

ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 NEWSLETTER FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING
 JUNE 2021 NUMBER 46
ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

William Timpson, Del Benson, Bob Meroney, Lloyd Thomas and Kip Turain (?)
 Fort Collins Rotary Club

In these newsletters of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to invite readers for contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to educate others by promoting the foundational skills for promoting sustainable peace and civility, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation. We also want to encourage the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties among people in more sustainable ways, i.e., with the interconnected health of their people, their economies and their environments. In our July issue we will focus on INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION with guest speaker, Professor Eric Aoki (CSU, Speech Communication and discuss) what can help us better deal with conflict with people, customs or ideas from other cultures.

**NOTE: Professor Del Benson will lead our Sustainable Peacebuilding Fellowship
 on Wed. June 2 from 1:30-2:30 MST**

All are invited. Share this newsletter with a friend or colleague.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/494943309?pwd=SmtTUDYzTIZrcVBhblVLRmdvbVh6dz09>

ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING
Short-Term Lessons from Covid-19 that relate to Long-Term Behaviors with Climate Change

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Our assignment for the June newsletter is Environmental Peacebuilding: Making peace with the planet; what are the implications for everyone; facing the threats of climate change; the continuing loss of species; rising levels of pollution. How do we turn all this around before a crisis hits?

Covid gave peoples of the world one common and identifiable goal: stop the disease quickly because it can affect us all. Research using old and new ideas and technologies exploded, and the world implemented effective vaccines, tests, treatments, personal behaviors, masks, and delivery services in record speed. Those acts are still in progress.

Now scientists and administrators lament that too few persons will be vaccinated soon enough to overcome Covid and its variants. Reasons for not being vaccinated vary: location, economic status, religion, fears, race, politics, lack of long-term data, media choices, friends, do not want to, or other beliefs and barriers. If a pandemic cannot unite persons toward common behaviors, how can we expect humans to respond thoughtfully and progressively to global climate changes which are more difficult to experience by most human?

Covid lockdowns and new social and economic norms should provide important warnings for how people will need new adaptation behaviors to face climate changes. Pandemics are rapid and people can see the deaths, sicknesses, treatments, and economic impacts in their homes or in the news each day; yet some persons still refuse to act. Global climate changes are long-term and less obvious to most humans living in temperate urban situations, yet life on coasts, the Arctic, and in deserts is changing even if we do not see it, experience it, or believe it.

Humans cannot easily understand the complexity and depth of issues and solutions associated with climate change in its long-term continuum. Humans live more in the moment. Place climate issues alongside Covid to understand social and economic concerns.

One of the most active minds and philanthropists in the world, Bill Gates, wrote a provocative book in 2021 called *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: the solutions we have and the breakthroughs we need*. He addresses climate science issues and possible solutions while living in the comparative world of Covid. His thoughtful reasoning reflects our real lives.

Gates asserts, with evidence, that economic impacts of climate change are bleak. In the next decade or two, economic damage caused by climate-change will likely be as bad as having a Covid-sized pandemic every 10 years. Deaths attributed to climate changes could be just as deadly as Covid by midcentury and 10 times worse by 2100. His book painted a view of changes to come. He suggested major and coordinated approaches to solve climate problems similar to how scientific and administrative strategies addressed Covid. Granted, some of his ideas and the world's approaches to Covid prevention need resilient and iterative scientific research to take them from opinion into science and mainstream practices.

Thinking about food alone, you can imagine changes in agriculture and human activities as arid lands such as U.S. deserts or sub-Saharan Africa become hotter beyond current plant growing capabilities. Likewise, northern lands such as Alaska, Canada, Russia, and Scandinavia get warmer. Those lands might become more productive and their managers more prosperous. That is good for some and not for others.

Methane produced by melting permafrost, and receding glaciers add new problems to the north. National News recently showed Russian military harassing U.S. fishing boats in the north seas. Less ice enables travel and fishing. Trawlers now fish the waters, and most likely Russians want to keep an eye and political power over its neighbors during these changing times. Climate changes affect sustainability, peace, and civil relationships with our friends and neighbors.

Science can overcome some issues and cause others. About the time my career started, U.S. biologist Paul Ehrlich published a best-selling book called *The Population Bomb*, and predicted in 1968 that during the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions of people would starve to death and that India could not possibly feed 200 million more people. Overlooked, was pioneering research by Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman Borlaug, who developed new varieties of better producing wheat.

Other scientists did the same with rice and other crops. Granted there was starvation in those times, in part owing to more droughts, but research and greater production by farmers overcame the dire predictions. India now has a population of 1.4 billion and they, as the rest of the world, seek better lives, which food, material products, transport, energy, education, security, and health provide. India is also setting world records for Covid and facing oxygen shortages for treatments aside from administering vaccinations.

How will India and the rest of the world respond if in the next decade or two, economic damage caused by climate-change will likely be as bad as having a Covid-sized pandemic every 10 years? We should be worried and science is only one solution for action. Persons, institutions, and effective procedures must be ready to respond.

Being resilient and adjusting to immediate and probable situations are why humans have brains. Using those brains can provide solutions to climate changes. Having the will to address problems is the Rotarian way. Climate change is a social issue, economic issue, a peace issue, a civility issue, a sustainability issue, and should be our issue.

EMBRACE COMPLEXITY WHILE CONNECTING SYSTEMS, VALUES AND SUSTAINABILITY

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In my 2019 book, *Learning Life's Lessons*, the very first recommendation is to think about sustainability as embracing complexity and drawing on inspiration from various sources for ways forward. In January 1964, the U.S. Surgeon General released a report indicating that smoking was a definite health hazard. Over many years it eventually became public how aggressive the tobacco industry had been in attempting to conceal this connection and refute the medical evidence. A commitment to sustainability means asking hard questions and interrogating the responses that we get, including questions about the systems that operate our economies, our societies and our politics and that inspire our values. The following “tip” is adapted from #16 in *147 Practical Tips for Teaching Sustainability*.

Examine how capitalist and democratic ideals and sustainable practices interact with each other. Richard Fox, then with the non-profit organization, Trees, Water, and People, reminds us that democracy is not something we made *once*. He insists that it is an ongoing evolving experiment in working collectively and that *we* are the ones on the cutting edge of that powerful force.

As an example, Fox points to the fundamental question of water and asks if clean and sufficient water is a human right that government should provide or a commodity that can be sold to the highest bidder?

In the U.S., Fox insists that we face our own version of water privatization but that it comes in the form of bottled water. He notes that if you look at any convenience store, you will see that we have somehow accepted the marketed premise that we should pay more for a gallon of water than we do for gasoline. Think about that!

Worse yet, as people turn to bottled water as the solution for a perceived failure of our public water systems, we have less money to improve those very public water systems under question. Instead, we are now faced with a huge new form of trash (i.e., mountains of plastic bottles). The truth is that we don't adequately fund our water systems." Just think about the tragic events in Flint Michigan in 2015 when dangerously high levels of lead surfaced when the city's source for water was changed.

However, the real irony is that many tests are showing that some of the bottled water is no better than the water we get from the tap or, in some cases, it is tap water but

sold with a fancy label.” For insight into the international debate, read *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop Corporate Theft of the World’s Water* by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, or view the film “Thirst.”

Ask yourself and your students or audience members: In what other ways do the current economic and political systems undermine sustainability? What would be inspiring?



This young Rotary Club in Ngozi, Burundi, is in one of the poorest nations in the world. It is emerging from a legacy of colonial control and exploitation that led to 40 years of civil war. Despite these obstacles, these Rotarians embraced “service in action” to help a poor mountain community improve their water system and health. In partnership with the University of Ngozi, a central commitment for these efforts is to promote sustainable peacebuilding!

INTIMATE CONNECTIONS

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We all need to be connected to other people in some fashion...and to the larger environment to which we all belong. If we do not connect to others, we do not develop common, human characteristics. If we do not stay connected to nature, we risk dooming the entire planet with mounting pollution and wasteful practices. Sometimes we don’t even survive very long and now the planet is at risk. If we do not have sufficient contact with others, we may survive as a biological life, but less than “human.” If we do not have sufficient contact with nature, we may not survive as biological beings. To become fully human and fully connected with nature, we require intimate connections with other persons and with all living entities. Here are some suggested activities for establishing those necessary intimate connections with others.

CONNECTING

1. Each person risks revealing themselves to be as they genuinely are, without letting the possibility of another person’s judgment or opinion (approval/disapproval) deter or alter their expression.
2. Rather than a statement about you, view what *the other* has to offer as a statement about the him or herself (their likes and dislikes, feelings, wants, limitations, etc.).

3. Learn to see “different-ness” and disagreement as an opportunity for growth and new understanding, rather than as a put down or criticism. Present different-ness or disagreement as a statement about yourself and not a judgment or criticism of the other person.
4. Commit yourself to work through whatever emerges until all the feelings are out in the open, all information is shared, and mutual satisfaction is achieved.
5. Accept that we cannot change our feelings by an act of will; rather each of us must be in charge of establishing his or her own boundaries so we do not get to the point of resentment-collecting.
6. Both individuals need to be clear in stating their boundaries and wants. Each needs to hear the other’s boundaries as limitations and needs rather than ultimatums or attempts to control.
7. Have a clear, internal understanding and acceptance of the fact that *neither person intends to hurt or use* the other.
8. Accept “my intent is to give all I can to you” *only* if it will hurt neither me nor you.

TRUST

We can build mutual trust with one another when:

1. Each of us is giving freely, without coercion, to our connection to a healthy environment.
2. We appreciate each other for the gift of contact with a healthy environment and the commitment to that contact.
3. We can spontaneously express at any time with anything we feel about nature and there will always be room for error and forgiveness.
4. You will hear what I have to say about our shared environment and will listen to my feelings even if you don’t agree with my words or are upset by them.
5. Not only will you not try to change me (an impossibility anyway), but you really *do not want* to change me.
6. Each is committed to him /her own growth as primary, the relationship secondary.

INTIMATE EXPLORATION

The more you practice non-sexual intimate contact, the more comfortable you become with it. Here are some suggestions for exploring what intimacy is like.

1. Each one perceives the other’s non-verbal behavior, and asks for clarification if incongruities are sensed. We need a new honesty about the threats to our shared environment.

2. Explore the discrepancies in expressions about sustainable peacebuilding.
3. Educate yourselves to the use of our own inner resources...our “body messages” and our alliance with a healthy environment.
4. Share your fantasies and daydream about a way forward that honors the environment.
5. Keep communication in the immediate present...regarding both internal and external events and what is happening in the environment.

DIFFERENT WORLD VIEWS: ARE MY FACTS YOUR FACTS?

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A frequent dilemma when discussing climate change, the environment, and current perceptions about their impact are the different wells of information drawn upon to justify opinions. It can be difficult to differentiate between conclusions based on science and facts, ideas based on beliefs, political preference, or religion, and those based on ignorance.

It is important to differentiate between objective versus subjective information. Objective information is based on observation or measurable facts. It is often expected to meet the tests of the scientific method, replication, and validation before acceptance. Objective writing should be contained in encyclopedias, textbooks and (hopefully) news reporting. Subjective information is based on personal opinions, assumptions, interpretations, and beliefs. It is commonly found in newspaper editorials, blogs, biographies, and comments on the internet. Normally objective information is suitable for decision making and subjective information should be used with caution.

Just because something is objective does not mean it is always true. The information may be outdated, definitions or criteria change, and new information may revise understanding.

Consider the following objective statements:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| • Taipei 101 is the world’s tallest building. | Once true no longer so, |
| • Burj Khalifa is the world’s tallest building. | Currently true, |
| • Six plus three equals ten. | False, |
| • There are nine planets in our solar system. ... | Pluto removed by definition change. |

In contrast, subjective claims cannot be proven true or false by any generally accepted criteria. This is because they are based on opinions, preferences, values, feelings, and sometimes emotions. They can involve facts, but are not themselves facts, and are not verifiable. Consider the following subjective statements.

- Salmon tastes better than trout.
- Spiders and centipedes are scary and yuk.
- Ex-President ***** was America’s worst president.
- Climate change is a liberal conspiracy which will destroy America.

In matters of subjective statements, although there are no generally accepted standards or methods that prove a claim is conclusively true, neither is there a conclusive way to prove it is false. Because a statement is subjective does not mean it is automatically false.

Let us consider a verifiable objective statement (OS) about the environment and then two

subjective statements (SS) based on the information:

- OS: Observed global land-surface temperatures have risen by 1° C since 1850.¹
- SS: These changes are most likely due to anthropogenic effects of man's industrial activities including the increase of atmospheric CO₂, and the observed warming is inconsistent with model estimates of natural climate variability.²
- SS: Since CO₂ makes up less than 0.04% of atmospheric gases, proportionately then out of say 85,800 molecules of air just 33 molecules are CO₂, and only 1 molecule is from man's activities, it is ridiculous to claim that production of CO₂ through human activity contributes significantly to global warming.³

The first two statements are verifiable and supported by extensive references found in the footnotes 1 and 2. The third statement is extracted from arguments proposed by climate-change denier Malcom Roberts. It is a mixture of verifiable information and a conclusion and opinion which is based on an incorrect understanding of how the Earth's energy balance is dependent on radiation absorbed by CO₂ molecules.⁴

The problem is that people MIX objective statements and subjective statements without clearly differentiating when one statement type ends, and another type starts. Given indoctrination and preconceptions these same people may not even know themselves. On the other hand, sometimes there is intellectual dishonesty. For example, people can quote some respected figures, data, or texts to justify their opinions or conclusions, but "cherry pick" the statements and do not include the context for the quote. Misinformation can also be insidious; it can seep into the unconscious and influence actions and beliefs long after we have forgotten its source.

I recently came across some wonderful words of wisdom in a fiction book titled "*Outcasts of Order*" by L.E. Modesitt, Jr. 2018.⁵ This is a book in the extremely popular Saga of Recluse Series in the Science Fiction/Fantasy genre. I think the words are worth passing on.

*Do not ever attempt to convince another about anything by the use of facts or logic. A stupid man will not be swayed by facts. An intelligent man already knows those facts, and if he does not agree with you, he either has more accurate information than you or his personal beliefs prevent him from accepting what you know to be true. In either case, insisting on pressing facts and logic on him will only strengthen his beliefs that he is correct, and you are not. A gentle question, politely framed, can help determine the basis for his firmness and what course of action may be required. If you believe he is indeed in error, first question yourself and whether through your own desires you are seeing what you wish to believe...*⁶

¹ IPCC, *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis*, Chapter 2, Observed Climate Variability and Change, Figure 2.1, page 107, Cambridge University Press, 893 pp.

https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/WGI_TAR_full_report.pdf

² Ibid, Chapter 12.6, Concluding Remarks, pages 730-731.

³ Roberts, M. (2011), *The Rice Video - Carbon Dioxide in perspective*, The Galileo Movement,

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/BC1l4geSTP8> and <http://www.galileomovement.com.au/docs/freedom1-CO2.pdf>

⁴ Fischer, D. (2011), "Galileo Movement" Fuels Climate Change Divide in Australia, *Scientific American*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/galileo-movement-fuels-australia-climate-change-divide/>

⁵ Modesitt, Jr. L.E. (2018), *Outcasts of Order* (Saga of Recluse), Tor Books, 656 pp.

⁶ I note that the author wrote the paragraph in male gender, but it could equally be applied to the female person by replacing words man, he, and him with woman, she, and her.

At least for myself, these are very good words to remember. As an academic, my own viewpoints tend to be driven by information and facts as I can find them. I try to avoid opinions on issues until I have researched the available information, and I truly try to look for alternative information or opinions. Unfortunately, I find I am then often guilty of expecting others to accept the facts as I find them as the correct facts.



The motivation to uncover falsehoods and lies is praiseworthy, but the problem is that people often see or conclude different things when looking at the same event. Since “fact checking” can itself be controversial, and we know personal biases can even influence well-meaning fact checkers in their choice of wording and sources, a recent suggestion has been to arrange for “adversarial” fact-checkers who would debate the same “evidence” when appropriate and publish results simultaneously.⁷

Finally, for an extensive source of information about climate change including discussions of misinformation and denial I would refer you to the internet site originally prepared by SueEllen Campbell and John Calderazzo, Emeritus Professors, Colorado State University English Department, and their associates titled “100 Views of Climate Change.”⁸

<http://changingclimates.colostate.edu/index.html>

PRIORITIES OF THE ROTARY FOUNDATION

See the RI website: <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/our-priorities>. You can find some of our past issues at the Rotary District 5440 website: <https://www.rotary5440.org/sitepage/peace-building-newsletters>. Future issues may explore the following: INTERCULTURAL COMUNICATION with Dr. Eric Aoki.

⁷ Ceci, S.J. and Williams, W.M. (2020), The Psychology of Fact-checking, *Scientific American Newsletter*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-psychology-of-fact-checking1/>

⁸ The Big Picture: Misinformation and Denial about Climate Change, <http://changingclimates.colostate.edu/humans-misinfo.html>