

Report of June 2011 Meeting Royal Society Southern Highlands Branch

Speaker: Dr Hugh Mackay

Topic: Why did I do that?

The Branch held its June meeting at 6.30pm on Thursday 16^h June in the Drama Theatre, Frensham School, Mittagong. Dr Hugh Mackay was welcomed by an enthusiastic audience of 60 people.

As a social researcher, Dr Hugh Mackay has spent most of his life exploring why we do the things we do. For fifty years, he has listened to subjects talking about their dreams, their hopes, their fears, their disappointments and their passions. After psychological analysis and reflection on the data he has amassed over so many years, Dr Mackay has recently released his 13th book, *What Makes Us Tick? – the Ten Desires that Drive Us*. It was the subject matter of this book that largely formed the basis for this fascinating June lecture.

Hugh Mackay identifies ten key social desires linked to personality, identity and relationships, these desires influencing our approaches to love and friendship, family, self-image, work and community. Although he clearly describes ten key areas, he emphasized at the start of the lecture that these desires are delicately and intricately intertwined, and although each can be readily recognized in its own right, they are all connected as if in a large web. They therefore are not placed in any order of importance by him, and he stated at the outset that frustration of one can lead to overcompensation in another.

The first social desire that Dr Mackay chose to discuss at length was the desire of people to be taken seriously. Simple examples where subjects did not feel they were being taken seriously included being ignored by the waiter in a restaurant, or feeling uncomfortable because the person they were chatting to at a party kept looking over the subject's shoulder to catch the eye of someone presumably more interesting. Mackay believes that the yearning to being taken seriously underlies much human behavior, because it is an acknowledgement that the individual is a unique and significant person.

As the lecture progressed, Mackay moved on to discussion of other social desires that explain human behavior and responses. He talked among others of the desire to belong, the desire to connect, the desire for control, the desire to feel useful, the desire for love. For each desire, he identified a shadow, the dark side of the desire which if left unchecked or overplayed, can lead to damage to ourselves and others. Such an example

was the desire for “my place” which can often be seen in a negative sense as territorialism – a threat to civilized society unless it is tempered with generosity and compassion.

Hugh Mackay’s lecture was extremely well received. The material was thoroughly researched, and the findings, analysis and interpretations were presented in the Mackay inimitable style. Question time was generous, and the large audience was indeed left with the impression that they had been “taken seriously”.

The vote of thanks was given by Anne Wood.

Anne Wood