



FORTY-THREE

OXFORD FRIENDS' MEETING
43 ST. GILES OXFORD OX1 3LW

NEWSLETTER

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Self-evident truths?

The Enlightenment is thought of as the defining moment for human rights. In George Orwell's 1984, Winston Smith explains that there is one phrase that it is impossible to translate into Newspeak, namely Jefferson's 1776 Declaration of Independence – a key Enlightenment text – which begins: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...' Critics have often questioned the universality of human rights. An upcoming series on the theme of 'Self-evident truths? Human Rights & the Enlightenment' has been organized by Oxford Amnesty Lectures Ltd. (www.oxford-amnesty-lectures.org) and the Besterman Centre for the Enlightenment (www.voltaire.ox.ac.uk/bestermancentre/index.html). Speakers were invited to explore both the historical contexts from which rights emerged, and their status as truths today. The seven talks are on the following dates:

10 February, *Rethinking Human Rights and the Enlightenment: A View from the Twenty-First Century* (James Tully, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Law, Indigenous Governance and Philosophy at the University of Victoria)

17 February, *'That the General Will is Indestructible': From a Citizen of Geneva to the Citizens of Gaza* (Karma Nabulsi, Fellow in Politics, St Edmund Hall, Oxford)

26 February, *My Happiness: Right or Wrong?* (Adam Phillips, psychotherapist and writer)

3 March, *Basic Human Rights: the Enlightenment Battle over the Place of God and Religion (1770-89)* (Jonathan Israel, Professor of Modern European History at the School for Advanced Study, Princeton)

10 March, *From Natural Rights to General Liberty: Slavery, Emancipation and the Origins of Human Rights* (Robin Blackburn, Professor of Sociology, Essex, and Editor of New Left Review)

17 March, *Cosmopolitanism since Kant: Claiming Rights Across Borders in a New Century* (Seyla Benhabib, the Eugene Meyer Professor of Political Science and Philosophy, Yale)

12 May, *(Dignity, Defamation and Rights: What does a Well-Ordered Society Look Like?)* (Jeremy Waldron, Professor of Law and Philosophy, New York School of Law)

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From Quaker Faith and Practice

Release

I was terrified I'd break down.
I did.
It didn't matter.

QF&P 21.68 Rosalind M Baker, 1986

Deadline for contributions to the March 2010 issue: noon, Friday 19 February

Contributions, of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated, preferably by email: newsletter@oxfordquakers.org. Paper copy can be left in the Forty-Three pigeonhole at Oxford Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373.

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All lectures start at 5:30 p.m. at the Taylor Institute, St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3NA. Tickets cost £8 (£5 concession) and are available from The Playhouse, Beaumont Street, Oxford, OX1 2LW (Tel: 01865 305305, www.ticketsoxford.com). Tickets are also for sale on the door, if available.

Thanks to **Sandra Figgess**



PATHS Volunteer Project: Promoting Access To Health Services

We need volunteers who will support homeless people to get medical treatment.

Luther Street Medical Centre is a medical practice that works exclusively with homeless people. Many of our patients lead chaotic lives, suffer from a chronic lack of confidence, and may feel threatened by places and people they are not familiar with. So they often do not attend hospital and other health-related appointments arranged for them by Luther Street. This can seriously damage the already poor health that many of them suffer.

We are setting up a new project to provide volunteers who can go with patients to their appointments, helping them to remember the time and day, find their way there and back, and to feel confident enough to deal with new health staff. We are looking for mature, non-judgemental people with good communication skills who would like to become volunteers on this project. You will need to be available during weekdays, and to offer 2-3 hours a week. You will receive full training and management support, and your expenses will be reimbursed.

To find out more, and to receive an information and application pack, contact me at Luther Street Medical Centre, P.O. Box 7, St Aldates, Oxford OX1 1TD; tel: 01865-792126; email: ohmfvolunteers@btconnect.com.

Jan Penrose

A Good Death?

A group of Oxford Friends gathered last month to discuss this subject, learning from one another as we talked about our attitudes to death, and what

might constitute 'a good death'. Confidentiality was a basic ground rule, and that enabled us to talk openly about our feelings – and fears.

Expectedly, there was a range of views, but some desirable components of a good death began to emerge, such as achieving harmonious relationships, having time to say goodbye, actively letting go of life rather than clinging to it. We had ideas about an ideal setting: in a well-loved and beautiful place, with family wafting us on our way, maybe with a requiem playing softly.

Among so many unknowns, there are some practical or spiritual steps that can be taken now. Some of us had made Living Wills to avoid intrusive medical treatment, or had reduced possessions and simplified finances. Others had evaded even the fact of mortality and were appalled at the thought of being dead, of existing no more. For several, death was no enemy, but it was the process of dying that we dreaded, especially the loss of dignity and control. We prayed for courage.

Behind these thoughts were even larger questions. What is our view of God? Some who didn't feel close to God, still felt looked after. Others had put their life, in trust, in God's hands. 'Let thy will be done.' Then, views of the after-life coloured thoughts of death, and here again opinions in the group varied. So did they on the subject of assisted dying. 'Surrender into the drama; be prepared to go the last mile' contrasted with 'people should have the right to get help in terminating their life'.

This Friday with Friends followed a suggestion from a Woodbrooke conference that the subject should be discussed at local level. In Oxford we felt privileged to have been part of such deep sharing, but there was no leading to form a new group.

Instead we felt encouraged to find one or more buddies to share some of our perceptions of just what is a 'good death'.

Peggy Heeks,
Co-convenor of the session





AVP in Havana

Our twins in Havana are very active in promoting the Alternatives to Violence Programme and their workshops are very well received. They are now preparing to work with the police in Central Havana and have just obtained permission to run workshops in the women's prison. The moving spirit in this work is Dr Ania Mora who, as well as being the GP for a large area, is a cancer specialist caring for a growing number of patients. I hope that we can support the work of Havana Friends.

Marigold Best