



RATIONALIST SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL REPORT
2019

TEN POINT PLAN FOR A SECULAR AUSTRALIA

1. *A secular, pluralistic and democratic Australia*
2. *Clear separation between religion and the State*
3. *'One law for all', with no recognition of parallel legal systems*
4. *Religious organisations subject to the same laws as other organisations*
5. *Children not to suffer because of the religious views of their parents*
6. *Education to be strictly secular, not promoting any particular religion*
7. *No discrimination on the basis of a person's sex, sexuality or gender identity*
8. *Freedom of reproductive choice, with no religious interference*
9. *Healthcare available to all regardless of the religious views of the provider*
10. *Guaranteed control over one's own body, free from religious interference, when facing end of life.*



RSA PATRONS AND FELLOWS



The RSA was delighted during the year that Professor Fiona Stanley AC FAA accepted our invitation to become the RSA's fourth Patron, joining the Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG, the Hon. Gareth Evans AC QC and Dr Rodney Syme AM.

Born in Sydney but spending most of her career as an epidemiologist in Perth, Fiona Stanley was Australian of the Year in 2003. She is a passionate advocate for science, and for an 'open society' that includes a strong, independent media. In accepting our invitation she

commented, "I have looked at the RSA website and am impressed ... particularly with the RSA's vision of trusting science and evidence rather than superstition and anecdote – we certainly need a good dose of science now in the face of we scientists being swept aside!"

During the year, we added former RSA board member and critical thinking expert Dr Peter Ellerton of the University of Queensland to our stable of RSA Fellows, joining public intellectual Dr Paul Monk and constitutional lawyer Dr Luke Beck as our subject matter experts.



With the shock election of the Morrison government in May 2019, Australia has its first openly Pentacostalist prime minister. As we are now seeing, religionist vested interests are using the opportunity to entangle religion with government policy as never before.

ABOUT THE RSA



"I suspect all Rationalists are Stoics, and Stoics share the Three Pillars of Rationalism."

Meredith Doig

Biologist-turned-philosopher Massimo Pigliucci has done more than most to popularise "New Stoicism", a modern interpretation of the ancient Graeco-Roman philosophy.

He summarises three foundational ideas of Stoicism: to work out how to live your life (*ethics*), you need to study *physics* (understanding the real world using the senses) and *logic* (understanding how the mind works - what we would call today cognitive science).

This sounds suspiciously like the Three Pillars of Rationalism:

-- Rationalists believe in *naturalism* - that the natural world is the only world there is and thus there is therefore no afterlife and no forelife, no heaven and no hell

-- Rationalists are *humanists* - which means the meaning and purpose in life is created by humans, not received from the gods or God, or some sacred text

-- Rationalists are committed to *rationality* - in their beliefs and their behaviour. In forming beliefs, a Rationalist relies on empirical evidence, logic and thoughtful reflection, not on unquestioning obedience to authority, blind faith or guesswork.

Rationalism is *not* the same as 'economic rationalism', an economic theory that focuses purely on monetary worth as a measure of value, without taking into account social and moral considerations - something most Rationalists would not see as rational at all.

Nor is modern Rationalism the same thing as 'rationalism' in the history of philosophy. Rationalist philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz held that the world could be understood by just *thinking* about it, in contrast with the empiricists. Few modern Rationalists would be rationalists in this sense.

For more on what it means to be a Rationalist. see "About/Rationalism" on our website.



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Last year we put in a major submission to the Ruddock Inquiry on Religious Freedom and had a private meeting with the panel. Despite widespread and well-founded suspicions about the panel's role, their eventual report was reasonably balanced, finding that there was no threat to religious freedom in this country. The Morrison government stalled its response to the report, no doubt because it failed to deliver what the more extremist elements in the party room wanted.

After months of delay, in August 2019 Attorney-General Christian Porter finally released a bill ostensibly designed to protect against discrimination on the grounds of religion.

The RSA is not necessarily opposed to including religion as a ground in anti-discrimination laws. Most states and territories already have such laws, and the federal government is obliged, as a

signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to protect against discrimination on the ground of religion *or belief*. However, the draft RD bill goes much further than providing such a shield; it equips religious bodies and religionists with a positive *sword* to shut down anyone who dares challenge their views or privileges.

In October, the RSA put in a submission on this flawed bill, arguing that the bill should be restricted to mirroring the provisions of other federal anti-discrimination laws, deleting the unprecedented additional clauses that have clearly been included in response to lobbying by powerful religious forces (eg, the 'Folau' clause on employer codes of conduct and the 'Porteous' clause overriding Tasmanian anti-discrimination law).

CAMPAIGNS

| | | |
|--|---|---|
|  <p>CORE PRINCIPLES</p> <p>What is secularism? How do secularists and their critics address freedom of and from religion? Explore secularism's basic political philosophy of separation, freedom and equality.</p> <p>Learn More</p> |  <p>FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION</p> <p>What does freedom of expression really mean? Should it have limits? Explore how restrictions on speech relate to religious privilege and discrimination.</p> <p>Learn More</p> |  <p>EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS</p> <p>What is freedom of and from religion? Explore how political and moral debates involving religion are framed around competing interpretations of equality and human rights.</p> <p>Learn More</p> |
|--|---|---|

RATIONALIST CURRICULUM

Last year we decided to keep a watching brief on the Victorian Government's decision to roll out a new 'Worldviews' curriculum, which would include education about secular humanism and rationalism. We met during the year with the new officer at the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority in charge of progressing this project, yet there is still little progress.

Education is clearly an important mechanism for countering the pernicious infiltration of religious ideology in schools, so we approached the Victorian Humanists with the idea of collaborating on a curriculum development project ourselves.

A joint steering committee has been formed and a well-credentialed consultant identified to do the work. This will be a significant project over the next 12 months.

PRAYERS BEFORE PARLIAMENT

Early in 2019, RSA made a significant financial contribution to support a Monash University project, led by RSA Fellow Associate Professor Luke Beck, examining the constitutional legality of religious prayers recited before local council meetings.

The resulting research will provide a scholarly basis for later campaigns to challenge the practice of prayers before parliament.

CAMPAIGNS

"To be a Stoic, it ultimately does not matter if we think the Logos is God or Nature, as long as we recognize that a decent human life is about the cultivation of one's character and concern for other people and is best enjoyed by way of a proper - but not fanatical - detachment from mere worldly goods."

Massimo Pigliucci



CHAPLAINCY CHALLENGE

In January 2019, we sent out a major survey to all Victorian school principals, seeking their views on the National School Chaplaincy Program that could be used as contributory evidence in our VCAT challenge to this overtly discriminatory program.

Acting as our legal advocate, RSA Fellow Luke Beck successfully negotiated with the Victorian Education Department such that they agreed to amend their public documentation to acknowledge that chaplains “may be of any faith **or no faith**” and that chaplains who do not have a religious affiliation can still meet the requirements of the National School Chaplaincy Program if they are simply endorsed by a religious organisation.

While these clarifications are welcome, the

government is so far failing to enforce these newly-documented policies. Chaplaincy providers such as Scripture Union Victoria and Korus Connect (formerly ACCESS Ministries) continue to state they will not even consider hiring non-Christians, despite the new government policy.

RSA will continue to pursue this matter.

OUTREACH



MEETINGS

We have continued to hold monthly public Meetups on topics ranging from the pros and cons of My Health Record, to 'Islam & the Future of Tolerance', to the role of Reason in a fractious society.

These meetings were set up some five years ago by RSA Treasurer Len Buller, who was keen to see a forum where members and friends could practise critical thinking in conversation. In April 2019 we were much saddened to learn that Len died of complications arising from a golden staph infection. His wry humour and good business sense are sorely missed. RSA member Rosemary Watson has kindly agreed to continue organising the RSA Meetups.

IN PRINT

We continue to publish our flagship quarterly journal, the *Australian Rationalist*, under the editorship of professional journalist David James. The last year featured cover stories on *Why is there something rather than nothing*; *How the Enlightenment changed everything*; *Political correctness*; and the *Open Society*.

In addition, this year we published an Occasional Paper on *Religion & Society*, written by RSA Fellow Paul Monk. A copy of this timely paper was sent to all members of the federal government. We also commissioned papers on *Identity Politics* from Melbourne University philosopher Dan Halliday and film and media editor Adolfo Aranjuez, which will feature in the December 2019 journal.



Vale Len Buller

OUTREACH



SOCIAL MEDIA



The RSA maintains a reasonably active presence on Facebook and Twitter, with our Facebook followers up 230% (from 3,500 to 8,000) and 'Twitter impressions' (tweets that actually generate interaction by others online) about doubled (from 6,000 to 11,000).

Our bulletin *RSA Daily* continues to attract subscribers, up 26% (from 556 to 703) from this time last year. The RSA website was refreshed during the year, thanks to *Fair Digital*.

GOVERNANCE

The RSA Board meets monthly during the year, with the Financial Advisory Committee and the Editorial Committee meeting on a quarterly basis. Vice-president Hugh Harris has decided to take a break from the board due to the pressure of family and job commitments and Edmund

Munday withdrew during the year due to pressure of work. We thank them both for their contributions.

This year we engaged Chris Noonan as our Administration Officer for two days a week to manage memberships and regular financials. Chris has also built our use of Action Network, a platform that supports grassroots campaigning, from letter campaigns to politicians to fundraising.

The Society's funds continue to be governed by a Financial Advisory Committee, comprising the president, the treasurer, the RSA's *pro bono* accountant, and a professionally qualified independent expert, reporting to the board. The board continues to follow a prudent 'passive' investment policy.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

Rationalist Society of Australia Inc. For the year ended 30 June 2019

| | 2019 | 2018 |
|--|---------------|----------------|
| Income | | |
| Income | | |
| Investment Income | 32,020 | 57,764 |
| Member Revenue | | |
| Member Donations | 3,852 | 192,209 |
| Membership Fees | 21,313 | 21,705 |
| Total Member Revenue | 25,165 | 213,914 |
| Revenue from Operating Activities | | |
| Event Revenue | - | 1,030 |
| Journal Subscriptions & Sales | 1,660 | 2,921 |
| Total Revenue from Operating Activities | 1,660 | 3,951 |
| Other Operating Income | | |
| Gain on sale of investments | - | 12,387 |
| Royalties | 1,047 | 1,915 |
| Total Other Operating Income | 1,047 | 14,302 |
| Total Income | 59,892 | 289,931 |
| Total Income | 59,892 | 289,931 |
| Gross Surplus | 59,892 | 289,931 |
| Expenditure | | |
| Campaign Expenses | | |
| Campaign expenses | 318 | - |
| Commissioned Reports | - | 1,100 |
| Minor Collaborations | - | 255 |
| Total Campaign Expenses | 318 | 1,355 |
| Employment Costs | | |
| Superannuation | - | 5,102 |
| Wages and Salaries | - | 55,109 |
| Total Employment Costs | - | 60,211 |
| Finance Expenses | | |
| Bank Fees | 292 | - |
| Finance Charges | 208 | 371 |
| Total Finance Expenses | 500 | 371 |
| Journal Production Costs | | |
| Authors and Contributions | 8,338 | 2,250 |
| Editors Fees | 16,575 | 16,600 |
| Journal Design Fees | 6,975 | 3,675 |
| Journal Posting and Mailing | 6,134 | 6,611 |

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements. These statements should be read in conjunction with the attached compilation report.

| | 2019 | 2018 |
|--|-----------------|----------------|
| Printing Journal | 15,481 | 15,153 |
| Total Journal Production Costs | 53,503 | 44,289 |
| Marketing | | |
| Marketing | 8,564 | 326 |
| Total Marketing | 8,564 | 326 |
| Office Expenses | | |
| Accounting Software | - | 600 |
| Admin Officer's Fee | 6,000 | - |
| Insurance | 33 | 1,143 |
| Meeting Expenses | 322 | 529 |
| Office Expenses | 1,067 | 675 |
| Postage | 375 | 1,210 |
| Printing & Stationery | 60 | 37 |
| Rent | - | 2,290 |
| Staff training | - | 2,257 |
| Subscriptions | 72 | - |
| Telephone & Internet | 95 | 250 |
| Total Office Expenses | 8,024 | 8,991 |
| Research Project | | |
| Monash Uni research | 22,998 | - |
| Total Research Project | 22,998 | - |
| Website Expenditure | | |
| Web Hosting & Maintenance | 270 | 340 |
| Website Development | 4,000 | - |
| Total Website Expenditure | 4,270 | 340 |
| Total Expenditure | 98,177 | 115,883 |
| Current Year Surplus/ (Deficit) Before Income Tax Adjustments | (38,284) | 174,047 |
| Current Year Surplus/(Deficit) Before Income Tax | (38,284) | 174,047 |
| Net Current Year Surplus After Income Tax | (38,284) | 174,047 |

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ASSETS AND LIABILITIES STATEMENT

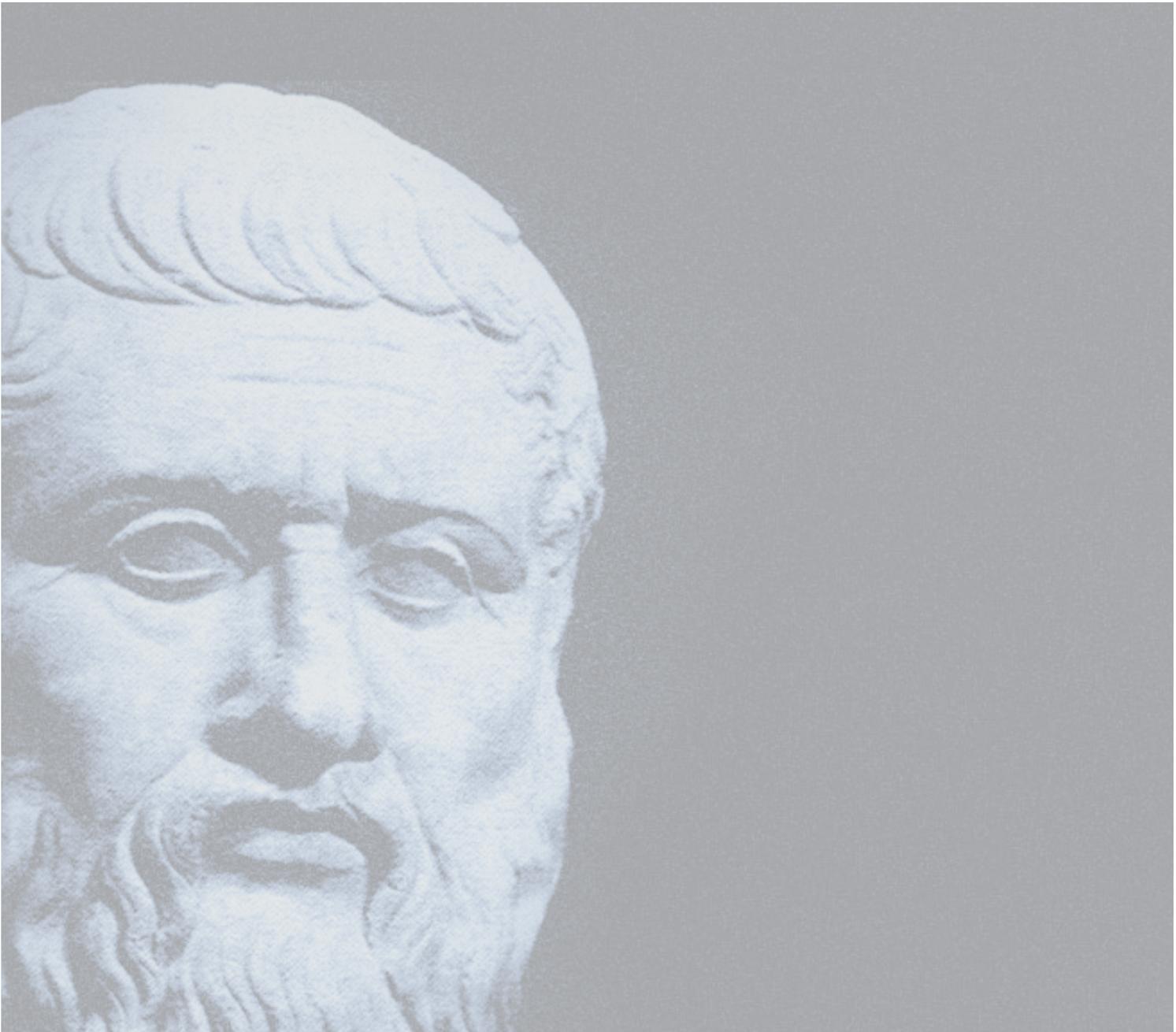
Rationalist Society of Australia Inc. As at 30 June 2019

| | NOTES | 30 JUN 2019 | 30 JUN 2018 |
|--|-------|----------------|----------------|
| Assets | | | |
| Current Assets | | | |
| Cash and Cash Equivalents | | | |
| Cash at Bank | | 12,416 | 47,514 |
| PayPal | | 664 | 900 |
| Total Cash and Cash Equivalents | | 13,079 | 48,414 |
| Other Current Assets | | | |
| Distributions Receivable | | 12,045 | 28,853 |
| Franking Credits Receivable | | 8,742 | 4,740 |
| Total Other Current Assets | | 20,787 | 33,594 |
| Total Current Assets | | 33,866 | 82,008 |
| Non-Current Assets | | | |
| Other Non-Current Assets | | | |
| Direct Share Investments | | | |
| NAB Shares - DRP - 35 Shares | | 935 | - |
| Total Direct Share Investments | | 935 | - |
| Managed Funds | | 892,427 | 854,508 |
| Total Other Non-Current Assets | | 893,362 | 854,508 |
| Total Non-Current Assets | | 893,362 | 854,508 |
| Total Assets | | 927,229 | 936,516 |
| Liabilities | | | |
| Current Liabilities | | | |
| Employee Entitlements | | - | 5,406 |
| Total Current Liabilities | | - | 5,406 |
| Total Liabilities | | - | 5,406 |
| Net Assets | | 927,229 | 931,110 |
| Member's Funds | | | |
| Capital Reserve | | | |
| Asset Revaluation Reserve | | 94,853 | 60,451 |
| Current Year Earnings | | (38,284) | 174,047 |
| Equity | | 870,659 | 696,612 |
| Total Capital Reserve | | 927,229 | 931,110 |
| Total Member's Funds | | 927,229 | 931,110 |

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RATIONALIST
SOCIETY OF
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