



Aztec Man Carrying a Cacao Pod (15th century)  
Brooklyn Museum – no copyright (Wikipedia)

## Chocolate: A Love Story

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2.00pm Moordown Community Centre,  
Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW

A relaxed, engaging, and family-friendly afternoon exploring the story and exquisite taste of one of humanity's greatest inventions.

From its origins in the ancient world to the bars we enjoy today, we'll take you on a journey through the history, making, and meaning of chocolate. Along the way, we'll discover how it's produced, what gives it its remarkable flavour, and some of the ethical questions behind it.

You'll have the opportunity to taste and savour a delicious range of chocolates—from the familiar to the surprising—as we explore how flavour, aroma, and country of origin shape the experience.

Chocolate samples will be provided—but if you'd like to bring a favourite to share, we'd be delighted.

Come along, bring your family and friends, and share in the simple pleasure of chocolate. But please let us know you're coming so that we will have enough chocolate to go round!

This choctastic event was inspired by Leo who is a young member of Dorset Humanists.

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## Enoughness: How much is enough for a good life?

Humanist Forum led by Henri Ruff: Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 7.30pm

Bournemouth West Cliff Hotel, 7 Durley Chine Rd, Bournemouth BH2 5JS. All welcome.

Modern life constantly encourages us to want more – more success, more possessions, more experiences, more of everything. But how much is actually enough for a good life? In this interactive discussion, Dorset Humanists member Henri Ruff invites us to reflect together on the idea of “enoughness”. How do we balance ambition, contentment, and gratitude? What shapes our sense of “enough” at different stages of life? This will be a friendly, open conversation where everyone's experiences and perspectives are welcome.



**Our Bourne Stream walk took us from Bournemouth’s Lower Gardens to Talbot Heath and beyond. A surprising discovery for many of us was Alder Hills Nature Reserve and lake. Photos by Aaron.**



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## Dates for your diary

Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> April 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Humanists in the pub. Informal pub social hosted by Dean or Lyn.
Saturday 11 <sup>th</sup> April 2.00pm	Moordown	Chocolate: A Love Story. Chocolate tasting and talk. Fun for all the family.
Friday 17 <sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Hotel bar social hosted by Sandra Lucie-Smith. No set agenda. Come along for a friendly social.
Thursday 23 <sup>rd</sup> April 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Humanist Forum at the Westcliff Hotel. Enoughness: How much is enough? Discussion led by Henri Ruff.
Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> May 10.15am	Swanage	Dancing Ledge walk led by Aaron. Details will be posted on Meetup.
Saturday 9 <sup>th</sup> May 2.00 pm	Moordown	How to tell fact from fiction: Practical session on how to identify fakes in the age of AI.

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

# Pecking Orders

## Aristocracy, meritocracy & hierarchy

*Eighteen people gathered round tables at the Westcliff Hotel to participate in a wide-ranging discussion on 'pecking orders'. The discussion was guided by Simon Whipple.*

Our discussion on “pecking orders” opened up a rich and wide-ranging exploration of class, hierarchy, meritocracy, status and equality in human life. The conversation touched on social structures as well as the role of hierarchy within groups and organisations.

One theme that emerged was how quickly human beings seem to recognise patterns of status, even from infancy. We pick up cues almost instantly—through dress, speech, confidence, and behaviour. This sensitivity to social hierarchy appears to be deeply rooted. Research in evolutionary psychology and primatology suggests that hierarchical organisation is a common feature of social species. As Frans de Waal has shown in his studies of primates, structured social relationships often coexist with cooperation, bonding, and mutual support.

At the same time, human beings are not simply passive participants in hierarchy. Anthropologist Christopher Boehm has argued that early human societies developed ways of limiting dominance, creating what he calls “reverse dominance hierarchies.” In such groups, individuals who attempted to assert too much power were often resisted or brought back into line by the group. This suggests that alongside our sensitivity to hierarchy, we also have strong egalitarian impulses.

These two tendencies—towards hierarchy and towards equality—continue to shape modern life. The discussion included



reflections on attempts to organise without formal hierarchies, such as in some activist movements. These examples highlight both the appeal of more egalitarian forms of organisation and the practical challenges they can sometimes encounter.

From a psychological perspective, thinkers such as Jonathan Haidt have suggested that our responses to authority, status, and fairness are part of our underlying moral psychology. Human beings appear to balance multiple intuitions at once: a respect for structure and leadership, alongside a concern for fairness and resistance to domination.

This creates an ongoing tension in contemporary society. Many modern movements place a strong emphasis on equality and the reduction of hierarchy, while everyday experience often reveals how readily hierarchies re-emerge in social settings. Rather than being a problem to be solved once and for all, this may be a feature of human social life that needs to be continually navigated.

The discussion highlighted how these questions remain highly relevant. Whether in workplaces, communities, or informal groups, we are constantly negotiating the balance between structure and equality, leadership and participation. Recognising both sides of this dynamic—our tendency to form hierarchies and our equally strong impulse to question them—may offer a more grounded way of thinking about how we live and work together.

# Humanist of the Year 2026

At our AGM in March, David Warden awarded 'Humanist of the Year' to Chris Smith, adding that, in reality, it ought to be a lifetime humanist award. Chris has been a supportive member of numerous humanist groups over the years. But this award was made in particular recognition of Chris's role as a trustee of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust which Dorset Humanists supports through its annual appeal. Imagine if there were thousands of humanist schools all over Africa – what a huge difference this could make to the future of that continent in terms of liberty, enlightenment and human rights.



David Warden awarding 'Humanist of the Year' to Chris Smith in recognition of many years support of humanism, especially the Uganda Humanist Schools. Photo by Dean.

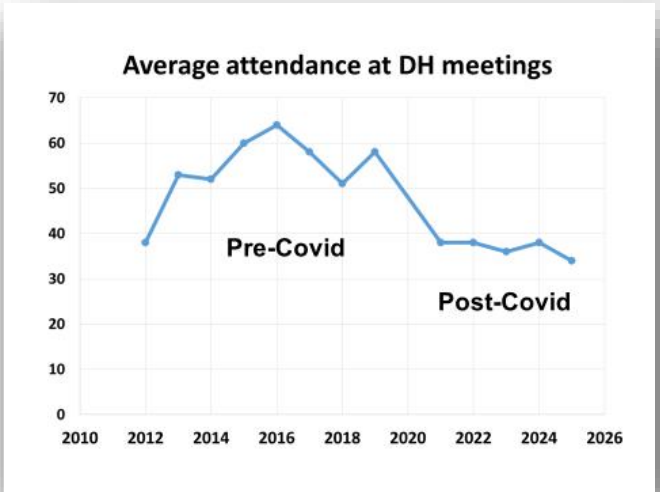
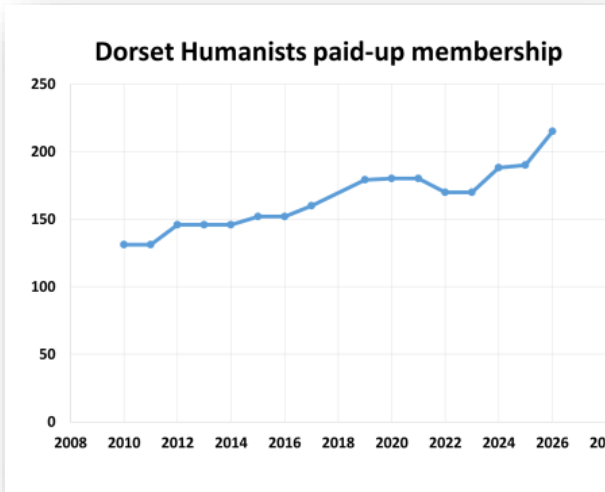
# Adapting to changing times

In his Chairman's Report, David Warden presented two graphs which illustrated that, while Dorset Humanists membership continues to grow steadily, attendance at events after the Covid pandemic has remained at a lower plateau. The reasons for this are complex, but we are adapting to changing times.

In particular, in 2025 we made the strategic decision to increase the amount of interaction at our events in order to foster the growth of community. Attendance at our recent Moordown events suggest that this new approach is popular and effective – although this could simply be a response to free food! ►



40 people attended our AGM – was food the main attraction?!



Dorset Humanists membership has continued to grow but attendance at events has shown a post-Covid plateau.

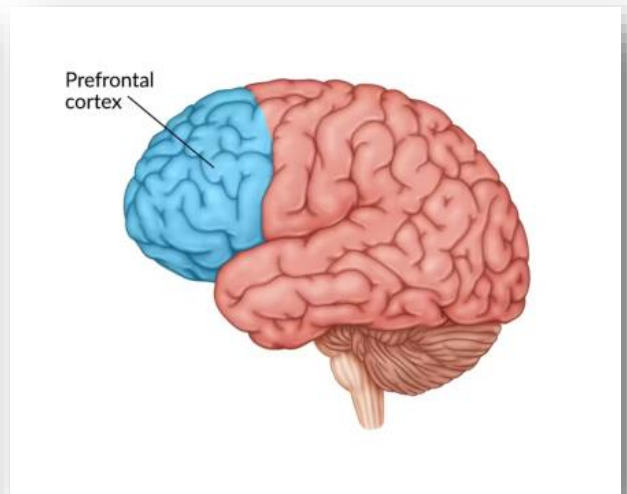
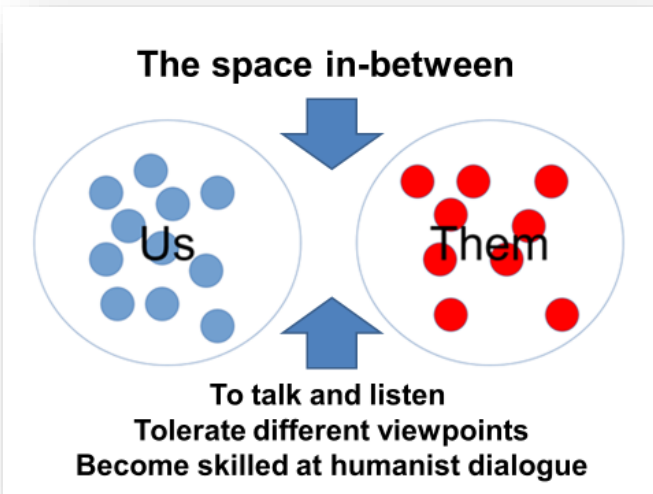
### How humanism can make a difference – strengthening neural pathways in the prefrontal cortex

David said that the world we live in today has become very binary, very polarised: left and right, leavers and remainers, globalists and nationalists, Zionists and antizionists, goodies and baddies. Humanism is not immune to such tribal identities and yet part of our mission is to try and remedy the problem.

We can do this not by trying to erase our differences but by doing humanism in ‘the space in-between’. It’s here that we can talk and listen, learn to tolerate different viewpoints, and become skilled at humanist dialogue. It’s not always easy. But this is the space and ethos we’re trying to cultivate. Where we can engage the more thoughtful and reflective parts of our brain. This is where

we do humanism – in our prefrontal cortex which sits behind the forehead. We’re trying to strengthen the neural pathways here. The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain which helps us to inhibit the impulses coming from the deeper and more primitive parts of our brain (the limbic system, particularly the amygdala) and to reflect on our own thinking. The amygdala gives rise to strong emotions and enemy-detection. These impulses helped our ancestors survive but in today’s world they are a strong driver of the “us and them” response.

Psychologists sometimes describe this as the difference between fast intuitive judgement and slow reflective reasoning. Ten years ago we had a talk on this by Phil James – the book by Daniel Kahneman called *Thinking Fast and Slow*. ►





## What a humanist group is for – and an ancient model for what we are trying to do

So this is what a humanist group is for. To stimulate the prefrontal cortex and calm down the limbic system. And this is one of the ways in which we can make the world a better place, a more peaceful place.

In 306 BCE, just outside Athens, the philosopher Epicurus bought a house with a garden. Not a grand academy. There was no marble colonnade. Just house with a garden. It became known simply as “The Garden.”

People gathered there not to win arguments, but to learn how to live well. They studied nature. They discussed human emotions. They shared meals. They formed friendships.

It was radically inclusive. Women were welcome. Foreigners were welcome. And even slaves were welcome.

The Garden was not about escaping reality. The people who gathered there were trying to cultivate clarity and steadiness in a turbulent world. Philosophy for them was not about abstract speculation but about how to live well.

The people who gathered there believed that wisdom grows best through conversation and friendship.

For over two thousand years, human beings have gathered in gardens, courtyards, and cafés, to ask how we might live well together. What we’re doing here at Dorset Humanists is continuing in that ancient human tradition.



Left to right: Paul, Jan, Jason, John, Clare, Sharon, Chris. Photos by Aaron



# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

## **From Keith Porteous Wood, President of the National Secular Society**

Dear Dorset Humanists

We are pleased to enclose the latest edition of the NSS Bulletin [copies are available at Dorset Humanists events].

At the end of last year, the Supreme Court found that arrangements for collective worship and religious education in Northern Ireland breach the human rights of children. That landmark ruling has brought renewed attention to human rights in education and the need to challenge collective worship across the UK.

In our latest issue, you'll find analysis of what the ruling might mean for our campaign for an inclusive, secular education system. We'll also unpack recent developments on religious charities promoting misogyny, including growing awareness of the role of religious privilege in charity law. This has in part been spurred by the publication of our latest report, *Mission and Misogyny*, which has helped spotlight the ways in which our charity sector is being used by fundamentalists to spread regressive and harmful ideas about women.

It is support from members like you that drive our campaigns for the separation of religion and state. If you would like to make an additional donation to support our work, you can do so at [www.secularism.org.uk/donate](http://www.secularism.org.uk/donate) or by sending a cheque to the address below.

Thank you very much for your support.

■ Dorset Humanists is an associate group member of the NSS.

## **From Simon Whipple**

Those humanists who attended the Challenge of Forgiveness discussion on 22nd January might be interested in listening on BBC Sounds to a half-hour programme broadcast on 18th March by Matthew Syed, called "Sideways", about forgiveness.

It provides a fascinating case study of forgiveness following a school shooting in the USA, and there is an interview with the psychology professor who developed the REACH forgiveness programme. Here is a link:

[Sideways - 85. The Hands of Forgiveness - BBC Sounds](#)

## **Humanists UK's Festival of Humanism is coming to Bournemouth this summer**

12-14 June 2026 at Bournemouth International Centre, Exeter Road, BH2 5BH.

"Kicking off on Friday evening with a fantastic evening of entertainment and welcome drinks in the bar, from Saturday morning through to Sunday afternoon we welcome scientists and campaigners, historians and artists, politicians and journalists, to fascinate, educate, entertain – and inspire!"

Tickets for Humanists UK Festival 2026 are £159, or special rate of £79 for students, disabled people, and people in receipt of universal credit or pension credit.

Click image for further information or visit <https://humanists.uk/events/our-events/>



# A point of view

David Warden

## What class am I? Reflections on the pecking order.

My paternal grandparents owned a medium-sized hotel on West Hill Road in Bournemouth. My maternal grandparents owned a draper's shop in Boscombe. My father was a technical draughtsman in a sign-making firm, and my mother was a housewife who supplemented the household income by running a small holiday flatlet business from our semi-detached home. Out of curiosity, I asked ChatGPT what class I might be, based on this information alone. The answer came back: lower middle class, with some small-business elements. That seemed about right in terms of origins. But in recent years I've taken two different "class tests" – one from the BBC and another from the Telegraph. On both occasions, I was placed in the category labelled "elite." This was a bit puzzling, seeing as I don't run a large organisation or live in a big house. So what's going on?

I discovered that, according to the BBC model, class is now a mix of three things: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. According to the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, class is not determined solely by income or occupation, but also by education, tastes, habits, and forms of knowledge. It's not just about your parents or what you earn, but how you live. The kinds of questions these surveys ask are revealing. Do you read books? Do you go to the theatre? Are you a member of organisations like the National Trust? Do you play a musical instrument? Do you feel comfortable discussing ideas? These are markers not of great wealth but of a certain kind of social and cultural engagement – one that institutions such as the BBC tend to recognise. Maybe the tests are also designed to flatter the participants!

In any case, this raises interesting questions about how we think about class today. The older, more rigid categories – working class, middle class, upper class – do not quite capture the complexity of modern life. It's now quite possible, as in my case, to have relatively modest beginnings coupled with a lifetime's accumulation of cultural capital – which, arguably, is a measure of social progress and opportunity.

These reflections connect with our recent discussion on "pecking orders" and class at the Westcliff Hotel. Simon suggested that we tend to regard the class system as something inherently negative. And there is, of course, a long history of inequality, exclusion, and unfairness associated with it. But there's another side to the story. Social mobility – the ability to move between different social and cultural worlds – can be a positive good. In my own case, access to education has been transformative. It has opened up opportunities, shaped my interests, and enabled forms of participation that would not otherwise have been available. If I now find myself classified as "elite" it's not because I am "superior", but because I have, over time, accumulated different forms of capital that enhance human flourishing.

In fact, come to think of it, Dorset Humanists has played a key role in that accumulation of social and cultural capital – through conversation, shared experiences, wider networks, and engagement with ideas. So when people ask, as they sometimes do, what is the point of a humanist group, these reflections can provide part of the answer. It's always a work in progress, but a humanist group is a space, a community, that can help people connect, grow and flourish.