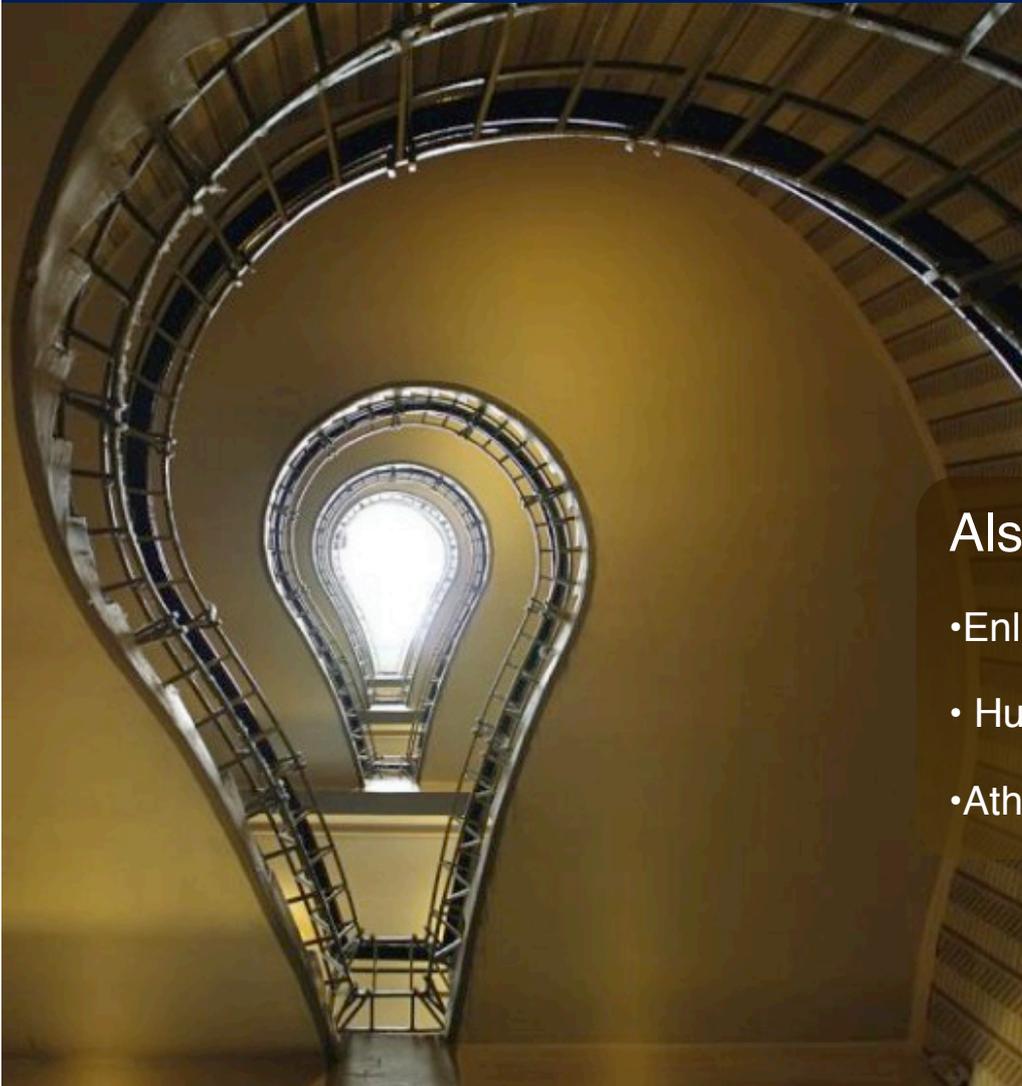




HUMANIST Viewpoints



Also in this issue...

- Enlightenment Values
- Human Rights vs Islam
- Atheists at Mardi Gras

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.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Apr 14 th | Ethics Classes in NSW Schools - Ian Bryce |
| May 6 th | Monday 10am - 2pm
CAHS Seminar - Theaterette State Parliament House |
| June 8 th | WFUNA (World Federation of United National Associations) - Geoffrey Little |

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

Book Room

A shout out to the fantastic work being done by Gillian 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.



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 for 2012/13. Many have still not 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 at abraxas@tpg.com.au or phone. Memberships must be renewed soon or you will lose your continuance.

Vale Trude Kallir OAM

Long-standing Humanist Society member member Trude Kallir died on 10 December 2012 aged 90.

You will have known Trude as a tireless and feisty activist for feminist causes, human rights, reconciliation, peace, nuclear disarmament, public education and the environment (particularly Kellys Bush). She was a Foundation Fellow of the College of Nursing NSW.

Her principal allegiance was to WILPF (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) where she was a mainstay of the NSW branch.

In 2011, Trude was awarded an Order of Australia Medal.

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.



Honorary Secretary Comments Affie Adagio

HuVAT: January – Brian Edwards kept us enthralled with his topic on why racism is part of human nature.

HuVAT: February - A puzzle of biological evolution solved and evolutionary origin of the Price Equation by John August and Victor Bien with slides meant another Darwin Day good attendance was intellectually stimulated and satisfied.

March CAHS Motions – had poor attendance due to the confusion because it was not meant to be advertised as an SGM in the Vpts and a notice of meeting had not been sent out for discussion of CAHS motions. Our sincere apologies. However, there were not many motions to consider and Victor is presenting our one in his segment in this issue, which has to do with our suggestion that Humanism be linked with the definition of Enlightenment. Also Angela is including any other motions submitted by other States.

FUTURE HuVATs: PHILOSOPHY. I am pleased to advise that I invited Victor Bien to present talks on philosophers Bertrand Russell (July), David Hume (Oct) and Immanuel Kant (Nov).

CAHS Convention 3-6 May: we will send out a final reminder so please book and send your cheque to our Treasurer Victor Bien *asap* as we are now selling tickets and we need to know our final numbers as soon as possible to determine the size of our catering orders.

colleagues brought dresses in to sell in order to raise funds for their cause.



Other speakers were the President of UNAANSW, Valerie Weekes and Committee Member Diane Sakelariou, UNWA Past President Sue Conde, and as the HumSocNSW delegate on the UNAANSW Executive Committee being the person responsible for the Status of Women Portfolio, I was the Convenor and MC of IWD.

My special reward was that as this was the 3rd year I have organised IWD and it was the best attended. We made a profit which was divided by the two organisations which sponsored the event (last 2 years there was a loss) and, furthermore, I was given a bunch of lovely flowers and everyone sang happy birthday for me! What a treat as the 8th is indeed my birthday and for it to be a success after so much work, it was certainly great!

VALE: Eugenia Polimeris 1920-2013. My mother 92 died recently in a Nursing Home. She was a beautiful and talented seamstress who sang love songs, resembling actress Rita Hayworth in her youth, although she could be as eccentric as Auntie Mame. For example one day my daughter Tina 3, wished she had an indoor swimming pool, so her grandmother sealed the kitchen doors and let the sink overflow until there was an indoor pool for her to splash around with her brother Paul 4 on that hot day! At the Funeral instead of flowers we collected a substantial amount to be shared between RSPCA, HumSocNSW and UNAANSW.

Many thanks for the donations and condolences from Affie and family.



UNAANSW International Women's Day cosponsored HumSocNSW was held on 8th March 2.30 in Jubilee Room Parliament House, with Keynote Speaker Dr. Nadine Shema. Attended by 50 people it was claimed to be a complete success. Nadine presented her factual evidence on the empowerment of women in Rwanda with statistical slides.

She was dressed exquisitely in traditional silk material which I photographed for that reason. Some of her



There's been some controversy over whether Primary Ethics, who provide ethics teaching in NSW should have Deductible Gift Recipient Status. The Deputy Treasurer has said he does not believe there are sufficient reasons for it to have such status. On our Facebook page, it has been something that has generated a great deal of interest. Posting to the group, Victor Bien, our Treasurer, has wondered just what reasons would be "sufficient".

Interestingly, ethics teaching is challenged by some entities such as FIRIS and the Australian Secular Lobby, who would like to see no teaching of any sort - be it ethics or religion - within anything like a "religious hour". This is something we realised as a result of outreach to these entities. Our pragmatic position recognises that as a worthwhile ideal, but nevertheless sees ethics education as politically feasible advance on the current situation. We see this position as a matter of choice, and accept that others may differ - but these groups seem positively hostile to our position.

Ian Bryce is spearheading a discussion of the teaching of Ethics in Schools at our next Australian Humanists Convention, of which Affie will be reviewing in more detail.

AC Grayling, Sean Faircloth, Pru Goward and Fr. Frank Brennan recently spoke at the Opera House; several members (including myself) attended a very interesting talk. Unfortunately there were no "local" atheists on stage which were able to challenge the claims made by the local Christians. Fr. Brennan seemed to make the usual implication that Atheists had no values, but Grayling was able to make the usual comment about these ideas originating in Greek philosophy.

To be sure, Fr. Brennan and Ms. Goward deserve credit for fronting to what seemed a mostly atheist audience - I mean, how many of us would go to see a prominent Christian author ? Also, Fr. Brennan endorsed full cooperation between the Catholic Church and the law when it came to paedophilia - and endorsed that any Vatican documents should be forwarded to Australia.

AC Grayling was also interviewed on Radio National's breakfast program; it was great to see Humanism being promoted and discussed in the mainstream.

Internationally, I was intrigued to hear the IHEU statement by Roy Brown to the UN Human Rights Council criticising the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for their human rights double standards, noted on the 14th March on the IHEU website :

Freedom of Expression and the OIC

Mr President,

Freedom of expression is once again under sustained attack from the member states of the OIC.

In Saudi Arabia last week, two activists were sentenced to ten years in jail for exposing hundreds of cases of human rights abuse in the kingdom.

In Iran, we have seen protesters imprisoned and even sentenced to death, for "waging war against God". But what strange logic can possibly equate criticism and peaceful protest with waging war? And since when did any government equate itself with God?

In Morocco, a colleague has had to flee for his life because he wrote of his doubts about Islam. [Speech by Kacem Elghazzali, HRC 22, item 4, 11 March 2013]

In Mauritania, two days ago, a group of nine antislavery protesters were attacked and severely beaten by police. [Private communication from IRA Mauritania, 10 March 2013]

In Pakistan, hundreds of Shias have been murdered for holding the "wrong" beliefs.

But we have waited in vain for condemnation by the OIC of human rights abuses carried out by agents of the State within its member States.

Instead, we have seen protests against Islamic extremism condemned as "Islamophobia", which was recently described by the prime minister of Turkey as "a crime against humanity".

A crime against humanity, Mr President? No Sir. We see murder, ethnic cleansing, torture, kidnappings, suicide bombings, and terrorist attacks as crimes against humanity.

It is people that have human rights, Mr President, not beliefs. Protesting against human rights abuse, and pointing out where the responsibility lies, is not a crime, Mr President, it is a duty. And may we respectfully remind the member States of the OIC that it is their duty to uphold the right to freedom of expression, not condemn it.

Thank you Sir.

For sure, something I agree with. People have the individual right to their own religion and beliefs - but "religions" themselves have no rights. And when religion has an oar in government and law - it a recipe for trouble. Still, we need to distinguish between the way religion is used for evil purposes by some, and the international situation, as compared to those who only use religion to inform their lives in a positive way, without wanting it to influence the law.

Getting back to Australian and our own events, our regular program of Humanist Viewpoints / Afternoon Talk included a recent talk by Brian Edwards on why racism might be a part of human nature.

Our regular Darwin Day event heard from Victor Bien and myself, where. we spoke on the Price Equation and the evolution of plants. The Price Equation is a able to describe group selection - while the parents may be defined members of a group, and have increased reproductive success, their progeny may not share this trait. While controversial, it does seem to me that group selection exists - it was as much the development of a mathematical approach to describe group attributes and group changes as anything else that led to its recognition as an underlying phenomenon. It is this dynamic between the opposing forces that helps us to

understand when a community might develop and sustain mutual altruism.

Sydney Queer Atheists, with help from committee member Ian Bryce, ran a "Higgs Boson" float in the recent Mardi Gras. I drove the utility carrying the float; I recall long ago Ian also built his Popemobile to make an alternate statement against the against the then visit of the Pope. It was quite an experience in any case.



John August

President
NSW Humanist Society

Letters to the Editor

Swimming Against The Tide

Should Humanists attach to a political voice? The voice of Conservatism is too aloof, Socialism too rejected and Communism is now a forbidden word. But without a public voice, Humanism isn't going forward.

Another human venture that tried to save the world, without a voice in Parliament, was the Cooperative movement. It had parallels with Humanism. Writing as an observer rather than an active participant, it's worth recalling its history. Most of it happened in my lifetime. Founded in industrial North England, in the late 19th century, it became part of my life from the day I was born in Scotland in 1915. By the time I was four, my chin was familiar with the counter tops of the co-op stores - grocer, butcher and baker.

I can still remember our Store number - 4228. I gave it with every purchase and ran home clutching the small ticket. It was the symbol of the periodic dividend that would buy a pair of shoes, a shirt or warm scarf, for someone in the family. This was profit-sharing at its best and fairest.

The customer was both owner and buyer. The movement in Britain eventually owned factories and farms. It encouraged social equality in a nation divided by religion and class. It was Abe Lincoln's ideal, but never tried in America. Shopkeeping for the people, by the people.

My family came to Australia in 1926. We eagerly looked for Co-op shops. They were hard to find. My first pair of football boots were bought at the Drummoyne branch of the Balmain Co-op. Originally three spacious shops on Great North Road - now Victoria Road.

Founded amid the shipyards and factories of early 20th century, managed by a capable and caring German/Australian. Classed as an enemy alien, he was imprisoned, during WW1. The fortunes of the Co-op sank.

Other successful Co-ops flourished in the Hunter Valley and Wollongong areas. All vanished because of inefficient or dishonest management. Now and then some idealist is dazzled by the Cooperative theory and sporadic attempts at a restart are made. Usually a small shop hidden away in some busy area of the city. There are no notable successes.

Britain, the birthplace of Cooperatives, fared a little better but was eventually beaten. Again by the loss of the ideals that gave birth to a movement that was going to save the world - and very nearly did. The newfangled supermarkets invaded traditional Co-op territory. Possibly the world isn't ready for peaceful, intelligent reforms. Humanism meets similar problems. Education was thought to be the answer. It isn't. The main obstacle to acceptance of highly necessary reforms is human greed. The need to feel superior, to rise above the milling throng. Never more evident than in today's world of national rivalry, political and commercial corruption and the totally divergent religions.

Education is not solving the problem. Maybe it's a matter of evolution.

The human race is too immature to acknowledge truth. Give us another million years and the world may be the place many of us would like to inhabit.

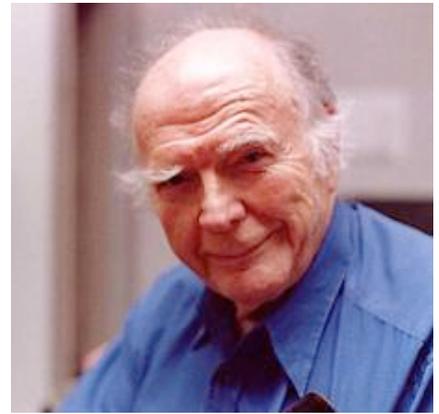
Charles Murray, 97, Member of NSW HumSoc.

Vale

James “Gerry” Gerrand

29 May 1919

12 October 2012



Prominent activist Humanist of 80s and 90s and co-founder of the Australian Skeptics died late last year.

The initial meetings to establish the Skeptics were held in 1980 at his home in Hawthorn, Melbourne, with lawyer Mark Plummer, who became the group's founding president.

Gerrand had previously spent six years working for the United Nations agency ICAO in Montreal. Gerrand and Plummer had known each other as colleagues in the early 1970s when Plummer was the industrial officer for the Professional Officers Association (the union representing scientists, engineers and other professionals in the Commonwealth Public Service) and Gerrand was honorary editor-in-chief of the same group's monthly journal.

In his day job, Gerrand was the superintending airways engineer for the Victorian & Tasmanian Region in the Department of Civil Aviation.

His son, Dr Peter Gerrand, reports that "Having decided to create the Australian Skeptics, inspired by what they had learned of the US organisation [CSICOP], James and Mark approached Phillip Adams, who readily and enthusiastically supported the new organisation, and

created national publicity for it, so much so that James and Mark were always ready to include Phillip as the third co-founder of the Australian Skeptics. It was Phillip Adams who had the bright idea of enlisting Dick Smith's sponsorship of a prize of \$10,000 for the first person who could convince a panel of scientific experts that their water divining could work." This was the first stage of what is now the Australian Skeptics' \$100,000 challenge.

Gerrand was founding secretary of the Skeptics, and managed the production of the Skeptics' newsletter and wrote many of its articles. He was also active as national secretary of the Australian Humanists, and in overlapping periods was the editor for the journals of the Australian Humanists and the Australian Rationalists.

His background in aviation led, among other things, to a series of important investigative articles on the famous Valentich UFO case.

He will be always be recognised as a key figure in the establishment of the Skeptics.

News in Brief

Religion incurable like the common cold?

Daniel Dennett, one of the late Christopher Hitchen's "The Four Horsemen" of New Atheism, appeared on BBC World News claiming religion is as useless to humans as the common cold.

He stated that many humans are 'afflicted' by their religion and should be cured and that religion successfully survives in spite of its negative effects, like hardy parasites or drugs and alcohol addictions.

Dennett acknowledged that as a result that religions may not necessarily disappear in the future.

NSW ethics classes at risk over tax status

The mainstream media reported that the future of ethics classes in NSW is threatened because of the federal government's refusal to extend Gift Recipient status to the provider of ethics classes, Primary Ethics.

The chairman of Primary Ethics, Bruce Hogan, said the organisation was surprised when that request was recently rejected by the federal government, despite the growing demand for ethics classes in this state.

"We have spent two years quietly really trying to make the Commonwealth government see sense," he said. "If Primary Ethics is to survive we can't let it rest."

About 7,000 students in NSW are expected to take ethics classes this year as an alternative to scripture, though many schools have waiting lists or do not provide the classes because there are not enough trained volunteers.

A broader, more comprehensive humanism

Victor Bien

Listening to ABC Radio National's Saturday Extra program compered by Geraldine Doogue around Easter time last year when she ran a panel discussion about the Enlightenment, a period of history which produced the advanced civilised Western world of today with its glittering economic, scientific and technological achievements I became very excited and stimulated when one of the panel members, Kieron O'Hara, described the outcome of the Enlightenment thinking as, "innovation, economic growth, advancement of science, cosmopolitanism (implies tolerance and optimism), universal values, optimistic, institutions, rule of law, independent checks and balances, honesty, trust, accounts, statistics, honest scientific inquiry and endeavour, that we can control our future." (I scribbled this down taking special note re-listening to the podcast).

The reason I became so excited was that for the first time I realised that I could understand atheism, agnosticism, Humanism, significant philosophers for my deconversion from Christianity such as Hume, Kant, John Stuart Mill etc. from a broader or wider perspective. The Enlightenment thinkers questioned religion within a general context of questioning all forms of authority and seeking a rational basis for authority – not one based on class, inheritance or religion. I realised that Humanists today concentrate on only one aspect of this development – resisting the machination of religion. Now I think we have over concentrated on this.

So what is special about Humanists?

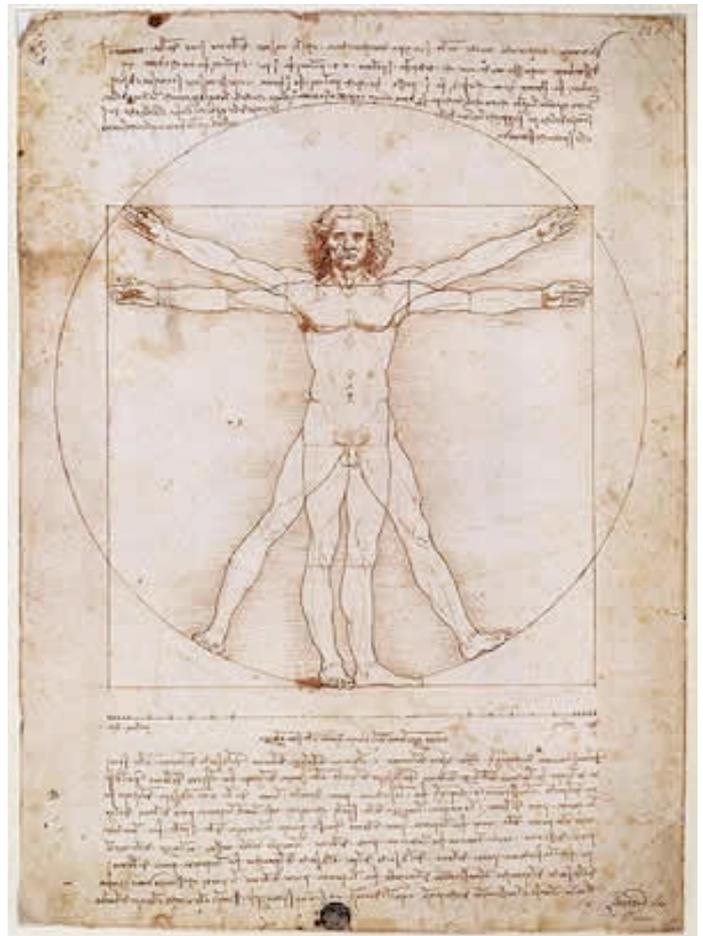
This over concentration on religion has led to a too narrow an understanding of what Humanism is. There are lengthy or wordy discourses of who and what we are, which I don't want to consume space repeating them here. This is quite demanding on you readers.

You will have to reread such things as the Amsterdam Declaration of 2002 (which you can read on our website) and various snippets such as in our various publications such as our contemporary Introduction to Humanism and also reflected in David Tribe's Words and Ideas book unless you are thoroughly au fait with them. For example clause 3 of the Amsterdam Declaration says, "Humanism supports democracy and human rights." The problem with this is that well so do most people. Similarly with all the other clauses.

So what is special about Humanists? Well it has tended to degenerate to opposing religion as our core object. This

defines us by what we oppose. It does not help to define what we are for in a distinct way. Defining ourselves in negative terms is unsatisfactory. I argued in my article in the October issue this problem was a major factor which allowed the situation with the people who tried to take us over over the last few years to develop.

The Enlightenment thinkers questioned religion within a general context of questioning all forms of authority and seeking a rational basis for authority...



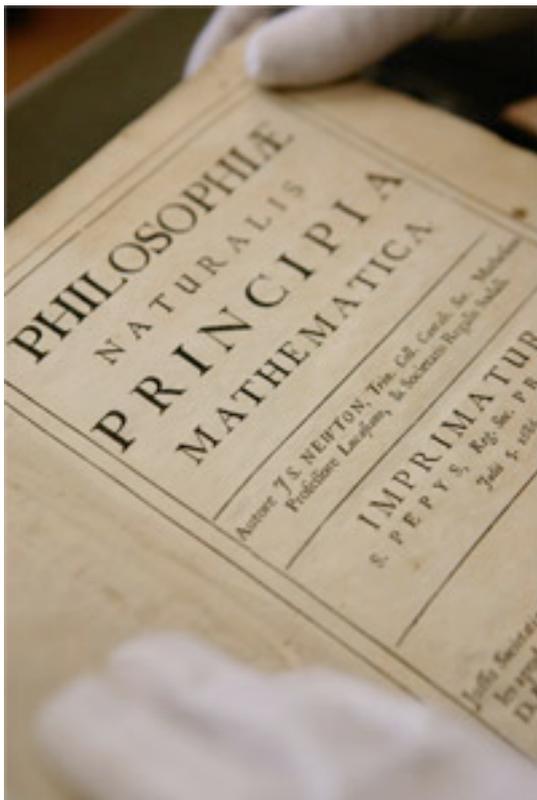
We did beef up our statement of Objects in 2008 but I still felt it was lacking somehow. What we needed is something positive and which "cuts through".

A big problem we have always had is that we come across as quaint, redundant, woolly and "hobbyists" with respect to societal issues except issues which closely challenge religious views – abortion, euthanasia, stem cell, i.e. closely related to physical human life.

We had no plausible conceptual basis to be integrated with matter which are today construed as “political” in nature. Issues to do with the civil society, economy, environment, non-human animal life, the arts and aesthetics.

What we have sorely needed is a one sentence answer to the question outsiders will ask when we say we belong to the Humanist Society is what we are about. Yes we are opposed to religion but we are more than that but how to say that which has a specific Humanist character?

Well what occurred to me from listening to that ABC program was that if we understand ourselves as present day promoters of Enlightenment values we have the still fresh legacy of the Enlightenment understanding and concepts of values as a one sentence statement of our objects. It certainly is critical of religion but that critique is within a broad framework which integrates the whole range of objects expressed by my scribbled notes back in April 2012. Defending, further developing, promoting and advancing Enlightenment values is the reason for existence of the modern Humanist movement!



I've also come to recognise Enlightenment values is synonymous with secular moral values. This perspective means that although our modern Humanist movement got going in the early 1950s we are not Johnny-come-lately as religionists tend to dismiss us as. In fact far from it! The history of the development of Enlightenment values has a long history going back to Greek philosophy and the Renaissance.

Therefore secular moral values has a solid historical basis equal to and possibly greater than the history of Christianity! This means we can automatically dismiss the charge of religionists that not having any faith means not having any purpose not having any values at all. It can be almost instantly shown to be completely wrong, complete rubbish! We can stop being defensive!

Being quite enthused I have obtained the support of the Society to put this motion to the cAHs Convention which will occur while this issue is current:

That the Australian Humanist movement adopt the defence and promotion of the values of the Enlightenment as an overarching concept for organising our aims, objectives and programmes.

So the Humanist Society is much more than about pursuing the separation of church and state and criticising religion. It has a whole set of values, maxims or principles which includes not only human rights, democracy, being against discrimination but also pursues civility, being and advocating cosmopolitan outlooks, having and developing a good aesthetic sense, support economic innovation to make life better, committed to the advancement of science all of which are an interlocking set of values which maximises the chance of a continuing constructive, creative and peaceful world capable of adapting to changing circumstances, changing populations, of welding together people of different outlooks on life - who have different beliefs, different interests...

Since then I bought the book by Kieron O'Hara and have now read it and started a second reading. It is entitled *The Enlightenment a beginner's Guide*, published by Oneworld Oxford ISBN: 978-1-85168-709-1.

Religion should be taught in the home, not at school

David Zyngier

It might come as a surprise to most Australians that our religious education system is not only out-moded but is doing damage to students, families and teachers.

Special Religious Instruction (SRI) is a flawed model of segregated and unprofessional religious education, catering to the interests of religious organisations.

Under the system as it stands, state government schools must allow non-teacher volunteers from religious organisations into classrooms to instruct students on a weekly basis. Meanwhile, valuable class time is disrupted and students who do not participate are often stopped from completing any meaningful learning.

Schools have no option over whether religious instruction is delivered. Principals and school councils must put the wishes of their communities aside and allow religious volunteers into classrooms each week, irrespective of how many students' parents elect for them to participate.

Students are also segregated according to religious belief contributing to stereotyping and suspicion of minorities and risking promoting religious exclusion. This is a system that hardly fosters religious and cultural diversity. Not to mention that it does not honour the central tenet of Australia's democracy – the separation of church and state.

In New South Wales there is an alternative. Primary Ethics is a course taught by volunteers and available to students who "opt out" of SRI. But the course is only available in a fraction of state schools and there have clearly been problems with meeting demand.

While it might seem better than no alternative at all, in fact the Primary Ethics course legitimises the place of religious groups who are intent on proselytising our youngest children.

The exclusive nature of these programmes has also raised concerns that first, students who elect to sit out are being discriminated against and second, that these programs do not adequately meet the needs of a multicultural society, where students should be encouraged to learn about diverse religious and ethical traditions.

In addition, the exclusive nature of many of these programmes risks exacerbating social problems such as prejudice, racism and religious vilification.

Scholars and community members are becoming increasingly uncomfortable that religious groups are able to proselytise our children in classes in what should be a secular education system.

Such activities are prohibited in American schools and the UK shifted away from exclusive Christian education to world religions education in the mid-1970s. Legal opinion



here in Australia suggests that the laws as they stand are illegitimate and open to challenge.

The 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians made a clear commitment "to nurture an appreciation of and respect for religious diversity". It is time public education clearly stepped up to that commitment and ended this practice in our state schools.

It's also time to understand that families are in the best position to provide specific religious education. They can guide their children either in the home or through special after school activities or in their own church, synagogue, mosque or temple.

We need to trust families to do the task of looking after the faith education of their own children. If we don't leave it to families and ask public education to become responsible, we forfeit a lot, including the secular nature of public education.

Australian public school students are participating in an outdated model of religious education, which presents children with a singular, and in many cases, an exclusive faith perspective, presented in pedagogically unsound ways.

Access Ministries, which provides 90% of all religious instruction in our public schools is unambiguous about its "mission" for volunteer "teachers" who are "fishing for souls".

When they say, "Every day of the school year, our teachers are sharing God's love with over 130,000 young Victorians ... helping students explore their lives with meaning and purpose" they do not mean that they want to "educate" children. They mean that they want children to believe in the religious doctrines that they do.

Access Ministries defines its role as "converting" children in a "cross cultural mission", since "without Jesus, our students are lost."

This is wrong and completely at odds with Australian state and federal governments' commitment to promoting a socially inclusive society. This must be changed before too much damage is done to students and to the public education system as a whole.

David Zyngier, is a senior lecturer at Monash University's Faculty of Education.

In History

Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman was a humanist American poet, essayist and journalist.

March 26 was the anniversary of his death in 1892.

Whitman is among the most influential poets in the American canon, often called the father of free verse. His work was very controversial in its time, particularly his poetry collection **Leaves of Grass**, which was described as obscene for its overt sexuality.

Born on Long Island in 1819, Whitman worked as a journalist, a teacher, a government clerk, and—in addition to publishing his poetry—was a volunteer nurse during the American Civil War. Early in his career, he also produced a temperance novel, *Franklin Evans* (1842).

Whitman's major work, *Leaves of Grass*, was first published in 1855 with his own money. The work was an attempt at reaching out to the common person with an American epic. He continued expanding and revising it until his death in 1892. After a stroke towards the end of his life, he moved to Camden, New Jersey, where his health further declined. He died at age 72 and his funeral became a public spectacle.

Whitman's sexuality is often discussed alongside his poetry. Though biographers continue to debate his sexuality, he is usually described as either homosexual or bisexual in his feelings and attractions. However, there is disagreement among biographers as to whether Whitman had actual sexual experiences with men.

Whitman was concerned with politics throughout his life. He opposed the extension of slavery generally. His poetry presented an egalitarian view of the races, and at one point he called for the abolition of slavery, but later he saw the abolitionist movement as a threat to democracy.

Whitman's work breaks the boundaries of poetic form and is generally prose-like. He also used unusual images and symbols in his poetry, including rotting leaves, tufts of straw, and debris. He also openly wrote about death and sexuality, including prostitution.

Religion

Whitman was deeply influenced by deism. He denied any one faith was more important than another, and embraced all religions equally. In "Song of Myself", he gave an inventory of major religions and indicated he respected and accepted all of them—a sentiment he

further emphasized in his poem "With Antecedents", affirming:

"I adopt each theory, myth, god, and demi-god, / I see that the old accounts, bibles, genealogies, are true, without exception".

In 1874, he was invited to write a poem about the Spiritualism movement, to which he responded, "It seems to me nearly altogether a poor, cheap, crude humbug." Whitman was a religious skeptic: though he accepted all churches, he believed in none. God, to Whitman, was both immanent and transcendent and the human soul was immortal and in a state of progressive development.

Whitman's vagabond lifestyle was adopted by the Beat movement and its leaders such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac in the 1950s and 1960s as well as anti-war poets like Adrienne Rich and Gary Snyder.



MOTIONS ON NOTICE TO CAHS CONVENTION

Humanist Society of Victoria

1. Asylum Seekers:

“That CAHS write to the Minister for Immigration (The Hon Brendan O'Connor) to express its concerns about Australia's treatment of asylum seekers regarding:

- a) the length of time in detention
- b) off-shore detention and its inhumane conditions.”

Rationale: 1. This treatment violates basic human rights;
2. It wrongly treats asylum seeking as a criminal act;
3. The resulting condemnations from the UNHCR and UNHRC bring opprobrium to Australia's international reputation.

2. Draft Anti-Discrimination Laws

“That CAHS complain to the Attorney-General (The Hon Mark Dreyfuss QC MP) on the proposal to provide exemptions for religious organisations under draft Anti-Discrimination laws.”

Rationale: 1. It is the duty of our legislators to protect all citizens equally;
2. Equality of opportunity for all underpins a cohesive, democratic society;
3. Publicly funded bodies should practice accepted social norms.

3. Tarkine Wilderness:

“That CAHS support the Australian Heritage Council's recommendation that the Tarkine wilderness area be protected.”

Rationale: The Tarkine is Tasmania's largest unprotected wilderness. Less than 9% of Australia's old-growth forest remains. The earth is all we have, and the extinction of a species is a loss for ever.

4. “That CAHS support a campaign by its members in all States and Territories to:

Encourage all schools eligible for Federal Government funding, to apply for and appoint secular student welfare workers (SWWs) under the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program (NSCSWP). This will require obtaining information from all authorized, secular recruitment organizations, known as 'potential funding recipients' (PFRs), and informing the schools about the services they offer.

(b) Encourage those schools which have already appointed chaplains under the NSCSWP, to replace them as soon as possible with secular student welfare workers.”

Rationale. The National Schools Chaplaincy Program should never have been implemented, but the later addition of SWWs is of considerable advantage to schools. By the secular principle chaplains should not receive any Federal, State or Territory Government funding. By appointing SWWs instead, schools have the flexibility to choose suitably qualified and experienced professionals to answer their particular needs.

Secular PFRs, unlike religious ones, are not equipped to approach every school or are precluded by professional ethics. Therefore Humanist Societies can provide a valuable alternative and independent service to the schools, to assist them in choosing the most appropriate PFR.

(See additional papers showing the distribution between chaplains and SWWs, as at 24 May 2012, and listing all ten secular PFRs currently approved.)

5. “That CAHS write to the Federal Minister of Education (with copies to relevant parliamentarians and the Australian Education Union), requesting that all religious PFRs, currently authorized to recruit both chaplains and SWWs, have their authority in respect of SWWs withdrawn, because of the obvious conflict of interest involved in religious organizations being responsible for secular student welfare. In addition, that secular SWWs recruited by religious PFRs be given the opportunity to transfer their employment to a secular PFR, with school approval.”

Rationale. When the opportunity for schools to appoint SWWs was introduced in 2011, it took some time to accredit secular PFRs, and the already established religious PFRs were able to approve the majority of current SWWs. This was in spite of the minister's initial public statement (see The Age of 8 September 2011), indicating that the welfare workers were to be secular. In at least some cases, the religious PFR plays a major role in supervising and directing the "secular" SWW.

End motions

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