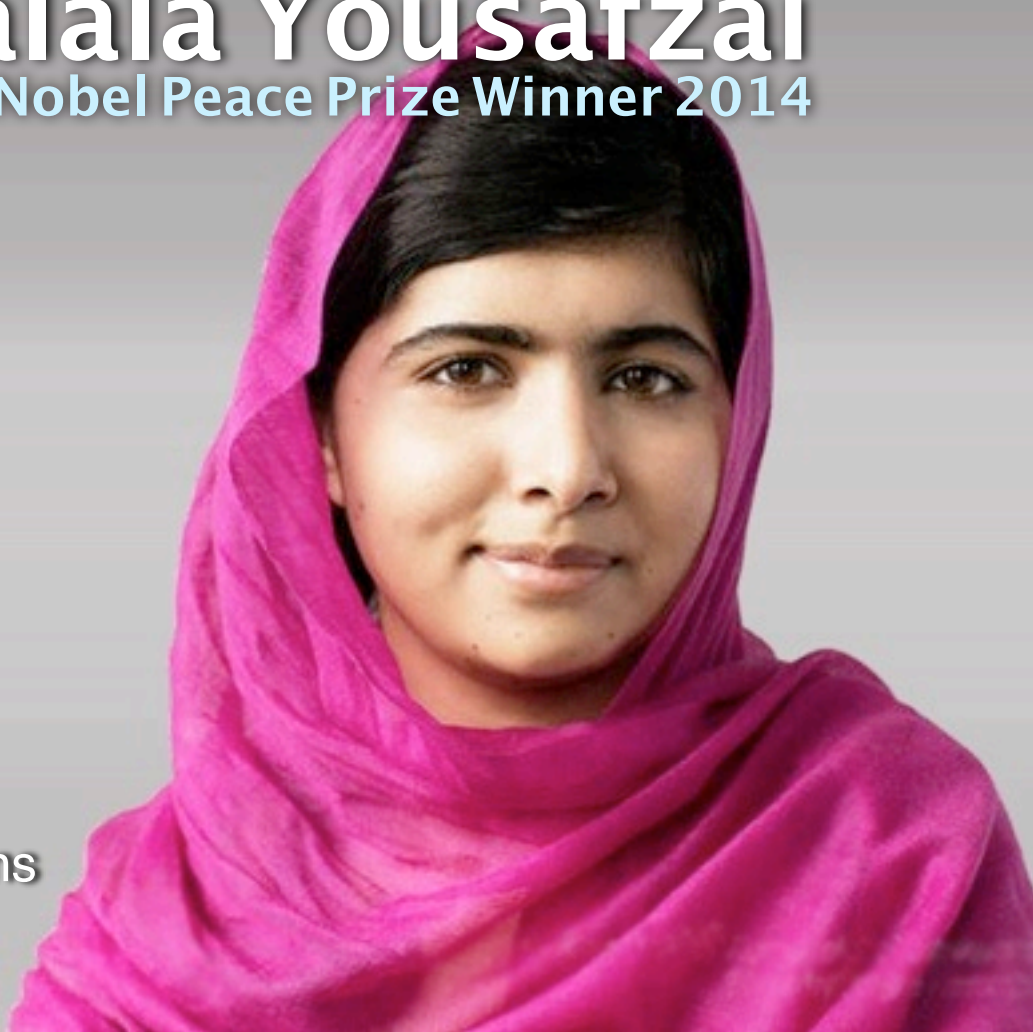




HUMANIST Viewpoints

Malala Yousafzai

Joint Nobel Peace Prize Winner 2014



Also

- Atheists + Aliens
- Tim Minchin
- Sex + Sin

HuVAT 2014

Oct 12 - Fundamental Physics & Science's Big Questions

Ian Bryce

Nov 9 - Israel & Palestine Panel

Emeritus Prof Clive Kessler (UNSW), Vivienne Porzsolt,
Valerie Weekes (UNAANSW)

Dec 14 - End of Year Party Rock & Roll Twist - Donation \$10

BYO Alcohol. Food provided.

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.

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,
Ian Bryce

Editor's Comments

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.



Outgoing Honorary Secretary Comments Affie Adagio

AGM 2014 - New Committee

It was a harmonious meeting and our new President, Ian Bryce, is a retired aeronautical engineer who is now a volunteer teacher in the Schools Ethics Program.

I stepped down as Hon. Secretary for now and Fay Love will be our new Secretary. They have my best wishes.

Get Well Wishes

Again thank you for the many well wishes for my quadruple heart bypass. For the AGM I received a beautiful card of get well wishes from elder member (97) Lilian Emmett and daughter Suzanne Gilkes who also added that although Lilian has almost lost her memory she is still mobile and enjoys her life at Glades Bay Gardens and asks after the Humanists, so she still remembers us. I read her card to the meeting and Viki (in her 90s) who says she was a close friend with Lilian felt sad she could not visit her because she lives so far away. So the Humanistic bonds are long and strong.

HSNSW Pamphlet

A copy of the pamphlet I designed for us and which was approved by the Committee is in this edition of Vpts. It also has four inserts and serves as a communication piece of literature. Feedback on what people think of it is welcomed. One of the inserts is a Feedback sheet.

End Of Year Party

Rock & Roll & Twist and dance to Sam Pelligrino's music again by popular demand. Last year some of you missed the fun don't miss it this year!

Sunday 14th Dec 4pm BYO alcohol - we provide the food.

Donation \$10





Ian Bryce
President
NSW Humanist Society

President's Report Ian Bryce

The Annual General Meeting was held at Humanist House on 14 September 2014.

Reports were received from office bearers (President, Secretary, Treasurer). Others with delegated responsibilities presented Reports on membership, books, donations, functions, the building, liaison etc.

Elections were held with voting by members present (22) and proxies (13). The new Office Bearers are:

President – Ian Bryce
Vice President – John August
Treasurer – Victor Bien
Secretary – Fay Love

Ordinary Committee Members – Affie Adagio, Angela Drury, Sturt Duncan, Brian Edwards, Gillian Ellis, Fred Flatow, Murray Love.

Votes of thanks were passed for outgoing office bearers. In particular, John August, who has led the Society through a most difficult period involving several problems, and has promoted Humanism through media and presentations. Fred Flatow has been a pillar of the Society for many decades. Affie Adagio has been so well connected to other organisations, and organised most of our social functions. All will continue to contribute their skills in the new Committee.

Other significant events in the quarter include:

Options for restructuring the Society are being investigated, in order to better protect our assets from malicious takeovers and lawsuits.

Allegations involving the Department of Community Services were brought to the Society's attention, and have been

documented and forwarded to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Speakers have been exchanged with several other bodies, including Theosophy and Realists.

Freethought Reading Room

I have floated a proposal for a Freethought Library, to be shared among several organisations. As books give way to electronic media, many libraries and bookshops have declined or closed.

But I feel there is still some role for an attended reading room, perhaps a lending library, and book sales. At present, many good books are going unused or being dispersed, when they could be donated to a central facility.

Each affiliated group could provide staff for one afternoon or evening per week. Thus members and the passing public would have frequent access with little effort by any one organisation.

I have mentioned this to friends in five related organisations to date, and there are several more. Although some of their members entertain beliefs which fall short of freethinking, I have found that their committees are generally quite enlightened. I asked about their resources including books, buildings, interested staff, and potential demand from members.

Individuals often accumulate books and other media, which they would like to pass on. I imagine books, CDs and DVDs for the library being selected on the basis of: accuracy, making a significant contribution, and furthering our common aims. They could be labelled with the donating organisation so they could be withdrawn if arrangements change. Security would not be an issue as there is no significant resale value.

Unsuitable or excess books could be sold to help fund the facility - there is already a suitable secondhand bookshop.

Members re invited to send their comments to: ianbryce@gmail.com

THE ANNUAL JOSEPH McCABE* LECTURE 2014

David Shoebridge MLC will deliver this year's Joseph McCabe Lecture.

'THE ELLIS DEFENCE & ITS AFTERMATH'

**Friday 24 October 2014
6pm ~ 9pm.**

John Ellis is an abuse victim who attempted to sue the Catholic Church for compensation. He lost a High Court case with costs awarded against him. The Church's argument was that the Church was an unincorporated association whose assets were held in unrelated trusts. David Shoebridge has drafted a bill for the NSW Parliament to make it possible for victims to sue the Church. In this lecture he will review the current situation in light of the revelations of the ongoing Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

**The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts
1st Floor Lecture Room
280 Pitt St, Sydney
Friday 24 October 2014 6pm-9pm**

Entrance by gold coin donation

Enquiries: Meg Wallace 0413 604 754 or Steve Maxwell 0404 009 294

Sponsored by The Rationalist Assn. of NSW, a freethought non-profit organisation www.nswrationalists.com

Would the existence of aliens mean the end of religion?

Merrill Miller

In A Brief History of Time Professor Stephen Hawking asks, "... if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?" Indeed, the more humanity learns about the universe in which we are just a very miniscule part, the less need we seem to have for a higher power. The theory of evolution cogently describes how we as a species came into being, and the Big Bang elegantly enumerates on how the universe itself came into existence. As our scientific understanding expands, purely religious answers for life's "big questions" seem to contract. But what would it mean for belief—or non-belief—if we discovered the existence of extraterrestrial life?

This question is central to the premise of a new book, *Religions and Extraterrestrial Life: How Will We Deal with It?* by David Weintraub, an astronomy professor at Vanderbilt University. The book examines the stances, if any, of the world's major religions in regards to the possibility of life beyond our own planet. Weintraub reports that one-fifth to one-third of Americans believe that alien life exists, and with the exponential increase in the discovery of new planets, finding one that would harbor living beings seems more and more likely.

However, not all Americans are quick to embrace the idea of extraterrestrials. While Weintraub found that 55 percent of atheists felt that the existence of aliens was possible, his book also states that evangelical and fundamentalist Christians are the least likely of any religious group in the United States to embrace the thought that life may exist beyond Earth. An article on Futurity examines this reticence of fundamentalists Christians to believe in aliens in terms of salvation—Christian concepts of original sin and the need for atonement through Christ's sacrifice on the cross would be complicated by the existence of otherworldly beings who may or may not require the same redemption.

While theological debates over the implications of alien life may be theoretically interesting, one factor that the Futurity article does not take into account is the distrust of science among fundamentalist Christians. Worldviews such as creationism and intelligent design present a purely human-centric view of the universe. From this perspective, the universe was created in six, 24-hour days—never mind that from a universal perspective, the concept of a "day" is relative to what planet one might inhabit. Also inherent in the fundamentalist

Christian perspective is the idea that God gave humanity dominion over all of creation, meaning that humans have free reign to do with the earth's natural resources, and presumably the resources of other planets, as they please. The existence of extraterrestrials, however, would muddy these straightforward concepts found in fundamentalist Christianity. Alien life, especially intelligent alien life, would mean that our perspective of the universe is relative and that we as a species are not specially appointed to control the cosmos.

Weintraub points out that not all religions would be troubled by the discovery of aliens. Hinduism and Buddhism have speculated that humans could be reincarnated as extraterrestrials, while Judaism and Islam see their tenants as only applicable to humans on Earth, regardless of life on other planets. Even some Catholics and Protestants have managed to somewhat ambiguously incorporate extraterrestrials into their understanding of God's plan. While the discovery of life on other planets might strike a blow to the worldviews of fundamentalists, the existence of aliens would not necessarily mean the end of religion.

Humanism, with its emphasis on science and logical reasoning, would have no qualms about accepting the presence of extraterrestrials, if such beings could be scientifically demonstrated to exist. Instead of looking to ancient texts or dogma to determine the possibility of alien life on other planets, humanists must merely wait for the evidence.

Courtesy American Humanist Association



Vale Lola Archer. Long time member and former committee member Lola Archer has died recently. She was also active in the founding of Dying with Dignity. She has left a small bequest to the Humanist Society.

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.

Tim Minchin: Atheist on a Mission

Ariane Sherine

Tim Minchin has risen from London-based Australian comic singer-songwriter to famous LA-based actor/composer/director/singer-songwriter, writing the music and lyrics of the award-winning West End musical *Matilda*, playing Judas in an all-star production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and landing the role of composer of the stage musical *Groundhog Day*, as well as directing and composing the Dreamworks animation *Larrikins*. In my experience, fame doesn't always bring out the best in people, and I wonder if the success – as it does for so many – might have made him aloof or self-absorbed.



I needn't have worried. When I meet Minchin at his management company offices in central London, he envelops me in a big hug and asks how I've been, before sitting opposite me at a boardroom table and warmly telling me about his life. He explains that he's moved to LA so he can spend more time with his family and that he doesn't get recognised there, so "it's good for my sense of normality". Despite having lived in London and LA for the past five years, his broad Australian accent betrays his upbringing in Perth. It's used to great effect in his role as rock star Atticus Fetch, the best thing about unedifying US drama *Californication*. He is the very definition of a polymath, deftly turning his hand to different art forms, and is involved in so many projects I can barely keep up: he is in London to promote his new book *Storm*, an illustrated version of his acerbic beat poem about alternative medicine and evidence-based thinking.

He is self-deprecating about his achievements. "This sounds like I'm just being politically correct, but I don't believe I deserve credit for anything I've done, because I don't really believe in free will," he says earnestly. "Not that I'm a determinist, but it's all luck, a hundred per cent luck, and if I worked hard, I was lucky enough to be taught to work hard." While Minchin says he's happy making "big old mainstream animated films and musicals", he also wants his work to do "positive things for people".

Part of this is writing strong female characters to inspire young girls. "I want to make sure that when I write about a little girl, it's not a Disney little girl who's like, 'I'm sassy and I've got awesome boobs!' Happily, my musical's about books and shit. I'm lucky, because I've stumbled upon these projects, but it's become more and more conscious."

I confess that my three-year-old daughter is obsessed with the movie *Frozen*, and with Disney princesses in general. How does he think we should get around that? "It's something I'm very aware of. I'm trying to write a modern woman in *Groundhog Day*. Talk about not being entitled to do that!"

We talk about *Storm*, in which Minchin delivers a stinging rationalist diatribe to a fictional hippy who doesn't believe in modern medicine. As it ends with the line "We'd as well be ten minutes back in time, for all the chance you'd change your mind," does he think it's worth trying to convert people to rationalism?

He eyes me wryly. "Is it worth putting signs on buses? Is it worth campaigning?" We laugh; he's referring to the "atheist bus campaign" I ran in 2008. I don't know, I reply, is it? "I think it is, because you just need the information to be available in as many forms as possible. The data shows that changing people's pre-established ideas is almost impossible – there are all these incredibly depressing experiments that show that the more you try to show someone evidence against their beliefs, the more they believe the thing [they originally believed]."

We just hate people telling us we're wrong, to the extent that we will double down when shown evidence to the contrary and we will confirm our bias at every turn by taking in the data we want and discarding the data we don't. That includes how we shape our Twitter feed and what we read and who we surround ourselves with – we're just firming up our [beliefs]. I do it," he admits, quipping, "It just happens that I'm right."

He continues, launching into a fast-flowing stream of ideas: "There's no new Enlightenment because it's not top-down enough any more. Back in the day there were a few rich men who said, 'Well, I think it should be about ideas, and we're not going to have a hierarchy', and you could kind of have an impact on a society that was only a couple of million people wide. Information dissemination is too disparate now. I'm probably right, there's probably not going to be another sort of Enlightenment, there's just information, gigabytes and petabytes of information churning out, and you've just got to make sure that the good information is amongst it as visibly as possible. I don't know whether the sides of buses and the internet [are the right forums], but you've just got to make sure that people who are interested have somewhere to go to to get information."

"And," he concludes, "teach critical thinking in schools, which if I was a politician would be what I would be running on, and therefore wouldn't get voted in."

Has he ever thought about it? "No," he says. "I think about it sometimes, but no fucking way. It would be about ego, I think."

I don't think it would be with him, I object. "Well, I don't know about that. I've had a real think about it, because you fantasise about 'What would I say if I could do a speech? If I were going to run, what would I say?' Because I'm so angry at the rhetoric my Australian leaders use. It's all demagoguery, it's all fear, it's all basically 'I'm going to protect our borders against the yellow peril!'"

"Well, it's 'brown peril' now," Minchin continues, referring to his homeland's recent anti-asylum-seeker policies, "but they're just saying, 'You should be scared and I'll protect you', and leaders have done that for ever. I'm so interested in rhetoric, and Obama's the best rhetorician of our time. His ability to act on it is stymied by a completely broken system, but I love the idea that leaders can inspire people to be better versions of themselves, not to win votes by fingering the dirtiest part of them, by pressing the buttons of paranoia." But if Minchin is quick to downplay his own role on the one hand – "My ambition is to have a fun job and have a cool time and make entertaining stuff" – he is driven nonetheless by a desire to influence people, to "disseminate good ideas".

"I think I'm doing the thing that best allows me to do that now," he says, suggesting that people stop listening the moment it becomes formalised. "That's why I didn't take up the presidency of the British Humanist Association, that's why I don't call myself an atheist in public, that's why when people ask, 'Are you a fan of Richard Dawkins?' I say, 'No, I'm not a fan of anything!' The more I label myself, the more people can go, 'Oh, he's just...' and discard the ideas. But if you're just a comedian, making people laugh, or a musician, composing songs... I mean, Matilda's full of pro-rationalist, pro-intellectual lyrics. It's almost propaganda! And it's probably more powerful for a young girl to watch that than for me to try and become education minister."

"But I'd really like there to be critical thinking [taught] in schools," he reiterates. "So maybe I could be on a panel at some point to talk about that."

Yes, I say, or provide lesson plans. "I'm not going to get around to that," he laughs. "But I do think we have a little problem on our side of thinking: there aren't many 'you's and there aren't many 'me's." Rather, he says, rationalism has become associated with "a certain type of didactic-thinking male who cares about scepticism and religion, and they're not very entertaining".

Minchin is far too polite to name names, of course, and makes clear there are "massive, massive exceptions" to the stereotype. But he identifies a certain tendency to assume that simply telling other people why they're wrong is the best way to promote clear thinking.

To make his point, he holds forth on how to teach schoolchildren about confirmation bias, zipping through about two thousand years of human history in a few sentences. It's a compelling story that gets the listener hooked, and is both true and convincing. I wish I'd had Minchin as a teacher instead of the boring, dry academics at my school. "Wouldn't it be amazing to be taught that, at 14?" he says.

We talk about acting. His latest project is a starring role in *The Secret River*, an Australian drama about the massacre of Aborigines by European colonists. "I've re-engaged with our denial of history. It's so horrific I can't even read the script, I get so upset by it, and I have to do all these terrible things, I'm the worst character."

How does he detach himself from that? "Well, I believe that the story needs to be told, and I'm an actor – ish – and the reason the director wanted to cast me is that she doesn't want the audience to have the 'easy out' of a baddy who is two-dimensionally 'evil'. The thing about Australia is that we need to tell stories about frontier conflict in the colonial days. There's no point blaming yourself for the behaviour of your ancestors, but there is something about acknowledging your inherited culpability. We need as a society to say, 'We did wrong by you, even though I didn't do wrong by you.'"

He describes the character he plays as multifaceted – "we excuse ourselves from culpability by going, 'That's an evil person – Rolf Harris is evil, we thought he was good, but he's evil – he sold us a lie' – and that's just not how humans work, there's no such thing. The director thinks I have an inherently friendly face. She wanted someone people would be forced to empathise with, because we as a white society need to own some guilt. It's inherited guilt but it's not bad to embrace that. I think I'm slightly doing this role partly as self-flagellation. I find it hard to talk about." Then he stops himself. "What the fuck? They don't want my fucking guilt!"

This reminds me of his song "The Fence", I tell him, where he says that nothing and no one is black and white. "Yeah, we divide the world into paedos and angels. We all think that if we were living in Germany in 1938 we would be one of the ones who helped the Jews, but I don't know, I would have probably toed the line. They were fed stories – we believe stories, don't we? And all the experiments show that there is very rarely anyone who won't do terrible things."

He explains why he takes on such a variety of projects: "I want to be an actor that people can't pigeonhole. I know it's very hard when you've got long hair and you're known as a comedian, but I'm doing it. I did *Judas*, I've done telly drama, I'm building up this body of work that says, 'No no, you can't tell me what I can and can't do, you fuckers!'" He smiles. "This is all me getting revenge for my twenties [when I was] never getting cast in anything, ever."

As he signs a card for my childminder – a fan whom he has never met – and draws a picture of an elephant in the card, then gives me a hug goodbye, I feel thoroughly glad that he will never face that situation again.

Reprinted courtesy of New Humanist (UK)

UN Day 2014 Celebrations

Friday 24th October UN Day Luncheon \$89

**Strangers Dining Room Parliament House Sydney:
bookings Peter Airey 0404 257 515**

**Guest Speaker: Professor Ramesh Thakur on "The
United Nations and the Elusive Quest for Peace"**

**Cenotaph Ceremony: 10.30 am Friday 24th October
Martin Place. No charge.**

**This ceremony honours Australian uniformed personnel
who have served the UN as peace-keepers. distinguished
guests including Lieut. General John Sanderson AC,
former Governor of WA and former Chief of Army.**

Countervailing the narrative of extreme Islam

Victor Bien



Extreme Islamists who engage in terror and condemn the west as "infidel" as well as ruthlessly killing, maiming and raping other Muslims are not a religious movement that we conventionally understand "religion" as, which has been shaped by Christianity; and the Enlightenment which religion it mainly had to push back.

Rather, from our Western conventions, they are more aptly seen as a political movement with a particular ideology (which has a heavy religious character). However this distinction is probably academic with Islam because for them religion, politics and political power are all of a piece. Islam has no concept of separation of mosque and state.

The rise of Islamic State or ISIL or ISIS poses a serious military threat to our world much as the Nazis and other lethally inclined groupings posed. We get forced into a situation that we can't be pacifist, we have to kill such threatening people because that is the only action that will stop them.

In this context the ABC RN (Radio National) Sunday Extra program on 28 September 2014 ran a segment War of Ideas download the podcast from <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/sundayextra/905-segment/5768226>

The blurb on that web page for the program said this, "As we've seen in graphic detail, Islamic State, subscribe to an extreme and fanatic dogma, and their actions have led to horrors, beheadings, crucifixions, mass executions, rapes and sexual slavery.

"So how do you go about combating this sort of barbarism?

"In the past fortnight Australia alone has deployed 600 Australian Defence Force members to the Middle East for potential action against Islamic State in Iraq.

"But can you fight ideology with weapons? If not, what's the solution?"

The general issue is that this extreme Islam is a highly effective organising principle to recruit particularly feckless and disaffected Muslim youth to join the cause and to fight. Consequently the movement cannot be defeated just by military means or by "hard power". There is a need for the West to come up with a countervailing "narrative" against the "wonders and paradise of the Sharia law which prevailed in the 7th century Caliphate". This is referred sometimes as "soft power".

What might that narrative be? It occurred to me that the struggles we've had to say what positive Humanism is is perhaps what the West as a whole should adopt as a top level narrative saying what its secular moral vision is; a vision which in brief compass says what our lives are all about in secular moral terms.

The ABC invited comments to the broadcast. With the above thoughts I posted this, which you can read on the site mentioned above:

I agree with one of speakers who said the war of ideas should not be seen in terms of the "clash of civilisations". Apart from being wrong it won't help.

I agree with the need for an overall "narrative" to countervail the Islamic one. I want to suggest our national Humanist resolution in 2013 (words changed here slightly for this context) "the defence and promotion of the values of the Enlightenment as an ongoing process for organising the west's aims, objectives and policies" would be that narrative.

An implicit Enlightenment value which the west has itself failed to uphold back to those times, is reflected in that, collectively, we've been Voltaire's bastards as J Ralston Saul put it.

The west must redeem itself, else I think the war of ideas against the aggrieved Arabic Muslim world cannot be overcome and the consequences will be dire!! The speakers on the program failed to bring this out properly although they did allude to it.

So in other words, as ever, the battle of ideas matter - for our lives and the general peace. The trouble is there are so many vested interests out there who don't care and don't want to care.

Following the 9/11 attacks there was discussion of the influence of Islamic scholar Sayyid Qutb who deeply influenced bin Laden. So the fundamentalist Islamic world view is an incredibly powerful political organising principle that can tap into disaffected Muslims.

I would think that much of that disaffection is a direct consequence of inequality perpetrated by the west. To correct that is a different sort of existential crisis for the west. I doubt that the fierce hatred of the west will be alleviated unless the west puts its own moral house in order.

Member News Membership Secretary

Thank You to the majority of our members who have renewed their membership for 2014/15 (due 1st July). Reminding those who have not yet renewed to send membership renewals in promptly. If unsure of membership status please ring membership secretary Angela 93614021 or email abraxas@tpg.com.au

A warm welcome to new members Erik Aslaksen, Elizabeth Dangerfield, and Peter Furness. Welcome back to member rejoining Colin Hesse.

Thank You for generous donations to renewing members including A Volans, G Stowell, G&B Carrard, B Barnett, T Bostick, W Dunstan, J Ievack, S Premier, A E Whitacker, R Farmer, R Harrop and L Crane.

The Humanist Calendar



3-Oct	1925	Birth of American essayist, novelist & former hon.president of the American Humanist Association Gore Vidal.
9-Oct	1940	Birth of John Lennon.
13-Oct	1909	Freethinking radical Francisco Ferrer executed in Spain.
13-Oct	1988	Shroud of Turin proved to be a Medieval forgery.
15-Oct	1980	Secular Humanist Declaration appears on the front page of the New York Times.
16-Oct	1854	Birth of Oscar Wilde.
2-Nov	2004	Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh murdered in Amsterdam by a Muslim fanatic.
4-Nov	1869	The first issue of Nature appears.
9-Nov	1934	Birth of cosmologist, Carl Sagan.
24-Nov	1859	Publication of Origin of Species by Charles Darwin.
10-Dec	1948	Human Rights Day proclaimed at UN meeting in Paris.
21-Dec*	annually	Summer Solstice in Southern Hemisphere.
23-Dec	annually	Festivus, a secular alternative to Christmas originating from Seinfeld comedy series.
25-Dec	1642	The birthday of Isaac Newton, aka 'Crispness'
30-Dec	1924	Edwin Hubble announces the existence of other galaxies.

* varies

Sex + Sin

Dennis Morris

Celibacy is practised by monks of many religions, assuming that it suppresses sexual desires in order to gain 'spiritual purity'. These religions have a problem with one of the fundamental instincts of humankind, our sexuality. There are conflicting views in society. Some are of the opinion that sex is one of the major degenerating factors in society, while others consider sex as a form of entertainment.

Priests in the early Christian Church decided that the word of their God was not enough and it required enhancement by man. They devised vast lists of specific 'sins' with punishments to match. These lists, many of which are over fifteen hundred years old, are called The Penitentials. They are the A to Z of sin and a great deal of it is sexual sin. Some of these medieval confession manuals are preserved in the British library. These manuals were well researched by the great-grand-daughter of Sigmund Freud, Emma Freud, in her book *Sins of the flesh*. Priests refer to these manuals when parishioners go for confession.

Homosexuality, bestiality and incest are grouped together, 'sinning against nature'. 'A man sinning with a man, a man sinning with a sheep', are to be found in chapter 72, for that the penalty is 15 years penance. The penance might be as extreme as a diet of bread and water for all those years. The basic premise is that sex should only take place within marriage for the sole purpose of procreation.

The Penitentials were the brainchild of St. Augustine (354-430 AD). He was one of the Fathers of the Christian Church, bishop of Hippo in North Africa (396-430) who profoundly influenced both Catholic and Protestant theology. His most famous works are, *Confessions*, a spiritual autobiography, and *De Civitate Dei*, a vindication of the Christian Church. In St. Augustine's honour the 28 August is a feast day.

St. Augustine had already had many mistresses, when his mother who was a devout Christian and later became St. Monica, told him to give up his mistresses. He tried for many years until eventually he 'saw the light'.

Even though the Penitentials are the work of men, they are treated as the work of 'God' and go into the kind of detail not found in the Bible. Every conceivable sin is included and every sin ranked according to its seriousness. As it goes through aspects of rape of a married woman, rape of a virgin, rape of a nun, the penalty becomes increasingly severe. Above all these is masturbation, which is a graver sin than the rape of a nun. Masturbation was regarded as wasting seed. They reasoned that, at least with rape the genitalia were used for the purpose it was intended. Not only did St. Augustine suppress the collective ardour of the medieval world, but blamed the whole 'problem' of sex on women.

The Church sought to protect its male clergy from the temptation of woman and the pleasures of the flesh and in the eleventh century made celibacy mandatory for the priesthood, which meant that priests could not marry. The Church thought, probably naively, that if a priest did not marry, he would not have sex. Up to the eleventh century married priests were the norm. There were even children of the various Popes running around the Vatican. Celibacy emerged from the monastic movement and eventually all clerics were forced to be chaste. Married clerics were defrocked and imprisoned, even killed and their lands seized. Because universities were for the training of clerics, academics were also forced to be celibate. Peter Abelard, who is considered to be the father of the University of Paris, was castrated when his marriage to Heloise became

public. Even though there were married professors in Italy as far back as the fifteenth century, Professors in Cambridge and Oxford in England were not allowed to marry until 1882. One of the "Cathedral Schools", as they were referred to at the time, was the Cathedral School of Oxford, which was later incorporated as Oxford University in 1210. The first University opened in Bologna, Italy in 1190, the next was in Paris, France in 1200.

The Church was so biased against women that in 1543 an act of Parliament was passed in England restricting women's right to read the Bible. The first woman to gain an academic qualification was Elena Cornaro Piscopia, awarded a degree in philosophy from the University of Padua in 1678. Laura Bassi (1711-1778) was only the second woman ever to gain an academic qualification. On 12 May 1732 she was awarded a degree in science at the University of Bologna and the same year the Senate of the University offered Bassi a chair, thus, she became the world's first female professor.



The imposition of celibacy on priests has caused no end of problems. Even though this hypocrisy seems more prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church, it is by no means confined to it. In recent times, not a week goes by without the exposure of the hypocrisy of a clergyman falling foul of the temptation of the flesh, be it by seduction, adultery, or paedophilia. The Church's message that homosexuality is wrong has been so powerful that it was absorbed into civil law in Britain in the middle-ages. Homosexuality was punishable by death and in the nineteenth century was diagnosed as a mental illness.

Today it medically appears more complex than may have been first thought. It may be hormonal, partially nurtured, partially genetic, or a combination. Therefore, the old fashioned condemnation may no longer be appropriate, too superficial and inadequate. Sexuality does not appear to be a matter of black or white. Most people are not exclusively heterosexual or exclusively homosexual but somewhere in the middle.

People who talk of a 'cure' for homosexuality are really talking of those who are somewhere in the middle, partially heterosexual and partially homosexual, by force of conviction or by force of sharing a community, or even by shyness and feeling uncomfortable with members of the opposite sex, even loneliness. There are many reasons why people choose a homosexual lifestyle. Therefore, these people are not 'cured' but merely move to another lifestyle. The possibility of a 'cure' for

those who are exclusively homosexual is extremely doubtful. It may be the biological makeup they are born with.

Due to repression homosexuals have had to hide their sexuality for so long. That is probably why they now flaunt it to such an extent, similar to the feminist movement when women were no longer prepared to abide by dominating religious standards.

Homosexuality has not always been seen as a sin. In some cultures it has been regarded as just a normal part of the variety of human sexual pleasures. It is not to everyone's taste, but neither was it seen as a road to hell. Sex is the great natural instinct we share with all our fellow animals. The difference is that we are the only species that surround our lives with the rules of religion, in conjunction with social restraints. The history of Biblical homosexual condemnation goes back to Hebrew scriptures where it is considered unnatural because one male has to take the role of the female.

Jesus never spoke about homosexuality, yet, in the New Testament we read: 'Now there was leaning on Jesus bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.....He then, lying on Jesus breast saith unto him'.... John 13: 23-25. Clement of Alexandria, one of the early Church Fathers, confirmed the existence of a later gospel of Mark, which was more spiritual and secretive, containing some verses narrating homosexual practices among members of the Jesus movement, and that it was stolen by the leader of a Nippurine Christian cult. Some claim that the leader of the cult added the verses; others believe the gospel never existed. We may never know, however, the words 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' does make one wonder.

Today, condemnation of homosexuality marks the great dividing line between the liberal and literal interpretations of religious teaching and this debate centres on the very origins of the human sexual urge.

Most of the taboos that have been inherited from centuries past may eventually go. They are ideas that are not well adapted to modern society. There is no longer a place for religious fanaticism that rules the lives of unbelievers. They want free choice in matters such as euthanasia, abortion and, sexual preference between consenting adults.

In 1962 Pope John XXIII signed a confidential document that outlined a policy of 'strictest secrecy' in dealing with allegations of sexual abuse by priests and threatened those who spoke out with excommunication. It was dispatched to bishops all over the world. This document has recently come to light and is hailed by lawyers acting for victims of abuse as a blueprint for an official Vatican policy of deception and concealment. Still more disturbing has been Pope John Paul II's refusal to change the laws on clerical celibacy, even though it is estimated that some 40% of the clergy simply do not keep their vows. The greatest

casualties of this disastrous policy have been the victims of those priests who have been unable to remain celibate and have resorted to compulsive pederasty and abuse. The suffering of thousands of children and women, who have also been abused and abandoned by priests, has until now gone unacknowledged by the church. Once an institution declares that it enjoys unique divine guidance, it becomes constitutionally unable to admit culpability. Cover-up becomes automatic.

In February 2004 the Roman Catholic Church released its first report of child sex abuse in the U S A, which hopefully is the beginning of the end of the secrecy. In the past fifty years 10,667 claims were made against 4,392 priests, of which 80% involved homosexual attacks, the highest number occurring in the 1970s.

Bishop Wilton Gregory, the USA Catholic Bishops Conference President, publicly apologised for all those who were harmed. Suggested causes included homosexual sub-culture and poor screening of candidates for the priesthood.

Robert Bennett, of the Catholic Review Board, stated that, as a result the Board found that many dysfunctional and psycho-sexually immature men were admitted into seminaries. For the perpetuation of crimes he blamed the bishops who often put the reputation of the Church before the welfare of victims. Bennett went on to say that the bishops breached their responsibilities of pastors and shepherds of the flock and put their heads in the sand. Furthermore, that for a percentage of priest's celibacy caused loneliness and alcoholism.

Victims' rights groups said that the report did not reveal the true extent of abuse, as many survivors never reported attacks. The scandal engulfs only the sixty four million members USA Catholic Church, the rest of the world's priests and nuns, still have to be investigated.

The present Pope is a criminal if he knowingly harbours, or conceals the names

of Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and Priests, who are rapists and paedophiles, the world over, instead of reporting them to police to deal with the matter.

When I was researching in a catholic monastery, one evening I heard someone crying, to my surprise it was a monk flagellating himself. I thought these ideas had long stopped. A flagellator is a person who whips himself or others as part of a religious penance or for sexual gratification. I could not say that I was researching, but that I was (very interested).

It is time to turn away from ancient dogmas and doctrines of the past that have been frozen in time for thousands of years, and reach out to a new future. Using science, reason and free inquiry blended with empathy and caring, we can achieve a new stage of human development.

All this is dedicated to:

All those who, over many centuries, were sexually abused, cruelly tortured or slaughtered in the name of religion; including those who have been denigrated and persecuted, for merely daring to pursue scientific knowledge.

Society now accepts donations & membership fees by PayPal

Pay to accounts@hsnsw.asn.au and send an email to that address stating the purpose of a payment.

News in Brief

Hong Kong Student Protests Have Christian Agenda

The Wall Street Journal reported that HK's churches are playing a quiet but important role in the city's protests underlying another dimension to the tensions. Relations between Christian Hong Kong and Communist China have run for decades.

US Woman bans Muslims from shooting range

Jan Morgan, the owner of the Gun Cave in Arkansas, has declared her gun range a 'Muslim free zone' in the wake of global terrorism and Islamic State threats.

The conservative blogger and NRA-certified Firearms Instructor lists a series of incidents that have triggered her decision including "the barbaric act of beheading an innocent American in Oklahoma by a Muslim", the Boston bombings, the Fort Hood mass shooting and the 9/11 attacks.

"Not all Muslims are terrorists, but almost all terrorists in the world right now are Muslim," she wrote.

In summary, I not only have the right, but a responsibility to provide a safe environment for my customers. I do not believe my decision is religious discrimination because I do not classify Islam as a religion," she said.

"It is a theocracy/terrorist organisation that hides behind the mask of religion in order to achieve its mission of world domination. People who shoot at my range come from all religious backgrounds ... some are atheists ... I do not care about their religious beliefs. I care about the safety of my customers who come to shoot here."



New Political Party Launches in Australia

The Australian Progressive Party has been launched by a group including former members of Australian Democrats, Secular Party and the youth-focused Emerge Australia Party. They state they are basing their principles on freedom, progress, community and equality.



Atheist told to swear to 'god' or leave US Air Force

The US air force has allowed an atheist airman to re-enlist after initially refusing to process his paperwork, because he refused to sign an oath that contained the phrase "so help me God".

The service announced the policy reversal after the American Humanist Association threatened to file suit by 19 September.

"After fighting for our rights, non-theists now again have the status quo in the Air Force, a secular affirmation consistent with other branches of service and our Constitution", said Jason Torpy, president of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, in a statement.

The unnamed airman, stationed at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada, was allowed to sign a secular affirmation to the service. Initially, the airman struck the phrase "so help me God" from his paperwork, and refused to say the phrase during a verbal oath when attempting to re-enlist on 25 August.

The other branches of the American military do not require the reference to God and make the phrase optional. "This is the only branch to my knowledge that's actually requiring everyone in all instances to use the religious language," he said.

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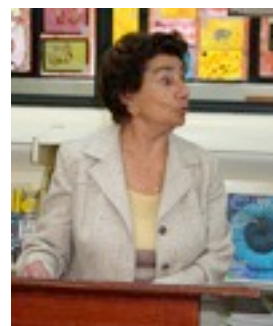
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