

Humanist Viewpoints

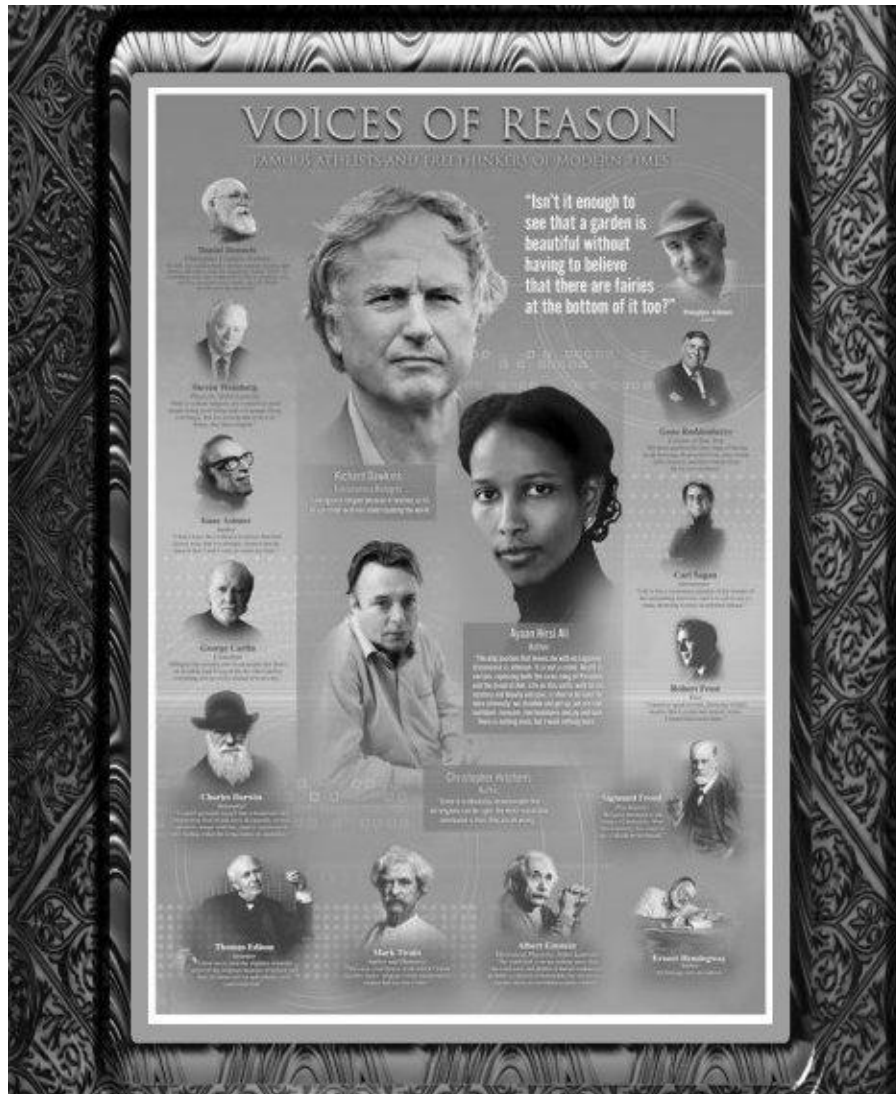


NEWSLETTER OF THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW INC.

Volume 48

Number 4

Oct/Nov/Dec 09



Famous Atheists and Freethinkers. See page 2 for details

HuVAT (Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talk) 4pm 2nd Sunday each month

4pm October 11th – Affie Adagio: Drug and Alcohol Debate

4pm November 8th – Waratah Rosemary Gillespie: Human Rights Bill

2pm Dec 13th End of Year Party - special entertainment by Ru-Bella



(Party food provided but BYO drink)

Opportunity for Humanists to socialise together over refreshments

HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW WEBSITE

<http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/>

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE BY THE 1ST OF JULY EVERY YEAR as follows:

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Please send to Humanist Society of NSW Inc., 10 Shepherd Street, Chippendale NSW 2008

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EDITORS COMMENTS

Affie Adagio

Our **2009 AGM** was well attended and the new committee consists of John August (President), David Duffy and Waratah Rosemarie Gillespie (Vice Presidents), Victor Bien (Treasurer), Affie Adagio (Hon Sec/Editor) and Angela Drury (Assist. Sec). Ordinary committee members: Dylon Anderson, Ken Cratchley, Tony D'Angiolillo, Hugh Drewitz, Gillian Ellis, Fred Flatow, Robin Hall, Mark Pavic, Andrew Wilson, and John Wright.



UNITED NATIONS DAY 2009-09-14 Friday 23rd October

The **Cenotaph** and wreath laying ceremony honouring Australia's contribution to UN Peace-keeping over 62 years will be held in Martin Place 10.45-11.45a.m. **Guest of Honour is Major-General Tim Ford AO** (Retd) Chairman of the Australian Peace-keeping Memorial Committee and former Chief Military Advisor at the UN New York.

The annual **UN Day Luncheon** in NSW Parliament House Strangers Dining Room 12.30 for 1.00p.m. The keynote address will be delivered by the eminent jurist the **Hon Robert Ellicott QC**, a former Attorney General, Judge of the Federal Court and longest serving board member of the Wayside Chapel. He will speak on Australia's future at the UN.

Members of the **Consular Corps** will be present at both events, and some will be laying wreaths at the Cenotaph.

The **cost of the luncheon is \$79** for members and their guests.

Your presence at both or either of the events would be sincerely appreciated.

RSVP: 16 October 2009

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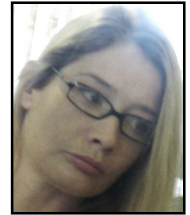
Emma Hannah is now our new Co Editor and my work as Editor is much easier. I look forward to working with Emma who is a HumSocNSW member and came to us from being the Secretary on the Bougainville Seminar Committee. Emma is a student of psychology.

GREETINGS

Emma Hannah

On the cover of Viewpoints, you will see the poster of Famous Atheists and Freethinkers. Some of my favorite Agnostics are displayed here. This poster is Item Size: 24 x 36 in and is US\$22 (shipping is extra). It can be ordered from:

<http://www.postercartel.com/en/1700-0245.aspx?o=2450-0245>



I look forward to assisting Affie with Viewpoints in the future, and wish to extend a warm "hi" to all.

HELP WITH HUMANIST HISTORY

Ann Young

I am trying to develop one (or more) atheist activity to draw attention from the public. Charles Darwin Day on 12th February was a good idea but it clashes with Valentine's Day and doesn't seem to work.

What other day deserves our celebration? Are there any dates in Australian history that we should celebrate?

I would also like to develop an atheist map. What places in Australia could I put on it?

My ideas are not enough.

NEIGHBOURS

Joan Vaughan-Taylor

They asked "who is thy neighbour?" He replied
"Not one who passed by on the other side
But he who showed humanity and stayed
To give the traveller comfort and first aid."

Today we count as neighbours those who live
Next door or near, some of whom will give
Help in trouble, while some others might
Be indifferent or want to fight.

Our world's made smaller by technologies
So neighboured nations fight for boundaries.
Those strangers who lived in a foreign land
Are now next door and living close at hand.

Sometimes solutions seem beyond our reach
While hostile faiths intensify the breach
But Pharisees of war will always fail
If ways of the Samaritan prevail.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

John August

My article in the previous issue of Humanist Viewpoints on Gordon and Elaine Syron originally appeared on the Home Page Daily website www.homepagedaily.com



We held our AGM recently, and elected a new committee, and I look forward to progressing Humanist business with the committee.

My talk from a previous Humanist Afternoon Talk (HuVAT) on the Hebrew Bible appears in this issue. It was during the preparation of that talk that I stopped to reflect: not all religions emphasise an afterlife. I know that's true of Judaism and also Buddhism - and probably some other religions as well.

Dorothy Rowe, one author and commentator on these issues, would have you believe that fear of death is the only thing driving people towards religion. Well, maybe it drives some people towards some religions, but it's not the only thing going on - it is in fact a somewhat biased view of what religion is about. And, for some Christians I know, they're "warm with the holy spirit" - not that I think there is a "holy spirit" of course, but I do think that the psychology behind some people's Christianity is only incidentally about the fear of death.

It's worth being aware of the diversity of what religion is, and what drives it; I think that many superficial approaches which focus on a "fear of death" miss quite a lot.

THE HEBREW BIBLE – CONTRASTING COMMENTARIES

John August

I've found a frustratingly larger number of atheist biblical commentaries, which emphasise its contradictions, intolerance and injustice, but don't really try to understand it.

You can emphasise its scientific inaccuracies - its cosmology, its ignorance of the workings of the solar system, its absence of information about disease, health and medicine - what God would tell you if he knew about the world and wanted to tell you about it.

Certainly, at the other end, anyone who claims that some statement about the world is valid because the bible endorses it is talking nonsense.

Still, the bible can help us understand how civilisations struggled to develop rules they could live by and organise themselves - or even, rules by which the elite could claim a disproportionate share of resources and lord it over others. Parts of the bible rail against the selfishness and inhumanity the writers see around them - and indeed, the idea that some might make the appearances of worship but hide a selfish character.

Contradictions and factuality

The different stories of the Bible capture particular and contrasting world views. It is contradictory partly because it encompasses different periods of history, each making their own particular emphasis.

Further, while the Bible is sometimes factually erroneous, it can still contain valid understandings of human nature and worthwhile life principles. Some observations from thousands of years ago can be just as valid today, because human nature does not change much - they are not necessarily tied to accurate knowledge of cosmology, disease or other details of the physical world around us.

Equally, our world is also different, and we need to give a nod to the institutions, technologies and ways of thinking which have developed in the last few thousand years. But some perspectives are timeless, and we can certainly learn from the Hebrew Bible.

Sources and motivation

In developing this talk, I've listened to lectures by Christine Hayes, Professor of Religious Studies in Classical Judaica at Yale University. I've also taken on board the videos of "The Bible Unearthed" by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman. I'll also be adding my own slant, too.

The Hebrew bible is not the only historical text which can be of interest; I'm sure we can learn things from other texts. However, the difference with the Hebrew bible is that we can see a continuity to this day, and so there's extra interest.

Historicity and distortions

Much of the Bible conflicts with archaeology. At the same time, we can also feel confident of the historicity of some elements. But even where the Bible conflicts with archaeology, we can be sure that somebody wrote that narrative with a purpose, and I think it is interesting to speculate on what that purpose might be. It may be a work of fiction in parts, but so too is Shakespeare's play Hamlet. Just because something is factually incorrect does not mean it lacks worthwhile content.

Survival of Israelite Culture, and its neighbours

Israelite culture has survived intact for thousands of years, unlike many others. Why? Maybe luck. But, it is

also possible their ideas made them more resilient. When they were invaded, rather than thinking their own God had been overwhelmed their invader's Gods, they interpreted this as God's justice because they had violated the terms of the Covenant (contract) made with him. Civilisations and empires rise and fall, but this interpretation meant they could maintain their religion even through an inevitable fall.

Ancient Israel always lived in the shadow of its greater neighbours, in particular Egypt. While Egypt is mentioned numerous times in the bible, in all Egyptian records there seems just one mention of something corresponding to Israel.

But, ancient Israel was surrounded on all sides by greater nations during its history. Egypt to the South, Assyria and Babylon to the North. For some time it was a vassal state to Assyria, but things got worse when it was invaded by the Babylonians and some were sent into exile.

Finally, they were invaded by the rather more enlightened Persians, who let them worship their own Gods and further endorsed their own local laws under their overall rule.

Ancient Israel was one part of what we call the ancient near east, including the Nile on the west and the Tigris and Euphrates on the West, and what we call Mesopotamia. They were surrounded by others, of varying power : Sumerians, Akkadians, Hittites, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Canaanites (from which they emerged) and Hurrians.

Competing Religious Ideas, the meta-devine realm, monotheism vs. polytheism

Let's consider the contrast of ideas about creation and theology - histories of creation of the Gods.

Other religions were polytheistic, with many different Gods. We can have a religion which has many Gods incorporated, but one central God. Finally, we have monotheism. However, Israelite monotheism is not just a development from polytheism. One difference is the "meta-devine Realm". The Gods of other religions were subservient to the rules of the universe, and often they "came" from somewhere, having to be created themselves. Once they were in circulation, they had to obey these rules. They did not have complete freedom to do as they pleased - they would have to form alliances amongst the various Gods in order to achieve some goal.

However, the God of the Israelite religion was not subservient to the meta-devine realm. He did not follow rules, he made them. When he created the world, he spoke and it came into being. In other religions, the world was created through some mixing of sexual elements.

We see the vestiges of this change in theological debates over the power of God, including the contemporary Christian God. The Gods of the other religions were not all powerful, but this God is. It means we get into tension over how the constraints of logic - perhaps the vestiges of a meta-devine realm - and the power of God. We have a well known question: "Can God create a rock which is too heavy for him to lift?". These tensions arise from God being all powerful and beyond the meta-devine realm. Not all religions have this element - but we see that the Israelite religion was one which developed this principle.

Divergent Creation Stories

There's also creation itself. In the Mesopotamian story involving Marduk and others, creation is the result of a mixing of sexual elements, and further conflict ensues before the creation of the earth. Other narratives of the time have the same elements, but in the Hebrew Bible, God puts the world into existence through his word, through his will, with no associated conflict. Some suspect that this was a deliberate dramatic contrast to the other religions.

A further subtlety is that these stories do not open with "in the beginning". The opening is "When Upon High", perhaps the opening of the bible is best translated as this, not emphasising the in the beginning so much as when God got around to paying attention to some particular activity.

Polytheism / Monotheism

The bible contains a tension between polytheism and monotheism, while being ostensibly monotheistic, it draws from originally polytheistic works. We also see it in the two hebrew words used for God - Elohim and Yahweh. Elohim was originally a word speaking of Gods, but it is used in the singular, a rather strange construction. Incidentally, these two words are translated separately as the words "LORD" and "GOD" in the St. James old Testament translation, so while it may have seem arbitrary, there was an original pattern to it.

Further, in Genesis, when Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden, Cherubin are set up to keep humans out of Eden. But what are Cherubin ? Further, there is a line where entities from heaven descend and breed with Humans:

Genesis 6:4 There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

The bible contains a tension over whether there are any other Gods. While God is a jealous God, claiming there

are no other Gods, the reality of those other Gods is sometimes acknowledged. There is a tension between not worshipping other Gods because they don't exist but you don't want your people distracted - by nonsense or superstition as it were; or not worshipping other Gods because they do exist but you don't like them. And then there's the reality of other Gods you would probably never want to worship anyway:

Exodus 12:12 And against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgement.

Exodus 23:24 Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images.

For while you might worship false images that have no Gods behind them, the idea you might "serve" a God suggests the reality of that God.

You can acknowledge the Gods of other cultures but worship your own. This is the case of most of the passages of the bible. When the possibility of other Gods is mentioned, there's a hostility towards them.

However, speaking of local Gods you could have your local pantheon which you worship, while there's one more prominent God. Or it could be a collection of Gods of roughly equal prominence. For, there are passages in the bible suggest a local pantheon, not a single God :

Genesis 1:26 And God said, let us make man in our image.

Genesis 3:22 And the Lord God said, Behold, then man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.

Genesis 11:7 Let us go down, and there confound their language.

Psalms 82:1 God standeth in the congregation of the mighty, he judgeth among the gods.

Along with the use of the word "Elohim", normally speaking of Gods in the plural, this suggests the Hebrew Bible originally derived from a polytheistic faith, not only acknowledging the existence of Gods of other cultures, but also maintaining a local pantheon of Gods relevant to that particular culture.

We can wonder when exactly the pantheon was modified into a monotheistic faith. We might speculate around 1000 BCE, though perhaps as late as 700 BCE. It is interesting to compare this to the emergence of two monotheistic religions and cults - Pharaoh Akhnaten around 1300 BCE developed the monotheistic worship of his sun God, and Zoroastrianism emerged around 1000 BCE, positing just one good God, in struggle with an evil God. The shift to monotheism may have been a general trend. This time is in fact the start of the Iron Age; just as

Jared Diamond notes that a lot of things happened at the start of the Neolithic Age, we can see that a lot of things happened at the start of the Iron Age. In any case, ancient Judaism still had its own particular features.

Elements of the Bible can be labelled as "E" and "J", for Elohim and Yahweh, J being Y in the German pronunciation. And it does seem that J was associated with the Southern community of Judah, while the E section originated with the northern kingdom of Israel, while paradoxically the integration was performed by the southern community of Judah.

The array of Gods in the Bible

In fact, the array of Gods at the time is a confusing mix, and one I'm still struggling to make sense of. But, to the extent I've been able to make sense of it, it seems the goddess Asherah was originally associated with trees, groves of trees, and also pillars; the Bible speaks of attempts to destroy these representations, in particular when it talks of "Groves".

The Bull is a representation of several Gods - El the chief God and Baal, perhaps the son of El.

The "God of the Desert, God of the South", Yahweh, El, Baal and Gods of the North all seem to have coexisted, while the bible refers to a conflict, the Golden Calf of Moses, where the idol was ultimately destroyed and Yahweh triumphed.

[to be continued in next edition... Ed]

BOUGAINVILLE

Clive Porabou

To Humanist Society Of NSW.

Hello and greetings to you all. On behalf of Mekamui/Bougainville people who are against mining in their land to preserve their land for future generation, I wish to thank you for financial assistance in meeting my visa fee to come to Australia and speak on your afternoon view point on the 12th of July 2009. I enjoyed the few minutes talking and answering the questions and the food which was served after the talk.

Europeans have destroyed so much beauty around the world when they greed for money, only minority of Europeans like Humanist and others around the world value the nature and the rights of the traditional owners over making more money. On our side, there are minority of Bougainvilleans who value money more than their God's given birthright, the Land.



We fight an uphill battle against Companies [who are getting bigger and more powerful] Governments who are under the influence of those Companies [often they are corrupt].

I see my women Landowners as messengers trying to wake up our Society from the loss and injustice caused by large scale resource exploitation.

Once again thanks very much for your assistance and kindness. My warmest greetings to the President John August. In solidarity.

UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR SHINES A LIGHT ON THE RIGHTS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Waratah Rosemarie Gillespie

Professor James Anaya, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples who visited Australia in August, left his mark. The gentle Apache noted that Aboriginal communities “endured tremendous suffering at the hands of historical forces and entrenched racism.”



Racism is a dirty word; it casts a shadow across the face of Australia, real but rarely acknowledged. The hysterical reaction to the UN Rapporteur’s observations was predictable; many were shocked to see Australia’s soiled linen washed in public.

Contradictory moves by government give cause for surprise and confusion, for example:

1. making an apology to the Stolen Generations while denying compensation to the victims;
2. signing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples while continuing the Northern Territory Intervention (it discriminates against Aboriginal people on the basis of race and violates provisions of the Declaration and international human rights treaties to which Australia is a party).

The grief, hardship and suffering endured by Aboriginal people, who once walked proud and free in their own land, is immeasurable. Anaya’s visit brought a ray of hope.

“During my time in Australia” he said, “I have been impressed with demonstrations of strong and vibrant indigenous cultures and have been inspired by the strength, resilience and vision of indigenous communities

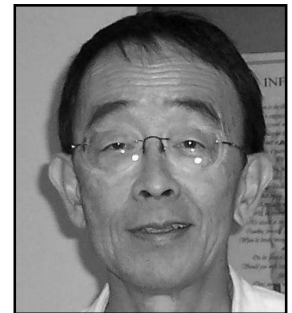
determined to move toward a better future...” He was deeply moved by a Yuendumu woman, awarded an Order of Australia for stamping out petrol sniffing in her community, now suffering under the discriminatory income management system imposed by the Intervention.

On Reconciliation, Anaya spoke of “a need to move deliberately to adopt genuine reconciliation measures, such as the proposed recognition of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a charter of rights to be included in the Constitution”.

THE CHRISTIAN CANON

Victor Bien

The Christian Church received its Bible from Greek-speaking Jews and found the majority of its early converts in the Hellenistic world. The Greek Bible of Alexandria thus became the official Bible of the Christian community, and the overwhelming number of quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament are derived from it. Whatever the origin of the Apocryphal books in the canon of Alexandria, these became part of the Christian Scriptures, but there seems to have been no unanimity as to their exact canonical status. The New Testament itself does not cite the Apocryphal books directly, but occasional traces of a knowledge of them are to be found. The Apostolic Fathers (late 1st-early 2nd centuries) show extensive familiarity with this literature, but a list of the Old Testament books by Melito, bishop of Sardis in Asia Minor (2nd century), does not include the additional writings of the Greek Bible, and Origen (c. 185-c. 254) explicitly describes the Old Testament canon as comprising only 22 books.



From the time of Origen on, the Church Fathers who were familiar with Hebrew differentiated, theoretically at least, the Apocryphal books from those of the Old Testament, though they used them freely. In the Syrian East, until the 7th century the Church had only the books of the Hebrew canon with the addition of Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sira (but without Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah). It also incorporated the Wisdom of Solomon, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, and

the additions to Daniel. The 6th-century manuscript of the Peshitta (Syriac version) known as Codex Ambrosianus also has III and IV Maccabees, II (sometimes IV) Esdras, and Josephus' Wars VII.

Early councils of the African Church held at Hippo (393) and Carthage (397, 419) affirmed the use of the Apocryphal books as Scripture. In the 4th century also, Athanasius, chief theologian of Christian orthodoxy, differentiated "canonical books" from both "those that are read" by Christians only and the "Apocryphal books" rejected alike by Jews and Christians. In the preparation of a standard Latin version, the biblical scholar Jerome (c. 347-419/420) separated "canonical books" from "ecclesiastical books" (i.e., the Apocryphal writings), which he regarded as good for spiritual edification but not authoritative Scripture. A contrary view of Augustine (354-430), one of the greatest Western theologians, prevailed, however, and the works remained in the Latin Vulgate version. The Decretum Gelasianum, a Latin document of uncertain authorship but recognized as reflecting the views of the Roman Church at the beginning of the 6th century, includes Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, and I and II Maccabees as biblical.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Apocryphal books were generally regarded as Holy Scripture in the Roman and Greek churches, although theoretical doubts were raised from time to time. Thus, in 1333 Nicholas of Lyra, a French Franciscan theologian, had discussed the differences between the Latin Vulgate and the "Hebrew truth." Christian-Jewish polemics, the increasing attention to Hebrew studies, and, finally, the Reformation kept the issue of the Christian canon alive. Protestants denied canonical status to all books not in the Hebrew Bible. The first modern vernacular Bible to segregate the disputed writings was a Dutch version by Jacob van Liesveldt (Antwerp, 1526). Luther's German edition of 1534 did the same thing and entitled them "Apocrypha" for the first time, noting that while they were not in equal esteem with sacred Scriptures they were edifying.

In response to Protestant views, the Roman Catholic church made its position clear at the Council of Trent (1546) when it dogmatically affirmed that the entire Latin Vulgate enjoyed equal canonical status. This doctrine was confirmed by the Vatican Council of 1870. In the Greek Church, the Synod of Jerusalem (1672) had expressly designated as canonical several Apocryphal works. In the

19th century, however, Russian Orthodox theologians agreed to exclude these works from the Holy Scriptures.

The history of the Old Testament canon in the English Church has generally reflected a more restrictive viewpoint. Even though the Wycliffite Bible (14th century) included the Apocrypha, its preface made it clear that it accepted Jerome's judgment. The translation made by the English bishop Miles Coverdale (1535) was the first English version to segregate these books, but it did place Baruch after Jeremiah. Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles of religion of the Church of England (1562) explicitly denied their value for the establishment of doctrine, although it admitted that they should be read for their didactic worth. The first Bible in English to exclude the Apocrypha was the Geneva Bible of 1599. The King James Version of 1611 placed it between the Old and New Testaments. In 1615 Archbishop George Abbot forbade the issuance of Bibles without the Apocrypha, but editions of the King James Version from 1630 on often omitted it from the bound copies. The Geneva Bible edition of 1640 was probably the first to be intentionally printed in England without the Apocrypha, followed in 1642 by the King James Version. In 1644 the Long Parliament actually forbade the public reading of these books, and three years later the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians decreed them to be no part of the canon. The British and Foreign Bible Society in 1827 resolved never to print or circulate copies containing the Apocrypha. Most English Protestant Bibles in the 20th century have omitted the disputed books or have them as a separate volume, except in library editions, in which they are included with the Old and New Testaments.

OUT WITH THE COAL, IN WITH THE FLUE

John Perkins

September 11, 2008

POLICYMAKERS who advocate an emissions trading scheme as the solution to global warming, but who overlook the role of Australia's coal exports, are suffering from delusion. Practically every atom of carbon in our exports of coal will soon become a molecule of atmospheric carbon dioxide. The Garnaut report provides no recognition of this. Our coal exports are the elephant in the room that we pretend does not exist.

Coal is the most carbon-intensive fuel. Most of Australia's coal is exported. Australia has the largest reserves of coal available for export and is by far the world's largest exporter of coal. Australia supplies almost 40% of globally traded coal and coal mainly consists of carbon. These exports are Australia's largest carbon emission, larger than all other atmospheric carbon emissions combined.

Australia's annual gaseous emissions of carbon dioxide amount to about 590 million tonnes. Our exports of coal are about 250 million tonnes.

Almost all of that coal will later be turned into carbon dioxide, with a mass of about 740 million tonnes. So, more carbon already leaves Australia in ships than is discharged into the atmosphere. Despite the pretence of reducing atmospheric emissions, current investments will double our coal export capacity within a few years.

When this happens, Australia's contribution to global warming as a result of our coal exports will dwarf all other domestic sources of emission. The proposed emissions trading scheme is thus little more than elaborate facade that appears to do something but avoids tackling Australia's global responsibility regarding coal. Due to this coal delusion, whatever carbon emissions any domestic scheme can possibly save will be insignificant compared with the projected increase in Australia's carbon emissions, in the form of coal.

The recent Garnaut report and the Government's green paper on carbon pollution not only fail to tackle this issue but are seemingly at lengths to indicate that Australia's coal exports will be protected from any impact of a carbon price as a result of the trading scheme. Energy intensive, trade-exposed industries are to be quarantined from emission mitigation requirements due to what is called "carbon leakage". This is the contention that emissions saved in Australia may "leak" overseas. No "leaks" in coal export ships are contemplated.

It is true that imposing costs on Australian industry that simply drive polluting industries elsewhere will have no net effect on global carbon emissions. But coal exporters such as Australia are in short supply and will remain so. This is a rather significant fact to overlook. How is it that the coal delusion arises? For the culprits in mass delusion, round up the usual suspects — fear, wishful thinking, and blind faith due to adherence to cultural myth and ideology.

The fear is that any impact on the coal export industry will damage the economy. This fear is unwarranted, because even if export volumes are halved and prices double, there is no loss of revenue. Prices have doubled in the past year, yet volumes have increased. If we fear the consequences of global warming, then we need to overcome our fear of higher export prices and mining less coal. This fear leads to blindness to the opportunities that higher coal prices may provide.

It is wishful thinking to imagine that taking actions that are limited in scope and geography will somehow solve a global problem. It is wishful thinking to imagine that carbon sequestration can be anything other than a belated and partial solution. It is wishful thinking to imagine that

alternative energy production will be deployed in the required quantities, unless there is a global price signal to motivate it.

The idea that Australia cannot influence world markets derives from faith in what economists call the "small-country" assumption. Australia is deemed to be a small player and therefore a price-taker. Exporting companies are loath to suggest otherwise. So the carbon solutions are focused on domestic issues rather than global ones.

In the global coal trade, the small-country assumption is patently false. Australia is neither small in market share, nor market power. Australian coal suppliers secured price increases of more than 100% this year. The small-country assumption is small-minded. This has led to blind faith in an emissions market as the only feasible solution.

In the Garnaut review, it is argued that a carbon trading scheme is preferable to a carbon tax as this will limit emissions directly. But alternative energy production will only be economic if the carbon price is high enough. With a trading scheme, the price is highly uncertain.

In the last budget, the Government imposed a resource rent tax on LPG condensate exports. This is a form of carbon tax. There is no such tax on coal. There should be. Most of the world's traded coal is supplied by a handful of countries. Australia can lead the way by co-ordinating with these countries and imposing a tax on coal exports. This will provide revenue for a global abatement fund and a price signal to the world that coal is a polluting resource and that alternatives are needed.

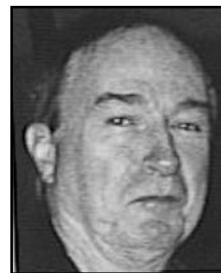
This would achieve more than trading schemes ever will. It will tackle our global warming responsibilities by using our ability to influence the global coal market. Only Australia can do this. But first we need to overcome the coal delusion.

Dr John Perkins is a Melbourne freethinker and economist at the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research.

GREENS TO INTRODUCE CIVIL CEREMONIES LEGISLATION THIS WEEK

Charles Foley (HCN)

Shane Rattenbury MLA, ACT Greens Attorney General spokesperson will this week introduce legislation to establish the right for same sex couples to have a legally recognised ceremony under the ACT's civil union legislation.



"This legislation is an important

step in ensuring equality and respect for same sex couples in the ACT." said Mr Rattenbury.

"This legislation will mean that same sex couples, if they wish, can stand before family and friends and make their declaration of love for one another, just as any other couple can."

The Bill will amend the Civil Partnerships Act 2008 to establish the right for a couple, regardless of their sex, to enter into a civil partnership through a legally recognised ceremony. Currently a couple can enter into a civil partnership only by making an application to the Registrar-General. This option will remain, and the new Bill will add- the option of a ceremony.

The Bill will also allow for members of the public to apply to be Civil Partnership Notaries. Notaries will attend the ceremonies and witness the declaration which forms the civil partnership.

"Despite media reporting and the political interpretations, our Bill would not create same sex marriage, and advocates for same sex marriage will still campaign at a federal level to make that happen."

"Whilst the threat of Federal veto hangs over this legislation, we must not allow that to get in the way of doing what is right for the people of the ACT." Mr Rattenbury said."

Same-sex marriage is currently legal in seven countries, which include the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, South Africa, Canada, Norway, and Sweden.

Same Sex Marriage Recognized, but not performed United States (DC, NY), Israel, Aruba (Dutch only), Netherlands Antilles (Dutch only).

Six US states also recognize/perform same-sex marriage, those being Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont (effective September 1), Maine (effective September 14), and New Hampshire (effective January 1, 2010).

Civil unions or civil partnerships are only performed/recognised in:

- New Zealand
- ACT in Australia
- UK
- US state of New Jersey.

Both Ireland and the Isle of Jersey is proposing to pass civil partnerships on the UK model.

Many countries DO NOT have civil unions, they have "registered partnerships" or "domestic partnerships" instead. These provide "proof" of a de facto/domestic relationship for ALL couples both opposite-gender and same-gender couples. Examples are of :

- TAS and VIC of Australia
- 127 cities/counties of the US
- Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Greenland (an independent country from 1 June 2009) [Norway and Sweden repealed their RP laws and FULLY replaced them with one Marriage Code 2009]
- France, Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary (eff. 1 July 2009)
- California, Oregon and Washington (State) on the west coast of USA
- Ecuador in South America and cities in Argentina and Brazil (not federal)

Countries that currently have "unregistered cohabitation" ("De Facto"):

- Australia (all levels of Government)
- Uruguay
- Columbia
- Portugal

CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Daily Messenger III

Mr Rattenbury, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10:34): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise this morning to introduce a bill which has already received Significant commentary. Personally I find some of that discussion somewhat confounding, but I will return to that later.

This is a bill to introduce legally recognised ceremonies into the Civil Partnerships Act 2008. A legally recognised ceremony will ensure that appropriate weight is given to the public act of entering into a civil partnership.

This bill is about giving full legal weight to a public declaration of love and shared commitment. This bill is about fully legitimising that declaration and giving it the legal weight it deserves. Couples entering into civil partnerships are making one of life's biggest commitments. The Greens believe that entry into a civil partnership deserves more than a simple registry process involving making an application on the papers. A legally recognised ceremony should be an option for couples, should they choose to have such a ceremony. Registry



processes are appropriate for car registrations, property dealings and the like. That is, registry processes suit everyday, routine transactions just fine.

What do not fit the registry process in all situations are those once-in-a-lifetime events that shape our entire future and the future of those around us. Events such as taking up citizenship of a new country or forming a legally binding partnership with the person you love deserve the option of being more than a registry process decided on the papers. For some couples a registry process will be the path they wish to take, and it is important to recognise their right to choose that path. But we should also give couples the option to choose a public ceremony to solemnise their relationship.

This bill recognises that entry into a civil partnership is one of those rare life-changing moments that deserve the option of being marked publicly. The current operation of the legislation means that a ceremony does not have legal effect. Rather, it is the decision of the registrar-general back in the office that marks the commencement of the partnership.

Civil partnerships deserve more and this bill delivers that in the form of legally recognised ceremonies.

This sentiment was set out well by the campaign coordinator of Equal Love Canberra in an open letter to the Chief Minister. In the letter the campaign coordinator said: "We believe that loving relationships deserve support and equal recognition, regardless of the gender of the partners. Love and commitment deserves to be celebrated, for the good of society."

In that sense, this bill is about what has meaning in our society and more exactly how we make meaning. The Greens believe it is right and proper that the most significant and meaningful moments in a lifetime be endowed with a social reality. By that I mean that the opportunity for those moments to be officiated publicly is incredibly important.

Without giving couples the extra option of having a ceremony, and legally recognising that ceremony, the law does not entirely recognise civil partnerships. It creates the potential for them to be regarded as something to be tolerated but not celebrated. It sets them up as something to be dealt with on the papers but not something that people should have an option of publicly engaging in. That is what this bill does. It fully recognises civil partnerships as deserving to be part of our society.

There are of course defined human rights contained in the Human Rights Act 2004 that this bill supports. At section 8, the act provides that "Everyone has the right to recognition as a person before the law" and also that

"Everyone has the right to enjoy his or her human rights without distinction or discrimination of any kind".

Recognising the rights of all couples to enter into a binding relationship publicly is the right thing to do. It is about ensuring equality and respect. In the words of section 8, it is about ensuring that all couples, regardless of their sexual preference, enjoy the same rights, free from discrimination.

One important thing to clarify at this stage is the role of ceremonies under the existing legislation. I do this for the avoidance of doubt but also because it draws out exactly what this bill will achieve.

Currently couples are able to have commitment ceremonies before or after they enter into a civil partnership. In some cases commitment ceremonies are attended by staff of the registrar-general who take possession of the application documentation and return it to the office for processing.

Commitment ceremonies do not legally create the partnership. The partnership is only legally created later in the office when the registrar-general processes the paperwork and endorses the application. Our bill will remove that confusing and unfair situation by providing that the ceremony itself will create the relationship.

These commitment ceremonies are a halfway step to equality for same-sex couples but do not go far enough. This bill goes the extra necessary step to ensure that all couples have access to the same rights. Members of the Assembly will be reasonably well aware of the provisions of this bill, especially those who were members during the previous Assembly. However, today I will set out briefly exactly what the bill will do in the interests of clarity.

Firstly, the bill will give couples a choice of how they enter a civil partnership. The current process of making an application to the registrar-general will remain. The bill will insert a second way in which a couple may enter a civil partnership, by inserting the ceremony option. The making of a declaration at the ceremony will legally create the civil partnership.

Secondly, the bill will provide for members of the public to apply to the registrar-general to become civil partnership notaries. For a ceremony to legally create a civil partnership under the act, the ceremony must include a declaration by each person before a civil partnership notary. It will then be the responsibility of the notary to take the declaration back to the registrar-general and get the partnership included on the register.

Thirdly, the bill will expand the range of equivalent relationships in other jurisdictions that can be recognised for the purposes of territory law. Currently, relationships in the other Australian states and territory can be recognised under ACT law. The bill will expand this to include the ability to recognise relationships from other countries.

Finally, the bill will make consequential amendments to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1997 and the regulations.

I spoke earlier about the commentary on this bill. It has been fascinating to observe the different attitudes and how social change comes about. There have been two threads to the adverse commentary on this. The first is a view that we should not even be trying on this because we ultimately might be defeated: we may not win. The second is that we are wasting the Assembly's time in canvassing the issue. The editorial in today's Canberra Times rolls both of these together in a completely defeatist case.

On the first, let me say that the bottom line is that nothing ever changes if you do not try. I have always liked the way Andy Warhol captured that sentiment. He said, "They always say time changes things, but you have to actually change them yourself."

Personally, I am not prepared to be the one who turns away because the challenge seems too great. Change mostly comes about because persistent people keep trying. They talk; they discuss; they agitate. They do not give up. Those people are far more inspiring and far more valuable members of our community than those who roll over and accept mediocrity.

Then there is the suggestion that we are somehow wasting the Assembly's time by putting this issue on the table. Members may be surprised to hear that I agree with this to some extent. The reason I agree with it is that we should not be having to spend time on this. It should not be controversial. It should not take a lot of time. It is simply the right thing to do.

As I have already stated today, this bill is about equality, it is about decency and it is about respect. We should simply get it passed and get on to other matters. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by Mr Corbell) adjourned to the next sitting.

MEMBER NEWS

Angela Drury

Welcome to NEW MEMBERS: Poe Bradfield, Dr Peter Airey, Morgan Qasabian, Alexandra Popelovina, Sean Grosset and Darrin Hodges.



Sincere thanks to the following members for GENEROUS DONATIONS: Mollie Campbell, Joan Vaughan Taylor, Veronique Longworth, Dierk & Rosemary von Behrens, R. Hague, Tryntje Bostick, Sue Molesworth, Celia Nolan, Barbara Leach, Warwick Dunstan, Ian Warwick, Kevin Bryant, Vincent Phelan, John Levack, Fred Whitaker, Colin Hesse, David & Elva Blair, Geoff Stowell, Lorraine Crane and Barbara Beiboer.

Members Jean Hale and Reginald Clilverd have died, and also Bridget Gilling who was a past president of Humanist Society of NSW and a life long activist for abortion rights.

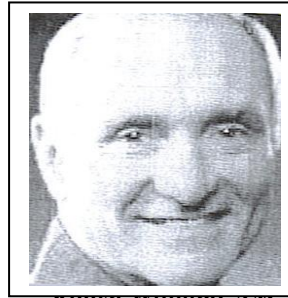
Dorothy Buckand-Fuller, one of our patrons, was made an honorary life member at the 2009 AGM in recognition of her contribution in anti-discrimination and ethnic affairs in the community, and her support for humanistic issues and the Humanist Society.

CORRECTION VIEWPOINTS (Vol 48)

"Abortion – RU486: legal or not?" it was reported that, in the current Queensland prosecution for procuring an abortion, the young woman concerned was 20 weeks pregnant. This was a misreading on the part of the typist, she was in fact about 6 weeks pregnant. The case continues to have ramifications with a medical abortion currently being unobtainable in Queensland due to perceived threat of prosecution.

Jan Tendys Article: The "found poetry" included at the end of Jan's talk on "Mystic Humanism", given to the Spirit of life Unitarian Fellowship, should have been attributed to Albert Einstein ("Einstein, Albert" in *The Enlightened Mind*, ed. Stephen Mitchell; New York: Harper Collins, 1991). Jan felt she would not herself express "what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty", with as much certainty as Einstein did.

OUR PATRONS



Robyn Williams AM

Australian Humanist of the Year 1993, Member of the Order of Australia 1988, a talented actor, science journalist and broadcaster, Robyn, presents Radio National's Science Show, Ockham's Razor and In Conversation. Robyn has written more than 10 books and received an Honorary Doctorate in Science from the Universities of Sydney, Macquarie and Deakin.



Dorothy Buckland-Fuller AM

Mother, bilingual sociologist, peace activist. Dorothy is also an environmentalist, a feminist and committed to the cause of reconciliation with indigenous Australia. As founder of the Ethnic Communities Council Dorothy was, and is still, a vital influence in the ethnic communities.

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