



Humanist Café

Can AI transform your life for the better?

Join us for coffee, cake, and conversation on
**Saturday 9th May 2.00pm Moordown Community
Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW**

AI is an astonishingly powerful new technology that is already transforming lives. It can rapidly improve your productivity, dramatically shorten the time spent on laborious tasks, create incredible images, and provide interactive companionship.

At the same time, we hear that AI can hallucinate, make mistakes, become an echo chamber, create 'deep fake' images and videos, and help scammers. There's even speculation that AI portends the end of life as we know it and even the end of the universe.

At Humanist Café this month, we're going to have some fun exploring these questions. We will hear inspiring accounts of how AI has been incredibly empowering and helpful. But we will also be mindful of the pitfalls of this powerful new technology. As always, we will steer a middle course of humanist wisdom through the hype and the doomerism.

Many thanks to Leo and Steve who helped David put this event together. Maya from Silicon Valley will be on hand to help via live audio link from San Francisco.

Tough on crime: is our current approach working?

**Humanist Forum led by Barry Newman: Thursday 28th May 7.30pm
Bournemouth West Cliff Hotel, 7 Durley Chine Rd, Bournemouth BH2 5JS. All welcome.**

Public debate in the UK often focuses on being "tough on crime", yet reoffending rates remain high and prisons overcrowded. This raises deeper questions about the purpose of justice. Should the priority be deterrence, public protection, rehabilitation, or some balance between them? What helps individuals and communities move forward after crime has occurred? Barry Newman will invite us to reflect on the aims of justice in contemporary Britain.

Doing Death Differently

Rethinking the End of Life



The Last Word BBC Radio 4 series ‘Doing Death Differently’ offers a thoughtful exploration of how attitudes to death and dying are changing in contemporary Britain. Broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and available on BBC Sounds.

Across five episodes, presenter Matthew Bannister (image on the right) examines how traditional models of funerals, mourning, and remembrance are being reshaped. There is growing interest in personalised funerals, environmentally conscious burials, and more open conversations about death itself. Rather than avoiding the subject, the series invites listeners to engage with it honestly and even creatively.

What emerges is a picture of a society gradually reclaiming death as a meaningful human experience rather than a purely medical or institutional process. Families, communities, and individuals are finding new ways to mark loss – often blending tradition with innovation.

For humanists and others interested in ethical living, the series resonates strongly. It suggests that how we approach death is inseparable from how we understand life: not as something defined by doctrine, but as something shaped by relationships, values, and the stories we choose to tell at the end.

From Simon Whipple: Those who took part in our two-part discussion on death and remembrance last autumn at Moordown Community Centre might be interested in listening to this series of 15 minute programmes.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002v9d9/episodes/player>

Dates for your diary

Thursday 7 th May 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Humanists in the pub. Informal pub social hosted by Dean or Lyn.
Saturday 9 th May 2.00pm	Moordown	Humanist Café: Living Well with AI. Facilitated discussion led by David and Maya from Silicon Valley
Friday 15 th May 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Hotel bar social. No set agenda. Come along for a friendly social.
Thursday 28 th May 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Humanist Forum at the Westcliff Hotel. Tough on crime: is our current approach working? Barry Newman leads.
Saturday 20 th June 2.00 pm	Moordown	Humanist Café: The Art and Skill of Good Conversation

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



Dancing Ledge Walk

Aaron led a spectacular Jurassic Coast walk on Sunday 3rd May from Swanage to Dancing Ledge and back. We encountered some delightful and rare species along the way, and Dave Elleman provided a running commentary on edible wild plants. A truly memorable day out with perfect weather.

Collage above: A group of male hominins: Aaron, Hugh, David, John H, Dave, Roger, John C. Photos on the left: A Rock Pipit joined us for a spot of lunch (photo by David); Wall Brown butterfly (photo by Aaron); Brown-tail moth caterpillar (photo by Aaron); Below: Herring gull (photo by David).





Photo by Aaron

Enoughness: how much is enough for a good life?

Twenty people attended our April 'Humanist Forum' at the Westcliff Hotel. The discussion, facilitated by Henri Ruff, explored the idea of "enoughness" — how much is enough for a good life?

Henri introduced the session by presenting a gallery of images contrasting lives of excess with more modest or restrained ways of living: luxury consumption, constant striving for improvement, and 'winners take all' economics set alongside ideas of moderation, equality, decluttering, and sufficiency.

Participants were then invited to divide into three groups. One group, 'Team Goldilocks', was asked to try to define what 'enoughness' might look like, feel like, and how it might be measured. A second group, 'Team Good Life', was given the brief that 'a striving society is an achieving society', that 'aiming for just enough is giving up a lot and difficult to achieve'. A third group, 'Team Moderation', was invited to advocate 'moderation in all things,' and to consider how such an approach might be presented or 'sold' as a way of living.

This structure led to lively discussion, but perhaps as much by resisting the set up as complying with it – humanists are difficult to pin down! For some, the 'Goldilocks Life', the 'Good Life', and the 'Life of Moderation' ultimately point in the same direction, rather than different ones. On the other hand, a society that settles for sufficiency might fail to innovate. It all depends on whether we're talking about individual lives or society as a whole.

For some, 'enoughness' seemed to refer primarily to personal life – having sufficient

resources, comfort, and security to live well, without being driven by constant acquisition. At the same time, this did not necessarily imply a lack of interest in wider progress. Many people who feel they have 'enough' in their own lives may still want to see improvements in areas such as healthcare, the environment, or social justice.

From this perspective, the apparent opposition between 'enoughness' and 'progress' may be overstated. The desire for personal sufficiency does not automatically entail resistance to collective improvement. Nor does striving for a better world necessarily require a commitment to excess in individual life.

As the group discussions unfolded, each perspective encountered its own kind of difficulty. 'Enoughness' proved relatively easy to describe in broad terms – contentment, security, fulfilment – but much harder to define or measure precisely. It became clear that what counts as 'enough' varies not only between individuals, but also across different areas of life, from basic needs to emotional wellbeing and personal aspiration.

The 'good life' perspective, meanwhile, often shifted away from defending excess as such, and instead emphasised the importance of progress – technological, social, and human. In doing so, it raised a valuable point: that much of what we value today has come about through a willingness to go beyond ►



what once seemed sufficient. At the same time, some participants questioned whether this amounted to a fair representation of ‘enoughness’, suggesting that contentment in one domain need not imply passivity in others.

The idea of moderation, while intuitively appealing, also proved difficult to articulate as a clear position. It was widely accepted in principle, yet harder to define in practice or to present as a compelling alternative. Some participants suggested that moderation is not easily ‘sold’ as an idea, particularly in a culture shaped by consumption and continual improvement. Others pointed out that it may be better understood not as a restriction, but as a different way of living – one that emphasises satisfaction, sustainability, and a release from the pressures of excess, sometimes described as a form of ‘alternative hedonism’.

The structure of the event – inviting different groups to define, defend, or ‘sell’ particular positions – may have encouraged a debating style, where the aim was to make a case rather than to explore ideas tentatively – the kind of engagement we’re trying to foster at Humanist Forum. Yet it also brought into focus the different ways in which ‘enoughness’ can be understood and the challenges involved in making sense of it.

The session also touched on several humanist

themes, including rational thinking, the importance of this one life, and the role of personal autonomy and responsibility. These principles suggest that questions of ‘enoughness’ are unlikely to have a single, universal answer. Instead, they invite individuals to reflect on their own circumstances and values.

In the end, the discussion revealed the complexity of a seemingly simple question. Rather than choosing between ‘just enough’, ‘the good life’, and ‘moderation’, it may be more fruitful to see them as complementary ideas, each illuminating a different aspect of how we live. How much of anything is enough for oneself and one’s family? And where does the desire for improvement still rightly apply?

Such questions don’t yield easy answers, but they are worth exploring. They invite us to reflect not only on how we live, but on how we might live well, both as individuals and as a species on a finite planet.

Further reading

- Henri Ruff, ‘Enoughness in an Age of Excess’ *Humanistically Speaking*, Spring 2026
- Kate Soper, *Post-Growth Living: For an Alternative Hedonism* (2020)
- Robert and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough? Money and the Good Life* (2012)

From bean to bar

The wonderful human story of chocolate

Thirty people indulged in the sensory delights of chocolate tasting at our Humanist Café event in April. This event was inspired by Leo Russell, one of our youngest members.



David surgically opened a real cocoa (or cacao) pod. Photo by Aaron.

The cocoa tree *Theobroma cacao* may translate as ‘food of the gods’ but it’s human beings who have transformed its bitter seeds into a delicious food enjoyed by billions of people.

Cocoa trees are about the size of a small orchard tree so quite modest in size. And the pods grow directly out of the trunk and main branches. They’re like rugby-ball-shaped fruits stuck onto the trunk.

The Aztec word “cacahuatl” became “cacao” in Spanish and then “cocoa” in English. And “xocoatl” originally meant “bitter water” but today our derivative word “chocolate” refers to a sweetened product, typically made into solid bars.

There’s strong archaeological evidence that cacao drinks go back at least 3½ thousand years – archaeologists have found chemical residues of cacao in pottery, specifically traces of theobromine (a chemical specific to cacao). The Aztecs are famous for drinking chocolate. The emperor Montezuma (who died in 1520) was a true chocoholic. He is said to have drunk 50 cups of cacao a day from a golden chalice to maintain his energy. But what the Aztecs were drinking wasn’t chocolate as we know it today. It was a bitter, spiced drink—quite different from the sweet versions we’re used to.



Eleanor and Duncan enjoying a chocolate sample. Photo by Aaron.

Spanish conquistadors discovered cacao in 1519 and brought it back to Spain. Initially it was used as a medicine and an aphrodisiac. No one at our humanist event confessed to having noticed this particular effect, despite having consumed chocolate on Valentine's Day.

Cacao spread across Europe and quite soon after its arrival people began experimenting by adding sugar, cinnamon and vanilla to the cacao.

Chocolate as we know it was invented by the English

So at this stage it was still a drink. Chocolate was first made into its familiar solid form in the 1840s by J. S. Fry & Sons in Bristol. So we can reasonably claim that chocolate as we know it today was invented by the English, and specifically by the Quakers. Quakers were excluded from universities such as Oxford and Cambridge and from many traditional professions, so they often turned to business and industry instead. (Same with Rowntree and Cadbury.)

Milk chocolate was developed in 1875 by a Swiss chocolatier called Daniel Peter working with Henri Nestlé who invented condensed milk. So milk chocolate is only about 150 years old. The Swiss and the Belgians became famous for refining chocolate, making it smoother, creamier, more luxurious.

Growing cacao

Growing cacao is quite difficult. The plants need warm temperatures, high humidity and conditions close to the equator. Cacao trees grow best in a band around the equator (the "cacao belt"), where it's warm and humid.

The largest producer in the world is Ivory Coast followed by Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon. Together, these West African countries produce about 60–70% of the world's cocoa. Then we have Ecuador, Brazil, Peru and Colombia in South America where cacao originally comes from. And finally we have Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia.

What's so special about 'single origin' chocolate?

Sometimes you see chocolate bars being sold as "single origin". Most commercial chocolate blends beans from different countries to create a consistent taste. Single origin chocolate is made from beans grown in one place, rather than being blended. This means you can start to taste differences between regions—as with wine or coffee. It turns chocolate from something uniform into something with character. Chocolate from Ecuador is described as floral, fruity or citrus. Chocolate from Madagascar may be described as bright and fruity with red wine notes. And chocolate from the Dominican Republic can be earthy or nutty or like dried fruit – more "chocolatey" in the classic sense.



Inside the pod there are seeds covered in a sweet white pulp. The seeds are fermented, dried, and roasted to become the beans which are then processed into chocolate. Photo by Aaron.

Is chocolate good for your health?

There's quite a lot of debate about this. On the one hand, you'll often hear chocolate described as a kind of health food. Cocoa butter is high in saturated fat, but one of its main components (stearic acid) ►

has a neutral effect on cholesterol (unlike, say, butter) so it's not quite as bad as people often assume. Cocoa butter is a mix of fats: stearic acid is neutral; palmitic acid raises LDL ("bad" cholesterol); and oleic acid is beneficial (like olive oil). These effects partly balance each other out.

A typical dark chocolate (70–85%) contains magnesium which supports muscles and nerves; copper which helps with energy production and iron metabolism; iron which helps oxygen transport in blood; manganese which helps metabolism and bone health; and zinc which supports immune function. It's also a source of polyphenols and flavonoid antioxidants, which improve cardiovascular health, enhance blood vessel elasticity, and support brain function (very good for humanists), and may also reduce inflammation. So it's quite nutrient-dense and not just empty calories. Chocolate also contains a stimulant called theobromine. Similar to caffeine but milder and longer lasting. It provides a boost to mood and alertness.

Studies have also suggested that melting chocolate in your mouth can create a greater mental high and heart rate increase than a passionate kiss. We did not test this theory during the event. Overall, chocolate is not exactly a health food but it's not entirely bad for you either. Best enjoyed in moderation.

The ethics of chocolate

Much of the world's cocoa is grown in West Africa, and over the years there have been serious concerns about child labour, low incomes for farmers and deforestation. There's nothing particularly wrong with palm oil nutritionally and it's very efficient to grow but it's controversial mainly because of how it's been produced—particularly its link to deforestation and habitat loss. Large areas of rainforest have been cleared which destroys habitats for our relatives the orangutans, and elephants. It's sometimes used in cheaper chocolate as a substitute for cocoa butter.

Chocolate is a source of polyphenols and flavonoid antioxidants which support brain function – excellent news for humanists

You may have seen labels such as Fairtrade or Rainforest Alliance on chocolate products. These schemes are important—and they have made a difference. But they're not a complete solution. Even organisations like Fairtrade acknowledge that issues such as child labour have not been fully eliminated, and monitoring large numbers of farms is a complex challenge. So the picture is a mixed one. There has been progress—but there is still work to do. One response has been the growth of smaller chocolate producers who focus on direct relationships with farmers – this is true of the Divine chocolate brand – the business is co-owned with Ghanaian farmers.

The five chocolate brands we tasted were:

1. Ombar vegan 'milk' chocolate; 55% cacao from Ecuador. Available from Waitrose Free From section. Melts in the mouth.
2. Waitrose Dark Chocolate; 75% cocoa from Madagascar. "Rich and vibrant, with red wine notes."
3. Waitrose Dark Chocolate; 90% cocoa from Ecuador. Too bitter for some.
4. Waitrose Dark Chocolate; 65% cocoa from Dominican Republic. "Delicately floral notes, chunks of zesty orange peel." Great taste!
5. Ombar White Chocolate; country of origin: Ecuador. 0% cocoa solids but made from cocoa butter and other ingredients.

We had other tasting challenges including 100% cocoa (Barry loved it); chili chocolate (Phil loved it); and cacao nibs. To round up, we had some singing challenges based on well known adverts for chocolate brands. Sharon Sheet gave a lovely rendition of the flake advert!



A point of view

David Warden

At our recent Humanist Forum led by Henri Ruff we explored the idea of ‘enoughness’. ‘What is enough?’ is not a new question. Philosophers have been grappling with it for millennia. Epicurus, for example, argued that a good life requires very little: basic needs fulfilled, freedom from anxiety, and above all, friendship. Beyond that, he warned, we tend to create desires that make us restless rather than fulfilled. Aristotle took a slightly different approach, suggesting that the good life lies not in having as little as possible, but in finding the right balance – the ‘mean’ – between excess and deficiency, guided by practical judgment rather than rules.

Religious traditions have also wrestled with these questions. Christian teachings sometimes push in a more radical direction, inviting followers to give away their possessions entirely, while in practice most traditions have settled somewhere closer to moderation, encouraging generosity alongside ordinary life. As Rehan observed on our discussion table, religion can offer clearer guidance on how to live within limits than contemporary secular culture. In our modern, largely secular context, the question of ‘enough’ is often left undefined and unexplored. We are encouraged to strive – to improve, to achieve, to accumulate. And for many people, especially when young, this is entirely appropriate and beneficial. Building a good life requires effort, some ambition, and a degree of striving – as well as good fortune.

The idea of ‘enoughness’ becomes tangible when we reflect on our own circumstances. In my own case, John and I own our home and we have more than enough income and material comfort. I have more books than I will ever read (not quite 40 million as Aaron claimed!) but I value the unread ones as a future possibility and the finished ones as reminders of intellectual adventures over a lifetime. In general, I’m not striving for more, not because I disdain material stuff but because, through good fortune, I have more than enough.

Others in our humanist community may be in very different situations. Some are managing on very low income while others are significantly wealthier than me. In such a context, ‘enoughness’ is not a single, universal threshold. It is shaped not only by personal choices, but by the conditions in which people find themselves.

What, then, might a humanist perspective offer? Perhaps not a fixed answer, but a way of thinking about the question. ‘Enough’ may not be one thing, but many: enough materially, enough emotionally, enough socially. It may also change over time. There may be stages of life in which striving is necessary and appropriate, and others in which the emphasis shifts towards rebalancing, relationships, and intense enjoyment of simple pleasures. For myself, I would like to spend more time playing the piano, getting my fitness back, and eating good food with good friends. In some areas of life, I feel a sense of sufficiency; in others, a sense of possibility. There’s also an awareness that time itself is running out, and that deciding what is ‘enough’ is also about deciding how to live in the years that remain.