

## **EDITOR'S COMMENTS**

*Affie Adagio*

It has been an exciting time with preparations for the *International Women's Day Bougainville Women's Seminar* at the State Parliament House Theatrette on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March where 81 people attended. Lee Rhiannon MLC, made it possible for us to have that venue and she also opened the Seminar. There were celebrities who read out the sworn statements from the people of Bougainville which were part of Waratah Rosemarie Gillespie's book about her experiences there. When I typed up more than 150 sworn statements for Waratah's book I suffered with the trauma that Bougainvilleans had experienced in the civil war that had resulted in the death of thousands when Rio Tinto had mined their land by force. Therefore, the Humanist Society of NSW, UNAANSW and WILPF agreed to come together and support this Seminar to take place in an attempt to raise community awareness. Because of the rape and torture of women, especially, and their families, I decided it would be appropriate to hold the seminar in International Women's Day Week. We also had the Chorus of Women sing 3 appealing songs after Waratah finished sharing about her experiences. Unfortunately, the Lateline DVD giving the historical overview did not work. Valerie Weekes (UNAANSW) and Dr. Stephania Siedlecky (WILPF) spoke on the UN Resolution 1325. We enjoyed a delicious afternoon tea at 4.30p.m. Ann Young who had organised the celebrities, filmed the whole event and I believe there will be copies for sale.

Joanne Dateransi whom we brought out from Bougainville had faced several obstacles and missed the seminar arriving one hour after the end. She applied for a 3 month visa and was only given a 3 week visa so we are squeezing her in to as many meetings and appearances as possible. She has managed to speak at the WILPFNSW AGM and the UNAANSW Executive meeting so far.

**Joanne will talk at  
HumSocNSW on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup>  
April at 9.30 a.m.  
COME & JOIN US**



*State Parliament House Sydney*



*Waratah and celebrities*



*Waratah and celebrities*

## **EDITORIAL SUB COMMITTEE**

We are fortunate to have found volunteers who are willing to eventually become editors of Viewpoints. Uttam Niraula is a past president of International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization (IHEYO) and will be returning to Nepal soon. RB Khattry is a permanent resident here and a member of IHEU. Emma Hannah is a new member of HumSocNSW and she was invaluable as Minute Secretary of the IWD Bougainville Women's Seminar Committee.

***UNAANSW Executive Meeting welcomes  
Joanne Dateransi from Bougainville***

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

John August

President's Report March 2009

We've recently procured some books on Atheism from the Rationalists for the Book Room. It now means we're carrying some stock which is "on message", please have a look when you're next in.



Affie Adagio, Waratah Rosemarie Gillespie and Ann Young recently organised in the Sate Parliament House Theatrette the International Women's Day Bougainville Women's Seminar, in conjunction with WILPF and the UNAA. For me, Waratah's most interesting story was about how the police swooped on her to try to deny her a visa to visit Bougainville. Clearly, Australia is not a "police state", where people get locked up arbitrarily or disappear. However, when the hand of the state reaches out in pursuit of unaccountable foreign policy - well, it does happen. It did however seem that the state attempt to suppress her in fact drew more attention to the cause - there's recompense of sorts.

We recently held a discussion of Evolution on Darwin Day, hosted by Victor Bien. For me, Evolution is a wonderful way of understanding and appreciating the richness of our world from a non-religious point of view, and something it is worth being familiar with.

The Humanist Society of South Australia is hosting the 2009 Australian Humanists Convention, from 8th to 10th of May at the Adelaide International Hotel. We've a contingent including Ann Young, Affie Adagio and myself attending. There are two motions we'll be taking to the convention - in support of the Atheist Foundation's attempt at bus advertising, and another in support of "Freedom of Conviction".

### Voluntary Euthanasia

I recently had a read of the latest issue of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of NSW newsletter, which included an article by Dr Rodney Syme, the Victorian author of "A Good Death", and a member of the "Melbourne Seven", who publicly stated they had helped people die. There was a police investigation, and a medical investigation that went nowhere. This seems to the practical state of the law - without the enactment of actual legislation, law enforcement bodies let doctors get on with "Physician Assisted Dying", and try not to make waves. Dr. Syme says the legal context is that when in the 1960's medical techniques for prolonging people's lives came to the fore, Doctors were concerned that in having to remove or turn something off which was no longer working, they might be held responsible for the person's death, and the law developed to let doctors withdraw treatment if it was futile. This however



contrasts to his real world experience of suffering and the effectiveness of palliation. While palliation can help at times, there are other times where the suffering is such that palliation cannot be effective, and this is the context in which he (and many doctors) operates in - "Physician Assisted Dying" in the context of alleviating suffering. This concept - separately to "Voluntary Euthanasia" - is where the greatest interest should be, because it incorporates its own justification.

Contemplating suffering, and indeed writing about it, is not the most pleasant of things to contemplate. Nevertheless, I do see such realities of the world twisted and distorted through a religious viewpoint. It is something we can hopefully challenge. It is worth challenging.

### The Hebrew Bible

I've been listening to a course on the Hebrew Bible from Yale University, given by Professor Christine Hayes, which Steve Maxwell originally put me onto. See <http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/introduction-to-the-old-testament-hebrew-bible/content/downloads>

I've found a lot of atheist commentaries on the bible, which emphasise its contradictions, intolerance and injustice, and don't really try to integrate it together, which is quite frustrating. Equally, you can also emphasise how scientifically incorrect it is - its cosmology, its ignorance of the workings of the solar system, its absence of information about disease, health and medicine - things that a God would tell you if they knew about the world and wanted to let you know more about it. And, indeed, at the other end, anyone who claims that some statement about the world is valid because the bible endorses it is talking nonsense.

But, equally, the Bible can give us wisdom to help us lead productive lives, even if we are ignorant about scientific facts in the world around us. And it can help us understand how civilisations struggled to develop rules they could live by and organise themselves by - the positive element - or indeed, rules by which the elite could claim a disproportionate share of resources - depending on how you want to look at it. For, the different stories of the Bible capture a particular and contrasting world view. The fact it is contradictory is partially caused by the fact that it encompasses different periods of history, each making their own particular emphasis. The videos "The Bible Unearthed", which Victor Bien procured for us and are available for loan, also develop these ideas. The background religions were pantheistic, and contained both good and evil Gods. So, in the Babylonian flood story, one God sent the flood because the people on Earth were making too much noise and he could not get any sleep, but another God sent word to Atrahasis to make preparations. In this story, there's a conflict between Gods, representing good and evil. But in the Biblical story, adapted from this Babylonian work, there's only one God, and the struggle

is instead between God, his creation, and his own ideals of justice.

When they were invaded, rather than thinking their own God had been overwhelmed by the Gods of their invaders, the writers of the Bible interpreted this as God's justice because they had violated the terms of the Covenant (contract) he had made with his people. Civilisations and empires rise and fall, but this interpretation meant they could maintain their religion even when things went badly. There are many other examples of how the stories of the Bible fit into a context, which makes it much easier to make sense of. Equally, there are many religious writings. The Hebrew Bible does have a particularly strong influence on our culture and history - but that's not to deny there are other religious writings which might also be interesting in their way.

## THE CHARLES DARWIN REVOLUTION

*Ann Young*

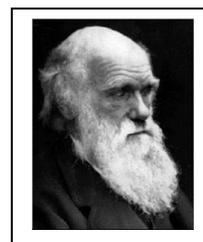
In 1859 "The Origin of Species by Natural Selection" by Charles Darwin was published. In the book Darwin extrapolated from the process of selecting the fittest offspring, sometimes known as breeding, to all living things - from single cells, to plants, to us.



This idea is now so normal that we have forgotten the radical implications that so scared Darwin that he became a partial recluse. Before Darwin there were humans and animals. Humans had souls and were created by god to have control over animals. People objected to being demoted to animals by Darwin. They had an emotional investment in remaining a special case.

To say people were related to apes, to them, was self-evidently silly. "We, intelligent, self-conscious, language-speaking tool-using humans with a conscience, are not animals." Black people were problematic. Were black people humans or animals? Animals could be owned, bread, sold, killed, whatever.

If black people were human then the possibility that all humans were animals threatened: this was not god's intention. To perfume, clean, overweight, dignified white people clothed in layers of manufactured fashionable attire, worshipping in stained-glass-windowed spired edifices, graduating from universities where they studied medicine, science, literature, history and geography, attending orchestral concerts and operas, banking and trading in international



currencies, and voting for a parliament which administered a vast empire, it was not self-evident that they were related to bare-foot illiterate, thieving, homeless, dirty street urchins of London, let alone the untouchables in the shanties of Bombay or Capetown.

Menstruation, lactation, pregnancy, birthing, and copulation all indicated that humans were animals. Women were problematic. Were women humans or animals? Women could pose as humans only if menstruation, pregnancy etc. disappeared. They vanished. Butchering, death and defecation vanished too.

Eating, sleeping, exercising and learning were made complicated and sophisticated so that they seemed beyond recognition as animals behaviours.

Because of Secular Humanists', like Thomas Huxley's, obdurate campaigning for the scientific recognition of Charles Darwin's interpretation of the facts of evolution and the natural selection of the best adapted offspring, there is almost universal acceptance in 2009 that white men are animals. Radical!

### **GOVT REVERSES BAN ON FAMILY PLANNING ADVICE**

*Mary Bergin*

#### **Australian Humanists congratulate the government on reversing the ban on family planning advice:**

Melbourne, (11 March, 2009). The Council of Australian Humanist Societies (CAHS), the national body for Australian Humanists have long supported well-funded family planning advice that includes readily available contraceptives and abortions. They enthusiastically applaud Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's executive order reversing the 13-year-old ban on foreign aid being used to fund safer abortions for women in poorer nations.

'The ban, in place since 1996, has seen overseas aid spending on family planning services fall from, \$6.9 million to \$2.3 million. This has resulted in many needless deaths in young women of child-bearing age, and many motherless children left to be cared for by other family members,' said Rosslyn Ives, president of CAHS. 'We are very pleased to see this ban reversed as it will enable women in poorer countries – the recipients of Australian overseas aid – to be provided with the same sort of family planning health services women in Australian can access.' 'This ban was agreed to by the previous federal government at the request of the former Senator Harradine, whose vote the government needed on bills quite unrelated to overseas aid. It had been a case of the religious beliefs of one member of parliament

holding to ransom the reproductive health of countless women in poorer countries. Judgment about what services overseas aid should be used for ought to be decided by agreement between the recipient country and the organisations delivering the aid, especially those working with the local communities.

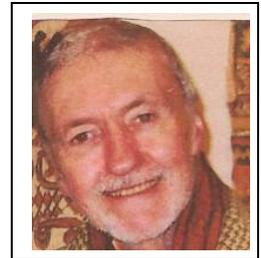
Australian Humanists strongly support the separation of religion and state. They are also strong advocates of freedom of religion and belief, but consider that personal beliefs, whether Humanist or religious, ought not to be forced upon those who think differently. This is a widely supported view among Australians. They want their governments to reflect common sense and the act in ways that place the final responsibility, especially for personal life style choices, into the hands of individuals. It is well known that what most women and men want, is to be able to control their own fertility, so they can plan the number and spacing of the children they have. Australia's overseas aid should rightly try to meet such a basic human right. The government's action is enlightened as it promotes greater well-being.

### **WORDS AND IDEAS**

*David Tribe (Contd. from previous edition)*

#### **REFORMATION INDIVIDUALISM (CI6):**

The heterodox beliefs outlined above could be attributed to the Reformation as much as to the Renaissance. Martin Luther had little argument with basic Catholic theology, but was disturbed by Catholic corruption, especially the brazen sale of indulgences to reduce the soul's time in purgatory. The Reformation is dated to his pinning *Ninety-five Theses*, mainly against indulgences, to the door of All Saints Church, Wiittenburg, in 1517. But it was his promotion of the Pauline doctrine that a Christian is "justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28) and Jesus' own teaching that "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21) which really undermined the "magisterium" (authority) of the Vatican.



This concentration on the individual conscience and individual responsibility took the Reformation far beyond what Luther would have wished. The sacraments first ceased to have nothing more than symbolic significance ("an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace"), and then were abandoned altogether by advanced Protestants. Finally,

the basic theology of the church was repudiated by sects which continued to use religious language either as a sentimental survival or as a device to escape persecution by church and state for infidelity. Church meetings thus became occasions for fraternising or group meditation, as with George Fox's Society of Friends (Quakers) in the 17th century.

The Reformation also had profound political, social and moral impacts. No longer was unthinking subservience to a hierarchical society possible; and the feudal system, already in decay, began to disintegrate. Great inequalities between rich and poor continued but, save in rural areas; they were less likely to be attributed entirely to God's immutable will. In 16th-century Germany the concept that all men (women were usually excluded as a hierarchy of souls persisted) were equal in the sight of God and before the law led to communist experiments. These tended towards anarchy and were easily suppressed. In fact, Marxist as well as traditional historians remember this period not for its "liberating" communism but for its encouragement of the "Protestant work ethic", competitive free enterprise and the rise of capitalism, with serfs being replaced by "wage slaves". Curbs on the self-indulgent excesses of the clergy extended to curbs on all forms of popular enjoyment, and to a sanctimonious Puritanism. As Lord Macaulay put it, "The Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators" (History of England, 1849-61).

**THE ENLIGHTENMENT (C17-18):** Commonly confined to the 18th-century "age of reason", the Enlightenment had its roots in the 17th century and even the 16th. Associated with men of literally encyclopaedic interests and knowledge it incorporated many isms, some apparently conflicting: atheism, deism, pantheism, cynicism, rationalism, empiricism, liberalism, scepticism (skepticism), humanism, classicism, formalism, cosmopolitanism. Most of these weren't new words, and the concepts behind all of them weren't new concepts, but political and social realities tended to modify their previous interpretations, applications and relevance. The following snapshots depict them in no particular order. All of them have relevance today:

atheism: The Reformation led to fragmentation within Protestantism and the emergence of many sects which, having thrown off their own oppression, were overtaken by religious "enthusiasm" and established new orthodoxies that persecuted heretical minorities in their turn. Most significant of these historically was the 16th-

century rule in Switzerland of John Calvin. He piously executed learned heretics like Michael Servetus, who discovered the pulmonary circulation of the blood as well as unorthodox Christology. After an initial period of shock at the Reformation, the Vatican mobilised its forces. The popes of this period became more hardline and illiberal than those of the Renaissance as they launched a Counter-Reformation. In the later 16th and the 17th century Catholics and Protestants escalated their war of words to the Wars of Religion (1562-98) and to a devastating Thirty Years War (1618-48).

On this battleground of rival faiths an avowed atheist was certain to be shot down by one side or the other and probably by both. So this century became disputatiously known for what David Berman, author of *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (1988), calls "covert atheists". The disputation arises from speculation over what their cryptic writings really meant to the authors and were intended to convey to perceptive readers. Sometimes, as in Daniel Scargill's Recantation (1669), we learn of covert atheism only after it's been repudiated. Other infidels like Thomas Hobbes in the 17th and David Hume in the 18th century, even though the latter had been a guest of avowed French atheist Baron d'Holbach, fell into the habit of "protesting too much" by denying that there was such an animal as an atheist, or at any rate a "true" atheist. It was said that noisy blasphemers were "defying" God, not denying his existence.

In a letter dated 1692, Richard Bentley observed that theists had their books but atheists hadn't. He admitted that atheism existed, but only through talk "in the private study" (Hume asked his guests not to discuss religion in front of the servants) or in "taverns and coffee-houses, nay Westminster-hall and the very churches". It would seem the situation was similar to that in the "non-ideological times" of the latter 20th century - before the recent flood of popular atheist books and blogs - when formal debates between religionists and irreligionists, so common in the 19th and early 20th centuries, had virtually disappeared. Instead, the pious merely asserted that the beauty, love and order

of the universe proved that God existed and the impious that its cruelty, evil and chaos proved that he didn't.

By the second half of the 18th century, religious mania was in decline and it was physically safe, if not socially advantageous, to confess to atheism in some circles. Most of the French Encyclopaedists, notably Holbach in *La System de la nature* (1770), were overt atheists. In 1782 William Hammon and/or Matthew Turner wrote *An answer to Dr Priestley's letters to a philosophical unbeliever*, which Berman calls "the first avowedly atheistic book" in Britain. Others followed soon afterwards, the most famous (or notorious) being Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811). In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Immanuel Kant demolished Aquinas's five proofs of the existence of God. (His *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) rehabilitated God as author of the moral law.) Phrases like "unmoved mover" and "uncaused cause" were meaningless oxymorons. God as "prime necessary being" or the subject of all predicates collapsed because existence itself was not a descriptive predicate and one could imagine things, through "categories" in the mind, which in fact did not exist. Purpose was also a category relating to our idea of purposeful behaviour, but there's no evidence for cosmic purpose. Hume added the empirical observation that statements about the origin of the universe cannot be tested by either experiment or comparison;

deism: This is a prime example of how words assume the meaning we put on them, regardless of their derivation. Both "theism" and "deism" mean a belief in God; one derived from the Greek, the other from the Latin. But theism has come to mean belief in a Creator and Sustainer of the universe, who watches sparrows fall, counts human hairs and answers - or declines to answer - prayers; whereas deism is belief in a remote First Cause, who creates or sets in motion the universe, then leaves it to its own devices. Though atheists were denounced by deist Thomas Paine in *The Age of Reason* (1794-5), deism and atheism both reject theism. The difference seems to be more semantic and pietistic than actual. Of course "deism" was a

more prudent label in turbulent times. It first appeared with Pierre Viret in 1564 and in England with Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621. Under the name "natural religion" it's elaborated in Edward Herbert of Cherbury's *De Veritate* (1624). As late as the sixth edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1823) "deism" was synonymous with "freethought". The connection is seen in Paine's *dictum*, "When opinions are free either in matter of government or religion truth will finally and powerfully prevail" (Appendix to *The Age of Reason*); the truth-being that God of Christianity is mythical and humankind needs a new God consonant with reason, common sense and observable nature. "Deist" became obsolete in common parlance till very recently, when English philosopher and Stratonician atheist, Antony Flew, announced his "conversion" to it;

pantheism: This is another term interchangeable with "atheism". Identifying God with nature, it seeks to reconcile religion with philosophy. It's chiefly associated with the 17th-century philosopher and lens-grinder, Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza. He discovered that the scholastic definition of substance as all-embracing, infinite and eternal was the same as the theological definition of God, and so the universe and God are identical. The term "pantheism" never really caught on outside religious circles, especially those of the East like philosophical Hindus. The Pantheon of the French Revolution (1789) was more a temple for all the gods than for a heretical image of one. Among the isms deplored by the First Vatican Council (1869-70) was pantheism. Around this time Thomas Carlyle was asked if he were a pantheist. He replied scornfully: "No, never was; nor a pot-theist either."

rationalism: In describing what he didn't believe in, Kant was a pure rationalist. In outlining what he did believe in, Kant recognised the importance of sense-perception to supply the raw materials of knowledge, but foreshadowed modern psychology by saying the mind organised this plethora of sensations into a coherent pattern. On the rationalist side, his 17th-century predecessors were Rene Descartes and Gottfried Leibniz. Descartes was the inventor of analytical geometry and

mechanics. He's also been regarded as the father of modern philosophy, more for his methodology than for the conclusions reached. Despite the odd "monist" (believer in only one level of reality) like Spinoza, he consolidated "dualism" (belief in the separate existence of mind and matter, soul and body) as the orthodoxy of Continental philosophers. While not denying the existence of matter, he accorded primacy to mind with his famous dictum, *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am). With Sir Isaac Newton, Leibniz was the inventor of an "infinitesimal" (now called differential and integral) calculus, found to be better than Newton's. He constructed a calculating machine and invented a theory of combination and a binary system, which foreshadowed modern computers. Among philosophers he's best known for his "monads" (singular entities having nothing to do with philosophical monism). Among non-philosophers he's remembered for his optimism, crudely stated as "everything's for the best in this best of all possible worlds" and beautifully satirised by Voltaire in *Candide* (1758).

Rationalism continued as the dominant strand in Continental philosophy; and the literati there loved to cite Kantian, Hegelian and Marxist jargon, even when they didn't understand what it meant.

empiricism: In Britain, and ultimately the British Commonwealth and America, the dominant philosophical strand, in the Enlightenment and beyond, was empiricism. In Appendix I to my *Nucleoethics: Ethics in Modern Society* (1972) I defined it as "the belief that the world can be understood by observation of how it functions", adding that empiricists brought knowledge "under the domain of descriptive and predictive laws, operating on causal principles". Observation, of course, is not enough; for example, the sun certainly appears to go round the earth. "Empiricism" comes from the Greek meaning "in a trial" or "experience". Of course, our earliest ancestors invented tools and weapons and used herbal remedies by a system of trial-and-error, and some of the ancient Greeks conducted experiments. But it wasn't till the 17th century that experimentation was

formally developed and brilliantly succeeded in the physical and biological sciences.

There were antecedents in Christendom. In the 13th century Roger Bacon rediscovered the Chinese invention of gunpowder. (Whereas the East used gunpowder for fireworks, the West used it

## **BARACK OBAMA – A HUMANIST PRESIDENT?**

*Relayed by Uttam Niraula & RB Khatri*

The Inauguration of Barack Obama as the President of the United States was a momentous event in the history of the world. It was purely a domestic phenomenon for the US but it certainly has created far-reaching ripples in communities across the world.



Americans, especially young Americans, have shown that they are capable of respecting their diversity in a manner hardly visible anywhere else in the world. More importantly, Barack Obama has become a symbol of unity. He has surged ahead as a true statesman, one who transcends divisive markers of identity like race, religion or ethnicity, to lead a heterogeneous group of people. He has spoken time and again of change, but it isn't change for merely the African-Americans but for the entire nation. During his campaign, he didn't appeal to 'his community' to come out and support him. He appealed to all of America. In his victory speech, he reminded people once more that he did not believe in pandering to any particular class of people, that he was everyone's president. The people have showed that that's what they wanted, a man who understood how tired they were of being typecast, as anti-abortionists, gays, born-again Christians, neo-conservatives, blacks, whites, liberals, and bring them together as Americans, sharing their common humanity. Perhaps that's an idealism stretched too far, but what is [Humanism](#) but an idealism that seeks to unify all human beings under the banner of their common humanity.

Is Obama a [Humanist](#)? Certainly he is religious, a church going Christian who was willing to stick his neck out for his pastor. But so far he hasn't allowed his religion to come in the way of his politics. And, as his speech on religion and politics reproduced below shows, he has consistently made allowance for both diversity and belief

in secular laws. He is a [rationalist](#) who has never worn his religion on his sleeve, or tried to thrust it down the throat of the unwilling. It is this tolerance for the other that Humanism celebrates and welcomes.

The world today is haunted by intolerance and division. The West has to own up to its share of culpability in this state of affairs. It is no less guilty than the Islamic world in encouraging the politics of identity on a global scale. The Church has managed to woo most political leaders into believing that the world is essentially divided, and the only way to make “our” world more secure is by encouraging this divisiveness. Perhaps Mr. Obama will take the lead in proving that the Church, as much as the mullahs, is wrong in this as well. The United States might just, for a change, lead the world from the front in uniting humanity. Someday other nations too might think of treating all their citizens, irrespective of [caste](#), race, sex or religion, as equals. Skeptics will declare that Barack Obama’s victory does not signify that America has overcome its traditional intolerance towards its largest minority group. Certainly that would be a miracle. But on the other hand, it has made that great leap of imagination of according leadership to a man who, traditionally, belongs to the ‘other’. How many of us can do that? And isn’t it high time we tried?

*M.Sangita (2008), [International Humanist News](#), 4 Nov ([www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org))*

#### **WORLD CONFERENCE ON UNTOUCHABILITY**

*Relayed by Uttam Niraula & RB Khatri*

International Humanist and Ethical Union ([IHEU](#)) is organizing the first “World Conference on Untouchability” in London, UK, on June 9 and 10, 2009. The conference will bring together activists and experts from around the world to explore a problem that afflicts nearly 250 million people in countries from Japan to Nigeria.

“Untouchability” – the social exclusion of people because of the population they are born into – used to be common in Europe and persists in Bangladesh, Burma, India, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Yemen and elsewhere. The IHEU ‘World Conference on Untouchability’ is the first conference of its kind to explore untouchability in many different cultures and to bring together activists to share strategies that have helped [untouchable](#) communities around the world. Campaigners plan to use the conference as the launch pad for a global campaign against untouchability.

“There are no ethnic differences between untouchables and the people who discriminate against them. Yet untouchability is akin to the scourge of racism in its

denial of humanity to people because of the social group they are born into,” says Sonja Eggerickx, president of the [International Humanist and Ethical Union](#). “We hope that this first world conference on untouchability will lead to a global campaign to tackle untouchability with the same resolve the world has fought racism.”

Please visit [www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org) for more information

## LOVE POETRY

Charles Foley

### In Times of Trial

In times of trial,  
It is Love that pulls us through.

It is love of country  
That tries to save it.

It is love of people  
That grieves for the lost.

It is love of neighbors  
That does our best for them.

It is love of family  
That shoulders the burden.

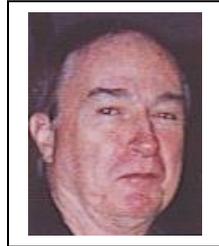
It is love of creatures  
That tries to rescue them.

It is love of strangers  
That seeks to restore them.

Your Love for me,  
My Love for you.

It is Love  
That will pull us through.

(c. Charles Foley 2009)  
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## OFF MY SHOULDERS BOOK REVIEW

John August

### Off My Shoulders, By Vicki Potempa

I thought it I'd outline just why this book is such an interesting read. Certainly, Dick Clifford's review outlines some of its merits, but there's more to it. Well written, but it also paints an intriguing picture of times past. For me, this was an amazing thing to see through Vicki's eyes. A few decades ago life was quite spartan, and there were shortages of numerous incidental things - cement for example. We've since seen both progress and regression. An awareness of the past lets us understand that duality better. Many things are now cheaper - but land seems less accessible than it was in Vicki's time. We see a seemingly unending procession of people who are willing to take advantage of her. There's a fine balance between being considerate and standing up for yourself, and it is difficult to get it right.



But, equally, in the thick of the repressive and limiting values Australia had in decades past, it certainly wasn't easy. This is the one down point - the string of things which go wrong, or people who take advantage of her - it does get a bit depressing at times. But, equally the strength that Vicki had was an incredible thing to witness, and her life does come together at the end. It's not a storybook warm and fuzzy ending, but it is nevertheless a positive conclusion with all the richness of real life. But it's not just people who directly take advantage of her - Vicki seems sidelined by bureaucracies. This sort of thing goes on today - but Vicki's portrayal gives you a new perspective. It's one of the minor injustices endemic in our world. Still, our world does lurch along, there are some positives which shouldn't be ignored - but let's not ignore its problems, either. Vicki's encounters seem to include many people whose fear of "feminism" (or other controlling, emotion laden words) - or indeed their own regard for religion - trap themselves in a pit of ignorance, where they become their own worst enemies, acting to limit their own opportunities. Vicki circulated in the early pro-choice and other movements - you get an intriguing historical perspective.

I was especially intrigued with Lionel Murphy's reforms. Lionel won the Australian Humanist of the Year Award in 1983, but is much maligned by some of the elite today. Prior to Murphy's changes, a widow lost a pension and her daughter lost the right to be at University because the deceased father had been married for one week while in England. The injustice was

staggering, it reaches out from the past to the present with its brutal simplicity. This and other injustices were quashed by Murphy's changes. Nevertheless, his reforms were challenged by the Catholic Church and other right wing elements at the time.

You shake your head in amazement at how anyone could have seen these earlier laws as capturing anything worthwhile. This is but one example - it's great to get a perspective on these long distant battles, the details of which you are only vaguely aware of. Sadly, too many people take advantage of our ignorance of the past, and weave their own distorted picture - Murphy being one prominent example. The saga of Vicki's life, intertwined with developing social movements in Australia, is an amazing book. Not only do you see the trials and tribulations of one woman's life, and witness the strength which she ultimately draws on - you have a bird's eye view of Australia's past social struggles. Knowledge of the past enriches your view of the present; my view of the present was much enriched by Vicki's book.

### **No Nursing Home for Me**

About 2 years ago my wife and I were on a cruise through the western Mediterranean aboard a Princess liner. At dinner we noticed an elderly lady sitting alone along the rail of the grand stairway in the main dining room. I also noticed that all the staff, ships officers, waiters, busboys, etc., all seemed very familiar with this lady. I asked our waiter who the lady was, expecting to be told that she owned the line, but he said he only knew that she had been on board for the last four cruises, back to back. As we left the dining room one evening I caught her eye and stopped to say hello. We chatted and I said, "I understand you've been on this ship for the last four cruises". She replied, "Yes, that's true." I stated, "I don't understand" and she replied, without a pause, "It's cheaper than a nursing home". So, there will be no nursing home in my future. When I get old and feeble, I am going to get on a Princess Cruise Ship. The average cost for a nursing home is \$200 per day. I have checked on reservations at Princess and I can get a long term discount and senior discount price of \$135 per day. That leaves \$65 a day for:

### ***TIME FOR A LAUGH***

1. Gratuities which will only be \$10 per day.
  2. I will have as many as 10 meals a day if I can waddle to the restaurant, or I can have room service (which means I can have breakfast in bed every day of the week).
  3. Princess has as many as three swimming pools, a workout room, free washers and dryers, and shows every night.
  4. They have free toothpaste and razors, and free soap and shampoo.
  5. They will even treat you like a customer, not a patient. An extra \$5 worth of tips will have the entire staff scrambling to help you.
  6. I will get to meet new people every 7 or 14 days.
  7. T.V. broken? Light bulb need changing? Need to have the mattress replaced? No Problem! They will fix everything and apologize for your inconvenience.
  8. Clean sheets and towels every day, and you don't even have to ask for them.
  9. If you fall in the nursing home and break a hip you are on Medicare; if you fall and break a hip on the Princess ship they will upgrade you to a suite for the rest of your life.
- Now hold on for the best! Do you want to see South America, the Panama Canal, Tahiti, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, or name where you want to go? Princess will have a ship ready to go. So don't look for me in a nursing home, just call shore to ship.
- PS. And don't forget, when you die, they just dump you over the side at no charge.