

FRIENDS IN SAN ANTONIO

7052 North Vandiver at Eisenhower

November 2011

Part of George Ellis's acceptance speech for the Templeton Prize:

The science-religion-ethics triad, and the true nature of deep ethics: Finally, a theme in my writing, set out in detail in the book with Nancey Murphy, is the importance of including ethics in the science and religion debate. This is because ethics is causally effective, as outlined above, and provides the highest level of values that set human goals and choices. Consequently a crucial issue is the origin of ethics, on the one hand, and the nature of ethics, on the other. With Nancey I am a moral realist, that is, I believe that we discover the true nature of ethics rather than inventing it, hence the title of our book: *On the Moral Nature of the Universe*. Indeed it is only if ethics is of this nature that it has a truly moral character, that is, it represents a guiding light that we ought to obey. I am fascinated that Stephen Pinker too has been suggesting moral realism in his recent book *The Blank Slate* — he too realizes this must be the case if it is to have the normative status that true morality must have. If true, this is a very important feature of the nature of the universe.

But then the issue is what is the nature of true morality? Nancey and I have argued that it must be kenotic in nature, that is, it must be a kind of ethics involving letting go of one's own interest on behalf of others, being ready if necessary to sacrifice one's own interests for them, even on behalf of an enemy. This is of course very controversial, just as it was when Jesus in essence stated it in the Sermon on the Mount. However I am convinced it is a deeply transforming principle of fundamental importance, which is universally recognised by the non-dogmatic branches of all the great religions: it is held up in all of them as behaviour to aspire to. Indeed this is the theme of one of Sir John Templeton's books, called *Agape Love: A Tradition Found in Eight World Religions*. Furthermore this is the only basis for true security, for the deep foundation of security is based in transforming your enemies into friends. That can in the end only be achieved by the kind of sacrificial practices exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Desmond Tutu, for this is the only way to touch the hardened heart. What seems rationally impossible can indeed become possible through the generosity and hope underlying and enabling kenosis and forgiveness: and this we experienced in South Africa. Nancey and I suggest this principle is deeply imbedded in the universe, both in ethics and in other aspects of our lives, and will thus be discovered by deeply moral beings in the vicinity of Alpha Centauri or the Andromeda galaxy, just as it has been discovered by all major religions here on Earth.

George Ellis is a South African Friend and astronomer.

Personal News

The recession comes closer to home. John, who works at UTHSC, has been laid off, just when his research on water conservation is attracting attention. He has recently been invited to attend meetings of the state Soil and Water Conservation Board. His current interest has been in the community organization of water barrels.

Ruth will celebrate her 95th birthday this month – over 90 years since those early days in Utah and much of them spent in service to others. She moved here from New York about 25 years ago on retirement.

Janet took part in an interreligious panel at UIW speaking of popular misconceptions about the religions involved, in this case Mormonism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Bahaism. Janet said that the most frequent misunderstanding about Quakers was that we still existed.

Dan has fallen off his bike and broken some ribs, so he is taking it easy. He's recovering well, but there is no solution but to wait for them to heal.

One Sunday morning in October there was an unpleasant smell behind the meetinghouse. Juan found it - a dead cat, decomposing. William and Thomas found it too and moved it into the gully where, maybe, the buzzards that live in their grandpa's old barn, will clear it up. But why, we wonder, had the buzzards not found it before?

Forums

The forums last month suffered from misunderstandings. There was no M&O forum while Gary was out of town and the forum on the effects of 9-11 on San Antonio Muslims was missed when Jilani could not find the day and time and Ken had not called him beforehand to remind him. We hope November's do better. But Val, home from Central America and Colombia, spoke of the progress in the number of groups using programs taken there by the Alternatives to Violence Project. These groups are spreading through the area, performing also Trauma Healing programs. Val showed a number of videos of individuals and groups involved. She spoke of a letter telling of the great help a man had received.

In November Jen will speak about her experience in Rwanda this summer. She has been doing research which may lead to trauma healing for Rwandans who suffered greatly during the massacres there. And Gary will lead a discussion of Bill Taber's Pendle Hill Pamphlet, Four Doors to Meeting for Worship. These are the Door Before, the worshipful state of mind which occurs during the week, the Door Inward, as we enter meeting, the Door Within, while we sit in meeting, and the Door Beyond, when we leave meeting and re-enter the daily world. The pamphlets are available from Gary.

Business Meeting

Meeting for Business commenced with a query: *If Friends Meeting of San Antonio were to form a Clearness Committee for our Meeting, what would we ask ourselves?*

M&O decided that its members will personally contact each member and attender in Meeting as a "loving gesture of concern" to discuss whether and how Meeting is addressing their spiritual needs and aspirations. M&O may revisit this task on an annual basis.

It has been suggested that the Pendle Hill pamphlet by William Taber, "The Four Doors to Meeting for Worship" be discussed in the December forum.

The Nominating Committee has begun preparing a list of committee clerks, officers, and others willing to work within Meeting. Nominating is confident that members will step up. Committees in need of special attention are Religious Education, Grounds, and Outreach. Members of the nominating committee will be contacting members and attenders of Meeting to fill committee

needs.

It is recommended that the RE committee be responsible for children's programs only, but that a facilitator be appointed to run forums and the librarian operate separately from the RE committee. It is also recommended that the ad-hoc Friendspace Development Committee be made a permanent committee and be renamed the Casa Quaker Committee. Nominating Committee will season these recommendations for another month to allow Meeting time to consider them further.

The Treasurer reported that a single large gift had causing September's income to exceed expenditures by \$5,382.18. Meeting is now almost caught up on its YTD expenses. The Sinking Fund has been replenished to its maximum value and the remainder of the month's surplus has been credited to the Cash Flow Reserve.

Considering the large gift, FMSA no longer needs to ask for the higher suggested per-person donations of \$120 per month, and can return to the original suggested monthly donation of \$90 per month.

The Finance Committee recommends that any funds left in committees' budgets be spent only on expenses necessary to the functioning of the committee. The committee thanks the former and new treasurers for making the transition smooth. FC recommends that the website line item's funds also be used for funding the Meeting's ad-hoc committee for digital solutions.

The Grounds Committee is arranging a Fall workday and pizza party (not a potluck lunch as originally noted) and children's activities for Nov. 12, 8 a.m. to noon. Activities will be outdoor activities, such as grounds maintenance, cleaning gutters, etc.

The Clerk has asked George, Ken, and Bill to serve on the Ad hoc Committee for Digital Solutions. No information is available about Quarterly Meeting this year so the line item amount will revert to the Finance Committee.

Meeting closed in silence.

Reminders

Remember, we are holding two midweek meetings each month now, each at 6.30 in the evening. On the first Thursday the meeting is in the meetingroom and on the third Wednesday at Julia's home. And on the first Sunday in December Michelle will organize our book and disc exchange. Bring any surplus books and discs and help yourself to any there which take your fancy.

Well, Good Gracious!

An Austin man, David, in on the founding period of Austin TanCerca la Frontera, an associate of AFSC, tells us he has just discovered something. He has been "out of the country and just learned about this myself. Susan Herman, national president of the ACLU, is my sister-in-law, married to my twin brother. I've known her personally and professionally for 35 years. This should be a good conversation if you can make it."

Well, yes. He's known her for 35 years and only just discovered she was married to his brother? Or only just discovered she was president of ACLU? Or maybe just found out he had a twin brother? Maybe they don't talk much. But thanks for the conversation piece, David

Miscellany

"... the Syrian people already are doing what could be critical components of an unstoppable nonviolent resistance, if they knew how to build on them. According to Akram Antaki, the Damascene founder of Ma'aber ('Crossroads'), 'one of the main characteristics of the Syrian revolution is that we are all working openly. The wall of fear has disappeared.'

Moreover, according to activist and lawyer Razan Zeitouneh, 'Many people may not believe

that, in the midst of this barbarism meted out to the Syrian people by their ruling regime, the survival of a space for other feelings than anger and pain is possible. In fact, there are still people that face the gun with flowers. . . they hope that the revolution shall change much more than the regime.”

Michael Nagler, of the Network of Spiritual Progressives at www.spiritualprogressives.org

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For Reform Judaism, the religious view – not just the civic view – of marriage changed in March 2000. At the historic meeting of the Central Conference of American Rabbis that met in Greensboro, North Carolina it became the first mainstream, religious voice in America to publicly affirm commitment ceremonies between people of the same sex. This Meeting affirmed this in 1998. In 1999 SCYM endorsed the marriages of individuals under the care of monthly meetings without regard to gender, assuring that same sex marriages could be taken under the care of all the SCYM monthly meetings. This does not require any individual Meeting to do so.

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45 years ago a professor in the U of Michigan School of Natural Resources, father of a girl in the Friends High School Group, said that America had already reached a standard of living impossible for all of the world. Looking at China and India, where possession of a car is the badge of arrival at middle class status, we must remember his words. Kunstler, in the *Washington Post*, has put it this way: “No combination of solar, wind and nuclear power, ethanol, biodiesel, tar sand and used French-fry oil will allow us to power Wal-Mart, Disney World and the interstate highways system . . . we have to make other arrangements.” Our very successes are leading us to a world crisis in which we shall need more successes.

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54% of Americans in a *TIME* poll have a favorable view of the Occupy Wall Street protestors, twice as many as those approving the Tea Party. Alex Altman, *TIME*

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An item in the *NYT* tells us that induction loop systems, described as marvellous for the hard of hearing, are spreading in the USA. They have been used in Europe for quite some time. When Ken was in England two years ago he was surprised to find it at a bank counter. Two-thirds of hearing aids made are now equipped for this. We tried it in the meetingroom a few years ago but it wouldn't work due to interference from transformer boxes mounted on poles to each side of the building.

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Friend Roberts Vaux (1786-1836) was an early protestor against capital punishment. “All our bloody statutes will not restrain the duellist, the assassin, or the desperado, who, in order to obtain the object of his pursuit, will risk his own life, and brave all dangers.” And there was the danger of wrongful conviction. Because of this, civil magistrates “. . . have no right to take from a private citizen any thing, which, if the taking should afterwards prove to be wrongful, they could not restore identically.”

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The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women was a polemical work by the Scottish Calvinist Reformer John Knox, published in 1558. The words, spellings, and senses are now archaic. "Monstrous" means "unnatural"; "regiment" means "rule" or "government". He was not an unmitigated sexist. He was merely railing against the female sovereigns of his day, particularly Mary of Guise, Dowager Queen of Scotland and regent to her Catholic daughter Mary, Queen of Scots, and Queen Mary I of England.

In June 1932, at the end of Herbert Hoover's presidency, people thronged to Washington to protest and set up a camp, a capital hooverville, clean and well maintained. They were unemployed, a 1932 "Occupy DC" movement. They were suspected of being communists. Douglas MacArthur was Chief of Staff and he ordered the army to clear them out. It did, with tear gas and fire, burning the hovels down. Hoover, one of our Quaker presidents, was a philanthropist, but feared communists. He had not told MacArthur to do as much as he did, but, after the fact, approved clearing the mob out. What did he experience, sitting in silent worship?

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C. Wright Mills was, in the 50's, a radical Quaker sociologist who said that one man looking for work when there were five jobs had a personal problem but five men looking for work when there was only one job had a social problem. In his "Pagan Sermon," Mills said that according to their [Christian ministers'] belief he was "among the damned," for he was "secular, prideful, agnostic, and all the rest of it."

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Joel E. Cohen, in the *NYT*, 10.24.11, says "we need to measure our growth in prosperity. . . not by flawed measurements like GDP, but by how well we satisfy basic human needs; by how well we foster dignity, creativity, community and cooperation; by how well we care for our biological and physical environment, our only home."

In 1972 Bhutan decided it should measure Gross National Happiness. But in 2008 its rate of economic growth was the highest in the world, spurred by Indian-built hydropower dams for power and its GDP has become almost twice India's.

New in the Library

We receive the *Quaker House Newsletter* and *The Carillon*, the Arkansas Quaker Magazine. *The Carillon*, in its September issue, has articles on holding people in the Light (difficult when personally hurt, yet, amazingly, yielding relief and even reconciliation.) There is a poem by a Welsh Friend on a bird feeder being sampled by a "brown rat, pink-eared and pink-footed" and two "encounters with the Divine" in which a Friend experienced a mallard mother killed by flying into his windscreen and then redemption when his cat brought him a baby rabbit, which he freed, and an experience of God in a zoo of the eyes of a silverback gorilla looking directly into his.

The *Quaker House Newsletter*, from the environs of Fort Bragg in N. Carolina, has news of help for an army Delayed Enlistment Program recruit who will be released because of his wife's pregnancy and of the new GI Rights Hotline website to provide help and advice for GIs having service problems. A soldier, helped while AWOL, will actually be released.

There has been an increase in the number of calls received asking for help, particularly from soldiers finding themselves to be COs. Help has been given to atheist soldiers protesting support for evangelical events on camp, and an account of Chuck Fager's objections to what he calls "American War Christianity." By this he means a Christianity which has a Jesus who is the Prince of War, not peace, Christ the pitiless avenger of Revelation, whose gospel is not "Love your enemies," but "hate and kill them."

And the Newsletter, of course, ends with humor: "Jacob Stone of Doylestown PA insists, 'The best laugh I ever had in a meeting for business happened when, after a long and contentious discussion, the clerk stated, in frustration, that he felt 'we don't seem to have unity about this issue.' A Friend immediately stood up and said firmly, 'I disagree.'" And "Elder Silas, who heard a politician in mid-speech avow that 'I was never caned in school but once, and that was for telling the truth.' The broad-brimmed elder rubbed his chin and observed, 'It seems to have cured thee right enough, I'd say.'"

Both are in the library. For the new hotline, go to www.girightshotline.org, accessible right from here.

Would you Want

. . . your daughter to marry one? A corporation is now legally a person. A letter to the *NY Times* asks, "Can I marry one? Is General Electric single?". And one person suggests, "A corporation is not a person until Texas executes one."

But is it eligible for Medicare?

Hell?

Oliver Thomas wrote an article in *USA Today* in which he went into the biblical origin of the belief in Hell. Most Americans, he said, believe in it – 74%. But he says the King James Bible is responsible. In the Hebrew bible the word is "Sheol," but this is a shadowy, dreamlike place, where everybody, good and bad, will go. And nearly every word from the lips of Jesus is mis-translated. King James translates "Gehenna" as Hell, but it was in fact a Jerusalem garbage dump.

Fundamental to the beliefs of the Abrahamic religions is that God is a God of Justice, not one with a one-size-fits-all punishment for sins. And Jesus taught that God was a loving and merciful God. Why, he says, should we worship a God who condemns us to burn in hell forever if we don't believe the right things about him? The answer, he says, is fear, a "horrible motivation for human behavior," and one which makes us "sick on bad religion," ready to punish those who don't live up to our standard with an "off with their heads."

Have We Gone Soft?

Consider Franco-American Friend, Stephen Grellet who, with the English Quaker William Allen, between 1831 and 1834, "In Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, the Crimea, Greece, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Prague, Naples, Rome, Madrid, Valencia, and many towns in France, Holland, and the Germanic states . . . visited poorhouses, hospitals, orphanages, asylums, houses of correction, and prisons.

They lobbied emperors, kings, princes and princesses, dukes, counts, popes, cardinals, diplomats, and government ministers to alleviate the suffering of the inhabitants of these places." Christopher Adamson in *Quaker History*, Fall, 2001.

German Terror

Nazi Germany committed many great crimes against humanity during WWII. It also made great strategic miscalculations. Daniel Blatman has written about the Death Marches in the last few months of the war as concentration camp inmates in Eastern European camps were forced to walk westward away from the advancing Soviet armies (*The Death Marches*). These marches were terrible, as straggling prisoners were shot to enable their scared guards to keep up. But the book also illustrates the terror with which eastern Germans feared both the armies and the prisoners appearing in their communities. They feared rape and pillage by the encroaching armies, and that, as guards deserted, the prisoners would take an awful revenge on the townspeople. Some took terrible precautions to prevent this.

But it is even possible to have sympathy for Germans hoodwinked by Hitler's grandiose visions and now facing brutal conquest. We have known a German-American Quaker family, the father an unwilling Berliner soldier who deserted on the eastern front and ran for his life. On the way he took with him a woman from a village to save her from the rape her sister later experienced. She became his wife and they emigrated to America as refugees under Meeting sponsorship as soon as possible.

Not all Germans supported Hitler but all were forced to comply with his plans.

Giving Among the Acirema

In 1970 Richard Titmuss wrote a book, *The Gift Relationship*. It was “ostensibly” a comparative study of blood donation. But Ann Oakley and John Ashton, in an introduction to the 2nd edition, say it was more; it was about the place of altruism in human affairs.

They quote an ironic review by Claiborne :

“For a lesson in modern political economy, consider the trade in *doolb*. In the land of Niatirb, the supplies of this vital commodity receive no pay, and its processing and distribution are in the hands of government bureaucrats. In Acirema, by contrast, nearly all supplies of *doolb* receive cash or other tangible, individual, incentives, and much of the processing and distribution is carried out for profit. Obviously, Acireman *doolb* supplies will be higher in quality, lower in price, more accurately attuned to demand, and involve far less wastage – right? Wrong”

You guessed? Acirema is America, Niatirb is Britain, and *doolb* is blood, the system of donation in the UK being voluntary and administered by the National Health Service. Blood costs 5-15 times as much in the US, 30% was wasted compared with 2%, and it was four times as likely to infect recipients with hepatitis.

Claiborne was borrowing his satire from Prof. Emma Linton, an anthropologist, who used it in 1936 to emphasize the errors outsiders make when they analyze a culture. In her example, the Nacirema have shrines in their houses where they perform secret rituals to cleanse their mouths using small bundles of hog hairs. In this shrine they perform ritual cleansing of their faces by mixing different kinds of holy water in a font, before which they bow. The water is obtained from water temples in the community where it is ritually cleansed by initiated priests. The men scrape their faces with sharp objects. Their myths say that they came from the east, led by a great chief Notgnihsaw, who chopped down a cherry tree in which lived the Spirit of Truth.

To read this account, go to [www.msu.edu/~jdowell/miner.html? pagewanted = all](http://www.msu.edu/~jdowell/miner.html?pagewanted=all).

continuity

in stars of fire
children sing;
in stars of rain
they cry.
their dancing song
in earth in air
is life
a wondrous why.
songs of dark and holy fire
in children's laughter breathe and blow
by riverbank the age of earth
where our grief falls in endless snow.
a fire of snow, the age of earth,
may know the secret of our woe.
in stars of wonder
children sing,
and whys unending
gently flow.

mark lee hickman

Faroff Atrocities – Prevention

While the Prevent War email list was on summer vacation, the Obama administration took a critical step toward improving U.S. capacities to prevent genocide and other mass atrocities. The White House issued a new Presidential Study Directive on preventing mass atrocities that will establish a standing interagency Atrocities Prevention Board. This body will coordinate a government-wide strategy for preventing mass atrocities and genocide. Further, the Atrocities Prevention Board will be tasked with taking an inventory of current government-wide capacities to prevent atrocities, assess gaps in the system, and propose innovative new tools and strategies.

FCNL has been lobbying for the creation of such a body and this type of capacities assessment for over two years. Thanks to the work of FCNL and many others, last year the Senate also called for such steps when it passed a resolution on genocide prevention, S. Con. Res. 71.

In issuing the directive, the President emphasized many of the same points FCNL has been making:

- Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.
- Governmental engagement on atrocities and genocide too often arrives too late, when opportunities for prevention or low-cost, low-risk action have been missed. By the time these issues have commanded the attention of senior policy makers, the menu of options has shrunk considerably and the costs of action have risen.
- In the face of a potential mass atrocity, our options are never limited to either sending in the military or standing by and doing nothing.

A 17th Century Opinion

A 17th century French opinion of Quakers, quoted by Lanson and cited in *Quaker Studies* 4 (1999):

“Tremblers [sic] are the latest which organized themselves only 3 or 4 years ago but which are talked about more than all the others . . . They are people of modest means and are possessed of a dark melancholy and their drawback is that they believe themselves so illuminated and filled with the holy spirit that they cannot err . . . their sermons are nothing but a type of gibberish or a tissue of passages from the scriptures quoted with little judgement. While they acknowledge, in general, that the scriptures are divinely inspired, they believe much more in the spirit and the light . . .

Moreover the Tremblers assume a greater probity and simplicity of customs and habits than other sects and one of their outward characteristics, apart from their sad countenance, is that they frequently sigh and groan, either an expression of their own weakness or the observations they make on the sins of other men.”

Sounds like us.

Calendar, November, 2011

Meeting for Worship is held on Sunday at 10 a.m., followed by refreshments and a Forum discussion at 11.30, usually lasting until about 12.45. Children are invited to join worship for the first fifteen minutes, after which they may go to join with the Young Friends program. Child care is available during Forum.

- 3. Thursday Midweek Meeting, 6.30, meetingroom.**
- 6. Sunday Potluck lunch at 11.30.**
- 12. Saturday Fall Work and Pizza Party. 8 am-12 noon.**
- 13 Sunday Forum – "Home away from Home: Jen's Adventures in Rwanda"**
- 16, Wednesday Midweek Meeting, 6.30, Julia's house.**
- 20, Sunday..... Meeting for Business.**
- 27, Sunday Forum – Spiritual Quaker Process: William Taber, Four Doors to Meeting for Worship.**

Each Thursday, at 4-5 pm, a silent peace vigil is held at the corners of S. Flores and Commerce, one block west of Main Plaza near City Hall.

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