

## Sunday afternoon music

When Roy Plomley devised Desert Island Discs in 1942, you'd have needed eight shellac gramophone records and a wind-up gramophone to play them on your imaginary island. It would be much easier to have your music library with you now, with a solar battery charger and an iPod. While we're temporarily stranded in Hadleigh Library on Sunday 27th October from 2-5pm, we'll entertain ourselves with a selection of your desert island discs on CDs. The idea is that they should be tracks that have special significance for you, perhaps because they remind you of someone or something important, but if they're just special favourites that make you feel good when you listen to them, that's fine. Bring at least one, but there'll probably be time to play more than one, depending on how many people turn up.

*"The English may not like music, but they absolutely love the noise it makes."*

— Sir Thomas Beecham.

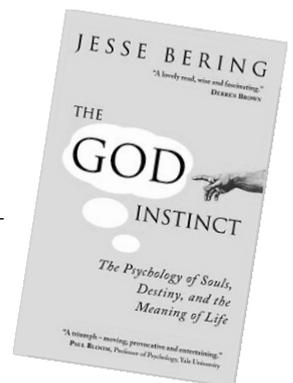
*"Music can be made anywhere, is invisible and doesn't smell."*

— W H Auden.

## Book Review—The God Instinct

Jesse Bering began his career in psychology as a professor at the University of Arkansas and is the former director of the Institute of Cognition and Culture at Queen's University Belfast. According to his own short biography notes he is notable for his frank and humorous handling of controversial issues – sex, evolution (what's controversial about that?), religion and morality. In 'The God Instinct: The Psychology of Souls, Destiny and the Meaning of Life' he explores the reasons why belief in one religion or another is so pervasive in human societies. He approaches the subject rationally and objectively. His stated viewpoint was summarised in The Guardian on the book's launch in 2011:

*"As a psychologist, the focus of my work has been on people's reasoning about such things as God, the afterlife, and destiny. I am not a philosopher or a theologian, so I have not considered the actual, outside-the-head existence of these things. Not only do I find the latter ontological question rather dull, but I also start with the assumption – because there is simply no good scientific reason to assume otherwise – that these things do not exist. In my view, atheism is an essential starting point for the psychological scientist, because it enables us to examine the more intriguing and, more importantly, empirical question of why the human mind is so easily seduced by a ubiquitous set of unnecessarily complex claims."*



From this starting point he explores the gamut of religious beliefs – in afterlife and immortality of the soul, the purposefulness of life, the paradoxes of belief in an all-powerful God and the existence of misfortune and evil, and, above all, whether God is an 'adaptive illusion' – that is, whether religious beliefs have conferred evolutionary advantages. In this last question – is religion an evolutionary adaptation with survival advantages - he comes to an interesting conclusion, based on what he calls the evolved 'theory of mind'. By this he means not only the fact that humans are highly conscious, but that they are acutely aware of the consciousness of fellow humans, and the

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Jesse Bering

## SUFFOLK HUMANISTS & SECULARISTS

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We meet in the lounge at Pinewood Hall, Ipswich, in the seminar room at Hadleigh Library, and at the Duke of York in Woodbridge. See meeting details. Lifts can sometimes be arranged—let us know if you can offer one. Guests are welcome. Please get in touch if you need directions.

Our group was founded in 1991. We're affiliated to The British Humanist Association, The National Secular Society, and Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE). The group is a member of SAVO—the Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations.



Sympathetic non-members are welcome, but by joining us you'll help us to raise awareness of Humanism and Secularism, and to challenge the increasing influence of religion in public life, the arts and the media.

If you're wondering what's happened to our website, it's being moved to a new content management system, which takes time, especially when our webmaster is busy! When it's completed, it should be easier for you to make contributions or add comments. Meanwhile, it's ticking over. We're still active on Facebook and Twitter (see below).

If you have any experience of desktop publishing and would be willing to edit one or more newsletters a year, **please** get in touch.

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importance of peer approval. Theory of mind also drives us to find or derive meaning from our sometimes random and dangerous environment. In this, he is not alone in pointing to the common drives perhaps underlying science and religion. However he also points to the social, behavioural and adaptive advantages that humans may have derived from 'the basic illusion of God ... "wilfully" "creating us as individuals, "wanting" us to behave in particular ways, "observing" and "knowing" about our otherwise private actions...and "intending" to meet us after we die.'

In summary – I found this an interesting (though not riveting) read. Appropriately it does not contain any blinding revelations, but is worth at least skimming for those puzzled or curious about the ubiquity of religious belief.

*John Mellis*

## Dates for your diary...

**Sunday 27th October—Desert Island Discs upstairs at Hadleigh Library—see page 1.**

**Noon on Saturday 30th November—Pub lunch at The Duke of York, Woodbridge.** The Duke of York, formerly The Seal, is on the corner of Ipswich Road and Old Barrack Road, Woodbridge. Parking at rear. Please let Denis know if you plan to come in plenty of time (see contact details above), so he can book a table.

**7.30pm on Tuesday 10th December in the lounge at Pinewood Hall, Ipswich—Adventure in Bhutan.**

Our secretary Denis Johnston has been visiting his son in Bhutan, and will have some traveller's tales. He's emailed, "I have never known such friendly people. We get dragged into village houses and treated as if we were royalty. Our son is known everywhere as the 'lopen chillup' (foreign teacher) and even forty miles away they recognise us."

Note: the October pub lunch is cancelled.

Why not join in the conversations on our website (URL below), on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/suffolkhands](http://www.facebook.com/suffolkhands)) or Twitter (@suffolkhands)?

Humanism is an ethical approach to life without religion; humanists think *we* can be good without God. Secularism is the belief that religion should have no place in civil affairs; that the church and state should be kept separate.

[www.agoodlifewithoutreligion.com](http://www.agoodlifewithoutreligion.com)

[www.suffolkhands.org.uk](http://www.suffolkhands.org.uk)