



John Stuart Mill

## Limits to liberty: how much power should society have over us?

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> April ❖ 2.00pm Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW

A talk by Dr Peter Connolly. All welcome - free entry. A small donation of around £3.00 is appreciated but not obligatory. Browse our lending library and stay for coffee and discussion after the main event.

The University of Sussex was recently fined £585,000 by the Office for Students (the independent regulator of higher education in England) after an investigation found it had failed to uphold freedom of speech. This case highlights the fact that freedom of expression, as well as the freedom to live as we please, has become a fierce battleground in contemporary society. But the problem is not new. The influential philosopher and liberal MP John Stuart Mill dissected the dilemmas of free speech and freedom of living in his celebrated work *On Liberty* which was published in 1859 – the same year as Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Peter Connolly, a member of Dorset Humanists, will explain how Mill's arguments remain highly relevant today. Peter Connolly was senior lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Chichester where he taught courses on Ethics, Indian Religion and Psychology of Religion. He has also worked as an associate lecturer in both Psychology and Religious Studies with the Open University.

## New chatroom launched!

If you want to chat online to other humanists go to <https://talk.dorsethumanists.org/> and follow the joining instructions including the REGISTER link. See you there!





## A talk by Winston Smith

**Wednesday 23rd April ❖ 7.30pm Westcliff Hotel, 7 Durley Chine Rd, BH2 5JS. Free entry. Small donation of around £3.00 appreciated. Chat in the hotel bar afterwards.**

In an age dominated by tech giants, are we witnessing the rise of ‘techno feudalism’? As corporations amass unprecedented power—tracking our every move, shaping public discourse, and profiting from our data—is human flourishing for the majority increasingly at risk? Governments seem unable to regulate these behemoths, leaving the public dependent upon a few corporate overlords for work, communication, and essential services. Are we becoming serfs under a system of total control? Join us for a compelling analysis of this new world order and what can be done about it. Winston Smith is a popular speaker and he will give us an informative and enlightening talk on this topic. Winston Smith (not our speaker's real name) is the main character in George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*.

## Dates for your diary

Saturday 12 <sup>th</sup> April 2.00pm	Moordown	“Limits to Liberty” A talk by Dr Peter Connolly on John Stuart Mill
Friday 18 <sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel, Durley Chine Rd	Humanists in the Hotel Bar – informal social event. Just turn up.
Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> April 10.15am	Beach walk from Durley Chine	Bournemouth Beach Walk, approximately 4.5 miles, medium difficulty including some cliff inclines
Wednesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> April 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel, Durley Chine Rd	Techno Feudalism – a talk by Winston Smith
Thursday 1 <sup>st</sup> May 7.30pm	Wetherspoons	Friendly pub social

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

# Members' Lunch and AGM photo report

*Around forty people attended our popular members' lunch and AGM. A fantastic spread of baguettes and cakes was prepared by our volunteers Aaron, Karen, Chris Smith, Cathy Silman, and John Hubbard. All photos by Aaron Darkwood.*

## Humanists of the Year

Every year at the AGM, David Warden recognises members who have made an outstanding contribution to the success of our group. This year, he was very pleased to give a joint award to Roger Mann and Steve Neel who turn up early before every event to help with all the practical set-up arrangements. Roger and Steve are also members of our committee.



Roger Mann, Steve Neel, David Warden



## Financial affairs

Our treasurer Daniel Dancey presented the 2024 accounts showing that we have a healthy bank balance of £7729. During the year we raised £1846 for our Annual Appeal. This will be distributed to our chosen charities Hope for Food foodbank and Uganda Humanist Schools Trust.



Lemon drizzle cake proved especially popular

## Chairman's address

David Warden paid tribute to Angela Bowden, one of our longstanding and loyal members who died in December just short of her 98<sup>th</sup> birthday.

He then posed a big question for humanists to contemplate: Is humanity flourishing or floundering? He said 'We've created a world of inequality, insecurity and existential fears about the future. Harold Macmillan, prime minister when I was born, said "You've never had it so good" and this probably applies to the boomer generation – most of us in here. But things are not looking so good for the zoomer generation. Existential fears about climate change and artificial intelligence have created an atmosphere of pervasive generational angst. This would be bad enough on its own, but young people are often engaged in a grinding struggle to pay the rent with little prospect of buying a home and starting a family, and a vanishing prospect of retirement on a comfortable pension. Our societal troubles didn't start with the election of Donald Trump. We've been building our 'Brave New World' for decades. The housing problem for example goes back to Acts of Parliament in 1961 and even 1947. In many respects, the election of Trump is a response to the sheer despair felt by millions of people across America and more widely across Europe and other countries. He's a symptom or a reaction, not the cause. So where does humanism come into this? Has humanism been asleep at the wheel? Maybe it has.'

David then gave a preview of the last session of our *Quest* series of discussions focussing on a number of questions including "What's a humanist group for?" and "Who is it for?". He highlighted Humanists UK's claim that there are approximately 3.4 million people in the UK who actually identify as humanists but that only a tiny fraction of them actually join humanist groups or even Humanists UK.



**Vice Chair Lyn Glass giving our photographer a scary look**

David asked 'What are the implications of this?'. He said that 'If identifying as a humanist means shaping your life in accordance with a common set of humanist values, aiming to live a good life for the common good, this suggests to me a collective effort or endeavour, not one which can easily or most effectively be done in isolation from others who identify as humanists. Just think what a difference 3.4 million humanists could make to the quality of our national conversation if we actually got our act together.'

Dorset Humanists is doing well with 190 paid-up members but we can never afford to be complacent. David hopes that everyone in Dorset Humanists will continue to think about how we can make Dorset Humanists even better, attracting many more people to our activities and events.

***"Keep up the good work all of you – it is so much appreciated."***  
**Anon (2024 survey)**



Robert Magara

# Why I was inspired to set up a humanist school in Uganda

## Chris Smith shares Robert Magara's graphic account of what inspired him to set up a humanist school

Chris writes: At Dorset Humanists AGM in March I spoke briefly about the Uganda Humanist Schools, making the point that they are all started by Ugandan Humanists – we're not missionaries! Driving home, I regretted not mentioning at least one of the reasons these particular Ugandans had moved to Humanism and were then motivated to spread humanist ideas through education. Robert Magara's is the most graphic and compelling reason:

It's now 25 years since the infamous Kanungu massacre on March 17, 2000 – a day that will remain etched into Kanungu's history for wrong and sad reasons.

An estimated 338 members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God died in our community near Kanungu Humanist primary school, in what appeared to be a mass suicide. Within a few days, additional bodies were recovered beyond the site where the explosion occurred bringing the count to nearly 800 persons. We never know the full details of what happened.

I was 19 years old, in senior three. I was a day student from my parents' home to school for five years. The members of the Movement wore black, green and white. Many of their rituals were Roman Catholic. The defining difference was the Movement's emphasis on moral standards dictated by the ten commandments by the group. The members lived an austere monastic life.

Leaders of the cult made members work like animals, starved them and made them sell all their belongings in anticipation of doomsday

and 'going to heaven'. It's difficult to figure out the full doctrine of the Movement because they lived a secluded existence characterized by secrecy. A lot was communicated by sign language. Cults thrive on spiritual hunger, offering hope to the desperate, but in the end taking lives.

I believe it is time for change. Education should reflect the diversity of modern society allowing children to explore a range of religious and non-religious worldviews and decide for themselves.

**Chris Smith is member of Dorset Humanists and a trustee of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust.**

**You can donate to the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust, either directly or through Dorset Humanists Annual Appeal. For the purposes of our Appeal, if you specify Uganda Schools only, your donation will be earmarked accordingly. Otherwise, your donation would be split 50/50 between humanists schools and a local foodbank.**

**Contact David for further details 07910 886629**



### Motcombe Primary School

One of the main aims of Dorset Humanists is to inform and educate pupils and students in school about humanism as the principal non-religious worldview. This is usually done within the religious education curriculum – although schools are increasingly calling the subject by other names such as “religions and worldviews”. In 2024/25 our team of four visitors spoke to at least 4,000 children locally and it looks as though we’ll exceed that score in 2025/26.

Dorset Humanists has been working away at this project for the past 20 years and our efforts are paying increasing dividends. For example, Cathy Silman and David Warden were recently invited by a Church of England primary school in Motcombe near Shaftesbury to contribute to their “humanism day” – an entire day focused on humanism for the whole school. This would have been unthinkable years ago! Teachers at the school explain that, nowadays, many children come from non-religious families and it’s really important for their backgrounds to be acknowledged and validated.

Cathy suggested a theme for the day based around the importance of questioning. David took a telescope into the school as a prop and spoke to nine-year-olds about how Copernicus and Galileo challenged the ‘Earth at the centre’ theory of the time and how Galileo got into trouble with the Church. The main message was the importance of

## The joys and challenges of teaching kids about humanism in Dorset

“Our goal is total conquest!”  
*Barry Newman quote*

questioning accepted ideas and how science progresses by people having the courage to do this. The children helped him demonstrate the heliocentric theory with a bright yellow melon and knitted planets. Cathy led lessons for the younger children based on Ben Faulks’ children’s book *What Makes Me a Me?*

“Maybe I am a humanist.”  
Student comment on a feedback form at Ferndown Upper School

Barry Newman has recently been contacted by a primary head teacher who is Leader for Church Schools’ Flourishing for Coastal Learning Partnership Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) comprising 14 local primaries. He has been invited to address a conference of MAT teachers on humanism in May which is a great opportunity. Barry often goes into schools with evangelical Christian Dave Pegg to do a joint lesson on Christianity and Humanism.

David often goes into schools with the Many Faiths Team with representatives from Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. They recently spoke to 500 students at Ferndown Upper School.

**Dorset Humanists School Visiting Team is Barry Newman, Cathy Silman, David Rees and David Warden. Please have a word with us if you have time, aptitude and enthusiasm to join our team.**



# A point of view

## David Warden

Have globalisation and free trade been good for human flourishing? In some respects, yes. If we can buy cheap goods that are made in China this will help to improve our standard of living. It also helps to lift millions of Chinese workers out of poverty. But the 'offshoring' of manufacturing to China, India and other developing countries has had devastating economic and social effects in the old industrial nations such as the US and the UK. It's also contributed to persistent trade deficits, ballooning debt, and concerns about national security. The trade deficit is one of those nerdy economics concepts but not too difficult to grasp. In brief, if we import more than we export, that trade gap has to be financed through such means as foreign investment in UK industry, borrowing from overseas investors, and selling off national assets. It's a complicated picture but centre-left parties, including Labour and the Social Democratic Party, are in favour of some degree of re-industrialisation to improve our ability to export and to create good jobs for workers in the UK. In some quarters there's also a recognition that if, for example, we stop making basic commodities such as steel we might not be able to manufacture the arms we need in the event of war. Globalisation has also entailed importing cheap foreign labour, a further impact on existing working people in the UK not only in terms of well-paid jobs but also the availability of housing.

Humanists tend to be ambivalent about these complex issues. On the one hand, humanists are in favour of liberalism, global co-operation, and free movement of people. But so are rapacious global corporations. Globalisation has meant free movement of capital, jobs and labour, and global finance is unsentimental about winners and losers. It's also unsentimental about the continued existence of nation states. For all it cares, they can be broken up and sold off. For some, there's a belief that all cultures and societies are equal and that people from different cultures and societies can move wherever they like without any negative consequences for social trust and social order.

The order I have just described is sometimes called Blairism. Tony Blair remains unapologetic about globalisation and maintains that it is a force of nature rather than a policy choice. That belief is now being tested to destruction. Some political pundits and commentators are saying that Trump's tariff revolution marks the end of this system of globalisation and that it's motivated by the desire to reindustrialise the US and reinstate the integrity of nations and citizenship. Many humanists have a deep-seated belief in universalism and would like the whole world to be unified, free, equal and protected from democratic outcomes they dislike. But for some time I have thought that universalism is naïve and highly destructive. An alternative view is that democracy, law and order, social trust and prosperity have been patiently built over centuries in specific cultures and countries and that they can be destroyed in a generation by misplaced utopianism.

- ▶ Let's continue this discussion in our new chatroom <https://talk.dorsethumanists.org/>
- ▶ Do you have a humanist point of view? Email [chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk](mailto:chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk)