dimensional colour vision is a miracle of evolutionary engineering. The human retina contains about 100 million photoreceptors, and these receptors are constantly capturing light and converting it into electrical signals. The optic nerve transmits this data to the brain at a rate of approximately 10 million bits per second. The visual cortex in the occipital lobe processes this raw data, extracting features like edges, motion, colour, and depth. The temporal and parietal lobes further interpret the data to recognise objects, faces, and spatial relationships. We don't need to know all the technical details of course, but we shouldn't take all this processing power for granted. As soon as we open our eyes in the morning, the world around us, looked at in an appreciative way, makes it good to be alive.