



**Spirit of Life** Unitarian Fellowship

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre  
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli  
(near Milsons Point Station)

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**Volume 13 Issue 9**

**October, 2017**

## Schedule of Services

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

**1 October, Geoff Usher, "Making Oneself Miserable."**

In the normal sprinkling of a human community, there will be other people doing better than we are in almost any category. By selectively comparing ourselves with them, we can quickly and easily make ourselves feel really inferior.

It is not difficult to make yourself miserable.

**8 October, No meeting. Markets**

**15 October, Helen Whatmough, "Why Reason and Evidence Don't Change Our Minds."**

Confirmation bias is the tendency people have to embrace information that supports their beliefs and reject information that contradicts them.

**22nd October. No Meeting. ANZUAA Conference in Adelaide.**

**29 October, Martin Horlacher, "The Age of Genius: The Seventeenth Century and the Birth of the Modern Mind."**

The Age of Enlightenment brought about a paradigm shift in the sphere of human thought. This talk will examine philosopher AC Grayling's recent book about this seminal period of history, and its ramifications for today.



*Spring forward.*

## A New Story for our Times

***The following are extracts from a long Guardian article by the British writer George Monbiot. He first gives us example of two “restoration stories” that no longer inspire the majority of the world’s peoples:***

The social democratic story explains that the world fell into disorder – characterised by the Great Depression – because of the self-seeking behaviour of an unrestrained elite. The elite’s capture of both the world’s wealth and the political system resulted in the impoverishment and insecurity of working people. By uniting to defend their common interests, the world’s people could throw down the power of this elite, strip it of its ill-gotten gains and pool the resulting wealth for the good of all. Order and security would be restored in the form of a protective, paternalistic state, investing in public projects for the public good, generating the wealth that would guarantee a prosperous future for everyone. The ordinary people of the land – the heroes of the story – would triumph over those who had oppressed them.

The neoliberal story explains that the world fell into disorder as a result of the collectivising tendencies of the over-mighty state, exemplified by the monstrosities of Stalinism and nazism, but evident in all forms of state planning and all attempts to engineer social outcomes. Collectivism crushes freedom, individualism and opportunity. Heroic entrepreneurs, mobilising the redeeming power of the market, would fight this enforced conformity, freeing society from the enslavement of the state. Order would be restored in the form of free markets, delivering wealth and opportunity, guaranteeing a prosperous future for everyone. The ordinary people of the land, released by the heroes of the story (the freedom-seeking entrepreneurs) would triumph over those who had oppressed them.

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***Neither of these stories says anything about our present environmental predicament. Monbiot goes on to sketch a restoration story that might capture our imagination as we face climate change.***

Over the past few years, there has been a convergence of findings in different sciences: psychology, anthropology, neuroscience and evolutionary biology. Research in all these fields points to the same conclusion: that human beings are, in the words of an article in the journal Frontiers in Psychology, “spectacularly unusual when compared to other animals”. This refers to our astonishing degree of altruism. We possess an unparalleled sensitivity to the needs of others, a unique level of concern about their welfare, and a peerless ability to create moral norms that generalise and enforce these tendencies.

We are also, among mammals, the supreme cooperators. We survived the rigours of the African savannahs, despite being weaker and slower than our predators and most of our prey, through developing a remarkable capacity for mutual aid. This urge to cooperate has been hard-wired into our brains through natural selection. Our tendencies towards altruism and cooperation are the central, crucial facts about humankind. But something has gone horribly wrong.

Our good nature has been thwarted by several forces, but perhaps the most powerful is the dominant political narrative of our times. We have been induced by politicians, economists and journalists to accept a vicious ideology of extreme competition and individualism that pits us against each other, encourages us to fear and mistrust each other and weakens the social bonds that make our lives worth living. The story of our competitive, self-maximising nature has been told so often and with such persuasive power that we have accepted it as an account of who we really are. It has changed our perception of ourselves. Our perceptions, in turn, change the way we behave.

With the help of this ideology, and the neoliberal narrative used to project it, we have lost our common purpose. This leads in turn to a loss of belief in ourselves as a force for change, frustrating our potential to do what humans do best: to find common ground in confronting our predicaments, and to unite to overcome them. Our atomisation has allowed intolerant and violent forces to fill the political

vacuum. We are trapped in a vicious circle of alienation and reaction. The hypersocial mammal is falling apart.

But by coming together to revive community life we, the heroes of this story, can break the vicious circle. Through invoking our capacity for togetherness and belonging, we can re-discover the central facts of our humanity: our altruism and mutual aid. By reviving community, built around the places in which we live, and by anchoring ourselves, our politics and parts of our economy in the life of this community, we can restore the best aspects of our nature.

Where there is atomisation, we will create a thriving civic life. Where there is alienation, we will forge a new sense of belonging: to neighbours, neighbourhood and society. Community projects will proliferate into a vibrant participatory culture. New social enterprises will strengthen our sense of attachment and ownership.

Where we find ourselves crushed between market and state, we will develop a new economics that treats both people and planet with respect. We will build it around a great, neglected economic sphere: *the commons*. Local resources will be owned and managed by communities, ensuring that wealth is widely shared. Using common riches to fund universal benefits will supplement state provision, granting everyone security and resilience.

Where we are ignored and exploited, we will revive democracy and retrieve politics from those who have captured it. New methods and rules for elections will ensure that every vote counts and financial power can never vanquish political power. Representative democracy will be reinforced by participatory democracy that allows us to refine our political choices. Decision-making will be returned to the smallest political units that can discharge it.

The strong, embedded cultures we develop will be robust enough to accommodate social diversity of all kinds: a diversity of people, of origins, of life experiences, of ideas and ways of living. We will no longer need to fear peo-

ple who differ from ourselves; we will have the strength and confidence to reject attempts to channel hatred towards them.

Through restoring community, renewing civic life and claiming our place in the world, we build a society in which our extraordinary nature – our altruism, empathy and deep connection – is released. A kinder world stimulates and normalises our kinder values. I propose a name for this story: the Politics of Belonging.

***To those who ask “How will this story be translated into reality? Monbiot suggests we look at the campaign conducted by Bernie Sanders:*** Rather than relying on big spending, big data and a big staff, it uses proliferating networks of volunteers, who train and supervise more volunteers, to carry out the tasks usually reserved for staff.

***The key is to have an inspiring restoration story to tell. The whole article “How do we get out of this Mess?” can be found at [https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/09/george-monbiot-how-de-we-get-out-of-this-mess?CMP=share\\_btn\\_tw](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/09/george-monbiot-how-de-we-get-out-of-this-mess?CMP=share_btn_tw)***

***Monbiot credits George Marshal, author of Don't Even Think About It (Why our brains are wired to ignore climate change) as co-author of the new story: <http://www.climateconviction.org/>***

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#### **A note on decentralisation.**

The new story above differs from the old social democrat story mainly by preferring decentralised, community based authority to that of the state.

Off-grid solar energy backed up by one or more batteries might be thought to fit into the community collectivist approach, except that it could easily result in undermining the existing grid, which is itself a kind of commons. The community of Lane Cove might be able to afford solar with batteries + mini-grid, but would the community of Blacktown? If not, who pays for the grid to reach Blacktown? Such questions may find answers but they aren't always obvious. **Jan Tendys**

## **Separating fact from fiction about euthanasia in Belgium**

As a Belgian social scientist working on the topic of end-of-life care and decision making for the last ten years, a lot of my research has concerned the practice of euthanasia, which my country legalised in 2002 for incurable patients with severe suffering.

Though there are issues around euthanasia in Belgium, the view from the outside is often heavily biased toward problematising our euthanasia law and practice. Let's consider some of the most prominent concerns and whether they're justified.

### **'They now put down children in Belgium'**

Journalist Caroline Overington said on the ABC's Q&A program on Monday that Belgium introduced a law which allows for assisted suicide, and now that law has been extended to children, so they now put down children in Belgium.

Yes, in 2014 the Belgian euthanasia law was expanded to include competent minors.

At first, that may sound outrageous. But it helps to know the underlying rationale for lifting the age barrier.

Referring to someone's age as a measure of competence – a central condition for an eligible euthanasia request – is inaccurate and unfair to minors who do have competence and would otherwise fulfil the legal requirements. Belgium policymakers have decided it is better to assess the minor's competence directly instead of assuming their incompetence based on their age.

For minors, the eligibility requirements are restricted to terminal illness. There are also extra requirements such as competence assessment by a child psychiatrist, and the parents' consent is needed.

So far there have been no reported cases of euthanasia for a minor.

### **Who decides?**

Overington also raised concerns that in Belgium, people were euthanised who did not themselves decide that they wanted to die, a doctor decided on their behalf.

Yes, administering drugs intended to hasten death without the patient's explicit request occurs in Belgium, in under 2% of all deaths.

However, there is no causal link between legalising euthanasia and doctors ending a patient's life without request.

These practices occur as well in countries without legalised euthanasia, wherever research has been done on end-of-life practices, including in Australia and New Zealand.

Since legalisation of euthanasia, the occurrence of these practices in Belgium and the Netherlands has dropped significantly.

They are thus not the product of legalisation of assisted dying. The Belgian and Dutch experience rather suggests that legalisation of assisted dying decreases the occurrence of these practices.

Also, upon closer analysis, many of these cases do not fit the label of "non-voluntary life-ending".

This is because the drugs and doses used (such as low-dose morphine) made hastening death highly unlikely. Or because the act was in accordance with the patient's wishes, in the form of a previously expressed wish to die albeit, rather than an explicit request required by the euthanasia law.

### **Out of control expansion?**

Another oft-voiced criticism is that euthanasia in Belgium is out of control, with the criteria for euthanasia expanding beyond the legal limits.

Yes, access to euthanasia in Belgium has been "expanding" from almost exclusively terminally ill cancer patients in the first years under legislation to a more diverse mix of patients in recent years. This includes a low but increasing number of cases of non-terminally

ill people who are primarily suffering psychological illnesses, such as long-standing severe depression or personality disorder.

In 2013, 67 cases of euthanasia for neuro-psychological illness were reported in Belgium.

However, this does not mean that the legal limits have now suddenly been transgressed. Rather, unlike during the first years, the full scope of the euthanasia law is now used more often.

Yes, this has produced a few highly controversial cases seeping through in the international media. This small handful of cases needs to be seen in perspective, though. They don't reflect the vast majority of cases and the wider practice of euthanasia in Belgium. Also, a complete and truthful account of these cases is rarely conveyed in media reports.

Having concerns is quite natural, and these concerns continue to exist in Belgium.

The topic understandably generates strong reactions but balanced, accurate and complete information in the debate on euthanasia is essential.

***Written for The Conversation by:  
Kenneth Chambaere  
Assistant Professor, End-of-Life Care Research Group, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) & Ghent University, Belgium; Post-doctoral Fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) Adjunct Associate Professor, Australian Centre for Health Law Research , Queensland University of Technology.***

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***Your editor would very much like to receive responses to the above article. The Australian author Elizabeth Jolley once said that assisted dying is what she would want for herself if terminally ill and in great pain, so she could hardly deny it to others. That is what many of us feel. How about extending voluntary euthanasia to chronic depressives however? A step too far? Let us know your thoughts. JT***

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## **William Adam**

William Adam (November 1, 1796-February 19, 1881), born in Dunfermline, Fife, Scotland, began his ministry as a Baptist missionary in India. His labors in India made him into a linguist, a biblical scholar, and a Unitarian. Thereafter for years, Adam tried to elicit support for his work as a Unitarian missionary, first in India and later in the United States and Canada. His career illustrates the meager support for and the difficulties of Unitarian missionary endeavors of the 19th century.

As a young man Adam was deeply influenced by the famous Scottish churchman Thomas Chalmers. Chalmers interested Adam in India and got him to join the Baptist Missionary Society. The Society sent him for his education to the Baptist College in Bristol and to the University of Glasgow. Adam set out in September, 1817, for William Carey's Baptist mission station in Serampore, India, north of Calcutta. He reached his destination in six months, in March, 1818.

After mastering the classical Sanskrit and Bengali languages, Adam joined a group of men who were revising the Bengali translation of the New Testament. The group included the cordial and scholarly Hindu, Rammohun Roy. Roy convinced Adam that the meaning of the Greek preposition dia required that Jn 1:3, a verse of the prologue to John's Gospel, be translated as the Bengali equivalent of the English words, 'All things were made through the Word. . .' not 'by the Word'. Translators of New Testament Greek in later generations would come to agree, but in 1821 the view of nature of Christ, supported by this translation and espoused by Adam and Rammohun, was rejected by orthodox Christians as the Arian heresy (named for the 4th century CE dissident, Arius).\* For this reason colleagues nicknamed him 'the second fallen Adam'.

Adam soon resigned his position as a Baptist missionary and, along with Rammohun and a few other Indian and European friends, formed the Calcutta Unitarian Society. Adam sent ardent appeals to British and American Unitarians for financial support. Support was

both slow in coming and quite inadequate when it came. Nevertheless, the Calcutta Unitarian Society remained fitfully active and viable for seven years. But in 1828 its Hindu supporters finally chose to create a new Unitarian form of Hinduism, Brahma Somaj, leaving behind Unitarian Christianity.

In need of income, Adam turned to clerking and journalism. Working for the British governor of Bengal, he did a three volume census and analysis of native education in Bengal.

With help from the Dixwell family, New England merchants in the India trade, Adam's wife and family left India to go to the United States. Adam followed four years later, in 1838. Travelling from Boston, he attended in London the first meeting of the British India Society, an anti-slavery organization. Members of the Society introduced Adam to leading Garrisonian abolitionists from the United States. When he returned to Boston he took up the position of professor of Oriental Literature at Harvard, which he had been offered before his trip. Adam found Harvard's academic atmosphere did not suit him, however, and he resigned after just one year.

Finding himself consumed by the anti-slavery cause, he returned to London for the World Anti-Slavery Convention in June, 1840. He vigorously protested the exclusion of women from the meetings. Afterward, remaining in London, he began working as editor of the British Indian Advocate, the journal of the British India Society, then called for his family to join him.

Eighteen months later the Adam family once again journeyed to America to join a new utopian community in Massachusetts, the Northampton Association of Education and Industry. Adam became the Association's secretary and director of education. He also invested money in the project, but after control of the capital was taken away from investors, he resigned. For a while the Adam family lived in the town of Northampton. William sought work as a lecturer and conducted classes for Boston women during the winter of 1844-5.

He met Charles Briggs, Secretary of the American Unitarian Association, who told him Unitarian ministers were desperately needed

in the "west," which at that time meant west of the Appalachian Mountains. On his way to Illinois, Adam stopped in Syracuse, New York where the Rev. Samuel J. May, also an active Garrisonian, was minister of the Unitarian Church. May told Adam of a new opening for a Unitarian minister in Toronto on the British side of Lake Ontario. After hearing Adam preach, on two Sundays and one mid-week evening in early July, 1845, Toronto Unitarians called him as their first minister.

But the match between minister and congregation was not a good one. After some early success—the securing of a church building and a strengthening of the congregation—financial problems soured relations. Adam, with a family to support, was feeling constraint. He also felt let down by Charles Briggs, the AUA and Toronto Unitarians. Only the Toronto physician, Joseph Workman, tried hard to raise fit support for him. He resigned and resumed his journey to Illinois. There, within weeks, in late July, 1846, the First Unitarian Church of Chicago, without a minister for two years, called him as minister.

Manuscripts of some of Adam's Toronto and Chicago sermons and lectures survive in Dr. Williams's Library in London. Their titles show the range of issues addressed by this scholarly, socially active world traveler. They include 'Truth and falsehood in man', 'Labour', 'The River and Harbour Convention', and 'Temperance'.

After yet another negative experience in Chicago, Adam withdrew from the Unitarian parish ministry. He is known to have traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana shortly afterward. There is no record of Adam's activities over the next five years. Sometime before 1855, he returned to Britain, perhaps without his family. He is known to have preached in December, 1855, at a small Unitarian church in High Garret, Essex, England. Charles Dall, the missionary to India of the American Unitarian Association, 1855-86, visited Adam in London in 1861 on his way to India. Adam made it clear to Dall that he had altogether renounced Unitarianism and its ministry. He was writing a book critical of Comte's philosophy of history, which was published anonymously that year.



Exeter Hall, London, where Adam attended the World Anti-Slavery Conference 1840. In a dispute as to whether women were allowed to participate in full, Adam sided with the women. However, women were excluded, being told to listen from behind a curtain. The experience led many feminists to focus their attention on Women's Right's.

Adam lived obscurely another twenty years. He died at Beaconsfield in Hampshire in 1881, aged 84, and was buried, on his instructions, without ceremony in Woking Cemetery. He left his money to Dumfermline Grammar School for University scholarships, stipulating that the funds should be distributed "irrespective of sex or creed or no creed, parentage, colour or caste, nationality or political allegiance".

Adam was the first international Unitarian of modern times. His convert's enthusiasm was much damped by the lukewarm response of both British and American Unitarians to his requests for their support of his work as a Unitarian missionary in India. Ultimately, he was disappointed in the Unitarian movement as a whole.

At the time Adam regretted that Rammohun Roy and his Hindu friends chose a Unitarian Hindu faith in preference to Unitarian Christianity. Yet without Adam's dedicated initiative and drive, the reformed Unitarian Hindu movement, the Brahmo Somaj, might never have come into being. The distinguished leaders of the Brahmo Somaj nurtured and propagated what became, in effect, a 'school of thought', which flowered into the famous Bengal Renaissance, a great burst of modern, yet distinctively Indian political theory, idealism and poetry. The Brahmo Somaj, first established in part by an ill-supported and mostly forgotten Unitarian missionary, influ-

enced immensely the intellectual and political culture of all India.

**From the biography of William Adam written by Andrew Hil in the Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography, an on-line resource of the Unitarian Universalist History & Heritage Society.**

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\* See "Arius the Heretic" <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/river/workshop2/arius>

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***Comment: There are very few pictures of William Adam available (testament to his humility?) but if Unitarians are into statues of past greats, should there be one erected to this religious pioneer, it must be together with his wife who loyally accepted the frequent upheaval of her family as William strove to fulfil his ideals. JT***

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Shortly after a woman began attending the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Summit, New Jersey, she found herself in a restaurant on Sunday noon. It was small establishment, with tables close together, and so she could not help overhearing the conversation at the table behind her. Two people were discussing their dissatisfactions with some aspect of the church they both attended. Suddenly, one of them asked, "Well, what do the Unitarians believe in?" Without a pause, the other replied, "Recycling!"

Pagan Unitarian Conference: "Keeping the Thor in Thursday."

A sign at a UU church read: "Bible Study after service today. Bring your own bible and a pair of scissors."

Existentialism? Don't even get me Sartred.

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## NSW Dickens Society

### Public readings of A Christmas Carol 2017

#### Geoff Usher will give four public readings:

Sunday 26 November, 2.00 pm. Concord Library, 60 Flavelle St., Concord NSW 2137

Friday 8 December, 12.00 noon. Bankstown Library, Corner of Rickard Rd., and Chapel Rd., Bankstown NSW 2200

Sunday 10 December, 12.30 pm Pitt Street Uniting Church, 264 Pitt St., Sydney NSW 2000

Thursday 14 December 11.am. Springwood Library, 104 Macquarie Rd., Springwood NSW 2777

<https://www.charlesdickensinfo.com/christmas-carol/>

### 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. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher 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: jantendys@yahoo.com.au 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

Website [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org)