



VICTORIAN HUMANIST

Monthly Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.

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Defending Freedom of Expression

The hard won right to freedom of expression is under challenge, due to the furore caused by a few satirical Danish cartoons. Deemed blasphemous by some Muslims, their publication has triggered violent protests in Europe and elsewhere. The resulting deaths, injuries, property damage and closure of several Danish embassies, has lead some commentators and politicians, across the world, to suggest that freedom of expression ought to be curtailed.

Humanists should oppose such moves, as freedom of expression along with equality and justice for all, are basic to Humanism and central to the success of liberal democracies. They are a product of Enlightenment thinking, which grew as a reaction to authoritative control – religious or state. It has taken hundreds of years of argument and campaigning to achieve these rights and values, the very ones, along with greater economic development, that have made western countries a mecca for people from strive torn and repressive regimes.

Freedom of expression is the right to express views different from established authorities, be they state or religion, and the right of creative people to make imaginative representations of their society. Cartoons lampoon or satirize people or situations in order to reflect back to society some truth about behaviour or actions. Like court jesters of old cartoonists poke fun at things treated too seriously or even denied. Cartoons defuse pompous certainty and offer, through levity, important alternative points of view. By protesting against the Danish cartoons Muslim extremists have facilitated their availability world wide, via print and web.

Fundamentalists often rage against the liberal values of secular societies, perhaps because such open-mindedness challenges and threatens the certainty of their beliefs? We see this even in Australia with the undue influence wielded by a tiny religious minority who lobby against developments the majority support, such as stem cell research, reproductive rights for women, assisted suicide, and equal rights for homosexuals, though rarely against creative works.

With terrorism fanned as a threat, many people are fearful. They'll concede to the government all types of repressive measures – like the new laws on sedition – which why Humanists need to defend freedom of expression, in all its many forms, along with other hard won rights. To do otherwise will hand disproportionate power and influence to fundamental religions.

Rosslyn Ives, HSV President

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Monthly HSV Public Lecture

**Thursday
23 March
8.00 pm**

Balwyn Library Meeting Room
336 Whitehorse Rd. Balwyn

Graham Ring

*“Indigenous justice
and the politics of
petrol sniffing.”*

Graham Ring is a journalist with an active interest in Indigenous issues, especially through his involvement with Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR).

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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

MARCH

- 7 Tuesday 8.00pm Existentialist Society, Unitarian Church Hall,
110 Grey St., East Melbourne.
Howard Dossor: "*Towards an Existential Synergy.*"
- 8 Wednesday 6.30pm Fabian Society, Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.
Clive Hamilton: "*The Death of Social Democracy.*"
- 12 Sunday 9.30am **HSV Committee meeting**
11am **Sunday discussion** 2 Houston Crt, Box Hill South.
Motions for CAHS Convention –see p. 7. Current submissions.
Bring food for shared lunch. All members welcome.
- 14 Tuesday 8pm Atheist Society. Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.
Dr Rod Foster: "*Could Natural Selection Prepare us to be Religious?*"
- 15 Wednesday 6.30pm Fabian Society. Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.
John Langmore: "*Making them Pay.*" On US and Aust. tax cooperation
- 17 Friday 5.30pm Troops Out of Iraq rally, part of an international
weekend of protest to mark the 3rd anniversary of the invasion of Iraq
@ State Library, cnr Swanston & Latrobe Sts, CBD.
Organised by the Melbourne Stop the War Coalition. Info 9639 8622 or
Email melbournestopthewar@yahoo.com.au
- 23 Thursday 8pm **HSV Public Lecture**
Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Rd., Balwyn.
Graham Ring: "*Indigenous justice and the politics of petrol
sniffing.*"
- 29 Wednesday 6.30pm Fabian Society, Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton.
Peter Fitzgerald: "*Public/Private Partnerships. (PPP)*"

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.
- 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.*"

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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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.

All correspondence to

The Secretary
Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.
GPO Box 1555
Melbourne, Vic. 3001

Discussion Sunday 12 March, 11am

- Latest submission.
- Motions to CAHS Convention – see page 7.
- VESV draft Charter for dying with dignity

Come along and add your voice to this discussion, and stay for a shared meal. Please BYO finger food.

Charter on medically assisted suicide

The Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Victoria (VESV), soon to be renamed Dying with Dignity, have drafted a Charter of Principles to support dying with dignity. The HSV has been asked to comment on this draft document. We will do this on Sunday 12 March, when copies will be available.

CAHS Convention 2006

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

All members are welcome to attend and enjoy the beachside location. See *AH* No. 81 for more details, or contact Rosslyn Ives, HSV President.

February Public Lecture

The first HSV Public Lecture for the 2006, by Emeritus Professor Brian Ellis on “*Humanism, a political philosophy for today*”, was a great success. Brian gave a stimulating talk followed a lively discussion. Attendance of nearly 50, including many members of the general public. A report on Brian’s talk will appear in the April *VH*.

Thanks for support on same-sex marriage

13 October 2005

Dear Ms Ives,

On behalf of the gay and lesbian community, I would like to thank you very much for your letter to the Prime Minister last year, condemning the ban on same-sex marriages (as reported in the Herald Sun, 11/10/05).

On a personal note, although the Government’s decision was extremely hurtful and only promoted intolerance, it is heartening to know there are groups like the Humanist Society willing to stand up against prejudice to help vulnerable minority groups.

You have provided an excellent example to other community groups of working together to achieve a fairer and more just society.

I encourage you with your future work.

Yours sincerely,

John Kloprogge

Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby, www.vglrl.org.au
Australian Coalition for Equality, www.coalitionforequality.org.au

HSV/CAPPE scholarship

Philippa Smales, awarded the HSV/CAPPE scholarship for postgraduate studies, has converted her research from a Masters to a PhD. The HSV has agreed to extend funding to Philippa to the end of 2006. She is investigating the situation of workers in sweatshop conditions and will present one of the monthly HSV public lectures later this year.

Help Wanted

Someone is needed by the HSV to handle publicity.

All you need for this position is:

- a computer with an internet connection,
- a few spare hours per week,
- a willingness to learn, and
- a desire to help promote the Humanist Society and its activities.

Or, do you know of someone who might help the HSV with publicity?

Contact President, Rosslyn Ives, if interested.

Harry Hasting Pearce

Nigel Sinnott, long-time secularist has been engaged by the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* to write the entry on Harry Hastings Pearce.

Frequently writing under the nom de plume “*Profanum Vulgus*”, Pearce was a very active in rationalist, freethinker circles from 1930s to his death in 1984. On his death his vast collection of freethought literature valued over \$500,000, and copies of his many articles were willed to the Australian National Library, Canberra, and La Trobe Library in Victoria.

Letter Writing

Help us get the words ‘humanism’ and ‘humanist’ into the media, as this is a good way of stimulating interest in the Humanist Society. The HSV would like to set up a letter writing group. We’ll start with a face to face meeting and then try coordinating contributions via email.

Please contact the Secretary, Mary Bergin if you are interested in being involved in this activity.

HSV Public Lecture Speakers

Suggestions for speakers and topics are most welcome.

Contact Coordinator Stephen Stuart, tel 9857 8318 or email SNStuart@msn.com

VH Contributions Welcome

Send to editor by 20th of each month.

E-mail rosslyn@netspace.com.au or post to
GPO Box 1555, Melbourne VIC 3001

Submission Report

Victorian Humanists support the medically supervised use of the drug RU486 as an abortifacient, for the following reasons:

- * Women have a fundamental right to decide and make choices about their bodies.
- * Every child should be a wanted child.
- * Evidence shows that around 50% of woman seeking an abortion would prefer a chemical option to surgery.
- * Medical bodies (W.H.O., A.M.A., Australian & NZ College of Obstetrics & Gynecology, Public Health Assoc. Aust.) regard the use of RU486 as less likely to result in serious complications than abortion by surgical procedure.
- * The continued use for several years in 33 countries (e.g. US, most of European, Russia, Israel, China) has established a strong case for the safe use of RU486 in Australia.
- * It is an anomaly for a minister, with or without medical training, to decide on the safety of a drug, rather than the experts in the T.G.A.
- * We deplore the use of political pressure exerted by sectarian bodies, intolerant of the rights of others to make different personal and social choices from the position they advocate so vociferously.

Halina Strnad & Rosslyn Ives

United Nations Association of Australia Victorian Division

7.30 pm, Thursday 2 March
Dr Helen Hill

School of Social Sciences, Victoria University
Issues Confronting the UN

Professor Joe Camilleri
Department of Politics, La Trobe University
*Ideas for the Long-term Sustainable
Functioning of the UN*

7.30 pm, Thursday 6 April
Claire Beck

Senior Country Program Coordinator,
World Vision Australia
*Experience of an NGO working with the
UN in the Field*

UNAA monthly meetings are held in the
Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn
(Melway 46 E8) on the first Thursday of each month.
They are free and open to all.

Humanist Ethical Education, No. 1

Your Life as a Trick? for 7 to 10 year-olds

*Mastering the Art of Living and Becoming a Citizen of the World – It Isn't Something that Just Happens** is the title of a teaching manual prepared for the use of trained humanist teachers from the Humanist University of Utrecht.

Under the Dutch system, Humanists have the right to offer this teaching to schools, and, to date, one-third of state primary schools are covered in a manner which is similar to that used for Religious Instruction in Victoria.

This article summarises Lesson 1 in the Art of Living section for 7 to 10 year-olds. The concept is to clarify the concept of the art of living.

The teacher enters the room wearing a bowler hat and a red nose and tries to make the children laugh with silly antics. The introduction considers the clown and his tricks. The children are invited to think up their own tricks and to perform them.

The teacher asks the children what the clown does and how does it make people laugh. How do you feel in yourself when you watch a clown? Can you make tricks, or an artwork, of your own life so that you are filled with laughter?

The children are divided into twos and threes to think up tricks to make them happy, standing on one leg, etc. and they practise it. They are invited to discuss whether laughing and fun makes them happy, and conclude perhaps by talking about a clown going into hospitals to give sick children a moment of joy.

Next month I will outline Lesson 1 under the manual's section on Budding World Citizens.

If any members feel inspired to follow up on this approach, perhaps we should get together sometime!

Harry Gardner

*By Tryntsje de Groot and Emma Klarenbeek of the Pedagogisch Studiecentrum HVO, P.O. Box 85475, 3508 AL Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2002.

Note: This is the first item in a series on Humanist Education by HSV committee member Harry Gardner.

'Imagine': John Lennon's Song and its Economic Relevance Today

HSV Public Lecture by John Perkins, economist, software consultant and HSV member, at the Balwyn Library Meeting Room on 24 November 2005

Report by Jennie Stuart

In the '60s John Perkins was caught up in the ferment of the time for radical change. He saw his generation as having a vision. Although that foundered, he still believes that Humanists need a vision: without a clear goal they are unlikely to reach their aim. John Lennon's well-known song 'Imagine' is sometimes described as a humanist anthem.

As a radical young student of computer science, John believed that if one could only apply the correct mathematical model to an economic problem, the solution would become readily apparent. However, as he laboured over a master's thesis about central planning in the Soviet Union as a viable alternative to market forces, he came to the realisation that, despite any amount of planning expertise, Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' would win out. And even if the massive administrative problems could somehow be made half-way manageable, it would never foster technical change or be flexible enough to benefit from it.

As a humanist economist he takes issue with some widely held economic views. To those who maintain that *economic growth should be zero or negative* he cautions that this turns on a mistaken view of economic growth, which ought to be about technical progress primarily, and does not necessarily involve an increased use of resources. For example, if we discovered how to extract energy from a ton of coal more efficiently (as was achieved in the past), that would lead to economic growth while using less coal. To those who advocate that *the way banks create money through debt is immoral* he warns that this is a revival of the ancient religious doctrine on usury, which has caused untold damage to human welfare for centuries – for example, the Holocaust. Without money markets modern civilisation could not exist, and it would be immoral not to pay compensation to lenders who are forgoing the use of their own money. Finally, to those who *condemn adherence to the notion of market forces as ideology* he counters that the inter-connection of demand and supply reflects human nature, which is tantamount to a law of social science. When demand exceeds supply, prices rise, and when the reverse is the case, they fall. The effects of this law of nature may be mitigated, but not revoked.

*Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try.
No hell below us, above us only sky.*

As Mark Twain said, 'Faith is believin' what we know ain't so.' World-wide, humanists are split over the question of whether to be non-religious or anti-

religious. John does not subscribe to the more tolerant first position, but believes that we need to be more radical, seeing religious belief as false, irrational and deluding. If we aspire to establish a post-religious society, conciliation will not work to this end.

*Imagine all the people living for today,
Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do.
Nothing to kill or die for, no religion too.
Imagine all the people living life in peace.*

Lennon's radical vision is also a humanist one and, thirty years later, still relevant. It should determine our agenda as Humanists. It is hard to think of instances throughout history where war has not been related in some way or other to religious or national zeal. International co-operative agreements can help to mitigate the effect of national divisions. A recent editorial in *The Economist* referred to Lennon's song in the course of an argument for reducing trade barriers. This is vital, since barriers to trade in agricultural goods are the biggest reversible factor in world poverty. What we need to do is to campaign for fairer rules for the World Trade Organisation, not for its abolition. The globalisation vision that we need is one of multi-lateralism, of universalism, of strengthening international institutions and international law. And international law needs to be extended to cover corporate governance and corporate tax matters, as well as dealing with crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In order to 'imagine no religion', one can envisage a post-religious society where people would be free to hold any belief they choose, but as a private matter, without imposing it on others. Moral values would be based on universal principles such as honesty, compassion, justice and freedom. There lies the path to a peaceful, rational world.

*Imagine no possessions, I wonder if you can,
No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man,
Imagine all the people sharing all the world.*

Perkins endorses the concepts of brotherhood and sharing but argues that private property is a beneficial feature of our civilisation; to pretend otherwise is a hopeless and dangerous delusion. Nonetheless it is possible to imagine reducing our needless consumerism and sharing surplus assets more wisely. Regarding greed and hunger, we certainly need to attend to the equitable distribution of income and wealth, globally and nationally, and an appropriate balance between private gain and public good. But as Adam Smith said, 'It is not from the benevolence of

the baker that we get our bread.' That is, the collective pursuit of private interest, through market forces, can also work for the public good. Furthermore, the wealth of nations is driven not primarily by capitalism, and certainly not by christianity or protestantism, but by the most humanistic of phenomena, namely technical progress or productivity.

*You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one,
I hope some day you'll join us, and the world will live
as one.*

This is an idealistic hope, but without a vision or goal we will achieve nothing. We are facing dire threats from global warming and resource depletion, especially of oil. There is the prospect of recession as a result. Our cherished Enlightenment values are under attack. The pillars upon which our civilisation has been built are crumbling – the rule of law, civil rights, rationalism and secularism. Internationally the rule of law has been abrogated by the disastrous and illegal invasion of Iraq. Civil rights are being seriously curtailed in the misguided and counter-productive 'war on terrorism'. Rationalism appears to be waning under a resurgence of religion and superstition. Finally, secularism is diminishing as institutionalisation of religion increases. The long-term consequences of these trends are indeed frightening to imagine.

Letters

Religion or religion?

The recent phenomenal rise of religious fundamentalism of all stripes is, I think, a reaction to a world that is increasingly divided in every possible way because it is trying to come together too fast and in the wrong way. Unfortunately, the current process of economic globalisation and its enforcement is violating and disturbing cultural norms everywhere. The problem is that humanists seem to have pressed the panic button, particularly where religion and politics intersect.

Politics has always been a process of power, and our current and rather feudal type of 'democracy' is no exception. We know that we must always oppose laws and public rules that impose a set of arbitrary restrictions common to only one particular group of the population, and we must always support those that are based on universal ethical principles. I do not think, however, that it is a good idea to do this by expressing opposition to the people who hold restricted views, because if we do, we can never make friends with them, influence them or work with them to build a better world. We would instead be open to accusations of being an opposing religion or ideology. Rather, we should continue to work for better human relations, and especially to work for better governance and always try to keep its effects balanced and universally applicable.

Carl Mahoney, North Balwyn

Thanks and Congrats.

I have received copies of the Feb. *VH*, plus HSV Annual Report and the *AH* No. 81 – all three a great credit to those involved. Congratulation on the financial status of the Society.

Bill Fenner, Ashburton

What a Wonderful World!

The lyrics of Satchmo's famous song ring true for me because, as regards my fellow human beings, I am incurably optimistic. I, too, see goodness everywhere, thoughtful, caring people who, in so many little ways, display generosity of spirit towards others, with a gentle word, a kindly deed, a friendly smile and a welcoming hand. Those who are always there, when needed, for someone in pain, distress or bereavement, or who might be just plain lonely.

There is truly a rich vein of goodness within most people who would never regard themselves as in any way extraordinary, and so, one isolated display of meanness is compensated for by hundreds of little acts of kindness, today and every day. Goodness wins out every time!

When misfortune strikes down a family, witness how quickly friends gather to offer kindness and support. Recall the many occasions of wider disaster when we have been inspired by the selfless, often heroic efforts of ordinary folk who materialise at the scene to provide succour and support for hurt and helpless victims. The well of human kindness, in such situations, simply overflows, confirming the reality that the human spirit is basically good. When the going gets rough, we are there for each other.

So, forget the pessimists who pontificate about the frailties of contemporary society. Ignore those dreary end-of-the-world forecasters who see us as 'an evil generation' about to cop our cosmic comeuppance. Instead, focus on the positive, the generosity of the human spirit and the kindness all around you. Let's keep that ball rolling, for we can all contribute something, however insignificant, to the common good, thus helping to make our world a nicer place in which to live.

David Milan, HSV activist, Wodonga



March Memoriam

Senator Olive Zakharov,
social reformer,
1984 Australian Humanist of the Year (AHOY) and active
HSV member,
died 6 March 1995.

Strains from *Sound of Music*
Mahatma Ghandi, as you know, walked barefoot most of the time, which produced an impressive set of callouses on his feet. He also ate very little, which made him rather frail and with his diet, suffered from bad breath. This made him: A super calloused fragile mystic hexed by halitosis

Motions for the CAHS Convention – Coolangatta 7-9 April

Victorian Humanist will decide their position on the following motions at the Sunday 12 March Discussion, 11am – 12.30pm. Copies of these motions with their rationales will be available at the meeting.

H. S. New South Wales

1. That CAHS
 - (a) deplores the lack of services provided in Australia for the mentally ill;
 - (b) calls on each State and Territory government urgently to review whether the standard of assistance it provides is up to the level acceptable in an advanced, humane society, and to rectify any shortfall, even at very substantial cost; and
 - (c) recognising that adequate funding is an issue, calls on the Federal Government to urgently convene a Federal-State meeting, so that an effective nation-wide plan for the mentally ill can be instituted.
2. That CAHS condemns radical Islam as the principal threat to the tolerant secular state, and CAHS vehemently opposes any attempts to introduce Sharia Law to Australia.

H. S. Queensland

1. That CAHS agrees that Humanism does not accept supernatural views of reality.
2. That CAHS agrees that the sole core feature of Humanism that sets it apart from religions is that it does not accept supernatural views of reality.
3. That CAHS agrees that when governments advantage religion and/or religious bodies they are in effect promoting belief in the supernatural.
4. That CAHS agrees that opposing the advantaging of religion and/or religious bodies by governments should be a priority area for Humanist political action.

H. S. South Australia

1. That CAHS urge Her Majesty's Opposition, all other opposition parties, all appropriate NGOs such as Amnesty International, U. N. Association, Legal Bodies, and previous Prime Ministers including Whitlam and Fraser, expressing our concern about imprisonment or detention for a period of years without charge contrary to the provisions of Habeas Corpus.

We request the above bodies to consult together to formulate a new Habeas Corpus Act, to supersede all other Acts, with clearly defined lengths of time after which charges must be brought. On reaching agreement all political parties would be asked to support and promote the proposed legislation at the next election.

2. That CAHS distribute the following campaign sheet to each State Society, consult with Doug Everingham as to which NGOs and overseas contacts should be

invited to undertake the day to day running of the suggested campaign. Each State Society should invite local NGOs, Amnesty International, UN Associations etc. to take part and search out areas where education can be improved.

H. S. Western Australia

That CAHS calls on the Australian Government to

- (a) initiate a law to prevent this and future governments from engaging in warfare without full parliamentary debate, save only in the event of invasion of Australian territory by a foreign power or an immediate threat of such invasion, and
- (b) initiate referendum procedures at the time of the next election with a view to amending the Australian Constitution so as to give permanence to such provisions.

CAHS

That members of CAHS agree to pay up to \$2.00 per quarterly copy of *Australian Humanist*, in return commensurately, for more pages and improved print quality.

H. S. Victoria

The following four motions were agreed to by members at the 12 February Sunday Discussion

1. That Humanist Societies of NSW, SA, Qld and WA urge their respective State governments to follow the example of the A.C.T. Act and the proposed Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.
2. That, in view of Australia's deepening partnership with the US (military, trade & cultural), Humanists openly express (i) their dismay at the continued actions of the Bush administration in destroying peace and racial harmony, and (ii) their dissatisfaction with its role of self-appointed leadership of the world.
3. (i) That all State Humanist Societies publicly advocate marking 'no religion' on the Census religion question, and publicise the biased form of this question, and (ii) That CAHS coordinate the associated actions.
4. That CAHS calls upon the Australian Government (i) to adopt a clear and consistent policy of opposing capital punishment, and (ii) in the event of an Australian citizen being charged with an offence in another country punishable by death, provide immediate legal and diplomatic assistance. Further the government must campaign on an international level for the abolition of the death penalty in countries which retain it.