



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
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Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
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Editor: Jan Tendys

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Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

1 August, Geoff Matthews "Horses' Birthday Today"

In this talk, the significant relationship of horses to the history and heritage of Australia will be covered, together with the impact of horses in our society, such as in the racing industry, equestrian, show jumping and people with mental and physical difficulties, and relating this to our connection with our society as Unitarians.

8 August, Ginna Hastings "Kindness"

This has become a little valued quality in today's society! This week's service will be some reflections on it's value for all of us, both as givers and receivers.

15 August, Ross McLuckie "Carers"

"We could all become one or need one. What are they like ? "

22 August, Jan Tendys "World Stress—Another Mindfulness Session"

We live in a stress-inducing world. This exercise is another useful stress-breaker.

29 August, Lilium Ouyang "Authentic Happiness". (Debut talk.)

We human beings have been relentlessly pursuing happiness. Is it something illusionary, or is it possible to reach authentic happiness? If true happiness does exist, then what's the pathway? And, is it something we are born with, or something we can add more in our life? In this interactive session, everybody will have a chance to voice their opinion on this topic.

5 September, Laurence Gormley TBA

12 September, Candace Parks "Surprised by Hope"

19 September, Geoff Matthews TBA

26 September, Colin Whatmough TBA

Compassion

Claire Morgan recently gave us a talk on the Charter for Compassion initiated by Karen Armstrong. The following notes are taken from the website of that Charter.

Karen Armstrong

Karen Armstrong is one of the most provocative, original thinkers on the role of religion in the modern world. Armstrong is a former Roman Catholic nun who left a British convent to pursue a degree in modern literature at Oxford. She has written more than 20 books around the ideas of what Islam, Judaism and Christianity have in common, and around their effect on world events, including the magisterial [A History of God and Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World](#).

Her latest book is [The Case for God](#). Her meditations on personal faith and religion (she calls herself a freelance monotheist) spark discussion especially her take on fundamentalism, which she sees in a historical context, as an outgrowth of modern culture.

In February 2008, Karen Armstrong won the TED Prize and wished for help in creating, launching and propagating the Charter for Compassion.

Why a Charter for Compassion?

The Charter of Compassion is a cooperative effort to restore not only compassionate thinking but, more importantly, compassionate action to the centre of religious, moral and political life. Compassion is the principled determination to put ourselves in the shoes of the other, and lies at the heart of all religious and ethical systems. One of the most urgent tasks of our generation is to build a global community where men and women of all races, nations and ideologies can live together in peace. In our globalised world, everybody has become our neighbour, and the Golden Rule has become an urgent necessity.

The Charter, crafted by people all over the world and drafted by a multi-faith, multi-

national council of thinkers and leaders, seeks to change the conversation so that compassion becomes a key word in public and private discourse, making it clear that any ideology that breeds hatred or contempt ~ be it religious or secular ~ has failed the test of our time. It is not simply a statement of principle; it is above all a summons to creative, practical and sustained action to meet the political, moral, religious, social and cultural problems of our time.

<http://charterforcompassion.org/>

The website invites the visitor to adopt the charter as their own, to make a lifelong commitment to live with compassion. **Here is the Charter itself**

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others -even our enemies- is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We therefore call upon all men and women ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human

Beings -even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

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Here are Claire's references for her talk:

Armstrong, K. 2004, The Spiral Staircase; A Memoir, HarperCollins, London  
(also many other of Karen Armstrong's books; especially The Great Transformation and The Case for God)

Barasch, M.I. 2009, The Compassionate Life; Walking the Path of Kindness, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco.

Dowrick, S. 1991, Intimacy and Solitude; Balancing Closeness and Independence, Random House, Sydney.

Fierce Light; When Spirit Meets Action, 2008, DVD, Seville Pictures, New York.

Holloway, R. 2008, Between the Monster and the Saint; Reflections on the Human Condition, Canongate, London.

Kumar, S. 2002. You Are Therefore I Am, Green Books, Totnes.

Kwek, G. 2010, 'What would you do?' Sydney Morning Herald online, viewed 09/07/10 at [www.smh.com.au/world/what-would-you-do-20100709-1034g.html](http://www.smh.com.au/world/what-would-you-do-20100709-1034g.html)

Moore, T. 1992, Care of the Soul, Piatkus, London.

Rifkin, J. 2010, The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis, Tarcher/Penguin, New York.  
(To see a great animate which summarises Rifkin's thesis go to YouTube and search for 'RSA animate empathic civilisation'.)

## Starting with Little Things

Love the earth like a mole,  
fur-near. Nearsighted,  
hold close the clods,  
their fine-print headlines.  
Pat them with soft hands --

Like spades, but pink and loving; they  
break rock, nudge giants aside,  
affable plow.  
Fields are to touch;  
each day nuzzle your way.

Tomorrow the world.

~ William Stafford ~  
(The Way It Is)

## Fluent

I would love to live  
Like a river flows,  
Carried by the surprise  
Of its own unfolding.

~ John O'Donohue~

(Conamara Blues)

## Searching for the Dharma

You've travelled up ten thousand steps in  
search of the Dharma.  
So many long days in the archives, copying,  
copying.

The gravity of the Tang and the profundity of  
the Sung  
make heavy baggage.

Here! I've picked you a bunch of wildflowers.  
Their meaning is the same  
but they're much easier to carry.

~ Xu Yun ~  
(Empty Cloud: The Autobiography of the  
Chinese Zen Master,  
Trans. Charles Luck, ed. by Richard Hunn)

# The Logic of Climate Change Thinking

*Eric Stevenson*

Our friend Jim has lent me an article by Paul Monk (Australian Literary Review, March 3, 2010). It sheds light on the unfortunate way in which proponents of a view justify their perception of reality. It is particularly critical of the arguments put forward by many of the most vocal advocates in favour of the Global Warming phenomenon to whom I have given almost unqualified support. e.g Gore's, 'An Inconvenient Truth' He includes in his list of castigations, the United Nation's Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change. It "has not been a clearing house for attempts to refute the AGW (global warming) hypothesis, but rather a political body committed to finding evidence that AGW is a reality."

I have found this article by a journalist who might justifiably be accused of being a climate change sceptic, very helpful. It is apparent how dangerous is the tendency of the human mind, firstly to adopt a belief, and then subsequently spend its energies on searching for data to confirm that belief. Monk writes, "We need to remember that the human brain is a 'sense making' organ that looks for patterns. It will find them whether they are there or not. Belief in what are in fact illusory patterns, which we dub superstitions, is very common, even in what we like to think of as a scientific society. Misinterpretation of the significance of dramatic events is common, because the brain readily leaps to conclusions...they can be very difficult to dislodge, because we are genetically prone to confirmation bias: seeking evidence to confirm our beliefs, and overlooking or devaluing that which is at odds with them." Furthermore, the recent discoveries in neuroscience suggest that, unless we have been trained not to do so, our strong convictions and judgements about "reality" are generated by our feeling brain, not our thinking brain. (Pardon my non-academic language)

He gives a brilliant example of the student who commented to the philosopher, it was to be expected that the ancients believed the sun revolved around the earth because it ap-

peared to be so from human observation. The philosopher replied, "Really? And how do you think it would have appeared to them if they had known that in fact the earth revolves around the sun while spinning at an angle of twenty three and a half degrees?"

The article prompts me to ask how we may have failed to integrate modern scientific method into our religious thinking. Have we started with a belief and proceeded to rely solely on confirmations of that belief in order to lay hold of ultimate truth? Alternatively, have we incorporated belief in the ultimate within a null hypothesis which says for example that there is no validity in the assertion "the universe was created by a supreme being", or "there is a purposive energy in creation", or "there is such a thing as a Spirit of Life"? Having hypothesised that there is no validity in any one of these claims, have we then sought to discredit it with valid, reliable evidence? More importantly have we mindlessly accepted the claims of religious human authorities as authoritative instead of being alert to the fact that their self-affirming hypotheses have not been open to scientific investigation? And worse, have we accepted the belief that some human beings cannot cultivate a scientific religious mind of their own without a thought for the inspiring null hypothesis that there is no validity in such a claim?

Eric is a member of the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought

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Paul Monk's article "More heat than Light" can be found here:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/more-heat-than-light/story-e6frg8nf-1225835659512>

The case for climate change as given by the CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) is given below. This site allows you to look at answers to frequently asked questions either in brief or in detail.

<http://www.csiro.au/resources/Climate-Questions-Science-Facts.html>

From Henry The Eighth (Cardinal Wolsey)

Farewell! A long farewell to all my greatness!
This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hopes, to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon
him;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
And when he thinks, good easy man, full
surely
His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do.

Act 3, scene 2, 350–358

Contributed by Margaret Armstrong who asks, “Does this remind you of anybody?”

~~~~~ Is ‘Do Unto Others’ Written Into Our Genes?

Where do moral rules come from? From reason, some philosophers say. From God, say believers. Seldom considered is a source now being advocated by some biologists, that of evolution.

At first glance, natural selection and the survival of the fittest may seem to reward only the most selfish values. But for animals that live in groups, selfishness must be strictly curbed or there will be no advantage to social living. Could the behaviours evolved by social animals to make societies work be the foundation from which human morality evolved?

In a series of recent articles and a book, “The Happiness Hypothesis,” Jonathan Haidt, a moral psychologist at the University of Virginia, has been constructing a broad evolutionary view of morality that traces its connections both to religion and to politics.

Dr. Haidt (pronounced height) began his research career by probing the emotion of disgust. Testing people’s reactions to situations like that of a hungry family that cooked and ate its pet dog after it had become roadkill,

he explored the phenomenon of moral dumbfounding — when people feel strongly that something is wrong but cannot explain why.

Dumbfounding led him to view morality as driven by two separate mental systems, one ancient and one modern, though the mind is scarcely aware of the difference. The ancient system, which he calls moral intuition, is based on the emotion-laden moral behaviours that evolved before the development of language. The modern system — he calls it moral judgment — came after language, when people became able to articulate why something was right or wrong.

The emotional responses of moral intuition occur instantaneously — they are primitive gut reactions that evolved to generate split-second decisions and enhance survival in a dangerous world. Moral judgment, on the other hand, comes later, as the conscious mind develops a plausible rationalization for the decision already arrived at through moral intuition.

Moral dumbfounding, in Dr. Haidt’s view, occurs when moral judgment fails to come up with a convincing explanation for what moral intuition has decided.

The above is an extract from an article by **Nicholas Wade** “The New York Times” Sept. 07 http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/18/science/18mora.html?_r=4&pagewanted=1

~~~~~ Ethics With or Without God

Exploring the Basis for an Ethical World View for today.

A Regional Conference at Beecroft Community Centre, Cnr Beecroft & Copeland Rds, Beecroft.

On Saturday **28 August**, 2010 (9am for 9.30 start to 4pm).

Coordinator: Eric Stevenson

Tel: (02)-98885361 Mobile: 0405758116

*** **[CPRT Freedom to Explore](#)**

Slavery in our own backyard

Many Australians misunderstand, or are unaware of, the prevalence and effects of human trafficking and slavery within Australia, according to the University of Technology Sydney's Anti-Slavery Project.

In an attempt to increase awareness, the Anti-Slavery Project has launched a campaign to focus community attention on the issue, which despite popular beliefs - extends beyond the sex industry.

"Many people would be surprised that the use of forced labour is becoming a serious problem in Australia, with consequences for local industries, workers and unions," says project director, associate professor Jennifer Burn

"A recent report from the United States State Department shows that labour trafficking outside of the sex industry and internal trafficking are not well understood here in Australia."

As part of the campaign, the Anti-Slavery Project is launching a new website which will help people become familiar with all forms of trafficking and which focuses on crucial issues such as how to recognise signs of trafficking, who to contact for help, issues surrounding forced marriage, internal trafficking and compensation for trafficked people.

"We know from our work in the community and with trafficked people that trafficking and slavery are poorly understood," she said.

"Unless we open our eyes and know the signs, we may miss opportunities to identify trafficked people and make sure they get help and advice ... Employees and employers need more information about how to spot the signs that a person may have been trafficked and who to call to get help. We're not just talking about migrant workers, trafficking can happen within Australia."

The launch of the website is the first step in a broader campaign which will target key groups, such as unions and migrant resource centres, as well as the wider community.
Internet Post Jul 15 2010 **Lawyers Weekly**

The Buddha told his followers

of the three components that make up the essence of what he had learned.

The first component is to live a moral life. Buddhism teaches that one should live according to the Dharma or universal law that governs both the physical and moral order of the universe. Good deeds result in a person gaining positive Karma and bad deeds lead to negative Karma. Buddhism shares the ideas of both Dharma and Karma in common with the Hindu moral tradition. Buddhism, however, did not embrace the Hindu caste system.

Second, to become enlightened, the Buddha taught that one must practice meditation. This will give the calmness to gain understanding of the true nature of existence.

Third, using insight meditation, one gains the wisdom. This wisdom reveals that even those things that seem most intimate, one's thoughts and emotions, are transient states that come and go. Meditators describe this wisdom as a great burden being lifted. The clamouring ego with its desires and disappointments is silenced. When a person gains this wisdom, a deep and lasting sense of peace and contentment replaces selfish craving and gratification.

From "The Essence of Buddhism", by Unitarian Universalist minister, the Reverend Roger Fritts.

Footnote

"My confidence in venturing into science lies in my basic belief that as in science so in Buddhism understanding the nature of reality is pursued by means of critical investigation: if scientific analysis were conclusively to demonstrate certain claims in Buddhism to be false, then we must accept the findings of science and abandon these claims." The Dalai Lama

(quoted in "Quantum Leaps" by Jeremy Bernstein)

God Grows Up

In his brilliant new book, "The Evolution of God," Robert Wright tells the story of how God grew up. He starts with the deities of hunter-gatherer tribes, moves to those of chiefdoms and nations, then on to the polytheism of the early Israelites and the monotheism that followed, and then to the New Testament and the Koran, before finishing off with the modern multinational Gods of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Wright's tone is reasoned and careful, even hesitant, throughout, and it is nice to read about issues like the morality of Christ and the meaning of jihad without getting the feeling that you are being shouted at. His views, though, are provocative and controversial. There is something here to annoy almost everyone.

In sharp contrast to many contemporary secularists, Wright is bullish about monotheism. In "Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny" (2000), he argued that there is a moral direction to human history, that technological growth and expanding global interconnectedness have moved us toward ever more positive and mutually beneficial relationships with others. In "The Evolution of God," Wright tells a similar story from a religious standpoint, proposing that the increasing goodness of God reflects the increasing goodness of our species. "As the scope of social organization grows, God tends to eventually catch up, drawing a larger expanse of humanity under his protection, or at least a larger expanse of humanity under his toleration." Wright argues that each of the major Abrahamic faiths has been forced toward moral growth as it found itself interacting with other faiths on a multinational level, and that this expansion of the moral imagination reflects "a higher purpose, a transcendent moral order."

This sounds pro-religion, but don't expect Pope Benedict XVI to be quoting from Wright's book anytime soon. Wright makes it clear that he is tracking people's conception of the divine, not the divine itself.

Extract from "No Smiting", by Paul Bloom, "New York times": June 24, 2009

Robin Hood (Tobin) Tax

British Unitarians have given their support to the "Robin Hood Tax" campaign to establish a tax levy on international bank transactions to create a fund to combat international poverty and fight climate change. It will also raise funds to stop cuts in vital public services.

The Robin Hood Tax is based on an original idea by the economist James Tobin. A tax of 0.05% on the billions of pounds sloshing around the global finance system every day through transactions such as foreign exchange, derivative trading and share deals can raise hundreds of billions of pounds a year.

The British General Assembly is one of dozens of voluntary sector, trade union and faith organisations who are supporting the campaign.

Ideally the campaign would like to see an international system of transaction taxes, but there is no need to wait. Individual countries – and the European Union – can easily get started now. Rather than wait for international agreement, it is hoped to build the Robin Hood Tax country by country.

If you wish further information on the Robin Hood Tax <http://robinhoodtax.org.uk/>

<http://uuwithoutborders.blogspot.com/>

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### Shades of Yesteryear

I don't know if they still teach a subject called "Scripture" in schools - but a teacher at a Sydney private school told me that in a Scripture exam, one of the girls informed us that, "There are two virgins in the Bible - the Authorised and the Unauthorised"

Which reminds me of a schoolboy howler of the period (probably apocryphal) - "Bass and Flinders circumcised Australia with a 10 foot cutter".

**Margaret Armstrong**

## Jottings

Thanks go to Candace again for providing her house for our most enjoyable Yulefest and for cooking our succulent dinner.

GINNA and Max not only took an overseas trip to one wedding but decided on another. He proposed and she accepted. Congratulations!

Lilium has become our newest member. It is very pleasing that we are attracting young people.

Lovely to see visitors too. Thanks to those (especially Ross) who make a point of greeting newcomers.

Barbara Gray has had her 80th birthday recently amid family celebrations - all of which was a great distraction from continuing health problems.

*If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for publication.*

**Please note that Esprit is assembled usually in the last week of the month so longer items should be handed in or sent by the second last Sunday of the month. Items for the Schedule of Services (talk titles etc) should be in by the Friday of the last week. Variations to this timetable may be necessitated by circumstances.**

Preferred method is as an MS-WORD or email to [jtendys@bigpond.com](mailto:jtendys@bigpond.com)  
Hardcopy (or electronic media) submissions can be hand-delivered to Jan or posted to:  
Spirit of Life  
PO Box 1356  
LANE COVE NSW 1595

Please note:  
If space is limited, submissions may be subject to editing.

**Do you have a topic of a spiritual nature that you would like to share with the congregation?**

As Unitarians, we support an "Open Pulpit" and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish.

**Just let Candace know what you would like to speak about and when you are available and we will fit you into the schedule.**

Also, please feel free to give us your feedback on any of the services. This is the best way to ensure the services address the needs of the congregation.

**Would you care to join us? Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter** If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring 9428-2244, consult our website [www.sydneyunitarians.com](http://www.sydneyunitarians.com) or speak to one of our members before or after the Sunday service. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee.