



HUMANIST Viewpoints

The mathematics of altruism

Also in this issue...

- President's Annual Report
- Darwin Day 2013
- CAHS Convention

HuVAT 2013

You are invited to the Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talk held 4pm on the 2nd Sunday each month. Please join us and socialise over light refreshments.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Jan 13 th | Why is Racism Part of Human Nature? with Brian Edwards |
| Feb 10 th | Charles Darwin Part 1 - "Biological Evolution" with Victor Bien
Part 2 - "Price Equation" with John August |
| Mar 10 th | SGM - CAHS Motions |

Follow us on our website www.hsnsw.asn.au and Facebook



Special Message from the President

Make a Donation

This year, please consider making a donation of \$5, \$20, \$50 or whatever you can to protect and sustain the NSW Humanist Society. Your donation will sustain the diverse range of activities the Society undertakes.

Consider Making a Bequest

Please also remember us in your Will. All bequests contribute to the longevity of the Humanist Society of NSW and Humanism.

Thank You,
John August

Editor's Comments Frank Gomez

Welcome to the first edition of 2013. The format has changed for clarity and consistency after trying a mix of different styles for variety. As always I strive to include something of broad interest to members to what is mostly a communication piece from the committee to members.

Our membership is also changing with some younger members joining, and I hope I balance the style and interests of our wide readership successfully. This issue's cover art is courtesy of artist Mathias Pedersen's website.

Book Room

A shout out to the fantastic work being done by Gillian and other volunteers in the book room. I have become an e-book junkie but many members continue to appreciate physical books.

So if you have any Freethought or Philosophic books in your collection then consider donating them to the Society's library. Please call Gillian on 9660 9658 if you would like to donate.

Correction

In the last edition of Viewpoints we incorrectly linked songs 2 & 9 on Dennis Morris's CD to the South African National Anthem.

Save paper by getting Viewpoints electronically

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

Member News 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 on abraxas@tpg.com.au or phone (after 6 Jan). Memberships must be renewed soon or you will lose your continuance.

Donations

Many renewing members have included donations. Thank you for your continued support to D. Dunstan, N. Power, D. Schama, and W. Brodesser.

Welcome

Welcome to new members Monique Boutet of Mt Colah, and Nick Power of Dubbo.

Words & 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.



Our End of Year Celebration was well attended with almost 40 people and we enjoyed the performance of our smooth musician/singer George Eynon who sang love songs, country and western for an hour. Some were cover songs of the Beatles, Elvis Presley, Jim Reeves, Roger Miller, Engelbert Humperdinck, Frank Sinatra, and other crooners. Then we mixed and mingled with our friends, over delicious healthy food accompanied by tea, coffee, and soft drinks.



Our Patron, Dorothy Buckland Fuller (see her picture and bio on the back), sent us this wonderful message which I am happy to share with all of you:

“Wishing you all a cheerful, constructive, and productive New Year” Dorothea.



UNAANSW: United Nations Day

As HumSocNSW Delegate I attended this event on 24th October and sat with Fred Flatow who was also there and we were pleased to hear the Governor of NSW, Marie Bashir speak.

There was a raffle which included one of my donated pieces of artwork and which altogether raised a few hundred dollars. The event involved wreath laying in Martin Place and lunch in Parliament House.

HuVAT October and November

Gillian Ellis filled in for the cancelled David Pollson HIV talk and her HuVAT talk on Are We Doomed? created an energised dialectic that kept everyone there intellectually sharp.



John August gave an interesting talk on the Biological Origins of Life at the November HuVAT and the audience was mesmerised.

Upcoming Events in 2013

Friday 8th March 2013 - UNAANSW INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY (IWD)

HumSocNSW will co-sponsor IWD at State Parliament Jubilee Room, including Afternoon Tea (\$15). Dr. Nadine Shema will be keynote speaker on the “Empowerment of Women in Rwanda” and, hopefully, Duncan Power from Grameen Foundation.



May 2013 - CAHS 2013 Convention

There is a CAHS Flyer loose in this edition of Viewpoints which Victor Bien and I prepared. Please help us by remembering to come and bring friends to support the CAHS Convention activities so that it is truly successful and memorable.

This has been a joy to convene and so exciting. I am happy to advise that our 2nd Patron Robyn Williams has agreed to attend the AHOY Dinner Dance on Saturday 4th May. Cost is \$65 and you will need to book early by contacting me on (02) 9690 1431.

Then Sunday 5th May will be a fun Sydney Tour Day.

Finally, Monday 6th May there will be a seminar 10-2 (incl. Lunch \$12) in the State Parliament Theatre Macquarie St., which will include Dr. Nadine Shema (Rwanda) who will lead representatives from the Great Lakes of Africa. Followed by our member, Ian Bryce leading a panel on “Ethics Education Initiatives in Australia”.

Duncan Power from Grameen Foundation Australia will cap off with a talk on “Social Business – A new rationale for alleviating Poverty”.



Annual Report

This report is some of the substance of the report I delivered at the AGM. It combined some material from previous updates in HV, along with some additional material. You'll find more detail in many cases in previous issues of HV.

A major initiative has been our response to the NSW Inquiry into Special Ethics Education. Our response covered a wide range of issues, some of which we suspect were not covered in any other submissions.

We challenged Fred Nile's historical perspective based on our own research with input from Victor Bien and Stephen Stuart in Victoria. Fred Nile claimed that Parkes wanted religious education in schools, that's what he in fact meant by "secular".

However, it seems in fact church schools were overstretched, and the State wanted to take over education - but churches negotiated a deal so that there would be a period of religious instruction. Parkes probably wanted "Secular" to mean no religious education **at all**; but it became something which was **necessary** to get the deal made.

The submission is at : <http://tinyurl.com/cjoj9vh>

Ethics teaching has since been confirmed by the inquiry which is great. It seems the responses overwhelmingly favoured the classes. Unlike Queensland, it seems the religious lobby have been unable to quash the initiative - at least the NSW Government is not a total puppet of the religious lobby.

Our regular program of Humanist Viewpoints / Afternoon Talk has been of interest to our members, but we were also able to host a few events of general interest which attracted members of the wider community. One such was Maryam Namazie, from the One Law for All group in the UK, challenging the influence of Sharia Law and its impact both in the UK also its significance for Australia. We also heard from the Nigerian speaker Leo Igwe. There was some overlap with Sydney Atheists for both these events, who helped promote them.

We also heard from our members : Brian Edwards asked "Is there a God?", Affie Adagio spoke on Co-dependence, Ian Bryce spoke on "A seculars system of Ethics", Murray Love spoke on Christian Apologetics, Victor Bien spoke on "Personal Knowledge and Post-Critical Philosophy", I spoke on "Star Wars and SF", and Gillian Ellis spoke on "Crime and Punishment in the Enlightenment". Ian Bryce gave his talk "can the human race survive another few decades ?", and we also had our end-of-year party.

Our regular Darwin Day event heard from Victor Bien and myself, speaking on Evolutionary Economics and

Evolutionary Psychotherapy respectively. Several of these talks are available on our website.

We also had a party to celebrate four birthdays : that of our patron, Dorothy Buckland Fuller, founding member Vicki Potempa, Hon. Secretary Affie Adagio and also David Tribe, a longtime commentator on Secular issues in both Australia and the UK.

We've met up with several Humanists from overseas. Jose Antonio Vegara visited from Chile, having attended the recent international conference and was an advocate for Esperanto. He told some amazing stories about how much stronger the hold of the Catholic Church is on Chile, and was amazed at the presence of the very progressive versions of Christianity like the Unitarian Church that we have.

We also met up with Patricia Rogers, Vice-Chair of the British Humanists, Guy Otten from the Manchester Humanists, and Brian Whiteside from the Irish Humanists. I visited the Humanists in Scotland on a personal trip, and found out more about the scene there.

Member Sue Hurst put me onto Hanifa Deen, an Australian writer on Islam. We're against Female Genital Mutilation and Sharia Law. Ayan Hirsi Ali's tells a harrowing story. You have public forums on Islam where the Islamic speakers are intimidating, or - at worst - have made threats of violence which have meant the forum was shut down - as has happened in the UK. Then you have the machinations by Islamic Republics in the UN trying to make Blasphemy an exception to free speech. These abuses and excesses need to be identified - and challenged.

However, it seems from Deen that some Australian Islamic sentiments embrace Australian secular law. These Muslims would rather keep their heads down and not make a fuss, working and raising a family as people do. So, the voices of Radical Islam tend to be the ones we hear.

Another book I read was "Contempt of Court" by Jean Ely on the Defence of Government Schools case. People have mentioned DOGS from time to time, but it was only after reading this book that the case made sense to me. The book makes a good case that Australia's founding fathers meant for Australia to have a "wall of separation" between Church and State much as the US has - drawing directly from them as an inspiration. However, it seems the Australian courts made a technical semantic reading of a sentence in the Constitution which went in an entirely different direction, betraying the intent of our founding fathers.

There's a rich-but-hidden secular history of Australia. Some of it is exposed in Vicki Potempa's book "Off My Shoulders", which exposes an incredible series of regressive laws supported by the Catholic Church. "Contempt of Court" shows us another important side. We are starting to uncover this rich history. It is worth taking on board.

Humanist House has been well maintained by Fred Flatow and Ian Bryce. We now have a new door and fire exit signs have been installed (with help from other members). Gillian Ellis continues to run our book room - we have plenty of books, but few volunteers to help with running it !

I have continued to reach out to the media, sending copies of "Introduction to Humanism" to some targeted journalists, without coverage so far. However, I did have a little success with the following letter to the Editor published in the Financial Review on the 19 July 2012.

After the Greens controversy let's not forget Labor preferences meant Family First were elected into the Victorian Parliament. Further, we lose sight of the hold the religious lobby have on the policy of both parties. Prayers in Parliament (and prayer groups, too), voluntary euthanasia, same-sex marriages, stem cell research, funding of religious schools.

The list goes on. This influence is all the more pernicious - because it affects both sides of Parliament - and is not out in the open.

John August president, Humanist Society of NSW

We continue to reach out to other groups. Along with a few others from the NSW Humanists I attended a function hosted by Dying With Dignity and the NSW Greens at Parliament House. The room was very full and they managed to get some coverage of comments by Nicholas Cowdery. We've since had Richard Mills from DWD address our regular afternoon talk. We hope to expand collaboration with them, particularly as the NSW Greens plan to introduce legislation in support.

The Sydney Atheists use Humanist House as a meeting room. I have attended several meetings of the Western Sydney Freethinkers, and also participate in the "Workers Radio" program on the community radio station "Radio Skid Row" in Marrickville (88.9 FM).

I have compiled a CDROM of extracts from these broadcasts, together with some of my own work and recordings from the Sydney Shove, including Nicholas Cowdery's presentation on Voluntary Euthanasia and Drug Law Reform. It is available for \$12 including postage, or \$10 by arrangement at meetings.

I have also cooperated with Steve Maxwell of the NSW Rationalists and Gilbert Grace of Art Cycle Sydney in running a "Freedom Trail" cycle tour around the Sydney CBD. We have also run a cycling tour of the Engineering landmarks of Sydney and Victor Bien has joined us for that. We also ran a walking tour combining elements of both.

Amongst other things we found out about was the sculpture of a crucified woman which was to appear on the Sydney War Memorial - till the Catholic Church kicked up a storm and stopped it.

Victor Bien has continued to maintain the NSW Humanists Facebook site, and has improved our own webpage, so that we can now post bulletins and news items on the front page. With the help of Nathan Dunn and now coordinated by Murray Love we have

maintained a Humanist Meetup Group on the meetup website; this groups meets at Humanist House. Between all these methods of promotion, an awareness of our events is developing in the community. Our next initiative will be to put out press releases towards increasing our media profile.

We have also introduced our new constitution, endorsed by members at a SGM, and our legal issues are settling. We are very appreciative of the pro-bono legal help we have had from the Hon Bob Ellicott QC and Mr. Michael McHugh.

An SGM which confirmed the committee resolution expelling three members, The meeting was in fact easier than some I've chaired over the past few years, and I appreciate the confirmation of this expulsion.

The Attorney General made an attempt to charge civil celebrants \$600 per year while not charging religious celebrants anything, and meanwhile not engaging with the nature of services provided in the market - something we've viewed with concern.

Nationally, the High Court has upheld the appeal by Ron Williams against the funding of School Chaplains. This is a case we have supported financially, it was good it had the coverage it had, in spite of the Government now trying to "wiggle out" of its consequences. In fact it should be a reminder that they are doing something they really should not - perhaps it will be a trigger for more public unrest - we can only hope that Secularism becomes more of contemporary issue in the public space.

Our members also attended the 40 year anniversary of the Levine ruling by the Women's Abortion Action Campaign.

Hon. Secretary Dr. Affie Adagio convened the UNAANSW International Women's Day Seminar on the topic Diabetes by Prof Lesley Campbell in State Parliament House. We sponsored this as was the late Waratah Gillespie's IWD Seminar.

The "Ellis Defence" is that Catholic Church property trusts are different enough from the Church operations that they cannot be sued; the idea that priests are not employees is also a defence.

The NSW Greens are pushing for legislation to reverse these two defences. They hosted a forum at NSW Parliament House on the 13th of June, I attended along with member Steve Maxwell. It was quite an experience to hear the stories of this abuse, and I am sure we will all wish the NSW Greens success in this initiative.

But it's still happens - and it does not seem that the broader Catholic Church will clean up its act until this sort of external pressure forces it to. There's a link at : <http://tinyurl.com/bnnzq6>

Catholicism does include engagement with the other side. I was able to see that at a debate on Voluntary Euthanasia hosted by the ACU at the Australian Museum in Sydney. I was joined by our Vice President, Fred Flatow.

We had a somewhat one sided panel, with the main speaker, Dr. Bernadette Tobin having about 20 minutes, and three supplemental speakers for the most part

against Voluntary Euthanasia - and the one voice in support, Dr. Philip Nitschke.

One issue seemed to get lost in the wash - it is **not** illegal to commit suicide. However, it **is** illegal to **help** someone commit suicide. A lot of the discussion seemed to get lost in whether an *individual* should be able to make a decision to end their own life. In fact, an individual **can**, and it seems strange to focus on something currently legal being a problem.

Overall, it has been an interesting and productive year. We can all look forward to a good new year coming up, and I hope all members and the committee can work together to develop Humanism.

John August

President
NSW Humanist Society

'Nuclear Winter' Professor to Talk at Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

5pm January 25th 2013 - Sydney University
(Mackie Building Rm114 - just across the footbridge from the Footbridge Theatre)

Professor Alan Robock, of 'Nuclear Winter' fame, will be speaking at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies on the continuing relevance of Nuclear Winter, catastrophic climatic impacts of nuclear weapons use, and related topics at 5pm on 25Jan 2013. The event is sponsored by CPACS, People for Nuclear Disarmament and the Human Survival Project, a joint PND-CPACS project.

Professor Robock of Rutgers University was one of the first people to do the computer simulations of the climatic impacts of large amounts of soot from burning cities in the upper atmosphere in the 1980s.

In 2006, together with Brian Toon and a number of other people, he did the work over again using the very most recent NASA atmospheric circulation models (the same model used to simulate global warming climate change.). The results were if anything, more worrisome than those obtained using the more primitive climate models of the 1980s.

Professor Robock and others work has led to an increasing emphasis on the catastrophic humanitarian effects of nuclear weapons at United nations disarmament meetings.

His appearance at CPACS is the only one in Australia. There will be a short media availability before the talk.

Angela Drury
Peace and Environment Contact

News in Brief

Scouts consider oath for atheists

The UK Scout Association is considering an alternative oath for atheists. The 105-year-old movement is launching a consultation to see if members would back a Scout Promise for those who feel unable to pledge a "duty to God".

Versions of the oath already exist for the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist faiths, but this is the first time such an adaptation has been considered.

In March, the National Secular Society said atheist children and potential Scout leaders were being put off joining the organisation. The organisation wrote to Chief Scout Bear Grylls, complaining that atheist children were being excluded or having to lie to join the movement.

Mother refuses radiotherapy for son

A frantic search was conducted last month in the UK for a mother who ran away with her seven-year-old son to prevent him having life-saving radiotherapy to treat his cancer.

Sally Roberts, 37, originally from New Zealand, has told family that she wants Neon to be given only "natural remedies" as he recovers from surgery on a brain tumour.

But the "very sick" boy's doctors say his chances of surviving will be "dramatically reduced" if he does not begin radiotherapy soon, and his father is desperate to make sure his son has "everything available" to help him fight the disease.

In a similar case, Emily, an 11 year-old girl suffering from leukaemia, was walked out of hospital by her mother in Phoenix, US earlier that week.

Membership and the Nature of the Society

by David Tribe

Victor Bien and Paul Zagoridis are to be congratulated on addressing the pressing issue of "Membership and the Future of the Society" in the last edition of Viewpoints. I agree and disagree with both of them.

Victor certainly isn't being "negative" in pointing to our "ailing and falling" membership. He's also right to warn against any unfocused, unregulated membership drive. On the basis of do it/say it and they will come, "externally orientated activities" are the best if not the only reliable recruitment tool. But the impulse for this comes from "emotionalised" existing members. Paul rightly declares that many groups with diverse interests have haemorrhaged members since 1970. He might have listed as causes rival attractions and virtual worlds.

HSNSW has had a special problem in retaining denizens of real reality, as during the 1960s it sprouted offshoots like the Secular Education Defence Committee (1962), Council for Civil Liberties (1963) and Abortion Law Reform Association (1969) as special-interest foci. What remains in the society is philosophical Humanism - and a potential for originating ad hoc activities for small-1 liberals. Size is no necessary handicap to effective action. The Anti-Corn Law League (1839-46) and Fabian Society (1884-) famously had few members, but they were passionate (and well-connected). I like Paul's postulated continuum from "awareness to engagement to involvement to affiliation with Humanism", but think we should avoid people who "will not be fully aligned with our flavour of Humanism" and from whom "we can withdraw our support when that becomes a problem". Recent history shows it's easier to enlist than delist. His proposal to "separate our assets from our day-to-day management", however, has merit.

Our existing assets could be held in a trust, also able to receive future bequests and in time to become a charity that supports only our educational and philanthropic activities. Even without such a structure our assets could be held by a self-perpetuating trust including an HSNSW officer(s) as ex officio trustee(s). But that wouldn't remove "the risk of takeover attempts altogether". There are ideological, self-promotional - and even sincere reformist - as well as mercenary motives for takeovers. Victor's proposal to hand over our assets to a university philosophy department to fund a Humanist scholarship or prize sounds good but looks awful. Whilst university economics faculties have been notoriously politicised, universities are theoretically non-partisan educational charities. We couldn't ensure that our gift would be used to promote Secular non-theistic Humanism. Instead, it would probably echo Nicolas Walter's plenipotentiary Humanism: *What's in the Word* (1988).

How have other freethought bodies in Australia and the UK dealt with these issues of membership, assets and charity status? A selection follows. In the 1880s Victorian Secularists had elected trustees who owned all their assets, including a block of lands on which a breakaway group built a hall of science. In 1891 the rump obtained a court order to possess the hall. The association's breakaway president then formed a Melbourne Freethought Society, which later bought back the hall. To protect a bequest, in 1925 the Victorian Rationalists

transferred their assets and five members to a holding company, which in 1938 expelled its secretary (also secretary of the association) and formed a rival Rationalist Association, which survives. The expelled secretary lost a legal claim for reinstatement and had to change the original Rationalist Association to a Freethought Society. To hold title to its current HQ, the then unincorporated Rationalist Association of NSW formed a private company (Thales) in 1971. In 1988 RANSW was incorporated and, opposed by its president, wound up Thales and transferred its assets to the association. Plans in the 1990s to form a charitable offshoot and in the 2000s to merge with HSNSW have been abandoned.

The UK organisations have an even more complex history, involving bequests, property, securities, magazines acquired by membership bodies (Rationalist *New Humanist*) or not (Secularist *Freethinker*), charity law, self-perpetuating or elected trustees and takeover attempts. *My 100 Tears of Freethought* (1967) explains how Rationalist Press Association and Ethical Union (then both charities) formed British Humanist Association in 1963. When EU lost charity status in 1965, RPA (with considerable relief) had to withdraw from the partnership; so EU changed its name to BHA in 1967. RPA soon lost its charity status but has since, I believe, regained it. This status is also enjoyed by a replacement, incorporated membership body, Rationalist Association, formed with elected directors (trustees) in 2000 and generously supported by RPA. Meanwhile, National Secular Society was incorporated in 1979 and its assets transferred from self-perpetuating trustees, including NSS president ex officio, to the society.

My GODLESS and Glad of It (2008) records UK Secular Humanist issues - similar to Australia's - in the 1960s and strategies which brought many victories, now being eroded by a Counter-Reformation. Most religions are losing adherents and vocations but retaining enough to keep their organisations and socio-political pressure intact. Even UK freethought bodies have at least one full-time professional worker, unaffordable in Australia. I therefore hesitate to list all the things we should be doing, with the knowledge of what we can do. Thus my suggestions are counsels of perfection which may be addressed incrementally in the hope new members, donations and bequests may gradually be attracted.

Sadly, in an age where admiss activities are eclipsed by their publicising. *GODLESS* reflected pre-internet days when frequent NSS media releases on current issues were usually well reported by provincial media and specialist journals if not by the London mainstream. These releases were supplemented by irregular reports of in-depth working parties and submissions to commissions of inquiry; large, well-planned debates and symposia on hot topics; and letter-writing blitzes of local newspapers and specialist journals. I don't know to what extent these outlets have been replaced by websites, blogs and interactive media like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and the rest. Whatever the mechanics, it's important to have somebody(ies) always able and willing to answer telephone calls from journalists immediately and emails promptly. This is, admittedly, a major hurdle.

Vale

Paul Kurtz

21 December 1925

20 October 2012

Paul Kurtz, American Skeptic, founder of the secular-humanist movement and philosopher, passed away on 20 October 2012. He was 86 years old.



He was Honorary Associate of Rationalist International and also Honorary Associate of Rationalist Association (formerly RPA) of UK. In 1999 Kurtz received International Humanist Award by the IHEU and in 2000 he received International Rationalist Award by the Rationalist International.

He authored 50 books and nearly 800 articles. Many of his books have been translated into over 60 languages. They include *The Transcendental Temptation*, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism*, *The Courage to Become*, and *Multi-Secularism: A New Agenda*. His published bibliography of writings from 1952 to 2003.

Paul Kurtz was largely responsible for the secularisation of humanism. Before Kurtz embraced the term "secular humanism," which had received wide publicity through fundamentalist Christians in the 1980s, humanism was more widely perceived as a religion (or a pseudo-religion that did not include the supernatural. This can be seen in the first article of the original Humanist Manifesto which refers to "Religious Humanists" and by Charles and Clara Potter's influential 1930 book *Humanism: A New Religion*. In 1969, Kurtz founded the publishing house Prometheus Books.

He was also the founder and past chairman of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (formerly the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP)), the Council for Secular Humanism, and the Centre for Inquiry. On May 18, 2010, he resigned from all these positions. He was editor in chief of *Free Inquiry* magazine, a publication of the Council for Secular Humanism. He was co-president of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Humanist Laureate, Honorary Associate of Rationalist International, president of the International Academy of Humanism and Honorary Associate of Rationalist Association (formerly Rationalist Press Association) of UK.

As a member of the American Humanist Association, he contributed to the writing of *Humanist Manifesto*. He was a former editor of *The Humanist*, 1967-1978. The asteroid (6629) Kurtz was named in his honour.

Kurtz used the publicity generated by fundamentalist preachers to grow the membership of the Council for Secular Humanism, as well as strip the religious aspects

found in the earlier humanist movement. He founded the Centre for Inquiry in 1991. There are now some 40 Centres and Communities worldwide, including in Los Angeles, Washington, New York City, London, Amsterdam, Warsaw, Moscow, Beijing, Hyderabad, Toronto, Dakar, Buenos Aires and Kathmandu.

Following his resignation from the Centre for Inquiry, Paul Kurtz launched the Institute for Science and Human Values as a separate entity. Kurtz was Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo, having previously also taught at Vassar, Trinity, and Union colleges, and the New School for Social Research.

Kurtz was born in Newark, New Jersey, the son of Sara Lasser and Martin Kurtz. Kurtz received his bachelor's degree from New York University, and the Master's degree and Doctor of Philosophy degree from Columbia University.

Charles Foley

Paul Kurtz attended our Australis2000 Congress and congratulated us on a well organised event. As he expressed this to me personally as the Convenor, I was so chuffed. Paul embraced Ian Ellis Jones (HumSocNSW president at the time) and me as we had a photo taken. He was such a dignified impressive philosopher/mentor. He will always be remembered fondly by many of us...

Affie Adagio

Evolution and Altruism

Darwin Day is a global celebration of science and reason held on or around Feb. 12th, the birthday anniversary of evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin. To coincide with this occasion John August and Victor Bien will be giving complimentary talks on 10th February on evolutionary biology including the principles of group selection in embodied in the Price Equation.

Here is a small sample from both of them.



Evolution has long struggled with the idea of "group selection". Evolution is normally "selfish", in that only the survival of the individual matters. An important insight was that you might be willing to sacrifice yourself for relatives, because that means that your own genes would persist, its just that they would not be your own copies - but being identical, they would count much the same.

But still the idea of "group selection" persisted. Could there be selection of a more or less unrelated group ? Could there be selection for cooperation ? The Price Equation was the mathematical formulation of a remarkable insight by George R. Price. In summary, The Price Equation tells us that when cooperation has

survival benefits, then genes corresponding to cooperation will survive. On the one hand this observation seems almost too obvious, but there is a power in the formulation that tells us so much.

The Price Equation can be applied whenever there is a tension between how a gene benefits the individual or benefits others. That can be in terms of abstract notions like cooperation - or biological effects like the prevalence of sickle cell anaemia - something that can provide both a resistance to malaria but also the illness of anaemia. My talk will cover some aspects of this remarkable formula.

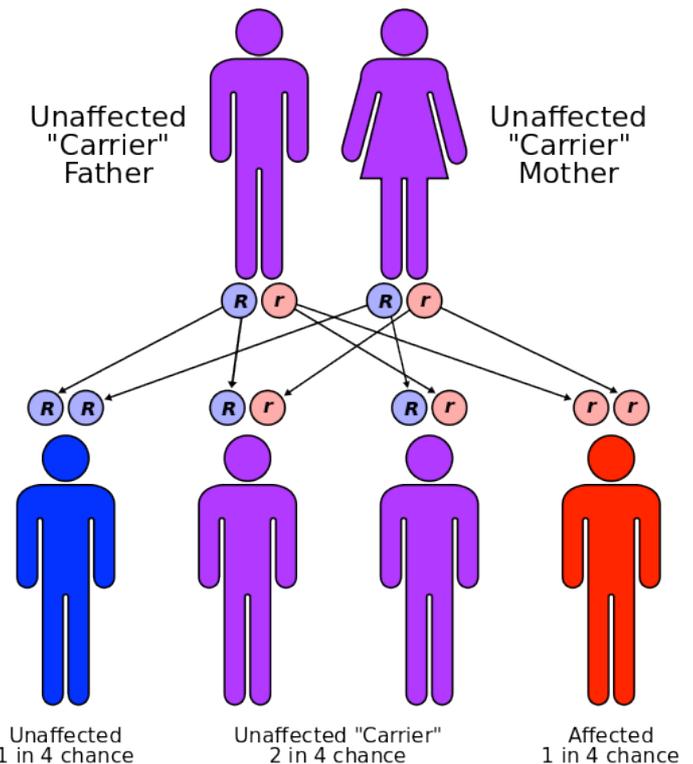
John August

I will be screening about a 10 – 15 minute clip from David Attenboroughs series the Kingdom of plants shown on ABC TV in October to November last year. My purpose is to initiate and stimulate discussion to increase appreciation and understanding of biological evolution. Specifically to see the modern answer to a puzzlement Charles Darwin expressed about the sudden rise of flowering plants in the evolutionary time-scale. His theory conceptualised gradual transformations over time but within evolutionary time-scale the rise of flowering plants was sudden and the results spectacular. Flowering plants swamp all other plant species.

Amongst other things, we will learn to see things we humans ordinarily cannot see and in the process we learn about the importance of increasing our ability to see with the aid of scientific means.

Both of these object lesson factors or "meta logical" factors are important to acquire as part of a "tool kit" for the task of advancing Humanism.

Victor Bien



Did you know?

That the Price Equation was featured in the plot of a 2008 movie thriller? It was released in the US as "The Killing Gene" and elsewhere with the odd name **WΔZ** pronounced double-u delta zed.

Vale

Col. Valery Yarynich

2 June 1937

13 December 2012

Colonel Valery Yarynich, formerly of the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces, died 13/12/12 in a hospital in Moscow aged 75. He is survived by a wife and two daughters.



I last saw Colonel Yarynich in Sydney Australia, last August, as I organised a speaking tour for him. The tour was highly successful, and there was time for him 'to see Kangaroos and emus in Gosford' and for a leisurely train trip to and from Canberra, where he met with officers of DFAT, and former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans. The Australian trip involved speaking engagements with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, The Lowy Institute, the Centre for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and the Hiroshima Day Committee. It also generated a number of media interviews, notably with Late Night Live and ABC-TV (various programs), and SBS. He made page 2 of the Sydney Morning Herald.

Colonel Yarynich in his earlier life, was deeply involved in the Soviet nuclear command and control system. He played a crucial part in the operationalisation of the 'doomsday machine' or second-strike system known as 'Perimetr' or 'Dead Hand'. In his later life since retiring from active service, he was very much involved in the campaign to lower the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems, taking a crucial role in the Foreign Affairs article 'One Hundred Nuclear Wars', in which 100 simulations of nuclear war are done, showing that arguments that there might be a 'destabilising' 're-alerting race' if nuclear weapons in the US and Russia are taken off high alert, are in fact incorrect. Colonel Valery's contribution has been to show this with statistical rigor.

He also published widely. I knew Colonel Valery only in the last years of his life, and it was my privilege to have been with him pretty much continuously during the last period in which he continued to promote de-alerting. On the day before he left Australia, he mentioned almost casually, that he was due to go into hospital as soon as he arrived in Moscow. I had replied something like 'then I hope that after that we meet again in Moscow'. Months later, I heard that he was in a bad situation medically, with a large tumour that had to be operated. I then had an email from him that sounded quite cheerful and hopeful. Then another silence, and an email saying the operation had taken place and he was weak. Then yesterday an email saying he had passed away. So we never got to see each other.

Colonel Valery is not replaceable. As someone with nuts-and-bolts experience in Soviet nuclear command and control, who had come to see the necessity both to get rid of nuclear weapons and to lower their operational status, he was unique. He was in a way, a 'doctor Strangelove' who had come in from the cold. Such people are rare and irreplaceable.

A chance conversation with him in an anonymous cafe in Vienna over a beer led to the setting up in Sydney of the 'Human Survival Project', dedicated to the task of ensuring that decades down the track we are all still here to tackle other problems of global justice, global warming, etc etc, by reducing or eliminating the risks of a self-made nuclear apocalypse.

My most poignant memory of him comes from a four-hour train trip to and from Australia's capital, Canberra. He pressed his face close to the window, outside of which rolled a benign landscape with patches of Australian bush and green fields with cows and horses. He sighed, and said something like "It's so beautiful. I wish I did not have to think of terrible things all the time". Those of us left will still have to deal with those terrible, world-destroying, issues that were your life. We salute you, Colonel Yarynich.

John Hallam

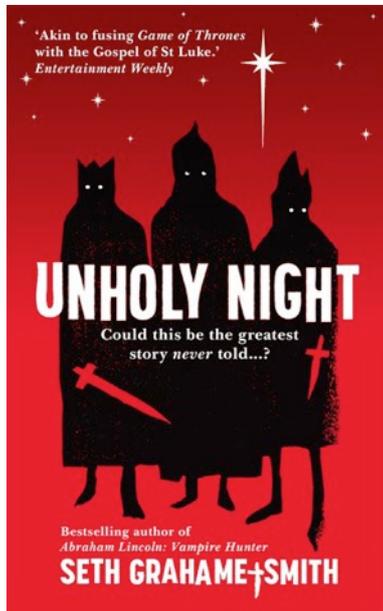
We were honoured to have Colonel Valery speak at Humanist House at a HuVAT last year. There was full attendance and we found out so many truths about the worldview of his country about nuclear warfare. He had such a gentle way of expressing the necessity for the world to do something about claiming peace and nuclear disarmament. Another peacemaker who will be remembered by many...

Affie Adagio

Book Review

Unholy Night by Seth Grahame-Smith (Bantam)

“When the legend becomes fact, print the legend,” said the journalist in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, a famous quote that holds true for the New Testament among many other texts. In Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Unholy Night*, the legend is that three kings visited Joseph and Mary in a Bethlehem barn upon the birth of their son Jesus, and the “fact” is the matter of the book.



Seth Grahame-Smith, who has emerged as one of the most popular American cultural entertainers of the last few years, specialises in counter-intuitive counterfactuals. His *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* does what it says on the tin, as does *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*, wherein the great man becomes an abolitionist after seeing slaves sold to the thirsty undead as livestock. *Unholy Night* continues the author’s affair with the off-kilter high-concept. What if those three kings weren’t kings at all?

“Balthazar had to admit, Herod’s dungeons were among the nicest he’d seen. The sand-coloured walls and floors were smooth and dry, and at ten feet by ten feet, the cells were on the larger side. But the real attention-getting amenities were the small, iron-barred windows on the east-facing walls of each cell. Windows ... in a dungeon. What a world this is.”

There’s no theological mischief afoot. The counterfactual extends only to the identities of the three kings, and the introduction of some spooky magicians from pre-Christian days. Anyone looking for a swinging rationalist treatment of the early days of Jesus will be very disappointed, because the tone is entirely respectful to the religion.

The book could in fact be handily racked with all those weird Christian Right post-Rapture novels without anyone feeling the need to pull a gun. It’s not like there was a great deal in the original text about the three kings to be argued with. And these three kings have more in common with the light-fingered soldiers of the George Clooney film than any local royalty.

They are, in fact, three thieves locked up in a dungeon together by Herod: Gaspar, Melchior and the protagonist of the book, Balthazar. Feted as the legendary “Antioch Ghost”, Balthazar is as rakishly charming a thief as the period can provide, a ragged Raffles who never saw a bad choice he didn’t prefer. Performing a jailbreak and making a run for it, wearing the robes of priests they’d pulled a lethally dirty trick on, the three men collide with Joseph, Mary and child just as Herod decrees the baby be found and put to death. Herod, demented client king of Judaea, is herein a diseased blimp of a man, driven mad by both power and the lack of it. A broadly drawn grotesque, but no less entertaining for it. Balthazar, driven to thwart Herod in all things and equally amusing as the soiled hero of the piece, determines to get the family to Egypt and safety.

And therein hangs the yarn. And make no mistake, this is a Ripping Yarn. Grahame-Smith has already sold it to Warner Brothers, and will be writing the screenplay himself. It’s a perfectly well-cut and solid three-act yarn with reversals and redemption and action and even a love story. The important thing to remember is that this is clearly precisely what the author was going for, no more and no less, and so the book should be judged solely on that basis. The man hasn’t sat down to present a fascinating historical argument or a piece of philosophical insight. He’s here to put bums on seats.

The great surprise, for me, was that Grahame-Smith knows his way around a sentence. He’s an actual craftsman, unshowy but capable of an elegant turn of phrase when it suits the moment. For a writer working with a fairly goofy high-concept, he produces a propulsive prose, free of fat or infelicity, without falling prey to the thudding character-free plod of an airport-rack thriller.

A Ripping Yarn, well told, is no bad thing. It’s almost a lost art, in fact. If you don’t expect more from *Unholy Night* than you did from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, you might even enjoy it.

Warren Ellis

(reprinted courtesy of New Humanist Magazine (UK))

CONTACT US

HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW INC. Website Australis2000 Website	HUMANIST HOUSE 10 Shepherd St., Chippendale NSW 2008 Ph. 9212-2122 http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/ http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/a2K/
President	John August john.august@mail.optusnet.com.au
Vice President	Fred Flatow - Ph 9588 1807
Treasurer	Victor Bien 9597.3218 PO BOX 400 ROCKDALE NSW 2216 vbien@hsnsw.asn.au
Hon. Secretary	Affie Adagio 0421.101.163 PO BOX 617 POTTS POINT 1335 affie@affie.com.au www.affie.com.au
Peace and Environment Contact	Angela Drury abraxas@tpg.com.au
Editor	Frank Gomez 0421.618.534 frankgomez@me.com
HuVAT Convenor	Affie Adagio 0421.101.163
Humanist House Bookings	David Duffy 4782.1330 (am only)
"Open Forum"	David Duffy 4782.1330 (am only) 9212.2122 (programme)
Sustainable Population Australia	George Carrard george_carrard@yahoo.com.au www.population.org.au
HumSocNSW Chaplains	Charles Foley (Canberra) James George
Blue Mts Group Canberra Group Newcastle Group	John Dillon 4787.5786 Dierk von Behrens 6254.1763 Jim Bright 4942.5197
House Manager	Fred Flatow
Humanist Celebrants Network Chairperson	Dally Messenger 03 9646.1649
Marriage, Naming and Funeral Celebrants	Eastern Subs.- Affie Adagio 0421.101.163 Queanbeyan Charles Foley Humanist Chaplain, Canberra Hospital 6297.9596 Ryde- Susanne Hurst (English, French, Hungarian) 9808.3473

The views expressed in "Humanist Viewpoints" are not necessarily those of the Humanist Society of NSW Inc. Text may be reproduced from "Humanist Viewpoints" provided the author and publication are duly acknowledged.

Our Patrons



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.

Important Information About Your Subscription

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