



# Australian Humanist

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**Commemorative sculpture of Raoul Wallenberg. Kew Junction, Melbourne.**

## On Humanism

Humanism is a modern alternative to religion and by its very nature cannot be expressed dogmatically. Humanists however do subscribe to some broad guiding principles which form a framework for leading an ethically good life. All Humanist groups have spokespersons and produce written expressions of Humanism. And from time to time widely endorsed statements appear. Two recent examples are *Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism* and the *Amsterdam Declaration 2002* on page 2.

**M***anifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*, was issued by the International Academy of Humanism, a specialist member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). It was written by USA Humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz, and supported by over a 100 prominent Humanists from 26 countries. Australian signatories were philosophers John Passmore (since deceased), J. J. C. Smart, and media personality Phillip Adams.

In the *Manifesto* preamble it states,

Many of the old ideas and traditions are no longer relevant to current realities. We need fresh thinking if we are to cope with the global society of the future. Although we who endorse this document share common principles and values, we are prepared to modify our views in the light of new knowledge, altered circumstances, and unforeseen problems that may arise.

In passages advocating the value of scientific naturalism and the benefits of technology, it says,

For the first time in human history we possess the means – provided by science and technology – to ameliorate the human condition, advance human happiness and freedom, and enhance life for all people on the planet.

Under ‘Ethics and Reason’ the key principles of Humanist ethics are set down as, follows.

- The dignity and autonomy of the individual is a central value.
- Freedom of choice should be maximized.
- Freedom must be exercised responsibly.
- Responsibilities and duties to others are essential values.
- Empathy and caring are essential for ethical conduct.
- Children should be provided with moral education.
- Reason should be used in framing our ethical judgments.
- That we should be prepared to modify ethical principles and values in light of current realities and future expectations.

The *Manifesto* concludes by calling for a universal commitment to humanity in particular for ‘A Planetary Bill of Rights and Responsibilities’, which expands the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and for new planetary institutions to meet global needs.

R. Ives, editor

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# Amsterdam Declaration 2002

Humanism is the outcome of a long tradition of free thought that has inspired many of the world's great thinkers and creative artists and gave rise to science itself.

The fundamentals of modern Humanism are as follows:

1. ***Humanism is ethical.*** It affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others. Humanists have a duty of care to all of humanity including future generations. Humanists believe that morality is an intrinsic part of human nature based on understanding and a concern for others, needing no external sanction.
2. ***Humanism is rational.*** It seeks to use science creatively, not destructively. Humanists believe that the solutions to the world's problems lie in human thought and action rather than divine intervention. Humanism advocates the application of the methods of science and free inquiry to the problems of human welfare. But Humanists also believe that the application of science and technology must be tempered by human values. Science gives us the means but human values must propose the ends.
3. ***Humanism supports democracy and human rights.*** Humanism aims at the fullest possible development of every human being. It holds that democracy and human development are matters of right. The principles of democracy and human rights can be applied to many human relationships and are not restricted to methods of government.
4. ***Humanism insists that personal liberty must be combined with social responsibility.*** Humanism ventures to build a world on the idea of the free person responsible to society, and recognises our dependence on and responsibility for the natural world. Humanism is undogmatic, imposing no creed upon its adherents. It is thus committed to education free from indoctrination.
5. ***Humanism is a response to the widespread demand for an alternative to dogmatic religion.*** The world's major religions claim to be based on revelations fixed for all time, and many seek to impose their world-views on all of humanity. Humanism recognises that reliable knowledge of the world and ourselves arises through a continuing process of observation, evaluation and revision.
6. ***Humanism values artistic creativity and imagination and recognises the transforming power of art.*** Humanism affirms the importance of literature, music, and the visual and performing arts for personal development and fulfilment.
7. ***Humanism is a lifeway*** aiming at the maximum possible fulfilment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times. Humanism can be a way of life for everyone everywhere.

Our primary task is to make human beings aware in the simplest terms of what Humanism can mean to them and what it commits them to. By utilising free inquiry, the power of science and creative imagination for the furtherance of peace and in the service of compassion, we have confidence that we have the means to solve the problems that confront us all. We call upon all who share this conviction to associate themselves with us in this endeavour.

Unanimously endorsed at IHEU Congress 6 July 2002.

# To be or not to be?

Charles Murray

When did you first know, or even suspect, that you were a Humanist? With some it starts early. For many, it is a slow and painful adjustment in later life, a gradual recognition that man created his own gods. For me, the seeds of doubt were sown when, growing up in Scotland, I became a nine-year-old altar boy. The summer influx of visitors to our seaside town meant that the milkman needed extra help with deliveries. For the handsome, sorely-needed reward of two shillings and sixpence, I undertook to work seven mornings per week – which meant missing Mass on Sundays.

Summer over, I returned to the fold and humbly revealed my sins. There were times when we had little to confess. My brothers and I sometimes hatched up some beauties on our way to church, but this was serious. I would get, at least, a penance of three Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys. The priest was a good, kind man, no doubt fully aware of the reason for my absence. He spoke in firm tones. This was a Mortal Sin that left an indelible black mark on my soul. I might never be allowed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The blot on my escutcheon stuck with me. I didn't brood over it, but it was always there.

I quite enjoyed leading the priest down the aisle, resplendent in his chasuble, while I distributed incense from my freely-swinging thurible. At the back of my mind the thought that persisted was: should I persevere with my rosary beads, plus an occasional Apostles' Creed, or should I just surrender to the Forces of Darkness? My chances of getting to heaven were a bit slim. I began to give it deeper thought when I was fourteen and living here, in Australia. By that age I was into serious reading. I grew up in a generation of readers. We didn't have the distractions of radio, television and computers. A paperback edition of H. G. Wells's *The Short History of the World* (non-fiction) started me off on a long pursuit of enlightenment.

Working on Sydney building sites in the 1940s and '50s, I was always involved in lunch-hour discussions. Perched on carpenters' stools, timber stacks and wheelbarrows, the languages and topics were a boiling mixture of life experience, coloured with wit and profanity, rather than the philosophies of higher education. Religion was far from being a forbidden subject. It was during one of those noisy, but mainly good-humoured, uproars that I had to admit I had long parted with belief in the supernatural, whether it be fairy stories or folk tales – or religion, which seemed to be a mixture of both.

Among the remarks that I was 'a bloody heathen' and an 'effin' no-hoper', it was generously acknowledged that I wasn't completely devoid of manners and mateship. What was I? Benny, the plumber from Holland, had some answers. He told us of being suddenly recruited to resist the Second World War invasion of his homeland. He enlisted, went into action, was wounded and was taken prisoner all on the same day. He spent the ensuing years as a prisoner of war. One of his German guards was a studious, friendly soul, too old to be influenced by the Hitler Youth Movement, too tottery to serve in the front line. He willingly helped the prisoner to keep in touch with his family.

Befriended by the enemy and with plenty of time for reading and discussion, Benny followed in the footsteps of his captor: he became a Humanist. That was the word I wanted. I knew it, but without the capital letter. Rather than a divine revelation, it simply established that there were many in the world – and had been for centuries – who thought as I did. I recognised that the myths and legends of the all-powerful God, the miracles, life after death, were fantasy, even though they were cherished, but not shared, by so many creeds, cults and sects. They were the outcome of the human refusal to accept that, like all other forms of life, we too will die.

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At the age of ninety-four, my Humanist principles are more firmly in place than ever. Despite that, looking over my extended family of four generations, I find I am the only atheist. Where did I go wrong? Dally Messenger provided some answers in his article about secular ceremony (*AH* No. 96). Because of family and social connections, I have now been to Presbyterian services, Catholic Christenings, Anglican and Hebrew weddings. I have still to venture into the wider (narrower?) world of Islam and beyond.

At all of these functions, there was ample evidence of the human need to belong. No doubt there were internal differences. All groups of humanity encounter this problem – even the Humanists. But there was the basic warmth of not being an outsider. Special events are enriched by ceremony. It induces the feeling of having a place in the scheme of things. That is why so many cling to beliefs that defy common sense. As Dally Messenger wrote, ceremony doesn't have to be confused with religion.

For the Humanist, there is no magical moment of enlightenment, no blessings from above. All that is needed is a firm grip on reality, awareness of what is going on in the world around you, plus understanding and compassion. Apparently, a little ceremony now and then doesn't hurt.

Charles Murray, is a NSW Humanist and Honorary president of the Robert Burns World Federation.

## Cover photograph

This commemorative sculpture (1985), located in a small garden, is one of many such gestures of appreciation for the humanitarian work of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg.

For about six months in 1944 he was responsible for saving an estimated 100,000 Jews by organising safe houses and travel documents from an office in Budapest.

Sculpture by Karl Duldig. Photograph by R. M. Ives.

# Addressing population growth. Social cognitive theory goes global

**Albert Bandura**

**S**oaring population growth tops the list of global problems. Even with the present population of 6.7 billion we have outgrown the Earth's carrying capacity, but we are heading toward a population of 9 to 10 billion by mid-century. We are destroying ecological systems that have evolved over aeons, and that keep our planet cool and habitable.

Burgeoning population growth also fuels civil strife. Around 80 per cent of the violent conflicts are in countries with large youth populations that are uneducated, unemployed, living in poverty and under autocratic, corrupt rulers. Such youth are easily recruited for violent activities.

How are we responding to the crisis? With token gestures. We are like the guy who jumps off a tall building, and as he passes the 30th floor he thinks, 'So far, so good!'

Diverse social forces stifle acknowledgement of this problem. Religious doctrines, contentious immigration issues, draconian population control measures that violate human rights, powerful lobbyists... all have rendered population stabilisation a taboo subject. Population growth has been lobotomised from the formula for ecological destruction. But our battered planet is in deep trouble unless we break the stranglehold. Billions more consumers will overwhelm any benefits from green, clean technologies. We have only 40–50 years to clean up our act, to prevent the irreversible collapse of entire ecological systems.

We need to fight not only time, but social practices that disengage moral sanctions from environmentally destructive activities. How can we do this, at a truly global level? First, we need a theoretical model: one that specifies the determinants of psychosocial change, and the mechanisms through which they work. This knowledge provides the guiding principles. Next, we need a translational model. This converts theoretical principles into an innovative operational practice.

With my lifetime of work in modelling and self-efficacy, we had a good theory, and Miguel Sabido, at Televisia in Mexico, provided a creative translational and implementation model. But we lacked the expertise and resources to disseminate it widely. We needed a social diffusion model, of how to promote adoption of psychosocial programmes in diverse cultural milieus. Enter Bill Ryerson and David Poindexter at the Population Media Center, who work worldwide using entertainment-education for social change. They recognised the effectiveness of this approach, and became our worldwide dissemination system. Many applications of this creative format – in Africa, Asia and Latin America – have promoted personal and society-wide changes that are bettering people's lives.

The serial dramas we have produced with Population Media Center encourage evidence-based, positive behaviour change among massive TV and radio audiences. These dramatic productions are not just fanciful stories. The plotlines portray people's everyday lives, and the impedi-

ments they face. They help people to see a better life, and provide the strategies and incentives that enable people to take the steps to realise their hopes. Hundreds of episodes, over several years, allow viewers to form emotional bonds to the models, who evolve in their thinking and behaviour at a believable pace. Multiple, intersecting plotlines can address different aspects of people's lives, at both the individual and social level.

Take the example of a serial we used in the Sudan. Here, the plotlines included the benefits of family planning; educational opportunities for daughters; the injustice of forced marriage; the risks of early childbearing; and HIV prevention. A special theme centred on the devastating consequences of the widespread practice of genital mutilation. Most people in the country favoured this brutal practice. We found that our programme reversed this social norm.

This kind of pernicious gender inequality is a frequent target for our plots. In too many societies, women are marginalised, devalued, disallowed aspiration, denied their liberty and dignity. The fastest way for societies to enhance their human capital is to educate their women. A drama for India, with an audience of about 125 million, illustrates some of the psychosocial principles behind our attempts to do this. A mother challenges restrictive cultural norms for her daughter Taru, and promotes her education. Taru raised the academic aspirations and pursuits of teenage listeners, who had little access to education. The episodes include positive models (exhibiting beneficial lifestyles), negative models (exhibiting detrimental ones), and transitional models (changing from detrimental to beneficial styles of behaviour). This contrast modelling highlights the personal and social effects of different lifestyles. Viewers are enabled, and inspired, by seeing others change their lives for the better.

## **Population growth has been lobotomised from the formula for ecological destruction.**

Of course, efforts at social change challenge power relations and entrenched societal practices. Success does not come easily. Social change requires development of resilience to adversity. There are several ways in which modelling is used to build resilience. The plotlines model prototypical problems and effective ways of overcoming them. They also model how to manage setbacks and recover from failed attempts. They show people how to enlist social support for personal change, and epilogues and other guides provide the essential environmental support, linking to self-help groups and other community resources. Seeing similar others succeed through perseverance strengthens staying power.

We also use vicarious motivators. Unless people see the modelled lifestyles as improving their welfare, they have little incentive to adopt them. The benefits of the favourable practices and the costs of the detrimental ones are vividly portrayed.

To change deeply held beliefs and social practices also requires strong emotional bonding. We have found plenty of

evidence of that. In India, 400,000 viewers sent letters supporting, advising, or criticising the various models in the drama. One wrote:

There are moments when I feel that Taru is directly talking to me. Usually at night. She is telling me, 'Usha, you can follow your dreams.' I feel she is like my elder sister... and giving me encouragement.

Our model of social change doesn't just operate on this direct pathway, promoting changes by informing, enabling, motivating and guiding viewers to improve their lives. In addition, the socially mediated pathway links people to social networks and community settings. These places provide continued personalised guidance, natural incentives and social support for personal change.

Failure to address the psychosocial determinants of human behaviour is often the weakest link in social policy initiatives. Simply providing ready access to resources does not mean that people will take advantage of them. One of our dramas promoted a national literacy programme in Mexico. The government had launched a national self-study programme. People who were skilled at reading were urged to organise small self-study groups to teach others how to read. It was a good idea, but there were few takers. Our survey identified three impediments to participation: a critical period barrier (believing that reading is learnable only when one is young); a low self-efficacy barrier (believing that they lacked the ability to master such a complex skill); and a self-unworthiness barrier (feeling that an educated person wouldn't be interested in devoting time to them).

In our drama, a popular star played the role of the literate person. She persuades characters representing different segments of the population to join the self-study group (diversity builds perceived similarity). They voice their self-doubts, and the instructor corrects their misbeliefs and persuades them that they have the ability to succeed. We modelled how to manage setbacks.

## **The fastest way for societies to enhance their human capital is to educate their women.**

The day after one epilogue, by an admired movie star, 25,000 people showed up to enrol in the self-study programme. Viewers were more informed than non-viewers about the literacy programme, and had more positive attitudes about helping each other to learn. Enrolment was 90,000 in the year before the televised series, and about one million during the year of the series. In the year following the series, another 400,000 people enrolled, suggesting a second-order influence: as people develop competencies that improve their lives, they serve as models, inspirations and even tutors for others.

Tanzania provided a unique opportunity for an experimental comparison of the effectiveness of dramas. In Tanzania the fertility rate is 5.6 children per woman. The current population of 36 million is projected to soar to 60 million in 25 years, and 88 million in 50 years. No economic development can cope with this. Our radio drama was broadcast in one large region of the country, with the remainder serving as a control.

The programme raised people's belief in their efficacy to control their family size. Before, many believed that their deity ordained the number of children they will have, or their husbands decreed it. The broadcast area had a substantial increase in the number of new families adopting contraceptive methods, compared with the control region. Adoption of contraceptive methods also increased when the programme was later broadcast in the control region.

There was also a graded exposure effect: the greater the exposure to the dramatic series, the more the marital partners discussed the need to control family size, and the higher the adoption of family planning methods. A similar programme aired in Mexico, and contraceptive sales increased by 23 per cent in that year (compared with between 4 and 7 per cent in the two previous years).

Another major issue in Tanzania is the spread of the AIDS virus. We devote an enormous amount of effort and money to treating the ravages of AIDS, but pitifully few resources to preventing the disease. In Tanzania AIDS is transmitted heterosexually, by long-distance truckers, in

## **Cultural sensitivity**

OUR TV and radio serials are not foisted on nations by outsiders. They are created by invitation, from nations seeking help. The Population Media Center works in partnership with the media personnel in the host countries, to create a serial drama tailored to their culture.

Extensive cultural and value analyses are conducted before programmes are developed and implemented. This formative phase identifies problems of major concern. These interviews provide the culturally relevant information for developing realistic characters and engrossing, functional plot lines. This 'value grid' is vital, because if you present in abstract, you are fuelling controversy. People will inevitably dump emotional baggage into the abstraction.

I am occasionally asked 'Who has the authority to say what should be modelled as "good"?' But the dramatisations are grounded in the internationally endorsed values, codified in United Nations covenants and resolutions. The values embody respect for human dignity; equity of opportunities; and support of human aspirations. These countries have signed up to these, but don't follow the practices. Does laissez-faire morality have no limits? Is it alright for despotic regimes to prohibit education for women, and spray girls with acid on the way to school? What is the moral dilemma in creating a culturally sensitive model for improving people's lives?

Also, we cannot afford to be casual or cavalier about the demographics involved here. Take the figures from Tanzania [see main article]. They need help.

truck stop hubs, with hundreds of prostitutes. About 60 per cent of them are infected, along with a third of the truck drivers. Our programme quickly debunked false beliefs: that mosquitoes transmit the virus, that sex with young girls is safe, and that having sexual intercourse with a virgin cures AIDS. Again, contrast modelling was used. There was a large increase in condom use in the broadcast area after the programme, and viewers also reported reductions in the number of sexual partners and the sharing of razors and needles. In Ethiopia, our serial drama was distributed as an audio cassette to truckers and sex-workers, who lined up eagerly each week for the new episode.

A storyline in the Kenyan drama illustrates how we tailor to particular cultural values. It revolved around the inheritance of land – in Kenya, only sons can inherit property – and the impoverishing effect of large families. Following the drama, contraceptive use increased by 58 per cent, as did preference for smaller families. The more people watched the programme, the more they talked to their spouse about family planning and the higher the rate of adoption of contraceptive methods.

Could such large effects really be down to our drama? Charles Westoff, a demographer at Princeton, conducted the assessment. He applied multiple controls for ethnicity, religion, education, rural/urban residence, life-cycle status and number of wives. The serial drama remained as a major contributor to Kenya's declining birthrate, and reduction in the rate of population growth.

And so the impacts mount up. In India, we addressed equal educational opportunities and career options for women; gender bias in child rearing; the detrimental effect of the dowry system; community development; and much more. The young woman in our drama became adored nationally. Her death in childbirth produced an outpouring of 170,000 letters, concerning the tragedy of forced child marriages. The programme sparked serious public discussions about the broadcast themes. But it went beyond talk, to collective community action. One village sent a letter to the broadcast centre, signed by its inhabitants, stating that they will work to eradicate the practice of dowry and child marriages, and support education of daughters. School enrolment of girls rose from 10 per cent to 38 per cent.

We are using a variety of other means, for bettering people's lives and promoting environmentally sustainable lifestyles. The popular, prime-time telenovelas on TV Globo, in Rio de Janeiro, dubbed into different languages, reach about 900 million people worldwide. Our Media Center helps in creating social themes that can be easily incorporated into the telenovelas.

To reach teenagers, the Media Center created radio mini-dramas written, produced, and hosted by youth. They enjoy high popularity. Each programme begins with a street poll of adolescents for the relevant topic. It is then explored in a brief mini-drama that helps teenagers to make informed choices for healthier and safer lives. The episodes, on issues such as drug abuse, teenage sexuality and pregnancy, are followed by listener call-ins. Invited guests provide further guidance, and referrals on where to go for information and help.

Each year, we also hold a summit in Hollywood for writers and producers in the entertainment industry. We explain how social cognitive theory uses the power of enabling storytelling for human betterment. We also present awards for dramas that include plotlines which help viewers

to manage difficult problems. Recent awardees include *Boston Legal*, for dramatising a lawsuit against the government for neglecting medical care of veterans injured in the Iraq war; the leading Hispanic network, TV Mundo, for dramatising the causes and prevention of diabetes; and *Sesame Street*, for having Waldo model physical activity, and healthy eating. We also give awards to political cartoonists who have managed to distil complex issues into memorable images that can have a powerful impact on public opinion.

Finally, we have addressed the environmental costs of unbridled consumption. Most people don't have the foggiest idea of how their consumption practices affect the environment. If they are to adopt environmentally sustainable practices, they need to understand the ecological costs of their consumption practices. They need to be enabled, and motivated, to turn enlightened concern into constructive behaviour. With this in mind, a creative team including Alexandra Paul and Michael Tobias produced a video, 'The Cost of Cool', for distribution to schools. It focuses on the buying habits of teenagers, tracking the ecological costs of the manufacture, distribution, sale and disposal of everyday items. It has sobering impact on teenagers. As one of them put it, 'I'll never look at a T-shirt, in the same way'.

Global problems instil a sense of paralysis in people. They feel that there is little they can do to reduce such problems. The mantra 'Think globally, act locally' is an effort to localise the global. Our global applications increase the scale and scope of social cognitive theory in promoting personal and social changes. They illustrate how a collective effort, combining the expertise of different players, can have a worldwide impact on seemingly insurmountable problems.

As a society, we enjoy the benefits left by those before us who collectively worked for social changes that improved our lives. Our own collective efficacy will determine whether we pass on a habitable planet to our grandchildren and future generations.

So, as you bring our knowledge, and your personal influence to bear, on saving our battered planet: May the efficacy force be with you!

**Albert Bandura** is Professor of Psychology at Stanford University

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## Resources

This is an edited version of Professor Albert Bandura's talk for the British Psychological Society's London and Home Counties Branch at Friends House, London, on 22 April 2009. A DVD of the event, plus an extended interview with Professor Bandura, is available: enquiries to [amandarose58@hotmail.com](mailto:amandarose58@hotmail.com).

For Professor Bandura's publications and much more information, see: <http://des.emory.edu/mfp/Bandura>  
[www.populationmedia.org](http://www.populationmedia.org)

# Current issues in global health, the big picture

Ingo Weber

Health and the right to health is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as more than just the absence of disease or war...etc. It includes access to clean water, sanitation, health care and security, amongst other needs for a healthy life for all human beings. However, with a burgeoning world population predicted to reach nine billion by 2040, largely due to high birth rates in the poorer nations, how can this right ever become reality?

One of the core issues for medical professionals concerned about global health is how to be able to secure better health and health care for all, at a time when human activity, in terms of energy consumption (including population rise), has increased a hundred-fold in the last 100 years. We live in a finite world and are overexploiting the natural resources available to us. Climate change is only one symptom of many. Apart from climate change the large destruction of our fresh-water aquifer systems around the world and the massive soil and forest erosions/degradations taking place are other major issues. And these are not even being considered by most people.

Species extinction is also occurring at an unprecedented rate – a thousand times faster than at any other recorded time as shown in the fossil data available to us. This should serve as a warning to us that we are about to cause a major ecological disruption in the near future, which will affect our food and water supply as well as the kind of world we will live in.

We only have one Earth. Pumping billions of tonnes of greenhouse gases into an atmosphere as thin as an onion skin relative to the size of the Earth, whilst burning down our forests at such a rate that they equate to the greenhouse gas load of 8 million people flying from New York to London in 24 hours, cannot be good for us.

One question of concern is, 'why is it that we *seem* to care so little?' Why will we risk our designer suit to jump into a lake to save a drowning child, yet we tend to ignore the plight of 10 million children dying each year as a result of poverty? And why are so few of us prepared to put the cost of a designer suit towards helping starving children or give up on Christmas presents and redirect that expenditure?

Part of the answer seems to be that events that we can relate to or which affect us personally we tend to deal with more immediately. This can be bushfires in our area, our own health, or seeing people suffer particularly at Christmas time. The tsunami of 26 December 2005 produced such a huge outpouring of donations, many aid agencies to this very day still don't know what to do with all the money.

However at other times, millions suffering extreme poverty, the effects of climate change and other suffering (including animals we rear for our Christmas feast) could be caused by us and our lifestyle. Yet these examples are too far removed or unpleasant to contemplate. We have found recognising that these global issues are our responsibility too hard to accept.

Sometimes our denial can be so strong that even at a very close and personal level we choose to ignore or deny rather than do something about it. For example, as a doctor I sometimes see patients who have managed to completely ignore a large festering breast tumour until the day it oozed with such a pungent smell of rotting infected flesh, that they were forced to seek medical help for this problem (not the tumour itself!). Sometimes I feel society tends to look away from problems within our community in similar ways, such as with obesity and diabetes now reaching epidemic proportions. Whilst others are starving, we are literally drowning in our carbohydrate excesses.

However, our society is not a bad society because of it. I believe that human beings, no matter where they are and who they are, are intrinsically good at heart. This is akin to our patient who ignores their breast tumour until it is far too late and despite the fact of it literally staring them in the face for a long time: ignoring this personal issue does not make them a bad person as such. It makes them bad in dealing with their particular issue and this can be for a variety of reasons.

I believe, dealing with difficult sensitive issues, be they personal or related to society (local or global), actually requires the same set of tools: a mature approach, the ability to seek independent information, and to care to do something about it, not be held back by fear or pessimism. The awareness to care and to educate people on current issues particularly affecting their health is important to us as medical professionals, especially if we want to make a difference on a global health level on issues such as climate change.

We need to find a way back within us of how to care and to care more consciously, as our conscience seems to have fallen asleep somewhat within the supermarket aisles. In this way I see climate change as an opportunity not just a disaster waiting to happen. It brings people from all regions of the world together, forcing us all to sit down and examine the ways we live and how we want to live in the future. Even without climate change our ways of exploiting this world and our dependence on, and the excesses of, carbon fuels cannot go on unchecked, as we reach limits in terms of its reserves as well as the destruction through heightened human activity such as high growth rates and industry (sustainability). If we do not care now and address the issues of overpopulation and global health and how others live or have to live in contrast to our own lifestyle, then many desperate people will rock up on our shorelines by the millions, as environmental refugees one day.

Wars and conflict will be inevitable as humans fight for the few remaining resources, rather than spending the energy on working out now how to live together in more sustainable ways.

We have to choose if we want to go down a new chapter for humanity on how we live and how we live together, or if we want to repeat the history of Easter Island, the statues of which serve as a stark and poignant reminder of what can happen with unchecked growth and overexploitation of resources within a finite system. We need to choose now. We need to start caring now.

**Ingo Weber**, medical doctor and HSSA committee member.

The above were the notes used by Ingo when he spoke at the CAHS Convention in Adelaide, May 2009.

# Israel, the Palestinians and the end of the two-state solution

Michael Shaik

In light of the current negotiations on the future of Judea and Samaria, it will now become necessary for us to conduct a race against time. During this period, everything will be mainly determined by the facts we establish in these territories and less by any other considerations. This is therefore the best time for launching an extensive and comprehensive settlement momentum, particularly on the Judea and Samaria hilltops which are not easily passable by nature and which preside over the Jordan Valley on the east and over the Coastal Plain on the west.

It is therefore significant to stress today, mainly by means of actions, that the autonomy does not and will not apply to the territories but only to the Arab population thereof. This should mainly find expression by establishing facts on the ground. Therefore, the state-owned lands and the uncultivated barren lands in Judea and Samaria ought to be seized right away, with the purpose of settling the areas between and around the centers occupied by the minorities so as to reduce to the minimum the danger of an additional Arab state being established in these territories. Being cut off by Jewish settlements the minority population will find it difficult to form a territorial and political continuity.

(World Zionist Organization, 'Master plan for the development of settlement in Judea and Samaria, 1979–1983.')

Well there is no doubt that I haven't been able to stop the settlements; and, there is also no doubt from my perspective that it's in, not only the US interests, but actually Israeli interests, to not build settlements.

(Barack Obama, *Fox News*, 18 November 2009.)

'If you will it,' wrote Theodore Herzl, the founding father of the Zionist movement in 1902, 'it is no dream.' The dream to which he referred was the founding of a Jewish state in the Arab country of Palestine, a project that would necessarily involve both the mass migration of Jews to Palestine and the displacement of the country's indigenous non-Jewish population.

In 1948 the dream was realised when Zionist militias conquered 78% of Palestine and with the flight or forced expulsion of all but a fraction of the Arab population of the conquered territories. Thus the creation of the state of Israel marks a turning point in the national history of both Israelis and Palestinians. For the former it marks the transformation of the Jewish people from a nation of exiles scattered around the world into a strong and proud European nation state. For the Palestinians it is remembered as 'Al-Nakba' (the Catastrophe), in which they lost their homeland and began their history as a nation of refugees.

In 1967, Israel completed its conquest of Palestine when it captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Once again it seemed to the world that Israel had won a great victory and would continue to flourish at the Palestinians expense. The decisiveness of the Israeli victory over three Arab armies left no doubts as to its military superiority, and its dominion over the Occupied Territories seemed a temporary phenomenon that would eventually be resolved as part of a peace settlement with its neighbours or even the formation of a Palestinian mini-state comprising the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

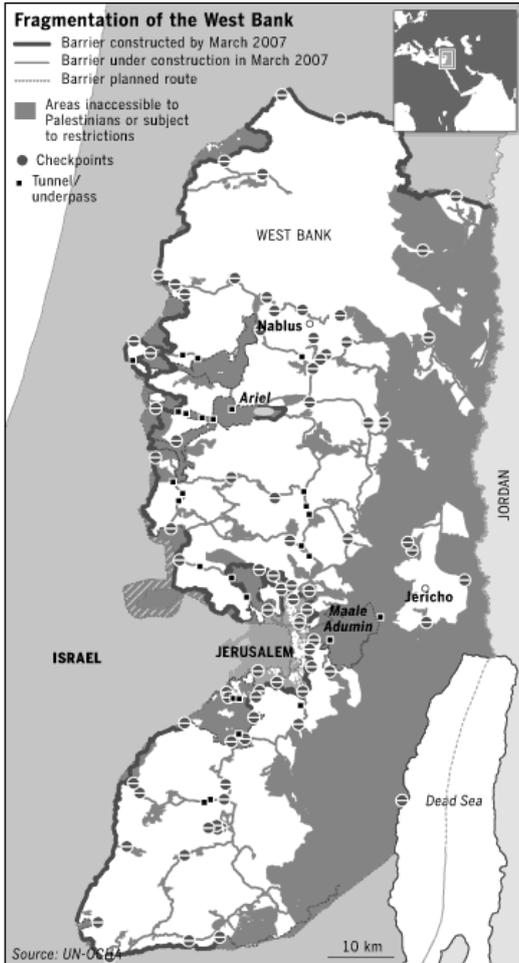
The real significance of the 1967 war for Israel, however, was that it marked the beginning of its end as a Jewish state and its gradual but relentless transformation into a Jewish-Palestinian entity in which two populations, sharing the same country are subject to different laws and have differing access to resources.

Ironically, one of the main reasons for this transformation was the very speed and decisiveness of its 1967 victory. In 1948, Zionist militias took six months to conquer 78% of Palestine, giving them plenty of time to depopulate the conquered territory of its Palestinian population. In 1967, Israel conquered the remainder of Palestine in only six days. While in the immediate aftermath of the war Palestinians from the Latrun area, East Jerusalem's Old City and other parts of the West Bank were expelled from their homes, the vast majority of the Occupied Territories' population remained in place, leaving Israel, for the first time in its history, governing territories that were heavily populated with Palestinians.

The main factor behind Israel's transformation, however, was its decision to colonise the Occupied Territories with Jewish settlements. In their history of Israel's settlements, *Lords of the Land*, the Israeli historian Idith Zertal and journalist Akiva Eldar, demonstrate how in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 victory, Israel's previously marginal religious Zionist movement was able to exploit the ambiguous policies of an uncertain and divided national government to establish the first settlements in the West Bank.<sup>1</sup> Following the victory of Israel's Likud party in 1977, however, all ambiguity regarding Israeli intentions regarding the settlements was removed and all subsequent governments have committed themselves to the expansion and developments as a national priority.

In order to understand the role of the settlements in Israel's transformation, it is important to realise their political purpose. Settlements are not merely innocent Jewish communities built on lands that have been confiscated from their Palestinian owners. Settlements are a weapon, the purpose of which is to foreclose the possibility of a Palestinian state by making Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank impossible. As the accompanying map

illustrates, the settlements have been built to make what Ariel Sharon described as a ‘pastrami sandwich’ of the Palestinians, surrounding their communities, preventing



their growth and breaking up the territorial continuity of the West Bank, particularly around Jerusalem where they have been built to separate Palestinian East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. In this respect one of the more ingenious features of the settlements are the ‘bypass roads’ which link up the settlements, which Palestinians are banned from using. In an article on the impact of the settlements upon the Palestinians, the Israeli-American journalist Gabriel Ash described the impact of these roads in the following terms:

Between August 1994 and September 1996, 4,386 dunam of private land (there are about 4.5 dunams per acre) were confiscated for the purpose of constructing seventeen ‘bypass’ roads. Roads are long and wide and their trajectory can be shifted here and there to achieve maximum impact in terms of houses that must be demolished, orchards that need to be uprooted, and growth that can be stifled. Used properly, a road is a weapon of mass destruction. For example, road 447, which shortens the trip to the Settlement of Ariel by a full five minutes, ‘necessitated’ uprooting one thousand olive trees and confiscating 75 dunams from residents of the two Palestinian villages which Ariel targets. In addition, every road that connects two Jewish settlements doubles as a road that separates two Palestinian towns.<sup>2</sup>

As well as land and roads, the settlements require water, which Israel provides by taking water from neighbouring Palestinian communities. The World Health Organisation has identified 100 litres of water per person per day as the

minimum amount of water required for a healthy community, when one accounts for domestic use, medical and business needs. According to Amnesty International, average Palestinian water consumption in the West Bank barely reaches 70 litres per person per day. As Amnesty notes, the primary reason for such a shortfall is the settlers’ profligate consumption.

Swimming pools, well-watered lawns and large irrigated farms in Israeli settlements in the OPT stand in stark contrast next to Palestinian villages whose inhabitants struggle even to meet their essential domestic water needs. In parts of the West Bank, Israeli settlers use up to 20 times more water per capita than neighbouring Palestinian communities, who survive on barely 20 litres of water per capita a day – the minimum amount recommended by the WHO for emergency situations response.<sup>3</sup>

To quote Ash again:

In this manner, the land becomes a palimpsest, in which every act of civil engineering is also its opposite, an act of war: roads increase the distance between people, building houses lead to overcrowding, laying down water pipes creates water shortages, etc. All aspects of human existence are turned into weaponry. Even the sewerage the settlement produces is a weapon against downhill Palestinian towns.<sup>4</sup>

According to a June 2009 report by B’Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, each year the settlements dump five million cubic metres of untreated wastewater onto Palestinian lands, ruining farmlands, contaminating water supplies and causing a range of health problems.<sup>5</sup>

While Israel has been largely successful at deflecting international pressure to stop settlement construction, its determination to make the occupation irreversible has been carried out with any apparent regard for the long term consequences of such a program. As early as 1983, when the Palestinians in the occupied territories were still quiescent, Israel’s former head of military intelligence warned that its continued colonisation of the occupied territories would inevitably result in the transformation of Israel into an Arab-Jewish state and the consequent ‘Belfastisation’ of the country.<sup>6</sup>

In March 2009, *U.S. Middle East Project*, a bipartisan panel of Middle East experts including Brent Scowcroft, the National Security Advisor to the Ford and Bush Senior administrations, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor to the Carter administration, released a paper entitled ‘A Last Chance for a Two-State Israel-Palestine Agreement’, urging President Obama to make a Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement a high priority for his administration. Failure to do so, it warned, would be ‘to cede the field to America’s enemies who are counting on the Arab-Israeli dispute as the gift that keeps on giving.’

Though the extent to which groups such as al-Qaeda have succeeded in exploiting the Palestinians’ suffering to mobilise Muslims against America and its allies is impossible to measure, there can be no doubt that the West’s support for Israel forms a central theme of its propaganda. In his study of radical Islamist movements, *Journey of the Jihadist*, Fawaz Gerges makes the following observation regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict in the radical Islamist ideology.

The truth is that Arabs – not just Islamists – thought that American politicians had stabbed the Palestinians in the back,

sacrificing them to placate the powerful Jewish community believed to dominate American political life. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has shaped the perception of Arabs and Muslims toward America far more than anything else. On this score there exist no differences between Islamists and secularists, leftists and conservatives; all blame America for tipping the balance in favour of the Jewish state.

Not surprisingly, every Islamist and jihadist I have ever interviewed has made a point of condemning America's policies towards Israel. In his 'Letter to America' published in the British *Observer* on November 24, 2002, after being posted on Al Qaeda's Web site on October 14, 2002, bin Laden tried to explain to Americans why he had launched his attacks on them. Palestine topped his list of grievances. 'The creation and continuation of Israel is one of the greatest crimes, and you are the leaders of its criminals... It brings us both laughter and tears to see that you have not yet tired of repeating your fabricated lies that the Jews have a historical right to Palestine, as it was promised to them in the Torah.' Bin Laden's opinion is widely shared by those who denounce his violent methods.<sup>7</sup>

Following Israel's assassination of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, bin Laden recorded a message which was broadcast on Arab television networks, vowing to take revenge on America (not Israel).<sup>8</sup>

In his June address from Cairo's al-Azhar University, Obama acknowledged the Palestinians' plight as a major source of tension between the America and the Muslim world. While firmly denouncing contemporary anti-Semitism, he also denounced Israeli settlement expansion as a violation of previous peace accords that undermined efforts to achieve peace. The response of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was to announce further settlement construction and pay tribute to the settlers as an integral part of 'a principled, pioneering and Zionist public'.<sup>9</sup>

In the war of wills that followed, it was Obama who gave way. In August, Netanyahu pledged that he would not evict any (Jewish) people from their homes as Israeli police evicted Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem, which were taken over by Jewish settlers. The White House reacted by stating that it 'regretted' Israel's actions. In September, Obama summoned Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to a summit in New York in which he praised Israel for having 'discussed important steps to restrain settlement activity' and called upon both parties to 'move forward' on negotiations, pressuring Abbas to drop his demand for a freeze in settlement construction and return to the Oslo formula of an open-ended 'peace process' against the backdrop of settlement expansion.<sup>10</sup>

'I understand English,' an exuberant Netanyahu gloated at the conclusion of the summit. '“Restraint” and “freeze” are two different words.'<sup>11</sup>



## Humanist Internet Discussion Group

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In November, he went on to demonstrate his proficiency in English by announcing that for ten months it would 'restrain' settlement construction to (only) 3,000 houses throughout the West Bank and whatever public buildings (schools, shopping centres, synagogues) are needed to accommodate the (government subsidised) 'natural growth' of the settler population. Palestinian East Jerusalem, where the lion's share of settlement construction is taking place, will be excluded from any such restraint.<sup>12</sup> In December, after witnessing a Palestinian family being evicted from their home in East Jerusalem to make room for Jewish settlers, the veteran peace activist Rabbi Arik Ascherman warned that 'the Obama administration remains a laughing stock at best, and in many quarters the U.S. is again the subject of scorn and derision.'<sup>13</sup>

At the beginning of 2010, with a burgeoning population of half a million Jewish settlers dominating fully forty percent of the West Bank, it would seem that both Ariel Sharon's dream of making the occupation irreversible by making 'a pastrami sandwich' out of the Palestinians and Yehoshafat Harkabi's worst fears concerning Israel becoming an Arab-Jewish state have been realised. According to figures from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2006 there were 5,328,949 Jews and 5,393,400 Arabs living throughout all of Israel and the Occupied Territories.<sup>14</sup> With Palestinian fertility rates significantly higher than those of Jews, it seems inevitable that the Palestinians will soon become the majority population.

Following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the British historian Arnold Toynbee described the Western powers' insistence that a non-Western people be made to compensate European Jewry for a crime of which they were completely innocent as a 'declaration of the inequality of the Western and non-Western sections of the human race'.<sup>15</sup> Had Israel confined itself to its original borders, however, it is unlikely that its conflict with the Palestinians would have become an issue of such centrality in international politics. After all, Israel is hardly the only state to have been founded upon the displacement of its indigenous population, nor, as contemporary events in India and Pakistan or subsequent events in Cyprus demonstrated, was the large scale and violent 'transfer' of civilian populations unknown in the twentieth century.

The reason that the Israel-Palestinian conflict has become such a defining and decisive issue in twentieth-century geopolitics is that, more than sixty years after the Holocaust, the Palestinians are still paying for the Nazis' crimes and, as a result of the changes in Israel's demography caused by its ongoing settlement drive, Israel's insistence upon its right to exist as the state of the Jewish people has become manifestly inconsistent with the human rights of the Palestinians as the land's indigenous population living as non-citizens in their own country.

The international implications of this contradiction became clear last April when the United Nations held a conference against racism in Geneva. The conference was boycotted by Israel, the US, New Zealand, Canada, Germany, Italy, Poland and Australia, all of which made it clear that their reason for doing so was that they feared the conference would provide a stage for the criticism of Israel over its treatment of the Palestinians, thus marking the first time since the end of apartheid in South Africa that the Western and non-Western worlds have been so clearly split over the issue of racism.<sup>16</sup>

In 2007, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert warned that without a two-state solution the Palestinians would eventually opt for a South African-style struggle for equal rights and Israel would be finished as a Jewish state.<sup>17</sup> Though it was made as part of his campaign to sell his unconvincing 'Consolidation Plan', which envisaged the consolidation of Israel's Jewish majority through the unilateral annexation of 'Greater Jerusalem', the Jordan Valley and the main 'settlement blocs', while leaving the Palestinians with a 'state' comprised of a patchwork of reservations surrounded by Jewish settlements, his observation is revealing.

Given the international community's evident failure to halt – let alone reverse – Israeli settlement construction, the term 'two states', rather than being a solution has become a euphemism for a one reality in which access to roads, water, housing and other resources are determined by one's nationality.

**Michael Shaik**, of Australians for Palestine, gave the HSV public lecture on the above topic on 27 August 2009.

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## Rudi Anders

**W**e emigrated to escape things like separate dances for higher and lower class people, unemployment and too much rain, and for the adventure.

Before flying to Australia in 1954 I learnt a few English words from older siblings but, when I got here, English was just incomprehensible continuous noise without separate words. The little dictionary I carried was useless. My only clues were facial expressions, which were mostly smiles on happy faces. I felt a passion to find out what people were saying.

I was sixteen and had to decide what kind of work I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I had no idea, but had done carpentry at a technical school in the Netherlands, so my older sister Marieke took me on the bus to Yallourn Technical School to enrol me. I felt as big as a mouse while the headmaster and my sister made all these meaningless sounds. The headmaster looked friendly enough. Back on the bus, Marieke explained I was welcome at the school but had to get a job to learn English and then come back.

My Dutch friend Joop, who had arrived in Moe three years before us, found me a job in a pastry shop; I was to help make pies and cakes. Joop emphatically listed the Dutch words that I must never use in earshot of Australians because they had rude meanings in English. Some of the words are extremely rude. Helpful Joop also taught me English swear words but gravely warned me against using them in front of females. Later I was amazed at how the blokes could talk with several swear words in every sentence and then talk without a single swear word when a woman arrived. Dutch women were more emancipated in that respect at the time, but Australian women have well and truly caught up now. Joop translated that the boss, who looked friendly, wanted to know what hours I wanted to work. I was amazed to be given a choice. In my mind bosses were heartless cold people to fear.

I had been eagerly listening to people speaking English at every opportunity and began to recognise separate words, which I looked up in my little dictionary. Television is a good way to learn a new language but television hadn't arrived in Australia yet. On the first day the boss and employee Bill kept saying the words, 'good boy.' I felt less apprehensive after I looked up 'good boy' in my dictionary. I had no problem remembering the name Bill because 'bil' in Dutch means cheek of a behind.

I was interested in girls, but did not dare go near one; speaking to one was out of the question. I couldn't believe my luck when the daughter of the boss brought half a dozen young shop girls into the bakery to talk and eat their lunch. I hid behind the oven with my dictionary, looking up words they used.

Bill and the boss looked pleased every time I comprehended something new, and went to some trouble to explain the meaning of a word, but often I didn't understand the explanation. The bloke who picked up pastry to take to the high school explained something every day; he wouldn't rest until I got it. He managed to get across to me that the previous boy often forgot to put raising powder in the dough and the boss was pleased because I never forgot.

The government provided 'English for New Australians' lessons at the local primary school. My teacher had a beaming red face and we sang English songs and recited phrases such as 'he did, didn't he, he was, wasn't he, she will learn, won't she.' He managed to make learning grammar fun. Occasionally people from different countries sang songs in their own language. The Dutchies decided to sing a South African song that was against the English invasion there. My father realized that the Australians had fought on the other side and stopped that one.

Bill was big and played in the Moe football team. One day he excitedly pointed at some honeyeaters in a tree outside the window. I barely showed an interest because I thought I would look sissy taking an interest in birds.

The boss always greeted me with a cheery 'How are you?' my response always was 'All right.' One day he looked me in the eye and said, 'Why don't you say something like terrific, or, couldn't be better, instead of all right?' I mended my ways, but without much enthusiasm. I was a typical sulky teenager. The reason was my total lack of self-confidence; I was afraid that whatever I did or said would be wrong.

To travel to work I bought a twenty-five pound pushbike on hire purchase. I earned four pound ten per week. During lunchtime I explored the local area. One day I came back late and managed to tell a made-up story about someone stealing my bike but I chased him and got it back. The boss looked pleased and said, 'Your English is getting better,' and he didn't dock me.

After three months my English was good enough to ask questions and understand the answer, so it was time to do something about becoming a carpenter. I got a new job at a joinery. I felt terrible telling the baker I was leaving, and I explained why. I thought they would be disappointed because they had gone out of their way to teach me the pastry-cook trade. Instead the boss and Bill's faces lit up and both said, 'Listen to that, he can talk English!'

The four blokes at the joinery were friendly and cheerful, they kept reminding each other not to swear to make sure I didn't learn the wrong words. I knew and understood a lot more than they realized. They said 'good boy' to me, and said to each other that I must have been to a good school; but still I had no self-confidence. When I was brushing on French polish, one laughed and called me the Dutch painter.

On one of my lunch-time bike rides a gust of wind blew some of the pages out of my very worn dictionary. I thought, I can now ask what words mean, I don't need my dictionary anymore, and threw the rest of it up and a flurry of loose pages blew out of sight.

One day two gentlemen in suits turned up at the joinery and asked me about school. I said I didn't go to school, and then they talked to the boss who signed papers, and I signed papers I couldn't read, and I was told to go to school one day a week. The teachers used many words I didn't know the meaning of. I wrote down what the new words sounded like and looked them up in a dictionary when I got home. English spelling is mostly phonetic but a few spelling changes would make spelling much easier for kids and foreigners. Spelling should be allowed to evolve with the spoken word.

I am a third generation atheist but have always had religious friends. I joined several church youth groups where I learned a new set of English words.

I noticed that every group of people uses different words, and to learn a language you have to mix with each

group – kids, teachers, tradesmen, girls, doctors. One lunch time at school, a boy insisted on talking to me. He explained something and asked questions. I had no idea what he was talking about. I memorized one word he kept repeating and hunted for it in a dictionary at home. The word was language.

When you want to learn something, learning is fun and an adventure. The best way to create good Australians is to be nice to them; not by putting them in detention camps.

**Rudi Anders** is a writer and member of HSV.

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# Is chaplaincy funding constitutional?

## Help fund a high court challenge?

Max Wallace

On 20 March 2008 a writ of summons was filed in the High Court, challenging the expenditure of more than \$20 million of federal money for the Catholic Church's World Youth Day (WYD) weeklong extravaganza which ran 15–20 July 2008 in Sydney. The applicant was a Mr Carmelo Vescio, a non-practising Catholic, who apparently fronted for another individual whose name was never revealed.

To my knowledge, this was the first attempted challenge concerning the expenditure of federal money for religious purposes since the Defence of Government Schools (DOGS) case in 1981. While the challenge did not even get to first base, it has paved the way for another case being planned, essentially asking the same question, 'Is it constitutional for government to fund religion?', in this case, funding for chaplaincy in state schools. I will come to it shortly.

Mr Vescio's writ was initially refused by Justice Susan Crennan, who said it was 'confusing, prolix and embarrassing'. She also said the writ was 'political in nature.'

On 20 June 2008 another hearing, this time heard by Justice Michael Kirby (since retired), decided that the case was 'reasonably arguable'. On 27 June 2008 the matter was then heard by a panel of three judges, Kirby, Gummow and Heydon. In fact, Justice Heydon said nothing. Justice Gummow said that Heydon concurred with his, Gummow's reasoning, to deny the writ, with Justice Kirby dissenting.

This hearing on 27 June 2008 went unreported but it was a fascinating reprise of some of the key constitutional points heard in the DOGS case 27 years earlier.

Mr Vescio's barrister, Peter King, set out to review the meaning of three clauses of the religion section of the constitution, s.116: the establishment clause, which has been understood to mean only that it prevents the identification of the nation with one religion; the free exercise clause, which allows freedom of belief, and, with qualification, actions that support that belief; the religious observance clause, which means no one should be compelled to practice a religion.

There is not enough space here to discuss what happened in detail except to say that Mr Vescio's case was weak. He argued that WYD would cause him to 'suffer loss and damage'. In particular, he objected to the Pope's use of Randwick Racecourse for his final mass which would cause Mr Vescio 'to go to Warwick Farm [racecourse] instead of Randwick for the six months that this imposition endures' causing him to pay 'about' \$1,040'.

While some important points of principle were involved here, this was like trying to fire a cannon out of a canoe. Even then, Justice Gummow and the silent Justice Heydon rejected the writ on the grounds cited by Justice Crennan, that it would be 'vexatious in the technical sense of the term to launch an action in this Court in reliance upon it.'

### The Williams family case

Ron and Andrea Williams are parents of six children. They live in Toowoomba. They are now members of Humanist Society Queensland (HSQ). What has happened to them in their attempts to get a secular education for their children at state schools has been appalling. It has galvanized Ron in particular into activism.

The millions of dollars given to Scripture Union Queensland to run the chaplaincy programs in that state have seen some state schools become recruiting grounds for evangelicals. They have read the federal government's grant of money, about \$20,000 per chaplain per annum, as a green light for evangelism. While in some instances, they take care to deny that is their aim, in others, helpless with religious fervor, they openly proclaim it.

For its part, the federal government (both Howard and Rudd) has hopelessly compromised itself by talking in parliament, and in other government documents, about the partly religious purposes of the chaplaincy funding program.

Both the Howard and Rudd governments, sanctimoniously cloaking themselves in Christianity for the votes, have apparently forgotten the key rationale in the DOGS case which allowed federal funding of religious schools for purposes of *education*, not religion. The 1981 High Court sleight of hand to allow billions of dollars to fund religious schools came at this price, namely, that if federal money is spent it has to be totally justified on non-religious grounds.

Now we have governments ignoring the double-edged sword of the DOGS decision, openly giving money to religious organizations partly for religious purposes. The point is, federal funding cannot be applied, fully or partly, for a religious purpose.

The Williams family has significant evidence of all this. They have been, and are, affected by it.

HSQ aims to support the Williams family in their High Court challenge to the federal government. A trust fund will be set up to raise the huge sum estimated to be required for the challenge: \$200,000. The idea is to attract 200 individuals or organizations to donate \$1,000 to this cause. HSQ hopes to attract a well-known individual to manage a Trust on the Williams behalf. What gives us hope that this will succeed is that when secular people see a cause that catches their imagination they respond. Recently, in Wellington, New Zealand, \$20,000 was raised in a matter of days to fund atheist advertisements on local buses, repeating the text from the London campaign.

The Williams case, unlike the Vescio matter, will not be firing a cannon out of a canoe. It will be all guns blazing from a more substantial vessel. It has much evidence of government funding of religious purposes, open evangelism, attempted indoctrination, and pressured religious practice in state schools, and the distress to children and families this has caused. It is against an opponent, the federal government, which has already shot itself in the foot.

Much turns on this case: if Australia is a secular nation, it cannot give money to a religious cause. The implication would be that constitutionally, s.116 of the constitution really does mean separation of church and state.

If the Williamses win, there is also the interesting prospect that the funding for Catholic World Youth Day was unconstitutional, as Mr Vescio and his supporters wanted to argue. Would it have to be paid back in the event of a Williams win?

Finally, it should be noted this matter concerns only the federal government. As there are no sections in any state constitutions separating church and state, state governments can freely expend taxpayers' money for religious purposes, such as the \$100 million+ that NSW taxpayers spent on WYD. Isn't it about time Humanist and related associations across Australia turned their minds to that major fact and what they might do about it?

If you can help, please send a cheque made out to The Williams Family Trust, Humanist Society Queensland, GPO Box 2041, Brisbane QLD 4001. Any contribution is welcome. Other ways of contributing will be added to the HSQ website shortly: <http://www.hsq.org.au>.

For further information on the above, see the websites:  
<http://www.thefourthr.info>  
<http://www.renaissanceofreason.com>  
<http://savetheenlightenment.com>

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## Conference on separation of church and state in Ireland

**Max Wallace**

It is gratifying the Humanist Association of Ireland have decided, at their December 2009 meeting, that my suggestion the Association run a conference on church-state separation in Ireland was a good idea. The timing is yet to be decided but it could occur some time in the northern summer. I argued that in the wake of the Murphy Report, which detailed ever more appalling cover-ups of abuse of children over decades by priests in Dublin, that the time for such a conference could hardly be more appropriate. In particular, I argued the conference could discuss how to remove the overtly Catholic Preamble to the Irish Constitution as well as the sections that openly support religion and ban abortion. It is likely the Irish people are more open now to referenda that would secularise their constitution, in the wake of the Murphy Report.

In December 2009 the National Secular Society reproduced Sinead O'Connor's comment in *The Independent* that,

Popes have had no problem voicing their opinions when we wanted contraception or divorce. No problem criticising the Da Vinci Code. No problem criticising Naomi Campbell for wearing a bejewelled cross. Yet when it comes to the evil done by paedophiles dressed as priests they are silent. It is grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre and unprecedented. They stand for nothing now but evil.

Since that comment was made the Pope has apologised, but it may be too late. If the conference persuades a political party there should be a referendum on changes to the constitution, any political party opposing the changes could be seen to be defending the indefensible.

In 1973 modest reforms technically made the Republic of Ireland separate from the church. But this was so much smoke and mirrors. Discussions are beginning as to how the IHEU can support this conference. The step from theory to practice is not always easy but the church itself has paved the way. If sometime in the future Ireland ceases to be a clerical state it would send an important message to other nations constitutionally compromised by Catholicism. Optimistically, it could also help the peace process in Northern Ireland for, if the south were to shrug off the church, it follows that the unification of Ireland would not turn on a Catholic takeover of the North. It would open the door for a united secular Ireland at some time in the future, where individuals are citizens first and members of a religion, or not, second.

**Max Wallace** is Director of the Australia New Zealand Secular Association and a member of HSQ. He is currently editing the book *Realising Secularism: Australia and New Zealand*, to be published early in 2010.

In the beginning there was nothing, then god said, 'let there be light.' And there was light. There was still nothing, but at least you could see a lot better.

At a recent symposium on space exploration the representatives from various countries were reporting on their current activities. The man from the USA said,

'We have just sent a man to Mars.' The audience applauded loudly. Then a Russian got up and said, 'We are about to send two men to Jupiter.' This news drew enthusiastic applause.

Then an Irishman got up and said, 'We sent a man to the Sun, last week.' There was no applause, but a lot of mutterings about the Sun's extremely high temperatures. The Irishman sensing disapproval then added, 'We avoid the heat by sending him up at night.'

In order to meet the conditions for joining the single European currency, all citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland must be made aware that the phrase 'spending a penny' is not to be used after 31st December 2009. From this date, the correct terminology will be, 'euronating'.

A priest, a baptist minister and a rabbi in the same town all traded in their cars for new ones around the same time.

Feeling the need to celebrate, the priest sprinkled water on the hood of his car. Not to be outdone, the baptist minister drove his car into the nearby lake. The rabbi thought for a while and then he bought a hacksaw and carefully sawed one centimetre off the tailpipe of his car.

An elderly couple is getting ready for bed one night, when all of a sudden the woman bursts out of the bathroom, flings open her robe and yells, 'Super pussy!' The old man says, 'I'll have the soup.'

# Darwin refused, a people condemned: Why America has one of the highest non-acceptance of evolution

Steven Conn

Abraham Lincoln, The Great Emancipator, has been much on our minds recently as Barack Obama moved into the White House. Exactly 200 years after Lincoln's birth, Obama's presidency is one fulfillment of the work of Lincoln.

Lincoln shares his birthday with Charles Darwin, the other Great Emancipator of the 19th century. Though in different ways, each liberated us from the traditions of the past. Charles Darwin and Lincoln were exact contemporaries. Both were born on February 12, 1809 – Darwin into a comfortable family in Shropshire, England; Lincoln into humble circumstances on the American frontier.

They also came to international attention at virtually the same moment. Darwin published his epochal book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. The following year, Abraham Lincoln became the 16th president of the United States, and in that very year Harvard botanist Asa Gray wrote the first review of Darwin's book to appear in the United States. They initiated twin revolutions: one brought by Lincoln, the Civil War and the emancipation of roughly four million African American slaves; the other initiated by Darwin and his explanation of the natural world through the mechanism of natural selection. Lincoln's Civil War transformed the social, political and racial landscape in ways that continue to play out. Darwin transformed our understanding of biology, thus paving the way for countless advances in science especially in medicine. With this powerful scientific explanation of the origin of species, Darwin dispensed with the pseudoscientific assertions of African American inferiority.

In this way, Darwin provided the scientific legitimacy for Lincoln's political and moral actions. Both revolutions share a commitment to the same proposition: that all human beings are fundamentally equal. In this sense, both Lincoln and Darwin deserve credit for emancipating us from the political and intellectual rationales that justified slavery.

For Lincoln, this was a political principle and a moral imperative. He was deeply ambivalent about the institution of slavery. As the war began, Lincoln believed that saving the Union, not abolishing slavery was the cause worth fighting for. But as the war ground gruesomely on, Lincoln began to see that ending slavery was the only way to save the Union without making a mockery of the nation's founding ideas. This is what he meant in his Gettysburg Address in 1863, when he promised that the war would bring 'a new birth of freedom'; he was even more emphatic about it in his second inaugural address in 1865. Slavery would not be permitted to exist in a nation founded on the belief that we are all created equal.

For his part, Darwin was a deeply committed abolitionist from a family of deeply committed abolitionists. Exposed to slavery during his trip to South America, Darwin wrote, 'It makes one's blood boil.' He called abolishing slavery his 'sacred cause.' In some of his first notes about evolution he railed against the idea that slaves were somehow less than human.

For Darwin, our shared humanity was a simple biological fact. Whatever variations exist among the human species – what we call 'races' – are simply the natural variations that occur within all species. Like it or not, in a Darwinian world we are all members of one human family. This truth lay at the center of Darwin's science and at the center of his abolitionism.

The understanding of human equality, arrived at from different directions and for different reasons, helps explain the opposition to the revolutions unleashed by Lincoln and Darwin, and why many Americans, alone in the developed world, continue to deny Darwinian science.

After the Civil War was over, opposition to Darwin came from several quarters, but most vociferously from the South. Many white Southerners, for their part, never accepted Lincoln's basic proposition about the political equality of black Americans. Slavery and segregation rested on the assumption that black Americans were not fully human. Yet Darwinian science put the lie to all that. Nonetheless, they set up the brutally baroque structures and rituals of segregation, and all the elaborate laws, customs, and violence of the segregated South served to deny the basic truth that all Americans are created equal.

Most Northerners, for their part, didn't care all that much about the 'Southern problem'.

The Southerners who thumped their bibles to deny Darwin were the same Southerners who railed against African American civil rights, who were obsessed with interracial marriage and sex, and who passed laws defining race with quasi-biological exactitude – the 'one drop of blood' laws.

Not surprisingly, Southerners used the law to promote creationism and to keep Darwin out of the schools. That effort riveted the nation's attention in 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee, during the Scopes trial. One-hundred-fifty years after the publication of *Origin of Species*, Darwin denialism is no longer confined to the American South, but it remains a piece of a larger conservative social agenda that is suspicious of expanded civil rights, whether for African Americans, women or gays and lesbians.

No wonder, then, that many Americans simply reject, then and now, Darwin's insights out of hand.

Lincoln insisted on equality as a political fact. Darwin demonstrated it as a biological fact. In their shared commitment to human equality these two Great Emancipators, each in their own realm, helped us to break free from the shackles of the past.

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# Impressions of a parliament of religions

S. N. Stuart

The new Convention Centre at Melbourne's Southbank was a suitably grandiose setting for the fifth Parliament of the World's Religions, held 3–9 December 2009. It was my first religious conference, and I was in for some surprises.

The first such Parliament had been part of the Chicago world fair of 1893, and Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) had wowed the crowd with vedanta and buddhism, pronouncing the Hindu belief that every religion was, in some sense, true. In 1988 IHEU issued *A Declaration of Interdependence*, drafted by Paul Kurtz, which called for a new global ethics founded on the common moral decencies of every known human society. The maverick catholic theologian Hans Küng observed that peace among the different religions would require a common ethical basis and proceeded in 1990 to found a Global Ethic Project. He stimulated the convening of the second, centennial Parliament in 1993 and drafted its *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*. Subsequent Parliaments pursued the course of multi-faith dialogue to get agreement among the religions about the problems of the world. It was clear to me that Humanism was close to the practical (if not the spiritual) goals of such dialogue between faiths.

Some six thousand people attended this Parliament, which comprised ninety-minute discussions (and some rituals) in around twenty-five parallel sessions. (See <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org>.) I gathered my impressions into selected themes.

## Global or naturalistic ethics

It was pleasing to find the organization Globethics.net releasing their draft *Principles: Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions* (Shanta Premawardhana & Christoph Stückelberger, November 2009). Global and contextual ethics were distinguished, and values and norms defined. 'When common values can be affirmed through dialogue, they provide a foundation from which communities can engage in common action towards conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace.' That was a Humanistic process, as I meant to point out later (see below), and Stückelberger invited me to lodge my piece with the Globethics online library.

Hans Küng reflected that the 1993 *Declaration* had rested on principles of humanity and reciprocity, and he expanded the message to cover business practices of globalization, announcing his new *Global Economic Ethic*. The ethic was to be a synthesis of principle and tactic: all stakeholders were responsible for humanizing the global economy; every initiative should demonstrate no serious social or environmental damage. Reactionary bishop Peter Hollingworth blamed the Enlightenment project for values-free secular education, which unleashed greed and contributed to the global financial crisis. Küng did not want secularism either – he liked the German Constitution enjoining 'responsibility before god and humanity' – but commented, even pope Benedict had agreed that agnostics were needed in the moral framework.

On display was *Charter for Compassion* (November 2009, <http://charterforcompassion.org>), instigated by Karen Armstrong and endorsed by Nobel laureates Desmond Tutu, Dalai Lama and others. There is nothing other-worldly in it, and it should interest Humanists.

Human sociobiology offered a conceptual bridge from facts to values; there were neural rewards for co-operation and love (anthropologist Solomon Katz). Humans, being conscious of their future, evolved moral behaviour to mediate fear and to protect one other (neurosurgeon James Doty). At that session I met Lee Van Slyke of the American Humanist Association, possibly the only foreign Humanist attending the Parliament. He remarked, to my surprise, 'You know, most of the presenters here are not theists.'

## Interfaith dialogue and conflict transformation

The work of Religions for Peace (RfP), founded in 1970, was a feature of the Parliament. They went to Sierra Leone in 1998, when the only infrastructure was religious, and mobilized women of faith to go unarmed into the rebel camps, where they were able to negotiate release of children and ultimately produce the peace agreement (Jacqueline Ogega). RfP built inter-religious councils in various trouble spots where they mediated between government and rebels, the first step being to ask the discordant parties, do you respect that your opponents sincerely believe what they say? They asked each religion to analyse the conflict and to contribute spiritual, moral and social assets – e.g. to enable forgiving the unforgivable – where secular government was powerless (William Vendley). RfP articulated guidelines for inter-religious dialogue (*Berlin Declaration on Inter-religious Dialogue*, March 2008). Religion was involved in social cohesion and what was secular was a contentious matter, so the solution to religious confrontation was not secularism but religious moderation (Desmond Cahill). A problem in Indonesia was that moslems and evangelical christians were not interested in interfaith dialogue (Jan Sihar Arintonang).

According to rabbi David Rosen, serious conflicts were found to be substantially territorial, not religious, but depended on a sense of communal identity, and so religion could get dragged into the problem. Moderate religious leaders who command respect must then be part of the solution: statesmen from Gamal Nasser (1918–70) to Barack Obama had failed to realize that. The notion that religion is a purely personal affirmation is a modern product of an individualistic culture.

## Science and religion

The global environmental crisis, summarized authoritatively by medical scientist Peter Doherty, could not be healed by science or religion separately: science identified problems and feasible solutions, but its actions created other problems, and global experiment was unacceptable; religious leadership was vital in limiting AIDS in Senegal and Thailand. Natural science was an expanding model of dispassionate nature: religion could mobilize the will to act but must advance with the science (religious biologist Pauline Rudd). We needed an ethics of sustainability (Doherty) or ecology motivated by religion (theologian Denis Edwards). Religious commitment to self-denial could encourage simple living (historian John Brooke). The Hindu tradition of the cosmic web of life carried persuasive power in that culture.

Theologian Philip Clayton said he had challenged the 'new atheists' (at the Darwin Anniversary Festival at

Cambridge in July) to serious public debate, but they had declined. Sangeetha Menon suggested that science and religion were not antagonistic, just two different dimensions. (Being a scientist I immediately thought of complex numbers, *real* and *imaginary*.) An audience member pictured religion and science as the wings of a bird, while LeRon Shults fancied they were difficult lovers. Menon remarked that in ancient India they were considered integrated together, as inner and outer searching.

A session on creationism pitted bioethicist John Buckeridge, who said creationism was a serious threat to science, against rabbi Shimon Cowen, who believed everything was miraculously, continually created anew, which distressed the christian, evolutionary biologist Phil Batterham, who regarded *Genesis* as a mere parable and tried to see a balance between scientific experiment and experience of the divine.

### The Humanist voice

The Humanist Society of Victoria made two contributions. (1) Harry Gardner demonstrated a participatory lesson for teaching secular values to primary schoolchildren, in the session, 'Religion and belief in public schools', 7 December, alongside Terry Lovat, Cathy Byrne and Desmond Cahill of Religions for Peace. Cahill confirmed publicly that christian lobbying was currently blocking the Humanist alternative to religious instruction in Victorian state schools. (2) Professor Brian Ellis and myself contributed to the panel session, 'Living a good life, the secular way', 8 December, by arguing that Humanism established a secular foundation for social morality, together with John L. Perkins of Secular Party of Australia (and HSV), Ian Robinson of Rationalist Society of Australia and philosopher Russell Blackford, ably chaired by Meredith Doig of RSA. The session was advertised as a highlight of the day and drew an audience of fifty or sixty. Questions were vigorous, with a sense of incredulity that we could reject the immortality of the soul and still keep our heads on; did we engage with the Other for understanding, and how did we deal with internal intolerance? (Good questions.)

### Conclusion

The closing plenary was addressed by the Dalai Lama, the exiled statesman turned religious leader. Inter-religious dialogue, he declared, needed to uphold 'the Indian tradition of *secularism*', which was to respect all religions *and non-religious philosophies* equally, as they all carried the same message of bringing inner peace.

The overall impression of the Parliament was of earnest, liberal thinkers, not stuck in the mud of the past, who didn't mind testing their beliefs by talking sympathetically even with unbelievers. At the present geopolitical juncture, Humanism has not only a general, third-party interest in interfaith dialogue but an opportunity to facilitate it.

The most discomfiting thought for me was that religions had unique qualities and should be deployed in conflict situations, that banishing the clerics from the negotiations was counter-productive. I still think religious actors would do well to follow secular, Humanist guidelines to resolve conflict. Humanists might perhaps accept Rosen's insight about modern culture and strive for a middle path between today's rampant individualism and ancient tribalism. But what would become of our opposition to recognizing group rights as well as individual rights, I cannot imagine.

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# Faith is not a virtue

## John Perkins

Faith is one of the seven 'heavenly virtues', according to Christian doctrine and folklore. However this is perhaps the most fundamental flaw in the religious conception of ethics. Faith is not a virtue, at least in the sense that it requires the abandonment of reason and the disregard of evidence. Religious faith is in fact a moral failing.

The problem of 'moral creationism' was first identified by Plato. If morality is defined as a whim of the gods, then it is arbitrary. If not, then it is determined by objective criteria, not by supernatural beings or superstitions. This is not, of course, the only contradiction that must be maintained to sustain religious belief. Numerous other contradictions, within and between religions, as well as contradictions with known facts, must be studiously avoided or denied.

However the contention that religions provide valuable moral guidance is commonly expressed, including by some atheists. Presumably this is based on the assumption that the concept of supernatural rewards and punishments provides moral incentives. Religions do inspire charitable work. However the more religious countries also tend to be more crime prone. So there is little evidence for the community benefits of faith. Religions, of course, cannot accept that blind faith itself is actually a sin, because that would undermine their existence.

The idea that faith, any faith, can provide community benefits was a theme of the so-called 'Parliament' of World Religions (PWR), held in Melbourne in December 2009. Another theme, that religions provide a path to peace, sat rather incongruously with the fact that religions are responsible for a range of major conflicts around the world.

A rabbi attending the convention even claimed that religion, not secularism, must provide the path to peace in the Middle East. Yet the prime cause of strife in the region is the notion that one type of belief provides entitlement to other people's land. The solution to this, and other problems caused by religion, is not more religion, but less.

Judging from discussions with participants outside the venue of the PWR convention, a good many of them were 'moderate believers', rather than fundamentalist types. Many humanists believe that engaging with such people at multi-faith forums is a good opportunity to exchange views and seek common ground.

### Secularism and religion

With this in mind, several freethought groups gave a joint presentation to the convention to represent our views. In my case, the intention was to give reassurance, but at the same time be thought-provoking. The text of my brief talk, on the subject of secularism and religion, was as follows:

Many religious people have reservations about secularism and the promotion of non-religious views of religion, society and morality. But they have nothing to fear. Secularists wholeheartedly endorse the concept of religious freedom. The Parliament of World Religions' theme is bringing religions together in peace. Secularism provides the ideal philosophy to achieve this.

Secularism had its origins in the 1648 Treaty of West-

phalia, which ended decades of religious warfare in Europe. State sovereignty in matters of religion was then established, together with the private right to practise the religion of individual choice. They agreed to live and let live.

Still today, most countries in Europe have an established state religion. What we now commonly regard as secularism, 'the separation of church and state', derives from the constitution of the USA, as amended in 1791.

In 2005, the International Humanist and Ethical Union defined 'comprehensive secularism', with three components. These are (i) the separation of religion from the institutions of state; (ii) state impartiality between religions; and (iii) protection of human rights from intrusion from religious beliefs and practices.

In this regard, in Australia, we are not secular, because while the state may be somewhat impartial between religions, we massively endorse religions to the tune of tens of billions of dollars per annum in subsidies to faith schools and tax concessions to religious enterprises.

How can a non-religious moral philosophy provide both a guide to personal ethics and a basis for social and economic policy? It is the view of many in the religious fraternity that religious beliefs are necessary for morality. However, I think this is clearly not the case, and indeed, the reverse is the case, for religious beliefs can often seriously impair moral decision-making.

A non-religious basis for morality can easily be stated, based on the universal principles of compassion, honesty, freedom and justice. In any moral dilemma, we should try our best to implement these principles. Such principles are not absolute rules. But, as Immanuel Kant suggested, a principle should be ignored only if circumstances justify that another principle has higher priority.

Such a principle-based system is commonly used in biomedical ethics, where the principle of compassion that is used is non-maleficence: do no harm. The universal application of a principle-based system of ethics can be seen with the addition of a further principle: the principle of utility, as first articulated by Jeremy Bentham in 1789. 'The greatest good for the greatest number' still forms the basis of most economic and social policy today.

Why do I suggest that adherence to religious belief may impair moral judgement? The first reason is in relation to the principle of honesty. This requires a diligent search for the truth using all available evidence and reason. Religious advocates systematically avoid this quest. Where, in this parliament, has there been any discussion as to which belief system is justified by evidence which is true, if any?

The second great moral failing of religion is in relation to freedom: the ability of the individual to make free choices, free from coercion. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for the right to 'freedom of thought, conscience and religion', and for the right to freedom from coercion in matters of religion. A child is a person. Children also have this right. In what religion is a child encouraged to exercise freedom of choice regarding religion, free from any coercion?

As John Lennon once wrote:

Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try,  
No hell below us, above us only sky.  
Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do.  
Nothing to kill or die for. And no religion, too.

That is the path to a better world.

Suffice it to say that following our talks, many in the audience found our views challenging, but others found the exchange interesting, and perhaps refreshing. The panel, I think, found it gratifying that our right to freedom of expression had been duly exercised. As an atheist standing outside the convention, I found that many of the more sceptical attendees agreed that the contrived pretence that there was no conflict between the truth claims of the various religions was somewhat surreal.

### **Professing atheism**

In seeking to engage with believers and with the wider community, how much should humanists play down their atheism? Should we regard atheism as being merely incidental to humanism? In my view, we should always be polite and diplomatic, and we should criticise beliefs rather than believers, but we should not shy away from asserting that religions are not only untrue, but also unnecessary and undesirable.

Given the great humanitarian cost, in terms of human rights and social welfare, that some religions, particularly Islam, inflict on their believers, it is counterproductive to collude with believers who deny these problems exist. Believers are often deluded by wishful thinking about the benign nature of their religions. Failure to contradict the dubious assertions of religions may be taken as acceptance of their validity.

The use of the word 'delusion' in relation to religious belief can be confronting to believers, but provided it is clear that the intention is to help, not to insult, then the judicious use of the word should not be avoided. Wilful blindness to contradictions is characteristic of religious belief. Believers themselves characteristically explain the motivation for their belief as arising from the fulfilment of some kind of emotional need, rather than evaluation of any truth criteria. Psychological delusion is thus not only an appropriate description of the phenomenon of religion, but also the key to properly understanding it.

It is also necessary, I think, to defend atheism from accusations from religious advocates and others, that atheists are 'intolerant', 'indignant', 'angry', 'arrogant', 'militant', and other such descriptions. These accusations arise because believers find the mere idea of atheism threatening, and so they exhibit these emotional responses. Merely expressing a preference for reason and evidence cannot be arrogant or deserving of any other such term of abuse. It is also most unfair to malign atheists in this way, when generally they are motivated by a deep humanitarian concern about the damage in the world that is caused by all forms of religious delusion.

While it is not necessary to be condescending to religions, it is important to recognise that having moral values based on reason and rationality is in fact superior to having values that are merely based on ancient dogma and superstition. Faith is not a virtue. As ever, our values and morals should be derived from universal principles such as compassion, freedom, honesty and justice.

**Dr John L Perkins** is an economist and founding president of the Secular Party of Australia.

# *Warramong*

## **Halina Strnad**

**A** lady who had volunteered to teach English to refugees befriended our family-by- acceptance. She mentioned us to her friends, the Reads, who lived on a farm in the Riverina, and these kind and brave people invited us, sight unseen, to spend Christmas and other holidays on their farm. Two or three of us at a time went as work commitments allowed.

I remember my first visit in December 1949. A city slicker, I had always found the Polish countryside exhilarating. On the train journey to Wagga Wagga, the town nearest the Read's farm, I imagined a little wooden cottage with the farmer guiding the plough pulled by the horse, and other charms of country life. The property, Warramong, had a large, well-appointed homestead with a wide verandah. There were sheds for tractors and other motorised farm implements.

Our hosts, the Read family, completed the contrast with a Polish farm. Margery and Don Read were well spoken, well read and knowledgeable. Margery was a graduate in medicine and Don admired locally for his agricultural knowledge and success. They kept a small library of books and classical records. Their three children, Michael, Anthony and Elizabeth, were at the time eleven, nine and five. Don's father and two older sisters lived in Wagga Wagga and the three generations of Reads were a close family in frequent contact with each other. Margery and Don made every effort to make us feel welcome and at home and soon succeeded. For a while the children were alarmed at our lack of Anglo-Saxon reserve.

Warramong was a beautiful place. A creek ran through one section, a forest abutted another. In the green paddocks there were several solitary eucalypts, large, magnificently asymmetrical and silhouetted against the sky. The farm ran a large flock of sheep, had several milking cows, several horses, some chooks and piglets. Elizabeth milked the cows swiftly into the bucket, with an unerring aim. My attempt produced a wide spray of milk all over the cow, myself and my very surprised teacher. Clearly, Elizabeth had never seen anyone quite so clumsy. The boys too had allotted tasks,

such as feeding the chooks and pigs, and sweeping the verandah. But mostly they did school homework, read or sketched animals or scenery. Both were very accomplished at drawing.

Margery and I used to go for long walks along the creek. It was the way she asked about and responded to our war-time events that made it possible for me to talk about them. It was not so with Don, who kept shaking his head in disbelief.

The fresh country air must have gone to my head one day when I asked Don to let me help in herding the sheep into another paddock. He asked if I had ridden a horse before. I said yes, recalling a pony ride when I was eight years old. Don gave me an old mare, slow and broad as a table. The riding was a pleasant experience and I went for several hours, ignoring the advice to take it easy on the first day. That evening every muscle in my body went into a painful spasm and I was hardly able to move for a couple of days. Hot baths and pain killers helped a bit. Later, shorter trips gradually increasing in length of time fixed the problem. Horseback riding at the farm was my idea of a good time.

Warramong was regarded as a model farm, and neighbouring farmers used to pop in often for some shop talk and Don's advice on methods of preventing soil erosion or salination, types of fodders and fertilisers, the pH of the soil or the latest research in agriculture.

The tricks of the trade fascinated me too. Lambing seasons produced the inevitable cases of stillborn lambs and twin births, with one of the twins often rejected by its mother. The trick was to dress a rejected twin in the skin of a stillborn lamb and present it to the bereaved mother. It was usually accepted because of its familiar smell.

Sometimes a sheep would refuse to suckle its single newborn. The trick here was to put the mother into a tiny enclosure where, virtually immobilised, she could not get away from her hungry baby. After suckling started, the bond was established. It puzzled me why some sheep stood and bleated pitifully over their dead babies, while others rejected their live one. One day I was helping Don to get a rejecting sheep into the bonding enclosure. The creature was huge and looked like a bale of wool on four legs. I asked Don why the mother refused to suckle her baby and he said it

was because she didn't want to lose her figure. I love the dry, one-line Aussie humour.

And there was the matter of the curdled milk. We could not bear to see so much milk discarded when not needed, so we asked to keep it. When it curdled we made cottage cheese and yoghurt out of it. (This was years before these products appeared on the market and became popular.) The Reads struggled to conceal their revulsion. Don asked if there was anything we could make out of bad eggs or rotten potatoes. I promised I would think of something.

(At the 2007 Christmas gathering of the Reads – children and grandchildren of the late Margery and Don – Michael Read told his fifteen-year-old granddaughter that many years ago at Warramong they had always kept a bucket of curdled milk when I was due to arrive. We were eating frozen yoghurt with mixed berries at the time.)

We marvelled at the long-term planning of matters such as the children's university education, at the generational continuum, the predictability of the future. To me, Warramong was peace, permanence and beauty. Since then, at stressful times I have imagined myself walking or horse-back riding along the creek, and it is a respite.

Our visits continued over several years and a warm and durable friendship developed, now into the fourth generation. I marvel at this friendship, a solid bridge built across a gulf of profound differences. The Reads were deeply religious – we were infidels; in politics they were conservatives – we were lefties. Their Anglo-Saxon reserve was in sharp contrast to our East European outspokenness, our ebullience and lack of the social niceties expected here. We ate unacceptable, revolting food and mangled their elegant King's English.

I think that the ground of common humanity is so solid that it can support bridges spanning wide and deep gulfs of personal, cultural and ethnic difference. And I can't help thinking that, had the present-day asylum seekers not been isolated and demonised, many would have bonded with the locals in this way.

**Halina Strnad**, is an active HSV member and was awarded Outstanding Humanist Achiever in 2002.

From *People and Places in War and Peace*. This book can be purchased from HSV, GPO Box 1555, Melbourne. Vic 3001. Cost, \$22 (includes postage), payable to HSV.

## Rights and responsibilities

VALERIE YULE'S article on Human Rights and Australian citizenship in *AH* No. 96, Spring 09, is I believe an excellent one on this issue. However there is always a dilemma with ideologies in terms of what is *ideal* and what is *pragmatic*. The 30 rights listed by the UN Declaration of Human Rights are ambitious and idealistic, but without a list of responsibilities they are probably very impracticable. So-called rights without responsibilities are often seen as licence and can easily be abused.

The first right listed states, 'That all people are born *free* and equal'. This is rubbish; it's a feel good statement. We are not born free. We are born with a genetic inheritance, which will determine much of what may happen to us. Many will be born into a religious belief system, which will indoctrinate the child into believing all sorts of spurious concepts. This is reinforced by article 26 where it states, 'Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children'. Thus if one dies trying to murder *infidels*, then that male individual will be entitled to have for his pleasure in an afterlife a number of young female virgins. Where is the freedom of the individual if they are indoctrinated into this belief?

Being born *equal* is ludicrous. Some people are born with a very low IQ or with extraordinary musical or mathematical abilities. We are all different and not equal physically, mentally or emotionally. Should we be treated equally? No. Governments look at the needs of society, treat, and assist some people more than others. If they need more people in one profession, they may assist the education of those people more than those in another profession. Those with sporting prowess may be assisted more than those of limited ability. Certainly, we would like to be treated equally, but humans are emotional creatures and we respond to each other in many different ways. We cannot possibly, even with the best will in the world, constantly treat everyone equally. The best guarantee of being treated equally is when we each have the same amount of power, prestige, intellect, emotional stability, physical prowess etc. When one has an advantage in an area, there is a tendency to exploit the other individual: that is why legislation should be and is often designed to protect the weak, the underprivileged, and the less able.

Everyone does not have the same rights without discrimination. It may be desirable, but ethnic, racial, religious and cultural differences, which are indoctrinated from birth, make this a pipe dream. Efforts by the state to expose children to multiculturalism can help to some degree.

All the rights listed in the United Nations Declaration are desirable, but unattainable because we are humans, and human nature will not allow for their absolute implementation. All we can do is strive to be aware of and respect the rights of the individual as far as is possible.

The right to marry and have a family is a very debatable right. Should parents with defective genes breed children who will be a great burden on society? In China, the right to have as many children as you wish was denied in order to control population growth for the greater good of the society. Sustainable societies of the past would have disposed of defective children. We have chosen to allow the individual's right to have precedence over what may be

considered more beneficial to society. The question here becomes one of whether the individual right is greater than what may be considered the right of society.

In a national emergency, individuals may lose many individual rights. Men and women could be conscripted into the armed forces, they may be forced to spy on each other, they may be forced to deny others their rights etc.

The right to social security and the benefits of society's progress will often depend on whether other rights are upheld or denied. Should you get social security benefits if you are able to work, but refuse to do so? Should you benefit from society's progress if you prefer to live in poverty stricken conditions? What are the responsibilities undertaken in order to qualify for rights, or are the rights immutable irrespective of what the individual does? What about the rights to education? Current costs in Australia make tertiary education extremely difficult for poor people, and even those who undertake a tertiary education are often indebted to the government or a bank for many thousands of dollars. This is counter to the right to a decent standard of living if you are faced with an enormous debt burden.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a wonderful feel good statement, something to aspire to; however the reality is it is largely meaningless to most people in the world. A declaration of the rights of Australian citizens would be equally meaningless without carefully stating responsibilities and you would probably need a hierarchy of rights as so many contradict each other. In other words the preamble, 'Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world', sounds great, but it really is nonsense when looking at the reality of the current world situation.

**Bill Hawthorn**, Ganagara, WA

## Congratulations

JUST A SHORT note re the *AH* No. 96, Summer edition 2009. First, congratulations on a wonderful edition – physical quality excellent and intellectually excellent. Now for a few specifics.

Being a lifelong admirer of Albert Einstein – whom my father met in London in 1931 – I'm sorry to say I don't appreciate the item on p. 3.

The article I appreciate most is by Tom Mole, 'Old King Coal', on p. 16 both because I consider global warming is mankind's No. 1 threat and because I can technically fully understand it.

The seven book reviews, pp. 22 – 25, I find excellent, and I'll be seeking to borrow copies of four of them from our local library.

The Society News from each state keeps members well informed.

There are some twelve other articles, most of which I find well worth reading – some, for me, quite difficult to understand, but that's *not* a negative comment.

So, again congratulation to all concerned.

**Bill Fenner**, Ashburton, Vic

## Secular ceremonies

THE ARTICLE by Dally Messenger, 'The power and purpose of secular ceremonies' in *AH* No. 96 (very appropriate number!), was interesting and informative and well worth expanding into a general article for a wider audience. Even those of us who were around at the time perhaps forget what Lionel Murphy did and the enduring, liberating changes that civil celebrants have had on a major cultural ceremony in society. The story and the success of this needs to be better known.

As some of us approach the age where the ceremony at the other end of life, viz the funeral, becomes a more common event than the marriage one, anecdotal evidence would indicate that there has been a flow-on effect into this as well, with quite a lot of people opting for a non-religious version but perhaps even more moving and less 'funereal' as a result. The funeral ceremony was mentioned in the article, so all that is needed is a secular version of the birth/christening one,\* and having to call on a god to witness any of the major rites of passage through life may finally become seen as primitive and passé.

The points made in the article about the necessity for ceremonies in social life were also quite valid and a timely reminder that secular humanists should not retreat into a wholly rational world of scientific empiricism if we wish to become other than a specialist sect ourselves.

**John Ness**, Pullenvale, Queensland

\* Name-giving ceremonies are performed and offered by many civil celebrants. – Ed. note

## Observations on *AH* No. 96

IT IS GOOD to see Len Bergin getting 'proactive', even though the practice fouls his theory.

Victor Bien makes a very serious proposal for us 'not (to) acquire a *mission* like the *religious* but to see the problem' as one of power. Therefore I see no problem; though Victor may be shallow as Oscar Wilde put it.

Dally Messenger III is right, ceremony is no problem. It is when the 'rite' signifies something serious that the trouble starts. At my funeral, I want these words spoken: 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust', and that is all.

Paul Kurtz says there is an 'overriding existential quandary that every person and culture faces.' I think that we need to be distracted to fly as Douglas Adams would put it, it is people like Pascal and Camus who think that we should sit stupefied.

Rudi Anders suggests meditation. I suggest that he takes some sedatives and has a good lie-down.

In reference to Howard Hodgkins's review, Greg Egan wrote a turn on the selfish gene in *Teranesia* and it is what it is – science fiction.

In reference to David Milan's review, Harry Gardner and Guy Harrison should meet and neuter each other, which would be most decent.

In reference to Rosslyn Ives's review, Karen Armstrong thinks agnosticism preferable. But which would she rather – a god that is mad or absent? Philip K. Dick was both devil and saint.

**Gregory Wilson**, Albany, WA

## BOOK NEWS

### ***THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH: the evidence for evolution,***

by Richard Dawkins

Bantam Press, 2009. \$23.86

Reviewer: **Jean Brown**

Dawkins's latest venture is a pleasant surprise as he sticks mainly to the topic and does not engage in too much polemic against religion, which was more than adequately dealt with in his previous book, *The God Delusion*. That said, he has an appendix illustrating what percentage of the population in various countries believes in such things as whether humans were contemporary with dinosaurs or the proposition that 'human beings, as we know them today, developed from earlier species of animal'. The findings are alarming but not intrusive. However, his exposition on evolution is masterful. His chapter, 'Dogs, cows and cabbages', raises the question as to why speciation has not occurred in dogs while he left us to assume it had occurred in cabbages.

The chapter on 'Missing links' is dealt with in excellent fashion with appropriate illustrations, as are the sections on the age of the Earth. This is very clearly aimed at creationists as, indeed, is the whole book. He mentions that not all of them are committed to the biblical 'young Earth'. Oddly, however, Dawkins clings to three propositions that are now hotly disputed.

The first is that evolution leads to more complexity when, in fact, evolution can lead to a simpler organism such as the mole rat. He would claim that its history is there in its physiognomy and though the sense of sight has been lost, the history of vision is there. Secondly, as the author of *The Selfish Gene*, he sees evolution as spurred on solely by competition while many now adhere to the idea that it also progresses through cooperation and altruism, two qualities that also assist survival and reproduction. The third is that he adheres to the idea that evolution is like a tree whereas it has been shown to be more like a complex web with interspecies gene transference and not just natural selection.

Dawkins also fails to explain why, in terms of any co-evolutionary 'arms race' between, say, gazelles and cheetahs, why each species remain so static. Also why if evolution tends toward stronger, faster, bigger individuals descending from mostly alpha males and females, is not the result a super race? Of course, it is known now that it can be the most intelligent or sneakiest, not the brawniest that win the evolutionary race and leave the most offspring. Man is a good example since we are like a plague on the planet but we are neither the biggest nor toughest. Indeed it is known that, coalitions of animals can unseat the alpha male or ruling family to be replaced by members further down the hierarchy. Dawkins oversimplifies the processes by which genes are perpetuated far too much.

With regard to oversimplification and prejudice against anything but natural selection, Dawkins dismisses the new field of scientific research in epigenetics, as a five-minute wonder, yet this is a burgeoning new field of research where

environmental factors can result in heritable traits. Though the definition is currently being revised; epigenetics deals with heritable alterations in gene expression caused by mechanisms other than changes in the DNA sequence.

Similarly, if my understanding of his argument is correct, he does not conceive of a single mutation creating a new gene let alone ones useful in encoding proteins. Though clearly some genes have evolved in humans in the last six million years when our lineage separated from chimps. These new genes may make us uniquely human – although this is surmise on the part of scientists.

His chapter on 'bottom up' creation of a living organism be it plant, animal or something that is neither, begs the questions, 'What is life? What is consciousness?' These questions are not in his remit but he does deal with the conditions that might produce life. The chapter just goes to show that we do not understand everything.

Despite these criticisms, the book is a clear exposition of evolution and worth reading. □

### ***POLES APART – Beyond the Shouting – Who's right about Climate Change?***

by Gareth Morgan & John McCrystal

Scribe Publications Pty. Ltd., 2009,

ISBN 9781921640094 – approx. \$50

Reviewer: **Margit Alm**

The authors – from New Zealand – come from a background of economics/investment portfolio management (Morgan) and writer/researcher (McCrystal). Morgan, spurned on by what he and his wife had observed during their global motorcycle travels, wanted to get to the bottom of the climate change debate and teamed up with McCrystal.

Being laymen, the authors decided they needed help and commissioned two panels of science experts to help with the analysis of data and issues, one from each camp, namely the 'alarmists' pleading the anthropogenic case, and the 'sceptics' who do not believe that humans can change the climate. Included in the latter group are the 'deniers', those who for vested reasons do not see the need for any change.

The book is systematically structured, identifying the key issues complete with historical data, the areas where the two camps find common ground, and where the two camps differ, followed by which camp produces the more compelling arguments and better researched data, and finally the verdict.

The writers throw some pointed barbs at the IPCC for manipulating models and at Al Gore for jumping from rubbery numbers to engraved-in-stone conclusions. Neither are the writers fond of the deniers referring to them at one stage as 'gadflies'.

The authors adopted an easy-to-read, casual, and at times humorous style producing a book that is both thoughtful and engaging. Somewhat distracting to me was

the abundance of information in brackets; I would have preferred footnotes.

In a rather unusual way for a book, the authors started with FAQs (frequently asked questions), which reminded me of a share investment portfolio offering and reflected Morgan's professional background.

In a similar vein, I would have appreciated at the end of the book a two-page facts sheet listing the key issues associated with climate change. It is unfortunate that fact sheets are virtually non-existent on a topic that becomes increasingly more confusing to the ordinary person, who is not interested in reading reams of paper, but wants fingertip information.

In vain I looked among the key issues for 'control of population growth.' Even though overpopulation is at the root of all our environmental problems and challenges, the topic still appears to be 'taboo' with most writers. □

## ***REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION IN EUROPE: Immigration, Islam and the West***

by Christopher Caldwell

Allen Lane, 2009, xii + 365 pp., \$29.95

Reviewer: **Ken Wright**

**D**uring the last half-century, Europe has been the recipient of the largest mass immigration in history. The effects of that population movement, which continues unabated, are so great that the author, an American journalist, feels justified in designating them as a revolution.

The seeds of this movement were sown in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when industries and governments in Western Europe set up programs to recruit manpower to their booming economies. The assumptions underlying that policy, as summarised by the author, were, 'Immigrants would be few in number. Since they were coming to fill short-term gaps in the labor force, most would stay in Europe only temporarily. Some might stay longer. No one assumed they would ever be eligible for welfare.'

When the falsity of these assumptions came to be perceived, 'Europe's welcome to the world's poor was withdrawn – at first ambiguously, through the oratory of a few firebrand politicians in the 1960s, then explicitly through hardline legislation in the 1970s.' But this did little to stem the flow of arrivals, which actually accelerated over the years. In 2006, the rate of non-European immigration was estimated at 1.7 million a year.

There are many reasons for this continuing population flow. The birth rate among native Europeans is well below replacement level. This creates a shortage of younger people to meet the needs of an aging population, and makes it harder to fill the jobs that locals prefer not to do. From the migrants' viewpoint, the relative wealth of Western Europe and its high wages provide a powerful incentive to overcome the obstacles in their path. They are prepared to take great risks, secreting themselves under lorries, or braving the storms of the Atlantic in unseaworthy boats.

Intending migrants also benefit from a strong information network that assists them in securing admission on

arrival. Each European country has its own policies of border control, yet there is freedom of movement throughout the European Union. At any one time, there will be a country with the laxest admission controls, and this information circulates via the grapevine. Asylum seekers also know that it is best to arrive without documentation, and from which country they should claim to have fled.

Mass immigration raises important questions. How well will the newcomers fit in? Do they wish to become assimilated? And where are their true loyalties? In theory, any profoundly different culture could prove difficult to assimilate into European life. In practice, it is Islam that is posing the most acute problems.

Islam is the religion of the great majority of the immigrants. At the end of World War II, there were virtually no Muslims in Western Europe; currently their number is around 20 million, and is expected to double by 2025. Unsurprisingly, they tend to be concentrated in run-down neighbourhoods where rents are low. Job opportunities in such neighbourhoods are few, so that the inhabitants are not exposed to the assimilation pressures arising in the course of employment. When the migrant population of such localities becomes a majority, they turn into ghettos, with customs and institutions of their own. There follow demands for public institutions to accommodate themselves to the requirements of Islam: school cafeterias are asked to stop offering non-halal meat, municipal pools to segregate swimming hours by sex, so as not to offend Muslim women's modesty.

Whilst large-scale immigration was unprecedented in Europe, it has a long history in North America. In the USA, the experience has been that the children of immigrants assimilate more fully than their parents, and the third generation better still. It seemed natural to assume that assimilation into Europe would follow a similar course. But that is not what is happening. The children of Muslim immigrants do not always find Western European culture, with its consumerism and sexual freedom, superior to their parents' culture. In many cases, the second generation of Muslim immigrants is less integrated than the first, and the third less than the second.

Immigration is not the only thing causing the weight of Islam in Europe to grow. The difference in fertility between immigrants and natives is at its widest for Muslims. Research has shown that religion is the strongest predictor of fecundity. In Austria, for example, the total fertility rate for Catholics is 1.32 children per woman. It is 1.21 for Protestants, 0.86 for the nonreligious, and 2.34 for Muslims. Nor is there any sign of these birth rates converging. The well-established Moroccan community in Belgium still has a birth rate two and a half times that of native Belgians. In Britain, immigrants from the Caribbean and from Eastern Europe have rapidly adopted the low birth rates of British society, but there has been no change in the fecundity of Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims between the first and second generations.

What Caldwell sees happening in Europe is a strong, authoritarian Muslim culture encountering a divided, guilt-ridden Western one. 'Europe finds itself in a contest with Islam for the allegiance of its newcomers. ... When an insecure, malleable, relativistic culture meets one that is anchored, confident and strengthened by common doctrines, it is generally the former that changes to the latter.'

Your reviewer has found the book both fascinating and horrifying. Fortunately the sources of Australia's immigration are much more diversified than those of

Western Europe. The bulk of our immigrants are subject to selection on the basis of their skills and ability to contribute to our economy, an approach that Caldwell commends. The lesson of his book for our policy makers is that we should maintain a high degree of diversity in the sources of our immigration. □

***DARWIN'S ARMADA:***  
***How four voyages to Australasia***  
***won the battle for evolution and***  
***changed the world,***  
by Iain McCalman  
Viking hbk Australia 2009 \$55

Reviewer: **Roslyn Ives**

**D**arwin's *Armada* was one of the many publications whose release was timed for the celebration of the bicentenary of the birth of the great English naturalist Charles Darwin 12 February 2009. The author, highly regarded historian Iain McCalman, looks at Darwin and three other men, all of whom had a central role in the promotion of general idea of species change or evolution by natural selection.

The book begins with an account of Darwin's funeral in Westminster Abbey on 26 April 1882. As is well known Darwin had, long before his death, rejected the possibility of a benevolent creator. In letters to friends he had revealed himself to be either a deist or agnostic, but never an atheist. He intended to be buried in the local church yard in Downe where he had lived for over fifty years. But such was Darwin's fame as one of the major scientists of the nineteenth century, his wishes and that of his family were overridden in favour of a state funeral. McCalman give a sense of the occasion, recording the range of people present, along with notable absentees e.g. Queen Victoria, Prime Minister Gladstone and the Archbishop of Canterbury. And among the ten pallbearers were Darwin's close scientific friends and colleagues, biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, botanist Joseph Dalton Hooker and zoogeographer Alfred Russel Wallace, the other men in this book. These were crucial, both in the scientific community as well as the wider public circles, to the selling of the idea of evolution by natural selection. They led an armada of advocates who drove Darwin's ideas through the resistance of some clergy and older, established scientists.

The first four parts of the book cover the expeditionary voyages and relevant life events of Darwin, Hooker, Huxley and Wallace. All were naturalist collectors, who travelled by sailing ship in the first half of the nineteenth century to lands and islands little explored by Europeans. In different ways each aimed to make their mark as credible scientists. These condensed life histories are well told and the shared experiences and aspirations are teased out by the author as he focuses on the connections, professional and personal, between the four men. Part five, 'The Armada at War, 1859–82', covers the supporting role of initially Hooker and Huxley, and later Wallace, leading up to and after the publication of the first edition of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859.

McCalman has had the advantage of being able to draw on recent research writings on the history of ideas in 19th-

century England. This has enabled him to convey the stress that Darwin felt whenever he contemplated the social implications of his ideas, stress that caused Darwin to periodically fall ill with bouts of nausea, headaches and vomiting. Others have tried to explain Darwin's mystery illness by more material causes like picking up a parasite in South America. McCalman is able more convincingly to tie Darwin's illness to the stomach churning stress of the implications of his ideas, about life having a natural origin and humans being part of the great tree of life and the different races of humans being mere natural variations. The world Darwin grew up in was very hierarchical, and standing over all major social institution was the very powerful Church of England. When Darwin thought about how his ideas would challenge and probably overturn existing religious ideas he very understandably felt so stressed it caused him to be physically ill.

The mid-1800s were socially turbulent times in England. Rapid industrialisation and the closing of the commons funneled the rural poor into urban centres. Cheap printing had lead to a rapid growth of newspapers, pamphlets, booklets etc. Railways were rapidly criss-crossing the country aiding the movement of people and ideas, both in print and by travelling public speakers. People from all walks of life were made familiar with the existence of native peoples and exotic plants and animals from the four corners of the globe, most commonly through accounts of travellers, but also via displays and exhibitions. Evidence of fossilised animals and suggestions that the Earth was considerably older than had previously been thought all added to the ferment of new and challenging ideas. It was against this background that Darwin wanted to release his argument for species change by natural selection.

Concluding the book is an Epilogue, 'A Pension for A Captain', which relates Darwin's role, and to a lesser extent that of Hooker and Huxley, in gaining a government pension for the co-discoverer of natural selection Wallace. Wallace had the disadvantage of being from a less well-heeled family and needed to earn a living all his life. An able and inquisitive man he ranged over a wide number of interests, including – to the disapproval of many of his science colleagues – spiritualism.

A highly recommended book for anyone wanting a readable account of the life and times of Charles Darwin. □

***RELIGION: The Greatest***  
***Confidence Trick in History,***  
by Dennis Morris  
Publisher: lulu.com

Reviewer: **James Lovell**

**I** have read all Dennis Morris's books since he first published them in the early 1980s; this is the best ever. Despite religion's vigorous and cruel suppression of rational thought and scientific knowledge over many centuries, human understanding has progressed enormously; it is religion that has remained frozen in time for thousands of years.

This book can be previewed online at [www.lulu.com/content/898216](http://www.lulu.com/content/898216). The preview includes the Acknowledgments, Preface and Contents pages. □

## Nigeria must end harassment of IHEU Representative Leo Igwe



Leo Igwe speaking on Nigerian caste discrimination at the IHEU 'Untouchability' conference, Conway Hall, June 2009.

IHEU has appealed to authorities in Nigeria to stop the police harassment of Leo Igwe, IHEU Representative for West Africa. Igwe and members of his family have been subjected to a sustained campaign of harassment by local police involving multiple arrests on unsubstantiated charges since 2007. Most recently, Leo Igwe and his father, Oliver Igwe, were arrested on Tuesday, 5 January.

Following complaints to Nigerian authorities by Humanists around the world, Oliver and Leo Igwe were released on bail. Then on 8 January, Leo's brother Uche Igwe was taken into custody by the State Security Service. He has now been released also.

The campaign of harassment against the Igwe family is a consequence of their work to bring to justice a powerful man in the area who allegedly raped a ten-year-old girl.

Leo Igwe's father, who is a 77-year-old diabetic in failing health, has been arrested six times on false charges since 2007. Two of Leo's brothers have been detained three times each in connection with the same case.

On 9 January, Sonja Eggerickx, president of IHEU, wrote to Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, President of Nigeria, to request that his office intervene to end the police harassment of Leo Igwe and his family. The IHEU request was also sent to the Nigerian attorney general, minister for the police, and the governor of Imo State, where the Igwes live. A separate appeal is being sent to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the regional human rights body in which Leo Igwe represents the IHEU.

Commenting on the case, Sonja Eggerickx said, 'Leo is fearless and selfless in fighting for justice for others. He is never afraid to speak truth to power, even when he is the lone voice and knows that the powerful may hurt him. It is up to the global Humanist community to show that he does not stand alone and that we will work together to ensure justice for him.'

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Report on IHEU website 9 January, 2010

Photo source: HumanistLife website of British Humanist Association,



## HUMANIST SOCIETY NEWS

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### CAHS

THE MAIN business of the executive over the last three months has been handling organisational matters leading up to the 2010 Convention, to be held in Brisbane in May 14–16. This has involved completing work on the outstanding resolutions from Convention 2009 and reminding the state societies when nominations for Australian Humanist of the Year (AHOY) and Outstanding Humanist Achiever (OHA) are due.

As this *AH* goes to press the selection of AHOY 2010 is close to finalisation. The person(s) concerned will be announced in the next *AH*, due out in early May just ahead of the Convention.

Another organisational matter CAHS pursues at this time of the year is invoicing each state Humanist society for affiliation fees. This is CAHS's prime source of income and takes the form of a \$4 levy per member on each Humanist society. In addition each society also contributes 50 cents per member towards a Travel Subsidy Fund. This fund was proposed by Dick Clifford from South Australia in 1997, with the aim of contributing to the travel expenses of one delegate from the more remote states in respect of the location of the Convention. The way it is meant to operate is that for a Convention in Queensland, travel subsidies will be paid for one delegate from WA, SA and Victoria, if a request is made by those states.

For the record the *AH* production and postage is financed directly by invoicing each state Humanist society for the number of copies required for members and other purposes. While the printing is paid for commercially, contributors, editing, proof reading, layout and formatting etc are handled by volunteers.

At this time of the year CAHS affiliation fees to the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) are due. As the fee structure has been altered by IHEU in an effort to enable more Humanist groups across the world to be full members, CAHS will be in the fortunate position of paying considerably less than was previously required.

I would particularly like to thank the Secretary, Mary Bergin, and Treasurer, Rosemary Watson, for their work on these vital organisational matters.

**Roslyn Ives**, President

### New South Wales

WE HELD a Special General Meeting on 29 November 2009, initiated by Affie Adagio, Waratah Gillespie and myself. This had the objective of declaring the August 2009 AGM election results invalid. As a result, we will be holding new elections in February, and the Executive was given responsibility for the day to day running of the society until we have a result from that meeting. It was a difficult SG meeting, and we thank those members who supported the motions.

## Queensland

The particular problems with the August election were the difficulties with preferential voting and the fact that people had no idea of the candidates they were voting for. This was the culmination of many difficulties we've had in the committee process, particularly since the last election but also going further back.

We've had difficulties in properly assessing the situation of one hirer of Humanist House (HH), the Public Information Forum (PIF), also known as 'Klub Nation'. This group was previously banned from hiring HH many years ago, but then came in under a different name. When we sought to recently suspend hire, this earlier resolution dating many years back was reversed by a committee majority. This majority included many members of PIF who had not previously attended social gatherings, contributed to the *Humanist Viewpoints* or otherwise taken an interest in the NSW Humanists prior to their election.

While other hirers of HH have a public identity and often a webpage, there is no such information available on PIF. Instead, there are some references on the 'White Pride Worldwide' website, Stormfront. These postings refer to the discriminatory attendance policies of the group. Further, postings by attendees of the group are often racist, and the group's convener is described as its 'Klub Fuhrer'. The only reasonable conclusion which can be drawn from this is that PIF are a racist group.

The NSW Humanists has in its objectives 'To encourage respect for the universal human rights of men and women free from discrimination on the basis of race, class, disability, gender, age, nationality or sexual orientation.' Further, the International Humanist and Ethical Union, has made statements against racism and any sort of xenophobic intolerance. Consistent with these principles, the Executive recently cancelled the hiring of HH by the PIF group. David Duffy who had continued supporting their stay in HH, has been replaced as Hall Hirer by Affie for now.

Our rules also mention 'freedom of expression'. In making this cancellation, it does not mean we endorse censorship or the coercive limitation of freedom of expression – be that by Government or private groups. It does mean, however, that we can at the same time choose not to support the expression of ideas contrary to our principles.

Along the way, we have had protesters against the meetings of PIF. I do not endorse these protests, as they have become violent, and while the protesters were organised enough to field a good presence at HH, they were not organised enough to contact us before the protest, nor have they taken the initiative of contacting us since. Rather than a protest in the ideal of democratic participation, their actions seem to be much more those who stand in the shadows and throw rocks – that is to say, coercive disruption of other's freedom of expression and assembly. These protesters are to be contrasted with members of the 'Fight Dem Back' activist group, whose communications have been reasonable.

This problem was not what I was planning to deal with when I became president, and it has distracted us for some time. However, we did at an executive meeting move towards the publication of David Tribe's 'Words and Ideas' booklet. Further, at our end of year gathering, we had entertainment from Ru Bella, a female impersonator. It was great to see over 60 Humanists together enjoying themselves and thanks to Affie for being the driving force behind Ru Bella's performance.

**John August**, HSNSW President

FOURTEEN members attended our annual lunch at the Gandhi Curry House, South Bank. Robert Heard recited his now famous 'Humanist's Grace', and with plenty of opportunity for discussion, we all had an enjoyable time. Our membership continues to climb steadily.

Our new website design has now been finalised, and a training session is being organised for early January 2010, after which, it should be operational. The date for the next CAHS Convention has now been finalised for Fri 14, Sat 15 and Sun 16 May 2010, and the venue will be the Queensland College of Art, across the road from South Bank Railway station. Further details will be available later this month, after staff return from leave.

Our challenge to the Government over the Schools' Chaplaincy Program, received a boost recently, with an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It seems well-nigh impossible that we will obtain the services of a barrister, pro bono, and we will have to raise money to pay our legal fees. We have already had one offer of a donation to fight the case, but of course, we will need much more.

Our President, Maria Proctor had the opportunity to speak on radio about Christmas. She agreed that Christmas was a celebration which western cultures had enjoyed for two millennia, and was, even in this increasingly secular age, still an important celebration for families and friends. She received considerable support from members, who made suggestions and expressed their ideas.

The result of the recent demonstration by the Pro-choice lobby, attended by many HSQ members, has been disappointing. The State government fixed the loop-hole in the existing law, to give protection to health professionals, who might prescribe for a chemical termination, but did not repeal the existing archaic law, which still effectively criminalises abortion. The Premier has stated that she would not oppose a private member's bill, and would allow MPs to vote according to their conscience. We will now have to wait until some private member has the courage of their convictions, to bring such a bill before the house.

**Bernie Doran**, HSQ Treasurer

## South Australia

OUR DECEMBER meeting did not follow the advertised program, due to the death of Cathie Brandt who had been ill for some years. The meeting became a wake, as we remembered the early years when she was largely responsible for the Social Club that introduced many new members to the Society. She was a very feisty lady, older members will remember her well.

On 1 January we held our usual New Years Day Social, but this year with a difference as it was the 85th birthday celebration of Dick Clifford. Presents were not permitted, in fact the situation was reversed, as all who came were presented with a \$10.00 voucher to buy food and drink at the kiosk (Botanic Gardens). Leoni and Dorothy Bell organized a collection for the Liberian Children's Scholarship Fund, now back in Liberia, which was very welcome as the fund was running low and their need larger than ever.

All had a good time and some stayed to visit the Amazonian water lilies, and the renovated Botanic Museum.

**Dick Clifford**, HSSA Vice-president

## Victoria

OUR OCTOBER Public Lecture Meeting was addressed by Heather Marriott, psychotherapist, on 'Mindfulness in psychotherapy.' In November the Public Lecture, after our AGM, was given by HSV member and student activist, Jason Ball, on 'Promoting Humanism on Campus'.

The AGM meeting voted to increase membership subscriptions and to alter the Constitution to allow one of two nominated committee members to be co-signatories to the Society's accounts. The committee for 2010 are Stephen Stuart, president, John Russell, vice-president, Tom Mole, treasurer and Mary Bergin, secretary, and ordinary members elected by secret ballot: Jean Brown, Harry Gardner, Howard Hodgens, Marie Hodgens and Rosslyn Ives. We thank past committee members, Peter Turner and Leon Midalia members of the previous committee for their valuable contribution to HSV.

Discussion Meetings continue to attract interest. Topics discussed include AHOY selection, CAHS Convention motions and submissions. At Harry Gardner's request, we discussed definitions of Humanism and ethics for his education manual.

Recent submissions made include the Inquiry into Suicide in Australia by a Senate Committee, a letter to the Attorney-General (Vic) recommending the rescinding of the recent anti-discrimination exemptions granted to religious bodies, and to the Victorian Premier and the Minister for Education urging the government to shelter schools from commercial sponsorships and attempts at advertising. Submissions were completed by Halina Strnad after discussion with members, and involvement of Geoff Allshorn and Stephen Stuart.

The annual dinner was a great success due to the work of organizers Judy Watt and John Shilliday. It was enjoyed by 64 members and friends. Guest speaker was Waleed Aly, who spoke on 'Muslims in Western Society – Culture, Freedom and Liberalism'. Jennie Stuart created a striking Ikebana display and Rudi Anders an interesting photographic display for the occasion.

Parliament of the World's Religions, The freethinkers' session 'Living a Good Life, the Secular Way', which teamed HSV with Secular Party of Australia and Rationalist Society of Australia, was quite a success. Thanks in particular to Brian Ellis, Stephen Stuart and Meredith Doig. Harry Gardner in another session used 'Waltzing Matilda' to base an ethics lesson for children, which was well received.

We celebrated the summer solstice on 13 December with food and drink, friendly chatter, jokes, music and song. The Committee thank all who attend and contribute in any way to the success of our activities.

**Mary Bergin**, HSV secretary

### Correction

Previous report *AH* No. 96, p. 27, said, 'HSV is looking at applying for registration as a religion under terms of the Civil Celebrants Act.' HSV advises that it was requesting registration to perform weddings on a par with the religions. (S. Stuart president).

Apologies for my error. Mary Bergin

## Western Australia

IN OCTOBER Sophie Sunderland, lecturer at UWA in English and Cultural Studies, gave a talk on the subject of: Secularism and Law: Questions of Gender and Neutrality. She gave recent examples of laws containing unstated assumptions which damage its neutrality: such as, the 2004 Amendment of the Marriage Act to exclude same sex couples so that heterosexuality is to enjoy legal privilege. Prime Minister Howard's use of the term 'Australian values' to justify introducing anti-terrorism legislation and at the same time using a sophisticated way of stating a desired white christian identity and creating a fear and dislike of those others. Subsequent misuse of that law in the Mahommed Haneef case demonstrated the apparent neutrality of the law was not real.

Danna Vale a politician much less sophisticated than Howard blundered into this area with an argument that high abortion rates among non-Muslim women would cause Australia to become a Muslim nation within fifty years. Here were all the unstated 'values' of some conservative Australians packaged in one: white, christian, anti-abortionists, stand up for your beliefs.

In November we celebrated the publication of the *Origin of Species* by holding an outdoor meeting in conjunction with the Perth Atheists and Skeptics at the parkland near Monger's Lake. Mark Lofts spoke about the legacy of Darwin, quantum theory, Einstein and the origin of the universe and provoked a great deal of discussion.

There has recently been an outburst of letters re Darwin and Evolution and Creationism in *The West Australian* newspaper, and it has been reassuring to see that so many people not associated with us stepped up to explain evolution in simple, clear terms. We are making an effort to contact some of the letter writers to invite them to come to a future Humanist Society event or at least to make contact with us.

Another worthwhile development arose when Michael Hopkin, Science Editor of WA Newspapers, contacted our Secretary, Eric to ask us if we would prepare a statement to accompany the articles he was preparing on the recent discovery of Ardi, the ape thought to be a progenitor of humans. Eric and Des prepared the statement and we were gratified to see part of it included in the article in the newspaper on Thursday 8 October.

Two members; Eric Pyatt and Brian Smith have already booked to go to the Global Atheist Convention in Melbourne which will take place over 12–14 of March 2010.

We continue to work on the website and it is attracting more hits in the last month or so, but we have yet to see this bring us new members.

Finally we celebrated an event we called Soltifest/Xmyth at Rachel Geller's place and enjoyed a nice meal and much discussion.

**Des Young**, HSWA Committee member

### CAHS Convention 2010

**Brisbane, 14–16 May**

All members welcome

Queensland College of Art.

Further details available from your state society.

# *Australian Humanist*

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The views expressed in *Australian Humanist* are not necessarily those of the Council of Australian Humanist Societies.

## Humanists and Humanism

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

Well known Australian Humanists include Phillip Adams, Eva Cox, Peter Cundall, Tim Flannery, Bill Hayden, Ian Lowe, Philip Nitschke, Peter Singer, Robyn Williams and the late Donald Horne.



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