

HUMANIST viewpoints

STILL TIME FOR ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS - PLEASE SUPPORT OUR VITAL WORK



The new look in the hall of Humanist House. Current President of HSNW, Murray Love, is with the former President of the Norwegian Humanist Society, Roar Johnsen, who dropped into Sydney with his wife Tove on his way home from the IHEU General Assembly and conference in Auckland in early August 2018.

CHECK OUT MORE MEMBER NEWS AND PHOTOS ON PAGES 2-3

SEE PAGE 4 FOR A ROUNDUP OF EXTRAORDINARY HAPPENINGS HERE IN OUR STATE OF NSW

ALAIN DE BOTTON OFFERS US 'TEN VIRTUES FOR THE MODERN AGE' TO PONDER ON PAGE 5

SEE PAGES 6-7 FOR OUR CALENDAR INCLUDING EVENTS IN OCTOBER, NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER

COME TO IAN BRYCE'S TALK ON AUSTRALIAN SKEPTICS' PARANORMAL INVESTIGATIONS ON OCTOBER 14

RETURN AGAIN ON OCTOBER 25 FOR IAN'S DEMONSTRATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL ETHICS CLASSES

A SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER IS RUSSELL BLACKFORD ON TRANSHUMANISM ON SUNDAY 11 NOVEMBER

OUR FINAL 2018 MEETUP ON SUNDAY 25 NOVEMBER IS 'TAKING HUMANISM SERIOUSLY IN COMMUNITY'

OUR ANNUAL REPORT ON THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2017-18 IS ON PAGE 8-11 FOR THOSE WHO MISSED THE AGM

JOIN IN AND CELEBRATE OUR COMMUNITY AT THE END OF 2018 ON SATURDAY 1 DECEMBER

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



MEMBERSHIP PAGES

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

We still depend on elder members who have been outstanding workers for Humanism in NSW. We wish them a long life, but we cannot expect them to carry the load indefinitely. Times have changed, and we know modern generations find many other demands on their prime time in the twenty-first century. So why don't we all look for new ways to volunteer, with more of us offering to assist in smaller amounts at a time! There are so many ways to help, Send me an expression of interest. List your skills and how many or how few hours a month you might be available., This way we can build a new corps of volunteers, and begin 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 58 years young, with assets to be treasured, a heritage to be celebrated, a world network of activism, and a positive philosophy to be shared.

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.

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. 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 Rationalist Bookshop. Volunteers in our headquarters are often frontline contacts with those who enquire about rationalism and humanism while they browse the items around the walls. Space is tighter now so we like to better books.

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. **Email items to lovemuz@gmail.com.**

Members' comings and goings. We have not had any new members in the last quarter. Do you have a family member, partner, or close associate living with you who would like to share your membership? Two members at the same address with the same journals get a discount membership of \$45 for the pair. If your cohabitant shares your interest in humanism why not aske them to join up?



With the warmer weather, and her improved health, our ambassador Gillian Ellis has been back in the office at Humanist House, selling books to raise funds and meeting and greeting various casual visitors.

One of these visitors was Anya Overmann from St. Louis, Missouri, USA. She was 'down under' for the IHEU Auckland conference.

Anya grew up in the Ethical Society of St. Louis, and has been involved at all levels of the Ethical Humanist movement since childhood.

Anya now volunteers as a Communication Officer for the International Humanist & Ethical Youth Organisation (IHEYO). She runs her own business as a digital marketer and content creator.

Anya was very impressed with meeting Gillian who she described as "basically me in 60 years".

Anya declared on Facebook: "It's incredible to be able to travel to the opposite side of the planet and find Humanists just like myself!"



The puppy topiary sculpture by Jeff Koons on the square out the back of the Bilbao museum

Our Treasurer, Angela, enjoyed a well-earned getaway to Spain during September 2018. Here is Angela at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in the Basque Country on the Bay of Biscay. The city of Bilbao won the bid from America's Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in its search for a location for its arts museum in Europe. Designed by Canadian-born American architect Frank Gehry, it was built of titanium, sandstone and glass in only four years of construction.

Opened in 1997 it was an instant success. On the banks of the Nervión river the *Museo* on the *Avenida Abandoibarra* has become the Basque city's landmark, drawing a million visitors a year, turning what was once a struggling industrial town into a cultural metropolis. Inside the building has been described as "like a labyrinth on three floors with little doors, galleries, corners, niches, angles, windows and skylights - everything is flooded with light, appears airy and playful."

The city of Bilbao provided the land and paid for the building, but the Guggenheim Foundation manages the facility, and keeps the museum filled with exhibitions of works from its prestigious collection. There have been over 170 different exhibitions including artists like Yves Klein, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter and Jeff Koons, but one section of the gallery is permanently dedicated to Spanish and Basque artists. The art is from the last half-century or so.

Angela has also visited: mountains in Cantabria region; the city of Burgos - the ancient capital of Castile; and the city of Astorgo on a junction of the Camino to Santiago. Below is an aerial view of the museum showing the stunning setting on the waterfront in a revitalised former wharfside and industrial area. Other cities have tried to achieve the 'Bilbao effect' in similar ways, but haven't managed to get the pull that the Guggenheim name has brought to the Basque Country.



NEW SOUTH WALES - THE STATE WE'RE IN

Strange things have been happening around NSW. The Uniting Church allowed for same-sex couples to be married in their churches, and the first marriage was here in Sydney.



Hannah and Cate married in their church on 21 September. This was the same church where they met, whe both leading youth groups. So, it's nice to see happening, but perhaps doesn't yet really open things up for those couples who'd simply like to get married in nice old stone church buildings with a traditional wedding bells ambience. This couple were committed believers, and got married in a modern building.

The Presbyterian church did the splits some decades ago with half going into the Uniting Church while the other half went over to a form of fundamentalism.



Mark Powell is a pastor of a Presbyterian church in Strathfield, and wrote in 2014 about a photo he had collected of a tattoo declaring: "I will never fall to my knees."

To most of us this would be down to conventional masculine bravado but for Mark "it's an intentional and targeted response" against the apostle Paul in Philippians: "at the name of Jesus every knee *should* bow". Mark asserts: "every knee will bow, whether they want too or not... make no mistake, we all will kneel!" I'll be interested to see what

happens to us if we stand up on the big day: Kneecapped? Brainwashed? Thrashed? A song says "shall bow" rather than "should bow" and for Mark that makes its a prophecy.

Then there's the strange case of Erik Lennestaa a Salvation Army guy living in the Blue Mountains but originally from far



off Sweden, where he was once a 'militant and articulate' atheist and communist and a 'feared' member of the school

debating club. He learned Latin, 'loved engaging with the old Greco-Roman philosophers' and his religious studies teacher told the whole class she was an atheist.

Then a Christian girl told him: "You keep making our lives hell, but you haven't even given Christianity or God an honest chance." She got him to read the Gospel of John and amazingly he immediately began to doubt his atheism. "What if I was wrong?" He tought. "What if Jesus was who he said he was"? He went to her church "ran forward, knelt, surrendered" - ending up in Australia at a Hillsong college.

Now Erik's in the Salvos, but he re-visited Sweden and, praise the Lord, that same atheist religion teacher came along when he spoke and "responded to the call at the end of the service!" Another *amazing story* which, to be honest, stretched his credibility to beyond breaking point for me.



Finally, the story of Brother Robert Krishna ordained last year at St Benedict's, Broadway just down the hill from Humanist House. Born a Hindu in Bangalore he became an "atheist at the age of 10", and later an agnostic. He began a science degree at the University of Sydney, falling into depression, worrying if his life had value. "the only alternative was that the world and human beings had value because they were valued by someone not transient – God".

Baptised an Anglican he became impressed with young Catholics happy in living what the Church teaches. He "was converted through their example rather than their arguments" but was told "you need to make a leap of faith." Drawn to "Augustine's image of every Christian as witness to the mercy and condescension of God" he became a Dominican priest. Another miraculous tale of an atheist discovering God. And right under our noses in Broadway!

It seems to me a few well-placed humanist chaplains could have saved some of these young people from a life of concocting dubious stories of triumphant conversion, and helped them find meaning in real life. We have neglected the task of developing humanism as a real alternative for building a worthwhile life. This has in turn left us rather bereft of people with genuine talent for building community.

Perhaps it feels clever that we've realised there isn't a God, but that not a strong point of appeal to others. Developing lasting appeal for humanism means long hard slog building strong institutions, articulating values worth sharing, and helping strangers bond together in honest fellowship. We can't change lives until we learn how to build community .

Compiled by Murray Love

ALAIN DE BOTTON'S TEN VIRTUES FOR THE MODERN AGE

- ☛ **RESILIENCE.** Keeping going even when things are looking dark; accepting that reversals are normal; remembering that human nature is, in the end, tough. Not frightening others with your fears.
- ☛ **EMPATHY.** The capacity to connect imaginatively with the sufferings and unique experiences of another person. The courage to become someone else and look back at yourself with honesty.
- ☛ **PATIENCE.** We lose our temper because we believe that things should be perfect. We've grown so good in some areas (putting men on the moon etc.), we're ever less able to deal with things that still insist on going wrong; like traffic, government, other people... We should grow calmer and more forgiving by getting more realistic about how things actually tend to go.
- ☛ **SACRIFICE.** We're hardwired to seek our own advantage but also have a miraculous ability, very occasionally, to forego our own satisfactions in the name of someone or something else. We won't ever manage to raise a family, love someone else or save the planet if we don't keep up with the art of sacrifice.
- ☛ **POLITENESS.** Politeness has a bad name. We often assume it's about being 'fake' (which is meant to be bad) as opposed to 'really ourselves' (which is meant to be good). However, given what we're really like deep down, we should spare others too much exposure to our deeper selves. We need to learn manners, which aren't evil - they are the necessary internal rules of civilisation. Politeness is very linked to tolerance, the capacity to live alongside people whom one will never agree with, but at the same time, can't avoid.
- ☛ **HUMOUR.** Seeing the funny sides of situations and of oneself doesn't sound very serious, but it is integral to wisdom, because it's a sign that one is able to put a benevolent finger on the gap between what we want to happen and what life can actually provide; what we dream of being and what we actually are, what we hope other people will be like and what they are actually like. Like anger, humour springs from disappointment, but it's disappointment optimally channelled. It's one of the best things we can do with our sadness.
- ☛ **SELF-AWARENESS.** To know oneself is to try not to blame others for one's troubles and moods; to have a sense of what's going on inside oneself, and what actually belongs to the world.
- ☛ **FORGIVENESS.** Forgiveness means a long memory of all the times when we wouldn't have got through life without someone cutting us some slack. It's recognising that living with others isn't possible without excusing errors.
- ☛ **HOPE.** The way the world is now is only a pale shadow of what it could one day be. We're still only at the beginning of history. As you get older, despair becomes far easier, almost reflex (whereas in adolescence, it was still cool and adventurous). Pessimism isn't necessarily deep, nor optimism shallow.
- ☛ **CONFIDENCE.** The greatest projects and schemes die for no grander reasons than that we don't dare. Confidence isn't arrogance, it's based on a constant awareness of how short life is and how little we ultimately lose from risking everything.

I saw reports describing these as 'commandments', maybe because there's ten of them. Further research turned up the original from the book *Religion for Atheists*. This makes clear it's a list of proposed **virtues**, which makes more sense.

Alain de Botton has done some great television and some good books, but is generally thought to have laid an egg with his book *Religion for Atheists*. I think it was a case of misdirection in the book title. De Botton's ideas were useful contributions for living a better life, and helped inspire valuable community-building by e.g. the *Sunday Assembly* movement. But those people who explicitly identify as atheists are often the last people wanting to establish a 'religion'.

Yet when viewed as a book of ideas for sharing together in building values and community, it wasn't such a bad effort for all that, and this is work in a field otherwise neglected. Humanists are atheists as well, of course, but we're those who look to take things further, and be a full alternative to religion, even if some of us have problems with certain misused words.

Humanists don't want anyone dictating morality or behaviour to them. They need to be free to think for themselves.

But Botton's ideas aren't a bad start and provide a worthy enough basis for discussion. Can some be given better names? I'm not sure I like the word 'sacrifice' here. It implies suffering itself is a virtue, which is nonsense. What is needed is willingness to give things up in the short term for a better future for ourselves and our children. Words like 'self-discipline' or 'investment' come to mind, but have their own problems with misunderstandings. What do you think of these virtues?

Commentary by Murray Love

CALENDAR OCT TO DEC 2018

PLEASE REMEMBER THERE IS NO ENTRY TO HUVAT BEFORE 3.00PM DUE TO A COMMITTEE MEETING

HuVAT Sunday 14 October 2018 3.00 for 3.15 p.m. is on Australian Skeptic's \$100,000 Challenge and the Laws of Physics

The Australian Skeptics believe the methods of science are the best path to useful knowledge. They offer a large prize for anyone who can prove they have psychic or paranormal powers with real evidence of claims like free energy, telepathy, communication with spirits, and miracle cures. This has attracted many applicants over the decades - no-one has claimed the prize. Some claims would violate the laws of science if true, and others would violate the laws of the land if found out. Many articles have been published, and business plans have been ruined. This talk will outline the most entertaining encounters, including: *Power Balance*, *Winecard*, *Lutec's Free Electricity*, *The Indian Spirit Guide*, *Rossi's Cold Fusion*, *Aquapol's Rising Damp Repeller*, and the *Mind Body Spirit* festival. Speaker Ian Bryce is a Vice-President of the Humanist Society of NSW, and has graduated in both physics and engineering. Ian works in the aerospace industry and lectures at university. Since 1980, Ian has been the Chief Investigator with Australian Skeptics Inc.

NSW Humanists Meetup 3-6PM Sunday 28 October 2018 will present ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING FOR ALL AGES

Speaker Ian Bryce is a Vice-President of the Humanist Society of NSW who has taught ethics classes at a Balmain primary school for eight years, under the *Primary Ethics* programme, as an alternative to Scripture lessons. Volunteer ethics teachers prepare and deliver approved lesson materials for an hour each week, in accordance with their training. Classes are discussion-based, with the ethics teacher as a facilitator, and are designed to assist students in learning lifelong skills such as listening to each other's ideas, expressing their own opinion, thinking critically and making well-reasoned decisions. Ian will conduct a live demonstration of a lesson. All ages are welcome to participate and learn. Why not bring your children or grandchildren? Typical class topics are stealing, challenging authority, telling the truth, or eating meat. Ethical development is a fundamental of the humanist lifescape. Come along and explore our common ground in secular ethics, based in reciprocity, egalitarianism, human compassion, understanding our place in nature, and the welfare of sentient beings.

HuVAT Sunday 11 November 2018 3.00 for 3.15 p.m. is on TRANSHUMANISM: A PHILOSOPHY OF THE FUTURE?

Our last *Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talk* for 2018 will be a special event with a distinguished guest speaker Dr Russell Blackford who has participated in various secular conferences and panels. Dr Blackford is editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, a dual PhD, a writer of both fiction and non-fiction, a philosopher and a critic who grew up in the Newcastle region and has now returned to work there. He will discuss the history and core ideas of TRANSHUMANISM as a philosophy of the human future. Is it really a philosophy or just a cultural movement with a cluster of related philosophical positions? "Transhumanists foresee a time when technological interventions in the capacities of the human body and empowerment of the human mind will lead to extreme alterations in human capacities – alterations so dramatic that it makes sense to think of the people of this imagined future not as human but potentially *posthuman*." Once again we explore the boundary of 'what is human?': - the evolving foundation of our selves, our common values, and our aspirations.

NSW Humanists Meetup 3-6PM Sunday 25 November 2018 - TAKING HUMANISM SERIOUSLY IN COMMUNITY

The last *New Humanists Sunday Open House* Meetup event of the year will try to finish 2018 on a strong note. The speaker will be Bart Campolo who has spoken at various secular conventions and also worked as a Humanist Chaplain at two large universities in the USA. His humanist podcast is titled *Humanize Me*. Bart won't be there in person, but we will enjoy his inspirational talks on *YouTube*, with Humanist House's *Wi-Fi* connection. He is an appealing speaker and will fill half the afternoon, and the other half will be the discussion it provokes. The Meetup is about outreach and Bart is all about community building. If you want to see a humanist movement focused on building a humanist community and able to bond a disparate bunch into a cohesive community able to transform themselves and others, then it's worth coming along and listening together to Bart's 'provocative' views. Humanism is about what we hope to achieve not just what we don't believe. Is this the shake-up our *virtual* humanist community needs to jolt it into a *living* community? Bart gets the question started but won't have all the answers. We'll explore some of the pitfalls and dead ends to be avoided. The only way to have a community is to get involved in one. We'll finish discussing what we think our community could aspire to achieve in 2019.

NSW Humanist Community's end-of-year celebration HUMANISTMAS IN DECEMBER 5.30 PM Saturday 1 December 2018

In July we celebrated our community by sharing a meal together and it went well. We can repeat the experience with our end-of-year celebration of *Humanistmas in December*. Rather than have one or two people doing all the preparation we will share it out this year. Everyone is asked to bring \$10, or \$10 worth of wholesome festive food. We need to plan for the food so do please send an RSVP by email to faylove@rocketmail.com. The entertainment will also be varied and shared. If you have an entertainment to offer please contact President/MC Murray by email at lovemuz@gmail.com. If you can't send an email, or you make a last minute decision to come, you are still welcome but it would be best if you bring some food. Above all please join in and make it another 'best party of the year'. We usually drift off some time around 9.30PM.

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

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



1-Oct	_____	International Day of Older Persons
2-Oct	_____	International Day of Non-Violence
10-Oct	_____	World Mental Health Day
11-Oct	_____	International Day of the Girl Child
18-Oct	_____	World Vasectomy Day
13-Nov	_____	World Kindness Day
16-Nov	_____	International Day for Tolerance
21-Nov	_____	World Hello Day
25-Nov	_____	International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
3-Dec	_____	International Day of Persons with Disabilities
23-Dec	_____	Festivus for the Rest of Us



ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018

This report covers events from 1 July 2017 until 30 June 2018 and also what has happened since 1st July 2018.

NSW has been in drought for a while now, which isn't good for the crops or the price of lamb, but days with more reliable sunshine have helped us to get better attendance at our Sunday afternoon meetings lately. Holding them at 3.00 p.m. rather than 4.00 p.m. might also have helped.



It seems such a long time since I delivered our *Tribute to David Tribe*, on Sunday July 9 2017, but that was the first event of this reporting year. There are many who knew David far better than myself. I only formally met and spoke to him once, at a signing of my copy of his last little book *Words and Ideas*.

David had lost touch with some of his old associates in the organisation, yet his was a big life. I think we need to celebrate both the great, and the less great characters in our community, noting their passing with some *gravitas*.

Surprisingly there was quite a lot to be found out about David both from digging on the Internet, and even in our little library here at Humanist House. I managed to present the twenty people who came along to the tribute afternoon with a lot of things they probably didn't know about David.

David left the society no specific bequest, but his lawyer felt we were the one's best placed to make use of the books and magazines on secularism and humanism that David had piled up over the last seventy years or so. I'm working to fit many of these into our collection at Humanist House.

The next event was our annual *Humanistmas in July*, which we have now done six times, with mixed results. Just twelve came to our annual effort to focus on ourselves as a sharing community in 2017. There weren't a great deal more who came along to the 2018 *Humanistmas* feast, but I think the

crowd this year got the concept better. In addition, it helps to have more useful tables available, as we currently do.

Last year was a reasonably good party, but this year more food was brought in to share. We sat around two tables and enjoyed broad conversation. There was only one woman, our host Fay, but the blokes who came got into the spirit of sharing reasonably well. Some excellent food was to be had. It would be great to have young people along next year.

We attended a film event in August 2017, with a special showing of *Fade to Black* followed by a discussion panel of those involved. The film was the story of Peter Short, a businessman who was suddenly diagnosed with painful terminal cancer, and was inspired to meet Dr Rodney Syme who also featured in the film.



Dr Syme was our Australian Humanist of the Year for 2017, in recognition of compassionate advocacy for voluntary assisted dying, and who has admitted that he has helped many terminally ill people to end their lives. The film has been shown on the ABC in 2018.

We got a small bunch, mainly the committee to attend the film screening, and we also celebrated Fred's 80th birthday while we were all together in the city.

In both 2017 and 2018 the August society event on the second Sunday was one of our series of Activism meetings, led by our Vice-President John August. In 2017 this was well attended with a mix of generations and a lot of discussion.

These meetings allow for guests and members to talk about their 'activism', which is broadly anything they are doing which other humanists might be interested in, whether humanitarian, political, social, intellectual or personal projects. We discussed 'the post-truth world' and those who came seemed to enjoy the discussion. Discussion got more heated at our 2018 August Activism meeting on abortion and death. One of our speakers was brought to tears.



If we are to build a community and extend welcome to guests and guest speakers, we need to be considered and restrained in our expressions of contradictory opinions in both public and private discussions.

It is unfortunate but visitors tend to judge all of us here on the basis of the behaviour of those who like to express their opinions dogmatically. A sense of certainty is not sufficient to justify such behaviour, which secular people can be more guilty of than mere believers - since we feel backed by science itself in our most distinctive beliefs.

It's hard to be humble when we're obliged to carry the burden of being correct on the big questions, but there can be wrong ways to be right.

Later in August, we had a smaller group of seven to our second Democratic Humanitarian event. We still raised enough Australian money to donate £100 to the IHEU GoFundMe campaign *Help Us Support Humanists At Risk* which began on the June 21 2017 *World Humanist Day*.

The IHEU has started a similar funding campaign this year. Fay and I had earlier given another £100 of our own to the campaign. I would ask all of you to consider donating to assist people in serious trouble around the world.



My idea with *Democratic Humanitarianism* was to go round the circles of those attending, gradually building up a pool of cash and with everyone sharing their favourite humanitarian projects until a final vote on which project gets the money.

The numbers were small the first time and a little less the second time, so I thought I'd place less emphasis on the

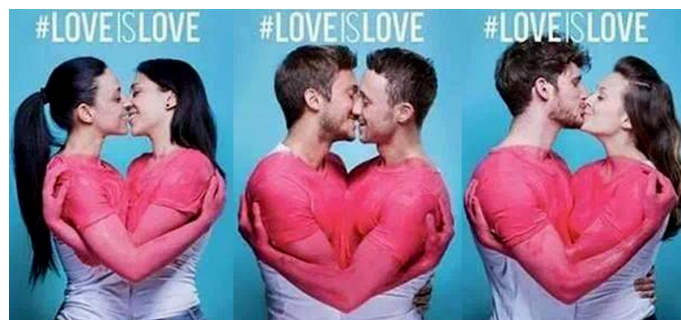
fundraising aspect this year. The number dropped further, rather than bounce back. It's a worry that humanitarianism is an unpopular topic among a group of humanists.

We had a little over twenty people at our 2017 AGM on September 10. We had a busy weekend late in September 2017, although attendance was small at both events.

Chris Johnson wanted to share with us his film *A Better Life: An Exploration of Joy & Meaning in a World Without God* on Saturday 23 September 2017. The film was beautifully shot, and it was a little bit fascinating to have an actual film-maker on hand to answer questions and share his experiences in making the film and taking it to cities around the world. It's a shame more didn't come along.

The next day, Sunday 24th, we were back at the Meetup for a discussion on the dangers of social media addiction. The speaker had been booked for months but failed to show up. Discussion shifted to a general discussion of some scenarios I had extracted from web research when I lost contact with the speaker. It seemed to be of value to the eleven people who came along, who had positive as well as negative experiences of social media.

Numbers picked up for the very topical "Love & Marriage" HuVAT In October 2017. We took advantage of the intense focus on the same-sex marriage issue at the time, by discussing 'Love & Marriage'. Murray & Fay, who have survived over thirty years of marriage got things started and managed the Q&A among the crowd of just over 20.



Discussion ranged over romance, divorce, feminism, the men's movement, sex, loss, marriage and of course the treatment of the gender diverse.

It would be good to have someone to take some notes of the concerns and the wisdom that comes out of discussions like this. It isn't possible to simultaneously host a discussion and report on it, and it wouldn't be appropriate to record every word, which would inhibit those involved.

This is a segue to the issue of our next meeting in October 2017 which was a Meetup focused on encouraging more people to voluntarily get involved in the running of the society, and its internal and outreach activities.

The two people who did offer some interest haven't been seen in the place since then! This was, all the same, a stronger response than received at a society meeting the previous November, which featured activism and the work of our best volunteers. There are members amongst us with social skills, business skills and youthful energy, but we don't seem to be able to engage them effectively in carrying forward the work of the society. We can't be thankful enough for the doughty little crew that keep things going, but too much is expected of too few.

We were expecting about thirty people for the *Right to Die* HuVAT in November 2017, and it was a hot topic at the time with legislation coming close to passing in three states.

Half the RSVPs dropped out, but the seventeen who came were very involved. I presented this topic myself, rather than call in Dying with Dignity or similar groups, because I wanted to look at the politics, and how principles like the 'Right to Die' were being compromised away in the process.



I allowed some of the big thinkers on this topic like Seneca, Nietzsche, Nitschke, David Hume, Jack Kevorkian, and Paul Kurtz to carry the bulk of the argument. I personally think we should retain a rights-based approach in this argument, rather than simply relying on compassion for those in pain. The discussion was interesting and energetic.

The society holds the license to present the two films titled *Heroes of the Enlightenment*, and I made these the feature of the final Meetup for 2017 on the fourth Sunday in November. It was quite well attended by 23 people.

The 18th century Enlightenment is a key turning point in modern humanism and the two films brings to life key characters of the era such as Isaac Newton, Erasmus Darwin, Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet, Frederick the Great, Thomas Jefferson and the Marques De Pombal. It was a well enjoyed educative afternoon.



Some of the momentum from the well-attended events led to a good turnout of younger members of our wider community at our end-of-year party, which was once again on the first Saturday night in December. We got the enjoyment out of the trivia quizzes from the previous two similar events, plus a little bit of new stuff.

We need to look for new themes for our parties, or at least ones requiring less preparatory work. Fay and I needed a big holiday after a busy year in 2017 but we made it back in time for the Meetup on January 28.

We usually try to start the year by looking at the topic of humanism itself, and this time I tried to not pre-empt the thinking of those who came, and to let discussion take its own course. It was a successful approach in that attendees took to the process of defining humanism for themselves, something we all have to do.

The level of participation was very heartening at the time, although the participants didn't follow up so much, as the year progressed. This is a common problem and a symptom of depending too much on too few. We need more community builders amongst us.

Fay and I had to miss the *Darwin Day* event on Sunday February 11 because we had booked flight and accommodation in Melbourne for that weekend. This was to be for the global atheist convention which was unfortunately cancelled a few months earlier.

We got to attend a dinner organized by the Secular Party, and also organized a get-together with some of the senior members of the Victorian Humanists, so the weekend was quite productive in many respects.

While we were away Vice-President John August took responsibility for organizing the Darwin event which was a great success, with three speakers from our membership.

Erik Aslaksen discussed his newly released book *The Social Bond*, John August spoke on two Australian 'living fossils' - the *Nothomyrmecia* ant, and the Wollemi Pine. Victor Bien looked at the biological and geological history behind the Tasmanian Tiger - back to Gondwana.



The following month Ian Bryce stepped up with a tribute to Stephen Hawking who had died shortly before. John August also prepared and ran another Activism Meeting. In May John repeated and extended his rendition of *Marvels of Human Ingenuity*, being a slideshow of engineering prodigies he has photographed on his trips.



April also saw the CAHS AGM and annual convention held in Adelaide. Fay and I attended as delegates. I have been

working as the CAHS Treasurer, and also responsible for the 2017-18 AHOY process, which selected Gillian Triggs.

The convention was a modest affair, but in those terms was well done. There was a big report in the previous issue of *Viewpoints*. I also note that it was necessary to combine two issues of *Viewpoints* during the year as the editor, yours truly, was away at the crucial times. It's a shame, but once again it reveals there aren't enough volunteers - a theme we need to keep repeating, unfortunately.



A very special event was the Meetup on May 27, where we had a guest speaker from Sydney University to discuss the legacy of the May 1968 student uprisings in Paris. This was political theorist Simon Tormey, who explained why the influences of 1968 continued, despite the political failures at the time. He then submitted to a very interesting Q&A which enthralled the participants. It became a hard act to follow.

In June we had just the one event, our annual World Humanist Day symposium which was more of an open mike afternoon this year. We did manage to get a good demographic variety of participants, with some representation from several generations.



Fay and I went to Canberra the next weekend to attend as guests of a meeting of the ACT Humanists, and listened to

their ideas about the future for their organisation, which has a more youthful leadership than NSW.

NSW is responsible for the 2019 humanist convention and I wanted to get input from members of both societies on ways to build a future for the Australian humanist movement. This is the theme for the convention next year.

We still have room for more regular tenants or casual users, but we have been glad to have an involvement with ICAN the *International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* who recently won a Nobel Peace Prize.



(The Council of Australian Humanist Societies has also become a partner organisation of ICAN).

This is our first venture into hot-desk style arrangements and it has been an added incentive to install Wi-Fi and to further develop an online calendar of events, which we are close to launching.

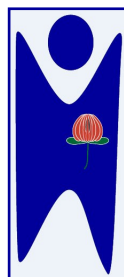
In addition to editing *Viewpoints* I have now inherited the task of producing *Australian Humanist*. Hopefully the prolific Victorians will continue to supply contributions, but it is desirable for NSW members to also get involved in writing articles or at least letters, reviews, and suggestions.

During the year the Rationalist Society of NSW became more at home in Humanist House, and held three important events on cults, religious child abuse, and Muslim apostates. We are building a closer relationship with this sister organisation, who will shortly enter a tenancy with us.

Open Forum has continued its long run of presenting an extraordinary range of speakers to an inner Sydney audience. Our business relationship with Zigi from next door has continued at a modest pace.

I would like to thank the twenty members who came along on the day of the 2018 AGM, all of those who attended our events during the year, and particularly the other members of the committee for their work and support during the year. These are John, Ian, Fay, Angela, Fred, Gillian, Sturt and Bill. The same committee was re-elected at the AGM.

The humanist movement has something important to offer global humanity and we need to keep working at our local efforts to be part of this.



Murray Love
President,
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of New South Wales



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Our Patrons



Robyn Williams AM

Chosen as Humanist of the Year in 1993, talented actor, science journalist and broadcaster Robyn presents Radio National's Science Show and Ockham's Razor. Robyn Williams has written more than 10 books and received Honorary Doctorates in Science from Sydney, Macquarie and Deakin Universities.



**Dorothy Buckland-Fuller
AM, MBE**

Mother, feminist, bilingual sociologist, peace activist, environmentalist, and committed to the cause of reconciliation with indigenous Australia. A founder of the Ethnic Communities Council, Dorothy has been a vital influence in the ethnic communities

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