



V *HUMANIST* Viewpoints



Can Science-Fiction teach us Humanist Ethics?

HUVAT

Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talk 4pm
2nd Sunday each month.

- Oct 14** - **John August** "Biological Origins of Life"
Nov 11 - **David Polson** "HIV is not a death sentence"
Dec 9 - **George Eynon** "End of Year Celebration"

Opportunity to socialise over light refreshments.

Also in this issue...

- Debate of Society's Future
- Islam & Free Speech

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Honorary Secretary Comments



The AGM was held on Sunday 9th September at 2pm and it was a peaceful and dignified event. Cameron Shraner served as the returning officer. The HumSocNSW committee was re-elected with the same office bearers following a majority vote.

We thank you for your proxies and support. Peter Young was voted a Life Member for his outstanding contribution to HumSocNSW.

It was resolved by the meeting that no member was permitted to use Humanist House inside or outside for media interviews giving the impression they were spokespersons for HumSocNSW as the President was our official spokesperson or whoever he chose to delegate. After the business of the meeting we settled into a pleasant much deserved peaceful supper with our many supporters.

HuVAT AUGUST: Col Valery Yaryanich (ret) formerly of the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces – topic: “de-alerting and abolition of nuclear weapon systems.” We had a full house with a captive audience with this speaker and we have filmed this event. I am planning to hold a viewing in the New Year for those who missed this talk or who wish to see it again as it was a most informative event.



To summarise Col Valery’s talk...

- the main aim of his visit was to force authorities to openly explore this serious issue
- 25 countries have the possibility for nuclear weapons
- that problems can be resolved by quantitative studies without secrets
- how serious the Cuban Crisis had been.

Col. Valery joined us for supper where he continued the conversation with members.

UNAANSW WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY:

Prof. Shirley Randell spoke on the “Role of Women in Post conflict Reconstruction with special Reference to Rwanda.” As Director of the Centre for Gender, Culture and Development Studies at the Kigali Institute for Education, Rwanda, she spoke with passion and knowledge and made a major impact. Her presentation was universally well received. As the Professor will not be in Australia for the IWD I invited Nadine Shema, the Rwandan woman in this photo who is part of a group of indigenous women beginning a new organisation. Nadine has agreed to participate with her group in the UNAANSW International Women’s Day on 8th March next year of which I am Convenor and HumSocNSW is a Sponsor as I am its delegate for UNAANSW.



ANOTHER DENNIS MORRIS AFRICAN CD

You Can't Stop the Revolution

I have listened to this beautiful chanting and humming by singers in this Dennis Morris production which was performed in 1988 when Nelson Mandela was in prison for 25 years; he was to stay another 2 years before being released. Song nos 2, 9, and 13B are now a part of the South African national anthem. All as amazing as his “*Love is Born*” CD. Please remember this is totally for fundraising so buy them.

END OF YEAR CELEBRATION

SUNDAY 9 DECEMBER 2012

2pm

I once saw New Zealander George Eynon (pictured below) perform and his smooth voice mesmerised me. So I booked him for our End of Year Celebration Party. You will love his singing too. Come join us and have fun, lovely food, good company and amazing entertainment. BYO drink.



President's Report

John August



On Islam & Free Speech

There's been a lot of interest prompted around Islam in the past weeks, focused around a puerile video produced in the US. We've all had a chance to think about Islam over the last few years, and here's my reflections on the current controversy.

Islam is different things around the globe. In Iran, women must wear the veil; their protests have been violently suppressed by religious police. Ayan Hirsi Ali has quite a story to tell about Genital Mutilation and the dark side of Islam. In other nations, violence against women is justified through Islam. In the UK, threats of violence have meant debates were abandoned.

In contrast, in Australia converts to Islam see it as a path to personal contentment, and many community-minded Muslims lead positive lives.

However, some Australian Muslims justify offensive behaviour using Islam. Quite apart from violent protests over the video, at the recent Global Atheists Convention in Melbourne, Muslim protesters held signs saying Ayan Hirsi Ali should burn in hell, and in Sydney debaters have been intimidated by Muslims.

Whether local or international, this behaviour is justified through Islam by those committing it. Other Muslims outside those groups say it is cultural, not endorsed by the Koran. Others claim Islam is compatible with Human Rights, and community Muslim leaders have condemned the violent protests. Leaders have also distanced themselves from Sheik Al-Hilaly's provocative comments, comparing women to uncovered meat.

Islam is a diversity, more so than Christianity. Individual Imams in particular Mosques can make their own statements, but it does not mean those statements are "owned" by all Muslims. A priest in a Catholic Church may make some comments, for example, about the nature of news and how we

relate to it, but we'd not normally see that as being "the voice of the Church". Of course, if he spoke about something central to doctrine, we might see it differently. Further, different denominations have different views on Christianity. But somehow this diversity within Islam is a struggle to understand.

In spite its diversity, all Muslims pray towards Mecca, providing them with something in common. Within Catholicism, for all their differences, Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits all look towards the Pope.

As Humanists, we challenge the worth and privilege of all religions. I see much criticism of Islam while the privileges and influence of Christianity are ignored.

There's a lot of violence and contradiction in the Bible. Nevertheless, as a lived and personal non-fundamentalist experience, Christians can live worthwhile lives. It's good to see some Christians challenge the Australian Christian Lobby, and good to see Christians who support progressive policies such as Voluntary Euthanasia.

While the Koran has its problems, it can likewise inform a worthwhile and positive lived experience. However, we should take it no more seriously, and give it no more privilege, than any other religion.

Hate speech is a concern, but we must scorn Blasphemy laws. One thing that became clear reading Hanifa Deen's "The Jihad Seminar" was how Muslims do not see the distinction. Within the UN, we've seen a resistance by Islamic States to grant Human Rights precedence over Sharia Law - though some commentators do try to emphasise their compatibility.

Victor Bien sees that Christianity has been through the Enlightenment, which has served as a moderating force, something Islam has not experienced, not to mention the colonialism it also experienced, which can't have helped. Still, as noted in a previous AH, Averroes was an Islamic scholar who was an important Enlightenment figure.

Further, no faith, including Islam, has a monopoly on regressive values. The ultra-right in Australia promote racism, something other Australians find offensive.

I see that there are a lot of permutations at work here. A lot of media commentary focuses on one aspect and refuses to acknowledge all the factors at work. I think it is important to take it all in.

AGM

We recently had our AGM, with office bearer positions being filled unopposed, and elections for a committee which has the same makeup as last year. I thank the members for their support, and look forward to promoting humanism.

I recently attended the "Overcoming Christianity" workshop as both a speaker and audience member. It was a vibrant initiative, congratulations to Murray Love for putting it together.

Same-Sex Marriage

I'll make some comments on same sex marriage. For me, the crucial thing about marriage is the idea of the "one other, to the exclusion of others". To me, the sex of the other is incidental to the nature of an exclusive relationship. So, I don't see changing the nature of marriage to avoid mention of sex as undermining what marriage is, because for me that "exclusivity" is the important part of marriage, the part we are acknowledging.

Some talk about the historical meaning of words, but as I recall being pointed out on Q&A on ABC TV - this begs the question of why gays and lesbians have no equal stake in our language, that a particular group, informed by their prudishness, have the monopoly to decide what words mean?

So long as "marriage" is an affair of the state, this all makes sense to me. If the state **only** dealt in "unions", and marriages were exclusively the domain of the churches, well then I'd be happy for marriages to be whatever the different churches deem it to be.

In spite of strong support in the community, outcomes are not reflected in the legislature. That's a problem with our current democracy, and we need to not only be disappointed by this outcome - we need to hold democracy itself accountable.

Nuclear Disarmament

We recently had Colonel (ret'd) Valery from Moscow speak at Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talk. He had some media coverage while here, and it was gratifying to have a vibrant talk. He was advocating for de-escalation of the nuclear situation, taking missiles off "launch-on-warning" status.

He told us that the USSR was not planning to actually retaliate with a nuclear strike, while it may have been fond of "sabre rattling"; that command of the Cuba arsenal was completely delegated to local command (they could have been launched if the commander had flipped); that there was an alternative launch command if Moscow had been wiped out (this was incorrectly reported in the media as an "automated" system - in fact, there was still a human command - but they were given control in an "automated" way.)

Recently Ian Bryce has given speeches to schools, and is also pursuing the possibility of ethics education for schools under the Humanists umbrella.

Humanist Film Festival 2013

Member Paul Zagoridis is planning to run a Humanist film festival in 2013, and we're planning to have some Humanist film screenings soon, with a few details to be sorted out. Anyone interested should contact me or Paul paulz@zagz.com.

I've been doing some radio work on Radio Skid Row's morning program in Marrickville Sydney, and have compiled a CDROM of this work, along with other material, such as a Sydney Shove talk by Nicholas Cowdery on Voluntary Euthanasia. This is available for \$10 at meetings or \$12 including postage - contact me via john.august@optusnet.com.au

Subscriptions are due by the 1st of July every year as follows:

Single \$35, Double \$45, Concession \$20, Viewpoints only \$20

Please send cheque to Humanist Society of NSW, 10 Shepherd St, Chippendale NSW 2008

A Vulcan Meditation:

On Humanist Ethics and Syncretism

by Frank Gomez



Science Fiction and Fantasy (SFF) as a genre has often proved a fertile ground for writers to both comment on the religious mores of a society of the time, as well as speculate about alternative, or future ethical and religious belief systems.

The current season of *True Blood*, for example, has vampires engaged in an internal battle between religious moderation and fundamentalism, and is a good example of the genre's ability to reflect back what is happening in contemporary society.

Other examples, such as *Battlestar Galactica's* TV reboot, and *Babylon 5*, fall into the more speculative quarter. They reflect the idea that even in a very technologically and scientifically advanced future that humans and other intelligent beings will still be engaged with religious ideas.

Many of these fictions reflect existing belief systems, albeit with a twist, that can be attractive to individuals seeking inspiration away from traditional religions and stone-age (as well as stone-carved) moral rules.

The most widely known fictional religion would be the Jedi belief in the *Star Wars* films that has spawned a phenomenon where some individuals claim to be Jedi on census forms when asked about their religious affiliation. Many respondents are no doubt being irreverent, though there are some, like a Sydney group who meet regularly, who take Jedi ideals more seriously, often synthesising them into Asian based martial arts studies. These individuals are often seeking connection to others while creating a mode of thought and action that mirrors and reinforces pre-existing ideas about how to live. This could be an example of individuals choosing, by way of syncretism, belief systems that resonate with their own established, inner code.

These real-life neo-Jedis are drawn perhaps to the source narrative's core beliefs about self-reflection and choosing good over evil rather than any literal belief in the supernatural elements in the films, often displayed by manipulating "The Force" and performing feats of telekinesis and levitation. Many adherents have rejected formal religious traditions and institutions, and this may qualify their beliefs and practices as an example of a humanistic belief system.

Do Androids pray to electric Gods?

One of the great SFF writers, Asimov, constructed iconic rules for robot behaviour, that could be argued, operate as a type of proto-morality. These laws, initially three, are:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

Asimov's stories often explored how these elegantly simple rules increasingly failed to deal with complex real-life situations and often produced head-aching ethical dilemmas. Though, by definition robotic laws may not appear to be useful to humans, they reflect the difficulty of making moral rules work in practice.

Vulcan History

Mr Spock is one of the most popular characters in SFF; a half-human, half-vulcan officer of the multi-planetary and very secular Starfleet in the Star Trek TV and film series. Spock's own hybrid parentage embodies the conflict between the rational Vulcan mindset and Humanity's emotive passions. Vulcans generally are not lacking in emotion, rather they are governed by a system of beliefs that suppress emotion, particularly when it interferes with logical thought and action. However it is the canonical back-story to why they suppress emotion that is interesting.

Around 2,000 years before the era represented by Spock's character, Vulcans were similar to humans: engaged in escalating warfare that eventually led to a nuclear holocaust that almost obliterated their home planet. Around this time, a philosopher called Surak (pictured above) begins to preach a system of ethics that stresses logic and rationality above emotion. The nuclear war becomes an example of emotion run riot, expressed through tribalism, rivalry, nationalism and aggressiveness. Therefore only the containment of emotion could prevent such a repeat of this destruction.

The parallels between humanity's past, present and possible future and the fictional earlier Vulcans are striking. In spite of human technological advancement the Earth faces environmental catastrophe via global warming and habitat destruction, the rise of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Large tracts of humanity live in poverty or in countries that systematically abuse or fail to protect fundamental human rights.



The rise of messianic and prophetic religious memes, such as Jesus, Mohamed et al, have failed to mitigate humanity's more destructive processes, and in some cases the religions they inspired are making the situation worse through their calls to stone-age morals. These figures, historical or otherwise, claim something divine, yet the fictional character of Surak only argued on logic. He was a thinker, not a priest or charlatan with a bag of tricks, yet he inspired a planetary movement that gave Vulcan hundreds of years of peace.

The writings of Surak of course do not exist beyond fragments of designed "alien" writing props used in some episodes of the TV series. But what is interesting is that a number of websites have sprung up offering interesting views of what Surak's writing may have been had they really existed.

One of them offers "The Logic of Surak" at www.surak.org and in the section on the existence of a Creator, the surmised logic of Surak leads that writer to the conclusion that one cannot prove or disprove the existence of a god or gods. In other words, agnosticism is the only logical outcome. This view corresponds with many humanists who argue that no religion can prove it is the one and only true creed, and that science cannot currently provide definitive answers about purpose or the creation of matter and energy. Further pages are devoted to the use of logic in the application of law and universal rights with a humanistic touch.

Other sites, such as "Path of Surak" offer interesting, if nebulous ideas about Vulcan philosophy and how they intersect with Zen Buddhism. Sayings attributed to Vulcan characters in the TV series, mostly Mr Spock, are listed, as are some sayings from early books of the Old Testament that echo similar sentiments. A section is titled "Humanistic Principles" and mentions Kurtz's Humanist Manifestos I and II while reflecting on Spock's own half human half Vulcan nature to surmise that "reason should be balanced with compassion and the whole person fulfilled."

Some Star Trek fans have adopted Surak-inspired personal philosophies and founded similarly inspired rationalist charitable organisations.

These reconstructions of Vulcan philosophy (I call them neo-vulcanism) reflect very human ideas about a secular system of ethics, often drawing from humanistic philosophies and the non-theistic religions, as well as the self-awareness and emotional control found in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and other disciplines.

A Humanist Religion?

Alain De Botton recently argued that modern, secular societies are at risk of losing the positive ritual, self-reflection and community minded aspects that traditional religions provide. Can SFF provide us with ideas on how to recreate humanistic rituals and traditions, using a synthesis of ideas taken from fiction and actual philosophy and psychology? It is an interesting idea that spurred me to consider what a meditational ritual for a non-religious person like me could look like. I envisioned a Buddhist rostrum, a Vulcan figurine, a brass oil lamp and arranging texts such as Grayling's "secular bible" where an individual could reflect and practice some mindfulness and recite "The Meditation of Reason":



In Reality's denial was I blind -- by Reality's Acceptance do I see.
In Assumption's acceptance was I bowed -- by Assumption's Denial do I stand.
In Emotion's surrender did I stampede -- by Emotion's Mastery do I stride.
By these three do I drink from the depths, tread beyond the horizon, and reach for the
zenith of the World.

Recitation courtesy the Circle of Reason. <http://www.circleofreason.org/>

It is probably wishful thinking on my part, that one day, a human "Surak" will rise and lead humanity to a more enlightened future. When we look at the "religious freedom" that we witnessed a few weeks back in Sydney and the ongoing violence and human rights abuses around the world fuelled by ignorance of pathological proportions, the need to develop a cult of reason and logic needs to become an urgent project to save the future.

Sources not mentioned in the article:

www.3s.amazonaws/spacenookie/PathOfSurak.pdf

Religion for Atheists, Alain De Botton (2011)



The Unicon Freecon October 26, 27 and 28, 2012 At the University of Technology Broadway

The 2012 Unicon Freecon is a Free Entry Science Fiction and Fantasy event which will feature several local SF&F Writers and a number of panel discussions on topics of interest to SF&F Readers, Sci-Fi viewers, Published and Emerging SF&F Writers.

It also features an audience judged Short Story Writing competition.

It will take place in room CB06.06.103, building Six of the University of Technology Sydney. This event is open to all who enjoy the ideas found in Science Fiction, UTS Students and staff are particularly welcome to take part. Getting in touch now to book a seat is strongly recommended.

For final program details contact Garry at Sydfreeconcom@gmail.com This event is sponsored by the UTS Atheists and supported by the Friday Night Sydney Futurians.

Membership and the Future of the Society

Part I

Firstly, one view from Victor Bien

As we don't need to be reminded, the take-over attempt in 2009, which came within an ace of succeeding, was something which was possible because our membership is aging and falling. Like many other associations which have a democratic structure and own a valuable asset it is a tempting take-over target. One person whom I was talking to after the AGM meeting mentioned that basketball associations have similar difficulties, where there are risks of non-genuine members conspiring to take-over the club for interests that have nothing to do with basketball. So while basketball and the Humanist Society are vastly different interests, a common theme is ownership of a valuable asset which attracts undesirable interest thus prompting the need to consider legal structures to minimise risks of take-over.

Sure it takes malicious people to stage a take-over attempt but we need to recognise the underlying risk or cause of take-over attempts (there was another less determined attempt a couple of years earlier) is our small numbers. 30–40 years ago the Society had over 1,000 members. With that many members take-over merchants have a much harder, if not impossible, task of mustering sufficient numbers to cross over certain voting requirements. The smaller our membership the more prone or higher the risk of take-over we face. This membership numbers issue is what this article focusses on.

There are various strategies we could adopt to minimise such risk but I am not going into these much for the present. I will leave it to others to contribute to this discussion or debate about options. I certainly urge you members putting your thinking caps on and contributing to this debate. While take-over attempts are a risk there is another risk which is equally unpalatable and that is a gradual slide to very small numbers and virtual irrelevancy like the Rationalists have suffered from their heyday in the 30s and 40s. In recent years the South Australian Humanists had to close their association but after a few years they have resurrected themselves.

I have been thinking reallocating the assets to a university foundation, which is a big subject which I cannot go into much detail here, although I did mention it at the recent meeting adding that I have no support for it at this time but I'm firmly of the opinion that if we really have the interest of promoting Humanism we should consider it. Clearly this implies a very different kind of Humanist Society or rather movement. To me Humanism is a “peak level” interest not like hobby or sporting clubs or even political parties. Humanism belongs to this sphere. Having raised the idea I have to expand a bit to clarify. By university foundation I mean something similar to what John Hirshman did on his own bat. A search on the UNSW site brings up lots of links. For Humanism I have in mind such a foundation funding or contributing to funding a scholarship or annual prize in Humanist Studies something like what Paul Kurtz does in the US. I envisage departments like the Philosophy department, Political Science or Sociology benefiting. I'm emotionally closer to the UNSW but if it came to it we'd consider Sydney U, Macquarie and UTS... I would exclude the U of Notre Dame.

The day to day, week to week and month to month activities pattern of meetings could still continue but of course not at Humanist House which would have been sold off. We'd run meetings say at the SMSA centre in Pitt St. Then there would be no tempting big asset to attract non-genuine interest.

Within the existing structure our membership is still barely clinging on if not slipping down bit by bit over time. The membership is aging and people are dying or becoming infirm and have to resign. We have struggled to maintain membership, but a positive has been that a few genuine people have come through the woodwork, supplemented by a few new members from the Sydney scene. Despite these successes it is not enough to off-set our losses. Losses cannot be allowed to continue beyond say 5-7 years. If numbers turn around fine, I'd be the first to congratulate. This article would then become redundant, irrelevant. If not it has bite! I am talking about brutal reality and I'm not one to beat around the bush about this despite some members who dislike my being so “negative”. This article is intended to dispel complacency! This is not a Johnny-come-lately issue. 1995 is 1995.

I outlined at the meeting that the “membership drive” approach we adopted in the mid-nineties directly led us to the take-over situation we had to ward off with exhausting effort. We certainly don't want to go through that again! So now we are very sensitive about whom we accept for membership.

So how to attempt to build membership with other than a membership drive approach? Short answer - activities.

However, there is a potential Catch 22 with that approach. There has to be enough present members willing and able to run activities. We barely have enough such persons. What activities are there? You should appreciate that by naming these activities I am not at all damning them by faint praise!

There are HuVAT; the celebrants; and more recently John August bringing the Sydney Shove series into closer alignment with Humanist issues and running events like the Historic Tour of Sydney city area; Murray Love running some Sydney Atheist meetings in Humanist House and Ian Bryce is pursuing ethics classes in schools under an avowedly Humanist frame and speaking to school events on invitation; Gillian Ellis who manages the bookroom at HH.

Those were what I categorise as externally orientated activities. There are important internally orientated activities, namely: Angela Drury who does the secretarial work and myself who does the Treasurer's work and run our website. However, these in themselves don't attract membership interest.

What is happening is fine but as I mentioned at the AGM the "pipeline" of prospective volunteering activists is virtually empty. So the vitality of the Society is not robust in my view.

Open Forum is explicitly not included in this discussion because of certain aspects of its character.

While I did not say this at the meeting, I need to reiterate that before anyone will do anything the interest has to be emotionalised. Since the advent of social media we have made connections via Facebook and Meet-up. When we count people who have come into our "orbit" via these sites then we are in touch with hundreds of people. However, out of these hundreds there are only a few one can count on one hand who are switched on enough to actually do something and meet us face to face!

It remains to be seen whether this social media avenue will lead to anything for the "brick and mortar" HumSoc.

This article is my "best" effort thoughts that I could muster to date. I would be delighted if you readers can put your thinking caps on and write in to continue the debate with a view to advance thinking about our future, which personally I think we desperately need.

Victor Bien

Membership and the Future of the Society

Part II

Response from Paul Zagoridis

Victor points out that at its height the Society had over 1000 members 30-40 years ago. I counter that trade union, political party, sport and social club memberships have all similarly declined over the same period of time. Go back a further 30 years and you would find suburban picture theatres seating 500 to 1000 patrons per session. Times change, television killed the B movie and the picture show at the same time. In the 21st century the concept of joining to an organization in order to express belonging has similarly changed. People no longer first join an organization and then look at how to get involved. First they take some action and finally may sign up as a member.

Beware of equating the health of our Society with pure membership numbers. Look instead at the continuum – awareness to engagement to involvement to affiliation with Humanism. Our activities are directly aimed at increasing people's awareness of some aspect of secular Humanism. Out of those people a percentage will become engaged and do some work for the activity. A smaller percentage will become involved and take a organizing role in the activity. Finally a smaller group still will become affiliated and join the Society. Does that mean that the people at the awareness end of the spectrum are not the "right" sort of Humanists?

Our current membership strategy is to look for the "right" sort of Humanists. I think we should stop trying to pick winners and attract people who can make a difference. Sometimes it will turn out that those people will not be fully aligned with our flavour of Humanism. That's okay! Withdraw our support when that becomes a problem and free up resources for the next group. But in order to do that we must separate our assets from our day to day management. That removes the risk of takeover attempts altogether.

Basketball Associations do not deal with takeover attempts by selling their stadiums and endowing a university for scholarships or annual prizes in Basketball Studies. They fight takeover attempts, then structure themselves to remove the temptation. If they fail - they did not deserve to be stewards of those assets.

In our case we could either set up a trust to own and manage Humanist House, or split the society in two. One society owns Humanist House, the other society promotes Humanism. The owning society does not seek to grow its membership base beyond referrals from long-standing members. The promoting society accepts anybody. We could do this in the one society with differing classes of membership, but there are good corporate governance reasons for splitting.

An endowment to a university of our assets will not be sufficient to fund the sort of advocacy and outreach of the last 12 months alone. All while fighting the most concerted and well-organised fifth column attack on our very existence. Universities are not the place where endowments lead to social change within our lifetime. Let's take a hypothetical (and extreme) situation – say members decided that our one and only priority would be the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia in Australia and we would do nothing until that goal was met. Would the best use of our assets be to endow a university or to promote a grass roots campaign? I think social change would be best served by applying our own efforts in the field. Would a university endowment had fought the National School Chaplaincy Program?

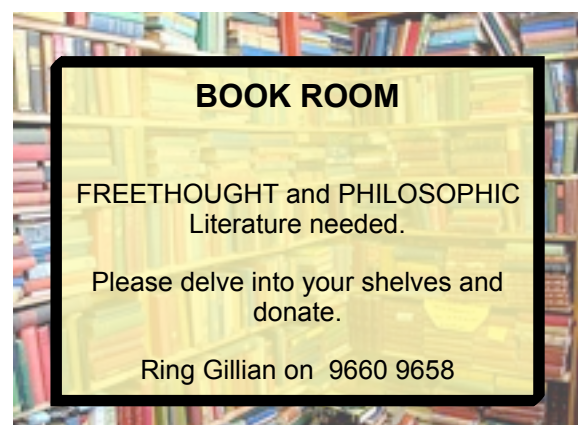
Victor seems to fear that the Humanist Society of NSW has an aging membership base that in future might not be sufficient to sustain its aims. I disagree vehemently that this is a problem. Every changing of the guard has bemoaned the lack of commitment and altruism of the younger generation. Our external activities will either engage people and promote Humanism or fail to get traction in which case we've outlived our usefulness.

Furthermore, Victor laments an aging and infirm membership base while naming: HuVAT; the celebrants; John August's Sydney Shove & Historic Tour of Sydney; Murray Love's Atheists; Ian Bryce's ethics efforts; and Gillian Ellis's book-room. John August added that we have been getting prominent speakers to Humanist House. There was Leo Igwe, Marayam Namazie, Colonel Valery. Maybe not so prominent, but it was also good to get Richard Mills from DWD. These speaking events help to raise our profile, which is a start - and "communicate the good ideas" to a broader audience. As we improve our recording technology and experience, we can put more guest speeches up on the Internet, extending our reach further. For a withering organization there is a lot going on.

Social media is not the solution to our small membership base. It is a channel of communication, part of the disruption and fragmenting of markets and audiences that the Internet has caused. The only way to measure social media's value is to measure the results of engaging that audience. I will leave that analysis to another time, but state that we have not even tested a concerted and focused social media strategy yet.

How many people does it take to have a vibrant, healthy, Humanist Society of NSW? Just one who is capable of igniting the passion, commitment and enthusiasm of others.

Paul Zagoridis





WEA Course : "All the Theories"

21st October - 9.30 - 4.30 PM

Conducted by NSW Humanists President John August

John looks at Thermodynamics, Information Theory, Chaos Theory, Quantum Mechanics, Game Theory, Sub-Atomic Particle Physics and Cosmology, & includes a look at the Higgs Boson, & "The Second Law of Thermodynamics".

Cost \$109

See <http://www.weasydney.nsw.edu.au>
Courses - Science - All the Theories
or phone 9264 2781

This newsletter is also available electronically as a PDF in colour. Members who would like **an additional** electronic colour version by e-mail **at no extra cost** can contact me directly at frankgomez@mc.com.

Some members have indicated they would be interested in **only** receiving the electronic copy for future editions to assist the Society in reducing costs and the unnecessary printing of paper. If you are happy to forgo the receipt of the printed version and just receive the electronic version then please make that clear in your email. It is entirely optional and your decision doesn't affect the manner in which you receive all other communications from the Society.

Words and Music



"Words and Ideas" by David Tribe is available for \$15 for the total benefit of the Humanist Society of NSW. A very popular piece of literature which is selling fast so send in your order with your cheque or money order.



"Love is Born" CD is composed and the lyrics are written by Dennis Morris (past President of HumSocWA). The songs are English interspersed with Zulu, and are highly relaxing.

"You Can't Stop the Revolution" CD includes chanting and humming by singers performed in 1988 when Nelson Mandela was in prison for 25 years

The \$15 is totally for the benefit of the HumSocNSW so please send in your order with your cheque or money order.

Member News

from the membership secretary

Thanks to all those members who have renewed their membership. To those who have not yet done so, please continue to be involved in Humanism and your Society. If you are unsure of your status you are welcome to email me or phone.

Donations

Many renewing members have included donations. Thankyou for your continued support to G. Stowell, J. Levack, M. Peters, M. Powell, T. Bostick, M&F Love, M. Taylor, D&E Blair, B. Barnett, S. Preimieir, P. Young, and A. Lamond.

Welcome

Welcome to new members Stephen Lee, a celebrant, and Freddie Arguelles. A warm welcome back to founding member Mollie Campbell who has rejoined.

Vale

Sadly we report the death of member since 1986, Paul Lenart, who lived to over 100: and also the losses of Nan Marsh and Barbara Leach who have resigned due to moving into nursing homes.

CONTACT US

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Robyn Williams AM

Humanist of the Year 1993, Member of the Order of Australia 1988, a talented actor, science journalist and broadcaster, Robyn, presents Radio National's Science Show, Ockham's Razor and In Conversation. Robyn has written more than 10 books and received an Honorary Doctorate in Science from the Universities of Sydney, Macquarie and Deakin.



Dorothy Buckland-Fuller AM, MBE

Mother, bilingual sociologist, peace activist. Dorothy is also an environmentalist, a feminist and committed to the cause of reconciliation with indigenous Australia. As founder of the Ethnic Communities Council Dorothy was, and is still, a vital influence in the ethnic communities.

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