

HUMANIST viewpoints

**IT'S ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS TIME - SEE OUR BACK PAGE FOR PAYMENT DETAILS
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF THE WORK OF HUMANISM IN OUR LIVES & IN THE WORLD**



"The Humanist Society of NSW supports voting YES in the government statistical survey. We have long been a supporter of human equality and of accommodating real human needs in fair and flexible family arrangements. Marriage is one of the great institutions of humanity, found in very many cultures, but also in need of frequent review as our ethical framework matures in the light of clearer knowledge through science and reason. But above all we acknowledge the past hurt and suffering of our brothers and sisters, and wish them the joy and hope so beautifully expressed in weddings, and the intimacy and security that can grow when a whole nation and community backs up the special relationships we humans strive to build our lives around". M. Love
Please remember to vote for Love, for Happiness, for Equality, for Humanity - For Goodness sake - JUST VOTE YES.

SEE PAGE 6 FOR FULL DETAILS OF OUR ACTIVITIES FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE 2017

HUVAT SUNDAY 8 OCTOBER 2017 3.00 FOR 3.15 P.M. IS 'LOVE & MARRIAGE' WITH FAY & MURRAY

NSW HUMANISTS MEETUP 'ACTIVE HUMANISM - DOING STUFF' 3-6PM ON SUNDAY 22 OCTOBER 2017

HUVAT SUNDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2017 3.00 FOR 3.15 P.M. IS 'THE RIGHT TO DIE' - SPEAKER MURRAY LOVE

NSW HUMANISTS MEETUP 'HEROES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT' 3-6PM SUNDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2017

END-OF-YEAR CELEBRATION SATURDAY 2 DECEMBER 2017 5.30 FOR 6.00 P.M. 'A FEAST OF KNOWLEDGE'

SEE NEWS ON ACTIVITIES PLUS ON MEMBERSHIP AND HUMANIST HOUSE ON PAGES 2-3

SEE MURRAY LOVE'S PRESIDENTIAL REPORT FROM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON PAGES 4-5

SEE MORE OF JOHN AUGUST'S 'SECULAR HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA' ON PAGES 10-11

SEE BARBARA CATTUNAR'S HISTORICAL EXPLANATION OF CYNICS AND SKEPTICS ON PAGES 10-11

SEE DETAILS ON HOW TO RENEW SUBSCRIPTIONS AT BOTTOM OF PAGE 12

SEE IHEU'S GOFUNDME APPEAL TO ASSIST ENDANGERED HUMANISTS AT BOTTOM OF PAGE 11



QUARTERLY ACTIVITIES REPORT

Note that some of our activities are further described in my AGM President's report which is reprised on pages 4 & 5.

The July 9 HuVAT was replaced with a Tribute to David Tribe. 21 people came. We got a chance to review his life as a whole. His achievements are of such magnitude they can be researched on the web and in books in our library. We particularly were able to bring back elements of his childhood and his time in London in the sixties. He was extraordinarily busy and productive in his earlier years - just as any knowledge of his contributions in his elder years would indicate. Some of it is now on his *Wikipedia* page. He might have been our only member to have one.

The July 23 Meetup was our annual celebration of community. We need to have a core collection of members willing and able to help integrate newcomers into our movement. This isn't easy and we'll keep reviewing the format till we succeed. The 12 members who came had a lovely time. Thanks to all.

The August 13 Activism Meeting was one of our best yet. We had excellent participation. Peter Young shared his efforts in humanising Kings Cross. We discussed the world of fake news. About 20 people came and all got involved.

The August 27 Democratic Humanitarianism event was just 7 people, but a committed few raised enough AUDollars to pay £100 to IHEU's project raising money to protect endangered Humanists around the world. (See p.11 and add some yourself)

On Sunday September 10 we held our Annual General Meeting. There were exactly enough candidates to fill the available positions and no constitutional amendments this year so we enjoyed a unified experience, and listened to the various reports with interest. The formalities closed, the 19 members and a couple of visitors had a useful discussion and broke up into informal conversation as the afternoon trailed away.

The Meetup on September 24 was titled 'Social Media as Self-Dehumanisation'. Unfortunately the speaker failed to appear but there were people there to discuss their issues with social media, so we had plenty to say. The more drastic thesis was harder to sustain without those who could report more serious cases. Much of the general problems are really similar to the usual crises in adolescence and the usual phobias regarding new technology. But there are new dangers and opportunities to be dealt with and there will be scope for further topics in this area. Eleven of us had a good discussion.

We had extra events during this period. The first was the coming of the film *Fade to Black* on August 3rd. This was attended by at least a dozen members over the two sessions. The film took a man through the process of dying from cancer and he shared his innermost feelings with audiences on film and in the theatre. It was about the choices and decisions he wanted, and the assistance he received, and the opposition and impediments and the ultimate outcome. A very personal but informative exploration of the issues around assisted dying.

We also celebrated Fred Flatow turning 80 that month.

14 came to another special night on Saturday September 23. This was the film *A Better Life: An Exploration of Joy & Meaning in a World Without God* presented in person by the New York film-maker Chris Johnson. Some felt the film had less relevance to Australian society, but it was splendidly made, and fascinating to have the film-maker in the room to hear our views, and to share his experiences taking it around the world.

I also mention that John August made the effort to come and join Fay and Murray at the Penrith pub night we hold for Humanists, Atheists and Ex-Christians on the third Wednesday of the month. We very much appreciated his support. **ML**

MEMBER NEWS AND VIEWS

We warmly welcome our new members such as Ethel Talty & Alex Bormans - it's wonderful to see young professional couples raising families but finding time to engage with the Humanism movement. Also we have Joffre Balce, well known in the Association for Good Government, with which we share several members. Jim Alexander has joined his wife Ann in a double membership. Finally we now have Mr Vivian Robinson PhD who is an entrepreneur and inventor, with his own views on the secular underpinnings of the religions and their founders.

We thank those who have included a donation when renewing their membership, such as Ken Cooke, David Schama, Kamille Zaiter, Dierk & Rosemary von Behrens, Alice Volans, Ian Warwick, Murray & Fay Love, David & Elva Blair, Valerie Taylor, Victor & Sylvana D'lapico-Bien, Brian Edwards, John Levack, Barry Barnett, Terry Bunn, and John Dillon. Every little helps, but that extra expression of support for our efforts to rebuild the society is very much appreciated by the committee.

We are also grateful for a very generous final donation from longstanding member Tryntje Bostick of \$500.00. Tryntje has been with us, and supporting us, for well over twenty years but has now retired from the society. This will be her last issue of Viewpoints.

We found online a description of Tryntje's 2015 91st Birthday Party at her community on the mid-north coast of NSW. We wish her well for her days yet to come. **ML**

Birthday Celebration.



.Friends celebrate the birthday Tryntje Bostick (I call her Teena) at Hallidays Shores Her 91st birthday **(2015)**
Waving like the "Queen" she still is an active lady in the Village. She belongs to the Senior Citizens and also Probus. She still plays an odd game of croquet.

Please Consider Making a Donation or Bequest

From \$5 to \$10,000, 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.

President's continuing appeal to members to volunteer to assist in building our future

We have depended on elder members who have been outstanding workers for Humanism in NSW. We wish them a long life, but cannot expect them to carry the load indefinitely. Times change and modern generations do find many other demands on their voluntary time in the twenty-first century. So let's look for new ways to volunteer in smaller amounts at a time!

There are many ways to help, and if you can send us your expressions of interest, indicating your 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 assist in growing a future for this organisation, now 57 years young with assets to be treasured, a heritage to be celebrated, a world network of activism, and a positive philosophy to be shared.

Or come propose your own projects at the October Meetup.

Email our President at lovemuz@gmail.com advising skills you'd like to use, & hours you can offer - however small.

With job-sharing teamwork we can carry on the Humanist tradition. This call will be a regular feature of our member page.

Do You have items for Book Room & Library

If you have any good-quality non-fiction surplus hard-copy books, why not donate them to the Society's Library or for sale in the Bookroom. Volunteers in our Bookroom are often frontline contacts with those who enquire about Humanism while they browse the items around the walls. Gillian has reappeared for a few hours a week but other suitable volunteers would be welcome. Space is tighter now and we focus on the better books. You can contact the President, Murray Love at: lovemuz@gmail.com

Please Send Your letters, articles, information and ideas for inclusion in Viewpoints

Some members are not on the Internet and some live far from Sydney. Attendance and interaction get more difficult as we age, and distances need more assistance to overcome. Stronger, younger and newer members can assist.

A newsletter is one thing all members can share in. We have material on what's happening at Humanist House through the year, but also need contributions from individual members of the Society. You are welcome and encouraged to send in news and views for publication. These can be controversial - there's no party line. They can be on diverse topics - Humanism has a broad range.

We most-of-all love to hear from members who haven't contributed before. A short 'letter to the editor' is a valued inclusion. Disagree with anything you see - or share why you do agree! We can't guarantee everything will be used, but with patience and flexibility we'd love to include all we can. Communication by email is preferred. Handwritten and typed contributions might get postponed. Be careful items don't appear in both local and national journals. Email items to lovemuz@gmail.com.

THERE'S STILL TIME TO RENEW ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS. DETAILS AT BOTTOM OF BACK PAGE WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT MORE THAN EVER



The hall of Humanist House as it used to be, such as in November 2016 at the Meetup on Disability, Humanity & Opportunity. There has been a transformation with a fresh spacious look, which we hope will encourage newer usages of the venue. We hope we'll have some interesting photos of activities in the new-look hall in our next issue.

FROM THE PRESIDENT/EDITOR'S DESK

This is a rework of the report I gave at our September A.G.M.

In 2016 I laid out some goals we might need to pursue and I'd like to revisit these to set some context for the year in review. These 'goals' are of course, a "work in progress", and progress can be slow, but it is important to know where we're going.

Our number one goal is always to increase our membership, or at least to arrest its steady decline. Awkwardly, we share this goal with everyone else in Sydney! Competition for attention is fierce. And we're not just hoping for attention, but a commitment of regular attendance to form a community. We work hard to sustain at least two distinctly Humanist events a month at Humanist House. But we find that no-one's attendance can be taken for granted in this competitive world.

Loyal long-term members are a disappearing breed. We have to work to retain existing members, as well as to reach out to new people. Keeping such a diverse community interested requires a very broad-based programme of activities. Those new folk who show an interest in us can be even more widely differentiated. We're like a herd of cats.

One human's strong interest can be another human's poison. Members and visitors often need individuated attention. Such a diverse community needs to be delicately managed to maintain fairness and harmony.

All this can spread us thin in all dimensions. This brings us to another goal – that of developing a new generation of leaders, sponsors, helpers and supporters. We see many promising young people come along, but they often move on to other things. We see them around at competing groups like Sydney Atheists or Sunday Assembly. Some might say – no they don't compete – they're just like us. But that's the very point. We no longer have a monopoly on secular activities in Sydney.

Not everyone who joins Humanist and secular groups wants to be what some call a 'people person'. But we do need good community-builders amongst us. Other groups also value skills in welcoming and engaging with new people. We need them too. Sometimes, the very people who prefer not to put themselves forward, are the ones we need most of all.

Some of our future leaders are probably at this moment outside of this organisation - and we need to find them, invite them in, and keep them.

We need to give good people reasons to stick with us and help us grow. This becomes another one of our goals – reviving the appeal of Humanism itself.

Humanism is a special brand – needing to be understood as universal without being reduced to banality. Humanism needs to be both meaningful and perennial without becoming stilted or pretentious. We need to keep it in vogue, but not so trendy it inevitably falls out of fashion once again.

While Humanity exists - Humanism is forever! There are those who promote post-humanism and anti-humanism. These are absurdities. Our Humanity is inescapable, and Humanism is nothing more or less than our best efforts to be effective human beings. It's never a passing fad or a failed project. Time does pass, and people do fail, but Humanism goes on.

A more tangible goal is simply to be Sydney's node in an international network of Humanism. The IHEU, soon to change its name, is the shining star of our movement. We have

important relations with the other state Societies and with CAHS (Council of Australian Humanist Societies) our national peak body. We need to draw strength from the institutional magnitude of our movement - its philosophical depth, its historical length and its geographic width.

We need to think globally while also acting very, very locally. Global thinking needs to provide inspiration. Local acting calls for those with discipline, experience and versatility.

Acting locally leads on to the final goal of modernising our governance – making jobs more do-able and more enjoyable to do; upgrading our assets to better provide revenue for survival; spending wisely; ensuring a safe and pleasant environment for volunteers and visitors.

With limited resources we tend to be re-active to situations rather than proactively plan forward strategies. But setting out some simple guiding goals might help us make better choices.

Our activities used to be limited to the Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talks or HuVAT but these days we have a broader range on offer, including our activism exchange meetings, our longer seminars, and all the different things we try at the Meetup gatherings.

This year we've brought all our regular activities into line with a consistent 3.00pm start. I hope you like it. This also meant a tightening up of our Committee meetings. I think this has been an effective change. Committee members have a productive two hour meeting, with still enough energy left to participate with those in our wider community from 3pm on. We're more disciplined, but I think we actually enjoy meetings more.

It's been a good start in improving governance. We've plenty more to do in modernising our systems, but our first priority is to get the best out of ourselves in working together.

I've referred to our Activism Meetings as 'activism exchange meetings' because they're not really about us planning activism campaigns. The days when we could offer a rent-a-crowd for various causes are well behind us. What we really do at these meetings is get guests from congenial organisations and our own most active members, to share updates on their values, their work, and their plans - and stimulate thinking.

At our Activism Meetings this year we've heard from Max & Meg Wallace of the NSW Rationalists, Jo from Sunday Assembly, Howard De Witt from the Citizens Science Lobby and such active members as Peter Young, Ian Bryce, John August and Tim Josling. We've let off steam about the post-truth world we live in, and the difficulty of measuring progress. These meetings, an innovation from John August, have been a great opportunity for everyone to share ideas.

A special Activism meeting last November tried for a historical perspective - looking at our Society's own activism in the near and distant past. We also honoured the active careers of five new Life Members – Fred Flatow, Dennis Morris, Affie Adagio, Gillian Ellis and Robyn Williams.

One of our Life Members, David Tribe, died at the end of May this year. Another early major figure, Ian Edwards died in March, and we have honoured their passing - Ian in the journal, and we had a special tribute meeting for David. This got me started on historical research. We need more, and I'd love to hear from anyone else interested in digging up our history.

We had another big Darwin Day in 2017 with John August on Evolutionary Psychology and a special address by Dr Daniel Hutto of Wollongong University on the evolution of our brains.

I did a HuVAT myself in August 2016 on 'Humanist Pilgrimage' – looking at sites and events that are worth going to see, and that enhance our sense of meaning in our lives. I had to quickly construct an even longer version for a recent Meetup, after the speaker I'd booked had to postpone his talk, and I needed to fill in. One day I'd like to develop this as a web page or a blog, and see what broader interest it gathers.

John August had a slideshow of his travels to technological achievements in another HuVAT - 'Marvels of Human Ingenuity'. We had one more HuVAT on Gravitational Waves - plus a bit of alternative science from John again. Ian Bryce lead a discussion on 'Physics and Determinism' in February.

In our Meetup events, on each fourth Sunday of the month, we continued to examine our own lives, and the dimensions of humanity, in a varied programme attended by newcomers and old-timers alike. We discussed spirituality; consciousness; happiness; what we even mean by the word human; and how persons with disabilities claim the fullness of their own humanity in difficult circumstances.

The Meetup group and website turned ten years old last October, and we celebrated the milestone. We also celebrate Humanistmas each July – where we try to get people focused on the actuality of a community – by simply communing together around good food and bad drink. Attendance has been small, but we need to keep trying to get the measure of ourselves as a real and enduring community. We won't get that by just offering an entertaining speaker for one afternoon.

To some extent this was proved by our biggest special event, just before our last AGM – the visit by AC Grayling. It even took time to get our people excited for this opportunity. We had a fabulous evening together, but couldn't convert our supporters to the habit of sharing ideas together as a community.

We need to go beyond celebrity, and start to BYO ideas, BYO inspiration, BYO resources and Get Our Own community.

A unique event was an evening shortly before Christmas to remember Christopher Hitchens, five years after his death. A small but dedicated group of us shared a special experience.

For our World Humanist Day celebration this year we had just one main guest, our new President of the Council of Australian Humanist Societies – Lyndon Storey - who nevertheless managed to fill up a very interesting afternoon, which was well attended by members. He got us thinking about the future of the Humanist movement in Australia.

Both this year and last year, we held a special Meetup in August to feature Humanitarianism. Each of these also raised money for worthy causes. In 2016 we helped a Ugandan village girl with albinism to get three years schooling at a wonderful humanist boarding school in that country.

We then took it forward - passed the bowl around at the Grayling night, promoted it to our online communities (including a donation by one person of \$900). We boosted the fund to the \$1800 needed for the whole three years.

In August 2017 we raised UK £100 to donate to the IHEU GoFundMe project to help protect Humanists in trouble in theocratic regimes and bigoted communities around the world. They still need more, so please give that your own support. *(See the promotion of this funding project on page 11.)*

Managing our money is always an important part of the good governance of the society. We discovered serious charging errors in our printing costs and managed to claw back \$1000. We have also cut back our printing to be manageable in the future, with many of our members now preferring the PDF online version of the newsletter in full colour.

Organising the newsletter changeover has also allowed me to be in touch with many of our members that we don't see too often at Humanist House itself. It is difficult to keep in touch but our newsletter is a vital way to do that. We'd love to get our own members sharing with one another on a regular basis, in social media, through the newsletter or other means.

There is so much to do to bring about revival, and there is plenty of room for anyone willing to help. We have filled our committee positions, but please know that each of you is very welcome to let me know of any way you feel you can help.

At Humanist House we've done a deal with the business next door who wish to use it for catered parties with cooking lessons. They've assisted with repairs and redecoration. This has the added benefit of making it a more appealing venue for others to hire. We'll be hoping to get more out of this in the near future. Take a look yourself, and tell everyone you know that Humanist House is now a great venue for their events.

We have closer relationships with the other Humanist Societies around Australia. We all share similar difficulties, and liaison between us is easier with modern communication. I now participate in online meetings for CAHS, and have frequent email and telephone contact with key interstate members.

A South Australian team led by Scott Sharrad worked hard over 2015 & 2016 on ways to modernise the Humanist movement in Australia. But this really needs involvement from the big states too, and I managed to put together a team from across Australia at the CAHS AGM in Melbourne in April 2017.

Scott assisted in the transition, but found it less personally satisfying, and has moved on. South Australia is still with us, and we now have a Queensland Secretary, A NSW Treasurer and an ACT President. In the ACT itself, we once again have a fully functioning Humanist Society which is now back in CAHS.

The Conference this year in Victoria was ambitious, and proved successful. NSW had a sizable contingent, and we all enjoyed the weekend very much. Fay and I stayed back and saw a bit more of the Victorian leadership. We also got to know the new people in Canberra a bit better, when we stopped there on the way down to Melbourne.

I thank the NSW committee for their support over the past year, and hope we can achieve more in the coming year together. The work isn't easy, and I welcome any offers of assistance, particularly from those members who haven't found the opportunity to contribute in earlier times.

Even if you can only contribute by reading our emails, or by coming along once in a while, or by making a modest donation from time to time every little bit of support help keep us going.

The Humanist movement is an essential part of the human world, and if it didn't already exist we'd have to invent it.

There's real work needing to be done by real people. We'd love to hear from you.

Murray Love, President



CALENDAR FOR OCT-DEC 2017

HuVAT Sunday 8 October 2017 3.00 for 3.15 p.m. is LOVE & MARRIAGE with Fay & Murray

This topic is inspired by the widespread 'debate' on same-sex marriage. But we'll range across all forms of intimate relationship - or not. Naturally, we'll avoid making anyone feel disrespected. Marriage isn't right for everybody, and the single life, divorce, and disastrous relationships are also valid to discuss. This can get very personal. No-one need reveal anything that troubles them—nor feel their views are unwelcome - if expressed without harm to others. Murray & Fay Love, who have survived over thirty years of marriage, will present discussion starters— opinions are out there for the taking, plus abundant lyrics, clichés, platitudes and proverbs. Then we'll quickly open up discussion. We will have to be sure to "think of the children" sometimes, but, for the same reasons WC Fields warned against sharing the stage with them, we plan to quickly get back to discussing the adults. "Secular Humanists" get the blame for all the new family formats we see today, and some out there consider the family has been damaged by experiments and failures in partnership formation. Yet, the evidence is that most adults rise to the occasion, and most families work for those who are in them. There has never been so much talk of LOVE & MARRIAGE as there has been lately, so we'll never be readier to flirt with a topic so likely to go in unexpected directions and down rabbit-holes and pitfalls. We'll try to keep heads level and noses clean, and enjoy ourselves with good-humored exchange. Stay back to enjoy a meal together. \$5 donation please.

NSW Humanists Meetup ACTIVE HUMANISM - DOING STUFF 3-6PM on Sunday 22 October 2017

This is a chance to volunteer and initiate active humanistic projects. Humanism is a way of living, not an empty academic construct. Personal development and self-improvement come from active participation—in discussions, in hosting other people's discussions, working on statements and submissions, maintaining websites and libraries, researching, or cooperating online. It might be active engagement with other people in hospitals or institutions or at their homes and nursing homes, helping them get a grip on their situation through sharing serious conversations that they can't always get from their family members. Engage with the planet at the local level in environmental projects, or widen horizons and human understanding by visits to synagogues, galleries, gardens, museums. We could share in education through online courses, book clubs, collaborative learning & document development, exercising or meditating together, sharing child care, sponsoring common interests, humanitarian projects. All these things can begin in small ways. They often need support teams willing to do the legwork to make things happen and to keep on happening. It all starts with goodwill, energy, and focus but is sustained by facilitating cooperation. Bring along an open mind, and ears to listen, dreams to share, knowledge to grow in collaboration with hundreds of others inspired by the potential of humanity.

HuVAT Sunday 12 November 2017 3.00 for 3.15 p.m. is THE RIGHT TO DIE - Speaker Murray Love

We'll look at some of the latest attempts to implement Voluntary Assisted Dying, particularly Victoria, but this isn't another re-run of the VAD issue. Murray wants to look at the politics involved, and how our principles might be compromised away in the process. Have religious activists infiltrated the anti-suicide movement and imposed rigid "pro-life" attitudes? Suicide is now a dirty word. The topic can't be discussed without obligatory referral to Lifeline etc. In the new catch-22 anyone asking to die proves they are mentally ill for asking, and thus not eligible to be assisted due to inability to make a rational decision! Only those mentally competent can choose to die, yet any decisions made prior to becoming mentally incompetent become void. Those preferring death to dementia can thus become trapped in a deteriorating condition at the mercy of religious providers. Philip Nitschke, our 1998 Australian Humanist of the Year, and serious contender for Australian of the Year just over a decade ago, is more often vilified today, and somewhat disowned by movements involved in current legislative attempts. Our trusted compassionate doctors are reviled as some kinds of Nazis wanting to eradicate various disability groups. We need to disentangle the developments of recent decades and touch base with the simple common sense of fundamental human autonomy. Stay back for a meal together.

NSW Humanists Meetup 'HEROES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT' 3-6PM SUNDAY 26 November 2017

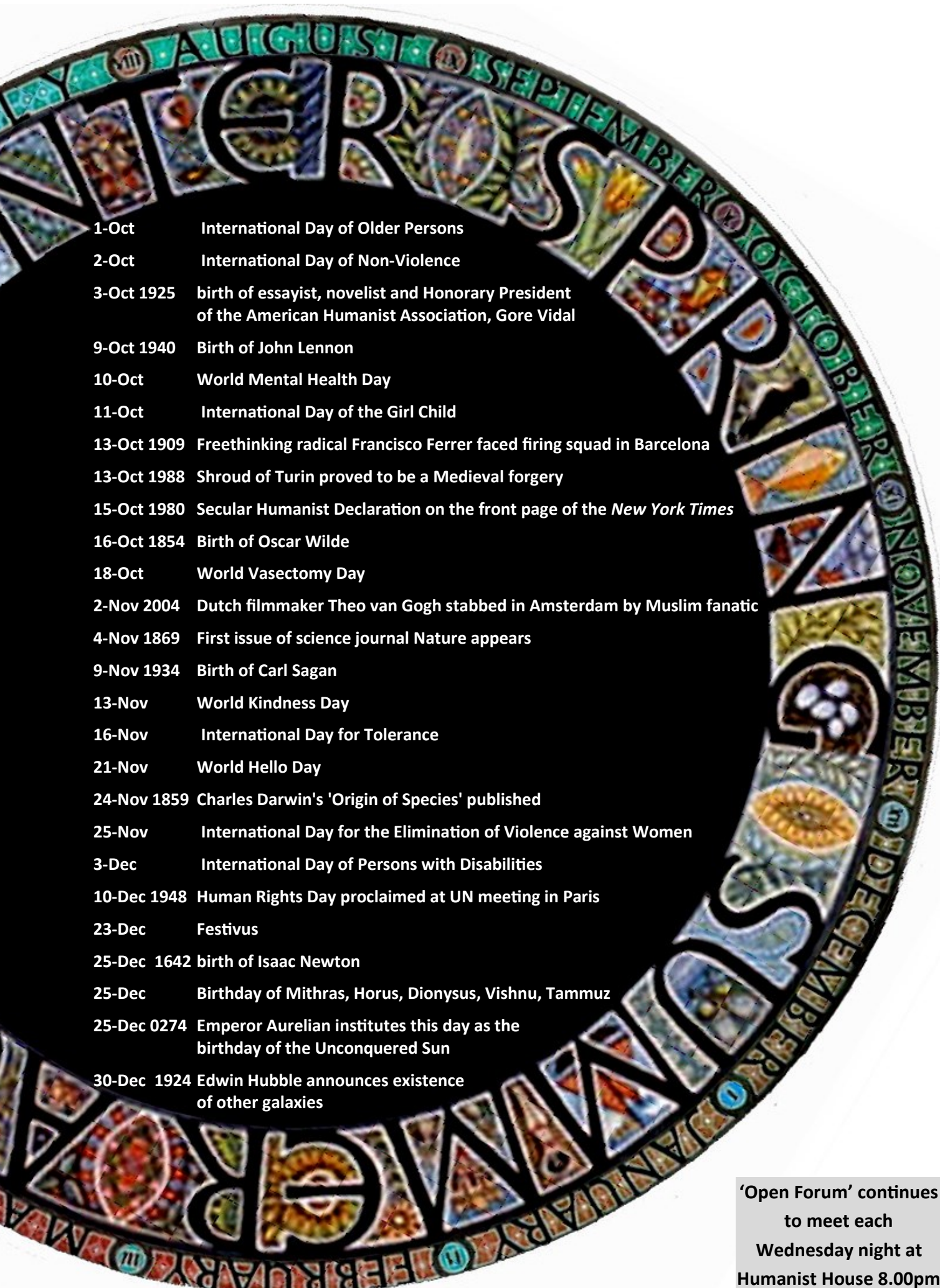
The first documentary THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE starts 3pm. After a 15 minute break, we'll have part two CHANGING SOCIETY - finishing at 5pm. We'll have another break then a chance to discuss the impact of the Enlightenment on the 21st century, and whether we need a new one. (NSW Humanists are licensed to show these films on an educational, non-commercial basis). Modernity owes existence to a single defining period: the 18th century Age of Enlightenment. In barely 100 years, deference to divine and royal authority gave way to the idea that humans had the power to understand their own nature and the universe around them. It was a revolution in ideas, information and technology. Beautifully filmed, this illuminating two-part set brings to life key characters of the era - **Newton, Erasmus, Darwin, Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet, Frederick the Great and Thomas Jefferson** - and the ideas that shaped the modern Humanist movement. The series pulls no punches. New Humanists Sunday Open House is a gathering for those new to Humanism, seeking to renew Humanism, having new perspectives on Humanism, or making new friendships in a Humanist community. And those more longstanding in a Humanist community are also a vital part of the process.

END-OF-YEAR CELEBRATION SATURDAY 2 DECEMBER 2017 5.30 FOR 6.00 P.M. A FEAST OF KNOWLEDGE

Our end-of-year entertainment for 2017 will be another evening of trivia, food and fun on the first Saturday of December, at the newly refurbished hall of Humanist House. Those who came along in 2015 and 2016 all enjoyed an excellent evening, and will be back in 2017, but it would be lovely to see some new faces. Come with your mates, or we'll organise teams for you on the night - plenty of tables this year for a very comfortable round of festive seasonal delights. Our quiz is designed for fun and learning, but we will have some simple prizes for the winning team. Parking is easier late on Saturdays. We'll have some spontaneous entertainments while we check the scores. And we'll have wonderful hot food and festive desserts. Members and prospective members of the Humanist Society of NSW are especially invited to come and share in our annual feast of celebration & discovery.

PLEASE BRING A \$10 DONATION TO COVER A MEAL AND EXPENSES— COME AND BE PART OF OUR COMMUNITY

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



- 1-Oct International Day of Older Persons
- 2-Oct International Day of Non-Violence
- 3-Oct 1925 birth of essayist, novelist and Honorary President of the American Humanist Association, Gore Vidal
- 9-Oct 1940 Birth of John Lennon
- 10-Oct World Mental Health Day
- 11-Oct International Day of the Girl Child
- 13-Oct 1909 Freethinking radical Francisco Ferrer faced firing squad in Barcelona
- 13-Oct 1988 Shroud of Turin proved to be a Medieval forgery
- 15-Oct 1980 Secular Humanist Declaration on the front page of the *New York Times*
- 16-Oct 1854 Birth of Oscar Wilde
- 18-Oct World Vasectomy Day
- 2-Nov 2004 Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh stabbed in Amsterdam by Muslim fanatic
- 4-Nov 1869 First issue of science journal *Nature* appears
- 9-Nov 1934 Birth of Carl Sagan
- 13-Nov World Kindness Day
- 16-Nov International Day for Tolerance
- 21-Nov World Hello Day
- 24-Nov 1859 Charles Darwin's 'Origin of Species' published
- 25-Nov International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
- 3-Dec International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- 10-Dec 1948 Human Rights Day proclaimed at UN meeting in Paris
- 23-Dec Festivus
- 25-Dec 1642 birth of Isaac Newton
- 25-Dec Birthday of Mithras, Horus, Dionysus, Vishnu, Tammuz
- 25-Dec 0274 Emperor Aurelian institutes this day as the birthday of the Unconquered Sun
- 30-Dec 1924 Edwin Hubble announces existence of other galaxies

'Open Forum' continues
to meet each
Wednesday night at
Humanist House 8.00pm

SECULAR HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA #4

My review continues focusing on the period Menzies-Whitlam.

Bob Menzies was Prime Minister 1939-1941 and 1949-1966. He resigned in 1941 and was replaced by Arthur Fadden. After a switch by independents the Governor-General appointed Labor's John Curtin who won the 1943 election.

Curtin died in 1945 and was replaced by his deputy Forde then Ben Chifley was elected by the party. Chifley won the 1946 general election but Menzies came back to power in 1949, and stayed - thanks to things like the Petrov affair of 1954-1955.

Menzies retired in 1966, saying he'd never had a proper holiday. His party remained in power for almost another seven years under four different Prime Ministers - Harold Holt, John McEwen, John Gorton and William McMahon.

In June 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea, and Australia joined the war. It was a volunteer army, and the war had ALP support. In 1952 the ANZUS treaty was signed. Allegations surfaced of a 'nest of traitors' in the public service. The Domino Theory warned of armed subversion spreading through South East Asia. SEATO formed as an Asian 'NATO'.

Menzies reached out to Asia, but kept "White Australia" although accepting non-British Europeans. Within the British Commonwealth he supported Apartheid South Africa, and backed French and American intervention in Vietnam.

During World War II resentment of Americans culminated in the 'Battle of Brisbane' - a riot by Australian soldiers, but after ANZUS our relationship with the USA grew ever stronger.

In 1956, during the Suez conflict, Menzies tried to support the British and French, but the Americans were cool on the idea. A residual anti-Americanism still resonated. But Menzies purchased US equipment for the military, cementing the American alliance, and by 1962 the US had bases on Australia.

The defining element of this time was a fear of communism. Yet there's reason to think Communist influence peaked in 1945 and was in natural decline during the Menzies period.

Tension over communism split the ALP and expelled members eventually formed the Democratic Labor Party (DLP). These directed preferences away from Labor, and helped keep them out of office for decades.

In 1956, Soviet troops invaded Hungary, and Australia accepted many refugees from the conflict. Menzies refused to recognise China, as he thought that would be a 'victory for communism' in the region.

The threat of communism resonated with the middle class. Menzies successfully linked Labor to communism while Harold Holt expanded immigration, with problems accommodating the large number at times. The term 'White Australia' was euphemised to 'Immigration Restriction Policy'.

Melbourne's Cardinal Mannix claimed every communist wanted a victory for Evatt and the ALP. Whereas Cardinal Gilroy in Sydney said Christians could vote for any party - except the atheistic communists of course.

Menzies' emphasis on the economy, job security, higher wages and standard of living, won him the 1958 election. However, in the 1959 'horror budget', credit was tightened in response to prosperity and international prices - reminiscent of 'the recession we had to have'. Menzies won in 1961, but only just by one seat with Communist preferences.

In the 1963 election, Menzies won extra seats by diverting attention from the economy onto foreign affairs issues.

There was support for Malaysia against Indonesian 'confrontation', and aid to South Vietnam. The Indonesian Ambassador said Asian problems should be solved by Asians. Nevertheless, later in 1964 Australia entered the Vietnam War after the phony 'Gulf of Tonkin Incident'.

Labor became absorbed in structural reform, and suffered from an association with communism and anti-Americanism. Middle Australia supported the US alliance. Calwell attacked both unions and Catholics. Gough Whitlam replaced Arthur Calwell as Labor leader after the debacle of the 1966 elections. He had a 'stamp of leadership' and 'calculated vision'.

1966 was the year our currency decimalised. US President LBJ visited. In 1967 Marshal Ky the PM of South Vietnam came. These were well received at the time, but lost favour later.

Anti-Vietnam activists were supported by Labor, and Gorton was unable to deal decisively with the issue. The Labor left, such as Tom Uren and Jim Cairns, criticised the US and Nixon.

France - the Joker in the pack - was testing its nuclear weapons in the Pacific. Australia took France to the International Court, but France boycotted proceedings.

Wool prices fell, as did wheat prices after Canada recognised China. Nixon began to withdraw troops from Vietnam. Gorton chose not to become involved in the Cambodian crisis, demonstrating a little independence in foreign policy.

By the late 1960s the ALP was gaining in strength. Whitlam led a delegation to China. Later, Nixon himself went to China, vindicating Whitlam's position. In 1972 Whitlam came to power. He reversed the prison sentences of those who had not accepted military service. He ended conscription.

Whitlam cancelled the Commonwealth New Year Honours, and declined to become a privy counsellor. He recognised China and developed trade relations with the USSR. He sent a career diplomat, instead of a retired politician, to the London High Commission, and recognised North Vietnam.

By the time Whitlam finally wrested power from the Liberal Party, the ALP leadership had been too long distracted by Catholic anti-communism, a strange hybrid of notional compassion trumped by more vigorous anti-communism. Whitlam tapped into the emerging class of cosmopolitan, middle-class 'trendies', However, this class was also fickle.

In 1974 Whitlam gave Vince Gair, the DLP Leader, a cushy job as Ambassador to Ireland, effectively bribing him and neutralising the DLP. In the tight 1974 Election, which Labor won, the DLP was swept out of the Senate without Gair.

Around 1973 we all became aware of the Ustasha - Croatian fascists operating in Australia, with letter bombs and other violence. Croatian agitators were trained in Australia, and a leaked document suggested connections to the assassination of a Yugoslav official in France. The later book *Ratlines* has exposed the Vatican in ferreting away Nazi war criminals.

The Coalition had not been interested in these activities, but Labor's Lionel Murphy took a strong interest. After secret loans negotiations went awry, Malcolm Fraser targeted Whitlam over the scandal. Whitlam was dismissed, and Fraser then won the 1975 and 1977 elections. Whitlam was finished.

Regardless of political developments, massive social change continued in Australia throughout the sixties and seventies - shopping centres, car ownership, foreign investments, minerals booms. There was a frenzy of share-buying.

In 1965 came the Film, *They're a Weird Mob*. Plus *Oz* magazine, *Kings Cross Whisper*, and the Adelaide Festival of the Arts. Australian arts began to flourish. Big money was spent on opera houses, film industries, and art collections. We had the Barry McKenzie films, and iconic films like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. The politics around arts funding became an electoral issue and actors and writers became political campaigners. Censorship was wound back.

The mood was for creative change and expansion rather than conservatism. Activists ran the 'Freedom Bus Ride' and Moree was forced to rescind its ban on Aboriginal people from the municipal swimming pool. The 1967 Referendum passed to include Aboriginal people in the census and Australian law.

Whitlam made good on recognition, supporting Aboriginal stockmen in the Gurindji strike. Gough poured soil from the land into the hand of Vincent Lingiari - inspiring Kev Carmody's *From Little Things Big Things Grow*. Gough is the 'tall stranger'.

Australians were in the mood for a change, and claims from the Liberal Party that Labor was a slave to the trade unions, or planning nationalisations, didn't gain the same traction. The Liberal Party had internal struggles and tensions, becoming an inward looking clique - out of touch.

Another way of putting it, according to Tony Griffiths, is that Australians were now wealthy and prosperous enough that they could afford to consider social issues like Aboriginal health, the status of women, child minding centres, and a lack of respect for rights due to excessive security and secrecy. There was concern about the effects of pollution on the Great Barrier Reef, and sale of kangaroo meat overseas.

Some of the biggest social change related to marriage and the increasing rights of women.

Between 1965 and 1967 Humanist member Vicki Potempa was advocating for abortion. She has amazing stories to tell which capture the injustices of the time - which Catholics were simply blind to. For the present, three will suffice.

Her first story is of an Australian soldier who married a woman in the UK in a one-week relationship, but was then involved in a marriage to an Australian woman where they had a daughter who was going to university. But, on the husband's death, the marriage to the first woman was uncovered, the second marriage was revoked along with the pension to his Australian wife, and his daughter could no longer attend university!

These were the callous consequences of a retrograde system defended by the Catholic Church. Vicki knew these two women; she made representations to Lionel Murphy about enacting legislation validating de-facto relationships, something that eventually ended up in law.

Worse still, in order to obtain an abortion in 1965, Vicki's only option was to be recognised as a woman with a 'mental disorder'. After causing some difficulty, this was finally agreed to - however, the condition was that as well as having an abortion, she would also be sterilized - which she agreed to. Even so, she still needed her husband's consent!

Then some time later, when Vicki continued to advocate for abortion, she would receive criticism from other women at work. Till one day, one of them found that she herself also

needed an abortion. After that, this work colleague avoided Vicki, and Vicki never suffered those sneers again.

In 1969 the Victorian Supreme Court's 'Menhennitt ruling' established that an abortion was lawful if the accused held an honest belief on reasonable grounds that the abortion was both 'necessary' and 'proportionate.'

In 1971 the NSW District Court's 'Levine ruling' established that an abortion would be lawful in that State if there was 'any economic, social or medical ground or reason' upon which a doctor could base an honest and reasonable belief that an abortion was required to avoid a "serious danger to the pregnant woman's life or her physical or mental health".

In 1972 Elizabeth Reid was appointed as the first special adviser on women to a Prime Minister. Two Labor MPs introduced a private members' bill allowing abortion - supported by ten ministers including Whitlam and the Treasurer, but the bill was defeated with the support of Catholics in the ALP.

Menzies introduced the *Marriage Act* in 1961 - but only in 1973 would Lionel Murphy make use of its provisions in introducing Civil Celebrants. On 19 July 1973, his first appointee, Mrs Lois D'Arcy, was made a Civil Marriage Celebrant. Later, as civil marriage celebrants branched out into the performance of other ceremonies such as Funerals and Namings the term was shortened to Civil Celebrant.

Labor Attorney-General Lionel Murphy's most important legislative achievement was the *Family Law Act 1975*, which completely overhauled Australia's law on divorce and other family law matters, establishing the principle of "no-fault" divorce, in the face of opposition from the Roman Catholic Church and many other individuals and organisations. This Act also established the Family Court of Australia.

It was only in 1975 that women were paid equal to men.

Lionel Murphy led a raid on ASIO headquarters in Melbourne to ensure he was on top of information that ASIO had. There had been problems with ASIO not passing information to Government. It had previously been an entity running a conservative agenda independently of government oversight.

The hostile Senate muzzled many Bills, including an electoral equalisation bill that would have hit the DLP and the Country Party. Whitlam abused the Senate, something that would be echoed in Keating's 'unrepresentative swill' comments.

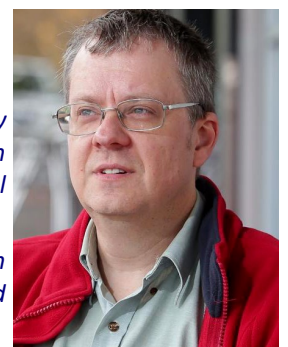
To break the Senate deadlock, Whitlam held a joint sitting and implemented Medibank and electoral distribution, also industrial development and mineral exploration.

In the next installment I'll examine the infamous case involving The 'Australian Council for the Defence of Government Schools' (DOGS), and Whitlam's efforts to recover the ALP's Catholic vote, which led to on to the many current problems with religious schools, and religion in state schools.

John August

Vice-President of our Humanist Society and a keen student of Australian History from a secular political perspective.

John also stands as a candidate from time to time with various minor and micro parties.



IS IT CYNICISM OR IS IT SKEPTICISM?

Oscar Wilde once defined a cynic as “a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.”

When I was asked recently whether I was a cynic or a sceptic, I decided that am a bit of both, although not as they were in Ancient Greece.

Cynicism was one of the first Hellenistic schools and it seems like the Cynics were a rebellious lot. They went against established conventions and were all for following one's natural inclinations. The movement flourished in the 3rd century BCE and revived in the 1st century CE.

Cynic philosophers taught through deliberately shocking their listeners by their speech and action. They dismissed and condemned traditional social values such as wealth, reputation, pleasure, property, family duties, and religion and they showed a contempt for comfort and pleasure.

The word Cynicism is taken from the Latin cynicus, or the Greek kunikos. It probably came originally from Kunosarges, the name of a gymnasium where Antisthenes taught, although it's also thought to come from the Greek, cynikos, popularly taken to mean 'doglike or churlish'.

Antisthenes is credited with a number of sayings that reflect his defiant attitude towards social convention, such as “I would rather go mad than feel pleasure.”

He was once criticized for associating with disreputable men, and he responded, “Physicians also live with those who are sick, but they do not catch fevers.”

Plato once criticized him and Antisthenes replied, “It is a great privilege to do well, and to be ill spoken of.”

Antisthenes' most famous pupil, and the one who gave the most distinct character to the school of Cynicism, was Diogenes (412-323 BCE), who came to Athens from the city of Sinope on the north coast of what is now Turkey.

Diogenes had been given his nickname Cyōn, 'the dog', because he applied his philosophy of 'living according to nature'. He lived the life of a primitive human or an animal, in the most literal sense possible, and his behaviour was as completely without shame as that of a dog.

Legend has it that Alexander the Great once met him, saying “I am Alexander, the great king;” Diogenes replied, “And I, am Diogenes the dog.”

Ancient writers passed on a great deal of information about Diogenes. He was probably hard to forget, as you shall see.

Diogenes absolutely rejected social conventions. He begged for food or foraged for what he could in the marketplace, slept in an old wine barrel, and wore little more than a simple cloth.

He dealt with his “bodily requirements” as and when he had the need, and there's talk of him urinating publicly (occasionally on people), defecating in a theatre, advocating free love, eating whatever and whenever he chose (including a raw ox foot), and engaging in open, shameless masturbation.

Diogenes would shout at people in the streets, striking them at times (just as a dog will sometimes bite people) making fun of their petty conformity. The people would shout back, calling him a dog for living as he did.

Diogenes the Dog, as he was called, was the exemplar of the cynic sage. He was wretched and poor by the measures of society, but, by his own lights, happy, free and rich in virtue.

This shouldn't be confused with the common occurrence today, of people who shout on buses, on the streets and in the pubs – they are often either drunk, drugged, mad, or all three.

Diogenes also shared Socrates' disdain for money and social standing, as well as his insistence on simplicity, being true to one's principles, and self-mastery.

But even Socrates slept in a bed, while Diogenes lived in a barrel. Diogenes allegedly threw away one of his few possessions, a cup, after seeing a boy drink from his cupped hands. “That child has beaten me in simplicity”, he said. He jettisoned his spoon too, after noticing another boy scooping up lentils with a crust of bread.

He died at age 90 by holding his breath because, as his friends reported, he wished to escape the remaining portion of his life. A statue of a dog was placed on his grave.

A psychiatrist today would find him a challenge to diagnose

But the cynics went quiet, and seem to have all but vanished in the shadow of the Stoics and Epicureans, until the first century, when they reappeared, of all things, as active political critics. They and other philosophical schools were deemed so threatening, apparently, that philosophers were banished from the city of Rome more than once.

There was a second wave of Cynics, led by Crates of Thebes and his disciple, Zeno of Citium. They eventually completely turned around the madness of Diogenes the Dog, into a life devoted to calm, imperturbability, and mastery over one's desires and needs. They said, 'Happiness demands that one desires nothing and hence lacks nothing'.

The meaning of the word 'cynic' has changed, from the unhygienic, anti-hedonistic, dog-like person, so that today, a pleasure-loving billionaire can be as much a cynic as the next person. It can be seen as more of an insult or personal criticism today, which shows how it goes from a school of philosophy to a human trait. There are many other words which have changed meaning over time:

- Naughty used to mean you had naught or nothing
- Gay meant lively or merry, now it means homosexual
- Nice used to mean silly, foolish, simple
- Egregious used to be a good thing: it meant you were distinguished or eminent. Now it means that someone or something is conspicuously bad, not good.

Now let's look at the word Skepticism.

Two or three schools of Scepticism emerged in Greece and Rome. The oldest begins with Pyrrho, who was active around 300 BCE, the second with Arcesilaus and the sceptics of Plato's Academy, and finally, Aenesidemus in the first century BCE and carried on by Sextus Empiricus into the second century.

The core of Pyrrho's philosophical views was that we should suspend judgment on every matter, and he tried to practice what he preached. People would have to steer him clear of potential dangers - wagons, cliff edges, dogs.

Pyrrho is known to have said: “If I claim to know that something is true, I immediately open the door for an opposing view, or a debate with someone on the issue, or simply create turmoil within my own mind as I reflect on the alternatives. We commonly find this when debating with others on politics and morality. I can instantly put an end to all the wrangling if I just suspend my judgment. I'll be more tranquil, and thus happier”.

Following Arcesilaus and using Socrates' endless scrutinizing and questioning, as well as Plato's use of the dialogue, the skeptics of Plato's Academy kept putting up arguments for and against any proposition.

Even if reason came up with a solution, it could still be argued against, so they said we can't profess to know anything.

The meaning of cynicism seems to have changed a lot over the centuries, but how has the word skepticism fared?

The ancient Greek meaning of 'skeptikos' meant 'an inquirer', so in that sense it remains the same. A skeptic doesn't believe anything without well-tested reasons.

Scientists are - and should be - skeptical. Scientific theories are models of how things work and can be changed. Skepticism helps scientists critically analyze information and come up with solutions by testing different ideas.

So called 'climate-change skeptics' - who, no matter how much scientific evidence there is, refuse to accept it is happening - don't fit the name. That's why they get re-named 'denialists'.

Is the answer that we should just suspend our judgment until further proof is found? Does this mean we should be like the agnostics, who sit on the fence over the existence of God, about which proof is lacking.

Cynicism and skepticism endure, but have they anything in common with the ancient Greek movements? By today's standards, skeptics may often look for solutions but cynics may be more focused on the negative parts of a problem.

The first seeds of cynicism are often planted when people put in effort to achieve a goal, like getting a promotion at work and,

what do you know? it goes to the candidate who just happens to be the nephew of the director.

The skeptic, after meticulous investigation, may agree that the nephew was the most suitable applicant.

The cynic, who predicted nepotism in who got the job, although his predictions came true, still has a feeling that nothing anyone does in life really matters.

Wide-eyed hopefuls are more vulnerable than their cynical counterparts, so they are bitterly disappointed when they are fed lies and broken promises.

Think politicians - they make a religion of cynical promises.

Cynics and skeptics are more prepared for disappointments, but both can be wet blankets. The last thing you wish to hear when you are wandering through some beautiful bushland, is to have your companion say in doleful tones, "Despite environmentalists' efforts, this'll all be gone in a generation when loggers and mining companies get their hands on it".

If anyone today said, "I would rather go mad than feel pleasure", as Antisthenes said, he would not find many cynics in our hedonistic world to support him.

Cynics today may enjoy life, its comforts and diversions as much as anyone, but still maintain a distrust toward the ethical and social values of institutions and authorities.

Oscar Wilde was a master of cynical one-liners, but at least he made us laugh.

Barbara Cattunar, Wollongong



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