



# VICTORIAN HUMANIST

Monthly Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.

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## Living more with less

An important aim of humanism is the well-being of all humanity. To achieve it requires a safe, stable and just society. One in which physical, emotional and psychological needs are adequately met. Sustainable ecosystems are also essential. For most Australians (apart from Indigenous people – to our shame), and the majority of people in developed countries, the conditions for well-being have been met in abundance. However, instead of spreading surplus wealth to aid the less well off, much of it has gone into over-consumption, creating a vast wealth and well-being gap, especially between developing and developed countries.

Driven by growth economics and technological innovation, endless consumption is held out as *the* way to live. Yet it is an unsustainable choice even for the lucky minority, and an unattainable option for the rest, as it causes environmental damage, loss of biodiversity, global warming, climate change, wealth inequalities, militarism and of late random terrorism. And, as social surveys show, less happiness and satisfaction. With a population of over 6,000 million, it would take the resources of at least three Earths to achieve current western standards for all. Decades ago it was apparent that this is a disastrous path for humanity.

In 1976, renowned humanist philosopher and psychologist, Erich Fromm, analysed the crisis in well-being, and offered a possible solution in his book *To Have or to Be?* His analysis draws on a psychological interpretation of the two main ways humans approach life. These are: the having mode which looks to things and material possessions and is based on aggression and greed, and the being mode which is concerned with shared experiences and productive activity and is based on friendship and love. Individuals and whole societies operate with a mixture of these two modes. What most concerned Fromm was the gross over-consumption – the having mode – with Americans as prime examples.

In a later book, *The Art of Being*, published just before his death in 1980, Fromm set out to show how the shift from the having mode to the being, might be achieved. The first crucial step, he said, is to direct production towards 'sane consumption'. As he points out this would only be possible if the power of companies to base their production on profit and expansion is drastically curbed, and if a significant number of people want to lower their consumption.

.....continued on page four.

## Monthly HSV Public Lecture

**Thursday  
27 April  
8.00 pm**

Balwyn Library Meeting Room  
336 Whitehorse Rd. Balwyn

Dr Lea Jellinek & Iswanto

***“Save the Earth  
program in Java,  
Indonesia.”***

Dr Lea Jellinek is an anthropologist and Iswanto is an Indonesian health scientist.

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# HSV DIARY DATES

HSV Public Lectures 8.00 pm 4th Thursday of the month  
HSV Discussions 11.00 am 2nd Sunday of the month

## APRIL

- 4 Tuesday 8pm Existentialist Society, Unitarian Church Hall,  
110 Grey St., East Melbourne.  
Colin Goodwin: "*The Existentialism of Duns Scotus.*"
- 6 Thursday 7.30pm UNAA Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Rd.  
Claire Beck: "*Experience of an NGO working with the UN in the  
Field.*"
- 7-9 Friday-Sunday 41st CAHS Convention, Coolangatta Qld.

## 9 Sunday NO HSV DISCUSSION

- 11 Tuesday 8pm Atheist Society. Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.  
Lynne Kelly: "*Science and the Paranormal.*"
- 27 Thursday 8pm **HSV Public Lecture**  
Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Rd., Balwyn.  
Dr Lea Jellinek, anthropologist, and Iswanto, Indonesian  
health scientist: "*Save the Earth program in Java,  
Indonesia.*"

## MAY

- 2 Tuesday 8.00pm Existentialist Society, Unitarian Church Hall,  
110 Grey St., East Melbourne.  
Assoc. Prof. Millicent Vladiv-Glover: "*Ethics of Popular Culture:  
Blockbuster Novels and Films.*"
- 3 Wednesday 6.30pm Fabian Society. Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.  
Defence Counsel Julian McMahon: "*Some Reflections on the Van  
Nguyen Case and the Anti-death Penalty Campaign.*"
- 3 Wednesday 7pm RMIT Globalism Institute, Storey Hall, 340 Swanston  
St., Melbourne. Prof. Jamal Nassar: "Palestine & Israel: Is Peace  
Possible."
- 9 Tuesday 8pm Atheist Society. Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.  
James Gerrand: "*Higher Superstition: Anti-science in the Academy.*"
- 14 Sunday 9.30am **HSV Committee meeting**  
11am **Sunday discussion**, 2 Houston Crt, Box Hill South.  
Report on CAHS Convention. Current submissions. All members  
welcome. Bring food for shared lunch.
- 17 Wednesday 6.30pm Fabian Society, Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.  
Senator Kim Carr: "*Australia's Future Cities.*"
- 25 Thursday 8pm **HSV Public Lecture**  
Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Rd., Balwyn.  
Dr Dirk Baltzly: "*On self-censorship.*"

For latest Humanist news and updates

HSV website  
[home.vicnet.net.au/~humanist/main/main.html](http://home.vicnet.net.au/~humanist/main/main.html)

## Humanist Society of Victoria



**Inc.** (Reg. No. A0020272M)

A non-profit, educational organisation.

The **Humanist Society of Victoria** works to build a more civilised society with ethics based on human values. It considers that reason, free inquiry and a scientific approach enable us to understand our universe and our place in it. It defends freedom and democracy and provides a positive alternative to religious and dogmatic creeds. It supports separation of church and state, and secular education.

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### Victorian Humanist (VH)

Monthly newsletter of the  
**Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.**  
Deadline for letters, notices and short  
items, 20th of the month.

Editor Rosslyn Ives  
Ass. Editor Howard Hodgens  
Reader Stephen Stuart  
Mailout Ray Dahlitz &  
HSV Volunteers

Views expressed by contributors to this  
newsletter are those of the writers and  
do not necessarily represent the views  
of the Society.



## Note

### **NO Sunday Discussion on 9 April**

#### **CAHS Convention 2006**

Humanists from across Australia will gather in Coolangatta, Qld., 7–9 April.

HSV delegates are Rosslyn Ives, Jennie Stuart and Stephen Stuart. They will report back to members at the Sunday discussion on May 14.

Humanist members and friends are welcome to attend the Convention. See *AH* No. 81 for more details, or contact Rosslyn Ives, HSV President.

#### **CAHS**

##### **Separating Church & State**

CAHS resolved at its 40th Convention, in May last year, “that a national conference be organised, whether public or by invitation, devoted to the promotion of secular government operating throughout Australia and New Zealand.” The idea was roundly endorsed by the Hon Chris Schacht in his speech at the HSV annual dinner (Feb. *VH*). HSV has got together with the Rationalist Society of Australia and the newly formed Australian National Secular Association to plan such a conference in Melbourne for the weekend of 17 and 18 June 2006. The HSV has pledged \$1000+ and organising personnel. CAHS is contributing \$2000 towards it. So mark your diary, and let the HSV Committee know if you can assist.

#### **Charter on medically assisted suicide**

Dying with Dignity Victoria (formerly Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Victoria), have drafted a Legislative Charter for dying with dignity. The HSV members discussed this Charter on Sunday 12 March. Member were very positive and fully supported the four legislative principles of the Charter, see p. 10.

We have written to DWDV indicating our support for the Charter along with a few suggestions.

#### **Welcome to New members October 2005 – March 2006**

Annette Simmons, Jean Menere, Linda Nash,  
Peter Turner, Bert McLaren, Ken Young,  
Ronald Marke, Suzanne Sheridan, Phillip Allaway,  
Richard Breen, Jonathan Rutherford,  
Ian Pierre-Humbert, Jason Palmer, Margaret Francis,  
James Latham, Kerrin & Rick Adams,  
Hansie Jaensch & Marilyn Jacksch.

#### **Humanists in Media**

*The Age* 16/3/06

Advertising on the ABC? Don't even think about it  
**Norman Rothfield**, Fairfield.

Advertising on our ABC would be vandalism – as would advertising on the sails of the Sydney Opera House.

**Jean Menere**, Albury NSW

#### **Help Save the ABC**

1. A petition is being presented to politicians in Canberra – and every signature counts. You can add your name via:

<http://www.getup.org.au/campaign/FundOurABC>

The ABC today has \$264 million less in real terms than in did 20 years ago. The government needs to hear from us that with an anticipated budget surplus of \$9.7 billion, soaring to \$10.7 billion by 2009, ignoring the ABC's plight is inexcusable.

The ABC is the eyes, ears and voice of our nation. We, its owners, have to fight for it.

2. Write or email your Federal member arguing for,
- increased funding for our national broadcaster.
  - retaining the Staff elected representative on the ABC board.

#### **Many Thanks to**

Alexander Yap and Dinesh Jayasuriya for improving the presentation and variety of material on the HSV webpage. The February and March *VHs* are now on the website, and there are also more links to kindred organisations and other sites of interest.

#### **Congratulations to**

Joan Drake who turn 80 on April 1. Best wishes from all your humanist friends.

#### **Help Wanted**

Members willing to assist with the following tasks:

- Monthly mailout of *VH* newsletter
- Publicising HSV public lectures
- Putting the HSV Library in order

Contact Rosslyn Ives.

#### **VH Contributions Welcome**

Send to editor by 20th of each month.  
E-mail [rosslyn@netspace.com.au](mailto:rosslyn@netspace.com.au) or post to  
GPO Box 1555, Melbourne VIC 3001

## SUBMISSION REPORT

Invited to comment on a revised National Statement on ethical conduct in human research, we made the following main points.

- The changes incorporated into the new statement meet complexities and current concerns in biotechnology.
- In addition to the basic ethical principles (respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence) we would like to see more emphasis on other values such as altruism and social goals which are being eroded in the current climate of individualism and materialism.
- Collected data and specimens should be re-identifiable in the interest of increasing knowledge.
- Compliance with requests for anonymity or time embargo should be mandatory.
- We suggest that foetal tissue be included in the chapter on human tissues. Its use for transplantation or research falls into the category of organ donation.
- Inherent difficulties of research involving children are dealt with sensitively.
- We strongly support a national register for Advance Directives. The existing Organ Donor Register should be augmented to contain directives regarding medical treatment, artificial life supports in hopeless conditions and preference for burial or cremation. Directives of competent adults or their agents with power of attorney should be acted upon out of respect for a person's autonomy and to prevent non-compliance by family members.
- Ethics Committees should have at least one member with a background of applied secular ethics to balance possible religious bias of other members.

**Halina Strnad**

## REPORT

Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Victoria  
32nd Annual General Meeting, 25 February.

There was record attendance to hear the address given by Pamela Bone. She spoke of her experiences and reflections since she was diagnosed with multiple myeloma (cancer of the bone marrow) one year ago.

Options of various treatments involved the calculations of the high physical cost of prolonging life only briefly. She quoted several writers on dying and agreed that fear of death is less than that of pain and loss of dignity. A division was observed between people who can be reconciled with their death and those who cannot.

She approves of assisted suicide and looks forward to the development and use of the 'peaceful pill' (advocated by Exit International and Dr Phillip Nitschke). It would help to know that there is a way of dying with dignity at one's chosen time. The address was recorded and filmed.

The President, Dr Rodney Syme, explained the rationale for the change of name from VESV to, Dying With Dignity, promoting the right to choose. The frequent omission of the operative word 'voluntary' leaves euthanasia with its sinister connotation from Nazi Germany, often exploited by opponents of VE. He also urged all present to report any cases of doctors refusing to respect patient's advance directives or their refusal of medical treatment.

**Halina Strnad**

## REPORT

### Symposium on the Statement of Ethical Principles for Biotechnology in Victoria

On Thursday 16 March Rosslyn Ives, Alan McPhate and Halina Strnad attended this Symposium held at the University of Melbourne. It was jointly organised by the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics (CAPPE) and the Victorian Biotechnology Ethics Advisory Committee (VBEAC).

Three speakers addressed selected aspects of the issues raised by the Statement.

The first speaker, Michael Gorton, Chair of the VBEAC, outlined the work of his committee and presented the Statement of Eight Ethical Principles:

1. Respect for Persons
2. Respect for Animals
3. Respect for Natural Environment
4. Respect for the Public Good
5. Benefit and Harm
6. Justice and Equity
7. Probity
8. Accountability

The second speaker was Professor Tony Coady of University of Melbourne. He was of the view that codes of ethics in general were a good thing, but could possibly be used merely to convince those outside without necessarily regulating the internal behaviour of the body concerned. He considered other philosophical ideas about the nature of the study of ethics, such as the changing ground between what is obviously a moral fact and what is more an area of moral opinion. In concluding he noted that codes can empower dissenters and conscientious objectors.

The third speaker was Michael Holland, a practising biotechnologist working in and with companies developing biotechnological techniques. He found little in the VBEAC document that he could object to. He pointed out that the driver of companies was profit, this year and into the future, but not at any cost. Companies operate in a social context and abide by laws and regulations and feel responsible towards employees and the good name of their company and products.

**Rosslyn Ives**

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### Living more with less

**Continued from page 1**

Though such a suggestion seems King Canute-like before the endless waves of consumer goods, increasing numbers of people, among them many humanists, are opting for lower levels of consumption by downsizing or even opting out of mainstream society. This choice to increase satisfaction and well-being is rarely publicised by commercial interests, so if you're living more with less, humanists would like to hear your story.

**Rosslyn Ives, HSV President**

# REPORT

## The Victorian Law Reform Commissions' Review of the Family Violence Law

Law reform and education are the main non-violent means of changing society. Legislation also has an educative role in stating the limits of acceptable behaviour. Thus statutes reflect the degree of civilisation a society has reached.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission initiated a further step towards civilised conduct in its review of the Family Violence Act 1987. The review, requested by the Attorney-General, the Hon. Rob Hulls MP, was given broad terms of reference, which included assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness of the present Act, public knowledge or misconceptions of current processes and the need for an educational program.

Regard was to be given to the accessibility of the Act to special groups such as immigrant women (recent arrivals), Indigenous communities, people with disabilities and children.

The Report is the result of three years of research and wide ranging consultations with organisations and individuals concerned with domestic violence, expert and public submissions in response to a Consultation Paper, and records and literature reviews.

At the launch of the 457-page Report, 16 March, the Attorney-General referred to domestic violence as a national shame, the 'silent epidemic' affecting at least one in five women, and an under-reported crime. He welcomed the Report as the basis for reform.

The 153 recommendations of this Review aim to achieve a profound cultural change in dealing with the social problem of family violence. Key points include the following.

- Violence in the home is not to be regarded as a private matter and ignored: it is a violation of basic human rights.
- Its definition is widened to include sexual assault and other sexually coercive types of behaviour, emotional, psychological and verbal abuse, economic abuse, damage to a person's property as well as assault and physical injury.
- The courts, the police and the community do not respond adequately to family violence. It is condoned through attitudes and beliefs that stereotype women's and men's roles in the family and the society.
- The courts and the police are letting victims down and, the legislative and State's response to family violence is inadequate.
- The changes in approach will require that the victim's safety be a paramount concern. The police should remove the perpetrator from the premises and not the victim, as at present.
- The intervention order system is to be strengthened, and breaches prosecuted.

- Training is to be organised for the police, registrars and magistrates, on the dynamics of family violence, to avoid legal responses based on social myths and stereotypes.
- The creation of police units and courts using trained, specialist personnel to deal exclusively with family violence.
- A broad community education campaign to focus on the need to respect family members and on the unacceptability of all forms of violent behaviour.

The education campaign and new, well formulated laws are essential elements to bring about change.

**Halina Strnad**, who attended the Report launch on behalf of the HSV.

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## PRESS RELEASE – 16 March 2006

### Freedom to Live: Freedom to Die

Sandra Kanck, Leader of the South Australian Democrats, has put voluntary euthanasia on the election agenda by vowing to initiate a legal challenge to the Federal Government's Suicide Related Material Offences Act.

Ms Kanck will detail, in State Parliament, various means of committing suicide, which will then be published in Hansard and on the parliamentary web site, bringing State Parliament into direct conflict with the Federal law which forbids the use of the internet to inform people of specific ways of taking their lives.

Ms Kanck's move will pit the sovereignty of the South Australian Parliament against the oppressive federal laws and almost certainly lead to a High Court case testing the constitutional validity of the Federal Government's attack on freedom of speech and its ability to censure Hansard in other parliaments.

It also raises the question of whether the Federal Parliament can make laws which, if applied to state parliamentarians, would disable them from performing their parliamentary duties.

The Suicide Related Material Offences Act makes it a crime to provide instruction, via the internet, of a particular method of committing suicide or to counsel others to commit suicide. (Maximum penalties are \$110,000 for the individual and \$550,000 for a body corporate.)

"The federal law is a disgraceful attack upon freedom of speech in Australia," says Ms Kanck. "I believe the Federal law is both undemocratic and unconstitutional and the High Court should quash it. "It undermines a fundamental human right – the right to die with dignity – and has no place in Australian law. "Further the selective application of the federal law is absurd. Should I pen a letter to a friend advising on how to peacefully end one's life, no federal law is broken, but if the exact same information is posted on a web site, massive fines apply. "It's outrageous that family, friends and medical practitioners of the terminally ill are placed in the invidious position of breaking the law if they email some advice on how to end that person's life."

This article is from Australian Democrats – SA Division  
<http://www.sa.democrats.org.au/html/>

# *Humanism, a Political Philosophy for Today*

HSV Public Lecture by Brian Ellis, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy,  
La Trobe University, on 23 February at Balwyn Library

Report by Jennie Stuart

It is time for renewal – time for a change of direction from economic reform to social reform, Professor Brian Ellis began. He argues that the political philosophy that would shape and justify this change is one that derives from humanism. He calls it ‘Social Humanism’.

A generation ago Australia had earned a reputation for being a just and compassionate society. It was a wealthy country in which wealth and opportunity were widely spread. On the assumption that fairness and well-being were more important than economic growth – though not incompatible with it – successive governments built a welfare state. A similar course was taken by Scandinavia, Northern Europe, Great Britain, New Zealand and Canada. However, by 1980, the welfare states of Britain and the British Commonwealth were being dismantled. From the end of the Second World War until then labour issues had dominated political agendas, in an attempt to redress the privations of the Great Depression and the war. It did not seem to matter which party was in power. The aim was to create a fairer, more compassionate and more tolerant society; economic growth and productivity were secondary. But with surprisingly little resistance the tide turned in the '80s. Again it seemed immaterial which party held government. Economic rationalism in Australia and neo-liberalism in Britain became the dominant forces, with capital rather than labour driving the agenda.

The social achievements of the post-war years in Britain and the British Commonwealth were easily sacrificed on the altar of economic growth. Professor Ellis believes that was because our political leaders, lacking a systematic political philosophy, saw the welfare state as a mildly socialist one, an uneasy compromise between the liberal ideal of a society where free-market rules were uppermost and the socialist dream of a just society with a command economy. The important question, ‘What must we do to improve the overall quality of people’s lives?’ hinges on a humanistic philosophy, which had underpinned the post-war welfare state as it had the Enlightenment. And although times have changed – the dominant role now played by corporations is a significant point of difference – the philosophy of a state that puts fairness and well-being at its core should be timeless.

Social humanism has links with Aristotle and with Thomas Aquinas. In the early Renaissance Aquinas developed theories of natural law and natural rights,

outlining the fundamental principles of justice and equal respect for persons. Widely accepted throughout the modern world, these philosophical principles have been adopted in many but not all Christian societies, especially Protestant ones. Other religious groups have occasionally endorsed them as well, Bhutan being a case in point.

Philosophically speaking, social humanism is very different from both socialism and liberalism. It is not, as these and most other political philosophies are, a theory that is based on an ideal social contract, or one that supposedly had been forged in a state of nature. It has a much firmer basis. The source of political obligation in a welfare state, and the launching pad for its programmes, lies in its *current* social contract, not in any supposed primitive or ultimate agreement. In this respect, social humanism is essentially a conservative philosophy – the kind of philosophy that the British parliamentarian Edmund Burke was famous for in the eighteenth century. But the social programme that social humanism seeks to develop differs from that of Burke, and even more so from the neo-conservatives of today. It does not aim to preserve the status quo, nor to implement a social vision expounded by Marx or Locke. Instead it is a compassionate, egalitarian philosophy with no ideological barrow to push in regard to public or private ownership, and no basic commitment to individualism or collectivism. It hinges on a pragmatic view of how to make things better, rather than a utopian concept of an ideal state.

From classical Greek humanism comes the ideal of perfection in human nature. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, outlined the concept of *eudaimonia*, which is usually translated as flourishing or well-being. It could be attained by the development of one’s natural virtues, and to strive to do so was the one and only route to true happiness. He argued that all men seek happiness, and that this required worthwhile goals and projects, as well as a community with which to engage.

Our notion of well-being has changed a great deal over time. Consider the well-being of women, for example. During the last thirty years they have achieved many rights and greater freedom. We need carefully to consider what constitutes an appropriate conception of well-being for our times. Should it include the well-being of non-human animals as well? This broader question must await discussion at another time. It may be said, however, that the idea of a good

life in which one may flourish in a way appropriate for our species is readily adapted to other species. Human well-being obviously requires wealth creation, job opportunities, social, economic and physical security, good health, education, companionship and a stimulating and congenial environment.

The only kind of state that can guarantee all these things is a welfare state. Socialist states offer universal health care, comprehensive public education and full and meaningful employment. But they lack the kinds of freedom that are needed for people to flourish and are evidently far less creative of wealth and economic well-being. Market capitalism guarantees many of the basic rights and freedoms required for human flourishing, but makes a bit of a lottery of health care, education and employment.

The primary aim of the welfare state was, historically, much in accordance with the eudaimonic ideal. For example, the Henderson Report on Poverty in 1975 argued that poverty had a multidimensional complexion, and consequently needed to be attacked on a number of fronts. It stated that it was essential that a 'poverty line' drawn in economic terms should not be the sole indicator of the extent of poverty; it made reference to the Special Senate Committee report on *Poverty in Canada*, which set out a programme to improve not only incomes, assets and basic services, but also self-respect, opportunities for education and social mobility, as well as fuller participation in decision-making.

Despite the universality of much of the social security legislation of the early post-war period, it was not inspired by socialism. It was not connected with collectivism or the questions of state versus private ownership. Strong government measures were called for, and few objected. Nor was it socialism by stealth, it was just common decency.

Brian Ellis concluded with a reminder that he is in the process of writing a book about social humanism as a political theory. Its key concepts cover human flourishing (well-being), progressive conservatism, practical liberty, democracy and social egalitarianism, and while none is entirely new he offers a fresh perspective.

## Giulio Vanni: burnt at the stake for atheism

In 1619 at Toulouse, France, an itinerant teacher of philosophy and medicine, Giulio Cesare Vanni, was burned at the stake. His alleged crime was 'atheism' (also implied homosexuality). His name became a byword for atheism and the 'naturalism' that accompanied it – that is, the view that nature is the ultimate reality and source of all things.

Until Pierre Bayle defended Vanni later in the seventeenth century, most writers aped the virulent attack launched by a Jesuit apologist, Francois Garasse, who stigmatized Vanni as a dangerous threat to religion and therefore the safety of society.

Vanni was best known for his book called *The Secrets of Nature*, in which he asserted that men had no souls but died as other animals did, and that the Virgin Mary was a woman like any other and needed to have sexual relations to get pregnant. While being led to the stake he cried out in his native Italian, 'I die cheerfully, as befits a philosopher!'

Legend adds that when ordered by attendant priests to ask for God's mercy, Vanni replied that if there was a God he would ask him to blast with lightning the unjust Parlement of Toulouse, and if there were a devil he would ask him to submerge the Parlement in hell; but since neither existed, he could pray to neither.

Reading Vanni's work shows that in fact he was not an atheist. He held that there must be a Necessary Being as the ground of existence, and further there must be an Absolute Being capable of resolving all contradictions.

Rene Descartes was intending to publish his book *Le Monde* in which he assumes 'that the natural world can be examined and understood as a system of matter in motion obeying natural laws, without the need for any invocation of supernatural forces or agencies.' It was the death of Vanni, and later the threats to Galileo that influenced Descartes not to proceed with publishing of his book *Le Monde*.

### Rosslyn Ives

[From: *Descartes: The Life of Rene Descartes and Its Place in His Times*, by A. C. Grayling, pages – 119-120. Free Press, UK 2005.]

## TAKE ACTION ON SAFER PETROL

About thirty members were lucky enough to hear the March 23 HSV Lecturer, Graham Ring, expose the politics of petrol sniffing. The Hon. Federal Minister for Health and Aging, Tony Abbott, maintains a policy of supplying safe alternative fuel only on request! Discussion was spirited, and Committee decided to draft a letter, which concerned members could send to their local MHR or our Senator(s). For contact details of Victorian Senators Allison, Carr, Conroy, Fielding, Fifield, Kemp, McGauran, Marshall, Patterson, Ray, Ronaldson and Troeth, see [www.aph.gov.au/senate/senators](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/senators).

### *DRAFT LETTER*

Dear [Representative],

#### Safer Petrol is a Vital Necessity

Opal motor fuel has a reduced aromatic content and produces no 'high' when inhaled. Ordinary unleaded petrol, on the other hand, contributes to self-destructive behaviour, particularly in central Australia, where it ought to be replaced by Opal.

A new report by Access Economics, 'Regional Rollout of Opal Fuel in Central Australia – Cost Benefit Study Findings' (The Opal Alliance, March 2006), concludes that the government can beat the scourge and yet save money. Petrol sniffing cost the nation \$79M in 2005, of which only 48% was the direct disease burden. The rollout of Opal is estimated to cost only \$27M. Assuming conservatively that Opal would reduce sniffing by 75%, the authors estimate 140 life-years gained and a net benefit of \$27M into the bargain.

On these figures there is no reason to shelve the proposal. It is unacceptable to deny our remote communities such a life-saver. Government action is required, now. A hospital would be hypocritical indeed to deny a casualty patient oxygen just because he hadn't filled out the right application form for it!

Yours, etc.

## Foster Humanist Growth or Years to Come

Please remember the Humanist Society of Victoria Inc. when making your will. A variety of arrangements with your will are possible such a gift of a fixed amount, creating a living trust, or a contingent bequest which provides for the Humanist Society only if your primary beneficiaries pre-decease you.

HSV, GPO Box 1555, Melbourne Vic 3001

## LETTERS

### Freedom of Expression in Context

The article 'Defending Freedom of Expression' in March 2006 *VH* expresses important principles of Free Speech.

However, when the likely consequences of publishing the satirical cartoons lead to rioting and, in fact, lead to many deaths, it would appear that our freedom of expression, like most freedoms, must be considered in the context of the social circumstances at the time.

Yours sincerely, **Alan McPhate**

### Congratulations

I am writing to inform you that I was mighty pleased with two items I saw in the March *VH*.

First, the editorial. Splendid line-in-the-sand stuff that stirred my blood! I could not have put my views on the matter better — or as well. I have scanned the editorial and am e-mailing copies where I think they will be appreciated, e.g. National Secular Society and *The Freethinker*. The right to criticise and mock political and religious opinions needs to be championed *tenaciously*. Authoritarians don't like mockery because, when it is well done, mockery works where sober argument often falls short. *The Freethinker* was started with the express purpose of criticising and mocking religion in general, and Christianity in particular, and as a former editor I feel very strongly about freedom of expression and the right to be rude.

Those who cringe to and try to appease Islamic fascism today will, I suspect, be judged by posterity as harshly as the idiots (and worse) who tried to appease the European and Japanese fascists in the 1930s. The appeasers rarely suffered, but millions of people suffered from fascism emboldened by appeasement.

If Islamic fascists can intimidate us about cartoons and "Islamophobia", they will move the front line forward and find something else to be violently offended by, until people other than far-right Muslims are trussed up like a spider's fly collection. I am offended by religious practices such as circumcision of infants (child sexual abuse), forcing women to cover up or denying them education, and aggressive indoctrination of children, but I do not try stoning embassies or religious people. I am equally offended by the pet trade and the meat industry, but I do not resort to violence or try to prevent people from lampooning vegetarians.

The second item is Halina's and your excellent submission on mifepristone (RU486). I cannot see an item I disagree with. I joined the Abortion Law Reform Association in Britain in about 1964, when I was 20. I saw the issue then mainly as a matter of principle and women's rights. A few years later a right-wing aunt mocked my views with 'What would you know about abortion anyway?' At that stage, only that my mother had been an accessory to an illegal abortion in wartime London (she had helped a friend obtain one). In 1984, however, my rather theoretical knowledge was abruptly upgraded. I found myself (in Australia) watching a 19-week induced abortion from beginning to end. I have not the slightest wish to repeat the sad experience, but it sure as hell stiffened my resolve to ensure that women have ready access to voluntary, legal abortion.

Congratulations again.

Regards, **Nigel Sinnott**

*“He is alive, but only in the sense he cannot be legally buried”*

## The case in favour of Voluntary Euthanasia

*‘A moral view has its merits because it is held in the heart and held deeply, not because it is legislated for. That is my position: I think God wants converts, not conscripts.’* Immigration Minister Senator Amanda Vanstone, during the debate on RU486, Feb. 2006.

I believe this comment is equally relevant to voluntary euthanasia (VE), a subject that has been debated with the same fervent passion as abortion. The arguments for and against both issues are based solely on the same premise, that only God has the right to take a life. Abortion aside, I would like to focus on VE for the moment.

I could be described as a passionate advocate for legislative change for choice and dignity in dying, yet do not seek to convert others, who prefer the status quo for themselves. My body, my choice. Your body, your choice. My concern is that my rights are denied because of someone else’s religious beliefs. Because I do not hold a conventional belief, I am automatically excluded from the terrors of what may occur to my soul after death should I seek to avoid ‘God’s will’.

However, I believe strongly, the right of competent adults to make important decisions affecting their lives is a basic human right. God has no place, in my sense of what is right for me!

In a Newspan poll taken by *The Australian* newspaper, reported in July 1996, the question was asked: *Thinking now about euthanasia where a doctor complies with the wishes of a dying patient to have his or her life ended, Are you personally in favour or against changing the law to allow doctors to comply with the wishes of a dying patient to end his or her life?* The responses in favour over three years, 1994, 95 and 96 showed those in favour were 79%, 81% and 75%. Those against over the same three years were, 15%, 14% and 18% respectively. ‘Uncommitted’ made up the difference. Fierce lobbying by conservative proliferators, impacted on the 1996 Statistics with a concerted campaign by the Liberal Federal Government, with support from the Labor Party, to overturn the legislation of the Northern Territory. This too was successful.

Who decides how people, that for 50 years are competent, self-sufficient individuals suddenly become incompetent, stupid, or incapable of deciding, would like to see their end of life challenges met? When these same self-sufficient individuals develop multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy or cancer or a number of lesser-known terminal diseases, it is their body breaking down, not their mind!...Then there are the chronic illnesses, namely rheumatoid arthritis,

kidney failure or diabetes, that could make one wish they were dead at a certain point of the illness’s progression.

Sometimes a person is ‘lucky’ and their illness develops slowly over years, allowing them many years of relative good living, although some may be severely restricted. Some die quite quickly, within months or a year or two of diagnosis. Others such as me go into remission for years. Russian roulette, at its most poignant!

Advance Health Directives (AHD), otherwise known as ‘Living Wills’, were developed to ensure that when and if there came a time that you were incapable of communicating, your wishes were known.

Although currently this document has no legal status in Victoria it does provide an indication of your choices. It has been said: ‘We are, each of us, standing in Theresa Marie Schiavo’s shoes.’ Having it recognised with the same legality as a last will and testament is something [yourchoiceindying.com](http://yourchoiceindying.com) is passionate about, regardless of the health carers, personal religious views.

Every competent adult has the legal right to refuse any recommended health care except palliative. Easy to achieve, when one is well and competent to communicate. Unfortunately during severe illness people are often unconscious or incapable of expressing their wishes – at the most critical time decisions need to be made. The directive ensures people with dementia who have completed the AHD before the onset of the deterioration will still have a voice in their ongoing medical treatment.

Advance Health Directives are available off the website of Dying with Dignity Victoria, [www.dwdvictoria.org.au](http://www.dwdvictoria.org.au) or by telephoning 9877 7677. Exit International, on the other hand, are more impatient for effective legislative change and are more direct with practical information and VE.

The spark of my own interest in VE, as a result of my mother’s death became a raging flame when I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 1999. With no previous history of cancer within our immediate family, we were all devastated by the news. I steadied and trimmed my sails into the raging storm that was survival – but nothing is ever the same again.

For many years I had ceased to believe in the teachings of my enforced childhood Catholic education. My personal experience arising out of the dubious care of the Good Shepherd Nuns set the tone for my attitude to religion for life.

I tried hard to regain my faith during my life-threatening illness but had to desist in the face of

overwhelming honesty with myself that I was being hypocritical. Faith is a gift to those who have it and I am sure it gives them strength, but it gave me nothing. Once lost, it was irrecoverable.

In 1995, seven courageous Victorian doctors, namely Doctors Norm Roth, Darren Russell, Rodney Syme, David Bernshaw, Andrew Buchanan, Sam Benwell, and Pat Scrivener, signed an open letter to the then Liberal Premier Jeffrey Kennett. The doctors asked the Government to recognise the reality of their work. They asked that an end be put to the uneasy hypocrisy of our law and to allow them to work without fear of prosecution. The doctors stated they respected life, but acknowledged that there are some patients who are beset by physical and mental suffering which is beyond the reach of even the most sophisticated efforts to control.

They were powerful words in 1995 and in 2006 nothing has changed. Yet society is steadily moving towards a secular position, and this needs to be reflected in our laws.

Doctors can end their own lives (as can vets) in a quiet and dignified manner, unlike their patients who must resort to jumping in front of trains, hanging themselves or even endeavouring to overdose on misunderstood medications. Ordinary folk are discriminated against by their lack of access to any controlled source of lethal medication regardless of their personal distress. Dying does not occur overnight, over days, but sometimes months and years. Realistically, dying commences from the time one ceases to 'live' fully, defined in the Macquarie dictionary as 'full of energy, activity, or brilliance'.

One is able to commit suicide provided it is done in an amateur way, often violently, guaranteed to have maximum impact on those who witness the mangled body – not to mention the distress to loved ones.

Faced with DIY suicide options, I know that medically assisted suicide is my preferred method to relieve pain and suffering at one of the most important moments of a person's life – their death. The manner of a person's passing is remembered long after the grief of loss.

**Mary Walsh**, HSV member and activist for choice in dying. Her website is [www.yourchoiceindying.com](http://www.yourchoiceindying.com)

## Campaigning for VE

**D**ying with Dignity Victoria (DWDV), formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Victoria, changed its name at its recent AGM on 25 February. DWDV have circulated a Legislative Charter hoping that many Victorians individually and in organisations will support and publicise their campaign.

On 12 March HSV members agreed to support the four legislative principles [below] and most of the rest of the wording of the Charter.

### Context

Survey research shows that **73%** of Australians believe that terminally ill individuals should have a **right** to seek and obtain assistance to end their life with dignity. This right does not exist in Victoria. **Current legislation therefore lags significantly behind the will of the people.**

Dying With Dignity Victoria has clear, simple and safe aims for updated Victorian Legislation.

### Four Legislative Principles

To support dying with dignity, DWDV promotes the following **four** legislative principles:

1. Patients with a terminal or incurable illness that creates unrelievable, profound suffering shall have the right to *choose* to die with dignity in a manner acceptable to themselves and shall not be compelled to suffer beyond their wishes.
2. No individual, group or organisation shall be compelled against their will to either participate or not participate in an assisted or supported death of a sufferer.
3. It shall not be an offence to confidentially advise a sufferer or relatives/guardian regarding death with dignity, to assist or support such a death, or to be present at the time.
4. Sufficient safeguards shall be in place to prevent abuse of the process.

For full details of the DWDV Charter, see [www.dwdvictoria.org.au](http://www.dwdvictoria.org.au)

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Bosses at a Stockholm hospital have asked a nurse called Jesus to change his name after concerns that patients told 'Jesus is coming soon' might get confused and think they were already dead. Jesus will now use his middle name, Manuel.

**Odd Spot**, *The Age*, 28 Mar 06

# Humanist Ethical Education, No.2

## Budding Seven-year-old World Citizens\*

The objective is for children to get to know a variety of children in their own country and in other countries. The teacher uses the cards of a UNICEF Memory Game (or a set of cards which they have prepared) and lays them out on a table with pictures of children facing up; see figures below.

The teacher asks:

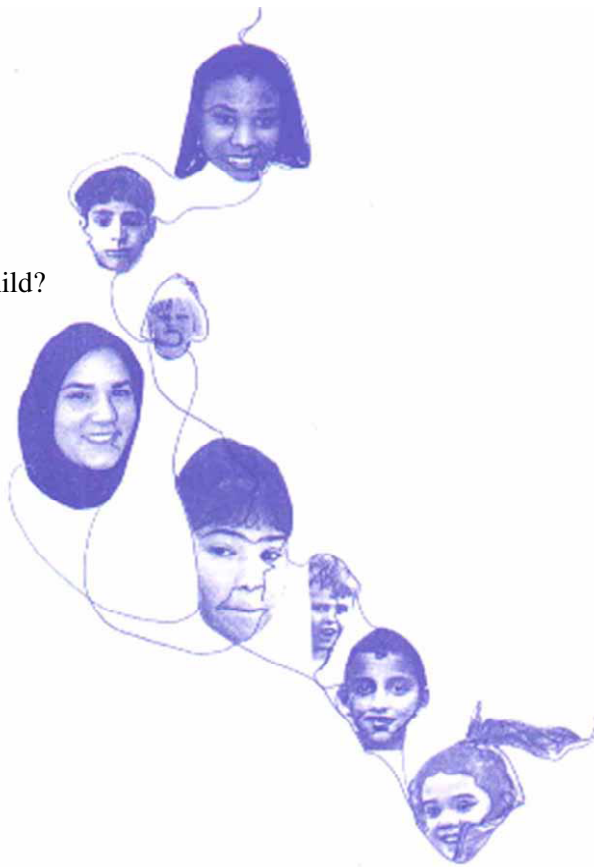
- Which child would you like to ask something of?
- What would you like to ask and why?

Then in a discussion group, one child chooses a card and the teacher asks a number of questions:

- Where do you think this child lives? How can you tell?
- What do you notice about the outer appearance of the child?
- Do you see children like this in Melbourne (or your own town)?

All the children in the group are asked:

- With which child on the cards would you like to play this afternoon?
- What game would you like to play?
- Why do you think that it would be fun?
- Where would you like to play?



**Note:** In March *VH*, page 4, we described the first lesson in 'The Art of Living for seven-year olds'. The teacher was instructed to enter the classroom dressed as a clown and performing antics. Figure opposite gives the idea of a Humanist teacher doing this.

\**Mastering the Art of Living and Becoming a Citizen of the World – It Isn't Something that Just Happens*, by Tryntsje de Groot and Emma Klarenbeek of the Pedagogisch Studiecentrum HVO, P.O. Box 85475, 3508 AL Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2002.

**Note.** If any readers feel inspired to follow up on this approach, please contact me?

**Harry Gardner**