



# The Royal Society of New South Wales

*"for the encouragement of studies and investigations in Science Art Literature and Philosophy"*

## **Minutes of the 1287<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of The Royal Society of New South Wales held by ZOOM Webinar on Wednesday 7 October 2020 at 6.30PM.**

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There were 80 Members, Fellows and guests in attendance.

### **1. WELCOME**

The President, Emeritus Professor Ian Sloan AO FRSN presided at the meeting and introduced the panel members. He welcomed members and guests and gave an acknowledgement of country. He also referred to the Society's Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

#### **1.1 Minutes of the 1286<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting held on 2 September 2020**

The Minutes of the previous Ordinary General Meeting, previously circulated, were approved.

### **2. CONFIRMATION OF MEMBERSHIP**

As no valid objection was lodged within two weeks following the 1286<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting, the election of the following new Fellows took effect from the date of that meeting held on 2 September. Certificates will be presented at the first opportunity at a face-to-face meeting.

#### **2.1 Fellows**

Dr Noel Geoffrey Barton  
Professor Dane Robert McCamey  
Dr Graeme Laurence Cohen  
Emeritus Professor Annabelle Duncan  
Adjunct Professor Nick Lomb  
Professor John Harold Loxton  
Professor Huw Price  
Professor Peter John Radoll  
Dr Tristan Andrew Reekie  
Ms Belinda Robinson  
The Hon Arthur Sinodinos  
Professor David Iain Warton

### **3. ANNOUNCEMENT OF NAMES OF CANDIDATES FOR MEMBERSHIP**

It was noted that the Fellows and Members Assessment Committee was scheduled to meet on 13 October. Nominations emanating from that meeting would be considered at the Ordinary General Meeting scheduled for 11 November.

## **4 REPORT FROM COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL**

The President brought to members' attention the following matters emanating from the Council meeting held on 23 September.

### **4.1 Bicentennial year**

Council agreed that the Society's bicentenary would be celebrated from June 2021 to June 2022 rather than in the 2021 calendar year. He said it was hoped that the change of date would allow unrestricted face-to-face events.

### **4.2 Revised Rules**

Council has undertaken a major revision of the Society's current Rules and By-laws in order to modernise them. This major exercise was greatly assisted by The Hon John Dowd FRSN, a former NSW Attorney-General. Under the current Rules and By-laws, the revised Rules require the approval of members. This approval will be sought from members using electronic voting (as was done for elections this year's AGM) in time for the result to be announced at the December OGM.

### **4.3 Strategic planning**

The draft strategic plan 2021 – 2023 is currently being considered by Branches and Council committees before going to the November meeting of Council for approval.

### **4.4 Membership fees**

Council has decided that the 2021 membership fees would remain the same as this year.

### **4.5 Distinguished Fellow appointment**

The President announced that Council had resolved to admit Sir Fraser Stoddart FRSN FRS FRSE FRSC as a Distinguished Fellow. He said Sir Fraser is a Scottish-born chemist who shared the 2016 Nobel Prize for Chemistry "for the design and synthesis of molecular machines" which, existing in energy-rich states, are potential drivers of a molecular industrial revolution. Sir Fraser holds academic positions at Northwestern University (USA) and Tianjin University (China). He joined UNSW Sydney as visiting Professor of Chemistry in 2017.

## **5 THIS EVENING'S PRESENTATION**

### **"WHERE NOW FOR THE STUDY OF TIME?"**

**Professor Huw Price, former Bertrand Russell Professor of Philosophy  
University of Cambridge**

**Associate Professor Kristie Miller and Professor Alex Holcombe, current co-Directors of the  
University of Sydney's Centre for Time**

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Huw Price was, until September 2020, Bertrand Russell Professor of Philosophy and a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. He is Academic Director of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, and was co-founder with Martin Rees and Jaan Tallinn of the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk. In 2019 he joined the inaugural Board of the Ada Lovelace Institute, and became the UK Director of the new China-UK Research Centre for AI Ethics and Governance. Before moving to Cambridge he was ARC Federation Fellow and Challis Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney, where he was founding Director of the Centre for Time.

He is a Fellow of the British Academy, a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and a Past President of the Australasian Association of Philosophy. He was consulting editor for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy from 1995–2006, and is an associate editor of The Australasian Journal of Philosophy and on the editorial boards of Contemporary Pragmatism, Logic and Philosophy of Science, the Routledge International Library of Philosophy, and the European Journal for Philosophy of Science.

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The scientific world has just marked the centenary of Sir Arthur Eddington's confirmation of Einstein's prediction of the bending of light by gravity. This work, based on observations during a solar eclipse in 1919, made Eddington a household name. He became one of the great science communicators of his generation. When he died in 1944, TIME magazine said that the world had lost 'one of mankind's most reassuring cosmic thinkers'.

One of Eddington's favourite cosmic subjects was Time's Arrow, a term he himself introduced to the literature in his 1927 book, *The Nature of the Physical World*. Eddington thought that there is something essential about time that physics is liable to neglect: the fact that it "goes on", as he often puts it.

Despite the best efforts of philosophers to pour cold water on this idea, similar claims are still made today, in physics as well as in philosophy. The lecture that began the presentation, argued all sides in these debates can profit by going back to Eddington. Eddington appreciates some of the pitfalls of these claims with greater clarity than their contemporary proponents, and also issues a challenge to rival views that deserves to be better known.

Associate Professor Miller talked about one compelling account of time where time is a fourth dimension similar to, but not the same as, the three spatial dimensions. According to this view, each of us is extended along this temporal dimension. So rather than its being the case that we move through time, by being first here, and then there, instead we are really one long elongated worm that is stretched out through time. Often though, this is not how we conceptualise time, nor is it how we experience time, or ourselves in time. Regardless of what time is really like, the ways that people think about and experience time have an impact on how they understand their lives. Some of our most recent research focuses on the ways in which *what* we want, and *where* we want it, are affected by the ways that we think about and engage with the temporal dimension. In a nutshell, one hypothesis is that the way we think about time leads us to have what seem to be irrational preferences: we prefer that we experience *more* suffering, rather than less suffering, as long as that suffering is located in our past, rather than our future.

Professor Holcombe explained how scientific psychology research has revealed a number of illusions associated with our experience of time, and demonstrated a few of them. These illusory phenomena, together with theoretical considerations regarding what perception is for, cast doubt on the validity of inferences about the nature of reality from our experience.

There followed a question and answer session moderated by Emeritus Professor Christina Slade, Chair, Events Committee.

## **6 VOTE OF THANKS AND CLOSE**

The vote of thanks was given by Emeritus Professor Elizabeth Deane, Secretary, Events Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.03pm.