

AIM: "To consider the question How can life in Australia become less materialistic and more spiritual?"

BACKGROUND: My novel 'The Grass Is Always Browner' supposes this has occurred.

METHOD: Collect ideas from various sources, including discussion in U3a Mind Stirrers class 12/09/13

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. Spiritualism is the search for "the sacred," where "the sacred" is broadly defined as that which is set apart from the ordinary and worthy of veneration

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirituality>

Materialism holds that the only thing that exists is matter or energy; that all things are composed of *material* and all phenomena (including consciousness) are the result of material interactions. In other words, matter is the only substance, and reality is identical with the actually occurring states of energy and matter.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Materialism>

These two perspectives, whether of some activity or of a person's lifestyle, seem to be mutually exclusive, the 'actual' and that 'set apart', as complements together making up all there is.

Humanitarianism is: concern for human welfare, especially as manifested through philanthropy; and the belief that the sole moral obligation of humankind is the improvement of human welfare. Insofar as altruism is achieved spiritually and inspired by philanthropy or human moral obligation to improve human welfare, it is a part of humanitarianism. But spirituality also exists in other contexts.

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/humanitarianism>

2. Coincidences are cool. They make me think that there could be something out there causing things to happen. Or maybe 'it' is everywhere, outside and inside everything, like when the electric doors slide apart and you walk into Number 1 Eagle Street. It is a huge steel, glass and synthetic marble office block, in which all the atoms of iron and molecules of silicon dioxide and calcium carbonate have been melted and ripped apart, purified, lined up, frozen hard, and cut up into building materials that are servants of an austere and implacable will. When I go inside, it is there everywhere and I fall under its spell, becoming compliant to regimentation. It is a reverence I feel for the makers, the same awe as when I enter Salisbury Cathedral in England, and walk along the soaring nave of the country's most beautiful building, started in 1220 and taking 38 years to complete. My respect is for the material accomplishments of the religions Christianity and Capitalism, under whose auspices these buildings were constructed. But when I walk under the giant Fig trees in Orleigh Park, the feeling I get is equally reverent but less oppressed. I marvel at the size of these living organisms and feel respect for the natural processes they embody, by which the material of the tree organises itself without human intervention or even a central intelligence, but by some spirit within it that keeps it growing and me in awe and wondering.

3. Are the laws that regulate how materials can behave all there really is? Could it be true that when we experience coincidences, insights, epiphanies, joys and sacrifices, a particular part of our brains tries to explain them by rational processes in logical order, but when it makes no sense at all, it defaults to inventing a spiritual world? When we are in awe of nature, such as the size of a Fig tree and a chameleon's camouflage, we attribute them to a spirit such as God because we can't see how they could evolve? Do we join with others to share in reverence for such spirits and to shore up the shaky foundations of a faith that counters science with evidence of discontinuities, bringing new hope and overcomes the cloying nihilism that attends materialism?

4. Fewer people these days hitch the reverence they ride to the wagon of an agency of the God industry, with skilled personnel who will guide their feelings to faith in a deity, with observances, icons, dogma and rituals from cradle to grave. Even though they know there is no magic left on Earth, such agencies are easy to join, promising heaven, and difficult to leave because they could suffer a vindictive hell that leaves them nowhere to hide.

5. People are becoming less reliant on the God industry in meeting their spiritual needs. Is spiritualism any more than the personal values and love of kin nurtured at our mother's breast, continuing throughout our lives, giving us confidence to see, taste, smell, feel and hear the world around us, and the honesty to deal with it efficiently and effectively, like children filled with trust? Is it our love for spouse, children, families and kin that inspires us to gather, transform and use the materials of our world? Without kin and alone, would staying alive be worth much effort?

Family gatherings have become less frequent as family members have dispersed in response to employment opportunities faraway. Weakening bonds bring a downward spiral in the spirituality of the family with so many younger members absent from celebrations. The rise of globalization in the economy values skills more widely and provides opportunities for high earnings and travel.

6. Iconic spiritualism may attach to emotional experiences, either real, such as football moments, or virtual, such as 'tear-jerker' movies or books.

7. Alternatively, is spiritualism revealed in art, those expressions of prescient individual experience and futuristic perspectives that we present in conventional media and genres for other's approval and purchase?

8. In the US, I can be an archetypal capitalist with an iconic spiritual stature. I can be a free individual, able to buy and consume goods and services, even artistic and spiritual ones. To earn the money I need, I can invest my capital in their production, if I can afford it, or I can work in one of many types of associated enterprise. I can dedicate my life to obtaining and retaining property, possessions, liberty and happiness for myself and my loved ones. I see gun ownership as logically necessary for that. It is a selfish vision, in which material gain is the avenue to spiritual happiness. I do not have to worry about anyone else, even if they are struggling — that's the way a survival ethic works.

9. All such discussions about materialism providing the gateway to spiritualism lead me to imagine entering emporia such as KMart, filling me with revulsion. Is it my age that has no use for the things they sell, such as electric toothbrushes? Am I stingy, living

frugally, getting my fulfilment from the amount of my savings, hating going shopping because my funds exclude discretionary and spontaneous purchases. For people who seem to have as many things as they need, buying Christmas presents seems wasteful and I become a grumpy Scrooge. Can I infer that my purpose is minimalism, to minimise my material footprint and maximise my independence from others?

10. The psychologist Abraham Maslow categorised human endeavours by the needs served, in a hierarchy in with physiological or material needs at the bottom, and meditative or spiritual needs at the top. In between are social and psychological needs. Essential material, social and psychological needs have to be met before spiritual needs can be addressed. However, Maslow does not suggest that everyone can meet these lower needs and graduate to a spiritual life. His description leaves open the moral question of What is a Good Life? Yet a sense of material repleteness and well-being is sometimes seen as necessary before attention turns to spiritual matters. Conversely, the tolerant stoicism of impoverished peoples in India and Indonesia may be partly attributed to expectation of a more provident afterlife. Thus spirituality causes non-material living, rather than the material living causing spirituality.

11. Dysfunctional behaviour is more often related to spiritual rather than material causes. So-called primitive people were under the influence of witches and witch doctors through a spirit medium. Freud identified conditions attributed to psycho-social events in childhood through the ego, alter ego and id. Faith healing with herbal remedies having no more effect than placebos has grown in popularity. Alternative health treatments using non-scientific methods such as acupuncture are paid for under health insurance schemes. It is evident that a person's good health can be tempered by spiritual experiences as much if not more than by treatment using objectively tested methods.

12. The idea of a Good Life can be inferred in biology from what benefits a family, species or kind. Lamarck suggested that a giraffe's diligent stretching of its neck would be passed on to its offspring, for their benefit and the good of the family. Therefore mating with a type having matching advantages, doing one's duty and working hard for offspring to inherit, was once enough. But Darwin refuted this and proposed that some giraffes are born with longer necks than others, making them 'fitter' to survive with more offspring. To lead a Good Life, which perpetuates the species, individuals need to mate diversely, to generate new types, compete with others, using any wealth and wisdom we have acquired. The winners, who are the ones better suited to feeding from tree-tops, will have most surviving and reproducing offspring i.e. the most grandchildren. Even if my genetic kind loses, my efforts are not in vain, for the victory is in taking part. This concept of the Good Life is totally materially determined.

13. An alternative view is that whereas Lamarck was wrong about the giraffe's long neck, he is right about human success. More is acquired between a generation than is inherited through the genes. In the UK, 60% of medical doctors have one or more parents who was a medical practitioner. Most successful farmers have one or more parents who was a farmer. Acolytes apprenticed to parents learn well. Can it be that the survival and reproduction of our children depends significantly on the skills they acquire from us as parents and from other family members? If so, then leading a Good Life requires building up a family skill and asset inventory, to pass on to our children.

Couples with complementary skills and common assets have an advantage. It is a more spiritual union than in Darwin's diversity.

14. Centralised communism unites us all in a collective enterprise with a national vision, in which those who have above average skills and resources contribute to those who are below average. Everyone's needs are equal. How they are to be met is decided by the central planning committee, on which our situations, hopefully, are represented. Only a few types of material goods are necessary. Other spiritual alliances are not allowed. The vision is altruistic or giving and dominated by nationalism and socialism. It is a bleak materialistic culture tempered by a collective vision.

15. Romanticism was an intellectual and artistic movement that originated in the second half of the 18th century. It was a reactionary response against the scientific rationalisation of nature during the Enlightenment, commonly expressed in literature, music, painting and drama. But it was not simply a response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment but also a reaction against the material () society, which accompanied the emerging and expanding industrial capitalism in the late eighteenth century. In this transition production became centralised in the city. The factory system of mass production was centred on processes that used and controlled natural forces such as water and wind, but also increased power by increasingly using fossil fuels. These processes, combined with the profit motive, 'degraded and despoiled', as some romantics saw it, the environment. Cities grew unprecedented, into centres of poverty and deprivation. They began to symbolise the failure of laissez faire liberalism's philosophy that a perfect society could be attained by essentially permitting people to follow their self-interest. Population movement from the land, and rational search for economically efficient production methods (involving division of labour, timekeeping and mechanisation) led, according to the Romantic Movement, to spiritual alienation of the masses from the land and nature. As Marx and Engels perceived it, they became units of production: cogs in an impersonal productive machine. People and nature were objectified, and reduced to commodity status.

This was regarded as undesirable and leading to the degradation of humans. According to the Romantics, the solution was 'back to nature' because nature was seen as pure and a spiritual source of renewal. Spoliation of a pure natural landscape was regarded as undesirable and destructive. These ideas are still with us and led the way for modern day conservation and environmentalism as well as outdoor recreation and appreciation for natural and historical heritage. For the new rich, it was also a way out of the fumes of the growing industrial centres

http://www.eh-resources.org/timeline/timeline_romantic.html

16. In Australia, there is a Romantic Movement spiritual crusade that embraces ruralism, Indigeneity, conservation, anti-pollution, climate change prevention and Luddite movements. The differences between these materially are greater than the spiritual differences within the 'back to nature' umbrella concept.

17. Buddhism asks is there a connection between materialism and spiritualism? Spiritualism helps us to realize the dignity of each individual. Spiritualism transcends diversity of race, colour, language and sect. It teaches us to develop understanding and increase compassion. Spiritualism promotes democracy.

The characteristics of a materialistic way of life are: interest in and excessive desire for money and possessions; idolization of affluence; constant fear of losing what we have; trying always to establish "This is mine"; selfishness; having no compassion; my own interest only persists; self - glorification; corrupting power. Power for control, riches, self-glorification, etc. brings about arrogance. The above characteristics cause erosion of human dignity. The characteristics of spiritualism or moral view of life are to overcome anger by love; evil by good; greed by liberality; and falsehood by truth.

We cannot judge spiritualism of a person or a nation by the presence or absence of material goods. All mental events can even be reducible to matters. People are free to choose the things that they want in their lives. They are free to choose their own balance between material goods and spiritualism. Every individual has his/her own way to find peace. There is no one rule that we have to follow. It depends on one's individual psychology. Our needs depend on our social status, our job, our earning, and our expectation.

<http://www.yogason.com/spiritual & material.htm>

18. Groups of people with different material sharing, selfishness and spiritual goals, can live in devolved communes in the same country under local laws, collaborating, coordinating and cooperating with others. The only national vision would be a philosophy of 'selfaltruism' in which once people have self-sustained their kin group, they make themselves available to help needy neighbours. I can choose employment and invest in projects that benefit my community, even if my earnings are lower or even nil. It is sometimes said that in Australia, there are few in material need. Why not help spiritual needs? In neighbouring countries, there are plenty of people who do need material help.

Under such a system, the emphasis on spiritual and material goals could be decided by like-minded people living together, interspersed with subsidised homes where the spiritually needy are esteemed for their independence, increasing their self-respect. People are not all the same: before pursuing spiritual goals, for example through meditation, they want material security.

The Grass is Always Browner, Zeus, 2011, p199.

19. What are the symptoms in personal development of over-materialistic and under-spiritual living? It is unhappiness, because we are unfulfilled, underachieving, unappreciated by others, unaccepted by those we esteem and unloved by those closest to us. We are empty from spending our time possessing, using, maintaining, repairing and replacing things, without time to consider who we are and what we really want. We neglect to update our beliefs, morals, values and integrity. Our relationships are few and shallow and unable to support us in adversity. We have anxiety, depression, pessimism and anger, or nervousness that can become mental or physical illness.

What are the elements of a Good Life?

20. Longevity is an indicator of The Good Life, as important as happiness. It has become a variable with the control of health budgets for life-extending surgery, however, lives thus extended may not have much added to a true Good Life index. When I asked some students in year 12 the value of doubling age at death from 70 to 140 years, if that was possible using the new technologies, they did not see much benefit in this, because it would be an extension to disabled old age. However, when I told them of

the experiments in which the lives of worms had been doubled by insertion of a gene from another type, and that this resulted in doubling of childhood, adolescence, young adulthood and every age, they regarded this as of much benefit. Therefore the Good Life is one that prolongs and makes enjoyable each stage of life.

21. We need to expose our spirit to a sensitive, benign and healing environment, not one that is hostile and damaged. We need as few as possible materials to provide for our physiological needs, with only essential structures and objects to take care of, by sharing and rostering duties with like-minded others. We need to owe obeisance to no man or woman, retaining our self-determination by the subsidiarity principle, which requires a good reason for others to take over. We need relationships with others that are balanced to allow for their and our inertias. We need opportunities to participate and invest in our local community, with our voluntary involvement in caring, educating and communing activities, both as a giver and a taker, under a philosophy of selfaltruism. This requires us to sustain our kin first and then to volunteer to help others. We need deep relationships with a few friends. We need a loving relationship with kin and with a spouse there should be intimacy, unconditional commitment and passion. Finally, we need time for ourselves to reflect, meditate, engage in 'flow' activities and participate in spiritual development activities. 'Flow' activities as those in which our personal time seems to stand still and our aging slows down relative to those engaged in activities they do not enjoy.

www.martinknox.wordpress.com

22 .Can materialism, for example capitalism, be controlled so that it doesn't increase and drive out spiritualism? When supply is centralized, for example by Coles and Ampol, with 'free' market conditions under the control of a 'watchdog' authority, capitalism is indistinguishable from centralized communism, where the financial interest cost, number of outlets, range of products, maximum prices and quantities allowed are all pre-planned. Although there is competition, there is convergence (e.g. with Woolworth's) and consumers have fewer and fewer real choices. This is disguised by increase of differentiated choices e.g. types of eggs, milk and octane number for petrol. Most people are unable to distinguish between these choices except by hearsay. The overall effect is to reduce customers' individuality and discriminatory spending, which reduces spirituality. Consumers' personal data taken from their credit cards enables the corporations to expand one-stop shopping to include a widening range of goods with a narrow choice in each at exorbitant prices e.g. vacuum cleaners. The corporations dominate the market and drive out smaller businesses that offer the same goods and services. There remain niche shops e.g. mobile phones, antiques. People, who will accept inconvenience for spiritual fulfillment, may resort to buying some foods at weekly market stalls. Such shopping expeditions have a social component and informality that supermarkets, with their narrow, regimented aisles and canned music, are unable to match for provenance.

Another different response is that people are buying less of their food at supermarkets and more fully prepared at restaurants. Whereas a restaurant visit was once a mainly a social occasion, it has become for these people more gastronomic, where they explore foods and tastes that they do not have the knowledge or skills, or cannot afford time and money to prepare themselves. Such growth in Epicureanism has a spiritual component and the focus of a group's social interaction.

Coffee bars have also become spiritual havens, where people can relax and share their hopes and fears with friends. Customers' extra costs for this, and for eating out, have been deducted from grocery budgets by converging on low-priced generic staples, resulting in a less varied diet most of the week.

23. Watching live sport has become a regular spiritual occasion for many people. There are rituals, chanting and glorification, which hark back to tribal confrontations. Others emulate tribal behaviour as they watch contests on TV at home.

24. The global consumer culture is making travel ever more accessible but less spiritual, due to reduced cultural differences. Citizens are unable to resist the destruction of their country's cultural traditions in package tourism and souvenir goods production. Here, as in local supermarket-led change, the pressure of materialism is resulting in spiritual loss. Too much materialism is unhealthy. I believe it stunts personal development, uses up scarce resources, causes pollution, diverts us from achieving happiness and can make us ill.

25. Growing older gives us an opportunity to sort through our value system. For example, we can better see that the spiritual really does contribute more to our life than the economic. We finally agree with the philosopher who says that who we are influences our happiness much more than what we have. How does 'who we are' influence our happiness? One way is that gaining belonging and respect within groups and the esteem of others promotes self esteem and happiness. There are many others that I hope to tease out, with your assistance through comments.

SUMMARY

1. The spiritual is venerated and not material or energy. It can be humanitarian.
2. I marvel or venerate giant trees more respectfully than new buildings but less than an old cathedral. Spiritual things can therefore be old and either natural or human-made.
3. Some natural things are awesome or spiritual when I don't know how they could have evolved. evolved.
4. Fewer people nowadays need a religion through which to express their spirituality.
5. A type of spiritualism may be nurtured by intimacy within families.
6. Spiritual icons can be emotional movies, books or goals.
7. Revelation of the future in a work of art may be spiritually felt.
8. In the US, capitalism has a spiritual dimension.
9. For me, the excess products of capitalism are unattractive. My spirit is buoyed by philosophies of minimalism and independence from material possessions.
10. Spirituality may be a superior motivation for Westerners who have everything. However, Hinduism teaches spiritual contentment with a minimum of possessions by deferring consumption to an afterlife. Buddhists require materials, whatever their amount, to be consumed according to spiritual precepts.
11. Both scientifically explained material causes and spiritual causes are commonly used to explain mental illnesses.
12. According to the Theory of Evolution, our highest purpose, survival, is materially determined.
13. There is evidence for human group selection. Spiritual connection may have evolved between intimates.

14. Communists with a central vision have it as a narrow spirituality.
15. The cog-like role of humans in industry, whether communist or liberal, was countered by 'back to nature' spiritualism.
16. Romantic spiritualism includes ruralism, Indigenous, conservation, anti-pollution, climate change prevention and Luddite movements.
17. According to Buddhists, spiritualism can grow independently of materialism.
18. Under a philosophy of selfaltruism, when my lifestyle is sustainable, I must help others in a spirit of altruism, or giving.
19. Our possessions can possess us and we can become ill from them.
20. A Good Life is indicated by longevity when it is extended at each stage not just in old age.
21. We should spend as much time as possible doing activities that 'flow' because these extend life and develop us spiritually.
22. Shopping centres, retail chains and eating out can reduce the provenance of a lifestyle to essentials, with a reduction in spirituality.
23. Live sport has been taken over by audience participation in tribal activities that are spiritual.
24. Travel overseas in tour groups is primarily material and undermines the local spiritual culture.
25. To turn from the material to the spiritual, one way is to develop personal relationships with self-esteem and happiness.

CONCLUSION

Life in Australia can become less materialistic and more spiritual. By reducing supermarket shopping, use of chain stores and materially oriented tour groups, self-esteem and spiritual liberation can result. Spiritualism increases in encounters with very large objects, venerable objects, unlikely flora and fauna, emotional experiences, intimacy, grand visions, giving, live sport, with others in good relationships and in living so absorbed, in work or a hobby, that time slows.