



**Spirit of Life** Unitarian Fellowship  
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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

<b>2 October</b>	<b>Jan Tendys</b>	<b>“Naivety”</b>
<p>We can easily raise the question : “Was Bertrand Russell naïve?” Dare we raise the question “Was Jesus naïve?” This will be a Views from the Pews.</p>		
<b>9 October</b>	<b>Candace Parks</b>	<b>“Flower Communion”</b>
<p>Please bring a flower to celebrate this ritual to symbolise the diversity, freedom and tolerance of Unitarianism. Hopefully there will be a few extra to allow for visitors.</p>		
<b>16 October</b>	<b>Rev. Geoff Usher</b>	<b>“Looking on the Bright Side”</b>
<p>All of us have to cope with problems and trials that come to everyone at different times and in different ways. We can respond with optimism or pessimism. Are you able to look on the bright side?</p>		
<b>23 October</b>	<b>Ross McLuckie</b>	<b>“Happiness”</b>
<p>We all want it. So let’s look at some clues.</p>		
<b>30 October</b>	<b>Candace Parks</b>	<b>“More and More”</b>
<p>We have discussed how Unitarian Universalism could fail to fulfil its religious promise and thus continue to become less and less. Now let's look at how our faith can reverse the trend and become "more and more".</p>		
<b>6 November</b>	<b>Dr Andrew Usher</b>	<b>“Spoons”</b>
<b>13 November</b>	<b>Janine Matthews</b>	<b>“The Power of Hope”</b>
<b>20 November</b>	<b>Eric Stevenson</b>	<b>“Hoping My Way to Meaning”</b>
<b>27 November</b>	<b>Colin Whatmough</b>	<b>To be announced.</b>

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**Registrations needed NOW for the “Heads, Hearts and Hands” Conference with Margaret Mayman and Val Webb October 21/22** Ring Eric 02-9888 5361

# Bertrand Russell

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Bertrand Russell (May 18, 1872-February 2, 1970), philosopher, mathematician, and political activist, was a prolific and controversial writer on an extraordinary range of topics, including education, social science, politics, ethics, and religion. Because of his "philosophical works . . . of service to moral civilization," he was awarded the 1950 Nobel Prize for literature. While he left no school of disciples and he himself eventually discarded nearly all of his own philosophical ideas, his methodology has furnished a framework for much modern philosophical thought. "Russell taught us not to think his thoughts," said philosopher Gilbert Ryle, "but how to move in our own philosophical thinking."

Russell's parents, Viscount John and Viscountess Kate Amberley, advocates of woman's rights and independent thinkers in matters of morality and religion, both died when he was quite young. At the age of three Bertie was turned over to his grandparents, Lord John and Lady Frances Russell. Lord John died two years later, so Bertie was reared by his grandmother. Lady Russell brought up her grandson in a Spartan manner with a sense of human sinfulness and the misery of mortal life. When she gave Bertie a Bible she inscribed it with the text, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." They attended the Anglican church and the Presbyterian chapel on alternate Sundays. Bertie was taught Unitarian ideas at home. When the Unitarian Christian Church in Richmond was founded, he signed the membership register. Although in his Autobiography Russell wrote that he believed in the doctrines of Unitarianism until he was about fifteen, he attended the church as late as his eighteenth birthday.

**During his late teens Russell systematically investigated his Christian beliefs, abandoning in succession free will, immortality, and the existence of God. In his studies at Cambridge, 1890-94, and in his**

subsequent work, he sought security and consolation in mathematics and philosophy. At the International Congress of Philosophy in 1900, Russell met Italian mathematician Giuseppe Peano, who had succeeded in reducing all arithmetic to a logical system based upon five axioms. Russell wished to extend Peano's work, basing all mathematics upon an even smaller number of basic assumptions. His subsequent elaboration of this project, in discussion with his friend and former teacher Alfred North Whitehead, was, as he described it, intellectually "the highest point in my life."

Russell's new approach to mathematical foundations, however, generated a paradox which reduced him to "intellectual sorrow." In order to evade this paradox Russell had to compromise the planned simplicity of his mathematical foundation. When completed, Principia Mathematica, written with Whitehead, was much more complicated than they had first envisioned. It later became apparent that the project was, mathematically speaking, a failure. In 1931 Czechoslovakian mathematician Kurt Gödel published a critique of the Principia proving that Russell's plan to reduce mathematics to pure logic was unsuccessful and demonstrating that all axiomatic mathematical systems are either incomplete or inconsistent.

Meanwhile, under the influence of his student Ludwig Wittgenstein, who saw mathematics as a set of tautologies, Russell feared that "to a mind of sufficient intellectual power, the whole of mathematics would appear trivial, as trivial as the statement that a four-footed animal is an animal." Therefore, he complained, "I cannot any longer find any mystical satisfaction in the contemplation of mathematical truth."

Although Principia Mathematica did not become the foundation of mathematics, it was a seminal work in philosophy. Many borrowed Russell's techniques, such as testing theories with thought experiments using difficult cases. Russell himself applied his methods to metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Over the years he adopted, tested, and later dropped a succession of philosophies, including logical atomism and neutral mo-

nism. According to logical atomism the world is made up of indivisible units or facts which combine sense data and some logical statement about them. Russell developed neutral monism using the work of William James. In this he categorized mind and matter as being of the same essence, but interpreted differently by the senses. Whatever the virtues of any of these theories, Russell could not maintain them once they were shown to apply partially rather than completely. As a result he initiated no specific school of thought. Nevertheless he is numbered among the founders of modern analytic philosophy.

On the other hand, his collaborator Whitehead, having moved in a different philosophical direction, developed process metaphysics. Lecturing at Harvard, Whitehead told his classes, "Bertie Russell says I am muddleheaded. Well, I say he is simple-minded."

Russell's ethical philosophy also passed through several stages of evolution. According to his 1910 paper "Elements of Ethics," based on G. E. Moore's Principia Ethica, a person discovers what is good by direct intuition. Like his grandmother, Russell believed that one should obey one's conscience. After George Santayana mocked his views, Russell changed his mind and decided that ethics were subjective. This stance did not survive the experience of World War II and the Holocaust. Finally, in Human Society in Ethics and Politics, 1954, he tried to reintroduce objectivity by judging actions by their consequences.

As a moralist Russell never found any final theoretical grounding, though he is remembered for his courageous political stands. Because of the honour accorded to his social position and the fame of the Principia Mathematica and his other philosophical work, Russell was able to command public attention. Stands he took were often unpopular and sometimes illegal. He accepted his punishment in the spirit of non-violent protest.

At the turn of the 20th century, Russell's political life was given its impetus, not by his philosophy, but by a mystical vision. He had come across Whitehead's wife, Evelyn, in the midst of severe pain. "She seemed cut off from everyone and everything by walls of agony, and the sense of the solitude of each

human soul suddenly overwhelmed me," he recalled. "Suddenly the ground seemed to give way beneath me, and I found myself in quite another region." All emotional assurance he had known before seemed superficial. The only thing that could penetrate such human isolation, he concluded, was "the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached." Also, "whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless." From this it followed that war is evil and "the use of force is to be deprecated."

For his opposition to World War I Russell was first fined, then imprisoned. He believed the war was motivated by national pride and that submission to German might would be a lesser evil than a world war. Later, he came to support the fight against the Nazis in World War II, however, because he found them "utterly revolting—cruel, bigoted, and stupid." After the dropping of the first atom bomb, he realized the danger posed by nuclear weapons and rose in the House of Lords to warn of the danger. So concerned was he about nuclear proliferation that he briefly urged the United States to use its military advantage to coerce Russia into abandoning the arms race. His 1954 radio broadcast "Man's Peril" led to the Russell-Einstein statement of concerned scientists and the beginning of organized popular resistance to development of nuclear weapons. He was sentenced to prison in 1961, at the age of 89, for civil disobedience at a demonstration for nuclear disarmament. During his last years he was an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War, accusing America of war crimes and atrocities in Southeast Asia.

During the 1940s Russell's views on marriage and sexual morality generated considerable controversy. A suit was brought which prevented his teaching at the City College of New York. In Marriage and Morals, 1929, he had argued against repressive attitudes towards sex. While he did not believe in acting upon uncontrolled impulses, he thought self-control ought not be an end in itself. Believing the intimacy of a good marriage did not preclude sexual relationships outside that bond, he advocated what was later called "open marriage." In the brief against him in the City College case, his works were characterized as being

"lecherous, libidinous, lustful, venerous, erotomaniac, aphrodisiac, irreverent, narrow-minded, untruthful, and bereft of moral fibre."

Unemployed as a result of the verdict and stranded in America because of the war, Russell accepted a lectureship at a private foundation. The result was his best known book, A History of Western Philosophy, 1945. Alan Ryan, a biographer of Russell, while conceding that the History "too often seems casual, unfair and prejudiced, and too ready to shade the truth for the sake of the bon mot," noted that Russell "wrote so well that he will always be the envy and the despair of other philosophers."

Russell was married four times: to Alys Pearsall Smith in 1894, Dora Black in 1921, Patricia Spence in 1936, and Edith Finch in 1952. The first three marriages ended in divorce. Especially during the years around World War I he had a series of extra-marital affairs. His daughter Katherine wrote, "His loves were as spectacular as fireworks and often as brief," and often afterwards left the woman "a burnt black shell." One such affair was with the unstable Vivienne Eliot, wife of his student and friend T.S. Eliot.

Eliot earlier had portrayed something of Russell's intellectual and sexual nature in the portrait poem "Mr. Apollinax" saying that "his dry and passionate talk devoured the afternoon" and "He laughed like an irresponsible foetus." Russell brought to Eliot's mind "Priapus in the shrubbery / Gaping at the lady in the swing." Later, Eliot made Russell the model for the fourth tempter in the play Murder in the Cathedral. Another student, mathematician Norbert Wiener, described Russell as a "philosophical rake," trying to chart a dangerous course in "a channel which is poorly lighted and poorly buoyed."

For many years Russell refrained from having children because his grandmother had warned him of a strain of madness in the family. Eventually he fathered three. Although he intended to be a kind father, he raised his children according to educational and behavioural standards as exacting in their own way as those inflicted on him by his grandmother. Nevertheless, at the end of her memoir, his daughter concluded, "He was the most fascinating man I have ever known, the only man I ever loved, the greatest man I shall ever meet, the wittiest, the gayest, the

most charming. It was a privilege to know him."

Russell's relationship with his daughter and her husband was troubled by their embrace of Christianity. Although he paid towards his son-in-law's seminary education, he could not agree with their theology. He thought of himself as an agnostic, and considered the probability of the existence of God very small. Russell thought all traditional religions untrue and harmful. Since the religions disagreed with each other, logic dictated that at most one could be correct. He thought that many specific doctrines were, in themselves, evil, and that faith in general encouraged people to believe things in the face of evidence to the contrary, thus discouraging coherent and independent thinking.

In his lecture "Why I Am Not a Christian" Russell explained that he did not believe in God and immortality, and that he did not consider Christ "the best and wisest of men." He thought that if there was any over-arching quality that might be called "good," it transcended any possible god as well, thus rendering the deity unnecessary. He thought the world so flawed that it did not do much honour to any god that might have created it. In fact he thought it at least as plausible that "this world that we know was made by the devil at a moment when God was not looking." The teachings of Jesus he divided into two categories, a few good and many others wrong-headed or cruel. Those he admired, such as "resist not evil," "judge not," and "give all to the poor," he found to be largely disregarded by professing Christians.

Although Russell detested traditional organized religion, he did not spurn the religious impulse. Through love and knowledge he sought to be "led upward to the heavens." And through pity for the suffering of humanity, he was brought back to service on earth. His daughter thought that "he was by temperament a profoundly religious man, the sort of passionate moralist who would have been a saint in a more believing age."

Article by **Wesley Hromatko** (who also wrote the Russells article in the Sept. Esprit)

(The article above was followed by a long of bibliographical list which can be accessed by going to the DUUB site. *JT*)

# Why was Russell so Influential?

*Jan Tendys*

I felt the need to add my thoughts towards explaining Bertrand Russell's great influence among the public at large and within Unitarianism and Humanism.

Russell gave a central emphasis in his own life not only to rationality but to love, compassion and public spiritedness.

His reputation did not rely on small achievements. Although Principia Mathematica did not achieve the goal that Russell and Whitehead had set themselves, it is still considered a very important step in the history of mathematics. It is also no small thing to have been co-founder of the analytic philosophical style, a continuing influence.

The depth of understanding, clarity of writing and humour of The History of Western Philosophy makes it still a great introduction to the subject. The judgements are Russell's of course and probably no-one will agree with all of them. Russell's tone could be irritatingly authoritative and he could be sharp in his dislikes, but few have been able to present the sweep from ancients to moderns as well as he did.

His book Marriage and Morals for which he was vilified, only presented liberal views on marriage, divorce, homosexuality and "trial marriages" (living together) that most of us take for granted today. Many of his readers agreed with his opinions on the whole. The secret of his influence was that most of the time what he said and wrote made good sense

Admittedly, he had a naive view of the possibility of free love (much more fraught with risk in my opinion than he realised). Incidentally, in the Wikipedia account of his life, which is compiled by various authors, it states that some "have suggested he had an affair with Vivienne Haigh-Wood, first wife of T.S.Eliot," leaving open the possibility that this may not be the case. For references see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand\\_Russell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand_Russell)

This utube offers a chance to see the man and his sense of humour in action: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OziPcicgmbw>

Russell was as aware of the difficulty of

taking a subjectivist position on ethics as he was of the difficulties of socialism. He could see the fallacies of Marxism as a theory and, unlike some of his circle, soon became disillusioned with the idea that Bolshevism would be good for the Russian people or anyone else. He was as free with his criticisms of the left as of the right, but yearned for democratic socialism.

His pacifism was admired more frequently than emulated. Russell was conscious of the difficulties of being a consistent pacifist. His solution seems to have been to respond to each war on its merits or lack of them. World War II he saw as justified, but not the Vietnam War. This passage from the Wikipedia account is of interest:

"In a speech in 1948, Russell said that if the USSR's aggression continued, it would be morally worse to go to war after the USSR possessed an atomic bomb than before it possessed one, because if the USSR had no bomb the West's victory would come more swiftly and with fewer casualties than if there were atom bombs on both sides. At that time, only the USA possessed an atomic bomb, and the USSR was pursuing an extremely aggressive policy towards the countries in Eastern Europe which it was absorbing into its sphere of influence. Many understood Russell's comments to mean that Russell approved of a first strike in a war with the USSR, including Lawson, who was present when Russell spoke. Others, including Griffin who obtained a transcript of the speech, have argued that he was merely explaining the usefulness of America's atomic arsenal in deterring the USSR from continuing its domination of Eastern Europe."

Always the activist, he became a leader of the ban-the-bomb movement and the marches associated with that.

His condemnation of the US and its allies in the Vietnam War was probably one-sided; it was a common failing at the time to see the Vietcong in too rosy a light.

As I have said, Russell could be naive. He admired Jesus for saying "Judge not that ye be not judged", "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." Perhaps the very fact that Christians do not always follow these rather sweeping commandments shows that Jesus, as recorded, could be naive too?

(Discussion needed!)

Certainly Russell himself made plenty of judgements about people, books and situations.

This summing up comes from the Columbia Encyclopedia: "Although he came to have misgivings about logical atomism and never assented to all the propositions of empiricism, he never ceased trying to base his thought - mathematical, philosophical, or ethical - not on vague principle but on actual experience. This can be seen in his pacifism as well as in his philosophy: he objected to specific wars in specific circumstances. So, in the circumstances preceding World War II he could abandon pacifism and, following the war, resume it.

Similarly, in ethics he described himself as a relativist. Good and evil he saw to be resolvable in (or constructed from) individual desires. He did distinguish, however, between what he called "personal" and "impersonal" desires, those founded mainly on self-interest and those formed regardless of self-interest. He admitted difficulties with this ethical stance, as well as with his logical atomism. As much as anything, his thought was characterized by a pervasive scepticism, toward his own thought as well as that of others".

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/>

## Riots—British or universal moral mess?

*Eric Stevenson*

Thanks, Jan\*. I agree with you. The fact that there was a significant number of locals who turned out to clean up the rubble after the riots is gratifying. **But the rubble was only symbolic of the moral mess they were helping to clean up, and their exemplary action a model for a non-violent response to having your territory invaded and your possessions trashed.**

**The real mess was that the trashers saw fit to use violence to counter the injustice of life in Great Britain.**

And what about the rest of the world? Wouldn't it have been wonderful on 9/11 if in order to prevent more moral mess the major response had been one of non violence? The fact is that regardless of the moral standing of

the world community, there will always be those who use and abuse the peace and freedom which is the fruit of good living. Yes the violence of the riots was sick, and there will also always be those who want to make an inappropriate vengeful and warlike response to such oppression (which is also sick). In order to prevent more mess, both need to be corrected and/or brought to justice.

**However, the moral health of society will only be preserved so long as we persist with standing on the side of love. Opportunities to do so are all around us. I see sticking up for boat people as an Australian example of helping to clean up the mess and of being a part of mess prevention.**

\*(Following last Esprit's article "UK Riots – one opinion", I invited readers to add their comments to mine which was given at the end of the article. *JT*)

## UK's Liberal Democratic leader wants to get away from mere punishment.

Nick Clegg will unveil a compassionate response to the riots in his keynote speech to Liberal Democrats on Wednesday by proposing that as many as 100,000 children at risk of going off the rails be offered a chance to attend two-week summer school prior to starting secondary studies. He will say the voluntary summer school can prevent children "falling through the cracks".

The £50m scheme will start next year, offering catch-up classes to help young people who he says have lost touch with their future. His response is markedly different to the punitive one offered by David Cameron in the immediate wake of the summer unrest. Rather than attacking a general collapse in morality, Clegg argues the generation that rioted appeared to have lost any stake in society. He was struck by the number of rioters who had nothing to lose. "It was about what they could get here and now, not what lies in front of them tomorrow and in the years ahead," he says. "Too many of those young people had simply fallen through the cracks,

not just this summer but many summers ago when they lost touch with their own future," Clegg will say at the close of the party's Birmingham conference.

*The above is the first part of "Nick Clegg keynote speech to propose summer school in response to riots," by Patrick Wintour, The Guardian, Wednesday 21 September 2011*

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**You are my Sunshine**

You are my sunshine, my lovely sunshine,  
In your great warmth I love to dance;  
You could supply us with all our energy  
If they would only give you a chance.

With conservation and solar energy  
And growing plants in a greenhouse dome  
We could establish new ways of living  
And truly make the Earth our good home.

**Contributed by Margaret Armstrong  
who is not sure where it came from.**

**The Hunter**

The hunter crouches in his blind  
Neath camouflage of every kind,  
And conjures up a quacking noise  
To lend allure to his decoys.  
This grown-up man, with pluck and luck  
Is hoping to outwit a duck.

**Ogden Nash**

**Another Margaret A. contribution.**

**Woman's Place**

From an 1884 sermon by J. Burgon  
Woman's strength lies in her essential  
weakness. She is at this hour what...the  
great Creator designed her to be—namely  
Man's help; not his rival but his help. Sheltered  
throughout her earlier years from all  
polluting influences... removed from the  
stifling atmosphere in which perforce the  
battle of life has to be fought out by the  
rougher sex, she is what she was intended  
to be, the one great solace of Man's life,  
his earthly joy.

**Yep, that sounds like Margaret! :-)**

**Children make a Difference**

*Jan Tendys*

We recently had some children among the visitors to our Fellowship. It is always delightful to see young faces.

However, if the family are able to come more frequently, some of us (myself included) will be on a steep learning curve with respect to the presentation of our talks.

We will have to find appropriate stories and other material for starters.

The picture below is entitled "Miss pretty in pink". And if that is not sufficiently PC for you, just imagine her growing up to have the competence as well as charm of Grandma Caz and Grandpa Peter.



### **Bits and Pieces.**

Many of the poems that have been printed in Esprit over the years have come from Panhala an on-line service which provides poetry and illustrative photos. If you want to subscribe use: [Panhala-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:Panhala-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

It was a pleasure to have the company of John Maindonald at our Fellowship on the occasion of the very able presentation of the life and significance of Rabindranath Tagore by Rev. Geoff Usher, with the added enjoyment of piano music played by Andrew Usher. John belongs to the **Canberra Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**. *They meet from 10:30 - 11:30am on the first and third Sunday of each month, at the ANU University Chaplaincy and would be glad to have visitors.* Check the schedule on the website:

<http://cuuf.wordpress.com/>

Coming up very soon is the evening with **Sydney Gay and Lesbian Choir** at **Pitt St Uniting Church, October 21, 8pm**. NZ theologian and activist, **Rev. Dr Margaret Mayman** will deliver the address, "Practising Safe Spirituality in a Sex-Phobic Church." RSVP 02-9888 5361

*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.