

The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything. That's why we occasionally end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought interesting. Read on for four comments and discussions I thought worth highlighting.

Re-illuminating the sacred

Elizabeth Dori Tunstall recently ran a column about designing for religion and sacredness. This led a few discussion about the nature of belief, sacredness and even human nature, like this one between Tunstall and Jess Adj.

[Jess Adj](#) :

Those who hold belief in God believe that the world went through as process of creation by a creator i.e. the earth was divinely designed, and thus was sacred at its birth. Religious people then place humans as the profane of what was once sacred.

Religion in this instance is a way of making peace with what human's feel they have done. It is a way of re-establishing or remembering that which was sacred. Those who would refrain from referring to themselves as religious preferring spiritual identification instead also see sacredness in nature for its own sake.

I am more comfortable with faith because of this, as I know it has good intentions that have been realised in some of the greatest acts of love in history. I am resolved that humans, religious or non-religious, are imperfect beings and act atrociously and morally in equal measures. However, like you I do struggle, as I am uncomfortable with a more educated, less religious, secular society which perpetuates poverty and modern slavery through the mass production and mass purchase of products and goods, many of which have been designed to make the profane sacred. What is our justification for that? Surely not religion?

[Elizabeth Dori Tunstall](#) :

Unfortunately, our justification for treating other people, animals, and the environment as lesser beings is hubris. This keeps it within the realm of “human” as opposed to the supernatural, which offers the opportunity to change the hearts of humans.

[Jess Adj](#) :

Human hearts are of course eternally dissonant, but religion, faith or spirituality, the ‘supernatural realms’ that many move themselves into are ways of accepting that we are not perfect but are in need of some help to be better. Historically and today these realms are often a way for humans to take the initiative to rectify their own shortcomings.

For design to observe these ten principles to inspire sacredness, we must tackle the very complicated and difficult underlying problem of unethical production. I hope this ‘human realm thing’, whatever it is, offers the opportunity to change our hearts, because knowing about and being fully convicted of bondage production and our consumption of it seems to prompt very incremental and impotent change.

[Lindsay Kelly](#) also shared his thoughts on the nature of religion and its place in life and the modern world:

A gentle and thought provoking article.

“I deeply believe that design will meet its true promise when designers engage in design for the sacred.”

I share your belief but I note your hesitation on the 'r' word.

Of course the default position-especially in countries like Australia is that our post-Durkheimian secular culture has grown out of religion.

Religion however, is difficult to define: there are many languages that simply have no word for it. There is more than one scholar in comparative religion who has said one's definition of 'religion' will say more about you as a person than it does about the subject in question. To extend this idea: today, just as many people argue environmentalism is the 'new religion', it is easily argued that the widespread belief in unlimited economic growth is also a 'religion', defined in a negative way.

To extend the argument in another direction: comparing religious traditions reveals enormous diversity yet it also reveals astounding similarities in terms of what constitutes the ideals of human nature, wisdom, happiness and flourishing i.e. we can choose to see chaos and competition or we can choose to see an underlying unity given different hues in different cultures. The choice is ours.

In our post-modern world it is easy to mistake unity within diversity for meaningless chaos.

A point often made is that science disavows 'teleology' yet requires a uni-verse in order to discover-or 'make' any meaning at all.

Aristotle stated the situation succinctly: 'actuality (reality) presupposes unity'.

And 'unity' of course has no 'meaning' - no 'teleology' apart from unity itself.

The implication of this is that if we can accept that 'wrestling' with the idea of unity (what is real) has been the central concern of many religious traditions then the etymology of the word 'religion' as in meaning 'that which binds' leads us to a definition of religion as 'that which binds (

the practitioner) to reality. Assigning sacredness to any particular object is to a degree arbitrary in the choice, but non-arbitrary if it helps 'bind us' to the Real: the underlying unity out of which all this comes and into which it will all return.

A barrier to thinking this way is our tendency to interpret things in a 'literal' way that were never intended to be interpreted in such a fashion. It is a curious but little known historical fact that the prominence of 'fundamentalism' together with 'literal' interpretations of ancient texts is of recent origin. We assume all too often that we are smarter than earlier generations who also wrestled with the limits of language, meaning and with ideas of how human consciousness relates to reality. There is a dawning awareness that the post-enlightenment, historical-critical hermeneutics of our diminished Christian tradition has now almost run dry, but that ancient Christian commentaries and interpretations can still impart wisdom that is remarkably universal.

Our immediate difficulty is we find ourselves in a material world that does not value the material with no clear way out. The value of 'religious' traditions is that they can impart distilled wisdom-but only if we are prepared to listen.

Years ago I met a young woman who had spent time in a kibbutz who had a beautiful tattoo in Arabic on her arm. When I asked her what it meant she translated it for me: "Nothing is trivial."

The obvious implication is, of course, that the entire is sacred.

Thankyou.

Health Check: do wrist bands work to repel mozzies?

After arguing that topical mosquito repellent is still the best avoid to avoid the bloodsuckers, Cameron Webb spent some time in the comments of his article discussing other options.

[Matt G](#) :

Community highlights

Written by The Conversation USA

Probably the best-known natural “repellant” isn’t applied to the skin at all, i.e. burning citronella oil - does filling your garden with smelly fumes do anything at all to deter the bitey little critters?

[Cameron Webb](#) :

Unfortunately it seems as though burning mosquito coils/sticks/candles that contain citronella and other botanical extracts will help reduce the number of bites but rarely provide complete protection. If you want to use mosquito coils, products containing insecticides work best.

[Michael Ow](#) :

As a bushwalker, this is a most pertinent topic. I agree with the comments in this article. Using a cream or spray is most effective on exposed skin areas. Whilst permethrin-treated clothing is initially effective, this does fade dramatically over time and washings. One method which I have not tried is the personal electronic mosquito repellent. This may be limited in coverage as the device probably has a certain range where its ultrasonic waves would work. Short of a personal ‘shield’ device (as with many science fiction starships), I’m sticking to the creams and sprays. Slap it on Scotty!

[Cameron Webb](#) :

Hi Michael, please avoid the “sonic repellers” and “mosquito repellent smartphone apps” as they’ll offer pretty much zero protection. However, you will see “clip on” devices for sale that contain an insecticide combined with a battery operated fan - these products look to hold great potential.

[Shrinking Antarctic glaciers could make Adélie penguins unlikely winners of climate change](#)

[Paul Prociw](#) had a few questions about the Adélie penguins' history and what this change in habitat could mean for their odds of being eaten.

Fascinating stuff, but I have a question arising from “We found that, as for the emperor penguins, Adélies were far less common during the ice age.”

You seem to be referring only to the continent of Antarctica, but is there any evidence that these and Emperors lived further northwards then, perhaps up the South American coast line, where glaciation would have been extensive and conditions comparable to present-day Antarctica?

Also, without much ice around, Adelies will become easier targets for Leopard Seals, their main predators, as they won't have floating islands for refuge.

The article's author, [Jane Younger](#), had some answers:

That's very true, Adelies and some of the other species like Gentoos and chinstraps may well have moved north during the ice age, possibly to islands like the Falklands that weren't completely glaciated. No one has found any remains dating to the ice age though (and people have looked), but as sea levels were lower back then it's possible that ice age nesting sites are now underwater. It would be fascinating to know where they all went!

Your second point about sea ice is also correct - Adelies like to forage within the sea ice zone, partly because the ice gives them cover from predators. In the Western Antarctica Peninsula there have been large decreases in sea ice over the past few decades and the thinking is that is the cause of Adelie numbers dropping there. For now the sea ice in East Antarctica and the Ross Sea isn't declining, and the Adelies there are doing well.

[Connecting online can help prevent social isolation in older people](#)

Community highlights

Written by The Conversation USA

Finally, [Elizabeth Connor](#) humbled us:

At 75 and madly interested in international politics, I do most of my online socialising on TC. Such a wonderful source of ideas, arguments and occasionally even inspiration!

Thanks TC.

Thank you for being part of our community, Elizabeth.

Read a comment you thought interesting? Let me know during the week. You can leave a comment below or send me an [email](#).

Read more <http://theconversation.com/community-highlights-51025>