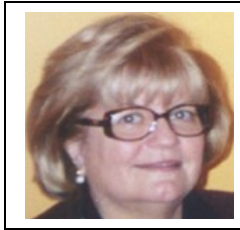


EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Affie Adagio

Please join us at our **End of Year Celebration: Mad Hatters and Masquerade Mask Party**; it will help us strengthen our association whilst having fun. (see cover for date)



HumSocNSW has established a Human Rights Sub Committee and a Sub Committee to monitor legal issues (the name will appear in the next edition when we are certain of the name)

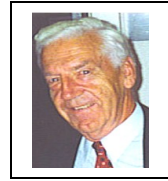
INTERNATIONAL PEACE DAY

I was invited by the United Nations Association of NSW to speak at the Peace Vigil on Sunday 21st September at Sydney University inside the entrance next to Victoria Park. As a HumSocNSW delegate on the UNAANSW Executive Committee I am responsible for the portfolio of the Status of Women. I spoke about the plight of women as a result of wars and also about Australian Aboriginal women. It was suggested that I also speak about Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) as I am a member.

I mentioned that UNAANSW have approved my plan to run a seminar next year in March on this plight. HumSocNSW will also be given the opportunity to join this project along with WILPF and any other organisation who is interested.

CAHS NEW PRESIDENT

Rosslyn Ives has taken on the position of President of CAHS after **Dr. Alan McPhate's** resignation. Farewell to Dr. Alan McPhate who is retiring as President of CAHS to give someone else the opportunity to take on the role. Alan has contributed immensely to Humanism.



AGM 2008

The AGM was well attended, ran smoothly and finished at 5.20pm with food and beverages being served after this. Members mixed and mingled and it was an enjoyable afternoon.



The 2008-9 Committee consists of:-
President: John August **Vice President:** Waratah Rose Gillespie **Vice President:** Ann Young **Treasurer:** Victor Bien **Hon. Secretary:** Affie Adagio

NEW 2nd PATRON:

DOROTHY BUCKLAND-FULLER

It is with pleasure that we announce one of our members Dorothy Buckland-Fuller AM to join Robin Williams as one of our two patrons.



Thirty-five women were appointed as Member (AM) in the General Division of the Order of Australia, one of those being our Ms Dorothy Buckland-Fuller MBE, “for service to the community as a contributor to a range of social justice, ethnic and migrant women's organisations and through raising awareness of issues affecting women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.”

Feminist, Human rights advocate, Migrant Community Advocate, Peace Activist and Sociologist:

Dorothy Buckland-Fuller is a sociologist and social activist of some longstanding, with a distinguished career in ethnic and multicultural politics, particularly as they impact upon women of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. She is a peace activist, an environmentalist, a feminist and committed to the cause of reconciliation with indigenous Australia. Of Greek heritage, Buckland-Fuller has had a long involvement with the Greek Community of New South Wales, and her valuable contributions were acknowledged in 2001 when she was granted Life Membership to the Council of the Greek Orthodox Community of Sydney and New South Wales. In 1974, she established the Australian-Migrant Women's Association, an organisation designed to bring together immigrant and Australian-born women. Among other things, she is still actively involved in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, serving as president in 2002-4. As a sociologist, she taught and conducted action research. Her life has been a case of putting that theory to

practice. In her own words, she is an ‘action oriented person.’
www.womenaustralia.info/objects/D00187.htm

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

John August

We've had the 2008 AGM, and welcome to the new committee. We've also changed the constitution and many challenges are behind us.



We're working on a revised **Happy Human** and hope to have that ready by the Newtown Festival in November. There's been an Inquiry into Charities by the Senate Economics Committee. Many charitable and other groups have made submissions. The Rationalists and Secular Party have also made submissions - they're available on their website at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/economics_ctte/charities_08/index.htm

I'm a member of the Secular Party and am most aware of their submission, which articulates a many valid concerns; of course members of the NSW Humanists cover many political parties and sympathies. The Secular Party's submission focused on the lack of distinction between charities and religious non-charities. It notes that in Australia today, all the operations of religious organisations are deemed charitable and are thus unregulated and tax exempt. Australia is one of only three countries in the world where these exemptions extend even to the commercial operations of religious organisations. Let us hope we

have more awareness of these issues and things change for the better! The Hillsong Church has received more flak lately - it has been accused of secretly making a push to convert public school students in New South Wales. "The NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Association says it has received a number of complaints from teachers and parents concerned that Hillsong is using public schools as a recruiting ground." NSW Greens MP John Kaye has encouraged the new Education Minister, Verity Firth, to step in.

www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/09/09/2359449.htm

Voluntary Euthanasia remains in the news. The Illawarra Mercury on the 9th of August told the story of Wouter den Dulk starving himself to death in an Unanderra nursing home, not wanting to be a "brain in a bed". Covered in the Sydney Morning Herald, Angelique Flowers also died in August, and recorded a video pleading for law reform, saying she had been robbed of "both my dying and my living". Certainly, there are concerns about Voluntary Euthanasia - that elderly people will be coerced by their families into dying for financial convenience. An appropriate legal process will prevent this. In any case, the fact is that the current laws about Voluntary Euthanasia mean a great deal of unnecessary suffering, and I'm puzzled that anyone could ignore that. We can only wonder why Voluntary Euthanasia continues to be illegal in spite of a majority of Australians supporting it. It is an uncomfortable truth that we have a level of welfare consistent with Australia's overall position; much otherwise regrettable Government policy does have

the support of the Australian people. But not laws about Voluntary Euthanasia. It is difficult to understand why this is the case - perhaps if we did, we would be in a better position to effect change. We can, however, hope that a change to the law results from the private member's bill introduced by Greens leader Bob Brown.

Still, Parliament reflecting the popular vote is not necessarily a good thing by itself. The majority can democratically discriminate against a minority. The issue here is how Parliament does reflect the democratic will of the people on most issues. And why is it the reverse in some cases ?

Victor Bien, our Treasurer, noted a story about undercover reporters at UK Mosques, where there was hotbed of intolerant discussion of gays and other minorities. However, it also seems that moderate Muslims have been equally critical of this intolerance: www.abc.net.au/rn/religionreport/stories/2008/2360820.htm Victor has also drawn our attention to recent changes at the UN Human Rights Council. As the result of a push by the Organisation of Islamic Countries, the HRC must now limit its coverage of freedom of expression, and focus on abuse of the right to freedom resulting in racial or religious discrimination. Opinions vary, but I wouldn't wish to condone religious discrimination. However, it does seem to limit our ability to speak out against Sharia law - such as laws which require the stoning of women for adultery or the hanging of gay men. Certainly, Muslims can be good people - we wouldn't want to think otherwise. Nevertheless, injustice is still injustice, regardless of a religious

vener. We're not just talking about the respecting the identity of a religion - but rather criticising things that are done in its name. See <http://www.iheu.org/node/3139> for a full article in International Humanist News. I recently visited the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque during an open day - I've included a report on experiences and some thoughts on Islam.

GALLIPOLI MOSQUE REPORT

I recently visited the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque during its open day. It was very decent of them to put this event on - Muslims can be good people, as can members of all religions - but Islam does have its things to be critical of. Islam seemed focused on a literal, past centric interpretation. The fact that Mohamed specified three penalties - exile, cutting off your hand, or death - hundreds of years ago - was still valid today. They embraced the idea of "necessary laws" - without rules our world will collapse into chaos. The bible specifies that there was an Adam and an Eve - anything else is blasphemy. Our guide was disappointed that Evolution is taught in Turkish schools. Apart from Adam and Eve, a related claim was that because we all came from the same human roots, endorsed by God, we should all respect each other. When I said that I could see us all respecting each other even if we came from primates - our guide said that was blasphemous - at least, without a justification, anyway.

In contrast to the Christian Creationists, Muslim Creationism is an "Old World" approach. "Harun Yahya's" "An Atlas of Creation" acknowledges fossils are indeed the ancient remains of once living animals, but denies that one form of life

might "evolve" into another. Rather, they are placed there - and then removed - but often persist to this day in identical form. At the same time, they speak of using technology for improved communication - and look approvingly to the Internet. And they don't "evangelise" about Creationism like Christians - though they do promote it amongst themselves.

Then there was Jesus - endorsed as a prophet, but nothing more. There were some Christians in our group. I didn't mention that the Koran has it that someone else was crucified while Jesus snuck off somewhere; neither did our guide ... Verse 4:157 - "They denied the truth and uttered a monstrous falsehood against Mary. They declared: 'We have put to death the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the apostle of Allah.' They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did."

The Auburn Mosque has some connections to both the local Turkish community, and also the Turkish government - so much for the separation of Church and State we've all heard of. But, having said that, the Turkish Government is also relatively progressive - it has good relations with Israel, for example. Comparisons between raw meat, cats and women have been made by Taj dim Al-hilali, from the Lakemba Mosque. To be sure, calling him "Australia's senior Muslim cleric" seems misleading - a better description would be "A prominent Australian Muslim cleric". Apparently, the original title was claimed, not granted, and at the time of the controversy Ali Roude of the Islamic Council of NSW distanced himself from those comments, and the Lakemba

Mosque's council acted to censor and control his sermons .

There would seem to be some diversity in both global and Australian Islam - and it also seems equally unfair to deem that one Cleric's provocative statements hold for all Australian Moslems. In all Mosques the parishioners face Mecca, because that unifies them as Muslims, in spite of their other differences. That's not unique. The Franciscans and Jesuits are quite progressive Catholic religious orders, in contrast to the conservative Dominicans. However, they all somehow acknowledge the Pope as their leader and this brings them together.

Still, I did get the impression of Islam being a bit more "democratic" than Christianity - everyone can think and learn and develop. In Christianity, there seems to be a greater divide between priests and parishioners. And the hierarchy is less limiting - any Imam can give his opinion on matters - position is determined organically. Our guide said you should take care to distinguish when someone was giving their own viewpoint as compared to really speaking on behalf of the faith. Having said this, Moslems frequently operate in religious states, and while there's fluidity in Islam, the Government could be oppressive. And, there's the potential for the dark side of "community" to emerge - judgement, "in" groups and "out" groups, power struggles, emergent hierarchies and implicit limits on the range of thinking. Then there was "The Satanic Verses" by Salman Rushdie - our guide seemed to think this sort of blasphemous material was bad, and there were limits to the freedom of speech. Certainly, you cannot yell Fire! in a

crowded theatre but the thread from here to an obligation not to cause offence to a religion was less clear. Our guide did at least say that its author would be judged when he died, and that the Fatwah is only a non binding opinion of one Cleric.

I've had the chance to read an introduction to Islam, with some interesting divergences from Christian views. While an abortion can take place at any stage if the mother's health is at risk, late term abortions are otherwise prohibited. But a minority of Muslim scholars say that abortions are allowed for foetuses that are less than 120 days old, when the human spirit enters the foetus. This has some echoes of the "quickening" in the Christian tradition, where the spirit enters the foetus when it first kicks. This time has been advanced to the moment of conception - seemingly, to prohibit abortion. Suicide and Voluntary Euthanasia are considered sins, but if a person is brain dead a majority of scholars agree with removing life support.

Those behind Islam claim that women are treated equally. Historically, Islam was criticised by Christians for giving too many rights to women, and Muslims claim the rights granted to women were an improvement on the then status quo. It's certainly possible that the rights granted were an improvement on both the status quo and those in the Christian tradition at the time, but are still low by today's standards. Further, even if - for the sake of argument - both men and women are stoned for adultery equally - well, the problem is that stoning is condoned in the first place. There's the claim that female genital mutilation and honour killings are a part of cultural practices and are not in fact endorsed by the Koran, though they

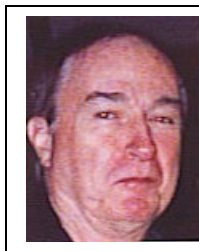
may be mentioned in other books associated with Mohammed. But it seems we hear these things being justified in religious terms. And there's some murky theological distinctions which are difficult to track.

What's Islam, really? What someone in authority says it is? Or what its believers think it is? Regardless, it does seem the penalty for adultery is stoning, and apparently this is an equal penalty for men and women - though stories persist about men and women being penalised unequally. But, at the same time, we must recognise that few nominally Muslim countries endorse such penalties. Indonesian Islam, for example, is relatively moderate. Certainly, Arab nations get more attention, partly because more extreme things happen there, and it is a more tense part of the world, but also because that's where Islam originated historically. And it is not clear which is the bigger threat - Islam, Christianity or numerous cults like Scientology. For all the fuss over Muslim schools, there's many more Christian schools which have been abusing the separation between church and state for a lot longer. And Christians have made serious inroads into our system of Government. Regardless, Islam is worth understanding.

HUMANIST CELEBRANT NETWORK

Charles Foley (Co-ordinator HCN)

The Humanist Society of NSW has been very supportive over the years of our own national Celebrant Association, the Humanist Celebrant Network (HCN). It continues in its



support for the HCN, and the overwhelming majority of Celebrants in the HCN are NSW Humanists.

The Attorney General's Department recently sent a letter to our HCN Association, along with the other 18 Marriage Celebrant Associations, inviting us to send a representative to a meeting in Canberra organised by (and with the venue funded by) the AG to be held on 16 October 2008.

Its purpose is to meet the new AGs requirements that there only be one celebrant association agreed "peak body". The AG wants one "peak body" to speak for all Marriage Celebrants to the AG and to whom the AG strongly prefers to specifically communicate. The letter from the Marriage Celebrant Registrar, Ms Nance, states: "His (the AGs) support for a more unified, collective representation of marriage celebrants has been made clear both to the department and to marriage celebrant representatives who have met with him." it is further stated: "The lack of unified representation by marriage celebrants has been of ongoing concern to government for many years."

The letter asserts: "It is not the role of the Attorney-General to promote the image of marriage Celebrancy or Celebrancy generally - that is the role of a professional peak body." The invitational letter says: "Each association is invited to send one representative to the meeting with the authority to speak on behalf of their association." As co-ordinator of the HCN, Charles Foley will attend since he first proposed a Celebrant contact organization body over two years ago to the AGs Department.

The Registrar of Celebrants says she will "discuss the department's perspectives" flowing from the AGs comments in the following half an hour. At all other times the AG and the AGs reps will not be in attendance at the venue allowing for discussion amongst the attendees.

This has set off other Celebrant associations to pre-lobby for what they think should happen. The President of the National Council of Celebrant Assoc of Australia has emailed all associations to encourage membership in the National Council as the proposed and ready made "peak body" organisation. Another President of a Victorian Celebrant Association has suggested "That membership be restricted to celebrant associations/federations with a minimum membership of 20 marriage celebrant members." And a Queensland Association has indicated that they will propose that membership in a "Peak Body" be limited to Celebrant Associations with 50 or more Marriage Celebrants.

This poses a challenge to our Humanist Celebrant Network, as nationwide we are a smaller organization than many of the major Celebrant Associations who don't have any Humanist ideology restriction on membership, have paying members and have many hundreds of members nationwide, rather than mainly in one state.

I note that there has been over 2000 new celebrants appointed as at 1 Sept 2008 and many of those have their email addresses listed on the AGs Registry of Celebrants on the Internet. I have emailed other Humanist state organisations for the

names and details of any existing Humanist Celebrants outside NSW who may be eligible Humanist minded Celebrants. To date there has been one response from Zelda in Queensland, who responded that there is no Humanist Celebrants in Queensland that she is aware of and certainly that none are members of the QLD Humanist Society. One of our HCN Queensland based Humanist Celebrants has indicated that she will join the Queensland Humanists.

So if any Humanists know of any new or practicing Humanist Celebrants anywhere in Australia who would like to part of our Humanist Celebrant Network, whether just ordinary Civil Celebrants or indeed appointed as Commonwealth Marriage Celebrants please let us know.

One of our new Humanist Marriage Celebrant Members has generously created a simple website at www.humanistcelebrant.org <<http://www.humanistcelebrant.org>>

which is still in the early construction phase. Suggestions for improvement are welcome.

A check of the internet under "Humanist Celebrants" will show that we Humanists in Australia who were leaders in this field are now far behind New Zealand, the USA, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, etc.

Ann Young, one of our Civil Celebrant HCN members, has reminded us that the Lionel Murphy connection should be spelled out as part of our proud history. She has written: 'The Humanist Society is

the organisation that was set up in the early 1960s to gain the same rights for people who do not accept the artifice of non-human authority as the rights that are enjoyed by people who do believe in it. The right to become legally married away from a church or registry office was one such right.

When the Australian Labor Party was elected to government in 1972 under Prime-minister Whitlam, Lionel Murphy became the Attorney General. As a member of the Humanist Society, Lionel immediately began to implement the ethical reforms sort by Humanists. Before legislation was introduced to make civil marriage possible, he alerted the NSW Humanist Society to prepare to nominate celebrants forthwith. This we did and continued to do.” Whilst it is shocking to me, as a former USA Humanist Celebrant “Clergy Equivalent”, to see how little support there is in Australia amongst Humanists for our own distinct brand of Celebrancy, it is also heartening to realize that the NSW Humanists have steadfastly seen the importance of continuing Lionel Murphy’s legacy.

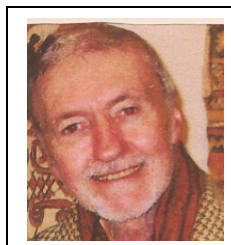
Charles Foley
Humanist Chaplain Canberra Hospital
President of the Humanist Celebrant Network
CharlesRfoley@optusnet.com.au

WORDS AND IDEAS

David Tribe

[continued from previous edition]

**MEDIAEVAL
RATIONALISM**
(C13-14) Platonism
and Neoplatonism



grew increasingly mystical, feeding into and being fed by both paganism and Christianity. Until the 13th century these isms remained the ancient philosophy preferred by Christian theologians. In that century St Thomas Aquinas discovered Aristotelianism, which had virtually disappeared in the Christian Ages of Faith but been kept alive by Arab philosophers like Averroes.

Aristotle was much more down-to-earth than his master Plato, whose transcendent *Forms* he rejected. Instead, he postulated immanent (natural) forms which, like Plato’s, were eternal, unchanging and immaterial. Aristotle was also a speculative physicist, meteorologist and astronomer and both a speculative and an experimental biologist. But in religious and freethought circles he’s probably best known for his metaphysics and logic where he believed in both a priori (deductive) and a posteriori (inductive) calculations. One is the tool of rationalism, passing from a general to particulars; the other of empiricism, passing from particulars to a general. He also believed in potentiality (essence), which was always mixed with actuality (existence).

Aquinas took on board Aristotle’s rationalism and logic, his view of God as unmoved prime mover, and his concept of “final” causes (universal purpose); but added a belief, derived from Plato and the Church Fathers, in individual immortal souls. Whereas Christians had previously relied solely on Revelation through the Scriptures and visitations by heavenly beings to establish the existence of God and formulate dogmatic theology, Aquinas said the same conclusion could be reached through natural theology and the exercise of reason. His *Summa theologiae* (1266-73) gives five “proofs” of the existence of God: his role as (1) unmoved mover, (2) uncaused cause (First Cause), (3) prime necessary being on which creation is contingent (ontological argument), (4)

absolute perfection and (5) origin of universal purpose or final cause (teleological or Design argument).

Slightly modified down the centuries, Aquinas's teaching, called Thomism, has persisted as such in Catholic circles to today, and largely exists unacknowledged in Protestantism. Most popular among the Catholic laity is the second proof and among Catholic theologians the third. Protestants prefer the fifth. The largely neglected fourth proof sees God as combining all the perfections that exist and postulates existence as a necessary perfection.

LIBERIAN REFUGEES

Dick Clifford

News from Liberia. Those of you who read my Buduburam Report (26th April) will remember that the Liberian refugees in Buduburam, Ghana, would be repatriated to Liberia from 1st of June under poor circumstances. This process is well underway. Slabe Sennay, President of The Center for Youth Empowerment reports that they have been able to lease a 10 room concrete building at Gardnersville, Liberia thanks to the generosity of a visiting teacher from Germany. Many legal documents and certificates have been signed and the new school is due to open on the 29th September. Enrolments are already taking place, Students are not only from Ghana but also from Guinea, Ivory coast and Sierra Leone. The main problem is to find sufficient money to pay the teachers Stipend. I shall be sending a contribution in approx. 3 weeks time. Unfortunately last April my appeal only brought 3 donations instead of the 10 I usually get. So if you have a little spare cash please make out a cheque to "Liberia Refugee Scholarship Fund" and post to R Clifford,



120 Goodman Rd, Elizabeth South, SA 5112 Visiting the Liberian Ambassador in London.

This is a funny story which is all quite true. I decided that I should send a letter to the Liberian Minister of Education praising Slabe Sennay and saying why he deserved full support. But I needed an address and was not satisfied with what I saw in the web page. So I decided to visit the Liberian Ambassador in Fitzroy Square, London and got there on a Friday in June. Pressed the front bell and a voice announced "we're closed" I attempted to explain but the answer was still "we're closed!" so I gave up. The following Thursday I went to Windsor Castle and realising that Fitzroy Square was on the way I stopped off and again and pressed the bell. The voice yabbered away but I could not hear a word due to the building machinery down the street. I told the voice that I could not hear and I thought I got a reply which said they were coming to let me in. But nothing happened. I waited and pressed the bell again. Immediately the door opened and a possible Liberian asked me if someone was expecting me, I said I thought so and he directed me to stand at the foot of the stairs and wait. I did that and turned round to speak to him but he had left by the front door.

I proceeded to knock on the 2 doors on the ground floor. No reply. I was beginning to realise that I was inside the embassy and nobody knew I was there! Up to the first floor, same result and the doors were locked. Up to the top floor where there was a door that was ajar. I knocked again and a voice said "come in" and it was the Liberian Ambassador! I presented my annual report and explained why I was visiting him. He provided the address and explained the best way of addressing the letter. He showed me out to make sure I negotiated the stairs, I said, "yes my 83 year old bones have to be careful on stairs" What! he says, I had no idea you were 83

years old! tell me, What is your Secret?!! I told him that you had to pick the right parents, mine had lived to 93 and 97 years respectively.

At the beginning of the interview he was a bit suspicious but we parted good friends. Hope you enjoyed the story, have you got your cheque book out?

All the best from Dick Clifford [HSSA]

MEMBER NEWS

Angela Drury

A warm **welcome to our new members** Frances Smith, Galena Stankevich, Kenneth Cratchley and David McBryde.



Thankyou for **generous donations** to members Barbara Beiboer, Tryntje Bostick, Ralph Secombe, Lorraine Crane, John Wilkes, Joyce Edmonds, F. Diehl, Charles Murray, Dierk & Rosemary von Behrens, Ian Warwick, David & Elva Blair, Barbara Leach, Kathleen Styles, Lola Archer, Alice Volans and Geoff Stowell.

Reminder to all that **membership renewals** for 2008/09 were due in July, and that many members still need to send in their renewals.

VALE: BERN GANDY DIED JULY 2008 (96yrs old) was an active member of HumSocNSW School of Philosophy during 1970s which was chaired by the late Fred Esch. Our sympathy which we pass on through his son Quinton to Bern's family and friends.

GORDON SYRON NEEDS OUR HELP

Please come to the October HuVAT to see Gordon's exhibition; some would look good in your home!



The Aboriginal Ballerina