

# HUMANIST viewpoints

***A FEW MEMBERS HAVE STILL NOT YET RENEWED FOR 2016-17. WE VALUE YOUR SUPPORT. PLEASE STAY A PART OF THIS VITAL GLOBAL MOVEMENT. THE WORK OF HUMANISM IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER. PAYMENT METHODS ON BACK PAGE.***



***On Thursday December 15, the fifth anniversary of the death of Christopher Hitchens, a small gathering in Humanist House spent the evening reminiscing over the extraordinary contribution this thoughtful, articulate and controversial man made to our movement in the last 5 years of his life. We toasted him one last time in his favourite tippie—Johnnie Walker Black Label Scotch.***

**SHARE IN THE STORY OF OUR END-OF-YEAR CELEBRATIONS ON PAGES 10-11. TAKE THE SECULAR QUIZ.**

**JOHN AUGUST REVIEWS A.C. GRAYLING'S BULKIEST TOME 'THE GOOD BOOK' ON PAGES 8-9**

**MEET 5 NEW LIFE MEMBERS ON PAGES 4-5. CAN YOU VOLUNTEER TO ASSIST IN SMALL WAYS? GET IN TOUCH!**

**THERE ARE NO EVENTS ON THE SECOND SUNDAY IN JANUARY. BUT PLENTY TO CHECK OUT ON PAGE 6.**

**DARWIN DAY 12 FEB; DETERMINISM 25 FEB; ACTIVISM MEETING 12 MAR; WHAT IS HUMAN? 26 MAR.**

**MEMBER NEWS ON VICKI POTEPA ON PAGE 3 - WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS AND SOME WHO'VE COME BACK**

**PRESIDENTIAL REPORTING ON PAGE 2**

**HAPPY NEW YEAR FOR 2017**

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

It's been a BIG year - notably 'embiggened' by the grand occasion of our visit from the fabulous philosopher himself, A.C. Grayling in September. But we also have tried to sustain a high level of activity throughout the rest of the year. What we would love to sustain even more so, and will keep trying to achieve in 2017, is bigger and better attendance at our events.

Throughout the year we have had ambitious events at Humanist House - 4 speakers at Darwin Day, 6 speakers at the WHD Symposium, and speakers throughout the year on Historicity of Jesus, Disability & Humanity, Corporate Hegemony, Humanist Pilgrimage, and the Hard Problem of Consciousness. We've also had community-building, and intellectual discussion events around the meaning and benefit of humanism, humanitarianism, multiculturalism, and human relations.

Many thanks to those who came to try us out. Those who came seemed to enjoy the events and bond and share readily in the exchanges. But it is hard to see, as yet, the growth in a new community of Sydney-based humanists that the Society's survival requires. And survival is the least of our concerns! NSW, Australia and the world need a vital Humanism movement, continuing to develop and offer humanitarian, internationalist, rational, thoughtful, empathic, creative and highly informed insights and activism at global, national and local levels.

We do have a shrinking older 'community', forged in *HUVAT* and *Open Forum*, that has thrived in the past on allowing 'five minutes of fame', as everyone took their turn sharing opinions on the issues of the day and the wisdom of their years. This approach is perfectly valid, and was effective in its time, but through no-one's fault, can become an impediment on progress. An established cohort, comfortable in their surroundings, with a strong sense of entitlement to their say, can be formidable and even forbidding for newcomers. Perhaps those with a strong sense of themselves break through, but there are often diverse views inhibited, and new voices too polite and, more concerning - plenty of competing alternate venues, more open to the younger and more diverse community we need to build.

Yet examining those who readily join our Meetup shows Sydney has a huge, diverse, potential Humanist community: ( see: <http://www.meetup.com/nswhumanists/members/> ).

For a fresh humanist community to snowball, we need a core of diverse and energetic activists. We see wonderful new faces, but they seem to find little to bond with. We need those among our existing members with skill, charm and the power of ideas - the ***young-at-heart*** - to find ways to be fertile for our movement. On pages 4-5 of this issue we honour our glorious elders, but at bottom of p.5 we call for new volunteers. Maybe the dedication possible in the past is difficult, but with information exchange we can devise briefer more targeted ways to assist, and to 'commune' with fresh effect.

It remains to review our last quarter of 2016. In October we studied Gravitational Waves and were introduced to "Alternatives to Relativity"- it was nerd heaven. The October Meetup looked back at 10 years of outreach, and tried to get discussion on just how extraordinary authentic interpersonal exchange can be ( some of us remain uncomfortable with looking at life too 'deeply' : ) ).

In November we celebrated our past achievements (see p.4) and tried to pass on some idea of our activist heritage. The November Meetup had a former young atheist activist delivering on his professional business, with an exposition on 'Disability, Humanity & Opportunity'. There is much to learn about life and its meanings from the lives of others.

December had two special events. On Saturday 3rd we had a wonderful end-of-year triviaganza party which was well enjoyed by those who came (see pages 10-11). December 15th was just another late night shopping Thursday before Christmas, but was also the 5th anniversary of the death of Christopher Hitchens. The failure of *Sydney Atheists* to co-operate in publicizing this event (as we once did back at the first anniversary in 2012) meant that attendance was low. But those who came to Humanist House that night shared a toast in his favourite scotch, some youtube highlights of his brief career as the fourth horseman of the atheocalypse, and observed his good humour and steady courage in facing his requirement to leave the 'party' of human existence he so enjoyed. We mused on some of his enduring quotes of wit and wisdom.

There has been debate on the merits of the phrase "Merry Christmas" but we can certainly join all Australians in hoping to see you all enjoying a safe, prosperous and **Happy New Year** in 2017.

***Murray Love, President***



# MEMBERS NEWS PAGE: VICKI POTEMPA



One of our Life Members, Vicki Potempa had some difficult experiences a year ago and wants her many friends in the Society to know about her situation.

About the end of 2015 Vicki was having painful spasms in her legs. Being over 93 years she considered moving in with a family member, or perhaps to a retirement centre. A grandson was buying a rural property, and for a while she considered moving in with him. But she was disappointed with changes in the arrangements, and pulled out – unfortunately after having already disposed of a considerable part of her furniture.

In January 2016 her leg problems became severe. Unable to find a doctor, her daughter arranged an ambulance to Maitland Hospital, where Vicki was admitted for a fortnight. Her pain was treated, but no physical therapy was available for her legs. Her family began looking for a suitable aged care home.

After the fortnight at Maitland, Vicki was transferred to the Kurri Kurri hospital. Once again she was unable to get massage or other physical therapy and felt confined and unable to return home. "I was not allowed to go down the lift by myself to walk a few paces to the next building for a few hours in the day care doing some occupational craft. Although I was capable of walking I was forced to sit in a wheel chair and be taken by one of the guards, and even to go to the toilet from the table I worked at I had to be wheeled for four or five metres. I insisted I was capable of simple tasks and am able to look after my needs. This fell on deaf ears". Sometimes, she felt worse treated than the prisoners she had often herself given assistance to in her younger years!

The family was unable to find a nursing home Vicki felt she could afford. Free at last, she returned to her own home in mid-March – "where I am my own master and can move as I please, and am managing more or less as before".

As John August has described the situation: "There was a perverse incentive of wanting their patients immobile for safety and efficiency from the management's perspective. You would think that maintaining 'quality of life' means maintaining the independence and mobility of patients, but that's not what was happening!"

Vicki herself described an article she saw in a newspaper "where a man wrote that in the institutions dedicated to aged care and welfare, aged people are kept inactive and in bed to gradually make them lose their mobility and to make them totally dependent on help for their daily requirements. This way, they are turned into intensive care cases, and the institution can claim in the order of 27 or 37 additional dollars per night. This is easier to manage. They don't have to chase ambulant residents and more money enters the coffers."

Vicki is still living by herself in the Maitland area, and would love to find a suitable companion to share her home and have someone around who can help if needed. She asks her friends to keep an eye out for suitable people.

**THE EDITOR**

## **Please Consider Making a Donation or Bequest**

From \$5 to \$100, any amount can help protect and sustain the diverse efforts of the NSW Humanist Society. Please also consider us in your Will. All bequests contribute to the longevity of the Humanist Society of NSW and Humanism.

## **Do You have items for Book Room & Library**

If you have any surplus 'hard copy' books, then consider donating them to the Society's Library or for sale in the Bookroom. Volunteers in the Bookroom are often frontline contacts with those who enquire about Humanism while they browse the items around the walls. Our most important volunteer Gillian has been slowly recuperating in 2016 but has reappeared in the Bookroom from time to time. We hope to see it more active in the New Year.

## **Please Send Member Contributions to Viewpoints**

Members are welcome and encouraged 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. We love to hear from members who haven't contributed before. Even a 'letter to the editor' format is fine. Please by all means disagree - or share why you do agree! We would love to include all we can. Send items to [lovemuz@gmail.com](mailto:lovemuz@gmail.com) by email. (Not all submission may be suitable)

## **Member News**

It's wonderful to again welcome more new members Sean Watt, Chris Cleary, Sofia Tsai & Ashika Datt.

If your renewal is still outstanding do please take action this very day to stay a part of our vital movement in the world. A big thanks to those who've recently paid, including several who had lost touch for a couple of years. We appreciate those who support us reliably each year, and we also appreciate the complex distractions in the modern lives of others.

Please keep supporting the Humanist Society of NSW in all the ways you can. We also ask for offers to assist in our work and maintaining our assets. A new cohort of volunteers is needed. There are many ways to assist, large and small.



# OUTSTANDING ACHIEVING HUMANISTS

It is a wide tradition among Australian associations, to honour outstanding contributors to the life of the organization, by declaring them **Life Members**. The Humanist Society of NSW has been distracted of late, and the pace of recognition slowed, with just **Peter Young** in 2012, and **Dr Victor Bien** in 2014 receiving this honour. We even had three living Outstanding Humanists of the Year not yet recognized.

We have corrected this deficit, and celebrated the achievement of five members who've made massive contributions, including the outstanding OHAs. This took place at a gathering which incorporated a Special General Meeting within an Activism Meeting, and took a cross-generational look at current and former styles of humanist activism. This was held on Sunday November 13th at Humanist House. All five easily achieved the requisite two-thirds majority.

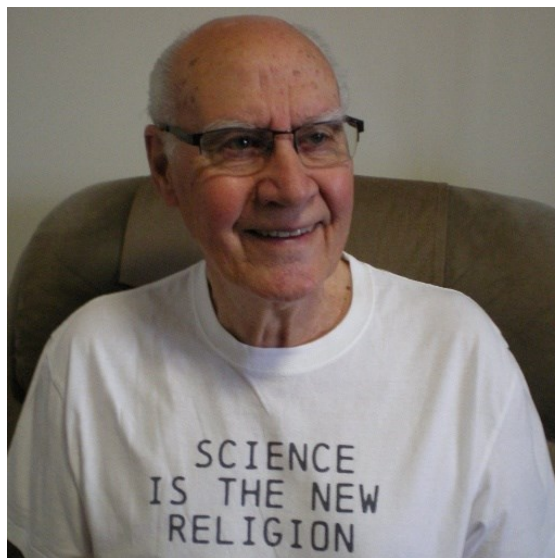
Those who came learned a little about the association's history, but also learned that it has been insufficiently documented. We would love some historians to help tell the vital story of the achievements of the society's members.



Our first new Life Member is **Alfred Flatow**. Born in Hitler's Reich just before WW2 Fred's family got him out through Shanghai, and on to Sydney. Fred had been named after a relative who represented Germany in 1896 Olympic Games – and who was then starved to death in the Nazi camps! Once in Australia, Fred qualified in engineering, and became our national chess champion. Fred is a natural skeptic. His formative influences in humanism was the philosopher and activist Bertrand Russell. Fred joined the Rationalist Association even while a teenager, and was a founding member of the Humanist Society of NSW. In 1960 he became its first treasurer. Fred came back to the committee in 2004, and served fearlessly as Vice-President in the difficult years from 2010 to 2014. Even more vital has been his work as manager of our headquarters, Humanist House - tirelessly hands-on renovating, painting, tiling and attending to the maintenance of our Society's signature asset. Fred is approaching 80 and looks to find younger members with the skills and commitment to carry on his work. Fred is a stalwart sustaining the association - catering, cleaning, tech support, security and whatever it takes to make events here a continuing success. Fred was the national **Outstanding Humanist Achiever** in 2013.



The 2011 **Outstanding Humanist Achiever** was **Dr Affie Adagio**, who becomes our next new Life Member. Affie retired from the NSW Humanist Society Committee early in 2015 after fifteen years of service. She 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 frequently represented NSW at our national Humanist events. She organised many successful and entertaining End-of-Year parties for the society. Her fundraising talents included persuading the NSW Premier to grant \$6000 to support the *United Nations Association* in its tenancy at Humanist House. Founder and Convenor of HuVAT, our monthly series of talks, Affie also successfully ran five prestigious *International Women's Day* events at Parliament House. She organised our first and biggest World Humanist Day Symposium - which she unfortunately missed due to a heart attack! Affie's innovative style, and extensive experience, helped steer the Humanist Society of NSW through some difficult years.



Next comes **Dr Dennis Morris**, who was the 2014 **Outstanding Humanist Achiever** in Australia. Born in South Africa he explored archaeological sites of early hominids. He fought against apartheid and created a musical with an African cast. He's written songs in both English and Zulu, and has traveled the world observing cultures, living in monasteries and helping street kids go busking so they could feed themselves. His travels were financed by his profession as an osteopathic

physician. Dennis is a passionate supporter of equality for Dalits in India. He came to Western Australia in 1988 and joined the Humanist Society there. Ten years later he was the President of the Society, serving until 2006, when he had a stroke. This didn't stop him finishing his most important book *Religion: the greatest confidence trick in history*. Dennis has also been a member of the Humanist Society of NSW for many years, although he continues to live in Perth and wasn't able to attend the SGM. Dennis donates all the profits from his paintings, books and CDs to the continuing prosperity of the Humanist Society of NSW.



Our fourth new Life Member, **Gillian Ellis** has been what we call a 'quiet achiever' - but with a big impact. Gillian came to Australia in a migrant family in 1951 and found herself too soon a parent. She raised two children alone in the fifties and sixties. Her work ethic was established in this crucible. After the children grew up, a joyful second marriage took her on an adventure cruising the oceans. Tragically one day the sea took her husband. She returned to Sydney, settling in Glebe. There weren't so many of her old mates from the Rationalist Society around so she joined the Humanists. She soon found a special place running the used bookshop we established in our main room. Gillian became the face of Humanism and the soul of Humanist House, greeting countless visitors several days a week for over ten years. She has raised thousands of dollars for the Society. She has been a vital part of maintaining the functions of our headquarters, managing supplies and keeping things in order. Gillian has always been a cheerful, dignified, contributor to the life of our association and well deserves the honour of life membership.



Famous ABC science journalist **Robyn Williams** has hosted the Science Show for over 40 years and been our Society's **Patron** for about half that time. He was even the **Australian Humanist of the Year** in 1993. Finally we have also made him a Life Member. Robyn has described himself as a 'humanist on stilts'. He is a **National Living Treasure**, a defender of public broadcasting, a former Commissioner for the Future, a prolific author, and an advocate for animal protection. Robyn has also appeared at NSW conferences.

The above five are our new Life Members and we congratulate them all on their many achievements. There are a further eight recorded Life Members among us. These are **Alice Beauchamp** (elevated in 2009), **David Duffy** (in 2000), **David Tribe** (in 2011), **Dorothy Buckland-Fuller** (in 2009), **Eric Avery** (in 1996), **Marion Hosking** (in 1987), **Dr Peter Slezak** (in 2002), and **Vicki Potempa** (in 2000).

These others are also high achievers. David Duffy is well known for running *Open Forum* for over forty years. David Tribe even has a Wikipedia entry and has several books to his name as well as articles and encyclopedia entries. Dorothy Buckland-Fuller is, of course, our second Patron, and her other honours can be seen on page 12 of this newsletter.

Marion Hosking holds an OAM and was nominated for *Australian of the Year*. She works tirelessly against family violence. Peter Slezak is a well-known academic, and we can sell you Vicki Potempa's own exposition of her hectic humanist life *Off My Shoulders*. Environmentalist Alice Beauchamp honoured us by attending the SGM on November 13. So also did Victor Bien who has been a leading light in the society to this day. Peter Young was most generous with skilled legal advice at a critical time, and Eric Avery has been a beneficiary to the society.

**Murray Love, President**

## PRESIDENT'S APPEAL TO MEMBERS TO VOLUNTEER FOR THE HUMANIST SOCIETY

It is wonderful that we already have fifteen members we have acknowledged as outstanding workers for humanism in NSW.

But times change and modern generations find much more competition for their time in the twenty-first century. Yet some time remains, and new ways to volunteer in smaller amounts need to be found. It was gratifying at the recent A. C Grayling event to meet some of our younger members. There are many ways to help, and if we can get expressions of interest, and indication of the limits on availability, we can build a new corps of volunteers, to rebuild our NSW Humanists community.

We particularly appeal to members between 20 and 70 years of age, to come forward and volunteer a few hours from time to time, to assist in growing a future for this organization, now more than 55 years old with assets needing management, a heritage to be celebrated, and a world wide movement with a positive philosophy for living to be understood and articulated.

Please email the President at [lovemuz@gmail.com](mailto:lovemuz@gmail.com) advising what skills you'd like to use, what kind of hours you might like to offer, and anything you'd need to make it all happen. We'll try to build teams to carry on the work our Life Members represent.

# CALENDAR FOR JAN-MAR 2017

THERE IS NO HUVAT FOR JANUARY—SEE YOU ALL AT DARWIN DAY IN FEBRUARY

PLEASE NOTE THAT HUVAT IN 2017 WILL COMMENCE EACH TIME AT 3.00 PM

HENCEFORTH ALL OUR SUNDAY EVENTS WILL COMMENCE AT 3PM

## NSW Humanists Meetup 'New Humanists Sunday Open House' 3-6PM on Sunday 22 January 2017

At this Meetup we'll ask an unusual question among Humanists— **WHAT'S YOUR SPIRITUALITY?** About one in five who join this Meetup include 'Spirituality' among their interests and perhaps an equal number hint at some similar interest. We'll presume they mean the "...but not religious" kind of "spiritual". If discussing these things concerns you, then please avoid this special afternoon as we will definitely be suspending "judgement" as we share the ways some Humanists seek more in life than the obvious and the ordinary. We can only invite participation, and preview some imaginative, psychological and philosophical approaches, but the afternoon will work best if members come to share some of their innermost intuitions. This is hard to arrange in advance, but the more who come with open hearts the better it will go. If this appeals to you, give it your support.

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

## The HuVAT for Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2017 at 3.00 for 3.15 p.m. will be our Darwin Day celebration

**Dr. Daniel Hutto, University of Wollongong, will speak on "How might our brains process information in the world around us and respond, and what does evolution have to say?"** Most of what humans do and experience is best understood in terms of dynamically unfolding interactions with the environment. Many philosophers and cognitive scientists now acknowledge the critical importance of situated, environment-involving embodied engagements as a means of understanding basic minds - including basic forms of human mentality. Yet many of these same theorists hold fast to the view that basic minds are necessarily or essentially contentful - that they represent conditions the world might be in. Dr. Hutto will take a look at what evolution requires of us, and how it might develop a brain able to react in a way that acts to improve reproductive success.

**John August, Vice-President will speak on "Past over-reach by psychology, and some precursors to evolutionary psychology".**

In the wake of World War 2, psychology scrutinised human aggression, with the promise that psychology alone would be able to lead us to a better, peaceful world. This stands in contrast to the current aspirations for evolutionary psychology - just what can it do for us? If there are grand claims, how do they compare to ones made previously on behalf of psychology?

REMEMBER 3PM START. AS ALWAYS PLEASE STAY AFTER EACH HUVAT FOR FOOD AND HUMANISTIC CONVERSATION AT 6 PM

## DETERMINISM & HUMANISM: special Meetup & Society event Sunday 26th February 2017 3.00-5.00pm

At the core of Human beliefs and practices are ideas concerning deities, ethics, personal responsibility, and absolute versus relative values. 'Experts' in various fields, discuss issues like how we should 'punish' wrongdoers. But how do we know these things, and how sure are we? Fundamental physics rarely gets mentioned, yet surprisingly can be said to answer many of these Big Questions with confidence. Relativity, particle physics and quantum mechanics all provide the same message regarding causation - everything that happens in the real world is caused by events which occurred earlier in the real world, plus quantum chance. The rulebook of physics seems to contain no gaps which could allow a god to intervene in the world, or freewill to arise outside the human brain. Science goes on to address sentience and ethical 'consideration' (in Peter Singer's parlance). At this special event, our Vice-President Ian Bryce will lead a discussion on the implications for religion, justice, education, and humanism.

## Sunday 12th March 3.15-5.15 p.m. will be the first Activism Meeting of 2017, sharing 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. We can also discuss our approach to items at the 2017 CAHS *Australian Humanist Convention* to be held 7-9 April at the Ibis hotel in Melbourne.

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 26th March 2017

We enjoyed several talks on *Constructing Humanity* at the 2016 World Humanist Day Symposium and continued the theme discussing consciousness and the overcoming of disabilities later in the year. This arose from an interest expressed in discussing the question **WHAT IS HUMAN?** at a productive Meetup in Feb 2016. We call for a return of those who came that day, and everyone else keen to get 2017 off to a big start by closely examining the essence of 'Humanism'. Views range from a rigid prescriptive approach based on 'human nature' or genetic factors, to a Sartrean freedom to construct one's own existence by making decisive choices. And who do we recognize as human in theory and in actual social practice? Who holds, and who grants, human 'rights'? When did we become human and where are we heading? Different disciplines slice human factors differently. We all think we're experts on 'being human'. So everyone needs to come along and try to pin down what we really mean.

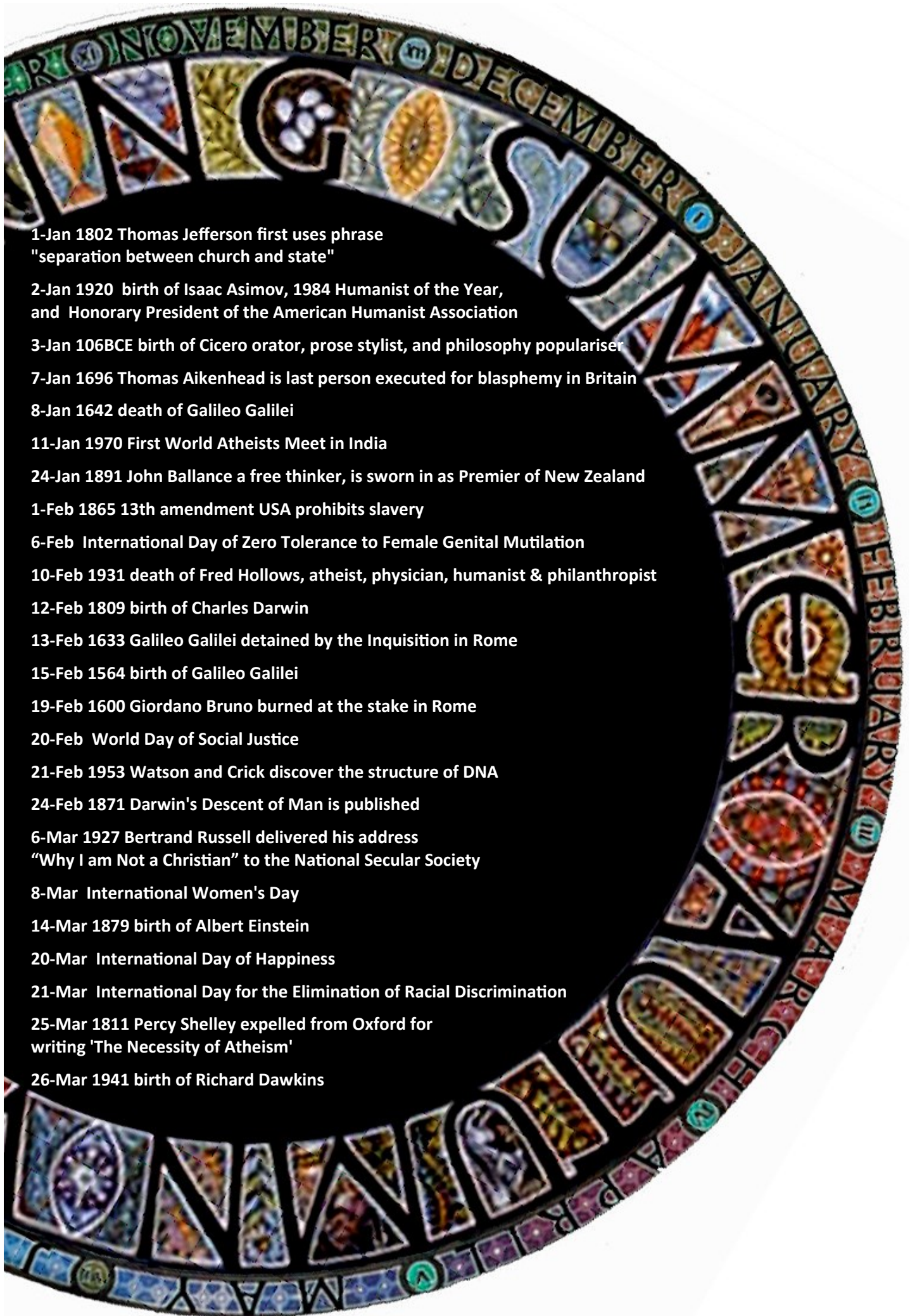
SHARE SPACE WITH A DIVERSE HUMANIST MEETUP COMMUNITY AND ENJOY A MIX OF DISCUSSION, SNACKS AND SOCIALISING

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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.**





1-Jan 1802 Thomas Jefferson first uses phrase  
"separation between church and state"

2-Jan 1920 birth of Isaac Asimov, 1984 Humanist of the Year,  
and Honorary President of the American Humanist Association

3-Jan 106BCE birth of Cicero orator, prose stylist, and philosophy populariser

7-Jan 1696 Thomas Aikenhead is last person executed for blasphemy in Britain

8-Jan 1642 death of Galileo Galilei

11-Jan 1970 First World Atheists Meet in India

24-Jan 1891 John Ballance a free thinker, is sworn in as Premier of New Zealand

1-Feb 1865 13th amendment USA prohibits slavery

6-Feb International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation

10-Feb 1931 death of Fred Hollows, atheist, physician, humanist & philanthropist

12-Feb 1809 birth of Charles Darwin

13-Feb 1633 Galileo Galilei detained by the Inquisition in Rome

15-Feb 1564 birth of Galileo Galilei

19-Feb 1600 Giordano Bruno burned at the stake in Rome

20-Feb World Day of Social Justice

21-Feb 1953 Watson and Crick discover the structure of DNA

24-Feb 1871 Darwin's Descent of Man is published

6-Mar 1927 Bertrand Russell delivered his address  
"Why I am Not a Christian" to the National Secular Society

8-Mar International Women's Day

14-Mar 1879 birth of Albert Einstein

20-Mar International Day of Happiness

21-Mar International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

25-Mar 1811 Percy Shelley expelled from Oxford for  
writing 'The Necessity of Atheism'

26-Mar 1941 birth of Richard Dawkins

# HOW TO FIND WISDOM?: REVIEWING 'THE GOOD BOOK' BY A.C. GRAYLING

A.C. Grayling's *The Good Book* has the subtitle 'A Secular Bible'. Just as some believe there is wisdom - of sorts - to be obtained by reading the traditional 'Religious' *Holy Bible* - might there be wisdom to be obtained in a secular alternative?

I've been trying to get into this book. It's been an experience, but also a struggle, and I have mixed feelings. Much is interesting - but it takes quite an investment to yield benefit.

In some ways, I wish it had been available twenty years ago when I was in my twenties. I might have been able to short circuit the process of developing wisdom. But I've figured out a lot for myself since then.

I've long been fascinated with the traditional *Holy Bible*. I've given talks on it as something to be appreciated and understood. But can we actually obtain 'wisdom', from either the Bible, or a secular alternative?

I think you can attain some wisdom not so much from the Bible itself, but by looking at it as a record of the moral struggles past civilisations had in making sense of the world. It becomes raw material for analysis which might yield insights into the way the historical - and perhaps the contemporary - world operate.

There are perhaps three 'wisdoms' we can attain:

- A clearer understanding of 'what is right', so we can be comfortable with our own consciences.
- A better understanding of the world around us, of human beings, of their interactions, and so on.
- Ways of dealing with the world more effectively, so we can achieve more and benefit ourselves.

Of course there's a fourth component that the *Holy Bible* and other religious writings specialise in, and that's understanding 'God', developing a 'relationship' with him, understanding how to worship him, and so on. There's also a focus on life after death - something which gives some people reassurances about death and unfairness - there's a broader plan, a big equaliser.

A 'Secular Bible' won't compete with these notions about "a relationship with God". Of course there are non-religious ways of coming to terms with death and the unfairness and arbitrariness in life around us. The wisdom of a secular text has a much stronger focus on the naturalistic world around us - the 'here and now'.

A religious text draws in other realities and supernatural forces (like Gods). Even then a certain amount of wisdom could be applied 'in the here and now', and may have some validity - not because of its supposed supernatural origin - but with ideas which are good just because they are good.

Grayling's *Good Book* contains a large section, "The Histories", which is fascinating in its way. It is written in a strangely biblical style - which can be intriguing. Is that merely a novelty, or does it have its own richness? I'm not sure myself.

Some stories have a great deal of incidental detail - much like the biblical stories - which adds to the character. But, like the *Holy Bible*, the stories can be overwhelming, marching along with little context or historical time-line. "The Histories" have been strangely enchanting in their way, but not quite a page-turner drawing me along to the end.

And further - looking at some Christian analysis - while I'd never think it was valid 'because' of any divine origins - you can hear people talking about "The blessings of the holy spirit" - wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, piety, fortitude, and the fear of the Lord. Somehow, it does seem to have a certain richness to it - it contains perhaps something worthwhile, regardless of the religious veneer.

Perhaps we could replace piety and fear of the Lord, with an awe for the destructive and arbitrary forces of nature - an attempt to identify and consider worthwhile characteristics, and perhaps gain some insight into human nature and human possibilities. The point is, this sort of analysis can have a secular and worthwhile richness - even if it was ultimately derived in a religious context.

How might wisdom be encapsulated? - Perhaps in stories that illustrate a point as well as maxims or proverbs. Some ancient Roman literature focused on the identification of maxims that would be useful in life, explain things, or help you at least attain inner peace. And how did we know they were true? Not because of any divine origins, but rather because we trusted the reflections of the author.

And no doubt we could look at some of the Proverbs in the *Holy Bible* as potentially containing wisdom.

This now begs the question - is there any wisdom to be found in maxims and proverbs? - regardless of whether their origin was reputed to be secular or divine. This goes to the promises of religion - particularly at places like *Hillsong* - that it will make you a "more effective" person through personal growth.

But we can in fact see much "raw material" out there that has the promise of personal development:

- Historical maxims, regardless of their origins
- The perspectives of 'the wise', both in the current day and in days past
- Perspectives from the art and science of psychology
- Perspectives from modern day philosophy
- The careful analysis of words and what they really mean (linguistic analysis can feed into wisdom)
- Some of the more tractable notions from Evolutionary Psychology and Game Theory

In the current day, we have a range of people giving us advice on life. There are motivational speakers such as Tony Robbins. You have people drawing from esoteric notions in psychology and elsewhere - e.g. NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming).

There are more subdued people such as Hugh MacKay, whose book *What Makes Us Tick* really opened my eyes. This was not so much a book on how to improve your life directly. Rather, you get the idea that a proper understanding of yourself and the world around you will then provide an improved life.

People like Professor Richard Wiseman draw on approaches from psychology. People like Alain de Botton draw from philosophy - both old and new. And then - while I can't point to books - you can also try to draw inspiration from perspectives in Game Theory and Evolutionary Psychology. And, of course, you have repackagings of the familiar promises of religion.



I would suggest that, whatever the package, you look at it in combination as a source both of 'ethics' and of 'good choices for personal advancement' - that way, you can better understand where it is coming from.

So, here is where I am flung. Can we say that there are valid maxims about life, developed by 'smart people', based on 'reflection' and 'experience' that sit outside any modern scientific paradigm - or perhaps draw from what was seen as advanced thinking at some stage in history?

When you reflect on the maxims of Seneca, and others, they do seem to have a truth to them - an intuitive appeal. For example: "Religion is believed by the masses to be true, by the wise to be false, and by the rulers to be 'useful'. There's also *The Enchiridion* by Epictetus. One emphasis is that if you worry about controlling the outside world, what is outside of your control, you will be frustrated.

However, these notions can only be validated through the personal decision: "this makes sense to me"! Of course we cannot run every aspect of our lives as though it were a scientific experiment - at some point we do have to take the chance and embrace something, whether or not it comes with the pedigree of scientific theories and experimental double blind tests, and knowing our understanding of the world is susceptible to psychological distortions and other fallacies.

Still, when we do this, we have an identified individual - Epictetus perhaps - and some history we can draw from.

The problem with *The Good Book* is that we no longer have this context. If *The Good Book* is replacing the *Holy Bible*, then maybe you have to go with it, but here's where we encounter a fundamental difference between the writings of an author like Epictetus, and the compilations of an editor like Grayling.

If you've known A.C. Grayling for a while and you're a fan, and can see where he has come from in the past, then you can follow into embracing *The Good Book*.

But, if you've no such past connection, it becomes something of a 'plunge' to embrace this book. Many will approach it, not as fans of A.C. Grayling with a past familiarity with his work, but rather as readers aware of the "fuss" around the book, but little other knowledge of the person behind it.

And therein lies a tension. I'm sure A.C. Grayling is a smart, wise person. But, to take the plunge and embrace something of this kind will be easier for those with an emotional connection, and a pre-existing degree of trust in the author. That is part of the fundamental tension with *The Good Book*.

For me personally, these were relevant concerns. Yet, if I were twenty years younger, perhaps I would be more willing to invest the time in reading this book, along with lots of other books, lot of other discussions, and lots of other ways of trying to attain 'wisdom'. In my forties, however, without the connection described above, it is difficult to find the inclination to invest lots of time in the book.

I'm sure I'll continue to nibble at it ... and maybe one day I'll pass the hump, and see that it was all worthwhile.

For the present, however, it remains, to me, an unusual, sometimes intriguing, but also rather large and imposing 'tome'.



John August



***The Good Book : A Secular Bible***, perhaps A.C. Grayling's bulkiest popular work, appeared in 2011. (note the U.S. subtitle was 'A Humanist Bible')

It was no mere coincidence that 2011 was also the 400th anniversary year of the appearance of the ***King James Bible*** in 1611.

A.C. Grayling duly noted the celebrations, and set out to produce an alternative, non-religious Bible, made in just the same way as the original - by "redaction, editing, paraphrasing, interpolation, arrangement and rewriting" of earlier texts and oral traditions.

The Judaeo-Christian *Holy Bible* was made over many years by many hands. *The Good Book* was created more quickly by A.C. Grayling using hundreds of authors, and a thousand texts drawn from three thousand years of the great secular traditions. In fourteen books chapter and verse, "he has distilled their teachings, their insights, their wit, their advice, their human stories, their tragedies, their yearnings, their love, their sorrow and their consolations". Like the earliest original, there are no footnotes!

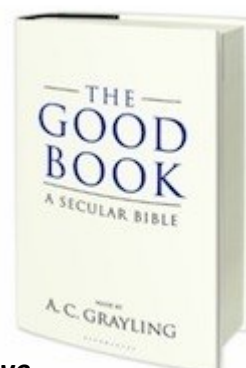
The fourteen books in Grayling's epic are: ***Genesis, Wisdom, Parables, Concord, Lamentations, Consolations, Sages, Songs, Histories, Proverbs, The Lawgiver, Acts, Epistles, The Good***.

It begins: ***Genesis*** 1.1. *In the garden stands a tree. In springtime it bears flowers; in the autumn, fruit. 1.2. Its fruit is knowledge, teaching the good gardener how to understand the world....*

It ends: ***The Good*** ....9.10. *Let us help one another, therefore: let us build the city together. 9.11. Where the best future might inhabit, and the true promise of humanity be realized at last.*

***Proverbs*** to help the reader: 3.4. *If the advice be good, it matters not who gave it. 15.2 All glory comes from daring to begin. 22.1 Something is learned every time a book is opened.*

**Favourite quote: Proverbs chap.141 verse 17: "Truth may languish, but can never perish"**



compiled M. Love



# 2016 END-OF-YEAR TRIVIAGANZA NIGHT

About 18 of us gathered at Humanist House on Saturday evening 3rd December 2016 to celebrate a big year for the Society with a social night of trivia and fun. Plus snacks and booze, followed by a delicious dinner and dessert.

Three teams formed to contest 70 questions. There was one question for each year from 1960 to 1989. Then there were twenty tougher questions on secular history, and twenty famous people to recognize from their youthful photos. We finished off with a couple of dozen sixties era pop songs to guess the title of - except they were the French version so there wasn't the familiar words to help remember. There were lots of chocolate prizes.

Those who came had a very enjoyable night. Working as a team to remember the past is a terrific way of getting to know each other. It's a shame more members can't make it along to our events and help build the humanist community Sydney so desperately needs. I guess it's a busy time of year for everyone.



The first team chose the name "The Brilliants" and this proved decisive once we got onto the serious questions on secular history. (See the quiz based on these questions on the next page). There is a formidable accumulation of years of experience around this table, but perhaps not enough attention paid to pop culture in their younger years.

"The Brilliants" came from behind to snatch the contest in the final round.

The next team called themselves "The Master Debaters" and it's no surprise this was an all boy's team! They certainly shone in the 'loudest shirt' part of the competition, but sadly this earned no extra points. Missing from his seat is Ian Bryce, no doubt checking out the snacks at the other tables. The boys stayed in range of the leaders all night, in what was a close see-sawing contest. The wine was well enjoyed at this colourful little table.



The third team staked out their cultural credentials with their appellation "Les Penseurs" - French for 'the thinkers'. They pondered as hard as a Rodin statue, and led the way in twentieth century popular history - and were stars in the individual pop music guessing comp. The core of the group was part of last year's winning team, but they were pipped at the post in 2016 by the erudite efforts of "The Brilliants" in the questions targeting secular and atheist history. We humanists need to get to know our own history more.



## TRY OUT FOR YOURSELF THE QUIZ ON SECULAR HEROES FROM THE LAST TWO CENTURIES

1. Which Greek sophist and protégé of Democritus said "Man is the measure of all things"?
2. Who am I? Born a Jew in the USSR I was a famous President of the American Humanist Association.
3. Which leading Democrat was the prosecutor at the 1925 Tennessee Scopes Monkey trial?
4. Which civil libertarian was the defence attorney at the 1925 Tennessee Scopes Monkey trial?
5. What was the last name of the defendant at the 1925 Tennessee Scopes Monkey trial?
6. Who was the first British MP to enter parliament by affirmation after repeatedly refusing an oath?
7. Which lordly humanist said he believed in 1925 "when I die I shall rot" then lived another 45 years.
8. Whose statue's hooded figure looms over the Campo di Fiori in Rome where he died in 1600?
9. Which jailed editor of the first openly atheist journal came south to goldrush Victoria & died in NZ?
10. Which great orator said: "What can be asserted without proof can be dismissed without proof"?
11. Which quotable hunchbacked papist poet told us: "the proper study of mankind is man"?
12. Which famous and hated U.S. atheist was kidnapped, murdered, mutilated and hidden in 1995?
13. In what year was the Humanist Society of New South Wales formed?
14. Who was the first Treasurer of the Humanist Society of New South Wales?
15. Which dogged debater on behalf of evolution invented the word 'agnosticism' in 1869?
16. Who said: "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve it by not dying."
17. Which son of Birmingham is wholly responsible for coining the word 'secularism' in 1841?
18. Which 19th century Republican American public speaker was called 'The Great Agnostic'?
19. Which young man was expelled from Oxford University in 1811 for writing an atheistic pamphlet?
20. Give the title of the pamphlet for which the subsequently famous student was expelled in 1811.

(Answers upside down below right)



Article author, Triviameister, and Society 2016-17 President, Murray Love seen hosting the 2016 Triviaganza in his "Socrates imbibing the Hemlock" t-shirt, purchased on a cruise to Greece and Israel earlier in the year. Photography by our Secretary Fay Love who also hosted the event and ensured good food and drink all round. A big thanks to Fay and all those who came along.

1. Protagoras
  2. Isaac Asimov
  3. William Jennings Bryan
  4. Clarence Darrow
  5. Scopes
  6. Charles Bradlaugh
  7. Bertrand Russell
  8. Giordano Bruno
  9. Charles Southwell
  10. Christopher Hitchens
  11. Alexander Pope
  12. Madalyn Murray O'Hair
  13. 1960
  14. Fred Flatau
  15. Thomas Henry Huxley
  16. Woody Allen
  17. George Jacob Holyoake
  18. Robert Green Ingersoll
  19. Percy Bysshe Shelley
  20. "The Necessity of Atheism".
- Don't worry the best team on the night only got eleven out of twenty right.
- Some of these people you will certainly have heard of already, but the others are worth learning something about. The right to think as we do didn't just happen, but was worked at, suffered for, and fought for, for decades, and we need to know our heritage and acknowledge our heroes. They were often prickly characters and didn't even get along with one another but their stories are worth reading and there is lots to be learned from some googling on the web.



## HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW INC.

Humanist House, 10 Shepherd Street,  
Chippendale NSW 2008

<http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/>

**President/Editor:** Murray Love, [lovemuz@gmail.com](mailto:lovemuz@gmail.com)

**Vice President:** John August, [john.august@mail.optusnet.com.au](mailto:john.august@mail.optusnet.com.au)

**Vice President:** Ian Bryce, [ianrbryce@gmail.com](mailto:ianrbryce@gmail.com)

**Secretary/Membership:** Fay Love, [faylove@rocketmail.com](mailto:faylove@rocketmail.com)

**Treasurer/Peace & Environment:** Angela, [abraxas@tpg.com.au](mailto:abraxas@tpg.com.au)

**Meetup Organizer:** Murray Love, [murrath@rocketmail.com](mailto:murrath@rocketmail.com)

**Humanist House Manager:** Fred Flatow, 0418 616 304

**Phone at Humanist House (when attended):** (02) 9212 2122

**Humanist House Bookings/Open Forum:** David Duffy,  
(02) 4782 1130 (am only); (02) 9212 2122 (Wednesday evening)

**Sustainable Population Australia:** George Carrard,  
[george\\_carrard@yahoo.com.au](mailto:george_carrard@yahoo.com.au), [www.population.org.au](http://www.population.org.au)

**South Coast Contact:** John Dillon (02) 4233 0780

**Newcastle Contact:** Jim Bright, (02) 4942 5197

**Canberra Contact:** Dierk von Behrens, (02) 6254 1763

**Canberra Chaplain & Canberra Meetup Organizer:**

Lyndon Storey, 0432 938 739, [humanistexplorer@gmail.com](mailto:humanistexplorer@gmail.com)

**Humanist Celebrants Network Chairperson:** Dally Messenger,  
(03) 9646 1649, 0411 717 303, [dallymessenger@mac.com](mailto:dallymessenger@mac.com)

**Sydney Celebrants Contact:** Affie Adagio, 0421 101 163,  
[affie@affie.com.au](mailto:affie@affie.com.au), PO Box 617 Potts Point NSW 1335

## Our Patrons



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*Mother, feminist, bilingual sociologist, peace activist. Dorothy is also an environmentalist, and committed to the cause of reconciliation with indigenous Australia. A founder of the Ethnic Communities Council, Dorothy was, and is still, a vital influence in the ethnic communities.*

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