



Jessica Toale MP

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Jessica Toale MP

My First Year in Parliament

From humanist marriage and assisted dying to housing, immigration, and local challenges — your chance to put questions directly to Bournemouth West’s new MP.

Please note revised date of Saturday 27th September 2.00pm. Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW.

Jessica Toale MP made history in 2024 by becoming the first Labour MP ever elected for Bournemouth West, a constituency previously held by the Conservatives since its creation in 1950. She will join us to reflect on her first year in Westminster.

Jessica studied PPE at York and urban development at the LSE, later working as a political adviser and co-founding Labour’s Foreign Policy Group before entering Parliament. She will speak for about 20 minutes, followed by a 30-minute Q&A. Our members may want to ask about humanist concerns such as legalising humanist marriage, House of Lords reform, faith schools, and assisted dying, as well as wider issues such as housing, immigration, Ukraine, and the local challenges facing Bournemouth.



The Chairman’s Tea Party in August raised £245 for our Appeal. Some of our members decided to drink wine instead of tea!

Photo by Jason

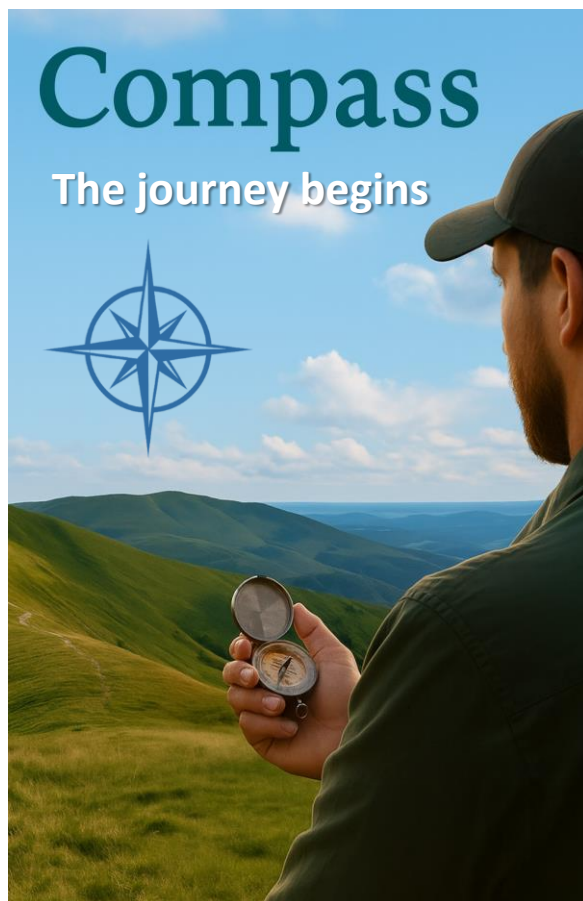
Humanists UK has just launched a social media campaign called *That's humanism!* featuring four animations narrated by Stephen Fry and a new series of eye-catching educational posters for schools. Click the image for more information.



Dates for your diary

Wednesday 10th Sept 10.30am	Coffee#1 Southbourne	Coffee morning 10.30am Coffee#1, 17 Southbourne Grove, BH6 3QS
Friday 19 th Sept 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Hotel bar social 7 Durley Chine Rd, Bournemouth BH2 5JS. Very relaxed and friendly. Just turn up.
Tuesday 23 rd Sept 6.45pm	Moordown	Compass course starts for 8 consecutive Tuesdays. You must pre-book to attend this course. See next page.
Saturday 27 th September 2pm	Moordown	Jessica Toale MP will speak about life as a new MP. Please note change of date.
Thursday 2 nd October 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Pub social hosted by Dean or Lyn. Very relaxed and friendly. Just turn up.
Saturday 11 th October 2pm	Moordown	Varieties of funeral customs across the world. What might we borrow to improve our experience when someone we care about dies? Simon Whipple leads the discussion.

Please check all events nearer the time on Meetup in case of any changes.



Compass is an 8-week course which will explore, and put into practice, the humanist values and virtues which underpin human happiness, resilience and flourishing. Exclusively designed and hosted by Dorset Humanists.

Philosophers have known since antiquity that we do not need the gods to tell us how to live good lives. All we need is the evidence of our own lives – what works and what doesn't work.

Limited to 24 places which are now filling up fast!

This course is the perfect follow-on from our *One Life* course and *Science of Happiness* course. Sign up now so you don't miss the boat!

Where, when, who and how

- Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW
- From Tuesday 23rd September 2025, 6.45-8.45pm, for 8 consecutive Tuesday evenings
- Coffee/tea at 6.45pm for prompt start at 7.00pm
- Booking fee £15 includes complimentary membership of Dorset Humanists for one year. £10 booking fee for existing members. Free for those on very low income. Pay cash in advance or at the first session.
- Course leader is David Warden. David has degrees in theology and human resource management, and a diploma in humanistic counselling. He is an experienced trainer and course leader.
- Email chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk or WhatsApp 07910 886629

Imagine

Imagine a world in which human beings practice integrity, courage, fairness, curiosity, tolerance, generosity, gratitude, humility, benevolence, and hope. Imagine a world infused with humanist values and virtues, from family and school to government and corporations. Our world is in crisis as it loses its moral foundations and compass. We can change that, one life at a time.



Shelley Pilgrimage Walk

In July, eleven pilgrims walked from Shelley's impressive monument in Christchurch Priory to his son's theatre in Shelley Park, Boscombe. Roger Eede conducted a private tour of the theatre which is now in excellent condition but waiting for a benefactor to provide capital funding.

It was a blistering hot day and we decided not to continue our journey to the Shelley family grave at St Peter's in Bournemouth where the poet's heart is reputed to have been buried, along with his wife Mary Shelley and her parents Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin.

At Oxford, Shelley developed radical and anti-Christian views. In 1811, he collaborated on a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*. He mailed it to all the bishops and heads of colleges which led to his expulsion.

Shelley is considered to be one of the major English Romantic poets. He didn't achieve fame in his lifetime. Recognition grew steadily following his death, and he became an important influence on subsequent poets, including Browning, Swinburne, Hardy, and Yeats.

One of his best-known works is *Ozymandias* (1818). In this sonnet, he imagines a ruined statue in the desert — all that remains of a once-great king. We see just the legs of stone and a shattered face, lying in the sand, still bearing a proud, cruel expression. The inscription boasts: "Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

The Mask of Anarchy (1819) is a fiery protest against tyranny and violence, calling for peaceful resistance in the name of liberty, reason, and justice. *Ode to the West Wind* (1819) is a passionate plea to nature's wild force to scatter Shelley's ideas "like ashes and sparks". *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) is a poetic drama which imagines humanity casting off tyranny and cruelty in favour of compassion and cooperation.



Plaque to the poet's son, Sir Percy, who lived in Boscombe.



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Phil Butcher on the origin of the universe debate

I've read the transcripts of Dave Pegg's and Geoff Kirby's treatises on cosmology (August Bulletin) but not tried to reanalyse them on their own merits, or to claim to have any new insights from a philosophical point of view. Regarding the physics, I've read that there is no need to postulate a very large amount of energy initiating the big bang, only a high degree of initial order (i.e. everything uniformly crammed into a high density). The released energy (radiation and matter) is balanced by the potential energy. It depends on a more nuanced and precise idea of what energy is.

Dave Pegg's second point was about the fine-tuning of the physical constants that shape the universe, but I think the main argument against that is linked to the enormously large number of *possible* sets of constants that could be predicted by current theoretical physics (mainly but not exclusively string theory), and then some sort of multiverse argument (i.e. all these possible sets are somehow tried out). There are different levels of anthropic principle, but the main idea is that we live in the only environment that we could live in. It is either: a sliver of liveable biome in what we can see is a massively inhospitable cosmos; or one set of physical constants producing a cosmos that is able to stay in existence long enough, and have the chemical elements necessary, for life to exist. Most of the others that could be (and maybe have been) produced could never support even a tiny sliver of life, or even stars and

planets. We are here because it's the only place we could be. I get a good summary of the subject by asking my favourite AI to discuss "fine tuning argument".

There is a lot of misunderstanding about time as well, in all the arguments we have had. Mike Fawcett gave a physicist's view (and roughly my view) in one of our short talks a few years ago, but we still glibly talk about things "occurring" "before" the "beginning" of time, when none of those words makes clear sense without time being taken into account. Causality is a difficult subject in physics. All basic interactions at the smallest level are reversible, so "causality" goes either way. Also "nothing" can spontaneously become a set of objects with balancing properties, and vice versa. We see some larger scale things occurring "before" other things because order is hugely more likely to turn to disorder than the reverse (example of smashed cup reassembling itself).

I don't think humans are equipped to discuss many of these things in everyday language. Physicists use mathematical language to describe the universe or the possible universe. My act of faith is that they are not constructing their mathematical edifices dishonestly, and that they are rigorously self-checking, or checking each other. They have a strong desire to find the logical errors in each other's arguments. They are trying to generate testable hypotheses and new ones are reported in *New Scientist* or physics journals all the time, although the testing may be a bit beyond current technology. I don't think there is any value in our trying to talk about whether they are right. I'm with Barry Newman in saying "We personally don't know, and that's quite ok", but I'm less sceptical than some of you were in the meeting about whether theoretical physicists are more in the know. They would accept that they haven't completely solved it, but I'm convinced it is a question for physicists, and not theologians, and that they are much nearer the truth.



A point of view

David Warden

I'm grateful to Karen Preston for suggesting the theme of our Autumn course on humanist values and virtues. I'm also grateful to Aaron Darkwood who has been asking for years, "How can we help people make the transition from atheism to humanism?" We even published a little guide on this topic via *Humanistically Speaking* magazine. But this was based on the idea of a distillation of rules and commandments for humanists. The problem with this is that rules and commandments are, inherently, a religious idea.

There's a better way to do this and it's been known for 2½ thousand years. Ancient philosophers such as Aristotle simply disregarded the gods and they got on with developing a scheme of virtues to underpin human happiness and flourishing. For the philosophically-minded, this way of looking at the problem of ethics is called *teleological*. The Greek word *telos* means goal, so *teleological* means goal-driven. *Homo sapiens* has an inbuilt drive towards happiness and wellbeing and ancient philosophers reckoned that the best way to achieve this is through cultivating a set of character values or virtues. But we don't have to take their word for it. We can cultivate those values in our lives and see what works and what doesn't work.

Western civilisation took a profound detour from its classical humanist roots when Christianity became dominant in the Roman Empire in the 4th century. Yet Aristotle was never entirely lost. His works were preserved by Islamic scholars before being transmitted back to Europe through Thomas Aquinas and, later, the humanists of the 14th and 15th centuries. Aquinas attempted a grand synthesis, weaving Aristotelian virtues into a Christian framework. By the Middle Ages, this fusion produced the well-known catalogue of heavenly virtues and deadly sins. Simon Whipple has recently sparked our interest in this strand of thinking.

Today, humanists tend to think that the basis for ethics is reason and compassion, or evolutionary psychology, or simple rules such as the Golden Rule or lists of humanist commandments. But these are partial and not entirely satisfactory accounts of why we should be moral. This deficiency was recognised by philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001). Her 1958 paper "Modern Moral Philosophy" is famous for restarting interest in virtue ethics. It had fallen out of fashion for centuries while people obsessed over rules and consequences. But Anscombe re-opened the door, and since then philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Iris Murdoch and Alistair MacIntyre have picked up the thread, as has positive psychology's focus on flourishing.

Don't worry, you don't have to understand the whole history of Western moral philosophy to come on the Compass course. But it's interesting to know a bit of the background and why the humanist movement as a whole is still a bit stuck with rules and reasons and commandments. There's a simpler way to be good without God. And that's to restore the link between virtues and human happiness and flourishing. That way, we can all get on with the practical business of becoming better – and happier – people.