



HUMANIST Viewpoints

Church for atheists ?



Also

- Christian Science under the spotlight
- Election debrief
- Multiculturalism debate

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.

Oct 13th Scottish Philosopher, David Hume - Dr. Victor Bien

Nov 10th German Philosopher, Immanuel Kant - Dr. Victor Bien

Dec 8th EOY Party featuring Sam Pellegrino

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.



Cover artwork

The cover is a stained glass rendition of the Flying Spaghetti Monster - a fake deity dreamt up by American Bobby Henderson in response to the Kansas State Board of Education's decision to allow the teaching of "intelligent" design. The stained glass is the creation of artist Sarah Pierce.

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.



Honorary Secretary Comments Affie Adagio

Committee:

Annual General Meeting Results - 8 September 2013

Another enjoyable event when the business of the day was carried out harmoniously and rapidly. We also had the pleasure of the company of Paul Zagoridis who is not only one of our members but also the CAHS President. There was a good turn up of members too.

The result was:

- 🌀 President: John August (Shove Group)
- 🌀 Vice President: Fred Flatow (Hum. House Manager)
- 🌀 Treasurer: Victor Bien
- 🌀 Hon Secretary: Affie Adagio (UNAANSW Delegate)

- Assistant Secretary: Angela Drury
- Brian Edwards
- Fay Love
- Gillian Ellis (Book Room)
- Ian Bryce (Ethics Classes)
- Murray Love (Meetup Group)
- Sturt Duncan (WEA Delegate)

There were no motions apart from the usual one regarding reinstating the Auditor and acknowledging his contribution. We finished the event with a pleasant social interaction, delicious food and getting to know new members.

End of Year Celebration

I found a very entertaining singer/guitarist called Sam Pellegrino at another community function when he managed to get people dancing in the isles with – rocking and rolling, twisting, cha chas and other Latin American dancing non-stop! I felt really young again. Sam has true charisma as an entertainer. So mark it in your diaries and for \$10 it is really worth coming out and having fun with us at the end of the year. We will send out a Flyer to remind your all.

International Humanist Day - 21 June 2013

"World Humanist Day is a Humanist holiday celebrated annually around the world (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/June_solstice), which usually falls on June 21st. According to the International Humanist and Ethical Union." Relayed to me by Charles Foley – Humanist Chaplin/Celebrant Canberra. I am asking all States to consider thinking seriously about making this an annual event. Please consider it. It could be organised in every State at minimal expense. Please contact me with ideas. My Email is affie@affie.com.au or 0421 101 163

Multiculturalism Debate

I agree with Peter Singer's definition of ethical behavior, as one, which avoids doing harm to sentient beings. So the only behavior that should be criminalized by a government, is one that does harm to other people (for the purpose of this debate, I am mainly talking about effects on people).

So things like female (and male) genital mutilation, "honour" killings and any other cultural practices which deny basic human rights, should be criminalized.

However, what language you speak, clothes you wear, food you eat, superstitions or ideas of the world you may have, your musical preference, etc, is your own business. So the government should only step in when real harm is being done (or plotted to being done).

In Switzerland, the government has outlawed the building of mosques which include minarets in their architecture. A clear case, I would say, of discrimination of a majority over a minority. "Mob rule", rather than proper democracy.

In short, diversity, which does not have a negative impact on society, should be tolerated in a democracy.

Fred Flatow

I think there is a case for what the Netherlands (and echoed a bit by France) is doing. Perhaps "multiculturalism" is not an appropriate concept posed by the challenge of Islam (not just taking it "externally" or overall but by its nature at a level of its detail - the details of its theology).

I don't know as much as I could get to know because I haven't had time or have not been able to make time to listen to a program series on ABC radio national called Mongrel nation which I gather is addressing these issues at a level of detail.

Check out the ABC RN website: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/>

I heard a Muslim or Islamist woman complain about the French ban on the wearing of religious symbols, viz. the burqua or even hijab as "assertive secularism"! She did not have a problem with secularism in the passive sense.

The trouble with a spokesperson like that gets back to the nature of the Islamic body politic or zeitgeist and that is, like all views emanating from the Muslim/Islamic communities, of an "anecdotal" nature. For everyone like that there will be others offsetting her who agree it's OK and you have others going to the other extreme who will say that nothing about Western culture is any good. So what is the Muslim/Islamic view? I suggest what is empirically the case is less important than their propensity - driven by their theology.

Moir had a cartoon around the 9/11 days I think which had a bin Laden figure with fiery eyes holding a devout looking

Muslim woman in a headlock brandishing a sword. Said it all in my view.

Multiculturalism would work with cultures who don't have some sort of (particularly very strong judgemental) supernatural agenda in the back of their minds. Picking some groups at random: the Chinese, Indian, the South Pacific Islander and Vietnamese populations who all have different cultures could be amalgamated with Australian society without much dramas I would expect. Well in fact they have.

But the Muslim/Islamic people's? Yes they have a strong propensity to create "parallel" societies. We see it already in Britain where they are starting to put demands for Shar'ia law to take precedence in certain ghettos.

Actually the other wing of the Abrahamic religion creates similar difficulties - the Jews particularly the Zionist extremists. I argue there is "antisemitism" because Jews bring it on themselves by the way they carry on as any significant body politic living amongst this or that community.

Victor Bien

I note that the federal Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs is now called the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Has the term "multiculturalism" taken on the same stigma that banished "ethnic", "new Australian", and "migrant"? I suspect there is an element of changing language to go with the populism and fear-mongering.

The western political reality demands an external enemy or threat in order to justify the surveillance state and abandonment of civil liberties of the twenty-first century. Those threats are currently radical Islam and bikies. In the past the threats have included communists, fascists, Japanese imperialists, the yellow peril, suffragettes, African tribalism, Indian nationalism, native self-rule, and trade unions. I categorise the list of threats as anything that does not represent the dominant culture of the ruling elite, or more recently, a media consuming class that deludes itself into thinking they are represented by the ruling elite.

I believe in diversity of experience and ideas. Once an organisation, or even a nation, engages in group think, the best days are behind it. You cannot have diversity if everyone has the same viewpoint and experience.

Multiculturalism does not mean blindly accepting all other cultural traditions as equally valid. Nor does it promote tribalism or ghettoisation. But let's not defend the semantics of multiculturalism.

Instead I believe our society is robust, capable of growth and change in the face of competing ideologies. Change is not always for the best - after all we've given up both habeas corpus and judicial review - in the name of war on terror and

anti-bikie laws. Our society has grown more progressive with each generation, so I am confident retrograde steps are not permanent. But the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

People who forward such emails fear radical islam and want "someone to do something". This is a lazy demand that abdicates responsibility for shaping of our society. It may be a symptom of the nanny state, but that is beyond the scope of this reply. It is definitely poor citizenship.

Evangelical Christians want a return to Christian values such as abolition of abortions, no recognition (or outright banning) of homosexual relationships and religious instruction in schools. We do not fear their campaigns, which are equally long term and well organised. Instead we are confident of winning in the long run.

I have not addressed wearing the burqa, female genital mutilation, fatwas or many more reprehensible practices in the name of Islam. But Islam is not the sole source of honour killings and child brides. Many cultures practise oppression. Humanism specifically can face these injustices and overcome them.

Paul Zagoridis

Multiculturalism was first developed in countries where the variations weren't as jarringly different as they are now. So a review is well overdue.



Our recent AGM passed without the need for an election. I appreciate being returned as President, and welcome the new committee, including new member Fay Love.

It was good for us to give our reports in an amicable environment, and while there was no need for an election, the number of proxies received was heartening. I appreciate the fact that members took an interest in the makeup of the new committee.

Recent experiences have given me a chance to engage with Christians who assert the worth of the Bible, God and religion. In the past, I've had amicable discussions with people from the Unitarian and Uniting Churches, where the existence of God was rarely an issue - and when it was, something for dispassionate analysis. For the most part, we were all worried about what was wrong with the world, and how to go about fixing it. The most intense discussion I recall having was one with Graham Long, not on the nature of God, but rather on the nature of Evil.

I've not sought out discussions on the nature of God, but I recently became involved in them. For the first time in a while, I was trying to recall the arguments put forward by Greek philosophers long ago on the irrelevance of God, which I later looked up :

Socrates : Is what is morally good commanded by God because it is morally good, or is it morally good because it is commanded by God?

Basically multiculturalism allowed people to still be Australian without having to adopt British ways. In an 'SBS' sort of way it was very successful over the last three decades.

What would we think if Indian Australians practised suttee, Chinese Australians practised footbinding, American Australians practised slavery or any such 19th century practices? Of course we would take umbrage at any such things. But they don't happen. So Islamic issues stand out more. Islamists have rejected western values and asserted their own, including many practices we find repellent.

This is a world wide phenomenon. Can there be a response limited to Australia? Do we want a war with Islam and who wants to die in it? The war approach seems to have failed.

I don't think Islamism is a multiculturalism problem. I think the problem exists separately from that. Multiculturalism has had to grow up alongside post-modernist cultural relativism and the two have got confused. Obviously we would like humanist secular values to set limits to the abuses of specific cultures. Our big question is how we achieve that. We have to solve the puzzle of why 'what seems common sense to us' doesn't sweep the world.

I do suspect male power backlash is a driving force in many of the anti-modernist movements we see - Christian, Hindu or Muslim - or African for that matter.

Murray Love

President's Report John August

Epicurus : Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

I also had the opportunity of talking to a gentleman who asserted the worth of the values he had picked up in the Catholic Church. It seemed he must have been under a rock for the last twenty years to have missed reports of pedophilia and child abuse in the Catholic Church. We do talk about "cognitive dissonance" - but I can only report that when you see it before your very eyes, you feel it inside you in a way you do not otherwise. In any case, it was an eye-opening experience.

I recently had the opportunity of seeing committee member Ian Bryce debate Hamza Tzortzis, an Islamic commentator. Hamza seemed to think that problems with infinity prompted a need for God as the creator of the universe - I found it to be a dubious argument, but even if a God did create the universe, that doesn't mean it was ever the source of moral truth, or that it would take any particular interest in our development and have a plan for us. Ian put up a good case that we did not need God to explain the development of the universe.

Ian spent some time criticising many religions, and in particular Islam. Hamza seemed to ignore the point that if a religion had problems, it may not necessarily deny the God existence, but it sure doesn't look good for that God. It is strange that a God would divinely inspire a work of text, and then after that point, leave its interpretations to vagaries of human thought and conflicting interpretations - and not think far enough ahead to worry about how the religion would survive after the death of the current leader. Maybe we're talking about an "all powerful" God. Just possibly. But ... "all wise" ?

Hamza noted how the Koran emphasised the pursuit of knowledge. I'll have to take his word for it. Certainly, early Islamic societies did advance our scientific understanding. However, the Koran said nothing about medicine, cosmology or other sciences which were not known at the time, which would have helped rather a lot more than mere encouragement - it suggests early scientific advances under Islam were a precarious cultural phenomenon, rather than a divinely inspired one.

While we've tried to promote a course in Humanism with the WEA, they have so far rejected our approaches. I will be looking into running such a one day course at Humanist House, and hope you will be able to attend should we go down that path.

I continue my involvement in community radio; you'll frequently hear me on Radio Skid Row, 88.9FM between 6 and 9 am Mondays. There's some recordings of previous interviews on the web:

Nathan Zamprogno from Cult Information and Family Support : <http://bit.ly/15tkffy>

Andrea Garatshun, Genesis 6:4 - <http://bit.ly/14RtqDn>

Gaby Grammeno, women and Islam : <http://bit.ly/1cqXZt5>

George Khouri and Christianity : <http://bit.ly/14j3JeJ>

Ricky-Lee and Marriage Equality : <http://bit.ly/14of3XN>

John August,
President

Atheist "churches" in London, New York, Melbourne.

A group of Melbourne atheists is trying to recapture the sense of community that religion brings - in a church.



This is not an isolated event. America too is dealing with a new British import, but with a difference: This church doesn't believe in God. It's motto is "live better, help often, and wonder more." It's striving to be a global atheist religion.

Welcome to the Sunday Assembly, "part atheist church, part foot-stomping good time", as its founder, English comedian Pippa Evans, describes it.

Stand-up comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans started the original Sunday Assembly in a decommissioned London church in January 2013, and there are now five congregations in the Sunday Assembly Everywhere (SAE) denomination: Three in Britain, one in New York, and one in Melbourne, Australia. Starting Oct. 22, Evans and Jones are starting a "global missionary tour" to visit the four branch congregations and set up new ones in 18 other cities in Britain, Scotland, Ireland, the U.S., Canada, and Australia.

To get a sense of what an atheist church service is like, the Melbourne Age reported that it was "utterly familiar, yet eerily

different. There is a polished, urbane man up the front holding a microphone, and behind him is a large screen to display the words for the songs and any video messages. Next to that is the band, much more casually dressed.

The assembly unfolds in the normal format: words of welcome, music, members of the congregation doing the readings, more music, a message, a communal greeting of the people near you, a rather embarrassed plea for cash in the collection hat, and a closing song, after which an impressive home-made cake is shared.

But there is no cross, no altar, no prayer, no Eucharist, and definitely no God."

At first sight, an atheist church seems an oxymoron, an absurdity - like a football match without the football. Certainly some of the more devout atheists and Christians have criticised it on those grounds.

Monash emeritus professor Gary Bouma, a sociologist of religion and Anglican minister, is amused but not surprised by the idea. His response: "Why not? It's finally an acceptance that atheism is a belief system, a world view, and the way we in the West deal with a world view is something that looks like a church. We get together and we sing, and we talk about ethics - it's all part of our ethos."

He points out that though people claiming no religion reached 22 per cent (4.8 million people) in the last Australian census, the number actually calling themselves atheists remains tiny, at about 100,000.

But that's still a big enough base to justify an alternative to the traditional lecture-hall nature-society meeting. And because atheists have been so evangelical in recent years, they need a broader model, he feels - something to which they can invite people.

Enlightenment Serendipities

Victor Bien

Arising from our interest in the the defence and promotion of the values of the Enlightenment as an ongoing process for organising our aim, objects and programs various supports and interests have emerged showing how fruitful this approach promises to be. When it was voted on at the cAHs AGM, while everyone was in favour, except WA, the support was half hearted. It was a case of, well OK if you insist.

Speaking for myself, this formalised interest and knowing everyone formally supports my idea, has caused my eyes to acquire x-ray vision if you like.

Recently working in getting our library in Humanist House into better order and going through many books I realised how powerful my x-ray vision had become. There were many books and many authors who were following through various strands of thought from the Enlightenment. For example, Immanuel Kant, a most prominent Enlightenment philosopher, wrote a book *What is Enlightenment* where he argued its motto was "dare to know"; that one ought to think autonomously, free of the dictates of external authority.

He had in mind supernatural religious authority of his day. Well, while going through the books out popped *What Dare I Think* by no less than Julian Huxley, a grandson of Thomas Huxley, Darwin's bulldog, and one of the first presidents of the modern Humanist movement in Britain in the 50s or 60s. It was very interesting reading – written nearly eighty years ago, Huxley's prose and sentiments were so up-to-date and describes the syndromes we still face today to a tee!



An even bigger heavier impact or connection with what we are on about is felt in a BBC 2 part documentary series broadcast over SBS TV recently. Unfortunately you can no longer access it from SBS on demand. You can get a bit of flavour of the program from this very brief YouTube clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpPhSKmOxo0>

The Committee will likely approve my proposal to buy the DVD set from the BBC and buy the right for us to share it within the Society and I expect to have it available over our website. Another idea which fits in with our film night idea is to show these DVDs as "content" of such nights.

In an on-line sharing type posting I had occasion to write this, "In about the first ten minutes this TV program says it all about the, historic and continuing, impact and significance of the achievements of the Enlightenment. The ballistic, intense, rearguard reaction and rejection of the secular world view by religionists (and also rulers who used religion to maintain control) is blindingly clear - even shocking to our modern minds which are a outcome of that period. We can expect seething resistance/push back from religionists to continue."

This brought a supportive response from one of the other posters, "The ballistic, intense, rearguard reaction and rejection of the secular world view by religionists"... thought that was a reference to the Rudd-Gillard years for a moment!

"Still, all's well now we have an Abbot and a Bishop in control."

In reply I wrote this, "We can take your remark as black humour and also it's all too true. The Enlightenment thinkers lived about 250 years ago. The difficulties we face today are not new! They faced it back then. From this perspective humanity hasn't progressed much.

"The stubborn, pig headed, bigoted, persistent religious believing isn't even set back for any length of time with the story of the catastrophic Lisbon earth quake [in 1755] and its aftermath, told about half an hour into the episode. The devastating physical earthquake devastated the credibility of the church - but only for a while. It was one period in history when human society en-mass rejected the church - it doesn't normally happen.

"But as soon as the memory of the disaster started to fade the religionists were on the march again! The Marquis de Pombal seeing the risk this would have on hard won secularisation had to 'take a huge risk'. That was a shocking event associated with the Enlightenment (the other major one was the French Revolution and its period of 'The Terror' - the guillotine)... He executed the activist Jesuit Malagrida who was starting to successfully get the ear of the Pope. Pombal's work was subsequently rolled back, despite all that, by the successor to King José the very religious Queen Maria I but that is another story.

"The comment from the compere of the episode was that the execution of Malagrida ended the Inquisition forever.

In another thread of postings I wrote, "A major thing I've come to realise since becoming fixated on the Enlightenment in recent times, is a view that we non-religious have been far too brow-beaten by the religionists asserting that without religion a person cannot have any values!

"Another aspect of being brow-beaten is us failing to challenge, whenever it arises, the religious when they claim status and prestige from the glitter, glamour and power of the modern first world as somehow arising from them! The truth is just the opposite as the SBS program showed as well as other knowledge we have from the history of ideas in the Western world.

"When religion had full power we had the dark ages. When modern knowledge got a foot hold in the Renaissance, which began the process leading to the glittering world of today, where all asylum seekers want to come, where no one wants to go the other way, was burgeoning, the religionists tried to stamp it out at every turn! It wasn't until Marquis de Pombal executed the activist Jesuit Malagrida that the Inquisition was ended. The rise of science, technology, democracy, equal vote, equality for women etc. are all products or outcomes of secular Enlightenment thinking. Implied by all that are secular moral values.

"Religionist resisted all that and now they have the hide, or ignorance of history to claim the high achievements of the Enlightenment reflected in the world order today, as having come from them!

"Just goes to show if lies or ignorance are repeated often enough more and more people will come to believe in them, including us, unless we drill down and do the hard work to get our heads clear!"

A Science for Simpletons

Dennis Morris

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE, founded by Mary Baker Eddy, emphasised the unreality of matter. Believing that disease and evil are illusions of the mind, it teaches that spiritual healing is the only cure.

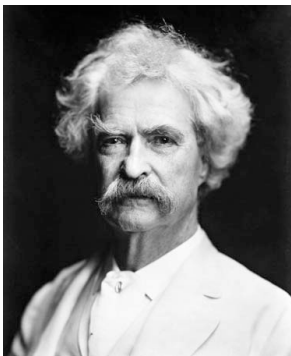
Alarmed by the progress of Christian Science, Mark Twain uttered a serious warning. "Within a few years," he said, "unless the advance be stayed, the false doctrine would conquer, not only the land of its birth, but the whole world."

Christian Science was pre-eminently a science for simpletons, and, since the world is peopled by persons who are mostly fools, the victory of this metaphysical humbug was inevitable."

Two biographies of Mary Baker Eddy are flatly contradictory of one another. One of them, the official biography approved by the church, canonised by the leaders of Christian Science. In a holograph document the "pastor emeritus," Mary Baker Eddy herself, recommends this account to the faithful, credulous, community of her admirers.

One would think then, that this biography by Miss Sibyl Wilbur must be thoroughly dependable, but in fact, it is a truly Byzantine example of literary embroidery. Written for the edification of those already convinced "In the style of the Gospels of St. Mark" (sic), it exhibits the discoverer of Christian Science in a rose coloured light and wearing a halo.

In this biography, Mary Baker Eddy is presented to our unworthy eyes as immaculate, as filled with divine grace, endowed with superhuman wisdom, an emissary from heaven to earth, the paragon of all the excellences. Whatever she does is done well, she embodies every virtue mentioned in the prayer books, her character is bright with the seven colours of the rainbow, for she is womanly. Christian, motherly, philanthropic, modest, gentle and mild; but, her adversaries are dull witted, base, envious, criminal, blinded by error and overflowing with malice.



"Within a few years," Mark Twain said, "unless the advance be stayed, the false doctrine would conquer, not only the land of its birth, but the whole world."

In a word, no angel was ever more angelic than the founder of Christian Science. With tears in her eyes, the pious disciple contemplates the saintly portrait from which every characteristic trait has been carefully expunged.

But the rival biographer, Miss Georgine Milmine, shatters this golden image with the club of documentary evidence, working as consistently in black as Miss Wilbur does in rose-colour. Miss Milmine shows up the great discoverer of Christian Science as a vulgar plagiarist who

stole the theory from the ill guarded desk of a predecessor; as a persistent liar, an ill-tempered hysteric, semi-literate, a woman with an unpleasantly keen eye for business, an artful dodger, and at times a perfect fury.

With the industry of an able reporter, there is here collected an abundance of evidence to show how hypocritical, deceitful, crafty and grasping was Mary Baker Eddy; how preposterous and ludicrous her doctrine. I need hardly say that this biography is no less fiercely discountenanced by the votaries of Christian Science than the rose-coloured biography is passionately extolled. In fact, Miss Milmine's book "was eventually purchased by a friend of Christian Science, and the plates from which the book was printed was destroyed, the original manuscript was also acquired. As a result, this most valuable source-book has become exceedingly rare."

It is interesting to note that Dakin's Mrs. Eddy, being independent is also taboo, and that the Christian Science movement endeavoured to boycott its sale. In spite of this, the book was best seller.

Stefan Sweig also tells of a man named Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, who learned the art of mesmerism and hypnotism from a certain Charles Poyen. In a lad named Lucius Burkmar, about seventeen years of age, Quimby found an extremely sensitive subject, so the two joined forces, Quimby as mesmeriser and Burkmar as medium.

The two set forth on tour, practising in what soon developed from mere mesmeric demonstrations into a method of curing the sick by a sort of hypnotism and clairvoyance, Quimby, operating through his medium, would make a clairvoyant diagnosis.

The method was simple enough: in full view of the public, he threw Lucius Burkmar into a hypnotic trance, then the sick person was taken close to the medium, who, supposedly speaking out of the trance, would declare the nature of the illness, and prescribe the appropriate remedy. To us who are accustomed to elaborate blood tests and x-rays as essentials of diagnosis, this clairvoyant diagnosis must seem quaint, and may well raise a smile, but Quimby and Burkmar drove a thriving trade. Quimby was, however, greedy, and eliminating the intermediate link. Why did he have to share the fees?

He now changed his method of treatment, being satisfied to sit down beside his patient and explaining his theory of disease. That sufficed a cure.

"This is my theory, to put man in possession of a science that will destroy the ideas of the sickness, and teach each man one living profession of his own identity with life, free from error and disease. My practice belongs to a wisdom higher than man, it was taught to us by Jesus, but since then it has never had a place in man's heart."

Mary Baker Eddy was a hypochondriac, faking fits and convulsions in childhood to get out of doing homework and to stay out of school. In later life she feigned being partially paralysed, so as to be waited upon, paying children to swing her on a swing. Therefore the so-called miracle that cured her by Quimby's method was not surprising. So enthusiastic was she after Quimby had cured her, so intoxicated by it, that she was deaf to the voice of reason; or did she sense fame and fortune? She also started practising the method.

She later never mentioned Quimby, after breaking from him in 1875. Fundamentally egocentric, she claimed as her "immortal thesis" the first edition of Science and Health, which at first had been no more than a faithful transcript of Quimby's Questions and Answers, expanded a little here and there.

She, however, kept writing, until finally she completed her book consisting of 465 pages. Mary Baker Eddy claimed that "God never made a man sick." Illness is nothing but illusion. To be ill is not merely an error, a fallacy, but a crime, for to doubt God is to be guilty of blasphemy. God cannot be the father of error. The same "argument" is incessantly used throughout the pages of Health and Science.

Enemies began to bring up their guns, the regular practitioners of medicine. Mark Twain republished in book form the articles he had written for the North American Review, making fun of Christian Science.

**Hollywood star, Joan Crawford, was
an adherent of Christian Science.**

Aroused by the hubbub, the heirs of Phineas Quimby became aware of the vast sums of money his ex-pupil had earned through her plagiarism of his teaching, claiming it to be her "revelation," that she had been "miraculously" and supernaturally selected by almighty God to receive divine revelation directly from God to herself alone, of the greatest gift ever to be given to the world".

Her son, George Washington Glover, neglected and impoverished, while his mother was earning about a million dollars a year from her many pupils and thousands of followers, sued her in court. His lawyer Senator Chandler claimed that Mary Baker Eddy was unquestionably "suffering from systematised delusions and dementia."

However, the movement spread, the Massachusetts Metaphysical College churned many "doctors," and each graduate was a fresh propagandist for the "Christian Science Journal," enlisting subscribers, money being the name of the game, as Stefan Sweig says, "Christ and the dollar."

In her old age, Mary Baker Eddy, did not want people to know that she was frail, weak, toothless, had to be supported while walking and taking morphine for pain. It is claimed that she even had someone else, dressed up to look like her, go for daily drives in a carriage to show that she was still in good health. It was certainly clever of Mary Baker Eddy to found her system of mental healing upon the rock of the officially recognised church, and by, when naming her "Science", precluding it with the word Christian" which, in America, especially at that time in history, and even now, is a term to conjure with. Few will be so bold, as Mark Twain, as to speak of a method as humbug or puffery when its exponents flourish the great name of Christ and appeal to the raising of Lazarus by Jesus as signal proof of the soundness of a doctrine.



Her shrewd coupling of a new creed with Christianity was unlike Mesmer who, being thoroughly honest, refrained from describing his method as being divinely inspired. But then he did not want to start a new sect, and did not have to fabricate messengers from God, or the voice of an angel, like those who regard themselves as saints and prophets. There are, of course, those who believe what they want to believe despite documentary evidence to the contrary.

Stefan Swieg comments that: "That may be, then, that Mary Baker Eddy's precise formulation may not be accepted in the future, but her method of healing by faith, even though it may be by imagination, has acquired a place among the pioneers of psychology, illustrating once more that in the history of the human mind the uninstructed and untouchable impetuosity of a seeming simpleton may do as much for the advance of thought as all the experts of accredited doctrine. The first task of any new idea is to arouse creative unrest. One who overstates his case drives forward, and does so precisely because he exaggerates. Even error, being radical, stimulates progress. True or false, good or bad, every faith that a human being has been powerful enough to force upon his fellows, expands the boundaries and shifts the landmarks of our mental world."

Every new religious school of thought brings the world a new illusion; a new illusionary enrichment of life. At times, even the absurd eventually gains respectability.

It is interesting to note that in a scientifically advanced country like the USA, the population has been so indoctrinated and, that most Christian sects have there origins in the USA. These groups often have preachers who are ill versed in Christian doctrine but well versed in obstinate preaching and fanaticism.

References: Religious Prostitution. Dennis Morris
Mary Baker Eddy, Sibyl Wilbur
The Mental Healers, Stefan Sweig
Mary Baker Eddy, Geogina Milmine

Dennis Morris: Founder and Past President: The Society of Freethinkers (South Africa).
Past President: The Humanist Society of Western Australia.
Member: Atheist Foundation of Australia.

Member News Membership Secretary

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The Election - Debrief

John August



I should first note that I stood for election in the seat of Bennelong on behalf of the Secular Party. I certainly have my inclinations outside the NSW Humanists, but hope my reflections will be of interest. Certainly, Humanist members come from all over the political spectrum.

There's economic issues; normally the incoming government says the finances are in such a mess that they can't do what they said they'd do. This time, it seems the new government has now reversed direction into saying things were not as bad as was previously made out.

I see the previous Labor Government as doing a good job with the economy. However, it did have leadership issues, and it did about-turns which lost it credibility. I wonder if there were any Governments which never broke even a single election promise. Howard even had his "core" and "non-core" promises! It did seem, however, that this time electorate was more unforgiving - after someone had slipped up once, they would never be willing to listen to them again. I wonder if Abbott will suffer the same unforgiving scrutiny.

Whatever the underlying feeling was, it was made worse by Abbott continuing to say "liar" with the Murdoch press backing him up. But it is difficult to know how much of the feeling was "underlying" and how much was "pumped up by the media". Similarly, we don't know how many people were swayed enough by Abbott to grant him more than one term - as compared to people who either wanted Labor in opposition for a term to sort themselves out, or will swing back to Labor based on what the Government does.

Both sides abused logic and the English language. Abbott claimed that Gillard "lied", but in fact if you say something wrong but think it true, you are "mistaken". It's only a lie if you know it to be untrue when you claim it is true. We might similarly say a promise you do not carry out is not a lie - it is only a lie if you genuinely do not plan to carry out the promise at the time you make it.

But, by the same token, Gillard claimed Abbott was sexist, inviting the observation that Abbott did get along with and have productive relationships with women. What was missed was that Abbott might be "situationally sexist" rather than "sexist" without any qualification. Abbott might well get along with women on his side, and intimidate women on the other side.

However, an unfinessed use of language means you miss out on these details.

As past Minister for health, Abbott quashed RU 486, and has in the past spoken of abortion as "the easy way out". It does raise the issue of to what degree the legacy of our past remains with us. Certainly, he tried to distance himself from that, and he noted that he was happy to go with Liberal Party policy. That was a fair point, but rather than have a contingent barrier, it's best not to have a problem in the first place. Clearly though, a lot of women voted for Abbott regardless of this history. We'll just have to hope that the Libs are not affected by these influences. Compared to Rudd, Abbott is clearly a less secular leader. This is not necessarily the case for the Liberal party - in times past, the Liberal party had Dr. John Hewson and Malcolm Turnbull as leaders, clearly much more secular people. We can only hope that over time perhaps the Liberal party will become more secular in character.

The dearth of women in Abbott's cabinet, and his removing the science ministry, amongst others, do not make for a good look. He's putting an axe to various climate initiatives, but at least he said he'd do that. Still, I'm not comfortable with the "gotcha" element of criticism out there. Abbott has done **THIS** - so his whole Government is invalid. Abbott has done **THAT** - so we need to get rid of his whole government needs to be chucked out. I may become critical of an Abbott Government, but I (and I think all of us) need to look at the whole picture, and make an overall reaction, rather than make a string of emotive knee jerk reactions. It's sadly reminiscent of the same sort of ongoing campaign we had of Gillard - and its no excuse to be doing it now just because of who the target is. It's the sort of superficial reaction I'd criticise, regardless of who was in Government.

And then there's the wrestle over "mandates". Strange, that Government claims mandates, and the opposition challenges the whole notion - till they're in Government, and then they like to think the whole idea of a "mandate" is actually pretty neat. At some level, the Government can do whatever it can get through parliament - just how the electorate feels about it is a different matter. My friend Chris Virtue says the Liberal party have a "mandate to form Government" - and no more. All valid points. Thing is, people holding the balance of power will be the meat in the sandwich when it comes to these debates over "mandates". Will they be "following their own principles" or "recognising the Governments' 'mandate' ?"

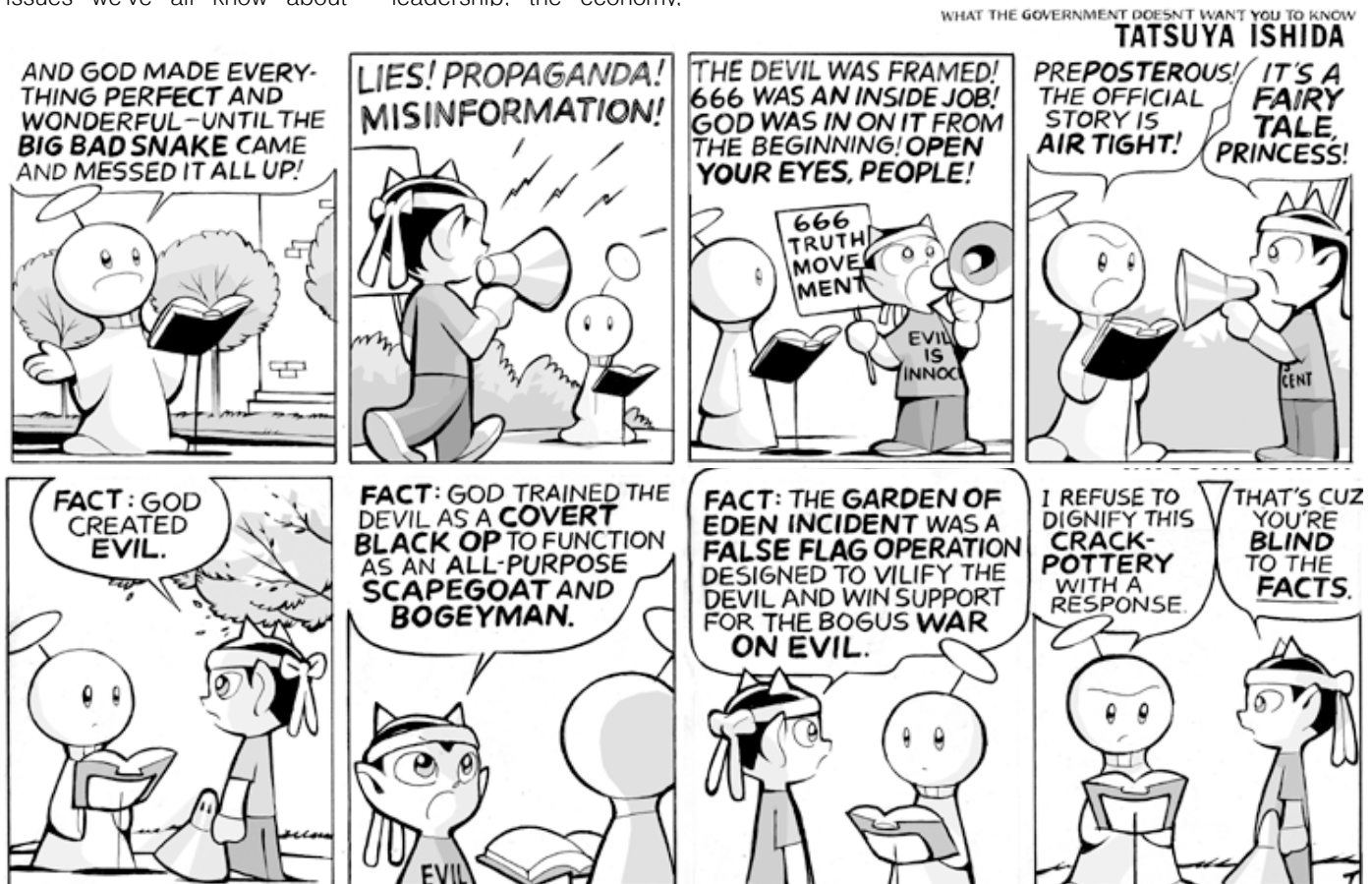
Certainly, we have some newcomers in the Senate, the result of Group Voting Tickets from the different parties. I expect the Senate makeup was not something the electorate would have wanted, but the GVTs and the limited options for allocating preferences gave control over votes to the parties rather than the voters. Some parties (the Secular Party included) had their preferences on their websites. But not all parties.

Anyway, its not the first time something like this happened. The Labor party in Victoria directed its preferences away from the Greens in such a way that family first got in. But, I'm sure if you asked the people who voted Labor, this would not have been their preferred outcome for the majority. As an electorate, we can't afford to take preferences - or anyone preferences directions - for granted. Too often, though, it seems we do.

The RU486 issue was the closest the broader electorate got to engaging with the religious influence on politics in Australia. In spite of the fact that some analyses showed that a majority of the Australian population supported marriage equality, it was difficult to discern any resultant swing (and I say this as someone who has publicly supported marriage equality). While we in the Secular Party did not poll that well, parties such as the Voluntary Euthanasia party did rather better; perhaps some "particular issues" will resonate with people more than will "a general secular concern"; but the fact that Dr. Nitschke has a profile would not have hurt, either.

Instead, it seemed that the election was dominated by the issues we've all know about - leadership, the economy,

infrastructure (including NBN), services (including Gonski and NDIS), carbon, refugees and so on. Of course, many people may have voted in principled ways but it does seem to me the majority were caught up in these prevailing items. It is a struggle for issues of "justice" in the way we might broadly describe "secular" or "humanist" issues to achieve prominence. Still, we can but hope for opportunities as the electoral tide changes - or that perhaps, as people people more literate in the issues that have grabbed the electorate's attention, perhaps they will be able to call the distortions for what they are and move onto other issues - hopefully secular ones.



BOOK REVIEWS

Big Gods: How Religions Transformed Cooperation and Conflict

Why did Christianity and Islam flourish while other faiths faded into obscurity? What binds complex societies together and enables strangers to live cooperatively within them? Norenzayan, a professor of psychology at the University of British Columbia, claims that these two questions answer each other. Religions that have omniscient "Big Gods" who monitor and punish adherents for moral transgressions gave rise to large-scale societies of strangers out of small groups of related hunter-gatherers.

Ranging across quantitative studies, historical cross-cultural examples, theological texts, and the practices of believers, Norenzayan convincingly argues that religions with Big Gods are successful because they generate a sense of being watched and regulated, require extravagant displays of commitment that weed out religious impostors, and encourage solidarity and trust.

While the author only briefly sketches why Big Gods incite war and violence, he speculates that we may be on the verge of cooperative societies without God. Prosperous and peaceful Scandinavian countries with a majority of atheists rely on secular institutions to enforce cooperation. They "climbed the ladder of religion, and then kicked it away," he writes.

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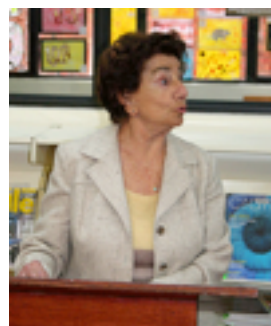
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