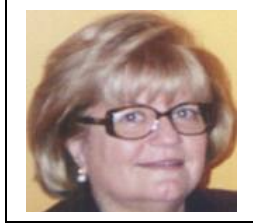


EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Affie Adagio

This edition is in a smaller font because there needed to be more information than the previous one. The focus is once again on a variety of issues.



SAVE AUSTRALIA

Franklin Scarf [UNAANSW member]

To significantly reduce and eliminate poverty and hunger in Australia and the world, and contribute to inter-generational equity and justice, we propose that Australia takes a lead by using the popular emblem [shown in enclosed flyer], and motivating **an International Food and Tree Growing Race**, instead of an arms race, on the basis that **'what is now proven was once only imagined'**. This can be achieved by the Australian Government asking every nation to adopt **Permaculture*** as one of the world's most honourable and necessary employment activities, to propagate, plant and grow increasing quantities of appropriate trees for climate stability, and provide an abundance of organic edible plants and living foods for everyone.

***Permaculture** is an Australian innovation of permanent, sustainable, organic agriculture which includes the companion planting of mixed-species trees, including fruit and nut trees with under-storeys of vegetables, herbs and medicinal plants, using minimum-maintenance and maximum-yield principles.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

John August

Religion claims that humans (or perhaps the some particular humans) are in some way chosen or special, and have life after death.



Two emotional claims which make religion appealing and enticing. But, speaking with a much quieter voice, understanding and appreciation of the world does have a warm feeling associated with it. Something like "Wow! That's cool! It's so good to understand". This the warmth of non belief, the warmth of knowledge, the warmth of understanding.

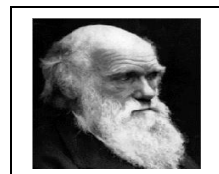
Humanism does have its emotional positives, something we shouldn't forget. You felt it at our recent Darwin Day event (see my separate review).

SGM: At our recent Special General Meeting, several motions were agreed for the upcoming Australian Humanists convention in Sydney (see separate notices). Several changes to the constitution were ratified, along with our new membership form. One significant change involved the incorporation of Human Rights, which was not passed. It's clear we need to think about the wording of this issue more, something Waratah Gillespie will be coordinating.

Discriminatory Advertising: Blue Mountains member John Dillon was incensed by the discriminatory portrayal of an atheist in an advertisement for AXA insurance, where a disreputable looking individual slurs that he's an atheist, with viewers invited to make the connection that atheists are necessarily so. The Advertising Standards Board notes it is concerned with the "discriminatory portrayal of people", but has only responded evasively to John's letters. The ad is no longer broadcast, though perhaps this is because its time was past rather than John being responsible. Regardless case, it's worth being aware of the Advertising Standards Board. In the meantime, keep away from AXA, and we'll let you know if we stumble over any insurers who are atheist friendly!

Book Reviews: I recently read "*The God Delusion*" by Richard Dawkins, but it's worth remembering other works on Humanism we have in our library - "*A Humanist Viewpoint*", edited by Ian Edwards - a publication of our own in times past - and also "*The Humanist Philosophy*" by Corliss Lamont. I've had the pleasure of reading these other works. Humanism has a wonderful richness about it, and together these volumes cover an amazing range of ideas.

Darwin Day: This year's Darwin Day event was held on the 13th February in conjunction with the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts (SMSA) and the Australian Science Communicators, and was a successful event with several Humanists in attendance - and also many people I didn't recognise - definitely a good sign! Dr. Anne Musser, Palaeontologist and Palaeo-artist



with the Australian Museum, spoke on Australia's Megafauna in Pleistocene Australia. The Pleistocene is a geological epoch originally intended to cover the most recent period of repeated glaciations. Australia was inhabited by the giant goanna Megalania, and large muscled Kangaroos amongst others. Anne showed us artist's impressions, skeletons and digs. They also became extinct - over quite a long period, and while perhaps humans caused some of the extinction, it was not the sole cause. Dr. Robin Holliday, member of NSW Humanist Society and speaker at last year's Darwin Day, gave another possible reason for their extinction - while competition might push animals into larger and larger sizes, this very size means a slow rate of growth, and a slow rate of reproduction. And this slow rate of reproduction carries its own problem - a reduced ability to make evolutionary changes in response to a changing environment. So to speak, larger animals are more "specialised" - and being more "specialised" means you have less ability to adapt (Hope that's a fair summary, Robin!).

And, well, humans reproduce relatively slowly, which would otherwise mean trouble - but our adaptability has probably compensated for this. Our next speaker, Dr. Darren Curnoe from the University of NSW, spoke on what makes humans unique. Darren's view is that in fact much of what we can do can be done by other hominids. One view is that there was an explosion of creativity in early man about 50,000 years ago, but Darren challenges this viewpoint, saying that Neanderthals were capable of artistic expression. And what about the sudden jump? Well, it seems early humans had their stagnant periods of several hundred thousand years too. Was there a genetic change about 50,000 years ago, letting us vocalise better, perhaps ? Or was it just the luck of the draw? Darren has a quite detailed position, and perhaps I'll be able to discuss it with him more sometime. Perhaps we need to talk not of us unique humans, but rather us humans as a part of a family of unique hominids. We've lost the Neanderthals, but what a wonderful world it would be to still have them around. Another intelligent species to talk to, appreciate their creativity and appreciate their art! Well, such is evolutionary history. We can't do much about what brought us here. But we can take an interest in the world around us now that we are here.

[Audio Recordings John August's web recordings are available through...

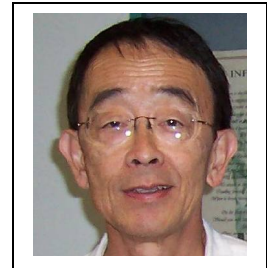
<http://feeds.feedburner.com/JohnAugustsPodcasts>
(Which includes a late night radio program done with Steve Maxwell of the Rationalists) and www.sydneyshive.org/radio.html]

HuVAT DARWIN DAY TALK

Victor Bien

A Darwinian explanation for religion

This is a précis of a talk I gave under that title at the March HuVAT. It was a HSNSW 'private' celebration of Darwin Day. A lookup of www.darwinday.org events listing will show that many Darwin Day events are celebrated around the world.



I conveyed little of my own views in this talk. I was acting as a 'messenger boy' conveying what Richard Dawkins had to say about the 'Roots of Religion' (Chapter 5) in his book *The GOD Delusion* for the purpose of facilitating discussion.

Dawkins wanted to get a *Darwinian* explanation for the universal urge to believe and the propensity for extravagance of religious ritual. He cites Daniel Dennett (another important Humanist name to note) who said religious rituals 'stand out like peacocks in a sunlit glade'. Religious behaviour is a writ large human equivalent of anting or bower-building (I gave a brief word picture of the behaviour of bower birds as shown in a David Attenborough TV show). An example of extreme extravagance is medieval cathedrals which took man-centuries to build and are not used as dwellings or any recognisably useful purpose.

Dawkins wanted an *ultimate* explanation not a *proximate* one. A proximate explanation for religion would be 'religion satisfies our curiosity about the universe and our place in it' or 'religion is consoling' or 'religion is tool used by the ruling class to subjugate the underclass'. These are psychological truths but they then raise the question of *why* our minds have evolved to incline to these satisfactions. The distinction between ultimate and proximate is an important one for Darwinians. Dawkins considers two categories of Darwinian

explanations, Group Selection and religion is the by-product of something else.

An example of group selection would be a tribe which had a stirringly belligerent 'god of battle' would win wars against rival tribes whose gods urge peace and harmony. The war inclined tribe would thereby preferentially survive; natural selection would operate in their favour. Dawkins does not favour this explanation because it would be vulnerable to subversion from within, i.e. cheats who preferred not to sacrifice himself, not to be a martyr would differentially have higher chances of survival which would lead to a tribe with uncertain commitment to the god of battle...

Religion as a by-product of something else is argued to be a much better explanation. The simple clear example Dawkins gives of a by-product of something else is the apparent propensity for a moth to commit suicide by flying into a candle flame (hardly something which would help its natural selection)! The reason a moth flies around any light including a burning candle is that it has evolved to navigate by flying to a fixed angle to some celestial object such as the moon or the bright evening star. A celestial object is effectively at an infinite distance from the moth so it stays fixed in space as the moth flies. However, a candle is close and as a moth flies with respect to it, the moth has to turn to maintain the fixed angle. If you plot the flight path where the candle maintains a fixed angle it is a spiral. The moth spirals into the flame! The moth appears to behave against sense because its behaviour arises from a tendency which evolved from something else. What are some "something else s" that apply to humans? Dawkins mentions a few. Children have evolved to unquestioningly obey their parents because in pre-human times it was necessary for them at times of danger to react instantly to parental instruction. Those who did not were naturally selected out! This predisposition gets hijacked when parents pass nonsense narratives (religion) to their off-spring. When they are small they are not in a position to be able to judge what really makes sense and what doesn't.

Humans are psychologically primed for religion. In our daily speech we adopt an approach which philosophers call dualism. I.e. we think of our personhood or "soul" if you like as a separate entity from our bodies. Descartes' aphorism, "I think therefore I am" puts it to a tee. Of course my using the philosophical term "dualism" here is just a

shorthand to home in on the factor I am thinking about. We don't need to know what I am talking about is called "dualism". The opposing approach is "monism" which is the position Humanists hold. i.e. the body, mind, spirit and soul are all aspects or attributes of a human being. One can easily see how this "common sense" can be hijacked by religion. Religion has a ready made psychological predisposition to advance the concept of a spirit or spiritual being who or which "implants" a soul into a body which otherwise would be just another animal. The human faculty to "fall in love" can be hijacked by religion. We are all too familiar with the scenes from rapture faiths. There you see people who are in a state of rapture like someone in love except that the "lover" they are responding to is invisible! Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies have been done of people in real rapture and religiously inspired rapture and the pattern of brain activities in each are the same! Other faculties I briefly discussed were Lewis Wolpert's irrational persistence (p 186 in the *God Delusion*), gullible child theory (p 188), random drift of ideas and universal tendency to wishful thinking (p.190). That covers the tendency to believe from the point of view of biological evolution. Of course that can't explain the variety of religious belief. To gain an evolutionary handle on the specific forms of religious belief, Dawkins moves into the realm of *memes*. Memes are the cultural analogue of biological genes. Both genes and memes are "replicators" an important technical term. Roughly memes are "units of cultural inheritance". Of course this can mean specific religions such as Catholicism, Judaism or Islam but it also refers to smaller things like Elvis fans...

I briefly discussed embryology and developmental biology and genes. This field of studies show that except for a few distinct things like genetic diseases there is no one-to-one correspondence of specific genes for specific bodily and mental outcomes. Genes work in concert. There can be "co-operating cartels of genes". Similarly this is the case in the realm of memes. One can have "memeplexes". This is central to understanding religious memes. To stand back a bit from our primary concern, religion, I briefly précised Dawkins' discussion of "cargo cults". I relayed the discussion of a particular cargo cult involving a "John Frum" in the New Hebrides in the 1940s. What was startling from this case study is that the form of this cargo cult narrative acquired a very similar form of the story of Jesus in

the Bible! And that is within living memory not history or quasi-history that gets very vague going back about 2000 years.

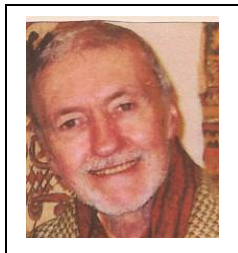
During discussion the conversation strained at the bit to talk about specific issues of religions and society. One member wanted consideration of the observation that when a society becomes less religious *consumerism* seems to take its place. All these discussions would be worthy topics of discussion for us Humanists but I had to stay focussed on my topic for the day. These other issues should go into the pool of issues we should pick up for future HuVATs. I gained the feeling in conversation after the talk that this Darwinian approach was very fertile or stimulating for Humanist thinking. All sorts of cross associations and new thoughts were prompted.

WORDS AND IDEAS

David Tribe

[This is the first of a series which will appear in Vpts by this Humanist author who has offered this material for us to produce in a pamphlet which we could distribute or sell for our own benefit...Ed]

Apart from alternately fashionable and unfashionable arguments for and against the existence of God, humanist literature has rightly come to largely avoid philosophical questions, the traditional staple of freethought, in favour of practical issues like personal freedom, social justice, science teaching, political toleration and bioethics. But the question remains: What does “humanism” really mean?



As Nicolas Walter demonstrated in *Humanism; What's in the Word* (1997), in recent decades many philosophies the liberal wing of most religions and even politicians from Nazis to Marxists have laid claim to the name. In Europe (including the United Kingdom) and Australasia we have managed to co-opt the word as a title for our organisations and magazines, while Paul Kurtz in the United States has found it expedient to adopt the qualifying description of “secular humanist”. This serves to show that humanism as we understand it is more than just an “attitude of mind” or a “life stance” but has an “ideological” content. Above all, the clarified name ensures that

evolution, inextricably linked with humanism, can be taught in schools without religious fundamentalists being able to claim that humanism is just another religion and everything associated with it must be excluded from schools to comply with the US’s secular Constitution. Australia has a secular Constitution too, modelled on that of America, but has embraced religion in schools, especially state—funded religious schools — but that’s another story outside the scope of this survey.

It arose when the Editor noted that, while our literature doesn’t claim to be narrowly philosophical, scattered throughout it are terms taken from philosophy - and more confusingly from theology in some cases without any attempt to define them, and has asked me to attempt this task.

We can all feel some sympathy with Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking—Glass* (1871): “When use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less”. Frankly, we all do this from time to time. Obviously this is a fault, as meaningful communication depends on agreed understanding of the words used. But the contrary fault is a failure to recognise that different organisations use terms in different ways according to each body’s origin and history, and that the common language is itself constantly evolving. A familiar and - now slightly risible example of the latter feature is Shakespeare’s “So shines a good deed in a naughty world” (*The Merchant of Venice*, 1597-8). In his day, “naughty” meant wicked or should I say “evil”, since television chefs have managed to devalue “wicked”.

A few decades ago almost everyone dated humanism to the Renaissance. Now it’s recognised as having its roots in pre-Socratic philosophers in the West and religious thinkers in the East. Curiously, both events occurred at around the same time: 6th century BCE. Little or nothing remains of the writings of the pre-Socratics. Insofar as they’re remembered at all, it’s through the reportage and interpretation of others, some of whom were disciples, others professional rivals. In a world where no defining isms had been generally accepted, or even invented, less is known about what their words meant to them. Partly their obscurity is owing to the lack of a solid base with archival facilities like Plato’s Academy or Aristotle’s Lyceum. More significantly, the early Christians had a deliberate policy of obliterating all

pre-Christian thought where they could, or at least preserving only those ancient philosophies that were most congenial to their beliefs. Plato was converted, into Neo-Platonism, which was influential in the monasteries till the 13th century CE, and Aristotelianism for the next two centuries.

In the following analysis I propose to adopt a chronological approach. While this illuminates the history of ideas, it is of course arbitrary in that the lives of thinkers and the schools they established or redirected overlap. I'll also confine myself to the West.

CLASSICAL MATERIALISM (C6.-5 BCE): Looking at the universe, many or, it seems, most - pre-Socratic philosophers identified four basic elements (earth, air, fire, water), though primacy tended to be given to one or two of them, according to taste or personality. Heraclitus, who favoured fire, described everything in a state of perpetual flux held together by the *logos* (cosmic reason) while Parmenides stressed unending stability. Leucippus and Democritus developed the first atomic theory, which reconciled flux and stability in that the atoms were always changing their relationships while remaining the same. Different in detail as all these concepts were, they were united in studying nature and finding no place for the supernatural.

CLASSICAL IDEALISM (C6—4 BCE): These philosophers tried to look behind and above the real world to what they saw as a creative and sustaining principle (or principles) which regulated this world. Pythagoras saw this as mathematics; Plato, as supernal forms, of which “tangible” objects were really shadows. We developed the abstract notions of the beautiful, the good and the true, which supposedly existed independently of whether anything or anyone was actually beautiful, true or good, and by which they should be judged. He also did most to promote the idea of an immortal soul or spirit which survived the body. Needless to say, these concepts appealed to Christians more than those of the pre-Socratics. As to the basic conflict between materialism and idealism, most of the idealists were sensible enough not to reject the real world completely and so could be called dualists giving primacy to spirit over matter. On that analysis, the materialists could be called monists.

CLASSICAL HUMANISM (c5 BCE): In the annals of freethought, this is associated with one

man, Protagoras, and his dictum, “Man is the measure of all things; of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not.” Usually only the first part of this quotation is cited. It provoked endless controversy in his own day and continues to do so today. We can dismiss the feminist objection to “man” as this simply meant humankind; though it must be conceded that only males were generally considered to make good philosophers, and all the famous, if not all, the classical philosophers were men. A more telling, but perhaps unjust, criticism is that it appears, like the Old Testament, to be anthropocentric and to ignore the rights of all other animals. But what does it really mean? Is it that, again as in the Old Testament, humankind is at the centre of the universe? Is it normative (standard-setting), suggesting that humankind and not the gods or cosmic forces must judge what is right and what is wrong for the world? Probably, since in *On the Gods* he declared: “About the gods I have no means of knowing either that they exist or that they do not exist.”

This new quotation raises what appears to be the essence of his first one; namely, it's epistemological, that is, relating to how knowledge is acquired and how it should be assessed. Thus he's credited with being not only the founder of humanism but also of agnosticism and metaphysics. In attributing his agnosticism about the gods in part to “the fact that they are never seen”, he accords primacy to sense-perception. Some philosophers extend this interpretation to a reliance on individual consciousness, so that he becomes the relativism, founder of relativism, subjectivism and even of solipsism. That means each person would know nothing about the world except what was in his/her thoughts or that there was nothing outside our thoughts to know. While this position can't be disproved, if true it would be pointless to write about it. Protagoras is also identified as the first Sophist — a teacher who showed his students how to succeed in law politics and the law courts. His supporters say he taught virtue and the recognition that there are two sides to every question. His detractors say he was concerned with the success rather than the truth of every argument, and he certainly enriched himself by his teachings. Thus he's further credited with founding Solipsism, sophistry and pragmatism (crudely expressed as “truth is what works”). (To be continued in next edition of Vpts)

**MEDITATIONS AND AFFIRMATIONS
FOR DAILY LIVING**

Dennis Morris (HumSoc Western Aust.)

This is an extract from my book *The Gospel of the Freethinker* published in 1985



Memory is information that comes into the brain and leaves a trace in the altered behaviour of the nerve cells that form the memory surface. The more an act is repeated, the deeper the tracing, hence the more permanent the memory. The conglomeration of memory forms the individual personality. Many loving thoughts will develop a loving personality, violent thoughts a violent personality, continuous hardship a hard personality. Therefore, we must be ever vigilant of the thoughts we allow into the mind. We must practise restraint. If we want to overcome any habit we must change our thought patterns; perhaps even our acquaintances and the places we frequent. The more drastic the habit, the more drastic the change will have to be, the more intense the new thoughts have to be concentrated upon. To change our attitude we must meditate on the opposite virtue for a few minutes, perhaps even for twenty minutes or longer until the desired effect is achieved.

MEDITATIONS AND AFFIRMATIONS

1. When we are in a turbulent state of mind, distressed by quarrels and arguments, the mind restless with churning thoughts that cause insomnia and inquietude, we feel pessimistic. But if we reflect on what seemed an insurmountable problem a few years, months or even a few short days ago, and now, after being solved or having run its course, seems unimportant, we realise that this will also pass. The opposite of pessimism is optimism so we should meditate on optimism to change our mental attitude, until we can with a clear mind, solve our problem and realise that even though it may also take time to run its course, we can laugh at our worries, fully aware of their relative unimportance. Meditate on optimism, an infinite ocean of optimism I am. Meditate on one virtue for ten or twenty minutes until you experience the desired result, in this way we can change any negative emotion into the positive frame of mind we desire.

2. Fears are of the mind. We should never instill fear in a child. When overcome by fear we should meditate on fearlessness, and courage. An infinite ocean of courage I am. We are fearless when we come to the realisation that the universal power of love stands behind all. We are then beyond fear. We are beyond everything except the joy of life. It gives us the courage to invite experience, invite adventure. Knowing we can walk any path unafraid, we develop confidence in ourselves. There is an old Chinese proverb which says, 'Fear knocked at the door, confidence opened it, and there was no one there'. We should face all trials and difficulties in life with equanimity and humour. We fear only those things which we do not understand, which we dislike. Confidence is the great quality to strive for. Meditate on confidence, an infinite ocean of confidence I am.

3. None of us is in a position to judge or criticise, for the wisest of us sees and knows only the minutest fragment of the Great Scheme of all things. We need to be more tolerant, lenient and understanding of the different way each individual and all things are working to their final perfection, whatever that may be. Make allowances for the shortcomings of others. Meditate on tolerance. I am perfect tolerance, an infinite ocean of tolerance I am.

4. When we find ourselves lacking in individuality, that we are timid and docile, a doormat because we lack the courage to refuse, we must learn how to serve quietly, not miserly, knowing when to give and when to withhold, to be able to mix with our fellows without losing our individuality, able to support our own opinions and to follow the higher dictates of our innerself.

5. When we are in deep depression, the deep chasm when we fear losing control of our mind, on the verge of a nervous breakdown and contemplating suicide as an escape, we need to meditate on calm quiet courage like those who can endure great mental and physical torture and yet retain their sanity. I am calm quiet courage, an infinite ocean of calm quiet courage I am.

6. We must also overcome self doubt, doubt of our own ability, not blindly follow the advice of others against our own better judgment. It is useless to say that we know better after the event, that we acted

upon unsound advice. There is no failure when we are doing our utmost, whatever the results may be. There is no obstacle too great or task too difficult if it is undertaken with the conviction that it can be accomplished. Meditate on quiet assurance. I am quiet assurance, an infinite ocean of quiet assurance I am, until you gain the wisdom and intuitive ability to judge between right and wrong, to act uninfluenced and with self trust.

7. We must make a point of learning by experience, and not lack in the observation of the lessons of life. We will thereby need less repetition of mistakes caused by hurry and inattention, gaining sufficient wisdom to avoid repeating the same errors. Meditate on observation. I am observant, an infinite ocean of observation I am.

8. Eradicate possessiveness, self love, self pity and self centredness. We must avoid becoming overly concerned about ourselves, our ailments, discussing our difficulties incessantly with all and sundry, bringing the topic of conversation continually toward ourselves, sapping the strength and vitality of the listener, leaving them exhausted. Change to a selfless, understanding listener, become an unsparing helper, concerned with the needs of others by the free flow of selfless love, unceasingly giving without the slightest thought of reward.

9. When we become disinterested, indifferent, we must train our minds to be more sensitive to inspiration, to have a lively interest in all things. Meditate on inspiration. I am inspiration, an infinite ocean of inspiration I am.

10. When we feel inadequate due to exhaustion from over-striving for perfection there are times we feel the results of the efforts are inadequate and it brings with it a feeling of despondence, the feeling that the responsibility is humanly impossible for one person to assume, during this momentary faltering of self confidence, during this brief moment, judgement can be dulled, wisdom overclouded and experience forgotten. Remember that this state is only *temporary*. We

11. Overcome hatred, envy, jealousy and suspicion. Hatred can be considered as the fundamental cause of every difficulty in life, because it is the antithesis of love, and love is the greatest force in the world. Hatred lies behind all negative aspects of human character. It is impossible to feel afraid, jealous,

intolerant or depressed if one truly loves, and feels oneself loved, for perfect love casts out all fear. Hatred is the absence of love as darkness is the absence of light. Hatred breeds insecurity, oppressiveness, jealousy, envy and suspicion. It produces feelings of misunderstanding, bad temper and anger toward one's fellow humans, and is contrary to Universal Love. Meditate on love, tolerance and happiness I am, an infinite ocean of love, tolerance and happiness I am, until we feel such love, tolerance and happiness, although we may have lost everything. Change the attitude until we can rejoice to see others take their rightful place, until we can bear the negations of life with understanding and tolerance.

12. When we dwell on thoughts of the past, nostalgia, homesickness, we can remove from the mind the regrets and sorrows of the past as this is a negative mental attitude if it becomes an obsession and causes an inharmonious state of near stagnation, a definite slowing down of the vital life forces. It has well been called a state of Lot's wife, for while the mind is looking back with fear, longing, or sadness, the body is being consumed by the fire of the present, and remains petrified in regard to the life which lies ahead. An example is that of a soldier who, after the war suffered nervousness, depression and panic because he could not forget his experiences during battle, or the woman who says 'when my husband died, half of me died too'. We should retain the lesson taught by past experience, while allowing the experience itself to pass out of the mind. In this manner we also forgive persons who have caused us great resentment and distress, even in childhood due to ill treatment, causing us to dwell on unpleasant memories. Meditate on all the good of the present and learn to extend it into the beautiful life that starts now, the dawn of the new day is the dawn of all our hopes and dreams of the future.

13. When we are weary, tired, mentally and physically exhausted, there are times when we are assailed by the doubt that we have sufficient strength or ability to face life or our work, yet in spite of exhaustion we can accomplish the task. We can be fortified mentally and physically by a short rest, lying flat on the back for fifteen minutes, just becoming aware of the breathing, counting the incoming and outgoing breath for about five minutes, meditate on power and strength. I am

power and strength, an infinite ocean of power and strength I am. After this we can resume work with renewed strength that we previously thought beyond our capability to achieve. However, we must not overtax ourselves continuously as this will be inharmonious and detrimental to our health.

14. For the time when we are quick in mind and action, impatient, irritable, and have extreme mental tension, when we find ourselves hindered by the slowness of others, finishing a sentence when the speaker is too slow, impatient with both situation and those around us, when we suffer from the extreme mental tension that often manifests itself as muscular tension and pain, at these times when we are accident prone and we get injured due to our bad temper and impetuosity, we must use control by a feeling of great gentleness and sympathy toward others, even though we may be capable, decisive, intuitive and cleverly intelligent, we must nevertheless at the same time be understanding and tolerant with those who are slower than ourselves. Meditate on the qualities of gentleness, sympathy and patience. I am gentleness, sympathy and patience, an infinite ocean of gentleness, sympathy and patience I am.

15. When we are despondent, lack confidence and anticipating failure, we may not attempt anything because we are sure of failure. We feel inferior to other people, then later think that we should have done it. Shakespeare wrote 'Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt'. Meditate on confidence and success. I am confidence and success, an infinite ocean of confidence and success I am. Meditate until you feel willing to plunge into life, take the risks, never be discouraged by the results. We then realise that if we fail, it is not because we did not try our best. We do not know the meaning of the word can't. They who have never made a mistake, have never made anything at all. There is no failure for them who have tried their best. We must find fulfillment in the work, not the result.

16. When suffering from a black depression, melancholia, gloom that brings with it a feeling of hopelessness, like a black cloud that envelops you and shuts out all pleasure and joy of life and it becomes impossible for the sufferer to be happy, cheerful or even normal in their thoughts, this is the time to meditate on joy and peace until we

experience inner stability, inner serenity, thereby counteracting the effect of the attack of melancholia and depression. I am joy and peace, an infinite ocean of joy and peace I am.

17. There are times when we have been burning the candle at both ends, or have suffered long under adverse conditions, or have been grievously ill for a long time, drained of our strength, absolutely exhausted, and forced to be inactive even though there is much to be done. We must realise that 'they also serve who only stand and wait'. Meditate on rest and recovery. I am resting and recovering. The vital force of life is at work restoring the strength and vitality. I am strength and vitality, an infinite ocean of strength and vitality I am.

18. Guilt feelings and self-condemnation to the extent of even blaming ourselves for the mistakes of others can drag us into the depths of despondency. It may be caused by being over conscientious, when we are hard taskmasters on ourselves. It can be due to a sense of pride. No great ascent was ever made without faults and falls. The best way to help another is not always by taking the responsibility and bearing their burdens. When a man has lost a leg in an accident we need not carry him around for the rest of his life, we need only get him an artificial leg to enable him to walk by himself.

19. Then there is the excessive fear and anxiety for others, the dread that some calamity may happen, always fearing the worst. Minor ailments can become major complaints in the imagination. When those dear to us return home late, there is the thought that some accident may have happened. We need only send out thoughts of safety, health or courage to those who need them or who may be in danger or ill at the time. It is the ability to remain calm, mentally and physically, in an emergency. Meditate on calmness. I am controlled calmness, an infinite ocean of controlled calmness I am.

20. Terror, panic and fright can be amplified by imagination or by stories of deadly snake bites, etc. We see a snake going about his business of searching for food. All he wants is a frog or a mouse, not a human. Instead of standing still and letting him pass, we panic due to stories we have heard about snakes. Instead we can stand calmly, meditate on calmness, an infinite ocean of calmness I am, until we develop the calm courage we find in

those heroes and courageous persons who will risk their lives to aid others. It is a state of mind wherein the self is completely forgotten.

21. Another morbid state to overcome is martyrdom, repression and self denial, a state of great inflexibility, practised by those who are lord and master of themselves, religious or political personalities who practise self denial and undergo a form of martyrdom in order to maintain the standard of conduct or the state of health they consider to be correct, or even saintly. This is not self-mastery, for true self-mastery comes through forgetting the self, not concentrating upon it. It is a form of self-domination, ruling oneself with an iron hand. We can certainly have high ideals, but when we are convinced of a higher or better ideal and forsake our original theories and beliefs and accept the proven truth, we have flexible minds without being easily influenced by others. Meditate on, I am flexible and open minded, an infinite ocean of flexibility and open mindedness I am.

22. Uncertainty and indecision are of the persons who lack the ability to make up their minds. Their conversation is sometimes erratic. They tend to jump from one subject to another, lack poise and balance, a real grasshopper mentality. We must develop calm determination, think quickly and make a decision with balance and poise, even our demeanor must have balance and poise. Meditate on calmness and determination, also on balance and poise.

23. Hopelessness, that hopeless despair that comes when we feel we have come to the end of everything, when the future is in complete darkness, when there seems to be no hope, no peace, and we are completely alone. When we feel we are a complete void, when the anguish is so great it seems unbearable, it is then that the cry for help is heard if we will but discuss it with those who have experienced this form of suffering, having the understanding and desire to help others in despair, and once cured, for us to help others as we ourselves were helped, to find peace and contentment in the service of our fellows.

24. There are those certain people who are too strong willed, dominating, inflexible, ambitious, ride roughshod over the opinions of others, crave power, are greedy for authority, never question the fact that they know better; they are the tyrants, the

dictators, demanding obedience. If we see ourselves in this type we should strive to be the type of ruler, leader or teacher who possesses the rare quality of leadership and ability to guide others by love and wise understanding. He has no need to dominate, he is the one who helps people to understand themselves, and to find their path in life. He is the leader who can inspire those around him by his unshakable confidence and certainty. Meditate on love and understanding. I am love and understanding, an infinite ocean of love and understanding I am.

25. We may find ourselves oversensitive to ideas and influences. Force of habit may hinder and frustrate our plans, and even change the course of our lives. Oversensitivity to big decisions, change of occupation, change of religion, change of country often brings physical and mental suffering because of slight regrets, heartbreaks at the severance of old ties, old associations and old thoughts. We can escape this mental prison by developing a character of constancy and determination like those who carry out their life's work unaffected by adverse circumstances, persevering even against the strong influence of their old training and background. Meditate on constancy and determination. I am constancy and determination, an infinite ocean of constancy and determination I am, in the search for truth in all things.

26. When we find ourselves becoming proud and aloof, not tolerating any interference in our affairs, feeling superior to others, disdainful and condescending, feeling over talented, that we possess profound knowledge, proud to a point of being mentally and socially rigid, we need to become like those who have great gentleness. Are tranquil, sympathetic, wise, practical counsellors, who have poise and dignity and pass gracefully through life. Meditate, I am dignity, poise, gentleness and tranquility, an infinite ocean of dignity, poise, gentleness and tranquility I am. Meditate on these virtues either combined or separate.

27. When we find our mind full of persistent unwanted thoughts, mental arguments and conversations, this type of thinking only results in fatigue and solves nothing, when the mind goes round and round like a carousel, the arguments or the words that we should have said repeating

unceasingly, the mind never cool and calm. Meditate on quiet and calm, I am quiet and calm, an infinite ocean of quiet and calm I am. Or meditate on being at peace with yourself and the whole world. I am peace, an infinite ocean of peace I am. Until peace permeates your whole being as those who possess a quiet and calm mind, at peace with themselves and the whole world, their quietness undisturbed by outside influences. In that quietness come the solutions to our problems, when we have learned to control our thoughts and imaginings and put them to constructive use.

28. We should not become apathetic or resigned to our illness or monotonous life, or think that the situation is hopeless, therefore we might as well get used to it, or that we have to bear it, we should not get weary, lack vitality or associate with dull companions. We should have a lively interest in life, in all the happenings in our own lives and the lives of others. This type of interest and vitality attract excellent conditions into our lives, and we enjoy friends, happiness and good health. Meditate on vitality, health and happiness. I am vitality, health and happiness, an infinite ocean of vitality, health and happiness I am.

29. Those who look upon life with bitterness, those who blame everyone but themselves for whatever adversity they experience, those who typically say, 'I have not deserved this misfortune, why should it happen to me while others get off scot-free'? Those that feel that they have been singled out by fate either to fail or to suffer, those that believe that the treatment they received was unjust and they begrudge the good fortune, the good health, the happiness or the success of their fellow humans, those should change their characters to display great optimism and faith in themselves as seen in the persons who have recognised their responsibilities through experiences which have come their way. Such persons draw unto themselves either the good or the bad according to the nature of their thoughts, and fully realise that it is within their power to do so. Meditate on optimism and happiness. I am optimism and happiness, an infinite ocean of optimism and happiness I am. To change the images in the mind and our attitude from a negative to a positive frame of mind may take years of constant practice, but it is attainable, and we do pass this attitude on to our children and those around us. The poem says that children learn what they live and

children live what they learn. We are all only children of different ages. Children learn what they live, Children live what they learn, Teach them to wake the love in their hearts. And they will find love in the world. If a child lives with criticism, he learns, to condemn, If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight. If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy. If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty. If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient. If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence. If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate. If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice. If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith. If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself. If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world. Anon. This publication was written while I was President and Founder of The Society of Freethinkers, in South Africa.

MEMBER NEWS

Angela Drury

New members A warm welcome to new members: Kevin McDonald, Christopher Bayliss, Lee Andresen, Jonatan Kelu, Richard O'Farrell, Dale Mills, Stephen Preimeier, and Radha Nair. And welcome also to the well known writer David Tribe who has long been associated with the Humanist Society and has now officially joined.



Affie is the HumSocNSW representative on the UNAANSW Executive Committee and has been appointed as the Co-ordinator, Status of Women Portfolio.



Angela and Affie at the UNAANSW dinner together with President Peter Airy, Lynne Chevor (Secretary), Diane Sackelariou (Vice President) and friends.