



Monash Philosopher Russell Blackford's keenly awaited volume of essays, *50 Voices of Disbelief: Why We Are Atheists*, is [now available through its local publisher](#) Wiley and from good bookshops.

The book's further local connections include co-editor Udo Schüklenk who was originally from Germany and now in Canada, but did his PhD at Monash with Peter Singer as his supervisor.

Add to that various contributors:

- Peter Singer (at Princeton these days)
- Graham Oppy
- Tamas Pataki
- Julian Savulescu (now at Oxford, and also did his PhD at Monash)
- JJC "Jack" Smart
- Emma Tom (Sydney journalist)
- Greg Egan
- Sean Williams (Adelaide-based science fiction writer)
- Jack Dann (American author but has been living here for about 15 years and has become a citizen)
- Peter Tatchell is a high-profile expatriate living in the UK
- Damien Broderick is an Australian author and futurist living in Texas
- Edgar Dahl, a German philosopher, has strong Australian connections and has worked here.

Early reviews have appeared on [Zarbi](#) and [Open Parachute](#) as well as an interview with the editors at [Butterflies and Wheels](#).

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of [Melbourne Atheists](#)
[Meetup Group](#)

A newsletter at long last

This little project has been in the melting pot for too much of this year, but it took the couple of headline stories on this page to finally push it over the edge.

As with similar projects, Issue 1 is also an attempt to break the chicken and egg problem of getting contributions submitted to something that has not been demonstrated to exist.

For the near term I am happy to do the production OR provide content, but know there will never be an Issue 2 if I am expected to do both. And given how far my opinions can be from orthodoxy, you might prefer that I stick with the production.

That said, I hope the material overleaf is also useful: a calendar of November events, links to like-minded local activities, notes about current controversies over school chaplaincy and human rights protection of religion and more.

—TS

Melbourne to host March 2010 Global Atheist Convention

[Atheist Alliance International](#) and the [Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc](#) have selected Melbourne to host the [Global Atheist Convention: the Rise of Atheism](#) on 12-14 March 2010 at the brand new [Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre](#).

Strong early bookings already guarantee the Convention will more than live up to its billing as the "biggest ever atheist event in Australia's history."

Presenters who made their fame in Melbourne include Lyn Allison, Catherine Deveny, Sue-Ann Post, Leslie Cannold, Maggie Millar, Russell Blackford, Ian Robinson, Tamas Pataki, Simon Taylor, Melbourne Atheist Meetup's own John Perkins, Phillip Adams and Peter Singer. These (sometimes ex-)locals are backed up by an equally impressive list from interstate and overseas.

Even more importantly for prospective attendees, this is clearly not your average sleep-inducing academic conflagration, with most of the presenters having made their reputations as entertainers or at least as communicators.

Arguably the most urgent question for Melbourne Atheists Meetup Group is how we leverage the once-off opportunity provided by the Convention to build our capacity and refine our objectives into the future.



www.atheistfoundation.org.au

Global Atheist Convention

Melbourne 12-14 March 2010

November Meetings of like-minded groups

Monday 2nd 6:00 for dinner, 7:30 for meeting

[Secular Party of Australia](#), [La Notte](#), 140 Lygon St., Carlton.

Friday 6th 6:00

[Pub Evening The Gertrude Hotel](#), 148 Gertrude St., Cnr Napier, Fitzroy

Tuesday 10th 8:00

[Atheist Society](#) public meeting with guest speaker Nigel Sinott: "My March to Militant Atheism, and What I Fought on the Way" at the [Unitarian Church](#), 110 Grey St., East Melbourne. (All atheists can [get together](#) at [Star Kingdom Restaurant](#), 82 Wellington Pde, East Melbourne from 6:30.)

Monday 16th 8:00 (meal from 6:00)

[Victorian Skeptics' Cafe La Notte](#), 140 Lygon St., Carlton, Steve Roberts:
Astronomical Hoaxes

Thursday 19th 7:00

[The Celestial Teapot Marina Cove by the Sea](#) Café, 333 Pt. Nepean Rd., cnr Heales St., Dromana. Sue Ward: Spooks! a virtual ghost tour of Pt Nepean.

Thursday 19th 7:30

Sea of Faith [public lecture](#), Carlton Library Meeting Room, corner Rathdowne and Newry Sts, North Carlton, John Gunson [Learning To Live Without God](#)

Monday 23rd 6:30

Melbourne Atheist Meetup Group Workshop/Forum (venue to be advised)

Thursday 26th 8:00

[Humanist Society of Victoria](#) Public Lecture, Balwyn Library Meeting Room, 336 Whitehorse Rd, Balwyn (Meetup members [get together](#) at McDonald's/McCafe, 318 Whitehorse Rd., from 6:00.)

Monday 30th 6:30

Meetup Group [Action Meeting](#), [Olmecs](#), 410 Bridge Rd., Richmond

Right to be human?

The sometimes smokescreen of human rights is being further abused to newly privilege religion at many levels.

The United Nations Human Rights Commission has [voted to outlaw "defamation of religion"](#) as a tactic to exempt religious claims from critique.

Australia on one hand is [looking to establish a charter of human rights](#) while on the other the same mob are [examining whether protection of religion goes far enough](#).

Victoria already has such a charter but is similarly [looking at whether its religious exemptions are working](#), though with [Attorney General Rob Hulls announcing exemptions](#) seen as preempting that report.

MAX Feedback ...

... and/or offers of contributions to future editions of this newsletter should be posted to [the appropriate thread](#) on Melbourne Atheists Meetup Group's message board.

Given our unanswered concerns over seemingly disproportionate government support for the recent Catholic World Youth Day in Sydney and the upcoming Parliament of World Religions here in Melbourne, there has been belated interest in the idea that the [Global Atheist Convention](#) should be entitled to similar "major event" support.

If only we knew that the organisers had thought far enough ahead to enter into the kind of preliminaries that the likes of the Formula One Grand Prix must negotiate then we might have something to really complain about. That certainly should not deter us from enjoying the Convention to the full.



Talking heads

- Melbourne Atheists Meetup Group presents [Atheist Age](#): 11pm each Tuesday on bayside community radio station [3RPP 98.7 FM](#).
- [The Pseudo Scientists podcast](#) of [The Young Australian Skeptics](#).
- [University of Melbourne Secular Society](#) recently organised a public debate and [video, The Problem of Evil](#), involving Lyn Allison, Russell Blackford and a couple of God-botherers.
- Melbourne Atheists Meetup Group member [Tom Middlebrook](#) is a standup comedian who has [a couple of short videos](#) on YouTube.

Promotion of religion in state schools

The Christian lobby keeps too successfully muddying the debate over [Howard's school chaplaincy program](#). The program's website remains [extremely apologetic](#) about the new government having opened a crack for secular participation.

More recently the ABC was convinced to run a [glowing report](#) based on "Dr Philip Hughes from Western Australia's Edith Cowan (Catholic) University has been commissioned by the National School Chaplaincy Association to look at government schools and assess how well the program is working"—the same person [identified earlier](#) as "the Reverend Philip Hughes of the Christian Research Association" re "1998 survey of 8500 Australians by Hughes' association and Edith Cowan University".

Meanwhile, Melbourne Atheists Meetup Group member Scott Hedges is finalising an issues paper "Affirming Religious Neutrality" to re-expose the legal distinction between [Religious Education and \(Christian\) Religious Instruction](#) and to make the case that Religious Instruction should be made strictly opt in.