



Schedule of Services

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

4 May **GINNA HASTINGS**

**"Capt. James Cook and George Washington -
Leaders of Their Times, Inspiration for Our Times."**

Both these leaders of British birth who didn't know one another but who achieved great things in the late 18th C demonstrated amazing skills and wisdom in their leadership in their times, and teach us something about how to be forward thinkers in these times

11 May **MORANDIR ARMSON**

"The Religion and Culture of the Vikings"

It is often stated that the ancient Norse religion was morbid, hopeless or cruel; a faith which promised happiness only to those who died in battle and left the rest of its people to face doom at Ragnarök, the final doom of gods and men. Yet, in reality, this view is far from complete. This presentation will focus on the more complex areas of Norse religion and culture, allowing a more nuanced picture of ancient Norse life and belief to be discerned.

18 May **COLIN WHATMOUGH**

~James Lovelock's Gaian Theory"

The Gaia hypothesis is "the first comprehensive, scientific expression of the ancient belief that the planet Earth itself, is in fact a living creature where its climate and surface environment are controlled by the plants, animals and the micro organisms that inhabit it" - a revolutionary concept.

25 May **REV. GEOFF USHER**

"The man Who Moved the World"

Nicolaus Copernicus challenged the wisdom of antiquity: he challenged the common sense of humankind, by proclaiming that the earth was not the centre of the universe, but that the earth is an ordinary planet that revolves around the sun. His attack shattered the grip of ancient dogma which had stifled scientific thought; his thinking was a turning point in human intellectual history.

"It is not true people stop pursuing dreams because they grow old, they grow old because they stop pursuing dreams." **Gabriel Garcia Marquez**

Barbara Gray, a "senior" member, and John Tendys, our web-person : nothing like a good natter with a friend. Do you need a member's phone number? Ask Geoff.



Four Ways of Knowing Reality

Geoffrey R Usher

(Sermon delivered at Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
on Sunday 23 February 2014)

1 *EXPERIENCING*

In the process of overcoming the dangers of their environment, early human beings acquired a great deal of knowledge about the world. This knowledge, derived from experience, was not acquired deliberately. It was not organised in orderly fashion. It was acquired because of the need to know.

The five senses - sight, sound, smell, taste, touch - sharpened by fear of dangers both seen and imagined, helped people to gain and to preserve experiences which were later organised in communal human memory-storehouses. Through sight, smell and taste they came to know which plants were pleasant to eat. Through practical results - survival or illness, or even death - they came to know which were safe or dangerous to eat. Through observation and experience, they also came to know the habits of animals, and which ones were good to eat, and how they could be caught and killed.

They observed the changes in weather and climate and the environment that came with the seasons and the passage of time. They became aware of the passage of time itself, and learned to use the day as a recurrent measure of time. The day can be divided into four parts: morning, afternoon, evening, night. There is, of course, always the question of just when a day starts. Does it start at midnight, when the date changes? Does it start at sunrise? Does it start at noon, as it does for mariners when the sun is at its zenith?

They came to see that the moon rotated around the earth every 28 days (or almost, but not quite, 28 days). And so 28 days, became a moon-month, divided into quarters which became weeks of 7 days.

They became aware of space and the world around them. They came to know the earth as a huge, uneven landscape covered with mountains and valleys, surrounded by water. They saw the sun and the moon and the stars suspended in the vaulted heavens, seeming to rotate around the earth. The sky was also where the wind and rain and other weather came from, and they came to believe that the heavenly bodies exerted a direct influence upon the events of their lives.

But they had no idea of the age or the vastness of the universe. However observant they were, they could not tell, from examining the heavens with the naked eye, that the sun was about 300,000 times more massive than the earth, and nearly 400 times further away than the moon.

Their survival depended upon careful observation of their local surroundings, and upon the development of the practical skills of hunting, fishing, gathering, growing, building. This practical experiential knowledge was gradually, gradually gathered, correlated, tested, organised, until eventually, the various sciences came into being: zoology, geography, astronomy, agriculture, physics, chemistry, . .

Ambrose Bierce declared that we give the name knowledge "to the small part of ignorance that we arrange and classify".

We are still in the process of gaining experience and expanding our knowledge.

2. UNDERSTANDING

Early people tried to understand the principles underlying and governing the world around them. They began to ask **why** things happened as they did. They began to seek the **reasons** for the many phenomena which they observed. Their senses helped them to make the observations, to gain the experiences; but their senses could not help in providing reasons. Reasons cannot be seen, touched, smelt or tasted.

They tried to correlate essential experiences and to draw conclusions from them or about them. They tried to **understand**.

They tried to reason out **why** things are as they are, and **why** creatures - animals, birds, other human beings - behave as they behave. Much seemed to be governed by fixed laws. Even if they could not clearly comprehend them, early people tried to find out those laws, to find out the principles governing things in nature. This attempt to understand or reason out the principles or laws of nature came to be called Philosophy, from the Greek meaning the study or the love of wisdom.

The need to **understand** as well as to **know** developed very early. Early people have now been given credit for being more than mere savages. They have been given credit for their perception, as well as their great and varied accumulation of experiential knowledge.

When primitive or early people began to grapple with the principles behind the reality of nature (however faultily, from our point of view) they were able to increase their knowledge and bring order into their life as a society.

Every living creature - from a flea to an elephant - possesses within itself the means of adapting to survive in a given environment. Sometimes the natural environment changes radically. Then, those living things will perish which cannot adapt themselves to meet the changed conditions - especially if they cannot adapt quickly enough.

The human brain, as an adaptive organ, is superior to that of other creatures, so that human beings have managed to survive catastrophic changes in climate, environment, floods, scarcity of food, and ravaging disease. Moreover, human beings have even been able to anticipate and prepare for some of the changes beyond the sort of instinct which leads some animals to hoard food supplies before winter sets in.

However, we do well to heed the warning of Jawaharlal Nehru: "It is well for us to realise that the great increase in knowledge in the world does not necessarily make us better or **wiser**. We must know how to use that knowledge properly before we can fully profit by it. We must know whither to go before we rush ahead in our powerful car. We must, that is, have some idea of what the aim and object of life should be. Vast numbers of people today have no such notion, and never worry themselves about it. They live in an age of science, but the ideas that govern them and their actions belong to ages long past. It is natural that difficulties and conflicts should arise. A clever monkey may learn to drive a car, but he is hardly a safe chauffeur."

3 BELIEVING

Understanding of the world grew, and to some extent satisfied the human quest to know the "what" and the "why" of things. However, certain puzzling questions gnawed at people and gave them no peace, because there were no clear or obvious answers.

There were - there are - no clear or obvious answers to questions such as:
- What had created the world?

- When?
- To whom did the earth belong?
- For whom was it created?
- Why were there so many different living things?
- Who had dominion over them?

Answers to such questions could not be found through observation, nor through reason. People could only **believe** the answers that seemed to suggest themselves, that seemed appropriate. They could only **believe** that there was some sort of purpose to life in general, and to their life in particular. They did not know, and could not prove, what that purpose was, but they concluded - from their observation of order, of cause and effect, in nature, - that it must exist. From this belief - that life had purpose in general, in which the individual was involved - arose the institution of religion. One etymological possibility is that the word "religion" comes from the Latin "religere" which means "to be involved".

4. CREATING

There is a fourth area in the experience of reality, in addition to experiencing, understanding and believing. **Creating** also goes back to the beginning of societal life, and is part of every human culture.

The experience of creating - of creativity - took many forms:

- It was expressed in sounds to convey a great variety of moods.
- It took shape - in clay, and stone images.
- It was conveyed through movement and dance.
- It found expression in the rhythmic patterns of language - used to express concepts and emotions.

Those different forms of expression were the arts, and the arts are closely related to religion. Early people - like most people today - could not meditate on abstractions for long. They - and we - clothed ideas in concrete symbols and surrounded them by rituals. Often, the more abstract the concept, the more concrete became the symbol, and the more concrete became the ritual and ceremony related to the symbol and embodying the idea.

In time, the concept or idea evolved and changed, although the ritual remained and continued to be practised. People have often accepted the ritual as traditionally practised, and have called it their religion.

In societies which we might call primitive or primal, religion has often been made concrete through a variety of images, often representing forces in nature. Each image was venerated for the specific blessings which it, presumably, could bestow; or it was feared for the punishment it could, presumably, inflict upon those who deviated from the behaviour prescribed by the elders and priests.

Early people did not have - nor could have - a clear idea of their place in the universe, although their mythology testifies that they often speculated about it. They came to believe that everything had been somehow created for their special use and benefit, even if the details of that benefit remained obscure. They had an anthropocentric concept of the world: the concept that humankind was the centre of the world, and that it was for humankind that everything had been created.

In spite of this anthropocentric concept of humankind at the centre of the world, the dominant feeling of early people seems to have been fear, rather than self-confidence. And the persistent search seems to have been for a sense of purpose in the crude cosmogony - picture of the world - which was developed.

Fear played a prominent role in the development and growth of the religions of all humanity. Fear of the unpredictable forces of nature: earthquakes, floods, droughts, hurricanes. Fear of illness, pestilence, the tribulations that so often afflict the elderly. Fear of death. Perhaps this was - is - the strongest fear, for people who could not accept death, and the idea of total individual and personal extinction.

However, we should not simply accept fear as the exclusive feeling responsible for the institution of religion. Fear - of the unknown, of the unpredictable, of death - certainly had, and has, a part in religion. But the main, dominant part in the creation and development of religion was, and is, the belief that life has some sort of purpose or meaning.

To live in accord with this belief, people everywhere have established codes of behaviour (and have dressed them in appropriate rituals and ceremonies) - codes which differ from one another in practice, although they are often similar in theory or principle, especially at their starting points. Commandments have been formulated, creeds have been adopted, ceremonies have been practised, to support and strengthen the believers in their dedication to their basic concepts of life's purpose.

The belief that life has purpose is the beginning and the essence of religion. This belief cannot be confirmed by the senses. It cannot be proved by reason. It can only be assumed by faith. Edwin Percy Whipple declared that knowledge, like religion, must be "experienced" in order to be known. And so we return to the first of our four ways of knowing reality":
experiencing.

We know reality by experiencing it; by understanding it; by believing it; and by creating it. We are part of it, and it is part of us. We are affected by it, and it is affected by us. It is expressed in these words by an unknown writer:

I have seen a mother at a crib,
So I know what love is.
I have looked into the eyes of a child,
So I know what faith is.
I have seen a rainbow,
So I know what beauty is.
I have felt the pounding of the sea,
So I know what power is.
I have planted a tree,
So I know what hope is.
I have heard a wild bird sing,
So I know what freedom is.
I have seen a chrysalis burst into life,
So I know what a mystery is.
I have lost a friend,
So I know what hell is.
I have seen a star-decked sky,
So I know what the infinite is.
I have seen and felt all these things,
So I know what God is.

I finish with Ben Downing's prayer, "Near and Far":

"O Thou who art nearer than we know, and yet further than we can name, we direct our thoughts for a moment away from ourselves, away from one another - away from all the "long littleness" in our lives.

We know Thee as a Presence haunting those who seek Thee, as a Spirit comforting those

who need something more than human love can give. We know Thee as a larger Power to which something in our lives belongs. We know Thee as eternal Heart which sustains all that is good, as an eternal Mercy which remembers the sick and the sad. We know Thee as an everlasting Love which forgives our weakness and ennobles our strength. We know Thee as a great Design in which our lives have a part to play. We know Thee as an Energy that moves mountains and as Force which paints a flower. We know Thee in the silence of the hills and the sighing of the wind. We know Thee in the surge of the sea, and in the solaces of hearth and home. We know Thee as the Beginning of all and as the End of everything.

O God bless our strivings, sanctify our search for higher meanings and better things. Give us thy Spirit's help, we beseech Thee, truly to learn the lessons of life."

(Based largely on "What the Great Religions Believe" by J Gaer)

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**Stress Management**

A young lady confidently walked around the room while leading a public address session and explaining stress management to an audience, holding a raised glass of water. Everyone knew she was going to ask the ultimate question, 'half empty or half full?'. She fooled them all .... "How heavy is this glass of water?" she inquired with a smile. Answers called out ranged from 8 oz. to 20 oz.

She replied , "The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long I hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance. In each case it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes." She continued, "and that's the way it is with stress. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won't be able to carry on."

"As with the glass of water, you have to put it down for a while and rest before holding it again. When we're refreshed, we can carry on

with the burden - holding stress longer and better each time practiced. So, as early in the evening as you can, put all your burdens down. Don't carry them through the evening and into the night... pick them up tomorrow, if you must.

1 \* Accept the fact that some days you're the pigeon, and some days you're the statue!

2 \* Always keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them.

3 \* Always read stuff that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.

4 \* Drive carefully... It's not only cars that can be recalled by their Maker.

5 \* If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.

6 \* If you lend someone \$20 and never see that person again, it was probably worth it.

7 \* It may be that your sole purpose in life is simply to serve as a warning to others.

8 \* Never buy a car you can't push.

9 \* Never put both feet in your mouth at the same time, because then you won't have a leg to stand on.

10 \* Nobody cares if you can't dance well. Just get up and dance.

11 \* Since it's the early worm that gets eaten by the bird, sleep late.

12 \* The second mouse gets the cheese.

13 \* When everything's coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.

14 \* Birthdays are good for you. The more you have, the longer you live.

16 \* Some mistakes are too much fun to make only once.

17 \* We could learn a lot from crayons. Some are sharp, some are pretty and some are dull. Some have weird names and all are

different colours, but they all have to live in the same box..

18 \* A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery on a detour.

19 \* Have an awesome day and know that someone has thought about you today.

AND MOST IMPORTANTLY

20 \*Save the earth..... It's the only planet with chocolate!

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Attending a wedding for the first time, a little girl whispered to her mother, 'Why is the bride dressed in white?'
The mother replied, 'Because white is the colour of happiness, and today is the happiest day of her life.'
The child thought about this for a moment then said, 'So why is the groom wearing black?'

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***A little girl, dressed in her Sunday best, was running as fast as she could, trying not to be late for Bible class. As she ran she prayed, 'Dear Lord, please don't let me be late! Dear Lord, please don't let me be late!'***  
***While she was running and praying, she tripped on a curb and fell, getting her clothes dirty and tearing her dress. She got up, brushed herself off, and started running again! As she ran she once again began to pray, 'Dear Lord, please don't let me be late...But please don't shove me either!'***

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Two boys were walking home from Sunday school after hearing a strong preaching on the devil. One said to the other, 'What do you think about all this Satan stuff?'
The other boy replied, 'Well, you know how Santa Claus turned out. It's probably just your Dad.'

Contributed by Ginna Hastings

Letter writing

The following is part of an article written by Caroline de Costa and posted on twitter by independent media, Crikey.

The grim prospects for pregnant asylum seekers on Nauru. Pregnant asylum seekers on Nauru live in appalling conditions without access to obstetric care. Professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at James Cook University Caroline de Costa says we're not fulfilling our duty of care.

(Omitted by editor: Dengue fever a risk for everyone)

The obstetric qualifications and experience of doctors employed by the International Health and Medical Services group in some detention facilities in Australia itself were inadequate when I inspected them in December last year; it seems unlikely that there is an experienced obstetric doctor available to the women on Nauru.

The single (military) doctor remaining from the now-axed Independent Immigration Health Advisory Group and now charged with overseeing healthcare for pregnant women has no obstetric qualifications. Who then is assessing the health of pregnant women currently on Nauru and making decisions about when they should be transferred to Australia for care?

I have not been on Nauru recently, but I worked there in 2003, operating in the Nauru hospital and consulting also in the asylum seeker camp. There was no blood bank on the island then and there is not one now. Nauruans who need blood transfusions must find relatives willing to donate blood on the spot. While most Nauruans have extended families able to do this, asylum seekers do not. Haemorrhage is the most common cause of pregnancy- and childbirth-related death in the world, yet if a pregnant asylum seeker on the island develops this complication the most basic facilities for her care are lacking.

Women are being transferred to Australia late in pregnancy; recently a woman at 31

weeks of pregnancy with premature rupture of the membranes was flown to Brisbane from Nauru — an odyssey likely to have taken at least 15 hours from decision to arrival at the Brisbane hospital.

Once a woman has given birth in Australia she is told that, along with her baby, she will be sent back to Nauru at any time. In the case of Christmas Island this happens when the child is four weeks old (for Nauru the age has yet to be determined, and babies are for the time being remaining in Australia for about five weeks).

Conditions in the Nauru detention camp are hot and overcrowded, with mothers and children accommodated in tents. This is a very unsuitable environment for children, who are generally more susceptible than adults to all sorts of infections, including many serious tropical conditions such as dengue. It is even more unsuitable for newborns. The mortality rate for Nauru for infants under one year is 30 per 1000 live births, more than six times that of Australia (4.66 per 1000, according to UN Population Division figures).

The most overwhelming health threat for pregnant women on Nauru, however, is the sense of hopelessness and helplessness that comes from being detained indefinitely on the 21st-century Australian version of Devil's Island, thousands of kilometres from any centre where life is being lived normally. In the Darwin detention facilities last December I met many women who were clearly depressed, both before and after giving birth. The chances of women returning to Nauru with new babies developing postnatal depression will be very high — with apparently no care available for them.

Rest of article :

<http://www.crikey.com.au/2014/04/29/the-grim-prospects-for-pregnant-asylum-seekers-on-nauru/>

Writing your response to your own federal representative might prove most useful. You could send a copy to:

The Hon. Scott Morrison MP, Electoral Office, PO Box 1306, Cronulla, NSW, 2230
Parliament Office, PO Box 6022, House of Representatives
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship?

Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter. *Full membership \$50 concession \$20* . If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring **0466 940 461** or consult our website www.sydneyunitarians.org . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher or Ginna Hastings for an application form at the Sunday service.

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 Esprit.

It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month: jtendys@bigpond.com or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

Do you have a topic of a spiritual / ethical 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. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service*

Fellowship contact 0466 940 461