



Humanist Society

of
New South Wales Inc.

Affiliated with the Council of
Australian Humanist Societies and
the International Humanist and
Ethical Union

ABN: 19 402 094 262



President's Welcome

If you are an atheist or agnostic who is looking for how to take it further, the NSW Humanists may well hit the spot. Humanism is an ethical approach which embraces compassion and tolerance, and holds that you can be ethical without the need for God. Too many people wrongly see a connection. Humanists "plant the flag" for an ethics which is valid but does not rely on a supernatural power, and support secular (non religious) tolerance.

If you've been looking around for a group which considers and discusses the world from a humanist standpoint, you can join a group of like minded people. We discuss issues arising around humanism - in person at our social gatherings, more formally when we listen to a talk at the Humanist Afternoon talk, held regularly - and also in dialogue through Viewpoints, the NSW Humanist Newsletter, and the national publication The Australian Humanist. You can join and become active - or merely draw solace from the fact you are a part of a community of like minded people.

Several decades ago, it was difficult to become a school teacher if you were an atheist, and access to abortion was illegal. Atheists were discriminated against. The world has changed - in Australia, atheists are no longer much discriminated against - but new challenges have arisen.

Laws masquerading as "family values" were a religious intervention in our lives - and when the intervention was not direct, a range of tax benefits directed people to lifestyles which the religious favour.

Creationism, and irrationality generally is on the increase - and Creationists are becoming more politically active, lobbying for everyone to be taught creationism. Creationism being indoctrinated to those in religious schools is bad enough - but its even worse that it be taught to everyone, including non believers. But this is the push that believers have at present.

We in the Humanists have tried to change the nature of religious and other education in schools, by introducing Humanism or ethics lessons as a replacement to Religious Instructions in Schools. The Queensland Humanists pushed for this recently; it was quashed by the religious lobby, with support

Defending the tolerant secular state and other enlightenment values

The Humanist Society promotes a non-religious non-supernatural world view and supports a number of issues which certain (fundamentalist) religious interests and prominent proactive individuals with deep religious convictions oppose including abortion law, drug law, euthanasia law reform and unaccountable allocation of public monies to religious organisations. These religious interests illegitimately want to compel certain values in the public space when society as a whole wishes to be rid of those restrictions. It is part of the movement which argues that the state and religion should remain separate.

Humanists do not rely on scriptures, theological or ideological abstraction, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

Apart from its outwardly directed function we serve as a group or venue for meeting like-minded people; to talk about subjects which may not occur or even be possible elsewhere. If you feel socially isolated because of values shared by us, you are more than welcome to apply for membership.

Humanists are anti-religious to the extent where we see it encroaching the civic or public sphere in an illegitimate way. The Humanist world view requires extensive appraisal and thinking about many aspects of individual or personal and civic or public life. As a consequence we tend to be polymath - i.e. have wide and extensive interests.

These broader interests include concerns about the environment and about the lack of sufficient concern about non-human species.

We see ourselves as defenders and promoters of the values from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which means democracy - free open societies, rule-of-law; it gives primacy to the individual and human rights coupled with corresponding responsibilities. We are "progressive" in our views about economic and societal matters including seeking general compassion and equity in social policies. However "socialism", meaning pursuing the "public ownership of the means of production", is controversial amongst us. The present writer does not support the concept on the grounds that its pursuit tends to lead to totalitarianism.

We are concerned about equity issues such as excessive income and wealth inequality, the unequal treatment of women, massive global inequity etc. but our main active focus remains addressing the ongoing issues from our roots, which is the inappropriate dominance of the churches in public affairs. To be involved in these "non-core" issues we tend to form alliances and/or support groups focussed on these areas including organisations such as GetUp! and avaz.org.

Clearly we support and promote the sciences and the arts.

Victor Bien
17 April 2011

from the then Federal Government. Fortunately, however, ethics instruction has been introduced in NSW, and we hope the present NSW Government continues to support it.

However, the introduction of School Chaplains represents a pernicious influence, supported by Gillard, following Howard's lead. A legal challenge, which we financially support, may yet see an end to this, but it remains a concern in any case.

While we currently have access to abortion, voluntary euthanasia continues to be suppressed for reasons which ultimately derive from narrow religious readings.

But it is not all bad. We have recently seen a renewed surge of interest in atheism, with the publication and discussion of various books on the subject, and atheism is becoming more mainstream in the Australian media. The challenges are there; but so too are the possibilities and reasons to look forward to the future, and there is much the NSW Humanists can do.

This surge has meant the emergence of new fellow travellers, such as the Sydney Atheists; it is our plan to cooperate with such groups, as we offer complementary things. Certainly, we supported the "No-To-Pope" coalition during the World Catholic Youth Day in Sydney.

Strangely Gillard, an atheist, supports religion. Going back further, Labor in opposition supported some quite regressive Liberal party policies, such as funding of religious schools, something Labor continued in Government. Kenneally, a Catholic, supported ethics instruction in schools and an enlightened drug policy including support for the Kings Cross medically supervised injection centre. Our concerns do not fit neatly into a divide between the political parties, nor are secular concerns necessarily promoted by non-believers in parliament.

My comments are not intended to be party political - I recognise good and bad in both major parties. Howard showed strong support for religions. His policy, a result of negotiations with Harradine, was against funding overseas aid which incorporates any support or information regarding abortion. After Howard lost, I would have hoped the Liberal Party might find its way back to support for the secular state, as was articulated by Hewson and Turnbull. Instead, it embraced Abbott. It was only in comparison to Abbott that Gillard was an advance.

I acknowledge those religious believers whose belief does not stop them from supporting women's access to abortion and voluntary euthanasia. Regardless of the details, we have common ground with many believers on issues of war and refugees. I also endorse the concerns of religious minorities who endorse the secular state, and feel marginalised by the dominant Christian culture.

But, in any case, I invite you to join the NSW Humanists, and participate to whatever degree you feel inclined !

John August
President
14 April 2011