



Gillian Triggs being presented with her AHOY award for 2018 by Anne Levy (AHOY 1986)

Photo: Janette Menhennet

Australian Humanist of the Year 2018

Gillian Triggs

Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs is an Australian academic specialising in public international law. She was President of the Australian Human Rights Commission from 2012 to 2017. She is a former Dean of the Sydney Law School, where she was the Challis Professor of International Law from 2007 to 2012. Prior to 2012 she was a Professor at the Melbourne Law School.

Gillian Triggs attended University High School and the University of Melbourne in the 1960s. She earned a Bachelor of Laws in 1967 and a Doctor of Philosophy in 1982. After her admission to the Supreme Court of Victoria as a barrister and solicitor, she worked as a tutor at Monash University.

The AHOY award to Professor Triggs is in recognition of her fearless, reasoned and compassionate approach to human rights in Australia, particularly her conduct of the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention, which shone a spotlight on those whose plight is so often forgotten.

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Undaunted by political or career considerations, Professor Triggs has been a steadfast voice for recognition and respect for the human rights of all people. Her resolute consistency of purpose is an example to each of us.

As reported by United Nations special rapporteur Michel Forst, Gillian Triggs faced ‘government intimidation and public questioning of her integrity, impartiality and judgment’ after her inquiry reported. She engaged fearlessly in public debate to ensure that the situation of these children not be continually ignored and forgotten. Gillian Triggs declared she would not be able to live with herself if she wasted her remaining opportunities to speak up nationally and internationally.

In announcing the AHoY award to Gillian Triggs, the CAHS President Lyndon Storey said:

We’re delighted to present this award to someone who’s done so much to advance the cause of human rights in Australia. The opposition Professor Triggs received shows how many strides Australia still needs to make before we can claim a ‘human rights’ culture with equal respect and dignity for all. The Australian Humanist movement supports the ongoing struggle to improve respect for human rights in Australia.

Gillian Triggs’ unflinching support for human rights exemplifies a Humanist approach, putting principle before popularity, and relying on reason and calm persuasion to appeal to the best of our humanity.

Source: CAHS media release

HUMANISM is a way of thinking and living that aims to bring out the best in people, so that all people may have the best life.

Humanists reject supernatural and authoritarian beliefs. They consider that we must take responsibility for our own lives, and show care and compassion towards family and community.

Humanists consider that conserving the habitats of all species is central to a sustainable future.

The Humanist lifestyle emphasises reasoned enquiry and dialogue, freedom, responsibility, and the need for tolerance and cooperation.



Australian Humanists of the Year

Since 1983 Australian Humanists have bestowed the award of Humanist of the Year on a person(s) who has made an outstanding contribution to public life, consistent with Humanist principles and values.

Selection is made by agreement among the State Humanist Societies with final endorsement by the Council of Australian Humanist Societies Inc.

1983	Lionel Murphy (dec)	jurist
1984	Olive Zakharov (dec)	Senator
1985	Theodore Noffs (dec)	social theologian
1986	Anne Levy	politician
1987	Phillip Adams	journalist
1988	Ian Lowe	scientist
1989	Victor Lloyd (dec)	educationist
1990	Gareth Evans	legislator
1991	Fredrick Hollows (dec)	ophthalmologist
1992	John Hirshman (dec)	health consultant
1993	Robyn Williams	science broadcaster
1994	Margaret (dec) & ‘Tup’ Baxendell (dec)	activists
1995	Ian Plimer	geologist
1996	Bill Hayden	Governor General
1997	Eva Cox	social policy analyst
1998	Philip Nitschke	medical practitioner
1999	Diana Warnock	journalist
2000	Henry Reynolds	historian
2001	Eric Bogle	songwriter & singer
2002	Donald Horne (dec)	social critic
2003	Alan Trounson	medical scientist
2004	Peter Singer	philosopher
2005	Tim Flannery	biologist
2006	Peter Cundall	horticulturalist
2007	Inga Clendinnen (dec)	historian & essayist
2008	Lyn Allison	parliamentarian
2009	Julian Burnside & Kate Durham	barrister & artist
2010	Bob Brown	political activist
2011	Leslie Cannold	bio-ethicist
2012	Ron Williams	musician & activist
2013	Jane Caro	social commentator
2014	Geoffrey Robertson	human rights lawyer
2015	Carmen Lawrence	psychologist
2016	John Bell	actor/director
2017	Rodney Syme	medical practitioner
2018	Gillian Triggs	law professor

Humanism in a Post Truth World*

Acceptance speech by Gillian Triggs, Australian Humanist of the Year for 2018

Given at the AHOY award dinner, Adelaide, Saturday 14 April

Introduction

Gillian began by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land and commented ‘that as a nation we have much unfinished business in ensuring our First Nations people have a voice in the nation’s future’.

She then thanked the Humanist Societies for the honour of its AHOY award. She said, ‘I am proud to receive it as the emphasis of the Humanist Society on the dignity and rights of all people reflects my approach as an international human rights lawyer, encapsulated by the theme of this Humanist conference, ‘Equality is for Everyone’.

Gillian went on to note that ‘Humanism was defined by reference to human rights and to rationality, evidence and reason’. She then referred to the Amsterdam Declaration, which states that Humanists believe the solutions to the world’s problems lie in human thought and action rather than divine intervention. Humanism advocates the application of the methods of science and free inquiry to the problems of human welfare. But Humanists also believe that the application of science and technology must be tempered by human values. Science gives us the means but human values must propose the ends. Humanism strives for the fullest possible development of every human being and considers that democracy and human development are matters of right.

Humanism in a post truth world

Having defined humanism, it is discouraging that in contemporary life, especially political life, evidence, scientific facts and human rationality are no longer seen as necessary foundations for policy, law and governance. We live in a post truth world where false news and misspeaking are increasingly accepted; where ideology and subjective views are gaining a populist traction in the political discourse that few could have imagined in the 50s, 60s and 70s.

When I grew up in London in the 50s, science and factual evidence was king, they were the foundation upon which a civilized humanist society could be achieved. Astonishingly, in the second decade of the 21st century facts are discarded for ideology. Roberts [a blogger] described post truth as ‘a political culture in which politics (public

opinion and media narratives) have become almost entirely disconnected from the substance of legislation and policy.

Using the question ‘Do facts matter?’, Jennifer Hochschild, Dean School of Government at Harvard, conducted research over the year leading to the election of President Trump, concluding that facts do not matter if a view has already been reached, or where a subjective view is entrenched.

Perhaps the most notorious example is Kelly Anne Conway, a White House spokeswoman, responding to the allegation by Sean Spicer, the President’s press secretary, that the inauguration of Mr Trump was the ‘largest ever’; a statement that was factually unsustainable. Conway said: ‘You’re saying it’s a falsehood. Sean Spicer gave alternative facts to that.’

Closer to home we have the use of false facts to demonise those who have crossed the government, e.g. allegations of the ‘Children Overboard’ and against Save the Children in Nauru. Despite the truth being made clear month later in Senate Inquiries the damage has been done and the political advantage gained.

The idea that there are ‘alternative facts’, and that they too have credibility, has created an *Alice in Wonderland* world where words mean what we choose them to mean. Or as George Orwell put it in *1984* when the party oligarch reminded the hero:

Reality exists in the human mind and nowhere else.
Whatever the Party holds to be truth, is truth.

Of course, there is nothing new at all in the idea that propaganda that distorts truth for political purposes. Indeed, it is well recognised that the first casualty of war is the truth. But post truth politics is not quite the same as lies, spin, and falsehood. The essence of post truth is not so much the mendacity itself but the community’s response to it.

Religion and false news

One of the most controversial contexts in which humanism and the distortion of truth have been in tension was stimulated by the postal survey on same sex marriage.

An unexpected legacy of our national discussion about marriage equality is the way it shone a spotlight on how Australia protects fundamental freedoms, especially the right to freedom of religion. The debate about the adequacy of legal protections for religious liberties created an unnecessary, divisive distraction from the core issue of equality before the law – but the debate did expose the

* This article is based on the text Gillian Triggs used in giving her AHOY acceptance speech, at the Australian Humanist Convention. A video recording of her speech should be available via sahumanists.org.au

slender legal scaffolding upon which our freedoms are based.

Distorting the political debate about marriage equality were mischievous misinformation, homophobic advertisements and false allegations, particularly the assertion that freedom of religion would be at risk. The 'No' case argued that freedom of religion is not fully protected in Australian law, but is occasionally protected by exceptions to laws. These campaigners feared that, if marriage equality were to become law, people would no longer have freedom of speech and would be forced to accept practices that are contrary to their religious and personal beliefs.

These concerns have some, but very limited, substance. As you know, late last year, amendments to the law allowing any two persons to marry has now been passed, and Parliament has agreed on a reasonable balance between equality before the law and freedom of religious expression. You might have thought this would bring an end to the argument that the right to religious expression needs further and better protection. Not so.

The federal government then commissioned the former Attorney-General Phillip Ruddock to hold an inquiry into the adequacy of protections for religious freedoms and their intersection with other human rights. While any government inquiry into human rights protection is to be welcomed, it is not appropriate to cherry-pick certain freedoms. Rather, we should consider how all our freedoms can be better protected. I would like to see Australia meet this challenge on the basis of evidence and consultation, away from the polarising question of marriage equality.

One particularly troubling aspect of the marriage equality debate was the argument that any amendment to the *Marriage Act* permitting marriage equality might usefully adopt Art. 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that protects the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; these freedoms are absolute, while their expression is to be subject only to necessary laws to protect public safety and the rights of others, including non-theistic beliefs and the right not to profess any religion or belief. Any laws must be both necessary and proportionate to achieve a legitimate aim.

This was little short of a stunning suggestion by the very politicians and advisors who have, over decades, so strenuously resisted the idea of an Australian Charter of Rights at the federal level, or the transformation of this Covenant into national law – proposals that would have made all our rights and freedoms accessible for all Australians.

The Council of Australian Humanist Societies has made a well-reasoned submission to the Ruddock Inquiry, arguing that the freedom of religion is adequately protected by Australian law and that the Government should not separate and privilege religious freedom above other fundamental rights, especially the rights to freedom of thought and conscience.

Why, for example, in the name of religious freedom, is it argued that a government, organisation or individual has the right to impose their religious views on non-believers?; such as on issues like euthanasia, abortion, birth control, education, clothing and national holidays. I would like both to congratulate the Council for its submission and to explore the right to freedom of religion a little more fully.

The concerns that freedom of religious expression is not adequately protected by Australia laws are largely, but not totally, unfounded. Freedom of religion is one of the few rights that the Constitution expressly protects in Section 116 which, among other things, stops the Commonwealth from making any law '*for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion*'. The High Court has interpreted the word 'religion' generously, including atheism and agnosticism. Most scholars consider that the High Court – on the few occasions it has considered the relevant section – has interpreted section 116 narrowly and has never struck down a Commonwealth law on this basis.

Take the example of the Victorian Supreme Court decision to reject a defence of religious freedom in the case of the *Christian Youth Camp (CYC) v Cobaw Community Health Services 2014* (Cobaw). The court found it was a breach of Victoria's anti-discrimination laws for CYC to refuse to accept a booking for accommodation from Cobaw, a gay rights education and suicide prevention group. CYC argued that to promote homosexuality was contrary to its religious beliefs and that it should not be legally forced to accept the booking. An application for leave to appeal had been rejected by the High Court, affirming the refusal by the lower court to allow religious convictions to oust the anti-discrimination laws in respect of an essentially commercial and public facility.

The decision of the Victorian Supreme Court in the youth camp case is helpful in finding that the CYC facility was a commercial enterprise that had not been advertised as having a religious purpose. In these circumstances, the group making the booking had no reason to expect its request to be rejected and had, the court concluded, been discriminated against.

Does this mean the 'No' campaigners are entirely wrong on the question of religious freedom? As is often the case in a public campaign that is broadly misleading, a kernel of truth sustains the debate. Religious freedom in Australia is protected by exceptions and that more should be done positively to protect this right.

Most protections for religious expression are indeed by way of exception. For example, Commonwealth law allows religious organisations to discriminate in delivering goods and services – including marriage-related services and facility hire. A religious organisation may, for example, refuse to employ a person in a same-sex marriage if refusal conforms to the doctrines, tenets or beliefs of that religion.

But while this part of the *Sex Discrimination Act* has effectively protected recognised religious groups for

decades, its protection does not extend to individuals. A person cannot discriminate against another on grounds such as sexual orientation, even if doing so accords with their religious beliefs. Only a religious organisation to which they might belong may do so. Services with a connection to same-sex marriage, such as reception centres, florists and the oft-cited bakers, are not excepted either. The rationale is that the law cannot permit individual preferences; individuals are not a law unto themselves.

Exception to the exception

Few people know of the exception to the exception to anti-sex discrimination laws where public funds are involved. The exemptions for religious organisations that discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation are now qualified. Under two sections added to the *Sex Discrimination Act* 1984, an exception no longer applies to Commonwealth-funded aged-care services run by religious organisations. The aim is to prohibit discrimination faced by same-sex couples in accessing aged-care services. Religious organisations can, however, continue to discriminate on the ground of sexual orientation when employing the people who provide that aged care.

The rare exception to the exception is ground-breaking policy, but it passed through Parliament with little media attention or controversy. The Commission, anticipating the amendments, looked closely at the aged-care industry, learning that faith-based bodies provide about 64 per cent of the facilities for older people. In these circumstances, it would be unconscionable to allow them to discriminate against same-sex couples when providing accommodation. We consulted representatives of religious organisations who overwhelmingly confirmed that, in any event, they did not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation when determining who could use their services. Christ the fisherman, they pointed out, cast a wide net.

The exception to the exception of religious organisations from the *Sex Discrimination Act* is significant. In an increasingly secular society, the case for further exceptions to religious exceptions may strengthen where public funds are involved. For now, the provision of aged care facilities appears to be a special case, but I expect any future contribution of government funds will prompt rethinking current religious exemptions.

A significant limitation on Section 116 is that it applies only to the Commonwealth, not to the states where, other than in Tasmania, religious freedom is not protected. However, there is some protection against discrimination or vilification on the basis of religion in both federal and state laws but these are inconsistent and narrow. Federally there is the right to complain about religious discrimination in employment, e.g. the AHRC received 26 complaints (2014-16); while the RDA covers religion in common 'ethnic origin' e.g. Jews and Sikhs, but not yet re Muslims. Any compliant must include a racial or ethnic element, and often does. States, except SA and NSW, prohibit religious discrimination; Victoria and NSW Charters protect religious freedom.

AHRC has long argued for better protection for all fundamental freedoms including freedom of religious expression under anti-discrimination laws, but those efforts have failed.

Australian exceptionalism – the need for a charter of rights

Australia is the only democracy in world without some form of national human rights act or bill of rights. Any inadequacy in protection for religion applies even more forcefully in respect of other rights such as freedom of speech, association and, the prohibition on arbitrary detention of the mentally ill, those who are unfit to plead, asylum seekers and refugees, violent criminals. I propose that the failure fully to protect our fundamental common law freedoms and to meet out international treaty obligations, should be remedied by a legislated federal charter for rights to give our courts the tools they need to check the growing power of executive government and parliaments. We should not privilege religion above other beliefs; rather, we should protect all fundamental rights that underpin our democratic Australian society.

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Balance vs truth

In an increasingly secular world – one that may demand further limits on the right of religious organisations to avoid the anti-discrimination laws that apply to everyone else – most people understand the need to balance freedom of thought, conscience and religion with freedom from discrimination.

The need for balance has, however, become an oft-repeated mantra. It appears conciliatory but has become almost meaningless. The more precise question is how to strike that balance in practice. I agree with those who are weary of the repetition of the need to balance rights. Politicians and commentators can appear reasonable beings by pleading the need for balance, while avoiding the question of what the outcome of a balancing process would look like. Of course, rights must be balanced one against the other. The exceptions are those rights that cannot be traded, such as the prohibition on torture, slavery or child abuse.

It is all too easy to sit teetering on the fence, avoiding nailing one's colours to the mast. If you will excuse this mixing of metaphors, my point is that there is a time when a choice must be made. The choice is not binary, in favour of one right or another. Rather, as shown by the amendments to the *Marriage Act*, it is possible both to achieve marriage equality and to provide reasonable protection for those

religious views that would condemn it. There is no hierarchy of rights. One freedom does not 'trump' another. What is reasonable, necessary or proportionate will always depend on the political and social context.

I do not question that the right to freedom of religious expression sometimes collides with anti-discrimination laws, particularly where religious groups want to discriminate in relation to admissions to religious schools, employment by religious organisations, and to the types of people to whom they will rent property. We need a means of determining how these rights can coexist.

In conclusion, may I observe that protections for human rights are regressing in Australia and that we have become increasingly isolated from other comparable countries such as UK, US, Canada, Europe and New Zealand. Not only do our laws fail adequately to articulate and protect fundamental rights, but also we have a growing tolerance for subjective, ideological views that are not based in evidence or facts.

The principles of humanism better reflect the prevailing concerns of most Australians that we should have equality for everyone.

Thank you very much.

Contributions to *AH* are welcome

Editorial policy

Preference is given to previously unpublished items that explore and advance the ideals of Humanism, or offer a Humanist view on matters of concern and interest to Humanists.

Item length

Articles (max. 3,000 words), short items, reviews (850 words), letters and poems (300 words) and illustrations. Send by E-mail, text only, no formatting, or clearly typed.

Deadlines

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Contributions should be sent to Editor *AH*,
E-mail AHeditor@humanist.org.au

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India's Forgotten Humanist



M. N. Roy

Sangeeta Mall

Introduction

Two years ago I went to Edinburgh and took a picture of the statue of David Hume, while I did what all tourists who've heard of Hume do – rub his toe. It's debatable whether the act brought me luck, but it did arouse in me a sort of wistfulness. The statue of a renowned atheist and rationalist adorns the most prime real estate in all of Scotland. When would India immortalise one of its towering thinkers, a pioneer of modern philosophy, in a similar manner? The vision of a statue of M. N. Roy looming over Gateway of India in Mumbai or India Gate in Delhi is almost laughable. Yet Roy's contribution to Indian thought is unique for being derived not merely from research, but also practical experience, and for amalgamating Indian thought with Western practice to articulate an indigenous, yet modern, vision of India.

Not many people in India, and even fewer in the world, have heard of M. N. Roy. Even members of the Humanist movement are ignorant of Roy, his contribution to Humanism and his role as one of the founders of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU).

Roy's life and influence

M. N. Roy was born on 21 July 1887 as Narendranath Bhattacharya in the state of Bengal in east India. Roy's early years, from adolescence onwards, were spent as a member of an armed revolutionary group in Bengal to wrest freedom from Britain. In 1915, Roy set out for the USA to seek weapons for his group. While he was unsuccessful in his mission, his quest took him to East Asia, USA, Mexico,

Russia and finally, Germany, before he returned to India and was imprisoned by the British for six years in what is known as the Kanpur Conspiracy case. After his release from prison, Roy joined the Indian National Congress in 1938, but broke ranks when he disagreed with the INC on its stand against the British during the war. To Roy, fascism was a bigger threat than imperialism, and the British had to be supported in their fight against Hitler, a point of view that didn't sit well with the burgeoning demand for independence from colonialism. Eventually Roy settled down in the quiet north Indian town of Dehradun with his wife Ellen, where he devoted the rest of his years to philosophical and historical writing, until his death in 1954.

Roy's towering life is now hardly remembered in India. He was the founder of the Communist Party of Mexico, and the Communist Party of India, as well as a member of the 2nd Comintern in Russia, where he was appointed Lenin's aide to China. With such significant achievements to his name, why is he now a forgotten figure? Why has he been relegated to the footnotes of Indian philosophical thought? And yet, why does his worldview still hold so much relevance even today?

In his lifetime, Roy wrote in German, English, Spanish, Russian and French on subjects as diverse as the Communist revolution in China and the historical role of Islam. Roy drew his influences from philosophers and ideologues from around the world. He wrote prolifically in a career that transitioned from violence to contemplation – a trajectory that very few ideologues can claim. While India's rich tradition of thought has given to the world philosophers and thinkers like Tagore, Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh and B. R. Ambedkar, Roy's legacy has dimmed over time rather than grown. Perhaps a clue lies in his own words:

Lie-hunting is my profession. This is a thankless job. But someone must tell the truth, if it is not to remain an empty concept. I have been lie-hunting ever since I learned to think for myself – to distinguish facts from fictions. It has not won me popularity.

Perhaps the most significant achievement that Roy made to Indian thought was the concept of Radical Humanism. So significant was this idea that a very large group of intellectuals, academicians, freedom fighters and professionals from various fields called themselves Radical Humanists or Royists. In 1937 Roy began editing a weekly called *Independent India*, which was renamed *The Radical Humanist* in 1949. The latter continues to be published every month by a team of dedicated Humanists. I was its Managing Editor from 1999 to 2005.

The basic tenets of Radical Humanism were that 'the development of the individual was the measure of social progress', and that 'the quest for freedom and search for truth constitute the basic urge of human progress'. These form part of the first two of the 22 theses of Radical Humanism adopted at an All India Conference of the

Radical Democratic Party (disbanded subsequently to give way to the Radical Humanist movement) in December 1946, a few months before India gained independence. In the subsequent theses the ideas of freedom, reason and rationalism and the repudiation of both Communist and capitalist structures of economic thought are elaborated upon. If the individual is positioned at the centre of all endeavour, and if ideas are assigned a life of their own, then the reading of history is altered, and the structures that had been governing the world till then are demonstrated to be erroneous. This formed the core of Roy's philosophy, and most of his writings pivoted upon this basic tenet.

In the 1930s and 40s, at the height of Roy's writings, large parts of India were still swathed in obscurantism and superstition. Roy devoted a significant portion of his work to this issue and the unassailable fact that, as long as India remained blanketed by superstition and ideas like the transmigration of the soul, its future as a politically independent nation remained bleak. At a time when the entire country was focused on attaining freedom, such a viewpoint did not gain its proponent many fans! In the preface to his book *India's Message* Roy wrote:

A critique of the ideology of orthodox nationalism may impel the spirit of a renaissance India to outgrow the obsession with antiquated ideas and faded ideals, and transcend the narrow limits of a political vision clouded by a racial conception of culture. National independence would be of little significance if it did not let in the invigorating influence of a cosmopolitan outlook and humanist culture.

At a time when India's leading intellectuals were solely engaged with the project of procuring independence from colonial rule, and then drafting a Constitution, Roy was crafting a very different vision, one where the individual, while being a citizen of the nation, would also be connected to the rest of the world through a common aspiration for humanist values. At a time when the definition of the enemy was fairly solid in the Indian imagination, Roy set out to prove that Indians would be subdued by a very different sort of enemy, that the adversary wasn't merely a colonial power but also the contradictions rife within the country. If India was to survive and thrive as a nation-state, its citizens must be freed from the yoke of ignorance and obscurantism as conclusively as from the yoke of colonial rule. His focus lay on the universal values by which the human race must live, rather than the more inward-looking compulsions of power sharing.

Today, this worldview has assumed undeniable relevance. Individuals around the world increasingly seek freedom rather than subscribing to narrow allegiances of nations, communities, religion or even gender. While Western philosophers like Bertrand Russell emphasised the importance of individual freedom, it is remarkable that Roy, who actively participated in the freedom movement, could look beyond it and predict the future of India after colonial rule.

The incomplete project of transforming India into a modern nation and addressing the preoccupation with caste and community that dominates the discourse now more than ever before, over seven decades after independence, has applied the brakes on the country's aspiration towards becoming a world power, demonstrating Roy's accurate reading of history. Caste and community-based politics tear into the fabric of a united nation every day. While this piece is being written, a controversy has broken out over the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act, which was drafted to address the societal violence against Dalits. A bench of the Supreme Court, the highest court, citing misuse, has put down stringent conditions under which a case can be filed under this act, practically rendering the act toothless and removing the legal protection offered to Dalits under it. The eagerness to protect the rights of the higher castes demonstrates the schisms that still exist within Indian society and how challenged the concept of freedom of the individual in India remains. Dalits, even those belonging to the ruling party, have voiced their dismay over the tightening of the act and questioned the need for creating such a clause.

The Partition of India, in which more than three million people were killed in Hindu-Muslim violence, was one of the most painful episodes in the history of the sub-continent. The ramifications have created structural changes in the geo-politics of the region, fanning out to the larger world. Roy, through his book *The Historical Role of Islam*, tried to foster harmony between the two communities through an intellectual understanding of one of the largest religions in the world, whose influence has carried over into every sphere in almost every corner of the world.

Within a few years of his rift with the Indian National Congress, Roy concluded that party politics in its present form was nothing more than an unscrupulous scramble for power, and that the goal of liberating the people of India from the shackles of orthodoxy and superstition could only be achieved through an intellectual engagement rather than a political one. He dissolved the Radical Democratic Party, exhorting its members to fan out into the community and promote the tenets of Radical Humanism.

Was this decision sound? Critics have questioned the act and concluded that the withdrawal from party politics sounded the death knell for Roy's political ideas, while ceding space to totalitarian parties like the Communist Party of India and the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party. It is true that in terms of the actual engagement with civil society, the contribution of Radical Humanism as opposed to Communism, for instance, has remained thin. However in the comity of ideas, Roy's legacy, though unsung, continues to engage people's imagination. Recent unlikely political events, like the mass outpouring of Dalit anger in Gujarat leading to the election of an independent Dalit candidate in the state elections, bear witness to Roy's assertion that the quest for freedom is a biological urge. The fact is that, to put it crudely, Radical Humanists are dying but not Radical

Humanism. Many Humanist organisations have sprung up across the length and breadth of the country. They may not give themselves the technical nomenclature, but their foundations lie in Humanist thought, the belief that the individual forms the bedrock of all development.

The true measure of Roy's legacy is that, unlike any other school of thought which becomes immutable over time, Radical Humanism by its very definition continues to evolve with changing times, and therefore can only become more relevant, not less. Roy, with his love for argument and analysis, would have been the first to engage with a point of view contrary to his own. His ability to change his views in line with changed circumstances was what made him unique as an intellectual. But there's no denying that today, even students of political science or philosophy have a hard time remembering Roy. Certainly his ideas find no mention in school textbooks, and in colleges he's almost reduced to a footnote.

The ruling party, a political offshoot of a fundamentalist Hindu organisation called the RSS, has undertaken to tinker with school and college syllabi to reflect a right-wing reading of history, one that unabashedly glorifies 'Hindu' rulers and vilifies or even obliterates anyone else from India's history. In such an atmosphere, Roy and Radical Humanism are ever more likely to be shifted to the margins. Had Roy lived longer, perhaps his ideas of social intervention would have found firmer footing and his followers could have formed a concrete program of action for burnishing his legacy. His death came at a time when the nation was struggling with many existential questions and Royists themselves were trying to find a foothold in a newly independent India. Lack of resources, both financial and human, would have created a huge roadblock for a movement that was less a movement and more an ideology – an ideology, moreover, that had no moorings of immutability. Another possible reason for Radical Humanism not gaining much traction in the post-war years could lie in its emphasis on universalism as against nationalism. Indians were in the throes of nation-building and a universalist focus on individuals transcending narrow boundaries wouldn't have found resonance with an immature citizenry.

Is there, then, any way of preserving Roy's legacy? Unfortunately, due to a variety of circumstances, very few of his personal belongings have been preserved. The house in Dehradun where he lived has been tied up in litigation for almost two decades. In Mumbai, Dr Indumati Parikh, a Radical Humanist and recipient of the Distinguished Humanist award from IHEU, created a campus called the M. N. Roy Human Development Campus where she founded the Centre for the Study of Social Change. The IHEU World Congress in 1999 was hosted there. While there may not be much remaining of Roy in physical terms, there is a vast body of work by and about him, existing in college and university campuses both in India and around the world. Many ideas have been tossed around on how to carry his

legacy forward. There was a proposal to sponsor a M. N. Roy Chair in the Department of Political Science in one of the Indian universities, but paucity of funds prevented the idea from becoming real.

In the aftermath of World War II there was a wave of reflection around the world on what it meant to be human. Roy believed that India could not afford to withdraw from this debate and occupy itself only with imperialism, that every individual must concern herself with the ideals of freedom and truth. In 1952 he was one of the founding members of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. He was too ill to attend its inaugural session in Amsterdam but the conference elected him as its Vice President in absentia, and the Indian Radical Humanist Association as a member organisation.

Perhaps the most appropriate tribute to Roy's legacy would be to continue to fight the forces of unreason and communalism that still dominate the popular discourse. The Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations (FIRA), amongst many other organisations, continues to fly the standard of reason and rationalism and continues to challenge established ideas of hierarchy in India. The growth of the Internet and social media is alerting people to the dangers of certain communities and encouraging them to expand their frontiers of knowledge. In the final analysis, this validation of Roy's view of the future of humankind would have given him far greater satisfaction than any physical relics of his existence.

Sangeeta Mall, resides in India and is a former editor of the *International Humanist News* (no longer issued in print), a published author and regular contributor to the *AH*.

Bill Hayden on Humanism and other topics

Robert Bender

Stimulated by Paul Keating's tribute to Bill Hayden on his 84th birthday, I've been reading his autobiography, *Hayden* [published by Angus & Robertson in 1996]. It makes fascinating reading on Hayden's long involvement in politics and public life, including leading the Australian Labor Party in the late 1970s/early 1980s, a Minister in the Hawke government, and then his time as Governor-General (1989–1996).

Near the end of his book Hayden wrote some comments on his values, identifying strongly as a humanist, and offering his views on several issues [the changing nature of the family, equal rights for homosexuals and voluntary

euthanasia] which have recently been much in the news, with the long-held humanist point of view now prevailing over the more traditional ones. Below are Hayden's words taken from his autobiography.



Bill Hayden

1996 Australian Humanist of the Year

Hayden explains that his values are those of a secular liberal humanist

I recognize that more than anything else my values have been those of a secular liberal humanist; above all else, it has been these values which have been constants in my belief system, through the changes I have undergone and which have underpinned my behaviour and actions.

Secular, because I believe not in things ordained by a higher power but in the exercise of free will, and in that restless quest for knowledge which recognizes that there is no such thing as absolute truth. That we must strive to try to find truth but that we will only do that through reason, observation, and error. Human understanding, like human beings more generally, is flawed and we cannot avoid error, but we should try to avoid fault as much as possible and by our efforts lead a better life based on improved knowledge and a demonstrated sense of community responsibility. Even the best scientific theories are approximations to truth and periodically have to be restructured in the light of new facts.

Liberal, because of my commitment to tolerance, a deep belief in the right of people to be different, and the importance of freedom – but that kind of tolerance which does not necessarily mean personal approval of one form of behaviour among others. A humanist, because of my great confidence in human beings, in their unique capacity among all life forms for being moral, for leading a good and noble life, for being committed to social justice among their peers. Sharing a faith in the latter, I believe in the principle of equality of opportunity, which is not the same as committing oneself to equal outcomes. For instance, everyone has the right to seek admission to a university but only those who have demonstrated an ability to capably pursue studies there should be allowed to enrol, and no-one should be allowed to graduate who has not

performed up to standard in those studies. Thus it is with life's other pursuits. [from pages 567-8]

Changing values – family, sexual orientation and right to die

When I was a young man, if someone then had said to me, 'Do you want to be a good family man?' I would have known exactly what they meant: supporting a wife who remained full time at home, two and a half children, a housing mortgage and paying off a second-hand car. Today, anyone young and thoughtful would have to respond to that question, first with the query, 'Define what you mean by family,' for the notion of family has many variants and presents a complex concept nowadays.

The single parent family, in particular, headed by the mother, is commonplace today. So is the unwed mother who prefers parenting alone to a formal co-habitation with a male, and this preference is no longer the target of vindictive moralizing and social ostracism, as it was when I was young. Once society decided to recognize people's rights to lawfully practice homosexuality certain inevitable consequences followed. It is no longer a violation of the law for a couple who are same-sex partners to establish a stable, permanent domestic relationship. Many claim this, and others recognize it to be, a family relationship. As a matter of justice homosexuals should be entitled to enter a legal contract similar in its rights for and obligations upon those partners to that available under marriage contracts between heterosexuals... [from pages 575-6]

Similarly, for those of us who believe, as I do, that we should have the option available of ending our lives with dignity when we feel we have lived long enough, that further living is an unacceptable burden. The present prohibition against voluntary euthanasia is quite unreasonable. It cannot stop someone engaging in voluntary euthanasia, that is suicide, who has soberly and responsibly reasoned their way to this conclusion. What it does is restrict our range of choices to acts of the most violent kind against ourselves. It would be preferable to have available some small draught or pill, soporific in its effect, capable of inducing a contented passing from this realm of the living.' [from page 577]

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Does Science Disprove Free Will?

Leslie Allan

The free will – determinism landscape

The modern scientific view of the world paints human beings as an integral part of nature. Over the last century or so, a number of areas of scientific enquiry have provided independent and mutually supporting evidence that human beings are subject to the same physical, chemical and biological forces as inanimate objects. These disciplines include physics, neuroscience, pharmacology, evolutionary biology, developmental psychology and artificial intelligence. On this view, our hopes, desires, beliefs and values all have a biological basis that can be explained using physical models and natural laws.

Consider for a moment my choosing to read aloud from *King Lear*. Explaining my decision and action, neuroscience tells us a story about information processing in various regions of my brain, including the visual cortex, Wernicke's area and the frontal lobe. In each of these areas, information is processed in scores of neurons. There are some 80 billion neurons in a typical adult brain, with some 100 trillion connections between them. Each connection is made using very small electrical impulses moving along axons and dendrites. One neuron can have literally thousands of connections to other neurons. This electrical activity is further regulated by neurotransmitters acting in the brain. According to neuroscience, all of this activity that eventually results in me reading aloud from *King Lear* happens strictly according to the laws of physics. This view that all human behaviours, voluntary and non-voluntary, are fully and completely determined by physical forces is known as 'determinism'.

For some atheists, humanists, secularists and rationalists, this model of human beings seems to lead to the inescapable conclusion that we never exercise 'free will'. When I was studying at university back in the 1980s, I subscribed to just such a view. It's called 'hard determinism', meaning that there is a 'hard' incompatibility between our nature as deterministic beings and our ability to act freely. At the time, I believed that is what a scientific understanding of the universe and our place in it leads a rational person to believe. As I progressed beyond first year studies, I got to appreciate that the hard questions in philosophy are hard for a reason. I came to appreciate nuances in the debate that had escaped me in my novice years.

An opposing view grants human beings free will on the supposition that there are some activities in the brain that are not caused by prior physical events, or not *completely* caused by prior physical events. This philosophical view is

called 'libertarianism' (not to be confused with political libertarianism). On this view, my choosing to read aloud from *King Lear* is not fully and completely caused by physical forces. This account is called a 'contra-causal' view because it is 'contra'/against a complete physical explanation of human decision-making. This lack of a complete deterministic explanation could be because of quantum fluctuations in some neuronal activity, or because there exist non-material minds or souls that act on some key neurons involved in human decision-making.

You may think that these are the only two possible positions to take on the question of free will, with hard determinists on the one hand accepting the thesis of determinism while rejecting free will and libertarians on the other rejecting determinism in order to allow for free will. Most professional philosophers, however, accept neither of these positions. Most philosophers think that we do possess the capacity to act freely even if all of our thoughts and actions are fully caused by physical forces. This position is called 'soft determinism' or, more commonly, 'compatibilism'. Don't be confused by the 'soft' moniker into thinking that compatibilists don't fully subscribe to determinism. They do. In this essay, I will advance some arguments for why I think the compatibilist position does most justice to both our current scientific understanding and to what the ordinary person means by 'free will'.

Why is this question of free will important anyway? Isn't it just an intellectual word game played by philosophers with nothing better to do? Well, one significant impact is on how people see the justifiability of moral judgments. Some scientifically-minded determinists think that once we get over the illusion of free will, we will see that we also need to ditch the concept of moral responsibility. And this has impacts on how we praise and blame people for their actions, how we treat people in law courts and how we punish people in our penal systems. These hard determinists also want to bring about a wholesale change in the way we talk. They want us to give up what we take today as quite ordinary talk. Take a rather everyday mundane expression, such as, 'I got a free choice on what uniform I wear to work'. Well, for these hard determinist language reformers, that's out the window.

'Ordinary language' analysis

I'm not going to deal with these implications for how we view moral responsibility here. That is a big subject in itself. What I do find, though, is that many of the arguments against free will and moral responsibility are based on some fundamental philosophical mistakes. I want to present to you a different way of looking at the question; a way that will challenge you while bringing simplicity and clarity. The approach I will use is called an 'ordinary language' analysis. This approach investigates what we mean by 'free will', and whether we have it or not, by looking at how ordinary folk talk about free will.

This approach is a strong antidote to the effort by hard determinists and libertarians to convince us that when

ordinary folk talk of acting freely, they are referring to an undetermined or underdetermined will; that is, a contra-causal will. I will try to show you that hard determinists and libertarians are overlaying our ordinary, everyday language with their own metaphysical presuppositions. I will try to show that our ordinary 'free will' talk is metaphysically neutral. What I mean by that is that when Joe says, for example, that he freely gave up his seat on the bus, that his expression is *agnostic* about whether or not his brain states were completely determined by prior physical events.

Let me begin my argument with some basic etymology. The term 'free' arose from the Old English word 'freo' in the thirteenth century. This word meant:

free, exempt from, not in bondage.

[Entry on 'free' in *Collins English Dictionary* and *Online Etymology Dictionary*]

Between the years 1525 and 1535, the conjoined term 'free will' arose for the first time. In the literature of the day and in the ensuing decades, the term was used to denote a person's will that was not constrained or forced. From its earliest uses, it meant an unencumbered and uncoerced will. The term was *not* contrasted with a caused will (i.e., a will caused either by heritable characteristics or brain physiology) as hard determinists and libertarians want us to believe.

This idea that absence of coercion is central to the notion of 'free will' carries through to modern day. For example, the *Collins English Dictionary* renders one of the two meanings of 'free will' as:

the ability to make a choice without coercion: *he left of his own free will: I did not influence him*

Constraints on free will

Now, with modern advances in science and jurisprudence, lay and professional folk have come to appreciate that a person's will can also be encumbered or restricted in other situations. In addition to coercion, these other kinds of situations in which a person's capacity to exercise their free will is restricted are these: manipulation, addiction and mental illness. It is to each of these that I now want to turn.

When you are coerced into doing something you don't want to do, you feel real psychological pressure. Imagine someone holding a gun to your head. In contrast, when we are robbed of our free will through manipulation, we *don't* feel this pressure personally. Yet the person on the street also regards manipulation as a means of robbing a person of their freedom to choose. In both cases, though, the basic notion remains the same: an unfree will is an encumbered will. Manipulation is a direct means of mind control and includes hypnosis, brainwashing, brain implants and zombie drugs. Here is one example of how non-philosophers and non-theologians regard free will in these cases.

Yeonmi Park fled Kim Jong-il's North Korea with her parents. She claimed she was brainwashed by the regime with the result that 'I had not been a real person – I was created for the regime to work for them. If they ordered us

to die, I would've died for them. I wasn't a human – I was something else.' After escaping and educating herself, she said, 'I now have free will' [SBS 2014].

As this example illustrates, brainwashing robs a person of their free will through replacing their personal identity, their character, with another. Central also is the idea that this manipulation is done deliberately by another agent. Once again, the philosopher's notion of contra-causality seems inconsequential.

Consider now addictions. For the ordinary person on the street, as well as for medical and legal experts, many addictions are seen as compromising a person's ability to choose freely. These psychological compulsions that inhibit the exercise of free will include alcohol, substance, work and gambling addictions. Examples are addiction to sex, hoarding, kleptomania and pyromania. Let's look at drug addiction as an example.

Dr Alan Leshner is director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse in the United States. He was asked in an interview about the drug addict's lack of choice and what this means for free will. First, he emphasized that one's 'brain is constantly changing as a function of the experiences one has'. However, if you're an addict,

You're in a state where the drug has totally taken over your being. . . . So, there's something about these biological changes that are going on at the cellular level that gets translated into compulsive, uncontrollable drug use on the behavioural level. [Moyers 1998]

So, for Dr Leshner, free will is *not* about having some of one's brain states form independently of one's genetic constitution and environment. It's about being free of psychological compulsion and being true to one's character; to one's being.

Consider also what happens in the court room. According to the Law Library, a judge will only allow an accused person to enter a guilty plea if they consider that the accused 'exercised free will'. The guilty plea is not accepted if the 'defendant isn't mentally competent at the time he agrees to the plea, for example, due to a developmental disability, intoxication or influence of narcotics' [Law Library 2016].

What these examples demonstrate is that both the common person and the medical and legal professional alike link the loss of free will in cases of addiction to feelings of compulsion, loss of personal identity and reasoning ability. The hard determinist's and libertarian's notion of contra-causality is notably absent from these considerations.

The fourth kind of situation that can limit the ability to choose freely is mental illness. This occurs where the mental illness constrains a person's mental capacity to reason and regulate their behaviour, either because of genetic history, accident or disease. Here is just one example in which ordinary folk talk about how a mental illness robbed a person of free will. June experienced hallucinations that commanded her to commit various acts.

She wrote:

I find that it is like my free will has been removed and have no alternative but, to obey.

She also linked this feeling of compulsion to the feeling that the voice inside her head 'keeps me from being myself' [Nemade 2009].

As this example shows once again, the common themes in the ordinary person's way of thinking about free will are that the exercise of free will requires that a person's character is intact and that they can reason.

Consider also what happens in courts of law. In many legal jurisdictions, the insanity defense applies when it is judged that the accused is dispossessed of their free will. Experts for the defense must testify that the accused is either cognitively incompetent, unable to comprehend the nature of the act and to reason about it, or volitionally incompetent, unable to control their impulses. Contrary to the libertarian's thesis, expert witness for the prosecution is never called upon to demonstrate that the causes of the defendant's transgression were themselves uncaused activities in the brain. The examples I give here are just a snapshot of the many more common person, medical and legal illustrations I offer in my essay, 'Free Will and Compatibilism' [Allan 2016a].

When we advocate the right of 'free thought' in society, we are upholding the right to thought and expression that is free from government, religious and other institutional restrictions.

Paradigmatic examples of 'free will'

Another way to illustrate my point is by looking at paradigmatic uses of the term 'free will' in common discourse. Imagine you're waiting in your local supermarket queue and you overhear this question asked in a conversation about a recent marriage: 'Anisha, did you marry Sanjay of your own free will?' If Anisha did *not* marry Sanjay of her own free will, what evidence would you be listening for in Anisha's answer? Would you be thinking of and looking for evidence about the neurophysiological state of Anisha's brain? Would you be waiting for Anisha to start talking about her motor cortex and whether there were sufficient physical causes firing her neurons? Or would you be looking for evidence of coercion, such as threats by family members to evict Anisha from her home if she marries Sanjay?

The lesson here is that questions about whether a person chose freely are practical questions, rooted in people's day-to-day lives. Hard determinists, in particular, have taken our modern, scientific understanding of the brain and overlaid this causal model onto what they think common language terms, such as 'free will', mean.

Scientists, such as Sam Harris, have also fallen into this trap of injecting their metaphysical understanding of the world into what they think is the common person's use of ordinary language terms.

The hard determinist's insistence here is akin to arguing that because science now shows us that the space within each atom and between the molecules that make up a table is mostly empty, that tables are not really solid. When we describe a table as 'solid', we are not presupposing some physical theory about the distance between the micro-particles that make up the table. In saying that the table is 'solid', we are completely agnostic about whether the micro-particles are jammed tightly together or even whether there are micro-particles. We are simply saying that it is firm with a stable shape. In the same way, when we say that Joe freely gave up his seat on the bus, we are not ascribing strange metaphysical properties to the act. We are simply saying that his act was not encumbered by one or more of the kinds of ordinary constraining factors identified above.

The absurdity of the free will denier's approach is also evident from looking at other paradigmatic instances of the use of 'free'. The term, 'free', is used as a modifier with a number of other nouns. Consider these examples.

When we speak of a 'free range' chicken, we are *not* meaning a chicken whose movements are contra-causal. We are not meaning that the chicken moves in a way that breaks the laws of deterministic physics. We mean that the chicken's movements are not constricted by being housed in a cage or enclosed barn.

Take the term 'free thought'. When we advocate the right of 'free thought' in society, we are upholding the right to thought and expression that is free from government, religious and other institutional restrictions. We are *not* referring to thought that is contra-causal. There are many other examples that illustrate the same point, including 'free hand', 'free vote', 'free fall' and 'free enterprise'. You can see the pattern here.

The ordinary-language critique I'm advancing here can be extended to judicial language and thinking. Throughout the modern history of jurisprudence, in determining whether a defendant was absent of the capacity for free will at the time of the crime, no jury or judge has requested or called in expert witnesses to attest to the fact that at the time of the crime the defendant's relevant brain states transitioned from a physically contra-causal state to a causal state. This is not surprising as no dualist theory of mind and body has delivered on the promise. No metaphysician yet has presented evidence for how and when particular neuron firings in a person's brain get removed from the chains of causation to which neighbouring neurons belong. The same is the case for indeterminists advocating random quantum effects in the brain.

In fact, judges examine, and juries are asked to consider, whether there were any circumstances that either eliminated or mitigated the defendant's ability to choose freely. The types of circumstances that the judge and jury consider include precisely those types of encumbrances I

outlined: coercion or manipulation by a third party, drug addiction and mental illness. These are precisely the impediments to free will to which the compatibilist points.

Four necessary conditions for free will

So far, I've crystallized the four types of situational impediments to the exercise of free will:

1. coercion,
2. manipulation,
3. addiction, and
4. mental illness.

What is it about these situations that minimize a person's capacity to act freely? In the examples I discussed, four requirements for 'free will' seemed to recur throughout. For brevity, I've called this compatibilist account of the requirements for free will the '4C theory'. These 4Cs are:

1. Compulsion
2. Control
3. Character
4. Cognition

I want now to describe briefly each of these requirements.

(1) This first requirement, **Compulsion**, is that the act not feel compelled by the agent's situation. The feeling of compulsion I am referring to here is an introspective psychological experience. Here, the agent feels that they will sacrifice something of great value to them if they do not act in a particular way.

(2) The second requirement, **Control**, is that the act not be controlled by a third party. With the agent's actions being manipulated either directly or indirectly by a third party, they have lost their autonomy. This requirement goes to the heart of what it is to be a moral agent with responsibility for one's actions. For when control of a person's behaviour is surrendered to another moral agent, the locus of responsibility moves along that line of control to the third-party agent in control of the human puppet's behaviour.

(3) The third requirement, **Character**, is that the action is consonant with and a consequence of the agent's character. When the agent's behaviour is out of character, the person is not a *bona fide* agent of their own actions.

(4) The fourth requirement, **Cognition**, is that the agent has the cognitive capability to offer reasons for their action and to deliberate about alternative courses of action. Without rational agency, the person is not exercising autonomy and is better described as a passive repository of impulses.

Each of these four requirements is necessary for a choice to be considered free. Even if one of them is missing, the agent has lost their capacity for free action. What ties all four requirements together is the fundamental axiom I expressed earlier; that a free will is an unencumbered will. With the advent of scientific knowledge and modern technology, this basic understanding of encumbrance as compulsion has been supplemented with

these additional requirements for moral and rational autonomy.

What seems clear is that philosophical and legal thought over the last century or so has largely coalesced around the view that freedom of the will is a characteristic of an autonomous, conscious agent who can reason and deliberate about alternative courses of action. The thinking here is that such a person is constituted by their character and that within the bounds of this character, the agent faces a range of options on how to act in a given situation. When this range is encumbered or restricted by either subverting the person's character or compromising their capacity for rational deliberation and action, the person's freedom is diminished.

So, does science prove that human beings do not have the capacity for free will? I've argued here that we have good reasons for answering, 'No'. As I have tried to show, 'free will' talk is more an expression of the day-to-day concerns of ordinary people rather than a window into their philosophical, metaphysical and scientific beliefs.

Leslie Allan runs the website Rational Realm and is a member of the HSV committee with the responsibility for their website.

He will be addressing the Atheist Society in Melbourne on 10 July, 2018 on the subject 'Can we be free willing robots? –free will in a deterministic world'.

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A group of doctors at an international medical conference are swapping experiences

A British doctor says, 'Medicine in my country is so advanced that we can take a kidney out of one man, put it in another man, and have him looking for work in six weeks.'

'That's nothing', says a German doctor, 'We can take a lung out of one person, put it in another man, and have him looking for work in four weeks.'

A Russian doctor says, 'In my country, medicine is so advanced we take half a heart out of one person, put it in another man, and have both of them looking for work in two weeks.'

The American doctor, not to be outdone, says, 'You guys are way behind us. We just took a man with no brain out of Texas, put him in the White House, and now half the country is looking for work'.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson are on a camping trip. In the middle of the night Holmes wakes up and gives Watson a nudge.

'Watson,' he says 'look up and tell me what you see.'

'I see billions of stars, Holmes.'

'And what do you conclude from that, Watson?'

Watson thinks for a moment. 'Well, astronomically, it tells me that there are billions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce the time is approximately a quarter past three. Meteorologically, I think tomorrow will be a beautiful day. Theologically, I see god is all powerful and we are insignificant. So, what does it tell you Holmes?'

'Watson, you idiot. It tells me, someone has stolen our tent.'

Randy, a Texan farmer goes to Australia for a vacation. While travelling around he meets Kev, an Aussie farmer and they get talking. Kev shows off his big wheat field and the Texan says, 'Oh yeah. We have wheat fields that are at least twice as large.'

Then they walk around the property a little, and Kev shows off his herd of cattle. Randy immediately says, 'We have longhorns that are at least twice as large as your cows.'

The conversation has, meanwhile, almost died when the Texan sees a herd of kangaroos hopping through the field and so he asks, 'And what are those?'

Kev replies with an incredulous look, 'Don't you have any grasshoppers in Texas?'

Humanism, Humanitarianism, and Humaneness

Peter Hotchin

Humanness is not humaneness. It is not, for the obvious reason that some people in their very humanness are decidedly inhumane. But there are also many people who are humane, and it is the contention of this essay that such people will generally subscribe either to humanism or to humanitarianism, or to both. The relationship between humanism and humanitarianism is the subject of this essay.

According to the Macquarie Dictionary, humanism is ‘any system or mode of thought or action in which human interests predominate,’ while humanitarianism is defined as ‘the doctrine that man’s obligations are concerned wholly with the welfare of the human race.’ ‘Humaneness’ will be broached in a moment, but we can already see how humanism and humanitarianism might be related. Since the notion ‘human interests’ arguably encompasses human welfare, humanitarianism could on the basis of the Macquarie definitions be looked upon as subsisting under humanism – anyone espousing humanitarianism would also be a humanist, though not vice versa. Alternatively, humanitarianism could be considered equivalent to humanism: no less a figure than the philosopher Sir Karl Popper (1902 – 1994) seemed to think so. Popper, who, amongst his many honours, was a recipient of the Humanist Laureate Award from the International Academy of Humanism, can be found using the terms as if they were interchangeable.

That said, there is another kind of relationship worth considering, where overlap between the ‘isms’ still occurs, but only partially. There would be people who are both, humanist and humanitarian, others who are humanist but not humanitarian, others still who are humanitarian but not humanist, and, of course, some who are neither humanist nor humanitarian. For a relationship of that kind to come into being, or indeed either of the kinds mentioned above (subsistence, equivalence), there would have to be something capable of bringing the two isms together. That something, I believe, is ‘humaneness’. Conceptually, each of the isms seems to me to be imbued with humaneness; and, as a personal characteristic, humaneness is a quality that appears to be common both to humanists and humanitarians. But we will also see that, besides being a means of connecting humanism and humanitarianism, humaneness can also serve to differentiate them.

Before going any further, I want to be clear that what we have in view here is something that might be called ‘small-h humanism’, as distinct from ‘large-H Humanism’. The latter refers to the system of thought adopted by the Humanist movement, which got under way late in the nineteenth century. The former refers to sets of beliefs held by non-members of Humanist associations, beliefs that conduce towards actions that are either wholly or largely consistent with Humanist principles. The main attitudes of small-h humanism have been around for very much longer

than large-H Humanism. For example, the Renaissance scholar Erasmus is widely described as a humanist. A Roman Catholic priest and scholar, Erasmus saw no incompatibility between the religious life and the use of reason in academic and literary pursuits. He was also an advocate of religious tolerance, but his devotion to Catholicism (he was an opponent of Lutheran reform) would today distance him from large-H Humanism, which is profoundly secularist if not atheistic. There would still be many people subscribing either tacitly or explicitly to Erasmus’s style of small-h humanism, with or without religious content, but also without fully embracing the large-H agenda.



Renaissance scholar – Erasmus

In other words, small-h humanists will be largely sympathetic towards Humanist policies and principles, but with a somewhat looser allegiance than that of their large-H counterparts. A similar distinction might be drawn between large-H Humanitarianism and small-h humanitarianism. The large-H variety would consist of the amalgam of tenets that guide the actions of operatives belonging to humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross, World Vision, and Amnesty International. Small-h humanitarianism would be formed from the beliefs among the general population that culminate in support, again either tacit or explicit, for the aims of such organisations. As was the case with humanism, my concern here is mainly with the small-h variety. Notwithstanding the proposed distinctions, humaneness, I believe, would be found to be characteristic of both varieties of humanism, and both varieties of humanitarianism. Whether the converse applies, to the

effect that humane people are necessarily either humanist or humanitarian (or both), will not be canvassed here, but I strongly suspect that the answer would be in the affirmative. I will now proceed with an analysis of humaneness.¹

Humaneness explained

If someone were to ask us what we mean when we use the term 'humaneness' we would probably start by talking about such qualities as 'kindness', and 'empathy'. And we would be correct to do so, but if we were to think a little more deeply about it, we might also find something like 'principled consideration of the needs of others' coming into view. I think it can be shown that that notion pretty well sums what humaneness is about.

Setting aside 'principled' for a moment, humaneness is 'consideration' in two of the term's customary senses, thoughtfulness and tolerance. Thoughtfulness consists in thinking before acting. By means of attentiveness, humane people take in as much relevant information as they can. Attentiveness serves to counter carelessness and any attendant harm. Thoughtfulness also entails reflectiveness. By means of reflectiveness we become aware of alternative courses of action from which to choose, and by the same means determine what kind of action would best serve our interests. Reflectiveness would also raise awareness of the possibility of our own interests being best served by catering to the interests of relevant others, for example those to whom we are bound by ties of affection and duty. In so far as it is humane, thoughtfulness occurs against a morally acceptable background. The same applies to consideration in general, with tolerance providing material for the background, i.e. tolerance as revealed by one's actions (and through them one's character), including the words one uses when referring to others.

A tolerant person understands that some beliefs held by others and the needs that go with those beliefs will be at variance with his or her own beliefs and needs. More than that, anyone who is truly tolerant will accept the likelihood that the beliefs of others will often be closer to the truth than one's own beliefs. In other words, there will be acknowledgement of one's mistakes; and, with that, the hope that others will be sympathetic towards one's unavoidable fallibility.² Humility and reciprocity go hand in hand with tolerance. Tolerance also extends to acceptance of actions consequent upon different beliefs, for example in matters of diet, dress, and worship – on the proviso that the actions are not themselves expressions of intolerance, and do not involve violence.

The term 'principled'

Humane consideration is principled because, when adopted as a guide to the conduct of one's life, it is adequately informed by reason and it is maintained and acted upon with consistency. Consistency is a mark of order, of conformity between a person's beliefs and actions. When one's beliefs include beliefs about the relevance of the basic needs of

other living beings, actions that stem from them will tend to enhance orderliness in the world, rather than undermining it. Part of that orderliness will be attributable to the mitigation of harmful unintended consequences arising from our actions.

To this point a humane person has been presented as being thoughtful and tolerant, in a principled manner. Kindness and empathy have also been mentioned, but there is another characteristic that I would also like to touch on, namely 'cooperativeness'. Cooperativeness could reasonably be regarded as a natural outgrowth of the tolerance that comes with reflectiveness, but it is important enough in its own right to warrant discussion. That great seventeenth century rationalist, and dare I say humanist, Benedict de Spinoza will be my guide.

Spinoza's work can be regarded as an attempt to reconcile self-interest with an ethical life. In his view, human behaviour is fundamentally motivated by striving for self-determined action, which may be presumed to arise from self-interest. While that might seem to be an unpromising foundation for an ethics in general and cooperativeness in particular, Spinoza nevertheless managed to find a place for both. His was a kind of rationally-based moral egoism, in so far as acts that superficially appear to be contrary to one's interests come to be justified by demonstrating that the acts concerned are or were – all things considered – in fact consistent with them. According to Spinoza, rational beings understand that their power of acting is enhanced or facilitated by enhancing or facilitating the power of acting enjoyed by other beings. Consequently, rational beings strive to bring into effect conditions that are conducive to the satisfaction of the needs of others as well as attending to their own needs – where the latter depends in part on the cooperative effort of other rational beings. In other words, conditions that are consistent with the interests of everyone involved in all of the many processes of need satisfaction – a community of interests, one might say, where cooperativeness is the rule.

The Humaneness of Humanism and Humanitarianism

In sum, norms, or values, that reflect humaneness include thoughtfulness, attentiveness, tolerance, kindness, empathy, cooperativeness, and principled commitment. Which, if any, of these values would be disavowed by humanists, or by humanitarians? None, I believe, by people of either persuasion: a person who is unthoughtful, or intolerant, or unkind, or indifferent to suffering, or uncooperative, or unprincipled would be neither humanist nor humanitarian. However, I suspect that endorsement of the values or some of them at least, would come from the respective camps with different degrees of emphasis. Should that be the case, humaneness would assist in differentiating humanism from humanitarianism, as well as linking them. A survey of humanists and humanitarians would help to prove or disprove the point, but, as far as I am aware, no such survey

is available. In its place, I will offer some suggestions on what I think might be revealed, were one to be conducted.

- Humanists are kindly disposed towards other people, but humanitarians tend to place more value on deeds done from kindness than on kindly attitudes.
- Empathy is a more pronounced principle of action for humanitarians than it is for humanists.
- Thoughtfulness and attentiveness are characteristic of rationality; as such, they are generally of higher value (relative to the other specified values) for humanists than for humanitarians.
- Tolerance of the beliefs and actions of others can be more or less rationally arrived at: more by humanists, less by humanitarians.
- Cooperativeness too can have either a rational basis or an emotional one, or a combination of the two. Humanists lean towards the former and humanitarians the latter, but it is generally of similar overall value to both sets of adherents.
- Humanists and humanitarians are principled people. All tend to be firm in their commitment to humaneness, though occasionally to slightly different versions thereof.

All in all, notwithstanding the shared centrality of humaneness, differences (not merely terminological) are discernible between humanism and humanitarianism. If the foregoing conjectures are anywhere near the truth, the differences could steer humanists and humanitarians towards different ethical positions. The essay concludes with some remarks on that matter.

Humanism and humanitarianism are both fundamentally ethical concerns. Each seeks to advance good over evil, or right over wrong. In its quest for a safer and more compassionate world, humanism aims at personal betterment, i.e. at making its adherents more virtuous – kinder, more tolerant, more empathetic, more reasonable, more strongly committed, and so on. In technical terms, the ethics of humanism is predominantly a virtue ethics. Humanitarianism, by contrast, looks more towards improving the lot of those whose welfare it considers deficient – deficiencies, for example in terms of widespread starvation, rampant disease, and endemic violence. Humanitarians feel that they are under an obligation to try to redress such deficiencies, often by means of charitable action. Humanitarianism's primary focus is *doing* good, as distinct from *being* good: technically, it is informed by a deontological ethics, i.e. an ethics of duty.

Mind you, as was the case with the characteristics of humaneness, the alternative positions with regard to ethics should only be regarded as differences in emphasis. For it is hard to imagine how someone could *be* good without *doing* good; and, conversely, how a person could *be* anything but good when he or she *does* good. Furthermore, it is highly likely that many humanists will be driven to act from a sense of duty towards others whose welfare is at risk; and that many humanitarians will be interested in striving for self-

betterment. Therefore, while a distinction between humanism and humanitarianism might roughly be drawn along lines of ethical orientation, the border would have to be regarded as porous. Popper's interchangeability may not have been so very wide of the mark after all.

Peter Hotchin is the author of *The Principle of Harm-Minimisation: A Naturalistic Metaphysic of Morality* (Sydney: Cilento Publishing, 2016) and HSV Treasurer.

Endnotes

1. The discussion of humaneness is based on my book, *The Principle of Harm Minimisation: A Naturalistic Metaphysic of Morality* (Sydney: Cilento Publishing, 2016).
2. I am indebted to Karl Popper for the ideas on the relationship between tolerance and human fallibility. Popper in turn acknowledged his debt in that regard to Socrates and Voltaire.

Corrections

The article 'Refugees – Breaking the Canberra Stalemate' by Kevin Bain, in *AH* No. 129, contained several editing changes an error, as follows, for which the editor apologises.

Page 2, slide 2 **The Problem for the refugees**. In the third dot point, the last phrase should have read 'they exist on **89%** Centrelink or from private charities'.

Page 2, second column, under the heading **Summary of April 2017 presentation**, the third dot point should have read 'the government having **no** credible exist strategy' not 'the government having **a** credible exit strategy'.

Page 4, 'We can expect that relying on ineffective domestic pressures, even when augmented by **international forces, can result in little more than getting the occasional case** to the International Criminal Court and charging Australia with 'crimes against humanity'.'

Was changed from:

'We can expect that relying exclusively on ineffective domestic pressures will be supplemented by **international forces which can be brought to bear, such as the case** taken to the International Criminal Court charging Australia with "crimes against humanity".'

The judgement introduced here is not mine (Kevin Bain), and is not very informed. The ICC case is a slow burning one but significant, and a large meeting at RMIT last December was fronted by Burnside and Gillian Triggs. It heard the case is progressing to a significant stage. Harvard Law School and London University Law Faculty have prepared the submission, and it is not seen by people close to the action a trivial matter.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/feb/13/international-criminal-court-told-australias-detention-regime-could-be-a-against-humanity>

Vale

Harry John Gardner (1927 – 2018)

A life well lived



Harry was born in Subiaco, Western Australia. He was an able student and gained entry to the University of Western Australia, where he completed a PhD in chemistry. This led to him being awarded a Fulbright Fellowship in the USA, where he met his future wife, Lorrie Niedeck. They married in 1956 and returned to Australia where Harry joined the CSIRO, in the Division of Mineral Chemistry, in Melbourne where he enjoyed a career in industrial electro-chemistry until 1988. He was a valued member of his professional association and was awarded life membership

Harry had a great love of music, especially folk, and once retired he drew great enjoyment from playing his fiddle. He was a life member and past president of the Victorian Folk Music Club and played frequently with the Fireside Fiddlers as well busking in shopping centres. He also assisted Lorrie with her puppet show, a school entertainment business she had run for many years. Harry's contribution was to add a scientific experimental component to the educational workshops, as well as his fiddle playing. It is estimated that together Lorrie and Harry entertained over a million children.

Harry joined the Humanist Society of Victoria in the late 1960s. He soon became a committee member and served as vice-president 1969–72 and president in 1973. As president, Harry led a well prepared delegation from HSV to the Committee on Religious Education (Vic Education Dept.), chaired by William B. Russell. The delegation argued the case for the abolition of religious instruction by volunteers, and the introduction of comparative religion and ethics, taught by professional teachers, in Victorian government schools.

The 1974 Russell Report concluded that change was indeed needed along the lines proposed by HSV, in order to keep pace with changing community attitudes. Regrettably, however, the government took no action on the reports' recommendations.

After the death of Lorrie in 2005, Harry served a second period on HSV committee, 2006–10, resuming his interest in children's moral education and acting as HSV education spokesperson from 2007. Being a gregarious fellow he initiated contact with the burgeoning multi-faith movement; he persuaded Centre of Melbourne Multi-faith and Others Network (COMMON) not only that 'Others' were needed but also that a list of humanistic values was sufficient for them to agree on common action.

Harry wanted to know whether the new Education Act of 2006 could allow a non-theistic world-view like Humanism to compete with Christianity in State primary schools. So he consulted Religions for Peace, which accredited non-standard religious instructors, and was given a friendly reception. He went on to develop a Humanist teaching manual comprised of 189 practical ethics lessons, which were entirely participatory. The topics were chosen to encourage both analytic and constructive thinking as the foundation for creative initiative and to guide ethical behaviour in later life. He tried some of them out on small groups, who joined in with gusto, owing to Harry's light touch. That work stands as one of his principal Humanist achievements. Its value is recognized by Harry's recent co-option to the committee of Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools.

In 2009 he presented a lesson demonstrating secular ethics to the Parliament of the World's Religions, using his Waltzing Matilda puppets. He has since been an important member of the HSV group marshalling parents complaining about religious discrimination in State primary schools; he proposed notifying all the school councils, as has been done. For his Humanist outreach, promotion of secular ethics, engagement of children and sustained commitment to children's needs, Harry Gardner was awarded as an **Outstanding Humanist Achiever for 2012**.

Harry continued to be active on ethical education. His efforts and those of many others were rewarded when the Victorian government excluded Special Religion from class time and set about replacing it with an education program on World religions and other beliefs including Humanism.

And as a final act of lobbying commitment, once the Victorian government foreshadowed its intent to put up Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill, in 2017 Harry undertook to personally visit as many Victorian MPs as he could. This personal approach led several wavering MPs to support the historic legislation passed late in 2017.

Harry lived as an outstanding and highly regarded Australian Humanist.

Compiled by S.N. Stuart and Rosslyn Ives

Achilles heel of the Enlightenment

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.

Adam Smith *Wealth of Nations*

Victor Bien

The self-interest of people-at-large is the Achilles heel of the Enlightenment. And as we know, the Enlightenment enabled and led to the industrial revolution which has transformed the world. There are a number of ways to illustrate this truism; probably one of the most well-known is the statistics which show growth in pre-industrial times basically as a flat line. However, once the industrial revolution was under way many statistics began to rise up steeply as growth and production rose. This results in a 'hockey stick' graph which first came to my attention when described by climate change deniers.

The underlying factor that creates the Achilles heel for the Enlightenment is the human propensity to unburden ourselves of the effort, or 'cost', in order to improve our lives, or gain 'benefit'. There are myriad of examples which document this propensity. However, ironically, the Enlightenment which can be seen as the outcome of the struggle of humanity to escape from the shackles of debilitating tribal and religious beliefs, has resulted in a most adverse outcome!

This unburdening has been achieved by directly or indirectly drawing some 'services' from the natural world. For example humans have achieved 'man magnification' by harnessing energy sources, notably fossil fuel. The resulting release of carbon dioxide that had been locked up for millions of years has produced the greenhouse effect that has led to global warming. This outcome is disputed by climate change deniers, but for me this scientific fact is not a debatable matter.

Man's harnessing of the Earth's stored energy sources has produced other compounding impacts on the natural world to satisfy our wants. These include railways, motor transport and airways. One piece of reading I've just done is how the plague of tourists on countless boats and ships is devastating the environment, including beautiful reefs in many parts of the world!

There are many, many stories about the impact of human activity on the environment which can be seen in terms of the Achilles heel of the Enlightenment described above.

For most of human history up to the beginning of the Enlightenment and its associated Industrialisation, the Earth seemed an infinite resource. This was an appropriate

assumption in the pre-industrial period, but in a mathematical sense it was never actually infinite. It was only assumable because the impact by humans in percentage terms was 'for practical purposes' infinitely small. However, over the four hundred years or so (~16 generations) since the beginning of the industrial revolution and the compounding effect of population growth, facilitated by the growth in technology and life-extending medical advances. Collectively these have multiplied our individually small impact by a very large number, such that the aggregate effect of humanity as a whole on Earth now is so large, the post WWII period has been dubbed the 'Anthropocene'!

This can also be described in terms of the 'limits to growth', a term generated by a book of that title in the 70s. At the time *Limits to Growth* was a controversial book, which makes it difficult to bring up the issue in the present, but again I not willing to let that little Achilles heel stop me from making use of the concept!

In other words, collectively, our human impact on the Earth is causing extinctions in the natural world that rival some of the greatest extinction events of the geological past, such as the asteroid impact which wiped out the dinosaurs. I'm quite pessimistic that despite strenuous efforts to reduce our impact on the environment, to limit the emission of greenhouse gases, we are not succeeding and the overall achievement of the Enlightenment will not end well.

Almost universally individual persons or groups such as a company, a community, a nation, a region, a tribe etc. seek to better themselves. For practical purposes no one does anything that is 'not in their interest'. So we have the syndrome of 'cost shifting'; that is, if we can pass the cost of doing something to someone else or some other group of people, we do! 'No one does anything out of the goodness of their hearts', 'people are greedy and take, take, take...', we have the 'tragedies of the commons' – one sees that everywhere in small scale and large and everything in between.

The human bias to only seek that which betters themselves, and cost-shift all that doesn't, notably affects the attitude to scientific knowledge as well. For over a hundred years everyone was for science. That's because all scientific discoveries nearly universally benefited everyone individually and collectively. The first notable resistance to advancing science was probably Darwin's theory of evolution. This was not in the interest of various religious communities. That historic event first created the reaction we see time and time again. The affected interested parties sought to deny the science. Today the biggest historic event with this character was when science, physical chemistry, elucidated that the large scale emissions of carbon dioxide would produce global warming. This led the fossil fuel industry to seek to deny the science of the effect of burning vast amounts of fossil fuels.

A serious knock-on effect of this denial is that the broad public saw that, because it was 'OK' (in the public relations sense – not in the scientific community) for a

global 'reputable' sector to deny scientific findings which did not suit their interests, they could behave the same. A terrible consequence of that behaviour is that today populist reactionaries have become politically assertive and will deny anything that doesn't suit them, and do so without embarrassment or shame to win votes! This syndrome has now morphed into a general disregard for 'elites' (which is not to say that some of the behaviour of elites hasn't been reprehensible). The overall result today in respect to the rightness or wrongness of propositions we have a tower of Babel! This is a broad outcome of the Enlightenment which of course was never intended!

Over time, particularly since the late 70s and early 80s, a time associated with the names of Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher, economic inequality has grown now to the point, where as Oxfam recently pointed out, the top 1% of individuals in the world own half of the world's wealth, with the rest of the 6 billion or so owning the other half in a hockey-stick-shaped distribution. Costs are shifted by people of more influence and power onto those that have less and so on down the chain via the poorest of the poor, and finally out into the environment directly or indirectly. In fact, from the top of the inequality pyramid everyone beneath a given person in question can be seen as part of the 'environment', and fractal-like, the view remains the same from the very top down the pyramid to the Earth!

With such a maldistribution of wealth and associated maldistributed means of influence or power by any person or group, it's small wonder when the whole of humanity is running up against the physical limits of the natural world. In other words, there is no more scope to expand into 'green fields' therefore conflict is guaranteed!

The Australian Murray Darling river issue exemplifies the problem caused by an unavoidable constraint to a tee. Putting the situation in economic terms (which many question whether that's appropriate, a debate which I'll ignore for now), the river provides a 'service' to the economy which can be quantified – so many gigalitres of water will support x hectares of crops. We need to keep in mind that there is a maximum amount of water which can be taken for agricultural use without damaging the environment of the river (it's a specific case of the statement that planet Earth is not infinitely big). A few years ago, Tim Flannery with an associate travelled along the river in a tinnie for a TV documentary. He showed scenes of river red gums dying by the banks of the river in its lower reaches because of insufficient 'environmental flows'. Where did the water go? A great deal is captured by large-scale, water-hungry agricultural activity, notably vast cotton farms in northern NSW. In recent months this issue made headlines because an agreement struck between the Commonwealth and States a few years ago to allow, a scientifically determined necessary environmental flow back was flagrantly disregarded by the big cotton farms in northern NSW. The environmental flow was funded by public money, and yet vested interests just ignored it because physically and politically they could.

Our local regional part of the planet constrains/limits what we humans can do. Everyone concerned need to restrain themselves for the greater good, but it's the constraint of earthly physical limits which creates the imperative for human restraint. Even if we should blithely destroy the river, there is only so much water. It's of concern that competing interests may turn to fighting over the water. A similar situation is happening in rivers all over the world. This is the Achilles heel of cost-shifting across the commonwealth. From the business point of view of people at the top of a river, everyone and everything downstream is seen as the 'environment'. If the environment is not internalised, not factored into accounts, it becomes a no-brainer to see what happens.

None of this is helped by religion reflected in these words from one of them, the Bible:

Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1: 28.)

These words written by humans became 'canonised' by yet more humans and reflexed back onto all of us. Giving us a special warrant to have dominion over the environment is exactly a root problem created by the human species in the first place!

Victor Bien is a long-time Humanist, holding position in several State Societies and at the CAHS level. He was awarded Outstanding Humanist Achiever for 2010.

Affinity groups

Joining an affinity group is one way for people to link up over a shared common interest. At the recent CAHS Annual General Meeting, 13 April, a late motion from HSQ proposed and passed, as follows:

'That CAHS act to facilitate co-operation between members of humanist societies with common interests by helping to establish 'affinity' groups for interested members. CAHS to develop processes for establishing affinity groups.'

As a first step, CAHS President Lyndon Storey is inviting expressions of interest from Humanist Society members who would like to help start an affinity group for developing and expressing humanist values and insight on a particular issue or policy area. If you are interested please contact him by email at president@humanist.org.au

Letter to editor

Gary Bakker remains critical of humanist chaplains

I AM NOT SURPRISED that several ‘humanist chaplains’ have responded defensively (*AH* No.129) to my recent criticism of the very concept of such a person (‘Recent craven concessions, compromises, and capitulations to spiritualism’, *AH* No. 128), but I am disappointed at the quality of those defences. All five respondents defended against arguments I did not make.

They busily pointed out all the great work done by humanist chaplains. At no time have I criticized or dismissed this. But I argue strongly that doing it as a ‘chaplain’ and in a chaplaincy system alongside religious chaplains simply bolsters all those who have dismissed humanism as ‘just another belief system’. I am *so* tired of pointing out that not collecting stamps is not just another hobby.

I want humanism to be more than Murray Love’s ‘serious alternative to religion in helping people’. It should, of course, be the norm, the mainstream, the authentic pure help, undiluted by dogma and proselytizing – not just another competing alternative.

Murray suggests that I should direct my complaint that amateurs are intruding on psychological work at *all* chaplains. That is *exactly* what I am doing – humanist chaplains included!

Murray assures us that no-one has the intention to proselytize ‘atheism to vulnerable believers’, and ‘of course we’d weed [them] out...No-one is seeking here to be some kind of priest’. But why should we believe him any more than we believe the Christian chaplains on this? Especially when Lyndon Storey admits he is keen ‘to build a humanist alternative and promote it’.

We are much better off keeping our beliefs completely out of our volunteer or paid helping roles.

Several respondents took the line: It’s only words. What does it matter what we’re called? Where to start with this?!

As names have power, words have power. Words can light fires in the minds of men. Words can wring tears from the hardest hearts.

(Patrick Rothfuss)

The word ‘chaplain’ has more than just a ‘religious history’ (Lyndon Storey). It has a current religious meaning. So the capitulation that ‘sometimes we might have to use words we don’t like, such as chaplain’ is not good enough. This would be like arguing to use the word ‘God’ instead of ‘Nature’ when discussing evolution because more people will listen to us.

Charles Foley feels the title ‘chaplain’ suits him ‘just fine’. But he also thinks we should ‘tweak’ the definition to

include people ‘commissioned or endorsed by a recognized belief system’. This is pure ‘concession, compromise, and capitulation’. It simply legitimizes the whole chaplaincy movement.

If you want to do that wonderful work, then train up as a volunteer counsellor, befriender, support worker, hospital visitor, celebrant, or whatever *secular* helper you like. I’m told Lifeline’s telephone counselling and befriender courses are good. But don’t do Spiritual Health Victoria’s chaplaincy course. Don’t accept and join the proselytizers’ world. And keep your humanism out of it, as we expect them to keep their religion out of it.

The problem I, and the Australian Psychological Society, have with chaplains in schools is that the government funds spent on them could have been spent on better qualified counsellors, school psychologists, social workers, and guidance officers. Replacing religious proselytizers with humanist or secular chaplains instead of fully qualified counsellors does not satisfy or appease us.

While we are redefining terms to suit us, Murray Love wants to redefine ‘spirituality’ to include “things like purpose, anxiety, choices, trust...” so we can happily cater for those who are ‘spiritual but not religious’ (SBNR). But these are not spiritual terms at all. They are psychological concepts. They have nothing at all to do with immaterial spirits.

So when letter-writer Joe Sehee quotes his Spiritual Care Victoria workshop literature claiming, with no supportive evidence, that ‘a focus on spirituality significantly improves patient health outcomes’, he is conflating and confusing spiritual and psychological support just as much as they are. This is clear when he asserts that ‘spiritual care is simply the provision of human comfort’.

Scientific psychology has taken over 2,000 years to supplant religious/spiritual/superstitious explanations for people’s problems. To appease SBNR people by providing spiritual guidance through a (humanist) chaplain instead of supportive counselling by a trained volunteer takes us back those 2,000 years.

Gary Bakker is a clinical psychologist from Tasmania

ENLIGHTENMENT NOW: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress,

By Steven Pinker

New York: Viking, 2018.

Reviewer: **Peter Hotchin**

Steven Pinker's new book opens with a brief account of the Enlightenment, which got under way in the eighteenth century. Reason at that time began to supplant dogma in humankind's striving for knowledge and understanding. The new age's motto was Kant's, 'dare to understand': an injunction that, if followed, promised new ways of improving the human condition. Followed it was, and through the application of critical rationality, science helped lead the way. Humanism, in its insistence on a secular and rational basis for ethics, joined the push for progress.

Progress is shown by Pinker to have continued beyond the eighteenth century, on many measures: for example, increases in global life expectancy and decreases in child mortality. Extreme poverty has also diminished, with an accompanying increase in prosperity (although at the cost of a surge in inequality). Contributing to the improvements have been the decline of communism, the development of market economies, the end of the Cold War, more enlightened leadership in a number of nations, and globalisation. Pinker stresses the importance of understanding how and why human well-being has progressed – identification and understanding of the causes will enable us to build on them.

Peace is shown to have been trending upwards; peace, that is, in terms of fewer wars between states and civil wars, and a reduction in deaths from genocide. Global military expenditure has been falling, as a percentage of GDP. Rates of death from homicide, motor vehicle accidents, plane crashes, industrial accidents and natural disasters have all diminished, spectacularly so. One adverse trend is the recent increase in drug-fuelled violence. Evidence of moral progress exists in worldwide downward trends in racism, sexism, homophobia, and child labour. Progress has also been achieved with respect to environmental problems, including reductions in the incidence of oil-spills and deforestation, and increases in habitat protection. Greenhouse gas emissions and the resultant global warming nevertheless remain huge problems.

Other threats to progress also exist. Cyberterrorism, bioterrorism, and nuclear war are common sources of anxiety. While the chances of cataclysm might be small, the risks have been amplified by the presence of apocalyptic mind-sets. Pessimism has become prevalent. A lot of people seem either unable or unwilling to believe that things

have gotten better on so many fronts. Why? Concentration by news media on crime and violence is one factor. Another is the human propensity to believe in the impotency of the good relative to the potency of the bad. Pessimism is also fashionable in some quarters. In such a climate, the worries could turn into self-fulfilling prophesies; or they could plunge us into defeatism. Pinker's advice is to treat the risks as problems, in which case solutions might be found. Quantitative thinking is his cure for pessimism. With regard to nuclear arms, it is noted that significant reductions in the number of warheads have occurred in the U.S. and Russia, thereby lowering the chances of an accidental nuclear conflagration. Pinker recommends that nations adopt a policy of No First Use: if that were done, there would be no nuclear war.

The book concludes with a chapter on humanism. Humanists will enjoy Pinker's affirmation of what humanism is about, and his spirited defence against its enemies. Friends of humanism include members of Humanist associations, and the many non-members who believe (either explicitly or implicitly) and live by principles central to the movement. Humanism consists in a set of principles on *what ought to be*, alongside science's naturalistic explanations of *what is*.

What is it that humanism maintains *ought to be*? Among other things, maximal human flourishing, abstention from doing harm, observance of human rights, and the determination of 'what ought to be' by human beings, not supernatural beings (humanism denies that such beings exist). Who are humanism's enemies? Pinker delineates two broad groups of assailants: religionists on the one hand, and adherents of the 'romantic-heroic-tribal authoritarian' complex on the other; the latter being conducive to populism. The same people may represent both camps; for example, American Evangelicals. Pinker's counter-attack is succinct and forceful. His argument against the theistic 'God of the gaps' proposition is especially cogent. He places Nietzsche at the forefront of the other enemy's legions. The German philosopher's notion of the *Übermensch* (over-man), and his dismissal of what he saw as the pervading 'slave morality', were ideas that eventually played into the hands of autocratic proponents of the might-is-right principle. Who will prevail?

On the whole, Pinker is cautiously optimistic about our future prospects: his message is along the lines of 'we have coped so far, and in all probability will continue to do so'. But there is no room for complacency. There is a great deal to be learnt from this important book. Pinker supports his argument with so much quantitative data that even the most hardened sceptic might find it difficult to remain unconvinced. The book is one to be savoured and digested. The writing is lucid and lively, and the erudition of its author most impressive.

THE RIVER OF CONSCIOUSNESS,

by Oliver Sacks

London: Picador, 2017, x + 237 pages, paperback,
ISBN 978-1-4472-6366-1, \$32.99

Reviewer: **Angus Martin**

The *River of Consciousness* is a collection of ten essays, the longest of which provides the book's title. It was published after Sacks' death in August 2015, having been assembled by his partner Bill Hayes, his long-time friend Kate Edgar and his editor at Knopf Publishers, Daniel Frank, from drafts, notes and recordings.

Here's a pertinent Sacks anecdote, to be found on page 123: taking her leave of him one day, Kate said she was going to choir practice. He was surprised, having had no idea that she belonged to a choir. She didn't. His aging ears had misheard the word *chiropractors*. A few days later the same word came across to him as *firecrackers*.

'So what?' may be your reaction – it's something that happens to all of us as we get older. Indeed. What is noteworthy, though, is Sacks' response to the incidents. He set up a special notebook in which he recorded each new anomaly: 'I enter what I hear (in red) on one page, what was actually said (in green) on the opposite page, and (in purple) people's reactions to my mishearings ...'

Obsessive? Hyper-pernickety? Perhaps, but surely also indicative of a defining aspect of Sacks' genius – his capacity to observe and analyse elements of human behaviour and to link them with underlying neurological mechanisms. 'While mishearings may seem to be of little special interest,' he says, 'they can cast an unexpected light on the nature of perception ...'

The River of Consciousness of the book's title and the penultimate essay derives from this question: Is visual perception a smooth, seamless, continuous process like a flowing stream, or do we see individual small chunks which our brains then assemble into the appearance of an unbroken flow? An element of the discussion is the recounting of case-studies, such as a woman who, following a stroke became 'motion-blind'. This meant that she might see a car, for instance, 'frozen' a considerable distance away, but find when she set out to cross the road that it was almost upon her.

Sacks' most widely read work, at a guess, would be his intriguingly-titled *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1985), which is an assemblage of comparably fascinating case-studies of people with such conditions as autism, Tourette's syndrome and a number of other extraordinary sensory, motor and cerebral capacities. Far from being a freak-show, it is built on the relationship between the observer and the observed being one of respect and warmth. Sacks' ultimate interest is not in the conditions for their own sake, but in their neurological basis, and in what they can

reveal about the mechanisms underlying the 'ordinary' condition.

I'm amused that one critic described him as 'the man who mistook his patients for a literary career'. In my years of teaching animal behaviour and evolutionary biology to tertiary students, I found the case-study approach uniquely helpful; in Sacks' hands it is compelling. *The River of Consciousness* is rich with examples, such as the fallibility of memory, the physiology of migraines and indeed the diagnosis and treatment of the liver cancer which was to take Sacks' life. But in the Foreword to the book the compilers note that in it Sacks also 'calls upon his great scientific and creative heroes – above all, Darwin, Freud and William James.' I knew very little about James; hence I was substantially enlightened by, in particular, the last two essays. I thought of Freud in terms that barely extended beyond the 'father of psychoanalysis' label; but in fact, and for no less than twenty years in his earlier career, he worked in the fields of anatomy and neurology. Sacks argues (p. 95) that Freud's substantial synthesis of his travels in these realms – written in 1895 but not published until much later – includes a number of notions that 'retain (or have assumed) striking relevance to many current ideas in neuroscience'. I had no idea of this 'other side' of Freud.

Sacks' third hero, Charles Darwin, receives more attention than do the other two: he occupies all of the first essay and most of the third. Given the number of books I've read by or about Darwin, I imagined that Sacks' essays might provide me with a comfortable cruise through familiar territory. I was wrong. While Darwin saw himself primarily as a geologist, for instance, and the finches and tortoises of the Galapagos Islands emphasise his zoological proclivities, Sacks reminds us of his seminal contributions to botany:

Darwin found in his botanical work the strongest evidence for evolution and natural selection ...

Botany, indeed, was the first evolutionary science, and Darwin's botanical work was to lead the way to all the other evolutionary sciences.

Again, he is aware of Darwin's self-reflection that 'my mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts.' This suggestion of drudgery may perhaps apply to his painstaking labours in writing *The Origin* and his other major works. Sacks notes, however, that over the 46 years after the *HMS Beagle* voyage, Darwin became an imaginative and innovative experimental scientist, carrying out 'dozens of beautiful experiments' (p. 19).

The *New York Times* describes Sacks as 'the poet laureate of medicine'; his mastery of the craft of writing shines through not just in its lucidity, but in its transmission of the joy that he obviously finds in the writing process. It's almost as though he doesn't fully recognise the reality of things until he's written about them. If you haven't read Sacks before, however, I don't recommend this as the book to start with; the fact that it's posthumous, as well as the essay structure, hasn't allowed him to reach his full heights.

But if you're a Sacks veteran I think you'll find as much pleasure in what the book reveals about Sacks the man as about Sacks the neurologist.

For a final word it may be fitting to turn to my Darwin shelf. When Charles' invitation to participate in the voyage of the *Beagle* in 1831 almost came to naught because his father didn't think he should go, he appealed to Josiah Wedgwood, his uncle (and father-in-law to be), to make representations on his behalf. This he did – successfully! Part of Josiah's argument revolved around the wonderful developmental opportunities it would afford his nephew, as 'a man of enlarged curiosity'.

What more apt characterisation of Oliver Sacks could there be?

ON DOUBT, By Leigh Sales

Melbourne University Press
First published 2009, this edition 2017.
\$12.99 (paperback), \$9.99 (eBook)

Reviewer: **Dierk von Behrens**

On *Doubt* was part of a MUP series Little Books on Big Themes. The frontispiece message of Pierre Abelard, French theologian and teacher, (1079–1142) captured my attention. He writes:

The beginning of wisdom is found in doubting; by doubting we come to the question, and by seeking we may come upon the truth.

This caused memories of Abelard's tragic love affair with Heloise, and of a visit I made to her monastery, to come flooding back.

The current edition of this classic, personal essay about the value of doubt and the need for careful scrutiny in search of truth and accountability is a handy, pocket-sized cure for fake news in a post-truth world full of cynical political manipulations. The author's incisive examination of the Donald Trump phenomenon, Brexit, PM Malcolm Turnbull, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and the Lowy Institute's August 2017 democracy poll, bring its lucidly written content right up to date.

In explaining her attitude to religion, Sales writes, 'Mum's anti-church streak bred in me an intense curiosity about religion.' So an invitation from a good friend led Sales to years of association with Christianity:

I attended a Pentecostal church affiliated with Hillsong, offering slick music and lots of young devotees. The church's social scene was engaging and the Bible was interesting reading.

She continues.

But by my early twenties, I had some serious doubts about religion, and soon after, I abandoned it altogether. [p. 11, 12]

Sales further develops her views, culminating in:

I could not bring myself to say I believe in something for which there is no irrefutable proof, yet in spite of that, I am so certain of my own opinion that I can declare that you are going to hell for not believing it.

She immediately follows this with:

Atheism struck me as being just as unattractive as Christianity. It too required a leap of faith to a position of certainty, albeit in the opposite direction. [p. 13]

This criticism of dogmatic atheism is valid. It is just as difficult to prove the non-existence of deities as to prove their existence. In practice, however, most secular, modern humanists act without referring to, or invoking, supernatural entities and thus are 'operational atheists', though philosophically agnostic.

Hurrah for the author's alarm at:

the influence of 'opinion' – with its basis in certainty – on the mainstream media. It flies in the face of historical experience, which has shown again and again that the application of a doubtful mind is the best way to wisdom and insight. That principle is enshrined in journalism's foundations – objectivity and balance – yet today some media organisations are drifting from those moorings in favour of reporting with unapologetic ideological bias. Fox News, talk radio, blogs, newspaper columns, certain cable television talk shows such as on CNN are examples of this preaching to the choir, 'telling consumers what they want to hear by pandering to their existing beliefs and biases.

In regard to balance however, Sales cautions:

As somebody who believes in facts I don't believe in false balance. This has become a major issue in contemporary media because frequently people representing inaccurate, fringe positions argue that if their voices are not given equal weight, it illustrates bias. The reality is there are not two equal sides to every issue. There is no equivalence in the anti-vaccination debate. There are not two sides to racism or bigotry. Every major scientific body in the world accepts the reality of global warming, meaning denialism is not a mainstream view backed by a body of evidence. [p. 111-112]

Hear, hear to that!

Yet on 8 February, when I wrote this, Professor John Hewson, former Liberal Leader, addressing the ANU Climate Update 2018, lambasted both John Howard and Tony Abbot as climate denialists for, in Howard's case, self-confessed purely pragmatic, political reasons.

I endorse Annabel Crabb's words: 'A superbly stylish and valuable little book on this century's great vanishing commodity.'



HUMANIST SOCIETY NEWS

CAHS

IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2018 CAHS experienced more committee changes, with Carmen Seaby resigning from the position of secretary, and from the committee. At time of writing neither position has been filled. Carmen deserves thanks for both her willingness to take on the role of secretary, and the cheerful manner in which she undertook the role.

Progress occurred in other areas. A reconstructed website with a simpler back end platform was launched. The new website now has more information about the meaning of Humanism and a list of the Australian Humanists of the Year. The plan is to steadily add information onto the website.

CAHS made a submission to the federal Government's panel on religious freedom. The submission is posted on the CAHS website. CAHS President Lyndon Storey, along with ACT Humanist society Convenor Mary-Anne Cosgrove, also spoke to the panel in Canberra. It is absolutely crucial to ensure that our political and social system protect all people's rights to freedom of belief and expression, not just the rights of the religious to be treated with dignity. This message was clearly and strongly put in both the written and spoken submissions to the panel.

As CAHS President I signed a joint letter with the leaders of several secular groups, asking for a Human Rights Commission inquiry into the National School Chaplaincy Program. It is necessary to challenge a government policy which restricts funding for general community activities, in this case providing pastoral care via a chaplain, only to those who can claim affiliation to a religion.

During recent months Lyndon Storey also visited an adult philosophy study group in Wollongong and spoke and answered questions about Humanism. The event was attended by more than 30 people and worked well to introduce people to humanist ideas.

As our 2018 Australian Humanist Convention approaches we look forward to a year of continuing action to promote humanist values.

This edition of *Australian Humanist* also marks the retirement of Rosslyn Ives from her position as editor. Since 1998 she has done a tremendous job of regularly editing and producing *AH*, and maintaining its high standards. It is important to acknowledge and thank her for the superb contribution to Australian Humanism that this represents. Thanks Rosslyn!

Lyndon Storey, President CAHS

ACT

THE ACT HUMANIST SOCIETY continues to work on building our local community and fighting for social change. Our Convenor, Mary-Anne, accompanied CAHS President Lyndon Storey to present the humanist case for freedom from religion to Philip Ruddock's Religious Freedom Review panel. The ACTHS submission to the panel is available on our website at <https://bit.ly/2GLgMxb>

Over the past 3 months the ACTHS arranged regular social gatherings at its Meetup discussion group, including discussions of the following themes:

- #metoo – let's explore the movement, its origins and its consequences from an ethical standpoint.
- Is there really such a thing as ethical tourism or is all tourism selfish & exploitative? (an article on this topic is on our website: <https://bit.ly/2qfSuUU>)
- Are there circumstances where a recourse to violence is justified &, if so, when & why? Is the use of positive discrimination ethical?

We continue to keep members informed with monthly emailed notices and have held one forum discussing the theme of 'This is a Great Book and Why'.

Our Society has established a register of Community Friends – volunteer members who are willing to make themselves available to any other member who would like:

- to talk over a problem that is troubling them.
- to discuss ethical issues from a humanist perspective.
- someone who will listen to them in a caring and non-judgmental way.

We currently have four Community Friends available in this role.

We have developed a procedure for the preparation of Position Statements, and our Convenor recently sent a letter to the Prime Minister, supporting assisted dying. One of our members shared their personal story on assisted dying, which was included in the letter. This was read out by Tara Cheyne MLA at the ACT Legislative Assembly and was written up as an article for the *Canberra Times*. You can read the letter to the Prime Minister on our website: <https://bit.ly/2FzYQ86>

Sadly one of our members, Emeritus Professor Colin Groves, died on 30 November. You can read about his rich and distinguished life here: <https://bit.ly/2AKbdzK>

The ACT Humanist Society is currently preparing for a World Humanist Day dinner and planning day.

Mary-Anne Cosgrove, Convenor ACTHS

New South Wales

In October 2017 we took advantage of the intense interest in same-sex marriage by discussing 'Love & Marriage' – everything was open to discussion and the event was well attended by over twenty diverse people, and well enjoyed. In November Murray Love presented a range of views on the 'Right to die' from Plato and Seneca to Nietzsche and Nitschke. Then we had a chance for the audience to air their

own hopes and fears. We made another effort in October to recruit new volunteers, with a small response. The November Meetup showed documentaries on the Heroes of the Enlightenment. We had a summing up and a discussion afterwards. This was a well-attended event.

The successes in October and November encouraged good attendance at our end-of-year trivia party on Saturday 2 December. A mix of generations, which was good to see. Over twenty people came.

The January Meetup was 'What is Humanism Q&A?' We let the new people do most of the talking and thinking, revealing a real potential for the appreciation of Humanism among the young.

Our Darwin Day in 2018 featured Victor Bien looking at prehistory, when what is now Australia was part of a supercontinent. Victor also explained how Tasmanian Tiger DNA has been found to be preserved, prompting the possibility of sequencing the DNA and perhaps re-creating the Tiger. John August spoke about two so-called 'living fossils', the *Nothomyrmecia* ant and the Wollemi Pine. Erik Aslaksen talked about some themes from his book *The Social Bond*. An important part of Erik's approach was looking at information exchange between individuals. We discussed whether the internet has brought us together or separated us, and whether historically we were subject to centralised media and how it compares to the situation nowadays.

The February Meetup was on 'Globalism & Humanism' with speaker Peter Cartledge. Discussion got hooked on distinguishing globalism from globalisation. These days, a mobile phone is all you need to plug into a world network. World government, international cooperation and rights for all humans everywhere are bedrock humanist values. There is much distress these days from the flow of people escaping bad conditions – does Humanism have the solution?

On Friday night 2 March President, Murray Love attended an event organised by Sydney's Christian Life Community, a mix of Protestants and Catholics who follow the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. It was intended as a dialogue about how Christians and humanists can communicate across the gap. Events like this need people willing to engage in subtleties and diplomatic silences, and not trying to get in points or the last word. It was an enjoyable evening.

Murray Love, President HSNSW

Queensland

FOUR NOMINATIONS WERE RECEIVED for positions on the HSQ management committee for 2018: Frank Jordan, treasurer; André Williams, secretary; Cliff Stenbridge, vice president; Ron Williams, president – all of whom were elected unopposed at our 25 February AGM.

Our appreciation for their work across 2017 was extended to outgoing office bearers Meg Wallace (president), Max Wallace (treasurer), and Carmen Seaby (secretary).

The most prominent item for discussion at the general meeting which followed the AGM was an anticipated proposal by the LNP for continued funding of the National School Chaplaincy Programme beyond 2018 in the May federal budget. Our fears were soon confirmed when a 4 March Fairfax article announced that a section of Liberal MPs were petitioning federal education minister Simon Birmingham with a request to permanently reinstate the NSCP from 2019. The MPs proposed that the NSCP be granted a 25% funding increase – a cost of \$75 million per year.

Understandably, during the weeks since that announcement all efforts continue to be made to encourage resistance to any extension of the NSCP. The NSCP, introduced by John Howard in 2006, has subsequently cost Australian taxpayers almost \$700 million without ever demonstrating, or being required to demonstrate, any measurable outcomes whatsoever.

Ron Williams, President HSQ

South Australia

AT OUR AGM IN DECEMBER the election results were – Tanya Watkins returns as President, Scott Sharrad returns as Treasurer/Secretary, and the General Committee saw the return of Peter Toomer and Martin Dunne, with the addition of Vivien Donohue and Alex Watkins.

Thank you to everyone who came along and had a wonderful, lively, discussion on the future direction of the HSSA in 2018. We are hopeful to extend our charitable purposes to also directly helping the disadvantaged; to this end, in April we will be launching our 'Give a Sock' campaign where we will be distributing care packages for Adelaide's rough sleepers. Our advocacy for basic human rights will continue, firstly in the form of a submission the 'Religious Freedom' report, and at any opportunity where we feel we can make a positive contribution to public debate.

HSSA is now running at least three different meet ups each month, in conjunction with other local organisations. Please see our website at sahumanists.org.au for details.

Tanya Watkins, President HSSA

Victoria

OUR GUEST LECTURER IN OCTOBER 2017 was social scientist Jacques Boulet, who discoursed on thinkers whom he called 'the new naturalists', ranging from Johann Wolfgang Goethe to George Monbiot, who all emphasised social relatedness and social ecology rather than individual psychology; we needed to learn again how to relate to nature so as to nurture sustainability. In November Rudolf Anders, an active HSV member, described his childhood in the Netherlands under German occupation; too young to comprehend disaster, he endured his father's detention as a hostage and played happily on the bombsites.

Our first lecturer for 2018 was Dr Tim Wright, one of the founders of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN); the stalemate that followed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 has at last been broken by the humanitarian argument against nuclear weaponry.

At the members' meeting in October, Stephen and Jennie Stuart shared their experience of Iceland, where they made contact with the local Humanist Association. In November the annual general meeting returned the committee unchanged, including Rosslyn Ives as president and Ann Johnson who had previously been co-opted as an ordinary member. Members' meetings discussed and approved a submission to the federal 'expert panel' on religious freedom, and a letter objecting to expansion of the National School Chaplaincy Program. Committee joined with ten other secularist bodies to petition the Australian Human Rights Commission to inquire into NSCP and its religious selection criteria, which flout the Victorian *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*; unfortunately, the Commission shrugged this off. Other subjects of discussions have been how public meetings might be made more attractive, how to use Facebook and how to harness the superb educational resources of Humanists UK.

Following a Parliamentary inquiry into end-of-life choices (to which we submitted in 2015) and further representations of ours, including tireless lobbying by Harry Gardner (Outstanding Humanist Achiever 2012), the Victorian Parliament finally legislated for voluntary assisted dying, scheduled to be implemented June 2019. As Humanists regard marriage as a civil right, we welcomed the national same-sex-marriage postal survey, in which Victorians voted 65 to 35 in favour. HSV advocated publicly for the decriminalization of homosexual acts in the 1970s and, more recently, promoted Jason Ball to be the first Young Australian Humanist of the Year (2016), in recognition of his effort in tackling homophobia in sport. Human Rights Day, 10 December, was marked by the Nobel Prize for Peace awarded to ICAN, the organization which began in Melbourne in 2006 and instigated the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July 2017. HSV joined ICAN in sending an open letter to the prime minister, urging Australia to endorse the treaty.

Mary Bergin (Outstanding Humanist Achiever 2016) took part in the annual Road Trauma Remembrance Day ceremony at Parliament House in November, representing the non-religious community.

Members joined a lively crowd of freethinkers at the annual Charles Darwin Day picnic, 12 February, down by the Yarra River at Kew.

After the stimulus of Lyndon Storey in August, the Society sponsored eight people to do the introductory counselling course designed by Spiritual Health Victoria. John Russell is gradually finding placements for them in local hospitals as Humanist volunteer visitors.

President Rosslyn Ives has been concerned to raise general awareness of Humanism as an ethical, non-religious outlook for everyone. She enlisted the help of Lyn Allison

(AHOY 2008), who generously gave the committee a seminar on governance and strategy planning and sowed seeds of several ways of doing things differently. The skills of all our members should be brought to bear on this.

HSV was sorry to lose a life member by the death of Gladys Folie, an acting president in the 1980s, and also our former president and perennial activist Dr Harry Gardner.

Stephen Stuart, Secretary HSV

IHEU General Assembly and Conference weekend 2018

3-4 August 2018

Auckland, NZ



The General Assembly and conference weekend of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) 2018 will be held in: Auckland, New Zealand, 3-4 August 2018. The weekend will include the General Assembly of our youth section, IHEYO, and a conference hosted by the Humanist Society of New Zealand. The conference website is:
<https://conference.humanist.nz/>

Conference speakers include:

Andrew Copson – IHEU and Chief Executive of Humanist UK

Catherine Low – Manager of Community Effective Altruism

Imtiaz Shams – an ex-Muslim and founder of Faith to Faithless

Gulalai Ismail – Human rights advocate from Pakistan

Leo Igwe – Human rights advocate and Nigerian humanist

For more details and booking go to
conference.humanist.nz



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DISCLOSURE

Humanists support freedom of thought and expression, therefore the views expressed in AH are not necessarily those of the Council of Australian Humanist Societies.

HUMANISTS AND HUMANISM

Humanists try to lead ethical and responsible lives without reliance on belief in supernatural influences. They consider that it is possible to build a more humane, democratic society using human capabilities, tempered by critical reason and a spirit of free enquiry.

Well-known Australian Humanists include Phillip Adams, Lyn Allison, Eva Cox, Peter Cundall, Tim Flannery, Bill Hayden, Anne Levy, Ian Lowe, Philip Nitschke, Peter Singer, Robyn Williams, and also the late Fred Hollows, Donald Horne and Olive Zakharov.



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