

Five Campaign Themes for 21st Century Humanism

A Humanists Australia Discussion Paper

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Authorship and origin of paper

This paper has been prepared to further the objectives outlined in a Resolution passed at the Humanists Australia 2019 AGM. A copy of the Resolution can be found in the Appendix. The paper has been authored by Lyndon Storey and he would like to record his thanks for the helpful advice and comments provided during its creation by Mary-Anne and David Cosgrove.

Overview

Humanism is both an ethical and a hopeful outlook on life. Its values provide the tools for conceiving of a better world, and the inspiration to try to achieve it.

Humanist values underpin support for creating a world in which each individual human being lives in a society based on democratic government, has their human rights protected, has access to sufficient material and cultural resources to live a fulfilling life, and the entire socioeconomic system is based on a sympathetic and sustainable relationship with nature.

While such a world may seem unachievable today, so once too did democracy and a secular state.

The humanist movement can offer an inspiring vision for the future. It needs to regain its role as a forward looking visionary movement, both for its own, and the world's sake.

This discussion paper looks at five areas of possible social and economic reform where Humanist ideals help illuminate both the fact that there is an urgent need for change, and the vision of what that change should be.

It is not just that these five areas are crucially in need of reform in today's world. They are five areas in which a distinctively Humanist outlook helps show the need for reform and point the way forward. Humanism does not simply bandwagon on the issues identified and promoted by others. It opens a light on the best possibilities for humanity. The five areas for targeted action proposed by this paper are areas in which the Humanist movement can have a new beginning; and help build a desperately needed better world in the process. In each of the five areas this paper proposes themes of action and reform for the humanist movement to advocate and undertake. The five theme areas are:

1. Meaning of life and human fulfilment
2. Opposing Neoliberalism: Addressing growing economic inequality and the demoralising nature of a society focussed only on economic growth.
3. Opposing nationalism and supporting Human Union.
4. Defending the dignity of the individual against the attacks of all anti-human ideologies and practices.
5. Supporting action to address global warming and environmental degradation.

Humanism:

Humanism is one of the major belief systems, possibly the major underlying belief system, in the world today. It is so widespread that even those who don't subscribe to Humanism see it all around them. For instance Charles Taylor, an eminent Catholic philosopher, has described our age as one in which "exclusive Humanism" is a "widely available option"¹.

Humanism is not a set ideology or set of commandments. The major agreed upon formal document of organised Humanism, the *Amsterdam Declaration 2002*, describes it as a "lifestance"². It is an approach to life more than it is a set of fixed rules. For this reason there is no single definition which perfectly encapsulates Humanism.

Humanism is an outlook which seeks answers to questions of meaning and ethics in life from an exploration of human rather than supernatural potentialities. It develops provisional and empirically testable ideas rather than stating absolute truths. Humanism supports respect for the dignity of all

¹ see Charles Taylor - "A Secular Age" Introduction

² see "The Amsterdam Declaration"

<https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/>

human beings and supports the development of societies that respect the fundamental rights and dignity of all human beings.

Humanism is more than anything an approach to ethics; it is the attempt to work out how to live a good life using the resources that our humanity provides us with; our sense of sympathy, compassion, reason, intellectual curiosity, and so on. The first words of Clause 1 of the Amsterdam Declaration, are that “Humanism is ethical.”³ Humanism is an approach to life which seeks happiness and fulfilment through care for others, and through realisation of each individual human being’s best potential.

Humanist International’s *Minimum Statement on Humanism* spells out the primarily ethical function of Humanism:

“Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.”⁴

Humanism supports all people everywhere to find meaning and purpose in their lives in a manner consistent with sympathy and care for others. It is an approach that both asserts the inherent dignity of all people, and is based on and grows out of the consequences of the inherent dignity of all people. Documents such as The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, with its reference to “ the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family”⁵ expresses a humanist outlook.

The Humanist movement itself, inspired by its ethical outlook, has been involved in many reform campaigns over the years in the interest of building a better world. For many, the humanist reliance on our sympathy and compassion for others as an ethical foundation has seen the concept extended to sympathy and compassion for all creatures, not only humans. It is a logical extension of the humanist principle of caring for those who suffer.

In the early years of the Humanist movement this broad outlook saw Humanism associated with broad campaigns to build a better world. For instance *Humanist Manifesto 1*, an early document of the American Humanist Society, states the “existing acquisitive and profit-motivated society has shown itself to be inadequate and that a radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted.” and says that Humanism will “endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all”⁶.

In recent times the Humanist movement has pulled back to a degree from broader campaigns for social reform and encouraging ethical development, focussing more and more on challenging the grip of religion on society. This has created the impression for some that Humanism is simply

³ <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/>

⁴ IHEU Minimum Statement on Humanism
<https://humanists.international/policy/iheu-minimum-statement-on-humanism/>

⁵ Universal Declaration of Human Rights <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

⁶ Humanist Manifesto 1 <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto1/>

another word for secularism or atheism and that its main focus is in removing religion. But this is not the case. Humanism is principally a human sourced approach to ethics.

Humanism relies on the application of humanity's best potentials; such as love, compassion and reason, to find the best available solutions to the problems of individual and social life. Other sources of answers; Gods, spirits, the "laws" of reason or of history, are all abstractions which have never been supported by empirical testing. Our human potential for love, compassion and rationality, while highly imperfect and uneven, is, on the other hand, really there, and what we have to work with to build better lives for ourselves and for others. As an approach to life based on recognising human beings as meaning makers, Humanism strongly defends the dignity of all human beings. It advocates policies that promote human flourishing such as those supporting human rights and democracy, and, in general, supports protecting and enhancing the dignity of all human beings and their opportunities to find fulfilment in life.

For instance the *Amsterdam Declaration*, states, in part:

...“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.” (Clause 1) ... “Humanism aims at the fullest possible development of every human being.” (Clause 3).⁷

Humanism's focus is on the rights and opportunities for the development and fulfilment of all human beings, not just those in a particular society or social group.

There is no point (for Humanism) in defending the rights of one human being unless those rights are defended in a way which supports the rights of all human beings. Humanism, in general, supports a cosmopolitan approach to politics that is about building a world, rather than just one nation state, where all people's basic rights and liberties are secured. The Humanist political vision is of a world where all human beings live in a democratic political system with human rights protections and have the maximum possible chance to seek human fulfillment and realization.

The 2018 Humanist World Congress, held in Auckland, New Zealand, issued the 2018 *Auckland Declaration against the Politics of Division*, which included the statement:

“The best ethical foundation from which to approach the problems of today's world and the future of us all is to try to see humanity as one global community.”⁸

Problems faced by the Australian Humanist Movement

The Australian Humanist movement was at its peak, in terms of active members, during the 1960s and 70s. Since then membership has declined, rapidly in some states, less rapidly in others. Even more disturbing for the future of the movement has been the age composition of membership. The remaining members tend to be long term members, many now in their 60's 70's and 80's. Even the small supply of new members appears to be dominated by those over fifty. An aging cohort has been keeping the humanist movement going without significant regeneration from younger generations.

There are many causes of this situation. One of these causes has been the rise of single issue groups that have attracted activists who might otherwise have joined the Humanist movement. Issues that

⁷ Amsterdam Declaration <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/>

⁸ Auckland Declaration against The Politics of Division <https://humanists.international/2018/08/humanists-condemn-politics-division-resurgent-many-parts-world/>

the humanist movement helped pioneer, such as support for euthanasia law reform, support for women's rights, support for LGBTIQ+ rights, and promotion of atheism, have become increasingly spearheaded by single issue groups focussed on those movements. A person with an interest in broad ranging political reform addressing the social and economic problems of today has little reason to consider joining an Australian Humanist society.

Another crucial cause has been the rise of atheism! As more and more people find themselves searching for a fulfilling life without God they explore alternative worldviews such as new ageism, deep greenism, nationalism, material wealth seeking, and so on. While some of these outlooks are not usually presented as “meaning of life” approaches, they nonetheless perform that function for people when they become the driving focus of their lives. The humanist movement has not presented a vision of a humanist path to meaning and fulfilment, and has seen many new “non believers” march right past it and seek other paths to meaning. For those whose focus is more on challenging religion than offering an alternative path to meaning the rise of atheism has also meant the rise of new (or revitalised old) atheist groups which may be just as appealing, or more appealing, than the humanist movement.

Humanism does have the capacity to inspire a meaningful life and shine a light on society that highlights areas where reform to maximise the chance of people leading a good and fulfilling life is needed. Both for the value and benefit that can be offered to society generally, and to avoid the humanist movement itself continuing its slide to irrelevance, it is high time for the Humanist movement to re-engage with Humanism’s role as a path to a meaningful life, and as an outlook which can shine a light on areas where social reform is needed. This paper does not say that the Australian Humanist movement needs to return to this role and the movement itself will automatically revitalise. But it does say that exploring how to build a better world is a natural part of Humanism, and this paper, it is hoped, will be part of the process of Australian Humanism re-engaging with issues of social and economic reform.

Five project themes for Australian Humanism

The next five sections outline and recommend five project themes that the Australian Humanist movement can engage in; as both necessary areas of reform for society and as part of revitalising the Australian humanist movement (thus making it more relevant to the issues of today).

Theme 1: The meaning of life and human fulfilment

Humanism offers the best way to address the lack of meaning and fulfilment for individual human beings in today’s materialistic and value-free world.

All around the planet, more and more people suffer from a feeling of being lost and insecure; living in a world with no anchored sense of meaning and purpose, either for their society, or for them as individuals. The steady destruction of traditional social roles and community has been replaced by a more and more brutal battle for economic and social survival. Too often people turn to imaginary idols, from the past or present: such as God, the nation, Marxism, Fascism, racial solidarity, and so on, to address the unfulfilling emptiness of contemporary life.

But these idols all come with a terrible cost. By erecting an idol that is more important than the dignity of the individual human being there is always the danger that the welfare, dignity, and even lives of individual human beings will be sacrificed to the idols. That has happened all too often in the past, in wars where people have killed or been killed mostly on behalf of their nation or religion.

Today, as people respond to an increased sense of social, economic and environmental insecurity by seeking the security of a sense of connection with these idols we see some terrible risks:

- The decline of broad social tolerance as people put their idols (nation, tribe, religion, race, etc) ahead of respect for our common humanity.
- The increasing intensity of people's sense of fear and alienation in any event as neither God, nor nation, nor race identity are anything more than historically contingent human constructs. They do not provide a "true" path to meaning at all. Like any other idol they can only be maintained by constant critique of the other.
- An increased risk of new idols arising, as the basic idea that meaning can only come from something intrinsically "higher" than the individual human being is not being challenged. There is little value in debunking an idol, such as a religious or national one, if the very idea of seeking meaning through idols is not also debunked.
- An increased risk of the paradoxical phenomenon of more and more people feeling insecure, alienated and unfulfilled, while society becomes more technologically and economically advanced, intensifying. The current situation is a recipe for increased human misery.

Humanism, by way of contrast, does challenge the incorrect idea that meaning can only come from surrendering one's being to a higher idol.

Humanism offers a sense of meaning and fulfilment through realisation of our human potential for love, sympathy, reason and of other potentials. From Confucius to Abraham Maslow, Humanist thinkers across the millennia have explored the ways in which realising the best of our own potential can offer a path to meaningful and fulfilling life. Humanism shows there is no need to depend on surrendering oneself to something higher to find meaning and fulfilment in life. This does not mean Humanism is against supporting causes broader than the individual. The humanist emphasis on such things as love and compassion does indeed mean connection with other people, in a way which respects rather than undermines their human dignity. The great causes and movements beyond the self which can uplift people do not descend from imaginary idols, but are created by the collective actions of human individuals.

It is a crucial and most urgent task for us to make people aware that fulfilment in life does not require surrender to an imagined higher idol. Humanism shows how we all have the tools to find meaning and happiness within us, not outside us. Until we set our civilisation on a humanist path to fulfilment and meaning we will continue to be unfulfilled by our current system. The humanist movement needs to offer a more vigorous presentation of the benefits of a humanist path to meaning to the many millions of people struggling with unfulfilling lives today..

Theme 1 suggested next steps:

- 1: Develop a steering group to oversee project
- 2: Create an online archive of Humanist paths to fulfilment, including a downloadable pamphlet pointing to humanist paths to fulfilment.
- 2: Develop a website and integrated social media platform to promote access to the information
- 3: Develop a Humanist "response team" to put humanist answers whenever people claim life is meaningless without religion, nationalism, etc.
- 4: Encourage the development of humanist communities and individual social volunteers to offer moral support to struggling individuals. This can be done either through encouraging local individuals and/or in tandem with local humanist societies everywhere.

5: Build alliances with other groups, whether self-described as humanist/ potentialist or otherwise, whose activities dovetail with these goals.

Theme 2: Economics and human fulfilment:

Humanism provides a path to address growing economic inequality and the demoralising nature of a society focussed only on economic growth.

Economic issues are immediately connected to Theme 1 and the search for meaning. Talk about meaning and purpose in life is of little help if people are too poverty stricken to look beyond their immediate economic survival, or too trapped in an endless battle to pay rent or mortgage to be able to look to broader horizons.

The current economic culture treats ever increasing material wealth as a goal in itself rather than as providing a platform for developing a better life for everybody. The consequence of this approach has been rising economic inequality and insecurity, a greater number of people trapped in perpetual work to pay for ever increasing rents and house prices, the steady destruction of our natural environment and the trapping of more and more people in unfulfilling lives.

While there are many reasons for this there are at least two key issues underlying the concepts of free market economics and neoliberalism that have contributed to this sad outcome.

Firstly the free market/neoliberal approach is based on far too narrow a view of human nature as being concerned only with material advancement and ever increasing efficiency; a sort of homo economicus. The vision of humans as needing nothing more than ever increasing material wealth to achieve a fulfilling life is far too narrow. It blinds people to the many other paths to fulfilment in life and risks trapping people in an endless search for more and more rather than finding meaning and fulfilment. The humanist vision of life sees human beings as having a range of potentialities within them, and seeks to find ways to cultivate, support and respect the best and most fulfilling range of human potentialities, rather than reduce the range of human potentialities to those of a homo economicus.

Secondly, there is the way that following free market oriented policies has led to a retreat by democratic governments from many important areas such as; regulation of industries crucial to people's standard of living, including energy and housing; various social services once performed by the state but now relegated to the private sector or volunteers; maintenance of the value of welfare benefits; attempts to ensure the largest corporations and wealthiest individuals contribute an appropriate share of taxation, and so on. The results of all this, since the revival of neoliberalism in the 1980s, has been widening economic inequality and growing economic insecurity.

Humanism supports a much broader vision of human nature and an appropriate policy mix to support people to flourish. Humanism supports a mixed economy, one where the basic human welfare needs of all are met; but in which those who wish to focus on entrepreneurialism and enterprise are free to continue to prosper. Achieving these goals requires a mixture of government intervention in some areas; firstly to ensure that economic growth is environmentally sustainable and improves the basic level of economic security and welfare of all, and secondly, in other appropriate areas support for a degree of freedom of the marketplace to continue. Thus allowing for the sort of economic growth that benefits all of humanity and our environment.

It is time for the Australian humanist movement to challenge the ideas underlying economic neoliberalism and put forward a much broader humanist view of human flourishing. It is also time

for the Australian humanist movement to campaign for policies that will build an economy based on humanist values.

Theme 2 suggested next steps:

- 1: Develop a steering group to oversee project
- 2: Advocate for a better approach to economic welfare policies, such as a Universal Basic income (UBI).
- 3: Advocate for Government regulation/control of industries for the common good; such as in key infrastructure industries like power generation, water supply, and so on. This potentially includes the banking (financial intermediation) industry.
- 4: Advocate for appropriate Government service provision in areas such as: subsidised/free education, housing, healthcare, and even food if necessary.

Theme 3 Global politics and human fulfilment - Human Union

Humanism offers the best path to end the civil war of humanity and the devastating effects of allowing the human political world to be divided into competing states.

The division of the world into competing nation states is something that has only happened in the last few hundred years. Scroll back five hundred years in European history, for example, and religion is the main device used to inspire people to join armies and fight wars. By the 20th century the two world wars were fought between armies organised along national lines.

Today the division of humanity into competing nation states has ruined efforts to cooperate: to address global poverty and underdevelopment, to protect global human rights, to address climate change, and a host of other positive goals as well. So entrenched is political nationalism today that people are in the habit of taking it for granted, as an unavoidable part of human life, rather than seeing it as the historically contingent social system that it is. The division of the human political world into competing nations is the invisible crisis underlying a host of issues that face us today. It makes every war a civil war, a civil war of humanity.

Humanism, with its emphasis on every individual human being as someone worthy of dignity and a fulfilling life, is a philosophy which helps people see the invisible crisis for what it is; a genuine crisis that perpetuates civil war amongst human beings and frustrates attempts to cooperate in so many areas.

A Humanist outlook not only sheds light on the invisible crisis of a divided Humanity. It also is capable of inspiring a vision of a global human political system that respects our common humanity rather than working against it. The best model for such a system is the Human Union model.

The term Human Union is used here to indicate an international organisation with common values that reach across the national borders of its members. In particular, these common values would include support for basic human rights and democratic processes of government. The model for this is, of course, the European Union. But, rather than a union of Europeans (another made up identity) it would be a union of human beings. There are four key characteristics of the Human Union proposal:

- 1: Membership would be conditional on observing basic democracy and human rights standards (similar to EU). This would make it a different type of organisation to the United Nations (UN) which does not have this requirement.

2: Its development would be gradual. It could start with as few as two members, or even just with one nation state declaring it would be willing to negotiate with other states to form a Human Union. Gradual growth and intensification of political values would be the goal as in the EU, rather than a sudden transformation of the world.

3: Its primary focus would be on common human rights and democratic standards, in accord with humanist ideals, rather than on financial and monetary unification goals (here learning from some of the terrible mistakes made in developing the EU).

4: Membership must be optional, and need not be confined to geographically contiguous countries. For instance the first two members could be New Zealand and Germany.

Key strengths of the Human Union model are its gradualness, its focus on democracy and human rights, and that it does not require the abandonment of national and other identities, but builds into its political structure respect for our shared human identity as well, thus limiting the capacity of our national identities to justify warfare and conflict.

Another strength is the historical example of the EU. A region which was for centuries a crucible of warfare and ideologies of eternal racial and national differences has formed a voluntary Union based on respect for human rights and democracy. This is a result which would have been inconceivable as recently as the first half of the last century. If the Europeans, with their astonishing history of developing racial and nationalist ideologues, and violence, warfare, and contempt for their fellow human beings, can do this, then surely the rest of humanity can.

The Human Union model is a historically informed model for taking us away from the world of competing states to the world of a human political system where, conceivably, as more countries joined over time, basic guarantees of democracy, human rights, and the chance to freely build a life of fulfilment and meaning could be extended to all human beings, without needing to wipe out national and other differences.

Campaigning to both show the risks and dangers of Nationalism and to promote a positive alternative, a Human Union, is a natural and distinctive role for the Humanist movement to undertake. In a world in which very few are willing to challenge the underlying basis of political nationalism, and even fewer are willing to propose an alternative, it would be both a valuable and distinctive role for the humanist movement to take on. (Note there is more information about this project in a separate Humanist Australia discussion paper, that is being prepared at time of writing, about Nationalism and Human Union.)

Theme 3 suggested next steps:

1: Develop a steering group to oversee project

2: See Humanism, Nationalism and Human Union discussion paper (still in development at time of writing) for a more detailed consideration of next steps.

Theme 4 Defending human dignity; human rights:

Humanism defends the dignity of the individual against the attacks of all anti human ideologies and practices.

Maximising each individual's chances of building the best possible life for themselves is a key goal of Humanism. This can be referred to as self-realisation, self-actualisation, human fulfilment, or by a

host of other terms. The Humanist version of this emphasises the role of sympathy, compassion and love in human fulfilment, as well as the pursuit of more individual interests. We can never fully realise all our positive potentials in life, but we can always find a way to realise at least some part of them, and Humanists should always want to support others to develop their best potential.

Accordingly, Humanism supports policies such as access to education, economic security, and freedom of thought and expression, that increase people's chances of realising their best potential. This of course leads to support for a wide range of policies. The first three projects discussed in this paper address the humanist paths to meaning, and how to develop and advocate for the appropriate global political and economic reforms to help bring a better world into being.

One further step along the way to Humanist inspired reform, is to defend people's basic human rights. The many ways in which, at various locations around the world, people's human rights are being challenged and violated, are too numerous to mention. It is crucial to not only advocate for a better world, but to defend people's rights now, as and when they are being violated. Humanism is an approach that automatically dovetails with human rights protection. the Humanist movement should be ready and willing to defend the basic human rights of anyone anywhere.

In order to maximise everyone's chances to realise their best potential it is necessary to protect their basic human rights; to freedom of conscience and so on. From a humanist point of view all people's rights are equally valid and equally worthy of protection. The Amsterdam Declaration states that "Humanism supports democracy and human rights"⁹.

Humanism is based on seeing each and every individual human being as an inherent source of meaning. Consequently, Humanism logically entails the highest of respect for the dignity of all human beings, without any national, religious, ethnic, gender or other bias. Defending human rights is a natural occupation for a Humanist movement. Indeed, how can a Humanist movement not act to defend human rights ? The Humanist movement needs to be able to stand up for basic human rights everywhere.

Exposing and campaigning against current human rights violations should become one of the major focuses of the Australian humanist movement. It is a distinctive and crucial role for today's humanist movement to undertake.

Theme 4 suggested next steps:

- 1: Develop a steering group to oversee project
- 2: Work on coordination with existing human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to ensure best use of resources.
- 3: Dovetail with existing Australian Humanist campaigns such as the campaign for a Bill of Rights.

Theme 5 Support action to address global warming:

Humanism supports a coordinated global process of addressing both climate change and the challenge of promoting human fulfilment generally.

There is overwhelming evidence that planetary temperatures are steadily increasing, and that human induced greenhouse gases are the most likely causes of this. The Humanist movement readily

⁹ See Amsterdam Declaration at <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/>

acknowledges the reality of global warming and should support policies designed to address its causes and mitigate its effects.

The other four projects proposed in this paper are driven by a desire to realise a Humanist vision of a world where everyone has the maximum chance of a fulfilling life. There is no chance of this if our societies are ruined by the effects of global warming. There is little value in proceeding with our other projects if we do not also support action to address climate change. Climate change itself is a fact. There is no need for a humanist vision or humanist philosophical analysis to see that. It is a fact established by empirical evidence and scientific analysis.

Nonetheless humanism can make some contributions, and some distinctively humanist ones, to how humanity develops its response to both climate change and the general need to protect our environment. Indeed the themes already discussed also dovetail with addressing climate change. Themes 1 and 2, with their focus on human flourishing coming from fulfillment rather than ever increasing material wealth provide a cultural framework to help us move away from the material consumption focussed lifestyle that is destroying our Planet's capacity to host human and other existing life forms. Theme 3, with its focus on building a human political community is also crucial in this. We will not be able to work together to collectively address climate change without some better sense of a broader human political community with a shared interest. Carrying out the values and goals of theme 3 will also be creating the groundwork of a global community that will be able to act together to address climate change.

A humanist vision is inspired by sympathy, compassion, and scientific understanding. Our sympathy and compassion does not stop at the species border of human beings. It is capable of extending to other creatures and the ecosystem in which we all live. A distinctively humanist outlook on addressing climate change is one which seeks ways to unite rather than divide the interests of all living beings.

The humanist ethos does not ask people to choose between humans or the environment but to find a way to maximise the benefits for all. Humanism supports both human and planetary welfare and seeks to find a way where both can be harmonised and reinforce each other, rather than pitting one against the other. This outlook is also an important contribution that Humanism can offer.

Theme 5 suggested next steps:

- 1: Develop a steering group to oversee project
- 2: Coordinate with [IPCC](#) campaigns where appropriate.
- 3: Develop information campaign re global warming
- 4: Build policy coalitions re policies to address global warming issues.

Conclusion

The core insight of humanism is a crucial one; that the source of love and compassion for others is in our own human hearts. It logically leads to an approach of deep respect for the inherent dignity of all human beings and a desire to develop a political program that can maximise human fulfilment and better relations between humans and other life forms and natural systems. This paper has discussed how a Humanist outlook shines an inspiring light on how to live a good life; the need to protect everyone's human rights and build a human political system, the inadequacy of neoliberal economics, and the need for a response to climate change based on respect for both humans and non humans.

Humanism is by far the best framework that is available to us as human beings for developing answers to questions of meaning and purpose. It seems odd in this context that the Humanist movement plays such a marginal role in contemporary life. Clearly one reason for this marginal role is the failure, so far, to fully utilise humanism as a philosophy.

Building the sort of social campaigns described in this paper will be crucial for humanity and our Planet over the next few centuries. If the humanist movement fails to engage in such campaigns others will have to undertake them anyhow in some other name. It's time for the humanist movement to start leading the way into the future using humanism as a guide.

Appendix

Below is a copy of the Resolution passed at the 2019 Council of Australian Humanist Societies AGM which led to the writing of this paper.

ACTHS Motion 3: CAHS should to a significant extent support activism and campaigns in areas where Humanism makes a distinctive contribution. Five such areas include:

- 1) Meaning of life and human fulfilment.
- 2) Humanism opposes economic rationalism.
- 3) Humanism opposes nationalism and supports Human Union.
- 4) Humanism defends the dignity of the individual against the attacks of all anti-human ideologies and practices.
- 5) Humanism supports action to address global warming and environmental degradation.

Rationale:

There is no reason for anyone to join, or even for a Humanist movement to exist, unless it is offering some distinctive contribution to life that is not available, or rarely available, elsewhere. The five proposed areas are areas where a Humanistic approach is very distinctive and needs to be advocated as part of addressing the issues facing the world today. In particular, in relation to:

- 1) **Meaning of life and Human Fulfilment:** Humanism offers the best way to address the lack of meaning and fulfilment for individual human beings in today's materialistic and value free world. Humanism offers a sense of meaning and fulfilment through realisation of our human potential for love, sympathy, reason and so on. A sense of meaning and ethics on life can come from realising the best of our humanity, as many humanist thinkers have shown. The humanist emphasis on such things as love and compassion does indeed mean connection with other people. But in a way which respects rather than undermines their human dignity. it is a crucial and most urgent task for us to make people aware that fulfilment in life does not require surrender to an imagined higher idol; such as a God, a nation, material wealth, or some other totalising ideology. Humanism shows how we all have the tools to find meaning and happiness within us, not outside us. Until we set our civilisation on a humanist path to fulfilment and meaning we will continue to be unfulfilled by our current system, and continue to be at risk of surrendering to the temptation of whatever idol is proposed next.
- 2) **Humanism opposes economic rationalism:** The reduction of social life to questions of economic utility has created growing economic inequality and more and more unfulfilled lives as people become trapped in a hedonic treadmill. Humanism's focus on the fulfilment and realisation of the best potentials in every human being offers an alternative framework of

values to economic rationalism. A framework of values which justifies policies designed to support human welfare and fulfilment rather than ever increasing wealth maximisation combined with inequality and unhappiness. It's time for Humanism to develop and advocate a suite of policies designed to address economic inequality and improve the welfare of all.

- 3) **Humanism opposes nationalism and supports Human Union:** The division of the human political world into competing states is the invisible crisis underlying a host of issues that face us today. It makes every war a civil war, a civil war of humanity. Humanism, with its emphasis on every individual human being as someone worthy of dignity and a fulfilling life, is a philosophy which helps people see the invisible crisis for what it is; a genuine crisis that perpetuates civil war amongst human beings and frustrates attempts to co-operate in so many areas. It's time for Humanism to challenge nationalism directly and support campaigns to build a Human Union.
- 4) **Humanism defends the dignity of the individual against the attacks of all anti-human ideologies and practices:** Humanism supports respect for the dignity and fulfilment of all people. The only limitation on that should be where one person seeks fulfilment, or claims dignity, by restricting another person's dignity or fulfilment. Humanism naturally opposes, not only attempts by religions to claim special rights that limit others' freedom and dignity, but claims by any totalising ideology or thought system. Humanism, as a positive outlook on life, is in the distinctive position of being able to oppose such restrictions, while simultaneously advocating a positive alternative for all; human fulfilment. It is this positive alternative provided by Humanism which enables it to bring a distinctive approach to the battle for human freedom.
- 5) **Humanism supports action to address global warming and environmental degradation:** Climate change is a fact, there is no need for a humanist philosophy to realise that. So this field of action is less distinctive. However the danger posed by climate change is so great that action is required. As well, the realisation (points 1 and 2) that ever increasing material wealth is not the key to human fulfilment, and the building of a sense of global political community (point 3) all will contribute to an effective approach to climate change. The Humanist outlook, which includes acknowledging human capacities such as sympathy and compassion leads to sympathy and compassion developing for all, for human beings, for other creatures and natural systems. In this way Humanism also offers an ethos for addressing climate change which does not ask people to choose between humanity or the environment as some approaches do. Humanism supports human and planetary welfare; and states they are not necessarily divided.

Actions:

Lyndon Storey to develop policy paper and seek members of action committee/affinity group. Call in AH for people with interest in any one area to be involved and focus on that area. Action also may include letters and petitions to leading figures and strategic interventions in debates on various topics. Develop educational materials about Humanism and how it shines a positive light in these areas.