



Schedule of Services

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

7 Sept. Christy Potter

"The Happiness Trap",

Christy Potter is a child and family therapist. She will describe the theories of therapy introduced by Dr. Russ Harris and Bev Aisbett. This talk will be followed by interactive discussion.

14 Sept. Morandir Armson

"The Plight of the Yazidi"



The Yazidi practice a syncretic religion that combines Shi'i and Sufi Islam, with various indigenous folk traditions, beliefs and practices. These traditions include elements shared with the Christian and Mandaean communities of the Near East, as well as more ancient religions such as Zoroastrianism. The Yazidi have been persecuted on religious grounds, by the Ottoman Empire, by Saddam Hussein, and most recently by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. This presentation will seek to describe the Yazidi, and look at their history of persecution and massacre, seeking an answer to the question; why are the Yazidi sometimes hated by their neighbours?

(Left: Yazidi man in traditional clothing)

21 Sept. Helen Whatmough

"Water, in Earth's History and Human History"

'Earth is water's creation'; the place of water in human history; how water is perceived in today's world.

28 Sept. Martin Horlacher

"Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind"

In one of the greatest graphic novels ever written, Hayao Miyazaki explored not only environmental concerns, but also the notion of free will and the very meaning of life. What can we, in our own technologically advanced yet morally troubled modern age, learn from this brilliant piece of literature?

Readings Selected by Ginna Hastings continued.

Final Reading

Radical fundamentalism casts human existence as an epic, ongoing, still-undecided battle between the forces of good and evil, of the divine versus the demonic. This is the most primitive human myth of all, and the most powerful. Wherever humanity has walked, wherever it has gathered to hear fables at firesides or offer ritual around altars, good versus evil is the story at its most elemental and descriptive.

We UUs do not have the “easy” solution of a theology that blames all evil on the workings of some devil. But many of us have witnessed unspeakable human acts that can only be described as evil: in Auschwitz, Cambodia, Dresden, Rwanda and in the barbarity of biological germ warfare. Some formalists would argue that the very existence of evil in the world would seem to negate our humanist valuing of dignity and worth in every person, expressed in the first Principle of Unitarian Universalism. But it seems to me that just the opposite is true. Our cherishing that Principle leads us to live by a view of human nature that is antithetical to radical fundamentalism.

The witness and mission of liberal religions have always been to seek the liberation of the human spirit—in the words of the hymn, from “the bonds of narrow thought and lifeless creed.” We stand willing to testify for a religious approach grounded in human possibility rather than pathology. Our starting place is the exaltation of the human spirit, rather than its denigration.

People are almost equally capable of both good and evil, but most of the time—say, three times out of five—people choose the good. The seesaw tilts just a few degrees towards the good in this tentative world, but those few degrees are the difference between peace and Armageddon. The job of the church is to put the few stubborn ounces of our weight on the side of goodness, and press down for all we're worth.

***Patrick O'Neill, minister of First Unitarian
Congregational society of Brooklyn, NY***

Herman Melville's Quarrel with God

Dr. Max Lawson

Herman Melville (a wayward Unitarian) was obsessed with religious and metaphysical problems: How could a benevolent God be reconciled with the forces of evil in the world? Why do the demands of Law often clash with the claims of justice? These “quarrels with God” are respectively the driving power behind Melville's novels: Moby Dick and Billy Budd.

“The trouble with Herman Melville,” said his friend and fellow novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne (to whom Moby Dick is dedicated), “is that Melville does not believe, but neither does he quite disbelieve.” This seems to me to be a good definition of Unitarianism – agnosticism with footnotes.

Actually Melville was a Unitarian of sorts himself. According to Melville's leading biographer, Melville became a Unitarian at the age of 31 to please his devoutly Unitarian wife. Later in life, when the Melville family moved to New York, Melville became a member of the prominent All Soul's Unitarian Church on Fourth Avenue, being recorded as a member in 1883. The All Soul's minister conducted his funeral service, and he had been married in a Unitarian ceremony.

Late in life, according to surviving family members, he was an irregular church attendee, but for most of his life he was obsessed with religion's problems particularly the benevolence or otherwise of God, the problem of evil and the clash between law and justice.

These heavy issues, combined with Melville's gloomy pessimism, put him at variance with mainstream Unitarianism. Indeed Melville could not stand Emerson's optimism - “Hitch your wagon to a star” mentality - and called Emerson America's leading Confidence Man. (Melville wrote the novel The Confidence Man published in 1857). Melville owned the three-volume edition of Emerson's essays and wrote angry annotations, one saying in effect, “God help the soul who believes this.”

(I like the comment in his annotated New Testament when Melville notes “Jesus is

being ironical here.” A considerable part of his annotated library survives which keeps Melville scholars busy.)

So Melville is a strange kind of Unitarian. (I think it better to consider him a nominal one.) Nineteenth Century Unitarians believed in a benevolent God. They would have looked askance at Thomas Hardy's viewpoint that there is a God, but He is indifferent. (In Hardy's novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles Hardy ends by saying, "The President of the Immortals has finished his sport with Tess.") Melville, at least in Moby Dick, seems to ratchet up Hardy's claim that God is indifferent; God is now seen as malevolent. No wonder Melville wrote to Hawthorne saying, "I have written a very wicked book," but added, "I feel it like a spotless lamb".

In 1851 at its first publication, a French reviewer said that, "the only reason Captain Ahab wants to harpoon the whale Moby Dick is that Ahab cannot harpoon God."

The white whale for Ahab paradoxically represents evil. The allegorical nature of the novel Moby Dick is omnipresent.

Ahab is a man possessed – this white monster scarred his face, ripped off a leg, and rendered him impotent. The whale was his nemesis and now Ahab seeks revenge at all costs.

In a masterly chapter, Ahab uses all the tricks of demagoguery to convert his crew into this monomaniacal drive to take revenge on the scapegoat, (so to speak), the White Whale.

The crew were to split the profits in varying portions of the catch of the many whales they would normally be expected to catch, but Ahab mesmerized the crew, converting them to his mad mission by his brilliant demagoguery only to end with the death of all the crew, save one, Ishmael, who survives by clinging to a life-float, which had been converted from a coffin – life in death.

The monomaniacal search for revenge, the conversion of the crew eerily parallels Hitler's demagoguery: "Versailles must be avenged," scapegoating the Jews and the ultimate collapse and ruin of Germany. At first Ahab can be seen as an attractive anti-hero like Heathcliff, cruelly treated, but later the obsessive quest for revenge by both Heathcliff and Ahab alienates the reader's sympathy.

Ahab, like Heathcliff, was an orphan. Ahab's mother was so crazed before she died that she named her son Ahab. 1 Kings 16-33 recalls the story of Ahab, "the king of Israel who did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than any other king of Israel". When Ahab was killed, like the fate of his notorious wife Jezebel, "the dogs licked up their blood."

The orphan Ahab was brought up with a Quaker, but Ahab became a lapsed Quaker seeing not the inner light in every person but the inner darkness.

Who is Ahab? The tension builds up – we hear a lot about him – but he does not appear till a quarter of the way through the novel, coming aboard his ship in the dead of night, just before Christmas Day dawns. No celebration here, though because light is dark, white is black.

The first description of Ahab is chilling: "He looked like a man cut away from the stake when the fire had wasted all the limbs without consuming them."

Continuing in this vein, Melville describes a long scar that runs down the side of Ahab's face, resulting from the tail lash of the whale, & concludes by commenting "Moody, stricken Ahab with a crucifixion in his face."

It is Ahab's intense suffering both physical and mental that Melville depicts so movingly. Melville himself, despite his pessimism, had great pity for those who suffer. Melville made strident pleas in White Jacker, one of his sea-faring novels, against flogging on ships, and his poetry collection Battle-Pieces (1869) reflected his anguish over the U.S. Civil War.

So initially like Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights Melville wants us to sympathize with Ahab. (Moby Dick, by the way, was written five years after Wuthering Heights.)

Although Melville initially wants us to sympathize with Ahab, Melville makes it abundantly clear that Ahab is responsible for his own doom and that of his crew.

Melville emphasizes also, however, that Ahab is magnificent in his defiance against the white whale, evil and God.

Although Ahab starts out, as an early critic Lewin Mumford points out, as a man battling against Evil, symbolized by the White Whale, Ahab becomes the image of the thing he hates.

Ahab becomes evil. (I am reminded of a novel by Eli Weisel – himself once a concentration camp inmate – who has one of his fictional characters become a renowned and successful Nazi hunter. One day he looks in the mirror and realizes he has become a Nazi himself.)

That Ahab has become the very evil he is chasing is evident from the following account (by which time most readers' sympathy for Ahab has evaporated):

Ahab tempers one point of his harpoon with the blood of his mysterious five Marilia oarsman he keeps below deck, and baptizing in blood, not water, Ahab blasphemously baptizes not in the name of the Father but of the Devil.

To conclude our discussion of Moby Dick we must bear in mind that the novel functions at two levels: a sea-story adventure (like his early commercially successful novels) and also as an allegorical novel. Moby Dick only sold some 3,700 copies in his lifetime, far less than his earlier novels – perhaps readers do not care for allegories – but academics certainly do and as you might expect there are a multiplicity of interpretations of Moby Dick.

Naturally enough religious interpretations come to the fore. Nathalia Wright in her book Melville's Use of the Bible counts some 650 references by Melville to the Bible, two-thirds of them coming from the Old Testament.

Inevitably Jonah comes up for discussion when Moby Dick is concerned. So a common interpretation by Melville scholars was about Moby Dick reinforcing the central teachings of Christian doctrine, particularly the doctrine of acceptance. Melville had deliberately arranged a contrast between Jonah's ultimate obedience to God, and Ahab's ultimate defiance of God. **Look at Job and Ahab's respective fates, and you have a Christian parable.**

But many readers of Moby Dick feel uneasy with this common interpretation of the novel because of the ironical or even caustic tone of the writing - which is the thesis of Lawrence Thompson's 1953 study entitled Melville's Quarrel with God, hence the name given to this talk.

Even more contentious than Moby Dick is Billy Budd (Published in 1924,

some 23 years after Melville's death.) For many readers of Billy Budd the plot of the novel is "painful, even repellent."

Billy Budd is impressed to serve on a ship, ironically called "The Rights of Man" and is taken off this ship to serve on "The Indomitable" under Captain de Vere. Budd has a speech impediment and when accused of mutinous behaviour strikes the accuser dead accidentally, in front of the Captain. Although the Captain knows Budd is innocent of murder, he is immediately summoned to "a drum court" and under the captain's manipulation the court condemns Budd to death and he is hanged the next morning.

De Vere's reasoning is this – military law must be obeyed. Killing an officer is a capital crime; England is at war with France; crew-members had been impressed on board like Budd, while other crew-members may have been involved in mutinies at Nore and Spithead.

To preserve the Law, the State, Budd must hang; otherwise there may be mutiny on board the ship in time of war. Eerily, just like with the Hitler/Ahab comparison, we can compare totally innocent people being killed in anti-terrorist laws to protect the state.

There is a lot of comparison with Christ in this Billy Budd story – both innocent victims who suffered undeservedly. Billy Budd's painful, unsuccessful efforts to speak, Melville tells us, "were a crucifixion to behold" (recalling Christ's silence at his trial.)

So again in Billy Budd, just like Moby Dick, we have a sea story, which also is an allegory. In the case of Billy Budd, the allegory is the disjunction between law and justice.

Also found in the same breadbox as the manuscript of Billy Budd, was the manuscript of a brief character sketch of Daniel Orme. (Or me?) On Easter Day, Daniel dies, "and on his chest is a crucifix tattooed, and a battle scar over his heart." As for his face, his eyes, even at death, are looking out to sea, symbol of eternal recurrence.

It is tempting to think that this last sketch is autobiographical and that Herman Melville at last did find acceptance, resignation, and peace.

Was Melville's quarrel with God at last over? We can argue that the spiritual agony

of the author reinforces the haunting, animating power of his novels, but was it bought at too high a price? Even in an early novel, *Mardi*, Melville posed the question "Why does God create men to suffer and die?"

It was about such questions that when Melville met Hawthorne (in Liverpool in 1856) Melville began to reason, said Hawthorne, as he always does, of "everything beyond human ken."

There are hints, but not to be overstressed, that Melville did find some measure, if not acceptance at least, of resignation. For his last novel *Billy Budd*, Melville does posit in F.O. Matthiessen's words, "the fundamental ambiguity of life, the co-existence of good and evil."

(Emphases in above article by the editor.)

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### **The Moon Flower**

I know a valley-- through its solitude  
A brown road winds towards a mountain crest;  
There gnarly ti-trees dripping sweetness rest,  
And grasses bend, too heavily bedewed.  
In that still valley by the still lagoon,  
A ruined homestead for her secret shrine,  
Dwells Beauty's self, half-earthly, half-devine--  
Thrilling, I saw her waken to the moon.  
In peaks of emerald the cactus crept,  
And there o'er rafters falling to decay,  
A miracle of flowers, spray on spray,  
Burst into perfect life while nature slept.  
First a slim silver riband from the sky  
Uncurled green fronds from each imprisoned  
bud,  
Then, one by one, bathed in the beaming  
flood,

Like ghost-notes in a spirit litany.

They blossomed out before my eyes,  
Great chalices of snow filled up with light;  
Set in the mystic radiance of night  
They seemed a vision from immortal skies.

Hidden in shadow near the still lagoon

Nightly I worship at a secret shrine,

There on a ruin-- lily-white, devine,

Is beauty lying naked to the moon!

**Lala Fisher.(1872—1925)**

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The Mallee

Her spell enfolds us. We can never thrust
Aside the bonds which hold to us the grey,
Wind haunted mallee; Satyr-like she may
Crush out the blood of life to slake the lust
That burns within her. Circe-wise she must
Fling curses where her lovers kneel to pray,
And souls that worshipped her in youth's glad
day
Are hurled before her in bitter dust.
In vain we leave her in our goading fear
To bathe where Lethe's darkling waters flow,
'Twere idle boast to say we could forget.
Her lone wind-music calls, and ever near
Her grim, stark beauty haunts us till we know
In sudden wonder that she claims us yet.

Alice M. Lapthorne.

China to reach 'peak coal' for electricity by 2015

Ross Garnaut

China's use of coal for electricity could peak as early as next year, then decline until 2020 in a turnaround of "global importance", according to economist Ross Garnaut in a lecture presented at the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, University of Melbourne.

The shift means the world has a much better chance of keeping global warming below 2 degrees C — the internationally-agreed guardrail against dangerous climate change.

Slowing economic growth, increasing energy efficiency and growth in low-carbon electricity sources are driving the trend.

The Chinese economy grew strongly between 2000 and 2011 by 11% each year, but has slowed to around 7% each year since. Combined with increasing energy efficiency, this is driving down growth in energy demand — to around 4% each year.

At the same time, low-emissions electricity sources — hydro, wind, nuclear, solar and gas — have grown strongly, by around 4% each year. Because these sources are cheaper to use than coal, this has led to a "dramatic decoupling" of coal from economic growth, said Garnaut.

Solar energy has recorded the fastest growth since 2010 — generation capacity of solar increased by over 140% between 2012 and 2013. But solar is difficult to predict, and Garnaut expects growth to slow up to 2020. Even so, low-carbon sources will continue to grow strongly until 2020.

Wind power grew by nearly 40% between 2012 and 2013, and is forecast to grow by 18% each year until 2020. Over the same period nuclear grew by 14% and hydro by nearly 5%, and both are expected to grow at similar rates each year until 2020.

Gas was more difficult to predict, due to uncertainty over domestic gas finds, but is forecast

to grow by 25% each year.

"Non-coal sources of energy account for virtually all the growth in electricity demand," Garnaut said.

While Garnaut based his "conservative" projections on the electricity sector, he said he would not be surprised to see total carbon emissions in China peak by 2020. "It makes it possible to think realistically about the world reaching a 2C target."

The rest of this "The Conversation" article can be read here:

<http://theconversation.com/ross-garnaut-china-to-reach-peak-coal-for-electricity-by-2015-30868>

(China is building both renewables and nuclear as fast as possible. Visible pollution from fossil fuels has been something of a wake-up call, but the danger of invisible greenhouse gases are also part of China's motivation. **Jan Tendys**)

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## **It goes against the grain to believe this but....**

Here are 10 reasons that fair-trade coffee doesn't do the amount of good you would expect:

**1. The flawed design of the system undermines its own benefits.** Recent research by development economists Alain de Janvry and Betty Sadoulet at U.C. Berkeley and Craig McIntosh at U.C. San Diego shows that when the world price of coffee falls (and the advantages of selling through fair-trade channels increase), more borrowers choose to obtain fair-trade certification. But this reduces the fraction of coffee that their cooperatives can sell at the fair-trade price. What they found after examining 13 years of data from cooperatives in Guatemala is that, on average, the economic benefits of participating in the fair-trade system are offset by the price the growers have to pay for fair-trade certification. In other words, they found that the long-

term benefit over time from fair trade to be essentially zero.

**2. Fair trade attracts bad beans.** Every crop contains some beans that are of higher quality than others. If the market price for the low-quality beans is below \$1.40 and the market price of high-quality beans is above \$1.40, then the fair-trade system incentivizes growers to dump their bad beans into fair-trade channels. As economists will lecture to you unceasingly, incentives matter. As the bad beans are drawn into the fair-trade market (what economics calls "adverse selection"), potential buyers eschew buying the coffee for fear of being stuck with the low-quality beans. This phenomenon has limited the market for fair-trade coffee.

**3. Fair trade imposes significant costs on impoverished growers.** The University of California study estimates that fair-trade certification costs about \$0.03 per pound. This doesn't sound like much, but in some years it is greater than any price benefit brought by the higher fair-trade price. Moreover, while restrictions on growing practices might seem to meet worthy environmental and social objectives, University of Wisconsin economist Brad Barham and colleagues find that costs to growers imposed by these restrictions on fertilizers and other inputs add to the production costs of impoverished growers, diminish yields, and mitigate the benefits of free trade. If coffee drinkers want to improve the environment, they should pay for it themselves, not impose added costs on impoverished coffee growers.

**4. Fair trade doesn't help the poorest growers.** In a recent study in Costa Rica, economists Raluca Dragusanu and Nathan Nunn at Harvard University found the modest benefits generated from fair trade to be concentrated among the most skilled coffee growers. They find no positive impact on coffee laborers, no positive impact on children's education, and negative impacts on the education of unskilled coffee workers' children. In contrast, the "impact reports" created by Fair Trade USA, which are available on their home page, are a series of documents that merely describe the nature and scope of the fair-trade programs for various commodities.

These reports fail to demonstrate any positive impact of the program by any credible scientific standard of impact evaluation.

**5. Relatively little fair-trade coffee originates from the poorest countries.** The poorest coffee-growing countries are in Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania. Fair-trade exports from these countries represent less than 10 percent of coffee marketed through fair trade, while the share of fair-trade coffee from middle-income countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and Columbia is many times higher. Effective poverty interventions should be targeted at most poor, not the medium-poor.

**6. Purported benefits of the fair-trade system lack transparency.** Although fair trade pays a \$0.20 premium over the world coffee price to growers for "social and economic investments at the community and organizational level," how this money is actually spent in the home country is vague at best. In an article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, California State University economist Colleen Haight finds that many of these funds are invested in coffee cooperatives' buildings and salaries, not in schools, which may explain why researchers fail to uncover positive impacts from fair trade on local education.

**7. The fair-trade system is inefficient at transferring coffee consumers' goodwill to producers.** In an experiment run by my graduate students in San Francisco (described in *The Taste of Many Mountains*), we found that the median coffee drinker is -- amazingly -- willing to pay a premium of 50 cents for a cup of fair-trade coffee. However, we find that even in the best-case scenario for fair trade, when world prices are at their lowest, the maximum amount a fair-trade grower from that same cup of coffee would receive is only one third of a cent.

**8. Direct trade is probably more efficient and sustainable than fair trade.** Under direct trade, a coffee buyer contracts directly with specific growers overseas to offer a higher coffee price, often in exchange for a higher-quality product and a long-term relationship.

Although direct trade is certainly not a panacea, more real value is created in the system, making it an arguably more efficient means of transmitting resources from coffee drinkers to coffee growers.

**9. We should encourage less coffee production, not more.** Efforts to help coffee growers by paying them more for their coffee all stimulate more coffee production, which is precisely the wrong way to help coffee growers. It is *lower* worldwide coffee production that brings the most benefit to each grower, by raising coffee prices. Thus the best approaches to helping coffee growers involve helping people move away from coffee production. Interventions in coffee communities like microfinance, cash grants to start new enterprises, and internationally sponsoring the children of coffee growers to help these children obtain more and better education help coffee growers worldwide because they reduce the world supply of coffee. This benefits everyone, because as coffee growers and their children move to other occupations, all producers in the world benefit from higher coffee prices. Artificially stimulating more coffee production keeps coffee growers poor.

**10. Fair-trade coffee fails to address the root of poverty issues.** Core poverty issues in developing countries suggest thoughtful, strategic interventions in areas such as health, education, infrastructure, entrepreneurial activity, and governance. If these core issues can be [effectively addressed](#), a new array of occupational choices will open to the poor, allowing them to lift themselves out of rural poverty. Instead of providing credible evidence of impact in any of these key areas, fair-trade coffee incentivizes production of more coffee (see #9).

***By Bruce Wydick, Professor of economics and international studies USFCA; author, 'The Taste of Many Mountains' . You may read the whole of this Huffington Post article at:***

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-wydick/10-reasons-fair-trade-coffee-doesnt-work\\_b\\_5651663.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=tw](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-wydick/10-reasons-fair-trade-coffee-doesnt-work_b_5651663.html?utm_hp_ref=tw)

***(Just think of all the church groups buying Fair Trade coffee! Your editor can't help wondering if the above is a full account of the situation and would be interested to hear from our readers).***

### **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.sydneynunitarians.org](http://www.sydneynunitarians.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](mailto: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**