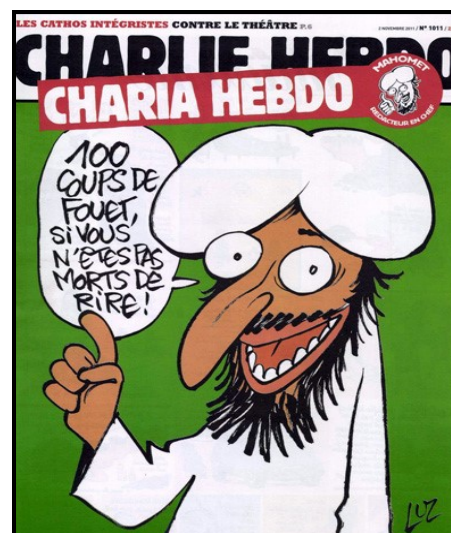


HUMANIST viewpoints



*"The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) is appalled and deeply saddened by the attack on the offices of the magazine **Charlie Hebdo** in Paris, France, today. This is an horrific and profoundly illiberal attack. It is an act of Islamo-fascist terrorism, aimed at silencing freedom of expression about religious beliefs, and about Islam in particular.*

No person who genuinely recognises the humanity of their fellow citizens, or who is remotely interested in the good of society at large or for any section of society, could ever justify this terrorism. Reading words and seeing images that satirise your beliefs is as far removed from a warrant to murder as it is possible to get.

Europe has a tradition of humanism, in which both freedom of expression, and freedom of thought and belief, including freedom of religion, are respected and upheld in law. To criticise beliefs, including through satire and ridicule, does not contravene others' freedom of belief. Rather, criticism is essential to freedom of expression. Murder on the other hand is the ultimate nullification of all a person's freedoms and being.

It is our true hope that Europe will neither bow to this violence, nor rise to it. We will not be provoked into an equal savagery. We will resist all terror, and we will defend freedom of thought and expression: essential values for free and meaningful lives."

— Sonja Eggerickx, President of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), 7th January 2015

SEE CENTRE PAGES SIX AND SEVEN INSIDE FOR A CALENDAR OF EVENTS IN APRIL, MAY AND JUNE 2015

HuVAT Sunday 12th April 4pm Philosopher David Macarthur [replacing HuVAT] Sunday 10th May 3pm 2nd Activism Meeting
HuVAT Sunday 14th June 4pm Brian Edwards on State Aid

PAGE 2— JOHN AUGUST EXPLAINS THE NEW APPROACH TO ACTIVISM MEETINGS

PAGE 4— IAN BRYCE'S PRESIDENTIAL REPORT PAGE 5— AFFIE ADAGIO'S REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY

PAGE 8— MURRAY LOVE (NEW 2015 VIEWPOINTS EDITOR) ON APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO MULTICULTURALISM

PAGE 10—JOHN DILLON ON THE EQUAL MARRIAGE ISSUE PAGE 11— VICTOR BIEN'S TRIBUTE TO LYN HARSANYI

**WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE A SHORT OR LONGER TALK ON THE ONGOING IMPORTANCE OF ANY ASPECT OF HUMANISM?
CHECK OUT OUR WORLD HUMANIST DAY EVENT ON PAGE SIX AND GET IN TOUCH WITH US ON THE DETAILS**

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



NSW HUMANISTS ACTIVISM MEETINGS

What are Activism Meetings for?

While we have the best of intentions of doing activism during regular committee meetings, it does seem too easy to get distracted. So, an initiative of mine, was supported by the committee, was to have "activism" meetings - with our first in recent history held on the 11th January.

Doing "activism" - changing the world for the better - has always been a goal for us. Part of that is doing. Still, action informed by good thinking is always going to be better, and it gave me the opportunity to express some thinking that I've extracted from books like "Rules for Radicals", and "How to Win Campaigns".

In addition our meeting was also about building up connections and finding out what others are up to. One bit of feedback I had was that while the meeting was interesting, we didn't actually **conclude** anything about what we needed to do. Still, it is early days - and while I do hope we'll eventually get to practical outcomes, I think it is great that we can have more of our thinking a lot more focused around "activism" than at regular meetings.

We now plan to have activism meetings as a supplement to general committee meetings, instead of HuVATs. We'll still be running HuVATs - but perhaps once a quarter we'll have an "activist" meeting. We hope to have at least a few interesting guest speakers - so apart from anything else, we'll be able to learn what's going on and build connections.

I think our aims should be to:

- change the law - change policy - change implementation - empower people - change prevailing awareness

For sure, the legal system is what constrains us, and money is diverted along religious lines through parliament. Changing the laws and how they're implemented is important. But, at the same time, "can we ignore the government, and lead our better lives regardless of Government?". And that does lead to the other elements - empowering people and raising awareness. For sure, a lot of campaigning is around "raising awareness". But we need to be thinking - "how is the increased awareness going to result in a better world, with people more able to lead more worthwhile Humanist lives?". I think that's an important element. So too is the idea of a measureable outcome - if we're trying to change laws, well, when a new law is enacted that becomes much easier. But other things are less easily measured. Still, I think it helps to at least be aware of these issues.

Now, we can try to get the world changed by direct communication with individuals - so that we, as it were, have shared communication with all the foot soldiers. And that's a worthy goal - not just to have our ideas in circulation, but think about how our ideas can help people assert themselves so that individually - and as a group - we do better things.

Appealing to the outside world - Tragedies and Scandals

However, our in-principle supporters may not be so committed as to have directly opened their communication channels with us, and we have to think about how we can have "an issue" that resonates with people in the community-at-large. This is where we need to think about how "issues" might get traction with people-at-large.

And so, we need to understand the difference between "a tragedy" and "a scandal".

- A 'tragedy' is something which should not have happened.

- A 'scandal' is something that could have been dealt with.

Calling something a scandal means you can get added traction with the media and the outside world. Rather than merely being an issue of concern, it becomes linked up with some mistake in its handling by a greater authority - Government, Business - or even a Community which was unable to stop to recognise the problem. So, if we are going to get better media traction - we need to think in terms of "scandals" - and identify some party that is "causing" the problem.

The position of religion in society

Changing how religion is perceived in society would be great. The world has changed, and as compared to Bob Hawke being openly atheist - religion has now become a part of politicians' credentials. In addition, religious commentators can claim a special status - as compared to them merely being part of the political square.

An important objective would be for Secular Charities to obtain recognition from the Federal Government, and have the privileged position of religious charities devalued.

Separately to policies, however, it does appear Australia is becoming less tolerant of diversity - with believers being more able to marginalise atheists and others. So, at the same time as we push for our values, we also need to push for tolerance.

Australia was specified as a secular entity. This was forgotten because secularists are laid-back, with no 'missionary zeal'. Christians (e.g. Fred Nile) call Australia a 'Christian country'!

Consider Making a Donation or Bequest

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

Book Room & Library

Some of us have switched to e-books, while many continue to appreciate physical books. Either way, if you have any surplus books in your collection then consider donating them to the Society's Library or for sale in the Book Room. Thanks also to all the Book Room helpers.

Member News

Vale: we regret to report the deaths of long term members Allyne Harsanyi, who many of you will have met at AGMs and other HumSoc meetings, and Frederick Diehl, member since 1994. Also recently joined member Robin Holliday has passed away. New member: as a tribute to his mother's support of and interest in the Humanist Society of NSW Dr Michael Harsanyi has applied to join us. We welcome him warmly. (Please also see Victor Bien's tribute to Lyn Harsanyi on page 11.)

Guest Speakers at the 1st Activism Meeting

STEVE MAXWELL from the NSW Rationalists, spoke on behalf of Max Wallace (but not on follow-ups on Ron Williams' case.). Max is interested in Fiji, looking at having a secular state.

LIZ JACKA - board member of Dying with Dignity NSW - reported that Richard Di Natale (federal Greens senator) has legislation before parliament; many issues needing attention regarding the constitution. Canada has passed legislation, making appeals via their Bill of Rights. In UK, Lord Falconer's cross-parliamentary committee drafted a bill which was passed but Cameron opposed it. Apparently the idea is that no criminal charges if assistance is given on compassionate grounds. In NSW, we need a Falconer-style report.

JOSEF DAROCZY - Freethought Student Alliance - A big problem across Australia is to motivate people to become active, then remain active. Student discussion groups tend not to continue. We need goals to create something constructive that will outlive the people. JD wants to connect students to secularism in the wider community.

Comments - VB: Continuity is an issue in student circles. Scott Sharrad from South Australia seeks funding for students to attend CAHS Convention. ML: Should we advocate for Humanist Chaplains to compete with religious chaplains?

ZAC BLOOD Macquarie Uni Atheist League - Consolidating on membership Social group for like-minded people. Holding events in conjunction with Sci-fi and Physics groups. Watched 'Cosmos' - Held 'Ask an Atheist' stall on campus. - Looking for more activism in 2015 and increasing presence on campus.

Member Reports and Suggestions from the Meeting

- We have many good books and publications in our library. - Could our library join the Library Society? (SM)

- We should try to adopt a think-tank role, get articles which could lead to talks of a quality that could get on to 'Big Ideas'. Need someone who can be interviewed (ML).

- We need to be a learning organisation, (therefore) we need new plans, concepts etc. (VB)

- We have a history, and have lasted 50 years, (therefore) we are perceived as "winners" - this helps in gaining credibility, in addition to having good ideas & concerns. We have values and a philosophy. The concept 'Humanism' has gravitas (ML).

- We need something to show for our existence. Can survey members by phone. We're on Facebook, community radio (JA)

- HuVAT offers stimulating conversation (BW)

- School chaplaincy continues to be an issue. Also Religious school funding and Judeo-Christian heritage in syllabus.

DAVID NELSON - Suggests a public resource, Searchable Knowledge Base on issues related to Humanism etc. John A or other committee member to sponsor project.

JOHN AUGUST - I noted there are some good books - some in our library, and also generally available - which are definitely worth a look. Part of our development should be doing some broader reading, as well as (of course) discussing, turning up to meetings and advocating :

- The Paganism in our Christianity by Weigall
- The Rise of Christianity by Albert Kalthoff
- Infidel by Ayaan Hirsi Ali
- Radical Sydney by Terry Irving and Rowan Cahill
- Islam, Arrogance and Delusion by John L Perkins
- Contempt of Court by Jean Ely
- The Bible Unearthed - Israel Finkelstein & Neil A. Silberman

Conclusion

I think that running activist meetings is a healthy thing, increasing our awareness of issues around us, and over time will help us to take a more active role in changing the world. I look forward to your contributions in future.

The next Activism Meeting will be on Sunday 10th May. The usual Committee Meeting will be shortened to finish at 3pm, with the last half hour or so related to internal activism issues, like managing our Facebook and other promotion.

The open session will then commence from 3-5pm with light refreshments. There will be the opportunity for members to outline what they've been up to, or their concerns. I also plan to allow some discussion of issues and opportunities. (See the range of possible speakers on the Events Calendar on page 6. If we're lucky enough to get all of them it might last a bit longer.)

John August, Vice-President



Dr Affie Adagio has retired from the NSW Humanist Society Committee after fifteen years of service.

Affie served as President 2002-2005, and for very many years as Honorary Secretary and as Viewpoints Editor. She was Convenor of **Australis2000**, the first regional congress of the International Humanist Ethical Union. Affie attended CAHS AGMs on several occasions representing NSW, and served as Secretary of CAHS Executive 2000-2002. She organised many successful and entertaining End-of-Year Parties for the Society's members. Affie liaised with the UNAANSW and sustained a profitable working relationship between the two

organisations for many years. Her fundraising talents included persuading the NSW Premier to grant \$6000 to support UNAANSW in its tenancy at Humanist House. Founder and Convenor of HuVAT, Affie also successfully ran five prestigious International Women's Day events at Parliament House, sponsored by both HSNSW and UNAANSW. A highlight of her final year of officialdom, was organising a major World Humanist Day Symposium - (which she unfortunately missed due to her heart attack!)

Affie's innovative style, and experience as a counsellor, helped steer the Humanist Society of NSW through some difficult years, and her energy will be missed. The Committee thanked Affie for a splendid record of service, and showed appreciation with a bouquet of lovely farewell tulips.



NSW HUMANISTS PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Our end of year celebration was a great success, with merrymaking all round.

The editorship of our newsletter Viewpoints has changed - this is the inaugural issue edited by Murray Love. We extend **hearty thanks to Frank Gomez**, who has done such a sterling

job for the past several years. Such efforts and skill by volunteers does much for the effectiveness of the Society.

This summer we met with Roy Brown of IHEU and his wife Diana. He spoke on his experiences on the U.N. Human Rights Council, which seems to have lost sight of human rights, and is often dominated by its growing Islamic member states.

Our Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talks (HuVAT) each month continue to get our message across. On 28 January I spoke on Fundamental Physics and the Big Questions of Philosophy. This includes the influence of science and the Enlightenment as a rational basis for humanism.

Other HuVAT topics included The Ellis Defence, where the Catholic Church placed legal barriers between its billions of dollars of assets, and its child abuse victims. George Pell, who could be the next Pope, may have made decisions that draw out the suffering of victims.

Over the holiday break I took the chance to meet with other Humanists and like-minded groups. In January I met with many of the Victorian committee to discuss humanist matters. We compared the booming primary ethics lessons program in NSW, with the very successful philosophical ethics trials in Victoria, where there has been a 40% decline in Religious Education due to school principals cancelling the classes.

I am in my fifth year of teaching ethics at Balmain, where we now have 9 teachers, and reach 48% of the students! We are making a real difference in the next generation.

I sat in on the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse. This helped see defence of human rights in action, and get an idea of what might lead to serial abuse and its cover up. The RC is costing \$320M. Good value it would seem!

John August gave a talk on Evolutionary Psychology to the Sydney Realists on 10 March, following Part 1 in 2014. The views are much in accordance with humanist beliefs. His talks are very well received with much discussion.

Open Forum weekly talk

This program, continuous for 43 years, presents expert speakers in controversial topics in religion, economics, politics etc. It includes many of interest to Humanists. See the program at : <http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/mtgs>

An earlier topic was the Israel-Palestine problem, with no solution in sight while both sides hold to fundamentalist and racist views.

The cost of child abuse was the topic at Open Forum (sponsored by HSNWS) on 11 March. Mr Nick Hossach estimated that lost government revenues alone are nearly seven billion dollars a year - pain and suffering not included!

Dr Wendy Lambourne on 25 March spoke on Justice After Genocide. What should be done after the killing has stopped to restore a decent society? Wendy described her work on reconciliation in Rwanda and Burundi.

CAHS Convention and Motions

Preparations continue for NSW participation in the CAHS Convention (Council of Australia Humanist Societies) to be held in Perth in 29-31 May 2015. All NSW members are welcome to attend – you might like to schedule a Western holiday.

On 8 March, HS-NSW held an SGM to formulate motions for the Convention. Motions already submitted by other states were discussed, and voted upon to determine our position.

To originate new NSW motions, the outcomes of the previous Activism meeting and of the Meetup discussions were reviewed. Ideas from the floor regarding current events were presented in a brainstorming session. A list of 10 ideas were finalized and voted upon. The most popular are :

With strong support:

- To oppose funding of chaplains in schools, while excluding secular welfare workers
- To express concern for social justice, in particular domestic violence, and support finding for women's refugees.
- To eliminate the privileged position of religion in charities.

With a lesser majority:

- That companies involving the supernatural pay normal tax & lose their financial concessions.
- To remove religious exemptions to anti-discrimination laws

Now HS-NSW is to draw up the most important (e.g. first 3) with a rationale in the required format. At the Convention, such motions from all States will be discussed and voted upon. Those carried will then become official CAHS policy and be the subject of letters and actions.

Nomination/selection of recipients of two Awards is in progress – Outstanding Humanist Achiever (OHA) – for active Humanist members, and Australian Humanist of the Year (AHOY) for known public figures advancing humanist causes.

Other Outreach

I met up with Kendric Frazier, - 40 years editor of the ***Skeptical Inquirer*** journal (and its predecessors). A group of Humanists and Rationalists took the opportunity to meet him for a relaxed lunch, in-depth discussions, and a tour of Cockatoo Island. He was here for the ***Australian Skeptics International Convention*** in November, which I attended, making contact with many leading overseas Skeptics and Humanists.

Several Humanists and friends attended the ***Unholy Trinity Downunder Tour*** on 13 March, which brought together three atheist activists. Matt Dillahunty, AronRa, and Seth Andrews took to the stage to share stories, interact with a live audience (and with each other), and address some of the challenges and opportunities in the fight against non-reason. It was a most enjoyable and humanist experience.

I built my fifth float for Mardi Gras – in this case a mobile Parliament House Canberra. Our VP, John August drove it, and I marched with it. It was organized by ***Sydney Queer Atheists***, and supported by friendly groups. While not under a Humanist banner, it promoted many shared values from a human rights perspective, and protested against the permitted exemptions from Equal Opportunity legislation granted to religious organizations etc.

Ian Bryce, President

**UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 8th MARCH 2015
PARTNERSHIP PROJECT of UNAA(NSW) and HUMANIST SOCIETY NSW**

5th YEAR

UNIWD 2015 TOPIC: CEDAW

held in Waratah Room at 2-5pm
Parliament House SYDNEY
on Monday March 9

Sponsored: The Hon Jillian Skinner MP
Minister for Health.

Welcome: Dr. Affie Adagio Convenor/MC welcomed the Minister and all present introducing Robyn Carroll to carry out the Acknowledgement of Country.

Acknowledgement to Country: was carried out by **Robyn Carroll**, Indigenous speaker, from Walla Mulla Family and Community Support, Woolloomooloo



Opening: The Hon Jillian Skinner MP in opening the Seminar spoke of her knowledge of improvements that have taken place with women's issues and she also focused on the need for extreme measures to protect women from violence. The Minister informed the meeting that a Minister for Domestic Violence which is necessary would be appointed if the Baird Government is re-elected.

Message from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon: Pamela Lemoine UNAA NSW member read out the message which was most inspiring to hear.



Pamela Lemoine

History of Women in Australia: Valerie Weekes past President of UNAA(NSW) and Co-Convenor of UNIWD Sydney gave an extensive report of the history of women in Australia for some decades and this will be available in print for those who request it of Affie. Also we filmed the seminar and it will be on You Tube too. (Valerie Weekes-->)



CEDAW HISTORY & UPDATE: Sue Conde was to speak on this topic and was unable to due to having to attend a funeral so Affie was able to print her 5 page fascinating talk onto a double sided page and hand it out as Affie was talking to it including her segment which was about how she attended the UN Conference/Forum in Copenhagen in 1980 when Australia signed CEDAW. Affie was one of 22 women community representatives together with an equal number of women government representatives who the Minister for Home and Women Affairs the Hon Bob Ellicott had chosen to attend this historic event. Nevertheless Affie said that looking at Australia and our situation with Women, Freedom, and Peace we cannot say that we need not worry! Domestic Violence is a huge problem and women are still not equal in pay with men. How can we be so complacent? She added "I have had in the last month one

woman and one man, both supposedly educated, ask me why do we need to have an UNIWD Seminar??!! As I said at the Seminar that left me speechless and anyone who knows me would find that amazing. There are two main reasons I have been passionate about convening the UNIWDAY Seminar 1. to Disseminate information about women's issues in order to raise awareness 2. To remind the community that Parliament House Sydney is available to the public to use gratis for respectful community members."

The printed talks are available for anyone who requests them - affie@affie.com.au or 0421101163 or 02 9690 1431

Indigenous Women Progress: Robyn Carroll, Indigenous Community Worker Walla Mulla Family and Community Support Woolloomooloo, recently awarded **Woman of the Year for Sydney 2015** in the **NSW WOMEN OF THE YEAR 2015 AWARDS**. Congratulations Robyn (here with Affie) who spoke on her life experience as an Indigenous woman and how she survived through the worst to reach where she is today in a centre which was begun by nuns and is run by women for women and families.

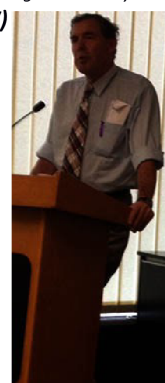


AFRICAN GREAT LAKES WOMEN: Margaret Conway GLAPD (Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development) Spoke about Women Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo sharing what trauma some of these women experienced to achieve what many of us would be horrified to live through. Again copies of this talk can be obtained if required.



Margaret Conway

Women and Peace: Prof Chris Hamer (UNSW) was invited to speak by Buddhist Ven Dr Tham from UNAA(NSW) Committee and he shared his good wishes with our future plans and some of the progress of the work he has been involved with to do with women, peace, and sustainability.



Prof Chris Hamer

Thanks to Speakers Mina Batra AM is responsible for UNAANSW Interfaith Portfolio and she thanked the speakers while Valerie Weekes presented bouquets of flowers or boxes of chocolates. The lovely roses in the vase were presented to Affie because she organised the UNIWDAY and because it takes place on her birthday.



36 present, Waratah Room can seat 40



Roses for Affie
(flowers or chocs for all speakers)

(Report by Affie Adagio)

CALENDAR FOR APR-JUN 2015

Sunday 12th April 2015 4-6pm , Humanist House - HuVAT & Meetup combined special event:

'Liberating Naturalism' - Dr David Macarthur (Associate Professor in the Philosophy Department at Sydney University) will address the concerns raised by Ludwig Wittgenstein at the end of his famous Tractatus: "even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched".

Can science's reach be overstated? What are the alternatives? Is, say, aesthetic behaviour more than an artefact of sexual selection? Can we find 'conceptual space' between scientific naturalism and supernaturalism? Are there aspects of life and the world which are not reducible to mathematical patterns? Ought vs Is! Freewill. There will be plenty of time for questions, and Q&A will be a major part of this session with an engaging and learned philosopher researching towards a 'Liberal Naturalism'. Please come along to this very special occasion.

Sunday 10th May 2015 3-5pm , Humanist House - NSW Humanists Activism Meeting :

(See John August's article on pages 2 & 3 for a report explaining the advantages and outcomes of our first Activism meeting held in January.) This will include - as with our last meeting - the opportunity to members to outline what they've been up to, or their concerns. I'd also plan to allow some discussion of issues and opportunities.

Speakers will include Ian Bryce, on the National CAHS meeting and John August on elements of our secular past and HuVAT and other available videos. We will invite the following people - no guarantee they'll all turn up, but we'll see:

- David Shoebridge, NSW Greens, on holding religious institutions to account for child rape; - Max Wallace & Steve Maxwell, NSW Rationalists, on the influence of the high court; - Cathy Byrne, Southern Cross University, on Religious teaching in our Schools; - Dying with Dignity representative; - Student Atheist/Humanist group representatives; - Athetha Blayse, White Shield, challenging abuses by the Salvation Army; - Black Rose Activists; - Nathan Zamprognio, Cult Information and Family Support. Why not come and share your own ideas?

Sunday 24th May 2015 3-6pm, Humanist House - New Humanists Sunday Open House (Meetup):

'Privacy & Identity in a Soul-less World' with Dave Nelson. Humanists generally reject notions of 'Soul'. We are really just strands of experience woven into a narrative we call our selfs - but we want to be **our own** weavers! Intrusions, electronic and otherwise, by decidedly soulless corporations and agencies, threaten the very processes by which we establish reputations, project images of ourselves, and face life front on. This event will be a chance to examine the importance of a functional contemporary process of retaining the privacy necessary to continue to be who WE want to be, and not just become what THEY want to make of us.

Sunday 14th June 2015, 4-6pm, Humanist House HuVAT (Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talk)

Brian Edwards leads a lively and provocative discussion on the merits of government support for private schools - State Aid. Brian will introduce the topic and be a devil's advocate on the issues.

Sunday 21st June 2015 a HumSoc & Meetup combined special event - '2015 World Humanist Day Symposium on why humanism matters', 1.00pm for 1.30-5.30pm at Humanist House (then on to dinner at a nearby restaurant):

This is a chance for Society members and friends to speak for 5, 10, 15, or 20 minutes about an aspect of Humanism that matters for them. A rapid variety of short talks can be very stimulating, and each of us has valuable knowledge and ideas. Humanism embraces values, ethics, history, politics, society, psychology, cosmology, biology, philosophy, literature, and the arts with a special approach to thinking and learning. So there are many ways to contribute. Please do, and please do it soon. Contact Murray Love at lovemuz@gmail.com, or Victor Bien at vbien@hsnsw.asn.au with a talk title, duration, and a sentence describing your talk. A projector is available. Watch the website and Meetup for updates. Above all, come in on the day to celebrate with fellow humanists worldwide.

	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
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P	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
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U	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
N	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30					

Open Forum meets each Wednesday night at Humanist House 8.00pm



- | | |
|---|---|
| 1-Apr 1908 | birth of Abraham Maslow, founder of Humanist psychology |
| 5-Apr 1588 | birth of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, reputed atheist, author of Leviathan, and early Enlightenment thinker |
| 6-Apr 1697 | first use of the word 'freethinker' in a letter to John Locke |
| 6-Apr 1903 | birth of Erwin Schrödinger, German theoretical physicist |
| 7-Apr 1948 | foundation of the World Health Organisation |
| 21-Apr 1869 | the term 'agnostic' coined by Thomas Henry Huxley |
| | |
| 1-May 1933 | first Humanist Manifesto issued |
| 17-May 1963 | formation of British Humanist Association |
| 18-May 1872 | birth of Bertrand Russell |
| 26-May 1864 | ban on gay books in Germany lifted (seen by gay activists as the symbolic date for the start of the gay rights movement) |
| 28-May 585BCE | described as the day science was born when an eclipse was predicted by the earliest known Greek philosopher Thales on scientific principles, rather than astrological premonition |
| | |
| 17-Jun 1963 | compulsory Bible reading in schools ruled unconstitutional by US Supreme Court |
| | |
| Friday 3rd to Monday 6th April 2015 Easter | |
| Wednesday 22nd April 2015 Earth Day | |
| Saturday 25th April 2015 Anzac Day (100 years since Gallipoli) | |
| Sunday 3rd May 2015 National Day of Reason (USA) | |
| Sunday 17th May 2015 International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia | |
| | |
| Monday 8th June | Queen's Birthday |
| Sunday 21st June | World Humanist Day |

THE QUEBEC CHAIN-EMAIL MASSACRE*

I received one of those chain-emails recently. You've probably seen them. Often there's an emotive anecdote and/or political concern – missing children, heroism, conspiracy. They ask you to pass it on to everyone you know, so it becomes a campaign.

This one has a story about Muslims so was seen as topical, as well as expressing views they supported. I generally don't pass on chain emails myself, - but I suppose I'm doing so in a big way now by publishing this one in Viewpoints!

I was myself immediately appalled by the email, but learned that other Humanists saw it as giving opinions shared by many in Australia - views not always expressed 'for fear of being accused to be racist'.

First—is the story true? I found no mention of the incident on the official website of Dorval in Quebec. But my Google searches turned up an earlier version of the story set instead in Ath in Belgium. It was originally in the French language, but otherwise identical. The Ath official website did have a categorical denial of the story by the Bourgmestre (Mayor) Marc Duvivier .

The Belgian Mayor called the message a 'mensonge' which translates as 'lie'. Even French language news called it a 'hoax'. Snopes, and other skeptical websites, dismiss the English language version just as forcefully. Still, some Humanists say, the point is it would be good if it were true.

I guess they feel it's time someone took a stand and told Muslim immigrants how to behave in no uncertain terms. I can understand their fears and frustrations. Nevertheless I found this particular message disturbing and repellant. Now I know that people of goodwill can see things differently. So I'd like to take a closer look at the email, and explain my concerns in plain language. As the story spread to Australia, I will substitute our country in my analysis.

Firstly, it is not insignificant that it is false through and through. Someone made the story up in order to set up Muslims for a fall. How would you feel if someone deliberately lied to make you look bad? And would it in any way mitigate the pain, if everyone generally considered it a plausible story?

The message has a scolding and intimidating tone: "Muslims *must* understand that *they have to* adapt ... to integrate... it is for *them to change* their lifestyle ...". This is a call to "shape up or ship out" addressed to a whole category of human beings. It could even be seen as expecting Muslims to start eating pork. Would anyone pressure Jewish people that way?

In any case, do migrants have to change lifestyles? Past migrants did have to adapt and integrate. Even change their names. But I thought we'd moved on from the attitudes Italian and Greek migrants endured in the post-war years. Isn't 'lifestyle' now a matter of personal choice? What's really left of 'freedom of choice', if your very lifestyle is dictated to you by local majority preferences?

The message is sarcastic: - "there are 57 beautiful Muslim countries in the world, most of them under-populated and ready to receive them with open halal arms". Does anyone else get or expect sarcasm, in letters from appointed or elected public officials? - OK it's not really from a public official, but it is meant to be imagined as such. Sarcasm is generally rude and unacceptable in correspondence. What does it mean if standards of good manners are dropped for a

particular kind of person? Surely official rudeness is demeaning, and the beginning of dehumanisation.

The directive tone continues with: "they must understand that in [Australia] with its Judeo-Christian roots, Christmas trees, churches and religious festivals, religion must remain in the private domain".

This statement seeks to establish so-called 'Judeo-Christianity' as a national tradition, and then demand all **other** religious manifestations be private only. The author seems to think there are established majority religions - and unestablished minority religions that need to know their place.

The message addresses "Muslims who disagree with secularism...". Perhaps some of us will see the word 'secularism' and feel this message reflects our values, but I ask them to think further. Secularism is not about privileging majority views, and still less about privileging local religious traditions. I suggest the author of this message has no understanding of secularism at all.

As a secularist myself, I draw no comfort from highly selective usage of 'secularism' directed only at minorities. Secularism isn't about separating just the unpopular 'churches' from the state. Secularism is in fact about one's right to be unpopular without suffering harassment from authorities.

The message insists that Muslims "must understand that [Australians] are neither racist nor xenophobic; they accepted many immigrants before Muslims". This is nonsensical - there is a well known history of rejecting foreigners and their foreign ways in all sorts of countries. This is an aggressive demand that no-one is to call the authors and supporters of the message a racist or xenophobe. (But perhaps it moves those who feel unjustly denied their own views for fear of such accusations).

It concerns me it's now often seen as far worse behavior, to accuse a particular fellow Australian of being 'racist', than it is to slur any of the less popular ethnic groups. And, of course, it can also be argued that Muslims aren't a race. So let's just leave 'racism' out of it! But who can hold me back from describing this chain-email message as xenophobic?

What's all this pork talk anyway? Kids don't have 'pork' for lunch. Surely it's ham that's in contention. Of course we all can agree that an Aussie kid can have a ham sandwich at his school tuckshop. The use of the word 'pork' seems deliberately symbolic and provocative. I think it shows this is mostly about identity rather than practical considerations.

The phrase "give up their identity" almost slips by us in reading the email, but I think it is actually the 'punch line' in the message. 'Identity' is the new obsession, and blood and ink get spilt over it. (I could substitute 'identist' for 'racist' but the **Apple iStore** has already taken the word for a software 'App' developed for use by dentists! ☺)

There are catch cries to defend 'identity' coming from militant chauvinists of all stripes and both islamo-fascist and islamo-phobic extremists. People fear theft of their 'identity' and regard it as a possession. Ancient libel and modern vilification laws intrude, not to forget duels and honour killings. Many wars were fought to redraw boundaries around group identities - linguistic, ethnic and faith-based. Identity becomes sacred while the sacred is blurred into identity.

THE HOAX CHAIN-EMAIL IN QUESTION:

Let's hear it from a Quebec Mayor...!

MAYOR REFUSES TO REMOVE PORK FROM SCHOOL CANTEEN-MENU... EXPLAINS WHY!

Muslim parents demanded the abolition of pork in all the school canteens of a Montreal suburb.

The mayor of the Montreal suburb of Dorval has refused, and the town clerk sent a note to all parents to explain why...

"Muslims must understand that they have to adapt to Canada and Quebec, its customs, its traditions, its way of life, because that's where they chose to immigrate.

"They must understand that they have to integrate and learn to live in Quebec.

"They must understand that it is for them to change their lifestyle, not the Canadians who so generously welcomed them.

"They must understand that Canadians are neither racist nor xenophobic; they accepted many immigrants before Muslims (whereas the reverse is not true, in that Muslim states do not accept non-Muslim immigrants).

"That no more than other nations, Canadians are not willing to give up their identity, their culture.

"And if Canada is a land of welcome, it's not the Mayor of Dorval who welcomes foreigners, but the Canadian-Quebecois people as a whole.

"Finally, they must understand that in Canada (Quebec) with its Judeo-Christian roots, Christmas trees, churches and religious festivals, religion must remain in the private domain. The municipality of Dorval was right to refuse any concessions to Islam and Sharia.

"For Muslims who disagree with secularism and do not feel comfortable in Canada, there are 57 beautiful Muslim countries in the world, most of them under-populated and ready to receive them with open halal arms in accordance with Sharia.

"If you left your country for Canada, and not for other Muslim countries, it is because you have considered that life is better in Canada than elsewhere.

"Ask yourself the question, just once, 'Why is it better here in Canada than where you come from?'

"A canteen with pork is part of the answer."

(At some point in the chain all this was translated exactly from a French language original set in Belgium. I have viewed and checked the Francophone version which only added a finishing 'Bravo Mr le Bourgmestre!' Also note you can check for hoaxes yourself, at sites like www.snopes.com, www.hoaxbusters.org, and www.hoax-slayer.com.)

We 'defend to the death' an individual's right to choose their various identities in a multicultural society - even to be a 'multicultural individual' if they so choose! But we all 'face death' if we allow groups of shared identity to take up arms in defense of that identity, or to enforce it on their colleagues.

I think this hoax chain-email is a case of an identity warrior masquerading as a champion of justice. If we ever allow identity to be an excuse for coercion, we re-open everything that campaigners against bigotry have worked to close.

As a practical issue, I do believe it fair that there be halal alternatives if Muslim children attend a school. (Provided someone buys them - there's no need for wasteful symbolism). And people have the right to be different, even stupid, and to

peacefully pursue issues that have only minority support.

On the other hand I'm opposed to burkas in banks, separate law codes which disadvantage women, guns, bombs, violence, and any privileging of faith over reason. But my concerns are never to be muddled with bigotry and xenophobia (either blatant or in denial of itself).

There are rarely just two sides to any questions these days, but human adversarial thinking will always tend to see things in black and white. I like to call mine a 'nuanced' view, but recognize there are many other 'nuances' out there!

Murray Love

**Apologies to fans of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*



Hi- I'm Murray Love, the new editor of Humanist Viewpoints and also the author of this article.

I joined the Humanist Society in 2009 and have been a Committee member for about five years. I was born in Brisbane in the early fifties and have recently retired after many years as a Librarian for Penrith City Council. My wife Fay has also joined recently, and is currently the Secretary of the Society.

Fay and I have also been running NSW Humanist Meetup since 2012. Meetup is a special kind of social networking website which offers access to group activities. Our Meetup group is one of hundreds in the Sydney area, but the only one focused on Humanism.

The Meetup Membership is growing towards five hundred. This sounds great, but these members can also belong to dozens of other groups so competition for attention is fierce. So my efforts have been focused on the revival of Humanism in a new generation, while perhaps being less visible to longstanding HumSoc members.

Editing Viewpoints will be a chance to become known to those whose main contact is the quarterly newsletter. Being a Committee member, I hope I'll be able to include more direct information on the association's concerns and activities as well as on the Meetup—now sponsored by the incorporated association. But I'd like all the help I can get. Please let me get to know you better too, by sending in comments and items for publication.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? VIEWPOINTS WOULD LOVE TO SEE MORE MEMBERS' VIEWS ON THIS AND ON OTHER ISSUES THAT MOVE YOU

THE RIGHT TO MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Opponents of equal rights for homosexual people, particularly regarding same-sex marriage, predicate their opposition on ignorant misconceptions of human biology, and unsupportable reliance on religious precepts.

The Christian Democratic Party's Rev. Fred Nile, well known for his vehement opposition to same-sex marriage has even labelled homosexuality a 'mental disorder'.

A rather better-qualified opinion would be that of the late Dr Albert Ellis*, a world-renowned American sexologist and psychotherapist, who showed it is actually 'devout belief and religiosity' which 'contribute to, and in some ways are equal to, mental or emotional disturbance'.

Rev. Nile and his ilk pontificate that the status of 'marriage' should only be conferred upon the union of one man and one woman. Yet even the Macquarie Dictionary includes in its definition 'any intimate union'!

But, is the biological coupling process for perpetuation of the species, the be all and end all of marriage?

In December 2013, two years after the death of his first wife, Rev. Nile, aged 79, himself married a new spouse aged 55. There was no intention or likelihood of increasing the population. What qualities did such a marriage have that are unique to the sacrosanct formula of one man and one woman? Surely no rational person could claim that love and companionship are the sole province of heterosexuals!

Another resolute opponent of equal rights is Jim Wallace, Managing Director of the Australian Christian Lobby. His organization promotes 'Christian principles and ethics', blindly derived from misconstrued traditions, and the dubious authority of holy writ.

We might ask, what advantageously distinguishes specifically 'Christian values' from the existing mores of a society already embracing humanism and democracy? Doesn't such democracy by definition include, without qualification, equality of formal and social rights?

Jim Wallace is on record as claiming that smoking is healthier than gay marriage. His specious rationale was based on dated statistics and effectively repudiated in public debate by marriage equality advocate, and Greens Senator, Christine Milne.

The Australian Christian Lobby manifesto includes an undertaking 'to foster a more compassionate, just and moral society' - if you please!

There are two main reasons for opposition to same-sex partnerships: gross misunderstanding of human biology, and bigotry arising from religious delusions.

First - biology. In human development and experience there are obviously widely divergent preferences and attitudes. Sexual preference is just one such consideration and is justly entitled to free expression and societal endorsement. Within that range of human expression, gender-related distinctions in behaviour and appearance occur. Yet these do not necessarily indicate sexual preference.

Appearances can be deceptive. E.g. Men have nipples and can get breast cancer because, at the earliest embryonic stage, gender is indeterminate. Subsequent developments, both physical and mental, are subject to natural influences within

that wide range of biological potential. And some of the embryonic variation potential remains in evidence.

And human biology includes brain function; in other words, the mind - often misunderstood, notably by the religiously inclined, to be a separate entity and imaginatively referred to as the 'heart'.

Homosexuality may be a minority phenomenon, but it is incontrovertibly natural. Homosexual behaviour has been documented in over 500 animal species.

It cannot seriously be suggested that so many who 'come out' after decades of suffering their sexual proclivities in socially enforced secrecy do so out of some developed fantasy to be different or outrageous, as has been claimed. It is clearly a matter of ontology - not choice.

Next - religious delusions. These result from two main assumptions: the existence of an almighty deity; and that the Bible is this deity's infallible instruction manual.

There is no credible evidence to support the first assumption, and the Bible is an incomprehensible, anonymous, contradictory, unsubstantiated, superstitious, misinterpreted collection of unoriginal manuscripts cobbled together centuries after the alleged events by a partisan committee! Further, it was compiled without benefit of modern science and allied enlightenment, and has been significantly edited over time.

The Bible supports slavery and the subordination of women; it tells of a loving God who orders and condones wars and atrocities, and who decrees death for minor infractions of the law. If such are its teachings, the Bible's dicta on homosexuality may well be cited as just further instances of abhorrent, misguided doctrine. Why should condemnatory biblical pronouncements on homosexuality be given any credence?

In rejecting the authority of the Old Testament, we have the backing of none other than Rev. Nile. On the ABC's Q&A programme in May 2013 he airily dismissed the entire Old Testament as of 'no modern relevance'.

Bear in mind, too, that of all the sayings and teachings attributed (rightly or wrongly) to Jesus in the New Testament, none broached the subject of homosexuality. At most, it can be said that he advocated upholding the law contained in the very same Old Testament Rev. Nile dismisses.

As a final biblical consideration, we might note the role of (Saint) Paul in condemning homosexuality in the New Testament epistles still attributed to him.

What of this icon of the Christian faith? Paul, formerly Saul, began as a morally and socially corrupt professional thug, and self-confessed persecutor of Christians. His famous 'change of heart' en route to Damascus, supposedly triggered by a vision of Jesus, is nowadays more reasonably attributed to visual and auditory hallucinations. And all this followed by an egotistic personal claim and conviction he'd been singled out by God to be of signal authority. Can it be imagined that, today, such events would be accepted as leadership qualifications?

If the male plus female formula and its potential for procreation, is the only permissible foundation for the status of marriage there are other obvious questions.

What of heterosexual couples who choose not to, or can't, have children? Is their marriage required to be invalidated - or

forbidden in the first place by way of a preliminary official questionnaire? - Of course not.

And if annulment or prevention of a childless heterosexual marriage is not a moral, social or legal requirement, then by what standard and to what purpose can it be asserted that heterosexual marriage is innately valid and uniquely superior?

In the event that a heterosexual couple can't, or decline to, have children there remains a supportive partnership founded on love and companionship, and still endorsed by society. Indeed, shouldn't love and companionship be the very basis of human partnership - as distinct from a primordial reproductive function?

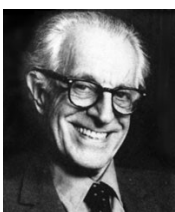
Given all these considerations, how would same-sex marriage detract, as it often claimed, in any way, from the social acceptance of partnerships as discussed - and referred to as 'marriage'?

As a concluding observation, concerning adoption of children, it is often claimed by opponents of equality that the effective nurture of children depends on there being a mother and a father.

I suggest that in today's diversified society balanced child nurture can be achieved regardless of parental gender considerations.

And I contend that, in terms of human welfare, freedom of sexual expression will prove far more beneficial than the misguided machinations of the religious, and others, who seek to deny it. In this matter of equality, it is high time we, as a civilized society, ceased being in thrall to the bigotry of ignorance, and the moral and political tyranny of unsubstantiated religious beliefs.

John Dillon, Blackheath



***Albert Ellis (1913-2007) was a famous American psychologist.** In 'The Case Against Religiosity' he wrote "This article will try to make a succinct and cogent case for the proposition that unbelief skepticism and thoroughgoing Atheism not only abet but are practically synonymous with mental health; and that devout belief, dogmatism, and religiosity distinctly contribute to, and in some ways are equal to mental or emotional disturbance. The case against religiosity that I am about to make ... is only presented as a firm (and undevout!) hypothesis that I believe has validity but that, like all scientific hypotheses, is tentative and revisable in the light of later substantiating or nonsubstantiating evidence".

VALE LYN HARSANYI

Lyn (Allyne) passed away on 5 December 2014. She was a long-time member of the Society who joined not long after the Society got going in the early 1960s. She and husband Stephen offered their home as one of several which contributed to hosting meetings for the "North Shore Group" which was active till the mid-90s I recollect.

My wife and I attended a couple of those meetings at their place in Lane Cove.

I personally liked Lyn a lot because she had a high curiosity level and often attended our meetings with great interest to contribute to discussing the issues.

Her daughter's eulogy included this:

"Lyn loved learning and attending WEA and University of Sydney courses on a wide range of subject matter - literature, history, philosophy. She enjoyed mental stimulation. She read with passion and she read widely. Current affairs, the Herald, good novels, history. She was always content with something good and solid to read. She loved going to the movies and seeing quality films. I could always rely on her assessments regarding books to read and films to see. She loved plays and the opera. We accompanied her to many of these over the years. She had an active and engaged mind up until the end. In her last weeks whilst in hospital, her primary request was to have her glasses and enough cash to buy the Herald each day, and that kept her happily occupied. ...

"Lyn believed in bettering the lives of human beings on Earth. She was a long term member of the Australian Humanist Society and met many friends through that organisation. Through the Humanist Society she was actively involved in many social causes including the decriminalisation of prostitution and ensuring the availability of abortion. She was also an active member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society. I have no doubt that the environment of social activism that I grew up with was a shaping influence for myself and my own choice of career in Social Work. I know she was delighted with my choice and always took an interest in what I was pursuing."

To which I say yes very much so, and which we Humanists much appreciate to this day.

Aussie Lyn was born in 1924 in Melbourne and through work came to know a new culture which developed in Sydney after WW2, of European Jewish refugees that arrived under post war migration. From this association she met her husband Stephen, with whom she begat two children Anne and Michael.

Today we are honoured that her son Michael has chosen to become a member partly to replace his mum. Thanks Michael - your membership is much appreciated!

I was able to compile most of the details of this article by the eulogy given by Anne, which can be accessed from our website:

<http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/articles/LHarsanyiEulogy.pdf>

Victor Bien

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