

# HUMANIST viewpoints



The congregation of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Australia is currently in the process of establishing an official Australian religion in His Noodlely Honour. The only dogma allowed in the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Australia is the rejection of dogma. They are offering a free certificate for Pastafarians who wish to become members of the congregation.

“Our pasta, who art in a colander, draining be your noodles. Thy noodle come, Thy sauce be yum, on top some grated Parmesan. Give us this day, our garlic bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trample on our lawns. And lead us not into vegetarianism, but deliver us some pizza, for thine is the meatball, the noodle, and the sauce, forever and ever. R’amen”

(for a new twist on old time religion check out [pastafarians.org.au](http://pastafarians.org.au))

- SEE PAGE 6 FOR DETAILS ON OUR UPCOMING EVENTS AT HUMANIST HOUSE APRIL MAY & JUNE
- COME TO EXPLORE THE EVIDENCE ‘DID JESUS EXIST’ AT HUVAT ON SUNDAY 10TH APRIL 2016
- MEETUP ON SUNDAY 24TH APRIL 2016 LOOKS AT ‘LIVING HUMANISM TOGETHER’
- BE THERE OR SEND IDEAS FOR OUR NEXT ACTIVISM MEETING ON SUNDAY 8TH MAY 2016
- MEETUP ON SUNDAY 22ND MAY 2016 EXPOSES ‘CORPORATE HEGEMONY’
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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK...

I am now commencing my second year as editor of our society newsletter so can take some time to review things, and muse on how the society is developing.

I'm also having to fill in space to complete the magazine before April is upon us. So my first thought is to appeal to members to send in news and views for publication. These can be controversial - there's no requirement to push a party line. They can be on diverse topics - Humanism has a broad range. It is particularly important to hear from members who haven't contributed before. Even a 'letter to the editor' format is fine. Please by all means disagree with anything you see in the newsletter and write to tell us about it. Or share why you do agree. Naturally, we cannot guarantee everything will be used, but with negotiation and patience and flexibility we would love to include all we can. Send things to [lovemuz@gmail.com](mailto:lovemuz@gmail.com) so that we can discuss what's best. Handwritten and typescript contributions aren't easily dealt with, and might get postponed. Communication by email is preferred. I also need to be careful that items don't appear in both the local and the national journal.

There are members who are not on the Internet and some live a long way from Sydney. And, as we age, even shorter distances need more assistance to overcome. Attendance and interaction get more difficult. It's wonderful when stronger, younger and newer members can assist. The newsletter is one thing that all members can share in, so we try to include material on what's happening at Humanist House through the year. We try to build local community and to fill the journal with contributions from members of the Humanist Society of NSW. So far we have managed that, but the burden of contributing can fall on the same few.

We treasure our members and especially those who have contributed ideas, effort, money and commitment in the past and into the future. We have members no longer able to attend but whose generosity sustains the society. We have members with immense life experience to share. We have members who desire nothing more than to pass on their evolved wisdom and hard-earned learning to make a better world. We have members who have worked hard in the freethought community and deserve honour and recognition.

Yet it is not our needs that define the association and its community. The greatest thing we all can wish for is that the society grows and thrives with new generations. We don't have a promise of eternal life. We Humanists also don't indoctrinate our children to take over as clones of ourselves. We nurture them in freedom. But we need succession all the same. It has been said that "posterity is ungrateful and forgetful". It's a lucky parent that doesn't feel the sting of that phrase from time to time. Like passing on a family farm we can only wait and hope that someone loves it all as much as we do. But we have to be careful of not loving it to death by imposing conditions that deter new minds from taking up the baton. And imposing conditions comes naturally and unselfconsciously to us human beings.

The NSW Humanist Meetup community will reach 1,000 some time this year. Online is the way to go, but it's a lot harder to get flesh and blood involvement. Once there were more than 1,000 members actually in the association. There was less competition for the freethought volunteer. An association needs an active core, sustained by turnover of duties and ideas. A core of volunteers, activists and participants with diverse ages and backgrounds and in regular contact. Only then can effective leadership be induced to give their time to build the society still needed in the 21st century more than ever.

We need to find activities that gather in the kinds of people that can sustain the association. We can't impose all our hopes on any fresh new face we see. We have to build a cycle of involvement where new contributors can find their way to the centre of things at their own pace. We're trying what we can, using the opportunity of the Meetup and the newsletter. We need to be willing to take chances and reach out to new people without frightening them away. But we need still the generosity of existing members blended with altruistic humility to give growth space for new contributors.

***Murray Love, Editor & Meetup Organizer***



# THE CATHOLIC CHURCH & THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO CHILD SEX ABUSE

I've been vaguely aware of these issues for some time, but it was only when I heard a program on Radio National's *Big Ideas* series - "How to inspire a Royal Commission" - that it came into focus. While I was originally quite interested in this issue, as time went on, my appreciation became more vague. It was difficult to speak to this issue in the face of Catholics who want to be offended, and see themselves as picked on.

More recently, the appearance of Cardinal Pell - remotely - before the Royal Commission, has brought the issue back into mind. Frankly, it was just as important a year ago, when there was less interest by the news organisations. And it will still be important in a year, whether or not there's coverage. Of course, those trying to quell the attention might prefer to complain about Pell being victimised in the current media climate.

To be sure, paedophilia by Priests in the Catholic Church is not the only occurrence of child rape. There are other churches, other public institutions, and even family abuse. But the fact that child rape happens in these other areas does not make us less disturbed about the Catholic Church. It is certainly my choice to focus on these issues, and I do not claim that it is the single most important issue on planet Earth. But it is one that greatly concerns me.

Obviously, many adults have grown up in the Catholic Church and had positive experiences. Some feel the Catholic Church "set them up" for future success in life. And there's no denying that the Catholic Church, when it operates in accord with its promise, can be a very positive thing for some people. The problem is that those who have had these positive experiences can find it difficult to comprehend that it could have been **very** different for others. There is a common error of over-generalising from your own experience - 'I've had good experience' - so everyone else must have had that experience!

Paedophilia by priests is a betrayal of trust. It also a betrayal of trust if parents abuse family members. However, at least individuals within families are on their own, if ever prosecuted by the legal system. Whereas criminal priests have an magisterial institution with a long corporate reach, and powerful collegial loyalties, to help them face the courts.

In correspondence from the Catholic Church to Father Denis McAlinden, reference was made to the fact that if certain protocols were followed, the Church would be able to "protect his good name". This was a shock to the people in the Radio National broadcast, and it came as a shock to me too.

The *Broken Rites* group say that the Maitland-Newcastle

diocese transferred McAlinden backwards and forwards between New South Wales and Western Australia. This illustrates what happens when you have an organisation with resources and a long memory backing criminals.

More recently, we have had Cardinal Pell trot out a list of claimed reasons why he took no action about paedophilia which was brought to his attention. Pell is certainly a very smart man, in terms of church politics, theology and public speaking and advocacy. But it is nevertheless quite strange that for all his competence, if he is to be believed, he missed this one. There is something wrong with this picture.

If we are to take Pell at his word, we can only speculate that the Roman Catholic Church cultivates a strange form of intellectual blinkering, where you can be impressive in some areas but completely blind in others - conveniently blind.

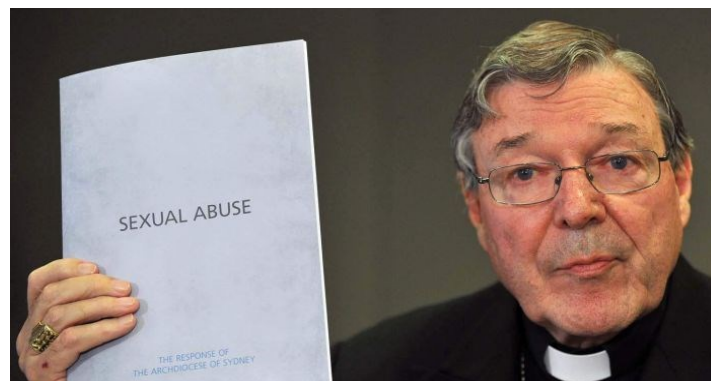
For all his claims of sympathy to the victims, in Pell's diocese the Church chose to use legal manoeuvres such as the *Ellis Defence* to evade responsibility in the courts. One issue is why Pell reacted as he did to things he heard - but he separately should account for his choice of legal manoeuvres. It is surely no excuse to 'follow orders' from a lawyer in such a case.

In response to concerns about child rape, Bishop Anthony Fisher - around the time of the World Catholic Youth Day - said that victims were "dwelling crankily on old wounds"! - This can be seen as insensitive. That's in addition to the use of the *Ellis Defence* and various other legal manoeuvres the Catholic Church has made, to avoid responsibility for what priests have done in the past.

But, apart from the machinations of the Catholic Church - the resistance of politicians to the holding of a Royal Commission - something that has since been vindicated - was amazing to hear of. In particular, it was distressing to find out that Barry O'Farrell, and Julia Gillard, were very resistant, and had to be forced into holding the Commissions. And then the commission process also seemed to have been abused in its way. There's quite a story in all this.

The actions and comments by the Catholic Church are troubling. There's a deeper history going back much further than the current interest in Pell. There's a lot of issues to be on top of, and you never know when and what things you'll be confronted with, that it would be great to be able to challenge. But we can all do our best.

**John August**





# VALE LILIAN EMMETT 1917 - 2015



In her mid-sixties Lilian courageously left her stagnant marriage and moved to a home unit in Birchgrove, where she made the most of being near the city. She frequently caught the 441 bus to the NSW Art Gallery and the Botanical Gardens. She loved driving or going by bus or ferry to discover new parts of Sydney. Seeing films and plays were other interests. She attended art classes for 10 years and made new friends with whom she went on holidays to many parts of Australia and often back to New Zealand.

Lilian had a lively mind, always up to date with current affairs, social and environmental issues, constantly reading or listening to the radio when at home. She was excited by new ideas. She'd been a great reader all her life. She read biographies, history, Australian and New Zealand novels, and travel books. Lilian attended rallies and demonstrations such as the huge rally against French nuclear testing in the Pacific, the Bridge March for Reconciliation with Indigenous People, and the protest in Town Hall Square against the violation of human rights in Tiananmen Square.

Lilian walked often and looked after her health, attending the STRONG gym at Balmain Hospital after a stroke at 83, and made a great recovery. Her eyesight and hearing deteriorated so at 92 she went into care. She remained cheerful and upbeat, and amused everyone around her with her quips.

Lilian had been a member of the Euthanasia Society and had mixed feelings about very old people being kept going with medication, instead of being allowed to fade away in comfort and peace in their own time. Lilian had made out an Advanced Care Directive, which greatly helped her family and her doctor in her final days, and she died peacefully at the age of 98.

**Suzanne Gilkes**



Lilian (front) at her 90th Birthday Celebration at Humanist House

My mother Lilian told everyone in her speech at her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party at Humanist House, that she had found friends and great mental stimulation at the meetings of the NSW Humanists. For at least 35 years she enjoyed the talks, conferences and social occasions of the Society, and she felt that she had found her tribe.

Lilian's family attended the Methodist church three times on Sunday in Ashburton, New Zealand where Lilian grew up, the eldest in a family of four. She told me that they enjoyed the rousing hymns and the social life centred around the church, although as a child she was very worried about sinning. This was brought on by the hell-fire and brimstone sermons.

Her family went through the Depression, with her father always in work on the railways. I think Lilian was shown a good example of compassion for others when her parents took in a family whose breadwinner had lost his job and looked after them until they got on their feet again.

Lilian trained as a shorthand-typist, but really wanted to teach English, which was her best subject at school. After marriage and children, Lilian became interested in social issues, especially Women's and Aboriginal issues.

The second wave of the Woman's Movement, starting in the 1970s, was a big eye-opener for her as for most women. Notwithstanding having a large family of three daughters followed by three sons, all of whom she loved dearly, she could see the point of women having access to birth control and abortion for their physical and mental health. Not least to be in control of their own bodies, and to find a human solution, and not rely on non-existent superhuman aid.

Our family had moved to Sydney in 1959 where my father got a job as an engineer with Qantas. The first years were very difficult for Lilian, who missed her family and friends in NZ, and finances were tight. However, she soon threw herself into exploring this new country and joined organisations such as the local Labor Party branch, and the Flora and Fauna Society. When she joined the NSW Humanists, she found kindred spirits, interested in Left-wing issues. Lilian was on the committee for some time and also was the Bookings Officer.

# MEMBER NEWS & VIEWS



Meet committee member Bill Wright who joined the committee in 2015, but has been an active member of the NSW Humanist Society for many years. Bill view is: "I would like to live in a society where religion plays a lesser role than it does today. After all science has eclipsed religion. I want a world where everyone has an equal chance to realise their potential".



Hi. I am Fay Love, Secretary of Humanist Society of NSW. I enjoy contributing to the running of this organisation and have been on the committee for about 3 years. I especially like helping out at the New Humanists Meetup, listening to discussions and hearing all sorts of points of view on lots of different topics. It is interesting to see the possible directions for our Humanist Society.

I retired from teaching in 2009; my last 19 years were at Jamison High School, South Penrith, in Sydney's West. My job involved ensuring the educational outcomes for students with learning difficulties and also overseeing the integration of children with special needs into a large comprehensive high school.

I have volunteered in many community organisations; the P&C committee at my children's local government primary school, the committee at our children's council-run long day care centre. I was also Age Manager at our local Little Athletics and Team Manager at our local Junior Cricket Club. Lately, my community involvement has extended to Nepean Blue Mountains U3A where I am on the management committee and I also tutor in French and Italian.

I suppose I'm a compulsive volunteer, but I feel it is one way to contribute back to the community which is so important to me.



## 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. Our thanks go out to those who have already made generous donations.

## 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

Welcome to new members Teik Hock Lim, Lyn Fraser and Andrew Hollier.

A reminder that all renewals will be due in July. Please keep up your support of the Humanist Society of NSW.

Thanks to Suzanne Gilkes for the wonderful tribute to her mother Lilian Emmett on the previous page.

## OUR LIST OF MEMBER EMAIL ADDRESSES IS FALLING OUT OF DATE AND IMPORTANT MESSAGES AREN'T GETTING OUT

KEEP YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS FRESH & STAY IN TOUCH BY FORWARDING YOUR CURRENT EMAIL ADDRESS to [lovemuz@gmail.com](mailto:lovemuz@gmail.com)

# CALENDAR FOR MAY-JUN 2016

## **The HuVAT for Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2015 at 4.00 for 4.30 p.m. will ask DID JESUS EXIST**

Speaker David Killingly will explore the question 'Did Jesus Exist'. David will guide us through the different ways the Christian gospel stories can be understood. Having studied the gospels for years from a secular perspective, even learning biblical Greek, David has debated apologetics with Christian scholars. David has digested the works of the notable 'jesus mythicists' and their opponents. David is well fitted to take us through why it is legitimate to doubt Jesus's existence and why the birth of Christianity and the new testament documents are explicable without a charismatic founder to kick it all off.

AS ALWAYS PLEASE STAY AFTER EACH HUVAT FOR OUR SHARED MEAL AND HUMANISTIC CONVERSATION AT 6 PM

## **NSW Humanists Meetup 'New Humanists Sunday Open House' 3-6PM on Sunday 24th April 2016**

The theme is LIVING HUMANISM TOGETHER. The ambition is to gather those who want to work as a team, to share hopes and difficulties, to explore possibilities and make things happen through the power of humans coming together in community and siblinghood. It might be something like a self-help group for human beings - It might be Team Cosmos rather than Team Australia - It might involve 'mutual self-realisation' given that individuality is a social phenomenon - it might mean toiling together in the garden of our own existence - cultivating our humanity. It might involve psychology, philosophy, science, intuition, risk-taking and vulnerability. It might involve sharing, and caring to listen to the needs and gifts of others. It might seem pretentious. It might seem pointless at times. It might be worth all that. It might need patience. It might need time. It might need willingness to return. It might need commitment. It might need contribution. Community isn't something we can switch on and off. We work from what we have as human beings. We learn from one another. We draw from the best that science and human ingenuity offer. We reflect on our intuitions. We project from our imaginations. We respect our colleagues. We have no gurus. Today's teacher is tomorrow's learner. If this appeals why not come along in a spirit of openness.

SHARE SPACE WITH A DIVERSE HUMANIST MEETUP COMMUNITY AND ENJOY A MIX OF DISCUSSION SNACKS AND SOCIALISING

## **Sunday 8th May 3.15-5.15 p.m. will be the second Activism Meeting of 2016 to share ideas and plans**

At these meetings The Humanist Society of NSW gets together with guests to share concerns and hear about projects, views and ideas towards progress regarding the values and issues that disturb and inspire the humanist community. Members are again invited to tell us what they are doing, and what they would like the society to focus on. During April John will be again organizing some interesting guests. Please send in your own suggestions. Murray Love will try to present some of his thoughts on the creative thinking, careful risk-taking, genuine outreach, and magnanimous succession planning the Society needs to engender to build a secure new future for the association and its assets.

REMEMBER A 3PM START FOR THE ACTIVISM MEETINGS - ALL WELCOME TO GO ON TO 'THE STONED CROW' FOR A MEAL

## **NSW Humanists Meetup 'New Humanists Sunday Open House' 3-6PM on Sunday 22nd May 2016**

will expose the burgeoning power of corporations, global and local. Guest speaker will be Peter Cartledge. The event will be titled CORPORATE HEGEMONY. Corporations are now more powerful than many governments, and have access to influence at the highest levels of administration, legislation and media communication. The US Supreme Court even granted them recognition as persons having human rights. Yet they can be very inhuman in their invulnerability, their ruthlessness and their wealth and power. International trade law and agreements, intellectual property codes, and the best politicians money can buy make for a heady mix of disempowerment as we discover that consumers aren't citizens and customers aren't always right.

SHARE SPACE WITH A DIVERSE HUMANIST MEETUP COMMUNITY AND ENJOY A MIX OF DISCUSSION SNACKS AND SOCIALISING

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## **WORLD HUMANIST DAY SEMINAR—'CONSTRUCTING HUMANITY' 1.30PM Sunday 19th June 2016**

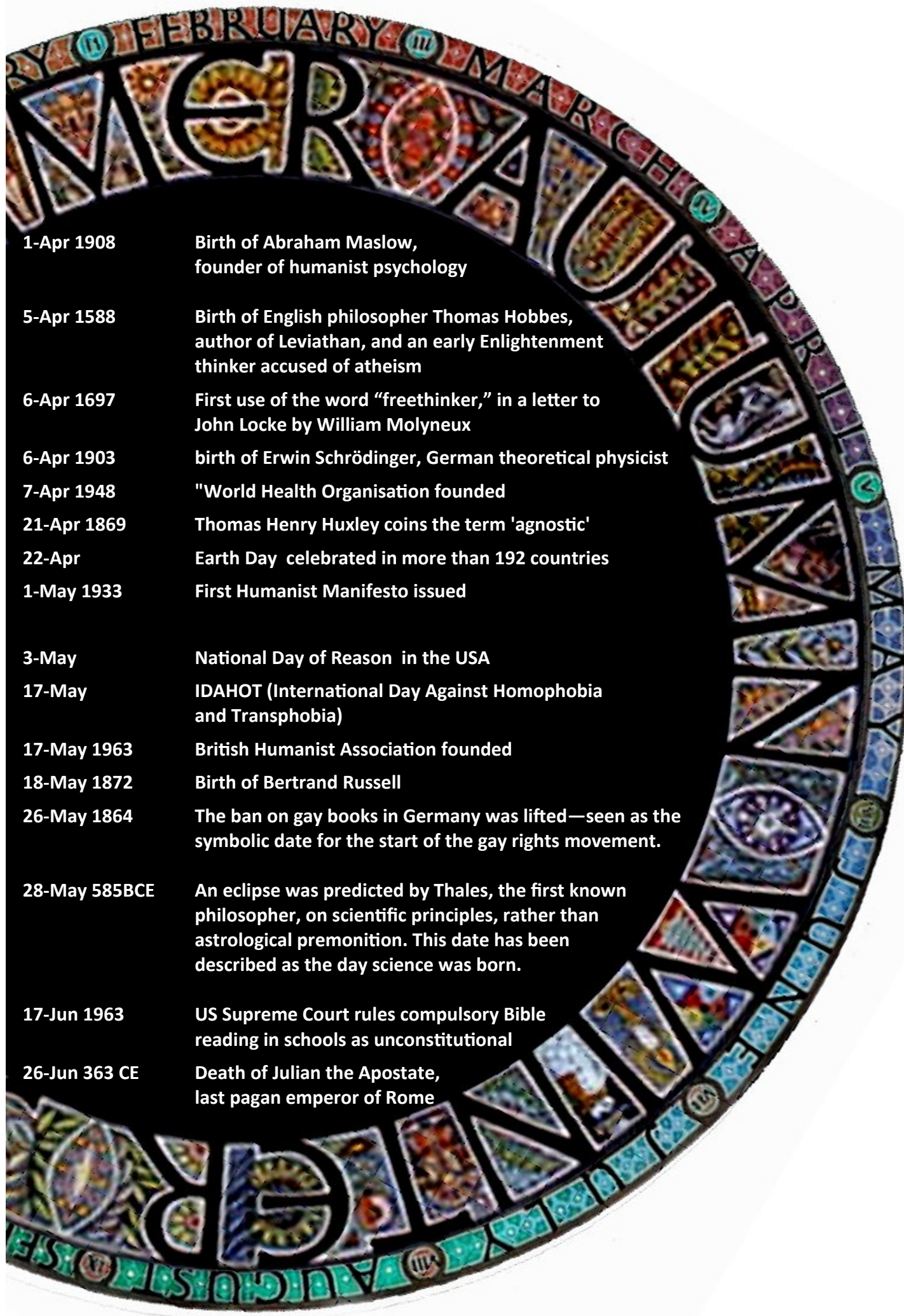
World Humanist Day occurs on the twenty-first day of June each year but our meeting are on Sundays so this year we will celebrate with our traditional seminar on Sunday 19th June 2016. (In June, this event replaces all other events we normally hold on the second and fourth weeks of the month.) The theme this year looks at what we might mean by the 'human..' part in Humanism. It will culminate in a meal after 5.30pm. **Do please note the date to come as an audience member and watch the society website for further details and for instructions on how to get a ticket.** But there is also opportunity to participate.

The header 'CONSTRUCTING HUMANITY' will be broadly interpreted to examine scientific, cultural, philosophical, psychological and semantic approaches, and the words 'constructing' and 'humanity' are shamelessly ambiguous in this regard. It runs 1.00 for 1.30-5.30 to 6.30pm. which is a core four hours, with half an hour before to gather, and time afterwards to chat informally and eat. (This is one of our major events). There will be breaks during the four hours of fifteen minutes at 2.45pm and fifteen minutes at 4.15pm. So there are six 30 minute blocs and two 15 minutes blocs for speakers plus Q&A. And some of those 30 minute blocs can be divided into 5 and/or 10 minute sessions allowing for more speakers including members.

**We are negotiating for a number of principal speakers but also opening things ups for society members to offer themselves for a shorter talk.** This can be as simple as explaining what you learnt from a particular relevant book or other media. Or a brief personal view on what a human is. **Send an email to [lovemuz@gmail.com](mailto:lovemuz@gmail.com) to discuss ideas or make enquiries.**

**ALL EVENTS ON THIS PAGE ARE HELD AT HUMANIST HOUSE 10 SHEPHERD STREET CHIPPENDALE NSW**

**'Open Forum' continues to meet each Wednesday night at Humanist House 8.00pm as it has done for many years. Open Forum has a diversity of speakers and does not represent the views of the Society.**



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|---------------|--|
| 1-Apr 1908    | Birth of Abraham Maslow, founder of humanist psychology  |
| 5-Apr 1588    | Birth of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, author of Leviathan, and an early Enlightenment thinker accused of atheism   |
| 6-Apr 1697    | First use of the word "freethinker," in a letter to John Locke by William Molyneux   |
| 6-Apr 1903    | birth of Erwin Schrödinger, German theoretical physicist   |
| 7-Apr 1948    | "World Health Organisation founded   |
| 21-Apr 1869   | Thomas Henry Huxley coins the term 'agnostic'  |
| 22-Apr        | Earth Day celebrated in more than 192 countries  |
| 1-May 1933    | First Humanist Manifesto issued  |
| 3-May         | National Day of Reason in the USA  |
| 17-May        | IDAHO (International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia)   |
| 17-May 1963   | British Humanist Association founded   |
| 18-May 1872   | Birth of Bertrand Russell  |
| 26-May 1864   | The ban on gay books in Germany was lifted—seen as the symbolic date for the start of the gay rights movement.   |
| 28-May 585BCE | An eclipse was predicted by Thales, the first known philosopher, on scientific principles, rather than astrological premonition. This date has been described as the day science was born. |
| 17-Jun 1963   | US Supreme Court rules compulsory Bible reading in schools as unconstitutional   |
| 26-Jun 363 CE | Death of Julian the Apostate, last pagan emperor of Rome   |



# THE QUEST FOR GLOBAL HARMONY

21 March is **Harmony Day** in Australia and **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**. It promotes inclusion and respect for Australians from diverse backgrounds. This provided a theme for the Meetup event held on Sunday 20 March 2016. Harmony Day is on the equinox, when daytime is the same length all over the world, and symbolic of equality between a developed 'North' and a developing global 'South'.

The theme *Harmony for a Day in a Year of Fear* discusses response to incidents of terrorism. 'Fear' might be one's own fear, the fears of others, real fear, phony fear, or just 'fear itself'! 'Year' was also metaphorical referring to the sense that terrorism is peaking in the current era - even though it's been around for decades. The various reactions to the stresses provoked by Islamist violence were the intended case study. But this phenomenon was relatively quiet the week before the event, and attendance at the Meetup was low. Sadly, in all senses, the events in Brussels came along just two day later.

Many views across a spectrum including many Humanists, seem to be wanting to remove the problem - get rid of the bad eggs - rather than resolve it. I had hoped to bring different sides together and clear up one another's thinking. I got a little bit of that, but really just scratched the surface. I'll try to do it on a more hypothetical basis in this article, but it's hard without people to speak for themselves. I'll do my best.

First I'll acknowledge that some critics attack the very word 'harmony'. They fear the need to preserve 'harmony' might trump individual rights to forthrightly discuss controversial matters. They argue that free societies are by nature 'cacophonous, argumentative and full of dissent'.

They are right, obviously, in certain respects. Often, though, different viewpoints don't get equal treatment. Debates get personal with a fine line between condemnation and censorship. Severe criticism is not necessarily persecution. Positive arguments or solutions are scarcely mentioned.

The notion of Multiculturalism is under siege, but surely draws on the same Enlightenment roots as the notion of Humanism. Humanism has always been global rather than local in its values. Yet intolerable behavior strains human tolerance. Tolerance is not enough. Can Humanism provide a solution?

Brussels on 22 March 2016 suffered Islamic State attacks, targeting the airport and a metro station killing at least 35 people, with hundreds wounded. "Hate and extremism have hit in Brussels," said the city's mayor, Yvan Mayeur. "This is an attack against the values of freedom and democracy, against the humanism that we value so much in Brussels."

Note his use of the 'humanism' for his values! In fact the very same Mayor of Brussels, M. Yvan Mayeur, gave a welcome address to the member organisations from over 20 countries at the 2014 European Humanist Federation assembly and conference in his city. So he knew about our movement, and meant what we also mean, when he chose the word 'humanism' to describe what was under attack. - Does 'humanism' have the wherewithal to respond?

The media seem to be blaming Brussels as having lax security. Belgium has a complicated structure due to its patchwork of different language groups, which makes coordination difficult. But Brussels regularly hosts major events and leaders. Belgium can't match former great powers like Britain and France in big firepower, but has all the modern security apparatus.

It's too easy to blame 'laxity' and has the effect of justifying ever stronger policing powers and limiting privacy and rights. Whether a lout stealing a car, a bully choosing a victim at school, or a terrorist wanting to blow someone up, there will always be factors that make one target easier to attack than another. The criminal will always find a victim.

The problem is only moved along by the security approach, not ended. The victim gets the blame for being vulnerable, even though the criminal was determined to strike someone somewhere somehow. We cannot secure every concert, every café, every queue, and every transport system - forever!

This security approach, coupled with an equally 'tough-minded' obsessive, self-righteous approach by the Islamist fanatics, drives an arms-race of chest-thumping, shirt-fronting, heavy-handed behaviour lethal to our lives in small measure, but to our rights and freedoms in larger measure. The warrior castes of all societies have justified their supremacy by the threat from the warrior castes of competing societies for thousands of years. The result is they get to lord it over the productive, creative, inquisitive 'castes' all over the world.

It's a perennial protection racket favouring thugs and their descendants. Thinkers like Hobbes and Machiavelli have looked for positives in all this. But we have also seen the potential of 'freedom and democracy' to moderate the process, and empower more effective ways to thrive. Humanism is that kind of thriving where our empathy, our creativity and our rational exploration and discussion progress us together across a wide front to a better world. This is undermined in a world at war and obsessed with security.

Humanism is under attack but there is not much concern about it. People are moved by emotions rather than by threats to values. All the concern becomes focused on 'refugees' - whether empathy or antipathy. And it's true that most of the pressure round the world is on ordinary people displaced by the conflicts. The reasons why refugees elicit sympathy from Humanists are, I hope, clear enough. The treatment of boat arrivals is atrocious, wasteful, expensive and cruel. Of course we should treat people decently, and detention is a blight on our society. Not to mention the Syrian refugees. While we talked in our little group on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> March, hundreds marched in rallies outside - welcoming refugees. Many marching would identify as Humanists, and our movement would benefit from their energy. What about opposing views?

I didn't get anyone to sum up views on the 'right' of the debate. So I'm having to rely on comments from websites. The following are not my view but extracts from the Internet.

*"Why are these 'refugees' so determined to travel to countries that have generous welfare benefits? Does it really make sense for Western countries to take in more Muslims when they're already struggling to integrate the millions of Muslims who are already there? Are people aware of the problems that Muslims bring? High welfare dependency, sky-rocketing crime, calls for Sharia, ghettos, parallel societies, resistance to integration and assimilation, terrorism, anti-Semitism, rape-gangs? None of the surrounding Arab nations have offered to resettle them. Instead, they are kept in refugee camps. Many of these 'refugees' are fit, young men of fighting age. Why aren't they staying to fight for their homeland? Why aren't we questioning the impact such an influx would have on the citizens of the host countries regarding their quality of life and safety. Isn't it more*



*compassionate for Europe to secure its borders, turn around illegal boats and deter these 'refugees' from ever making such a dangerous journey"?*

*"We are talking about a bunch of refugees who do not have or care for Australian values. They do not care for our freedoms they are not interested in integrating into our society. They do not understand or care for the separation of state and religion. Who is going to pay for this we have our own problem and it is not our responsibility or duty to resolve the Middle East problems. Muslims have a track record of ignoring western values and laws. They have a belief system that is thousands of years behind. You have no right to demand or even suggest the government spend tax payer money on supporting refugees. "*

There are plenty of more scathing and even vicious attacks on refugees, and those who support them, on the Internet. These I picked out as 'moderate'. Some Humanists do express concerns that sound similar. Probably they'd just like the 'bad behaviour to stop'. But if followed through to the conclusion that the above commentators want, they ultimately call for some kind of apartheid, sending Muslims to Muslim countries and keeping Australia for Christians and seculars.

But this is not going to happen even if Tony Abbott gets back the Prime Ministership and Donald Trump wins the Presidency. It's not possible, and in practice would descend into chaos. We shouldn't, and I think in Australia we couldn't, return to the kind of authoritarian regime needed to force cultural homogeneity. The idea of such a tough-minded solution flourishes though, and functions as an enticement to elect right-wing governments (which actually have a different priority agenda suited to the needs of the wealthy). What is surely a deeply Humanistic value of 'Equality' means that we can't resolve conflict by antiquated discriminatory practices.

Yet a spontaneous breakout of unanimity based on a common 'rational' approach seems even less likely. Despite a certain 'like-mindedness' people who identify as 'rational' are not as unified as might be expected. We can't even discuss our divisions in the Humanist community, meantime we're obligated to share our world with people who have far more different, objectionable and even dangerous ideas. (They find our ideas dangerous too, if in a different way!)

Often Humanists frame their concern in more secular terms of not being able to criticise because of excessive political correctness, or about how other humanists don't fully realise how badly Muslims are behaving, and how it affects good people they know. It's true that many Muslim spokespeople use ant-racism to dismiss all criticism, even criticism Humanists consider justified. But the point remains the same - there is no choice but to share the world with people of very different values. Complaining is one thing. Solutions another.

Unfortunately, much of the dialogue is just about how foolish everyone else is. Most sides have some validity but most won't see the further complexities. They point at problems not at solutions. We need to find out what's really bothering people and fix it. Often the 'truth' is found mixed amongst the 'lies' your opponents are throwing at you. I would have loved to have got some different sides engaged in exploring this, but I'm having to construct it by proxy. Here is another person's viewpoint extracted from the Internet:

*I'm not Muslim, but I did arrive as a refugee to Australia about 35 years ago. I did what I was supposed to do. Learnt English. Got a job. Paid taxes. Became a citizen. Married a true blue*

*Aussie. Yet I've constantly had the fact I'm not really Australian pointed out to me. I am Australian! I deserve to be here. I have contributed, and I continue to do so. But, I've always been called a wog. I've always been told that my English is very good, but you know, the accent. That the food I ate was 'funny'— for 35 freaking years. Just yesterday my boy came home from school. He said 'dad can you not give us leftovers 'cause the other kids said it was wog food and that it stinks. They didn't stop calling me wog all afternoon. I hate it'. So now my kids are also wogs. They are, like me, being reminded that they must conform. Otherness' must be removed. Yet my kids are born here. No foreign accent. What's going on?*

He asks what is happening. One huge problem for all hope of change is that a few unpleasant experiences far outweigh many good experiences, which we tend to take for granted. So it's hard to get a positive momentum for progress. Quite frankly, school bullying has a lot to answer for. Negotiating 'acceptance' is a big part of the problem. But the security approach just says we should teach potential victims how to avoid being bullied. At best this moves the bullies on to someone else – perhaps someone eating 'the wrong food'!

The 'experts' ask: "What can adults do to support their child from bullying?" but don't address how to better educate the actual bullies. There is an ambivalence in our society about competitive behaviour. Winning is highly valued while cheating is despised. But – If you're a cheater who wins...!

One trick (or cheat) is to get the issues framed on favourable terms to oneself and one's tribal identities. Framing is looking at something from only one particular viewpoint. Much public debate breaks down to assertions that one framework or another is the essential view. But Humanists need to examine issues in the round, from various different perspectives, even including those of criminals, terrorists and religious people.

We are a long way from any solution to the problem of Islamist violence, given the world we live in. Unproductive solutions to refugee flows, mix and match with equally absurd approaches to criminality, drugs, sexuality, work, money, war, borders, energy, environment, and language and logic itself.

The best Humanists can do is to encourage genuine critical thinking that 'begins at home'. It's not about how wrong everyone else is. Separating the good from the bad needs to begin with examining our own ideas in the light of different viewpoints and objective data. It's rarely about good versus bad people (although school bullies need to be addressed).

The Humanist movement needs to engage more in public debate, develop think-tanks, resident scholars, lobbyists, and far more dynamic conferences and all other forms of good hard thinking and gathering and studying facts and solutions.

There needs to be a Humanist ethic developed that combines a love of people with a love of learning and a love of the world as it really is. Rejuvenating the Humanist movement is itself a solution to the world's problems. People do need an alternative to consumerism and religion that finds meaning in working together. Humanism isn't a theory it's a practice.

To sum up: There is much more hard thinking needed to resolve the so-called clash of civilisations. Humanists need to get involved in a constructive way.

**Murray Love**



# HUMANIST SOCIETY FORMED IN A.C.T.

The A.C.T. Humanist Society (ACTHS), was founded in November 2015. Our website is at:

[www.canberrahumanists.org.au](http://www.canberrahumanists.org.au)

ACTHS grew out of Canberra Humanist Meetup group when several members wanted to go beyond discussing humanism, to exploring ways to live in accord with humanist values. ACTHS has members involved in humanist pastoral care volunteering, in a humanist contemplative community which meets on Saturdays, in the ongoing Canberra Humanist Meetup discussions, and other activities as the community in the ACT steadily builds and broadens its range of activities.

There had been a Humanist Society in the A.C.T., but it went out of existence some time ago. Subsequently HSNSW has provided some form of “umbrella support” for humanists in the ACT. For instance it supported Charles Foley and then Lyndon Storey as Humanist Chaplains at Canberra Hospital.

The momentum that led to ACTHS started with the organization of a visit to Canberra by Peter Boghossian in July 2015 as part of his speaking tour of Australia. His talk went well and at around the same time, as part of the follow up, a Canberra Humanist Meetup group was formed. The meetup group was organized with the support and sponsorship of HSNSW with two Canberra based members of HSNSW, Lyndon Storey and Dierk von Behrens, taking lead organizing roles.

There was no initial plan for the meetup group, other than to try to develop a humanist discussion group in the ACT. The group heavily focused on exploring humanism as a guide to action. Early meetings discussed issues such as humanism and the environment, humanism and refugees, and definitions of humanism. Often the group at a particular meetup would discuss and agree on a topic for a subsequent meetup.

The format for many of the discussions was to have a group member provide a brief introduction (which the member agreed to do at an earlier meetup) followed by brief opening statements from everyone present. Then came a more free flowing conversation, with an attempt to limit each individual comment to around two minutes, followed by another comment, and so on. People were asked to be courteous and wait for a turn to speak, rather than interrupting a speaker. Adopting this approach the meetup group developed quickly.

Apart from Lyndon and Dierk, most of the people who attended weren't members of HSNSW, and had no experience of organized Humanist Societies. But it quickly became clear that there are plenty of people in Canberra who are interested in humanism, but who do not seem to be aware of Australia's existing set of organized Humanist societies.

The Meetup group has helped connect with several such people. Meetup itself is an effective vehicle for organizing actual face to face meetings of people. While the number of people attending any Humanist Meetup always fell short of the numbers registered as members of the Meetup group, people did actually come along to meet and talk.

Several of the people who came along to the Meetup events in Canberra were interested in more than talking about humanism. There were people interested in approaching a range of political and social issues. and in engaging in community involvement, through activities such as pastoral care volunteering from the humanist perspective. In short

what appeared to be developing was not just a discussion group, but an actual humanist community in Canberra.

The Meetup group soon branched out into other activities, such as attendance at a rally supporting refugees. A launch for Meg Wallace's book “Freedom from Religion: Rethinking Article 18”, was organized through the Meetup group.

People interested in a range of humanist activities met each other through the Meetup group with several people expressing strong interest in further exploring ways to act and live as humanists, and to be involved in community as humanists. It soon became clear that an obvious next step would be the creation of some form of local humanist group to offer support and coordination for people's various interests and activities.

Some of the ideas discussed at this time, included developing a local humanist community - which could endorse and supply pastoral carers or chaplains for local institutions. Another was developing a process for creating humanist policy papers, and actual policies, on issues of interest to the Canberra humanist community. We also wanted to find ways to help people explore more deeply how to live life as a humanist.

A decision was made to create a local Humanist Society and ACTHS came into existence in November 2015. While the formation of ACTHS led to various administrative tasks that needed to be carried out, and which took up energy, ACTHS has continued to build on the activities of the Meetup group.

Canberra now has a “Canberra Humanist Contemplative Community” that meets on Saturdays and is open to interested people. Its website can be found at:

[canberrahumanistcontemplativecommunity.org](http://canberrahumanistcontemplativecommunity.org)

The original Meetup group continues. The people interested in pastoral volunteering have met, and several are discussing ways to support and encourage more humanists to be involved in pastoral care volunteering. Processes for creating policy discussion papers are being developed. There have also been several other activities, for instance a Darwin Day dinner earlier this year.

Setting up ACTHS is not merely the culmination of the activities that started with the Meetup group. It is part of building the platform that will make the next stage possible - a vibrant and active humanist community in the ACT, providing multiple options for people to explore living as a humanist. We'll also be contributing a humanist voice to society in the A.C.T. at many different levels.

The support from HSNSW in setting up the initial meetup group, and more generally for humanism in the ACT, has been crucial. HSNSW has helped keep the banner of humanism aloft in the ACT. Now that we are set up to carry it ourselves again we express our appreciation for the support of HSNSW and hope to work co-operatively with it where appropriate.

We look forward to building the ACTHS, building humanism in the ACT, and being involved in the broader humanist community outside the ACT.



**Lyndon Storey**

# PRESIDENT'S QUARTERLY REPORT

## Religious Freedom Roundtable stalled

As reported in the last issue, I was one of four non-faith representatives to the Australia Human Rights Commission's Religious Freedom inaugural Roundtable in November 2015. The AHRC published a Media Release with a summary, which included some of our inputs, and also some which were *not* made at the Roundtable. One of these is a proposal for self-regulation of religious bodies (it has worked well to date hasn't it!). I have responded to these on the HS-NSW website at:

<http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/articles/MediaReleaseOnRoundtable160215-Bryce.pdf>

A second event specifically for non-faiths was scheduled for 18 February. However, the organiser Tim Wilson suddenly quit the AHRC, in order to stand for federal Parliament. Sadly, this led to its cancellation. Nevertheless, the pre-meeting we had arranged for 17 February, went ahead in Melbourne as planned. It proved a valuable get-together of 17 people from most of the freethought organisations in Australia, including Humanists, Rationalists, Atheists, Secularists and Skeptics among others. This allowed us to identify the most pressing issues of the day, which include children and education. It was noted that "religious freedom" is often used to protect the privileges of organised religion, whereas the need is to protect individuals from organised religion. More generally, our non-faith common values are well described in the Ten-point Plan at:

<http://www.rationalist.com.au/10-point-plan-for-a-secular-australia/>

## Events in February

We resumed our program in February. The **Humanist Viewpoint Afternoon Talk** (HuVAT) was themed on Darwin Day, with presentations on issues connecting evolution with humanism:

The Evolution of Sentience – Ian Bryce – The capacity for pleasure and pain is essential to any theory of ethics, and the talk developed the implications for our consideration of humans, apes and other animals.

Evolutionary Psychology – John August – this talk traced the origins of cooperation, altruism and selfishness.

The Evolution of Resistance – Victor Bien – man can develop antibiotics and weedicides etc, but we find that organisms overcome this by developing resistance. Will evolution defeat us?

A related paper was published in the last VP – Evolution and Human Intelligence – Erik Aslaksen.

Our February **Open House Meetup** was titled 21<sup>st</sup> Century Humanism. The theme was current and new issues of relevance. It contained firstly an opening by Murray, then contributions and discussions from the floor. Thirdly our members offered topics on which we would like to hear talks.

State of the environment

Drugs – for and against decriminalization

Science and education – are we dumbing down?

Indigenous Australians – liaison

What is a human?

Economic power

Refugees

Domestic violence

Philosophy

Women

The real meaning of evolution

## Activism Meeting

Our March 13 event was an **Activism Meeting**, involving a workshop with members to identify actions and move towards implementing them. These are organised and run by John August.

We shared observations on the Royal Commission questioning Catholic Church officials (including George Pell) on their responses to child abuse. It was noted that Church records showing frequent transfers of priests was a good indicator of abuse, where actual documentation of complaints was not to be found. The frequent decision to "handle it in house", sometimes with police acquiescence, is seen as an illustration of religious privilege – being above the law – which we are strongly opposing in the Religious Freedoms Roundtable discussed elsewhere.

We also planned a campaign for our June World Humanist Day event. This is on Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD), the term preferred by proponent Andrew Denton (otherwise called Voluntary Euthanasia).

Tim Josling presented a persuasive case, as 180,000 die each year (worldwide), around 60,000 in dire suffering. Even the best palliative care is not enough, there being many cases of intense pain, indignity, diarrhea, and asphyxia. Two present told of personal cases where they suffered intense pain not relieved by medical treatment.

Tim said 80% of Australians support VAD – so why not governments and bureaucrats? Perhaps it is their higher proportion of Christians. Ian said that while hospitals and aged care are legally secular, this is not so with palliative care, most of it being run by Catholic institutions.

Experience overseas where VAD is implemented, has shown that all the traditional arguments against it (such as slippery slope, greedy relatives) have not eventuated.

The meeting included an online presentation and a Q&A by CAHS President Scott Sharrad, on his ambitions for making Humanism a significant and visible force in Australia. The Annual Convention (Brisbane, 27-29 May) is being turned into a public event with major speakers – please consider attending. CAHS (Council of Australian Humanist Societies) is our national umbrella body.

**IAN BRYCE**





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