



VICTORIAN HUMANIST

Monthly Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.

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Humanism – A Work in Progress

Humanism, in the sense of a philosophy of life, dates only from the mid-1800s, even though the seeds of humanist thinking were planted more than 2,500 years ago. It is therefore a work in progress. And as an increasing number of people identify with and write about humanism, there is a growing consensus on the main ideas of humanism. However, as it is relatively new and essentially open-ended and undogmatic, there exist variations in emphasis and interpretation.

An important source of variation comes from the many years it takes to make such a transformative shift in ideas, from a religious to a humanist perspective. Some people will embrace the new, but many stick with established views until they die. Those who adopt the new will be hampered by existing ideas and language, as seen in the way humanists use religion-based words, like 'faith' or 'belief', when describing humanism – see p. 7 for example. Another example is the debate that occurred when IHEU was formed in 1952, when some people argued that humanism was a new religion.

A difference in emphasis was aired recently at the Council of Australian Humanist Societies (CAHS) Convention in April, when delegates debated the motion, 'That CAHS agrees that the sole core feature of humanism that sets it apart from religion is that it does not accept supernatural views of reality.' This motion was lost, because the majority, including the Victorian delegates, considered that humanism was best described in positive rather than negative terms, and in a multi-faceted rather than a one-dimensional way.

The HSV is reassured to find that this majority view is supported by many humanists around the world, such as the well respected American humanist, Paul Kurtz, who in a recent editorial in *Free Inquiry* (Feb/March 2006) wrote: 'I surely do not define myself by what I am against, but rather by my positive stance. It's what I believe in deeply – what I am for – that matters more: we are naturalists, not supernaturalists; secularists, not theocrats; but beyond that, we wish to focus on free inquiry and humanistic ethics, and we have some confidence in a progressive future for human-kind.' He goes on to expand on the positive and affirmative aspects of humanism, as he sees it after a lifetime spent writing about and working for humanism.

By understanding humanism as a cooperative work in progress and by nature open-ended and undogmatic, differences of emphasis and interpretation are inevitable. The input of ideas from many people creates a productive tension that strengthens humanism. What we need and invite is member input on how we can best make humanism appealing and meaningful to others.

Rosslyn Ives, HSV President

Monthly HSV Public Lecture

**Thursday
22 June
8.00 pm**

Balwyn Library Meeting Room
336 Whitehorse Rd. Balwyn

**Dr Dirk Baltzly,
Philosophy and Bioethics,
Monash University.**

'On Self-censorship'

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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

JUNE

- 6 Tuesday 8pm Existentialist Society. Unitarian Church Hall, 110 Grey St., East Melbourne. Professor Colin Duckworth: *'From 'The Outsider' to the 'The Misfit: adapting Camus to the stage.'*
- 7 Wednesday 6.30pm Rationalist Society of Aust. Trades Hall, Carlton
Dr Philip Nitschke: *'Dying With Dignity: What Next?'*
- 11 Sunday 9.30am **HSV Committee meeting**
12.00am Winter Solstice Social
2 Houston Crt, Box Hill South. All members welcome. BYO food & drink for shared lunch. BYO poems, jokes, music as well.
- 13 Tuesday 8pm Atheist Society. Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.
Andy Blunden: *'Why Marx Was Not an Atheist.'*
- 17-18 Saturday 9am, Sunday 1pm. CAHS, RSA, ANSA Public Conference. *'Separating Church and State; Keeping God Out of Government.'* See p.3 and website below.
- 21 Wednesday **World Humanist Day**
- 22 Thursday 8pm **HSV Public Lecture**
Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Rd., Balwyn.
Dr Dirk Baltzly, philosopher: *'On self-censorship.'*
- 28 Wednesday 6.30pm Overland event. Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.
'The Decline of Compassion?' Natasha Cica, columnist and consultant, examines the social and cultural effects of a diminishing public sector.

JULY

- 4 Tuesday 8.00pm Existentialist Society, Unitarian Church Hall, 110 Grey St., East Melbourne. Peter Cuffe:
'Angst and Creativity: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Munch.'
- 6 Thursday 7.30pm UN Ass. Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Rd., Hon. Justice Shane Marshall:
'Justice or Appeasement - Human Rights in East Timor.'
- 9 Sunday 9.30am **HSV Committee meeting**
11am **Sunday discussion**, 2 Houston Crt, Box Hill South.
Current submissions. All members welcome. Bring food for shared lunch.
- 11 Tuesday 8pm Atheist Society. Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.
Ken Young: *'Happiness: Non-delusional Optimism.'*
- 27 Thursday 8pm **HSV Public Lecture**
Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Rd., Balwyn.
John Langmore: *'What shall we do with the United Nations?'*

For latest Humanist news and updates

HSV website
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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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.



Winter Solstice Social

Sunday 11 June 12 noon – 3pm
2 Houston Court, Box Hill South
(Home of Halina Strnad)

All members and friends welcome.

BYO food & drink to share

We'll celebrate World Humanism Day with poems, jokes and music.

Separating Church & State

CAHS with the Rationalist Society of Australia and the newly formed Australian National Secular Association are organising a public conference on 'Separating Church & State: Keeping God Out of Government', at University of Melbourne, 17 June (Elisabeth Murdoch Theatre) and 18 June (Union House).

Prominent among the speakers will be **Roy Brown** of IHEU and **Max Wallace**, author of the eagerly awaited book, *The Purple Economy*. Interstate Humanists will attend.

A registration form is enclosed. Contact the HSV Committee if you could help beforehand with publicity or Powerpoint slides, and consider assisting at the venue in setting up, monitoring tickets or ushering.

Meet Roy Brown

Roy Brown, immediate past president of the International Humanist organisation, IHEU, will be in Melbourne for the Separation of Church & State Conference. He wants to meet with Australian Humanists while here. Let us know if you are interested. Contact Stephen Stuart or Rosslyn Ives.

Congratulations to

Lottie Bench who was 92 on 20 May and
Ray Dahlitz who turns 80 on 15 June.

Donations

February to May 2006

Phillip Allaway, Richard Breen, Owen Curtis,
David Fotheringham, Timothy Harland,
George Henderson, Ian Pierre-Humbert,
Ronald Marke, Bill McKenzie, David O'Brien,
Jonathan Rutherford, Peter Truman,
Harry & Wanda Will, Ken Young

Many thanks to these people for their generous support.

VH Contributions Welcome

Send to editor by 20th of each month.

E-mail <rosslyn@netspace.net.au>

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World Humanist Day and Solstice

World Humanist Day is celebrated annually on June 21 throughout the world.

Marking day is a way to spread information and combat misinformation about the positive aspects of Humanism as a philosophical life stance and a means to effect change in the world.

The origin was in the 1980s, when several state chapters of the American Humanist Association (AHA) began celebrating **World Humanist Day**. Different chapters had different ideas as to when that day should be. Some chapters, for example, preferred the anniversary of the founding of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), while other chapters celebrated a Humanist Day on different dates of significance. In the late 1980s-early 1990s, the AHA and then the IHEU passed resolutions declaring the Summer Solstice – northern hemisphere, Winter Solstice – southern hemisphere, to be World Humanist Day. In both cases it was done as twin resolutions: the first to decide that there should actually be a **World Humanist Day**, the second to decide when that day should be.

At present, **World Humanist Day** isn't widely celebrated although several other groups and organizations are beginning to recognize the holiday and plan events and activities. Perhaps this is something Australian humanists need to discuss and formalise.

Humanists in Print

The Age, Thursday 11 May 06

We're all losers

Peter Costello's latest budget is like giving children junk food to keep them smiling, while ignoring their future health. Or, as Tim Colebatch writes (*Opinion*, 10/5), 'burn our future rather than build it.'

Significantly, those who will benefit immediately are the potential swinging voters whom politicians of any colour call 'the middle', and seek to ingratiate. People who most need help – including pensioners without homes of their own or substantial assets, and those on lowest incomes – are ignored, as they are not seen as likely to affect the outcome of the next election.

In the long term, everyone is likely to suffer because of the ever-increasing overseas debt and the failure to plan and devote sufficient resources to ensure our future industrial and economic well-being. Sadly, perhaps tragically, the myopic view of government scarcely extends beyond the next election.

Robert Corcoran, Edithvale

Beaconsfield

Miracles, shmiracles. All hail to the courage and skill of the rescuers!

Ron Attrill, Golden Square

Humanist (Honest) Ethical Education

The Humanist Ethical Education course now being published monthly in this newsletter comprises 47 lessons (plus 16 appendices) for ages 7 – 15 years, together with some fourteen future titles for ages 15 – 17 years.

Publication in the *Victorian Humanist* at the rate of one page per month means that there is sufficient material in hand for the next six years, with another two years planned for the ages above fifteen.

In anticipation that readers may want to view the full collection sooner rather than later, a display has been prepared, which also includes the summaries of some ten ethical and religious philosophies.

This display is mounted on criss-crossing panels occupying a 1.2 metre square (4 ft) x 2.3 m (7.5 ft) high. It is easily erected in 15 minutes and I am seeking opportunities for presenting it in the meeting venue foyers of sympathetic hosts.

My hope is that parents and teachers, who study the collection, will be inspired to set up suburban groups, meeting to discuss the ethical education of their children, either in the home, or perhaps in a school if this can be arranged.

One of the principal sources for the lessons is the book, *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 Dutch Humanist Association. (I am importing the book at a cost of about \$24 AUD each.) Although directed towards teachers, the lessons can be readily adapted for use at home, and they would give great confidence to parents concerned for the dispassionate ethical education of their children.

Ultimately it is hoped to prepare a parent-friendly, Australian-oriented version of the display.

Although the course was assembled specifically for Humanist ethical education it has proved to be of some interest to two religious groups, and the display has already been presented at a regular meeting for worship. One person commented enthusiastically that this was 'ethics without spirituality' and has made arrangements for the teaching of it to a children's group.

Harry Gardner, Ringwood

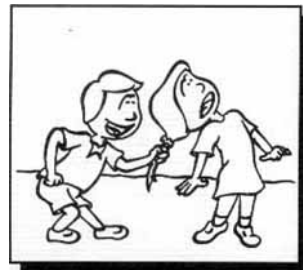
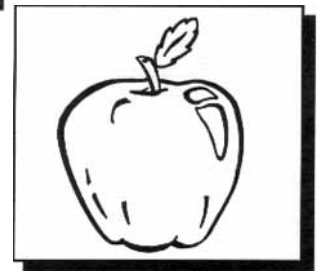
'Bad' and 'Good'

Harry Gardner

Aim: To show different ways of using 'bad' and 'good': see also Lesson No. 3 on 'right' and 'wrong' (May VH).

Write the words 'bad' and 'good' on the black or white board and encourage the children to talk about different kinds of behaviour.

Display objects or pictures such as decayed eggs, fruit, etc.



Is the decayed apple 'bad'? And what about the boy, is he 'bad' or 'wrong'?

Discuss with the children the school rules about bullying and teasing.

Help identify some playground activities or games that require children to play together. Help to list examples of bad behaviour that spoil the activity, e.g. destroying the property of other people, littering, painting on a wall, etc.

Brainstorm other examples of both 'bad' and 'good' behaviour. Divide class into groups of three or four, and assign one of the activities to each group to mime. The others guess what it is, and say whether 'bad' or 'good'.

Worth seeing

In the Shadow of the Palms (currently at the Nova Cinema Carlton)

This Australian documentary features interviews with ordinary Baghdad citizens just prior to the 2003 US/UK led war on Iraq, footage of the bombing and occupation and a follow-up set of interviews in 2005 of those people that could be located.

Save the Earth Program in Java, Indonesia

HSV Public Lecture given by Iswanto, Indonesian health scientist, and Dr Lea Jellinek, anthropologist, on 27 April 2006 at Balwyn Library

Report by Jennie Stuart

Iswanto, a health scientist with a Masters degree in Tropical Medicine, explained that his village, Sukunan, is about 5 kilometres from the centre of Yogyakarta. The houses cluster in the centre with paddy-fields ranged around the perimeter. Most of the 220 families are Muslim and the community is very close-knit and supportive. The farmers meet to play gamelan music once a week, and ideas are shared during nightwatch patrols, communal cooking, credit meetings and aerobics groups. Unemployment among young people is very high. About 20% of the families do not have private bathing and sanitary facilities, but must use the irrigation canals for washing, bathing and for toilet purposes.

For village people in Indonesia the link between illness and environmental problems is not apparent. However, Iswanto, as an expert in malaria and dengue fever, realised that mosquitoes were breeding in the water that collected in plastic refuse and old tyres left lying by the roads. Many household items are pre-wrapped now, whereas previously leaves had been used for packaging. Waste-collection is not routinely organised by the Indonesian government, except in large cities; instead, all 'rubbish' from village households is usually burnt, creating a smoky environment, or dumped on public land, where it often washes into the irrigation canals, clogging up the fields and lowering rice yields.

Iswanto visited the city landfill rubbish dumps and watched the scavengers sorting items for recycling. He realised that waste, if managed differently, could be a valuable commodity for his community, as well as removing a health hazard. Three years ago when Lea Jellinek and her partner, Ed Kiefer, were teaching Australian students in Yogyakarta, Iswanto observed them composting kitchen scraps and then using the soil to grow potted plants. The Save the Earth program evolved from this base, with some financial assistance from an anonymous donor in Melbourne.

From his father, a village headman, Iswanto learnt ancient Javanese principles about good leadership, 'Begin by setting a good example out in front, mingle with the community in the middle and be ready to offer encouragement from behind'. As a Muslim Iswanto also follows the tenet, 'Start with yourself, start small and start now.'

His first task was to help the community recognise the potential uses and hazards of different kinds of waste, as initially they had very little idea of the

distinction between, say, food scraps, plastic, glass and paper. Seventy per cent of household waste is biodegradable and households now use old clay water-pots to make compost. Some of the compost is sold and it is also used for growing plants for sale. Within the village gardens fallen leaves are now raked up and collected, instead of being burnt, and with the addition of compost fruit trees which have not been productive for many years have begun to bear again. Glass, metal, plastic and paper are separated into different bags in family kitchens and then collected in 44-gallon drums at 22 locations around the village. To help the community learn about waste the children have organised relay races, sorting and separating different kinds of rubbish. Iswanto has composed songs for them, which explain how burning plastic and other waste can harm the lungs and brain. Young men have learnt to weld in order to adapt the communal collection drums and a very successful art competition was then conducted, in which groups of 4 or 5 young people painted the drums together. The prize was a duck to be cooked and shared around in typical Indonesian fashion. Murals also helped to educate the village about the program, especially the importance of separating the components of household waste.

What has been achieved so far? After nearly three years about half of Sukunan is following the program, but many people probably still don't understand the health and environmental consequences of their old habits. Surprisingly, some of the most resistant families are the more affluent ones, who send their servants to dump or burn just as before. Usually aid projects rely on group meetings to disseminate information, but in Sukunan a house-to-house approach is planned for the near future.

The program depends on voluntary labour. Currently, the only person who is paid is the man who empties the big bins and takes the contents for recycling. This job is considered demeaning and is not popular. Income from the recycling supports the program and also helps buy community facilities. Within the village the women sew bags, hats and purses from the plastic packets which are not suitable for recycling. These have a foil backing and come from snack bars and coffee sachets. Using multiple copies of the same packets produces an Andy Warhol-style pattern, with neat, strong stitching for an attractive finish. The goods are sold at the village market and as the program now attracts many visitors,

from elsewhere in Indonesia as well as other countries, economic opportunities are expanding in many different ways.

Seven other local villages have now adopted the program and the Government has publicly endorsed it. They have even been given an award from the Department of the Environment.

And the health outcomes? Annually there are about 2000 cases of dengue fever in Yogyakarta, with 30 deaths. However, over the last two years dengue fever has been eliminated from Sukunan! But it is still a problem in neighbouring villages.

During his visit to Australia Iswanto, with the assistance of Lea, has visited many recycling plants and permaculture projects. He has investigated the idea of composting toilets to help improve sanitation within his village and would like to develop the program further, with other steps towards sustainable living, such as solar energy and waste-water management.

In the future pressure also needs to be directed towards manufacturers to increase their responsibility for packaging. But in the meantime, what if the manufacturers should object to their logos being used for commercial purposes, such as in the recycled shopping bags? The Save the Earth program has sympathetic lawyers ready who might be able to exploit such an opportunity for publicity, or even change.

If you would like to support the program, you can donate to the Sukunan Recycling Program through the Monash Asia Institute. Remember to specify that this is the program that you wish to support.
See www.arts.monash.edu.au/mai/index.html

China May Force the World To Rethink Its Economic Future

Howard Hodgens

Observing the dramatic growth of China's economy, Lester R. Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute, has written, *Our global civilization today is on an economic path that is environmentally unsustainable, a path that is leading us toward economic decline and eventual collapse.*

Despite declarations of this kind, and those of scientists like Tim Flannery, on the trends showing shrinking forests, expanding deserts, falling water tables, eroding soils, collapsing fisheries, rising temperatures, melting ice, rising seas and increasingly destructive storms, many people have been skeptical of the need to undertake economic restructuring.

Among the basic commodities – grain and meat in the food sector, oil and coal in the energy sector, and steel in the industrial sector – China now consumes more than the US in each of these except oil. If China was to consume the per capita equivalent of the US, it would take two-thirds of the world's grain harvest, and current paper production would double.

Worse still, if the Chinese had three cars for every four people, like Americans, she would have to pave an area equal to the land now planted in rice and it would need 99 million barrels of oil a day. Yet the world currently produces 84 million barrels per day and may never produce any more.

Plan A, business as usual, cannot take us where we want to go.

Sustaining our global civilization now depends on shifting to a renewable and recycling economy with a diversified transport system – that is, Plan B. This has three components:

1. a restructuring of the world economy so that it can sustain civilization;
2. an all-out effort to eradicate poverty, stabilize population (isn't AIDS doing that?) and restore hope in order to elicit participation of the developing countries; and
3. a systematic effort to restore natural systems.

Examples of the new economy are the wind farms of Western Europe, the solar rooftops of Japan, the fast growing hybrid fleet of the United States, the re-afforested mountains of South Korea and the bicycle-friendly streets of Amsterdam.

Among the new sources of energy – wind, solar cells, solar thermal, geothermal, small scale hydro, biomass – wind is emerging as a major energy source. The European Wind Energy Association projects that by 2020 half of the region's population – 195 million Europeans – will be getting their residential electricity from wind. Wind is abundant, cheap, inexhaustible, widely distributed and climate-friendly.

For the US automotive fuel economy, the key to greatly reducing oil use and carbon emissions is gas-electric hybrid cars, like the Toyota Prius, which achieves 28.2 kilometres per litre as against 9.3 km for the average new car. By plugging into the grid powered by wind farms across the US it would dramatically reduce both carbon and oil pressures on emissions.

Eradicating poverty requires investment in universal primary school education; school lunch programs for the poorest of the poor; basic village-level health care, including vaccines for childhood disease, and reproductive health and family planning services for all the world's women. In total it would take \$68 billion of additional expenditures each year.

This will also require putting together an earth restoration budget – one to reforest the earth, restore the fisheries, eliminate overgrazing, protect biological diversity, and raise water productivity to the point where we can stabilize water tables and restore the flow of rivers. Adopted worldwide, these measures would require an additional \$98 billion.

Such an investment of \$161 billion is huge but not a charitable act but an investment in which our children will live. The world is now spending \$975 billion annually for military purposes. The US 2006 military budget of \$492 billion goes largely to the development of new weapon systems. The military threats to national security pale beside the threats outlined above. The US military budget is totally out of sync with the new threats, and by shifting to Plan B it would still be spending more for military purposes than of NATO plus Russia and China combined.

However, Brown warns that time is the critical factor in facing the gravity of the earth's collapse. Will tomorrow be too late?

The Photographer

David Milan

Industrial relations is the talk of the town nowadays. Employers welcome the Government initiatives whilst a coalition of unions, churches and welfare groups fear the new laws spell a return to the industrial dark ages. The debate has become acrimonious and heated.

A hundred years ago, industrial relations were a burning issue for a New Yorker named Lewis Hines, who was disgusted by the rampant exploitation of child workers in American industry and determined to do something about it. He faced formidable opposition from powerful, conservative industrialists, who possessed great political clout and a vested interest in retaining their cheap labour force. These 'barons of industry' experienced no twinge of conscience about underpaying kids as young as nine to slave for long hours in unsafe, oppressive conditions, and bitterly resented Hines's call for reforms.

Hines found himself ridiculed, reviled as a dangerous radical and physically threatened. He founded Child Labour Reform Committees to arouse public consciousness, but knew that, to gain the victory, he would need irrefutable proof of the working conditions of children hidden away within many cheerless American factories. And now enter Hines's other passion – photography!

With breathtaking daring and at considerable personal risk, Hines charmed or deceived his way into many miserable workplaces to record, via camera and interview, the sorry state of the underage slaves there. For his efforts, he was frequently roughly manhandled then forcibly ejected, but the indomitable Lewis would not be intimidated, eventually accumulating sufficient evidence to coerce reluctant politicians, now facing an irate public backlash, to legislate to protect children's workplace rights.

So, one man and his camera, plus dogged determination, changed the face of American industry forever. Incidentally, Lewis Hines also happens to be a particular hero of mine – he was a Humanist!

THE HUMANIST APPROACH

Humanism gives an honest and secure base for each person's values and ideals, and for the extension of our concerns from ourselves, to our community, nation and the world. Humanism accepts a common responsibility of all people for all people, for the present and for the future.

Humanists have faith in the power of human reason and creativity, balanced by sympathy and insight. But it does take effort and time to change attitudes. Humanists are inspired by the amount of understanding that has been achieved, in science, history,

philosophy, literature, the arts, morality – but also we appreciate that we have very much further to go. This awareness that our understanding is incomplete means that we must be careful in our thinking and in our actions. But, however incomplete, we must use all our present understanding to the full.

Humanists' recognition of the human source of human knowledge distinguishes us from the religious: Humanists recognise no revelation, and no divine guidance or support. We do not follow ideological Marxists in their belief in determinism by the modes of production, and their consequent stress on revolution. We also reject incitement to hatred as a weapon between classes or races; and the very different destructiveness of selfish consumerism. The lives of many people are damaged, directly, by the unbalanced views of life and death, and of human powers, imposed by these attitudes. Although human beings share a common humanity, their potential is easily distorted by their upbringing.

The beliefs and commitments of Humanism are not asserted dogmatically, for we know they are not complete and final answers. They express the best understanding we have achieved so far.

HUMANIST VALUES

The responsibilities of Humanism are positive and exacting commitments. People do not become Humanists merely by rejecting supernatural beliefs.

For the Humanist, the central things that are best in humanity are our concerns to help each other, and our many abilities that make this possible. Our capacities to understand, to imagine, to create, to sympathise, and to find enjoyment in the enjoyment of others, are central to our concerns and actions. Life is meaningful because people create a web of meaning here and now, and by deriving satisfaction and fulfilment from so doing. All this is the key to morality.

For Humanists, happiness is good in itself, in so far as it reflects what is best in human nature. Walking in the mountains, listening to one's favourite music ... are good, in the pleasure and recreation they give. But reading a story to a child, or – on a different plane – working to relieve world famine, extends action outwards to other people and to the future, and will give a greater depth of expression and value to our experience. Ideally, life should be a balance of both kinds of enjoyment.

The job of Humanism is to give a vision to inspire people, and guidelines from which moral judgements can be built. This vision is of a world where each person's life is shaped by human warmth as well as by imagination and reason.

[Two sections from a British Humanist Association leaflet. Although a few years old still worth reproducing.]