Learningguild Letter

1.2003*

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

In March 2003 we began a Thursday seminar, giving it that name because it would differ from the philosophy seminar held on Tuesdays by having a wider range. We took as our title for the year the question "How have we come to be what we are?" Initially we discussed some of the writing of E.O.Wilson on evolutionary biology and the impact he considers it ought to have on other studies and our general view of human beings. Then we took D.S.Wilson's *Darwin's Cathedral*, in which he seeks to explain through evolutionary sociobiology the successful functioning of various groups, each united by its religion, in different historical periods. Our third author was Steven Pinker, psychologist, polymath and famous teacher (he is a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) whose book *The Blank Slate*, published by Viking Penguin in 2002, occupied us for much of second and all of third term. That book is the subject of this letter. I am grateful to members of the seminar for suggesting that we study it, for their kindness in presenting me with a copy, which I should be happy to lend, and for their comments in discussion.

Pinker's main theme, "the Blank Slate", he explains on p.2 as "the idea that the human mind has no inherent structure and can be inscribed at will by society or ourselves". He says there that "our intellectual mainstream is committed to … [t]hat theory of human nature ─ namely, that it barely exists". He rejects it, and holds that it has been extremely damaging that "[d]uring the past century the doctrine of the Blank Slate has set the agenda for much of the social sciences and humanities" (p.6). Here I shall first note his summary of his own position, and try to convey something of the breadth and strength of the case he mounts, and then turn to his second and third main themes, "the Noble Savage" and "the Ghost in the Machine". I shall explain why I find his treatment of the third less than satisfactory in its neglect of what I shall call the choosing of criteria and of ends, and argue that it underlies an inadequate treatment of the possibilities of family life and of education. Finally I shall comment on some of Pinker's references to religion.

Two sentences on p.viiif in the Preface deserve to be kept in mind so that we appreciate what Pinker is attempting:

> I am not, as many people assume, countering an extreme "nurture" position with an extreme "nature" position. … In most

> cases the correct explanation will invoke a complex interaction between heredity and environment: culture is crucial, but culture could not exist without mental faculties that allow humans to create and learn culture to begin with.

Much of the book can be related to that phrase 'mental faculties' in each of two ways, illustrated by Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. In the former, Pinker surveys what he regards as the damaging prevalence among social scientists of the 20th century of the Blank Slate view of human beings. On p.25 he quotes Margaret Mead as writing "We are forced to conclude that human nature is almost unbelievably malleable, responding accurately and contrastingly to contrasting cultural conditions." (In the final chapter, on p.428, he quotes O'Brien's words to Winston in George Orwell's *1984*: "But we create human nature. Men are infinitely malleable.") But how are those mental faculties to be studied and understood? Chapter 3 is entitled "The Last Wall to Fall".

> [It is] the one that twentieth-century social scientists guarded so jealously. It divides matter from mind, the material from the spiritual, the physical from the mental, biology from culture, nature from society, and the sciences from the social sciences, humanities, and arts. … But this wall, too, is falling. New ideas from four frontiers of knowledge ─ the sciences of mind, brain, genes, and evolution ─ are breaching the wall with a new understanding of human nature.
>
> (p.31)

Pinker then devotes the four sections of the chapter in turn to those four sciences, each of which he calls a bridge. Named more fully, they are cognitive science, neuroscience, behavioral genetics and evolutionary psychology. This chapter, two later ones on the fear of determinism and the fear of nihilism, and the two on politics and on gender, would all assist someone who wanted to understand Pinker's standpoint without (at least initially) reading the whole book. Much of the power of the argument lies in the cumulative detail: for example, in Chapter 3 the computer that defeated the world chess champion (p.33f); the adverse effect on the character of the railroad worker Phineas Gage of the spike that impaled part of his brain (p.42); the findings that "Identical twins are far more similar than fraternal twins, whether they are raised apart or together", whereas "unrelated siblings, one or both adopted, who are raised together from infancy" tend to be very unlike, in IQ and otherwise (p.47); and the distinction between proximate causation and ultimate or evolutionary causation (p.54).

In Chapter 10, "The Fear of Determinism", Pinker distinguishes explaining criminal or bad behaviour from exculpating it (p.179), and then argues that systems of punishment need to be applied consistently to those who have committed crimes and were capable of weighing the nature and consequences of their actions, in order to maintain an effective deterrence for other such people. There is a good deal in this, but attention needs to be given to whether the capability is often a matter of degree, the other purposes which, so far as possible, humane punishment must serve, and in particular the range of objections to capital punishment (contrast in these respects p.181). I comment on some parts of the following chapter "The Fear of Nihilism" at the end of this letter.

Chapter 16, "Politics", is perhaps the most thought-provoking of all. Its primary contribution is a development of a distinction drawn by Thomas Sowell, in *A Conflict of Visions*, between two views of human nature. Sowell wrote of "the Constrained Vision" and "the Unconstrained Vision"; Pinker prefers the adjectives 'Tragic' and 'Utopian', and, after describing the two outlooks, says on p.293:

> My own view is that the new sciences of human nature really do vindicate some version of the Tragic Vision and undermine the Utopian outlook that until recently dominated large segments of intellectual life.

On the following page, he gives various reasons, based on research in these sciences, why he holds it to be unlikely that "[t]he Utopian vision that human nature might radically change in some imagined society of the remote future" will be fulfilled, including in his bullet-point list of factors to be reckoned with:

> The primacy of family ties in all human societies and the consequent appeal of nepotism and inheritance. The limited scope of communal sharing in human groups …. The universality of ethnocentrism and other forms of group-against-group hostility across societies, and the ease with which such hostility can be aroused in people within our own society. … an inherent trade-off between equality and freedom. The prevalence of defense mechanisms, self-serving biases, and cognitive dissonance reduction, by which people deceive themselves about their autonomy, wisdom, and integrity.

On p.40 he notes the common ground that "the theory of human nature coming out of the cognitive revolution" shares with "the Judeo-Christian theory of human nature" and "the psychoanalytic theory proposed by Sigmund Freud". Here as elsewhere we should be very cautious about using that compound adjective (see Isidore Epstein's *Judaism*, p.142, on the difference between Jewish and Christian views of sin); but there is certainly a marked correspondence between Pinker's talk of "self-serving biases" and self-deception and that of the American Reinhold Niebuhr, a Christian theologian and a persistent critic of an optimistic liberalism, who in a lecture in 1944 spoke of "the divisive and corrosive effects of man's self-love" and said that "there is no level of human moral or social achievement in which there is not some corruption of inordinate self-love". (See *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p.19. I wrote about Niebuhr, with admiration and some objections, in *Learningguild Letter* 2.1997.)

At the end of Chapter 16, though not himself endorsing it as a political position, Pinker writes with appreciation of the emergence of a non-Utopian left, one which takes evolution seriously, as exemplified in Peter Singer's *A Darwinian Left* (1999).

In Chapter 18, "Gender", he endorses Christina Hoff Sommers's distinction between equity feminism and gender feminism. The former is within the liberal tradition and leaves open the empirical question how far the biological differences between men and women are accompanied by psychological ones. The latter emphasizes social construction and the power claimed to be exercised by men in general over women in general (p.341). Pinker draws upon surveys showing that there are differences in

preference-tendencies between men and women, and urges the need to respect people's preferences and choices, rather than suppose them to be necessarily the result of conditioning and insist on aiming at gender parity. At the end of the chapter he rejects Susan Brownmiller's thesis that rape stems from a general and socially conditioned urge on the part of men to dominate women, seeing it rather in traditional terms as the use of consent-ignoring violence in the gratification of inordinate sexual desire.

Belief in "the Noble Savage" could hardly survive a reading of Chapter 17, on the prevalence of violence in human history. Having used Hobbes's distinction of "three principal causes of quarrel", competition, diffidence (i.e., distrust), and glory, Pinker, who prefers 'honor' for the third, asserts on p.329 that "violence … is a near-inevitable outcome of the dynamics of self-interested, rational social organisms". Alongside the necessity of an efficient criminal justice system (pp. 330-2), he points to such means of conflict resolution as "submitting to the rule of law, figuring out a way for both sides to back down without losing face, acknowledging the possibility of one's own self-deception, accepting the equivalence of one's own interests and other people's" (p.336). I think he concedes too little to upbringing and environment when he says, with inadequate evidence, that "children are violent well before they have been infected by war toys or cultural stereotypes" (p.316). I must be cautious about generalizing from my my own experience of being a child, a father and a grandfather; but it does suggest to me that in an encouraging, orderly, fair and explained environment, where a child is secure and has a wide range of opportunities, there is very little propensity to violence.

Pinker has relatively little to say about "the Ghost in the Machine". The term, as he says in introducing it, is Gilbert Ryle's, in *The Concept of Mind* (1949), and aimed against the kind of dualism found in Descartes, in which what is called the mind, or the soul, is regarded as a separate entity from the body. However, whereas Ryle wants us to talk about the observable behaviour of persons, rather than of their unobservable "inner life", their "ponderings" (see his chapter "The Intellect"), and is not concerned with any details of neurology, Pinker invites our attention to what goes on in our brains. After noting the achievements of some "recent artificial intelligence systems", he writes (p.34):

> None of this is to say that the brain works like a digital computer, that artificial intelligence will ever duplicate the human mind, or that computers are conscious in the sense of having first-person subjective experience. But it does suggest that reasoning, intelligence, imagination, and creativity are forms of information processing, a well-understood physical process. Cognitive science, with the help of the computational theory of mind, has exorcized at least one ghost from the machine.

On pp. 41-43, Pinker's opposition to any talk about "the mind" or "the self" that is not reducible to talk about the brain is particularly clear: not only does he say that "every aspect of our mental lives depends entirely on physiological events in the tissues of the brain" (and with that we are bound to agree), but also that "the self … is just another network of brain systems" and

> Each of us *feels* that there is a single "I" in control. But that is an illusion that the brain works hard to produce …. The brain

> does have supervisory systems …. But those systems are gadgets with specific quirks and limitations; they are not implementations of the rational free agent traditionally identified with the soul or the self.

It is no use to cry "reductionism" at this (and Pinker distinguishes good and bad reductionism on p.69f). J.L.Austin, reviewing Ryle's book, pointed out that '"ponderings" are in fact "internal episodes"'(see the collection of essays *Ryle*, edited by O.P. Wood and George Pitcher, p.50). Those who are not content with the view that the self is a network of brain systems, or that reasoning and related mental processes are never any more than "information processing", must ask themselves what in human nature (as distinct from religious or other theories about it) has led people to think of the human being as, in the "normal" case, a "rational free agent" ─ or, more realistically, one characterized in various degrees by rationality and freedom. I propose that it is our capacity to ask and decide what criteria we shall apply, or seek to apply, to the ultimate judgments of value we make, and so what ends we seek to pursue. To decide whether means X is likely to achieve end Y may be a matter of information processing; but to ask the typically Platonic or Kantian question whether end Y deserves to be pursued by a being of our kind is not. Though Pinker is not without respect for Kant (see p.193), he does not dissent on p.279 from Hume's remark (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, II.iii.3) "'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger", in which Hume thinks of reason as something merely calculative, which, he has said in the same section, "is and ought only to be the slave of the passions". But our humanity is most distinctively revealed in our capacity to adjudicate among our passions, in terms not of their urgency or their probable rewards but their worth, and to develop a respect for humanity in ourselves and others which can keep our passions under control. Thus we need a richer conception of reason than as an information processor.

Those who have been encouraged to develop such a respect are likely to be unsatisfied by Pinker's accounts of both upbringing and education. He seems not seriously to consider the possibility that his remarks on the former are too closely tied to what might be called the "peer-group culture" that has become so prominent among young people in the United States, and some other western countries, even though he does recognize on p.380 that "if a sample comes from a restricted range of homes, it may underestimate effects of homes across a wider range" (p.380). "Whatever experiences siblings share by growing up in the same home", he assures us, "makes (*sic*) little or no difference in the kind of people they turn out to be" (p.379). He is so inclined on pp. 378-81 to emphasize the importance of genes and of "*nonshared* or *unique* environment" (the set of factors specific to the life of a particular child) that he says we can give to those, respectively, 40-50% and 50% of the influence on behavioral traits, and 0-10% to the shared environment. With upbringing as with education, it is desirable to find what attitudes and practices tend to have the best effects: a person who has grown up in a family environment of consistent love, warm encouragement, and patience, with a tradition of help to others, and a combination of order and freedom, and who has developed good relationships with parents and siblings in such a context, is likely to be deeply influenced by it. (One notable study, from within, of such a family is by Anna Buchan, the sister of John, in *Unforgettable, Unforgotten*: Hodder and Stoughton 1945.)

There is very little directly about education in the book, but many mentions of status. (See the index.) Pinker is quite right to say, at the end of a two-page discussion of education, that "the process of mastering [much of the content of education] may not always be easy and pleasant, notwithstanding the mantra that learning is fun" (p.223). What then is to be the best (and the most enduring) motivation of learning? Chiefly, I suggest, the maturing conviction, usually related to encouraging and constructive guidance, that to develop one's mental powers, to learn about humanity and the earth and universe, and to explore and discuss some of the many questions that emerge, is among the best things one could possibly be doing. How thin, by contrast, and how liable to produce over-competitiveness and, in many, a sense of failure, is Pinker's answer, with which this brief discussion of education ends:

> A family, peer group, and culture that ascribe high status to school achievement may be needed to give a child the motive to persevere toward effortful feats of learning whose rewards are apparent only over the long term.

Later (p.235f) he gives a paragraph to the curriculum, and holds that the fallacious thinking he has been describing in the chapter (13) would justify claims for "giv[ing] high priority to economics, evolutionary biology, and probability and statistics in any high school or college curriculum". I agree in the case of the biology; but to learn how to use one's own language well, where possible in the context of learning another, to study and apply the principles of what we used to call in Victoria "Clear Thinking", to master the main dimensions of basic mathematics and science, and to study humanity through literature, history and geography, as well as through evolutionary biology, are more fundamental in the intellectual and personal development of students than economics and probability and statistics, valuable though those can also be.

The chapter called "The Fear of Nihilism" begins with a justifiably hard-hitting section (pp. 186-190) whose goal, says Pinker, is "to refute the accusation that a materialistic view of the mind is inherently amoral and that religious conceptions are to be favored because they are inherently more humane". He rightly condemns "a mongrel of Dawkins and Freud: the idea that the metaphorical motives of the genes are the deep, unconscious, ulterior motives of the person" (p.191), and points out that the Golden Rule, "rediscovered many times", is basic to "an intrinsic logic of ethics", or at least to our moral sense (p.193). What the book lacks, however, is a serious consideration of what ought to be done about the distance there is between the author's world-view and the religious ones of most Americans or, one might say, most human beings. Almost no attention is given (p.187 provides an exception) to the possibility or impossibility of a religion compatible with science. One way forward, I think, whatever one's present view, is to encourage the asking of the question what, if any, aspects of a religion have as their best explanations the ones that the religion itself gives, and the frank, friendly and "Millian" discussion of such interpretative questions by people of divergent views.

Pinker's book, then, as we found in the seminar, is one to value, learn from, question and discuss.

Yours,

John Howes

Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*

This article by **ELAINE BARRY***, who has taught English at the University of Queensland and at Monash, is based on a talk she gave to our Friday-evening group on the 7th of March 2003. Elaine has felt obliged to relinquish her membership of Learningguild because of other commitments; we warmly thank her for the support she has given.*

This fascinating novel, published in 1999, is an attempt to imagine what went into the creation of the famous painting of the same title by the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Jan Vermeer.

Nobody knows the identity of the girl in the painting. Indeed not too much is known about Vermeer himself. We don't know what he looked like, who he studied with, whether he had pupils. He left no letters, no drawings, no preliminary sketches – just thirty-six exquisite oil paintings. Historical documents tell us that he was born in 1632 in Delft, he married in 1653 and had fifteen children, eleven of whom survived, he worked slowly, he was an art dealer as well as a painter, and he died aged 43, so poor that three of his paintings were used to settle the baker's bill for the family.

Chevalier manages to incorporate all the known biographical facts about Vermeer into her book. The historical record is more forthcoming about the larger context of his life and times, and she fleshes out her own portrait of the artist and his model by skilfully weaving relevant aspects of this background into her story.

Earlier in the seventeenth century, Holland won independence from the control of Catholic Spain, so that by Vermeer's time Catholics were a minority in Holland. He was baptised a Protestant but converted to Catholicism at the time of his marriage. By making her central character Griet, the assumed model for the painting, a Protestant, Chevalier can dramatize the religious tensions of the time and place. The tensions are never bitter (Holland, then as now, comes across as remarkably tolerant of its minorities): there is rather a sense of bemused incomprehension. When she accepts the position of servant in Vermeer's household, Griet has to move to his house at "Papists' Corner" in Delft ─ only ten minutes' walk from her own home, but a different world.

Chevalier reconstructs Vermeer's world with all the specific detail of a Dutch genre painting of the time. The novel describes the gossipy town market, the canals with their traffic, the painting of the famous blue Delft tiles (Griet's father is a tile-painter), the apprenticeship system (her brother Frans is apprenticed in his father's profession), and the Dutch passion for cleanliness seen through the daily grind of laundry, mopping and scrubbing.

Two factors were changing both the subject-matter and the market for art in Holland at this time. First, the Calvinist rejection of ornamentation in churches took away a huge market for artists, with their traditional subjects of saints and biblical stories. What replaced it was an interest in domestic scenes, everyday activities and ordinary

people. Secondly, the rise of a bourgeois middle class on the back of Dutch trading power gave those ordinary people the means to decorate their homes instead of their churches with art. Vermeer's subjects are those of simple domestic scenes; his buyers were local citizens, including the baker.

There is no documentary evidence to inform us about the way Vermeer worked, but Chevalier has drawn on a general knowledge of contemporary practice as well as the evidence of Vermeer's paintings themselves to construct for us an intimate insider's view of the painter at work. We see how various materials were ground to make the artist's colours (and how expensive they were). We see him painting always in his studio, and composing his paintings like a stage-set: particular props (a lion-topped chair, a yellow fur-trimmed coat, pearls, drapery) recur in several of his works. We see that he depended on natural light from the window, and composed his designs by juxtaposing light and shade rather than by the usual practice of preliminary line-drawing. One of Chevalier's speculations (one backed by many art historians) is that Vermeer also utilized the comparatively recent invention of the camera obscura to focus his scenes.

Girl with a Pearl Earring is a historical novel, and Chevalier was at pains to get the "history" right and to incorporate as much of it as she could into her book. But she's also aware of the limitations of history – like fiction, history is a narrative based on the author's assumptions about what's important. (Traditionally, for example, the history of men was more likely to be written than that of women, that of the upper class more than that of the lower.) Moreover, despite its claim to "objective" reality, no history can ever present the "whole" story. No novel can, either.

In inventing a world around the historical character of Jan Vermeer, in dramatizing, within the parameters of possibility, what **could** have happened, Chevalier helps us enter a larger and richer imaginative world. Some of the characters in the novel are actual historical figures – Vermeer, his wife Catharina, his mother-in-law Maria Thins, Van Leeuwenhoek, Van Ruijven – though whether they were like Chevalier's presentation of them is, of course, debatable. But most of her characters are totally fictional – Griet, her family, Tanneke, Cornelia, Pieter. She creates a believable context for the story. Within that imagined world we learn a great deal about the physical and imaginative process of painting, the value put on art, the relation between an artist and his model, the role of women at the time, class divisions even in a rising bourgeois society such as Holland's, and the competing claims of universal art and the individual life.

The emotional centre of the novel is the relationship between Vermeer and Griet, the servant girl and imagined model who is also a potential artist. It's a relationship marked by artistic, class and sexual tension, and its complexity gives rise to the central thematic questions of the book. Does the emotional power of great art depend on some kind of tension in the artist? Does great art render the process of making it irrelevant? Van Leeuwenhoek warns Griet that an essential amorality is part of the artist's vision, a view reinforced by the intimations of a kind of rape in Vermeer's treatment of her. Four hundred years later, could we say that, even if her story were true, the timeless beauty of Vermeer's painting justified the pain of one life? And what is our response to the possibility that Griet herself might just say that it was?

Growing up in Austria and Australia

HANS EISEN, *a member of Learningguild and of the Thursday seminar, has written for our* Letter *before (1.2000, on future taxation and welfare patterns). Now living at Red Hill, south-east of Melbourne, he describes himself as a contented retiree. This article is based on a talk he gave at the Friday-evening meeting on the 6th of June 2003.*

It is interesting for me to remember my early life ─ accurately, I hope ─ and particularly the years of it spent in Australia, and to consider it in connection with the life of my family in pre-war Europe. To what extent was my response to education in Australia influenced by the first five years of my life in Austria? Does one's family influence education irrespective of where that education is obtained?

My paternal grandparents were Polish-born. My father, born in Munich, was the third of their four children. Neither my grandparents nor my father nor his siblings had a university education. My grandfather was a successful manufacturer of men's clothing, with operations in Vienna, Berlin and Prague. My father (reluctantly) and my uncle were both engaged in the business. A few years ago, when visiting Vienna, we located the building where it had been based, which now accommodates an upmarket food store and restaurant. My maternal grandparents were also Polish-born. They had three daughters. My mother, born in Lwow, Poland, was the second child in her family. Grandfather was a timber merchant, between the two World Wars. My mother trained as a milliner while her sisters were university-educated.

I was born in Vienna in 1933, the second of twin boys. My parents employed a nursemaid who cared for us for some years and, I am sure, contributed to our early social education. We lived in a first floor apartment in a building owned by our family some three kilometres from the city centre. While that building still stands, its facade at least has been rebuilt. Close by were three parks, which we visited frequently. Summer holidays were spent in the hills not far from Vienna. As far as I can recall we did not attend kindergarten. We had a happy childhood and enjoyed, for the most part, a close family life.

Hitler entered Vienna on the 14th of March 1938. At that time my paternal grandparents were in Monte Carlo, with my uncle. They did not return to Vienna. My brother told me that he remembered seeing, from our window, Jews forced by Nazi soldiers to wash the footpaths in front of our apartment. I do not remember that.

In May my mother, with my brother and me, went to Paris where other members of our family were then located. My father remained in Vienna in an unsuccessful attempt to salvage the family's business assets. He was imprisoned by the Nazis but managed to escape and flee over the border to Czechoslovakia. He arrived in Paris in July.

Our family on my father's side applied for immigration visas for the USA. My father, who had met an Australian while travelling in Palestine in the early 1930s, also applied through him for a visa to Australia for himself, my mother and brother, and me. The visa for Australia was granted about one week before the US visas were granted. My father, who was on poor terms with his father, decided to migrate to Australia. The rest of his family together with my mother's sisters went to the USA. My maternal grandparents became stateless residents in Palestine.

We departed for Australia from Marseilles in September 1938 on the *Strathallan*. We landed in Fremantle in October and left the ship in Melbourne on the 28th of October. The trip, for my brother and me, was carefree, with enjoyable visits to Aden and Bombay. We had no formal education during our time in Paris or on the ship.

Early education

The family was established quickly in a flat in East St Kilda. At the start of the school year in 1939 my brother and I commenced school at Hornby Street State School, Windsor. By that time we spoke some English acquired from contact with other boys who lived in the same street. By the end of 1939 we were fluent in English and spoke little German at home. My recollection of Hornby Street is limited. I can, however, recall being "different" from other students particularly because of our Austrian clothes and our sandwiches, but I do not remember adverse comments. The primary education provided by that school must have been thorough as we had little difficulty with school subjects.

In 1940, because of the separation of my parents, my brother and I were enrolled as boarders at Box Hill Grammar School (now Kingswood College), located on farmland on the outskirts of Box Hill as it was then. The school was co-educational and Methodist, with an outstanding headmaster, Charles Walker. His children were all students there. Evan Walker, later an architect and Victorian Government Minister, was in a class below mine. One of our teachers, Mr Brunning, made a particularly strong impression on me through his confident and yet caring approach to his students. As boarders we participated fully in the life of the school. In the mornings we herded the cows and assisted with their milking. Though as twins we were bullied a little by older male boarders, in all other respects we were not treated differently because of our European birth.

My father enlisted in the Australian Army Corps in 1942 or 1943 and was assigned to an army camp at Bonegilla near Albury. My brother and I were then enrolled as boarders at Albury Grammar School, a Presbyterian college for boys. The headmaster, Alec Sellars, was a strong disciplinarian. The syllabus was influenced in part by the fact that most students were from farming families. My recollection is that the teachers were generally competent. Again we benefited from the freedom of country life: holidays were spent on rural properties of school friends.

In 1944 my father rented a house in Albury not far from our school. We became day students and remained in Albury until the end of the war in 1945. I recall assisting with packing up our possessions and returning by train to Melbourne with my brother.

In Melbourne we were enrolled at Toorak Central School as it was then a feeder school for Melbourne High School (MHS), which my father was anxious that we attend. There was a little pressure to perform well scholastically so as to ensure acceptance by MHS in the following year. At Toorak Central I first became aware of Jewish students in our class, though I do not remember that our fellow students gave them (or us) any special treatment. We cycled to Toorak and back to St Kilda twice each day. The first ride from home was to deliver newspapers and the second to attend school. Hard to imagine a young boy making those trips by bicycle today!

Melbourne High

In 1946 we commenced at MHS at the age of twelve. We were tall for our age and had benefited from sound education particularly at Box Hill and Albury Grammar Schools. Those assets assisted our induction to a school community which then also included a proportion of Jewish students.

The Principal of MHS in 1946 was Major-General Alan Ramsay. He managed skilfully the post-war re-establishment of the school at its imposing Forrest Hill location. He was succeeded as Principal by Brigadier George Langley who, with former Test cricketer Bill Woodfull as his Vice-Principal, was responsible for encouraging students towards scholastic, sporting and cultural achievements. Brigadier Langley in particular was an inspiring leader of the school. At school assemblies he was challenging and expansive in the subjects he chose to address.

While in the 1940s MHS offered a far smaller selection of subjects than is the case today, the syllabus was designed to equip students who wished to matriculate at the University of Melbourne – then the only university in Victoria. More important, however, was the outstanding calibre and commitment of MHS teachers, who at that time were all men. Throughout my life I have much appreciated their contribution to my education.

In 1946 my first desk partner at MHS was Barry Jones, later outstanding in radio quizzes and in Parliament. Our form master that year was Laurie Collins, who was to be Principal in later years. While my orientation in the first three years was towards science, in 1949 I switched to humanities and repeated fifth form in that year. Jack Gregory, a member of Learningguild, was my form master in the sixth form. He taught history and his skilful presentation was well received by his students.

Towards the end of 1949 I was appointed as Head Probationary Prefect and then in 1950 elected as School Captain. In that year my leadership experience included also the roles of House Captain and President of the SRC. An active sporting program and studying for the year-end matriculation examinations contributed to a busy year.

An overall view

Without doubt for me the single most important aspect of growing up in two countries was to have a twin brother. That provided the stability and continuity of a family relationship despite the impediments of leaving Vienna and the divorce of my parents.

Second was the humanist world-view of my father. Though his grandfather had been an orthodox Jew, my father was not an observant Jew. He had an egalitarian and socialist orientation in his thinking and imparted it to my brother and me. Nevertheless he insisted that we were to be bar mitzvah boys at age 13.

Third was the tolerance towards refugees which we experienced in Australia from the time of our arrival in this country. I was not subjected to or aware of anti-Semitism.

I am particularly grateful for the high quality of formal primary and secondary education we received in Australia. Despite attending more schools than might have been the case at a time of peace, and if we had had a more stable family structure, we were fortunate in the capability and dedication of our teachers, led generally by outstanding school principals. We benefited too from the attention given at Box Hill and Albury Grammar Schools and at MHS to sporting, cultural and societal interests.

It is difficult for me to imagine that the freedom of life in Australia, and the opportunities which education here provided, could have been matched in Austria, even if the Nazis had not taken it over. On the other hand there may well have been aspects of life in Vienna that could not have been enjoyed in Australia. I have no regrets that Australia has been my home for the past 65 years.

My education in Australia seems to have been little influenced by the first five years of my life in Austria. On the other hand my family, that is my parents and my twin brother, had, in my view, a positive influence on the direction and extent of my education in Australia. Would that have been the case in Austria? Perhaps.

Corrections to the article “Learning Japanese” (1.2002)

Jim Richardson has requested that three corrections be made to what he wrote on p.14 of his article. Under “The Writing System”, the description of Kanji should include not ‘often with Katakana letters’ but ‘often with Hiragana letters’. Romadji utilizes 22, not 21, letters of the English alphabet: *z* should not have been included in the list of those not employed. Under “Grammar”, the sentence to be modified with a view to translation should read ‘I saw the man who goes to the market’.

Five Years in Delhi

STEPHEN HOWES, *a member of Learningguild, spoke to our Friday-evening group on December 6th 2002 about his and his family's life in Delhi and his work with the World Bank. Still in that "mega-city", he writes on the same subjects, covering the five years 1999-2003. He notes that views expressed in it are his own, and not necessarily those of the Bank. In the next issue, we shall have another article from him about a school for slum-dwelling children in Delhi which he and his wife Clare are supporting, and to which Learningguild has given some assistance and hopes to give more.*

I joined the World Bank from the London School of Economics in 1994. My wife and I moved to Washington, and I worked for the next five years mainly on Indonesia, in the energy sector. While the work was very interesting, the frequent travel to and from Jakarta was quite stressful. I had to leave Washington on a Saturday morning to arrive on Monday morning, would often be gone for two or sometimes three weeks, and would return exhausted. Clare became a mother in Washington, and had a tough time managing with our two young children during these prolonged absences. We were very grateful to all our family and friends who visited from Australia and helped out.

In 1997, the East Asia crisis hit, and all the energy projects I had been helping to prepare crashed to the ground. I also realized that, though I had learnt a lot in the energy sector, I wanted to move back to more mainstream economic work. I therefore took a position in the South Asia economics unit, working on India. The job was once again Washington-based but I was fortunate that a position became vacant in the Bank's Delhi Office after a few months. At that stage, the Bank's Country Director for India was looking for (relatively) young staff to come to Delhi, and so I got the opportunity to go. Clare and I had always wanted to experience life in a developing country. The difficulties of the previous few years in trying to combine a travelling job with a young family only increased our interest in a move to "the field", as it is known in the World Bank. The fact that the job was in India made this opportunity a dream one. India is not only the world's second largest country, but also one of the Bank's most important clients: one indicator of this is that our office in Delhi is our largest in the world after the Washington HQ.

We left for Delhi in February 1999, and have been here ever since. Perhaps it is mainly because we have been here so long that we all feel very much at home. But there are other reasons as well. Since coming to Delhi, we have had two more children: twins, who have now spent their first four years in India. It is a very accessible country, with lots of English-speakers, and a commonwealth culture. The eldest of our four sons has become very keen on cricket, and I have become a cricket fan again.

Delhi is an enormous mega-city of 13 million people. That makes it India's third largest, after Mumbai (formerly Bombay) with 16 million and Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) with slightly more than 13 million. However, the number for Delhi excludes

the satellite cities that border either side of the Union Territory of Delhi: including these would put Delhi up with Mumbai. Delhi is also growing at a mind-boggling rate: 45% over the last ten years.

Being in a large city has many fascinations, but some serious potential drawbacks. We have been extremely fortunate to be insulated from most of them, and that is perhaps why we enjoy it so much here. For example, for most people living in Delhi means long commutes and traffic jams. For our first 2½ years, however, we lived in Vasant Vihar, only about 10km from school and office, and since then, after we moved, we have lived in the Lodi Colony, within walking distance of the World Bank office and our twins' pre-school and just a ten-minute drive from the older boys' school! Indeed, not only do I walk to work, but I am also able to come home for lunch: something I could never do in Washington, and shall probably never be able to do again.

A second potential drawback of living in a mega-city is lack of parks and open spaces, for example, for running. This is definitely something I miss, as I realize especially when I visit Melbourne and run in the open spaces of Royal Park. But we are lucky to have a huge house and garden, and to live opposite what is probably Delhi's most famous park, Lodi Gardens,which makes up in history and beauty what it lacks in size and open spaces. I walk through this park – in which are several Moghul tombs – every day to and from work, and look out into its treetops from my office. In these respects, again, I am remarkably fortunate.

But there are some inescapable drawbacks of living in Delhi. The worst is the pollution. It is hard to establish a causal link, but my asthma has certainly got worse since moving to Delhi, and now Clare also suffers from asthma in certain months of the year, and our eldest boy seems to be liable to attacks. I have read that simply living in Delhi is equivalent to smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. I don't know how well-founded that claim is, and of course one doesn't want to believe it is true, but one simply has to look at the bleached skies of Delhi to realize that pollution is a serious problem. How one trades off subjecting oneself and one's family to enormous doses of pollution against the terrific opportunity to experience life in a country like India I don't know. But the fact that we are still here suggests that we think it is worthwhile.

Certainly, my posting of five years is longer than is normal for the Bank. The minimum stay in the field is normally three years, and the average about four. I have been fortunate that my management has been supportive of my staying longer, perhaps on the grounds of India's size and complexity. Indeed, we often say that being posted to India is like being posted to a continent, and that working in different parts of India is like working on different countries in other parts of the world. A lot of the World Bank's work in India is in fact at the state level. India is made up of twenty-nine states and six union territories. State governments have partial or full responsibility for many of the areas in which the World Bank has projects, in education and health, or the power sector, or irrigation or roads. Thus states are often the implementers of these projects.

The India economics unit whose work program I co-ordinate does little by way of investment lending, but is heavily involved at the state level. The World Bank likes to think of itself as a "knowledge bank" as well as a financial one, and the economics unit's mandate centers around providing advice and analysis. My arrival in India in 1999 coincided with the onset of a severe fiscal deterioration in India, especially at the state level. The immediate cause was a generous public sector pay settlement, but there were also longer-term forces at work that left state governments often with inadequate revenues even to make their salary, pension and interest payments, let alone to provide for maintenance for roads, drugs for health centers, and chalk for schools. This state-level fiscal crisis, as it came to be called, has provided the backdrop for much of our recent work in India, since we view resolution of the fiscal crisis as necessary, among other factors, if the state governments are again to be effective in development. We have produced a series of economic reports for various Indian states. These centre on the fiscal crisis, but also use it as a springboard into broader issues that states need to tackle to accelerate development, such as deregulation, improving access to basic services, and infrastructure. We have also tried to raise some of the most difficult issues facing India's governments, such as the high levels of corruption in many of them. Tackling corruption is not easy, and immediate results are rare, but ignoring it benefits nobody except the corrupt.

Beyond reports, we have also engaged in structural adjustment lending to India's states to help them overcome their fiscal troubles. Adjustment lending is the other form of lending the Bank engages in. Whereas investment loans are tied to the particular uses for which they are intended (for example road construction, or drug procurement), adjustment loans are in the nature of budgetary support, and not tied to any particular use. They are provided on the basis of an agreed reform program, dealing with particular policy problems. In the case of India, the immediate purpose of our adjustment loans is to restore fiscal balance, but they are also related to some of the broader aspects of development mentioned above: for example, by providing priority sectors, especially the social ones, with more funding. There is a healthy international debate on the effectiveness of structural adjustment lending. In the case of India, we consider that experience shows that it is an effective instrument to support and encourage governments willing to undertake difficult but important reforms. The agenda being supported is not an ideological one, but a pragmatic developmental one. Bankrupt governments simply cannot be effective agents of development or poverty-reduction. All of this work is done in partnership with the Government of India: for example, all our loans pass through the central government, and are on-lent by it to the state governments concerned. Thus we do not see ourselves pushing a "foreign agenda" onto India, but rather assisting the Indian government to help state governments pursue a national reform program.

While I have been in India, we have worked in these various capacities – lending and non-lending – in about eight of India's major states. We have been active in both poorer and richer states, the slow- and the fast-growing. My own main focus has been on the southern state of Karnataka, a middle-income state by India's standards, but one of the most dynamic.

Looking back after five years, one can certainly see many positive changes, and in some states overall improvements in the fiscal position. It is also encouraging how quickly reforms adopted in one state, and seen to be worthwhile, are copied in others. But some states, especially the poorer ones, are yet to emerge from their fiscal problems. Through both success and failure, it has been both a fascinating challenge and a tremendous privilege to work alongside state governments to help them in some small way to tackle some of the most pressing problems. The problems and pressures governments in a country such as Australia are facing, serious as they are, fade in comparison to what governments in India face, with nothing like the financial strength and vast policy-making capacity which Australian governments enjoy. Apart from the delights of living in Delhi, it is this close interaction with government officials that I shall really miss when I leave India, as sadly I must some day.

I certainly hope that after I leave I shall be able to follow developments in the country, at least to some extent. I imagine that India is going to remain a development challenge for many years to come. Parts of the country are undergoing rapid change that would have been simply unimaginable five years ago. The World Bank has set up a new office in Chennai, in the south of the country, which now handles a lot of the organization's worldwide "back-office" work, such as accounting and administration. That office is set to become bigger than the one in Delhi. Such off-shoring to India has become a huge global phenomenon and is bringing new, well-paid jobs to the country. At the same time, many rural areas in India are clearly in the slow lane, and many Indians are desperately poor and face fundamental health and education problems. People in these areas are going to need a lot of assistance from government to emerge from poverty. If the World Bank can continue to play a role in helping India's governments provide more and more effective help to these people, our continued presence – large by our standards, small in the context of a country as large as India – will be justified.

Travelling by Train in India

ERIC SIBLY, *Shift Stationmaster at Box Hill in Melbourne, wrote for us (1.2001) on the results of enquiries into three train collisions. This time he gives a true railwayman's record of a wide-ranging series of journeys he and a friend made in 2002 in India. A member of Learningguild, he talked about these travels at the Friday-evening meeting on June 20th 2003. I have found that Plates 28-30 of* The Times Atlas of the World *provide an excellent complement to Eric's account. JH*

On the 21st of September 2002 I flew by Malaysian Airways to Hyderabad with my friend Fred Allen, who was to be my guide and companion in India. Fred is an Anglo-Indian in his sixties: he had migrated to Melbourne with his family from Secunderabad, which is next to Hyderabad. It was my first international air flight and second overseas

trip. (In 1963 I went around the world by ship and attended the World Scout Jamboree at Marathon, about 26 miles from Athens.)

We began our rail tour on the 24th by taking the 7.10am Andhra Pradesh Express, which runs from Secunderabad to New Delhi. At 5.30 the next morning we alighted at Agra Cantonment. Guided for the day by a retired Indian Army officer, we visited the Taj Mahal, its garden and outer entrance porticoes, and in the afternoon went to Agra Fort, where the Mughal (Muslim) rulers lived. One of these built the Taj Mahal from 1631 to 1653 as a spectacular mausoleum of white marble for his second wife, who died in childbirth in 1631. In Agra, we saw carpets being woven with hand looms. Although the city has 1.1 million people, I did not see any traffic lights. Many vehicles were hauled by horses, oxen, or water buffaloes, and men and youths pulled carts or rode bicycles attached to them. We saw such transport all over India, but bigger cities such as Hyderabad, Kolkata (formerly known as Calcutta) and Chennai (Madras) had a few traffic lights. We had hired a taxi for the day, which took us 31km in the early evening to Tundla: our use of it for 14½ hours cost 1400 rupees ($56).

At Tundla we boarded the daily Poorva Express (New Delhi to Kolkata), which departed at 8.05pm and arrived at Howrah Station, Kolkata at 6.30 the next evening, after a journey of 1301km. We should have arrived at 4.15 but our train was delayed at Mokama for about two hours from 9.15am because of a *bandh* (strike), affecting numerous trains, in protest at the killing of about 25 people in a temple in the western state of Gujurat earlier that week. That night we stayed in the Eastern Railway Guest House, part of the extensive Howrah Station buildings. Next morning, the 27th of September, we took a taxi across the Howrah Bridge (similar to Sydney Harbour Bridge) over the Hooghly river and walked around some streets near the GPO. We joined a Government of West Bengal bus tour of some Jain temples and visited the Victoria Memorial (a huge white marble museum, with a vast collection of memorabilia from the years of the British Empire, and very large surrounding grounds), the Indian Museum, the Nehru Children's Museum and the Zoo.

Kolkata is an exceptionally busy city with a huge population ─ the *Lonely Planet* North India Guide says 14 million people and *CNN Travellers' Magazine* 11.2 million. I've never had a shirt get such a dirty collar as mine did on that day. The air pollution is mainly from street vehicle exhausts. Kolkata has the only tram system in India. These trams generally operate coupled together in pairs, with a conductor on each tram. Across the Howrah Bridge they have been replaced by buses. All city/suburban buses we saw in India had at least one conductor.

We left Kolkata at 7.15pm, from its other major station, Sealdah, on the daily Darjiling Mail Train. The next morning we arrived at New Jalpaiguri Station at 8.15, having covered 586km in 13 hours. We changed to our narrow gauge (two feet) "toy train" of three non-airconditioned carriages for the journey of 88km uphill to Darjiling. A small steam locomotive shunted our train into the platform at New Jalpaiguri, but a diesel hauled it to Darjiling. We departed at 9.15am and after 23km, at about 10.30, we derailed at low speed, going round one of the many curves on the side of the main road.

A breakdown motor truck came and by noon the crew had jacked the loco and carriages back on the rails. The highest station on this line was Ghoom, at 7400 feet above sea level, and from there it was only 6km to Darjiling station at about 6500 feet. Before reaching Ghoom we had passed the daily Darjiling-Karsiyang-Darjiling local steam-hauled passenger train. We arrived at Darjiling at 6.50pm and walked to our hotel.

Next morning (Sunday 29th), it was raining heavily. Cloud and fog prevented us from seeing Kanchenjunga, the third-highest mountain in the world (over 28,000 feet). A young German couple had waited the whole week for the clouds to disappear and could wait no longer, so they left with us on the "toy train" at 10am. Again, the diesel loco pulled our train, but, as most of the journey was downhill from Ghoom to New Jalpaiguri, the total trip of only 88km took nine hours, as the train went very slowly downhill (slower than uphill) to avoid running out of control down the steep grade (mostly 1 in 25 but as steep as 1 in 18 in parts). The scenery over the valleys was magnificent. This Darjiling Himalayan Railway has been granted World Heritage status. Besides the two steam locomotives we saw working we observed seven others, but they were not in steam. There are no tunnels on the line but a few spirals and about seven zigzags. Very little of the line is in reserved track ─ most is alongside or even on the edge of the main road. When the line ran through towns it usually went where customers were served at the small shop counters on the main road, so that people had to move out of the train's path. We were sometimes very close to homes, including some, made of dried palm fronds, which had no electricity but only kerosene lights.

We departed New Jalpaiguri at 8.05pm on the Darjiling Mail train and arrived at Sealdah Station in Kolkata at 8.50 next morning. At 2.25 we left Howrah Station on the daily Coromandel Express to Chennai. It had 24 carriages and at Kharagpur, 116km from Kolkata, when I had a short walk on the longest platform in India (just over half a mile), I couldn't see the front of the train. We arrived at Chennai Central Station at 6.30pm on Tuesday the 1st of October, so our journey of 1663km had taken just over 28 hours. That night we travelled on the Nilagiri Express to Mettuppalaiyam, 530km south-west of Chennai, arriving at 6.20am. We boarded the 7.10 metre-gauge train to Udagamandalam (the former English Hill Station there was known as Ooty, short for Ootacamund). This train was pushed up the very steep grade (as steep as 1 in 12½ in parts) by a steam locomotive. On most of the uphill climb, rack and pinion gear was used ─ a grooved third rail, between the normal rails, is engaged by a grooved wheel under the loco and each carriage to assist the climb. After spectacular scenery and stops to take water for the steam loco, we changed to a diesel loco at Coonoor and arrived at Udagamandalam, 7336 feet above sea level, at noon. We departed at 3 and steam replaced diesel at Coonoor. Then one or two elephants were on the track and slowed our train to walking pace for 10-15 minutes. It was difficult for them to get off the track as the ground was very steep on both sides. There were a lot of tunnels on this line and the many children on the train (it was school term holidays) shrieked with delight in them. We changed back to our broad gauge (5ft 6ins) train at Mettupalaiyam and arrived at 5.50 the next morning in Chennai. That day and the next I was shown over locomotive and carriage workshops. We left Chennai on the Friday evening at 6.10 on the Charminar

Express and arrived next morning at Secunderabad, 755km away, at 7.15. My plane to Kuala Lumpur left Hyderabad at 12.55am on Sunday the 6th of October.

Our total rail distance for the twelve days, almost all on the broad gauge, was 7950km. Our All-Lines Rail Passes cost $673 each and entitled us to unlimited travel for fifteen days in the top class rail accommodation (air-conditioned first class, which included sleeping berths, bedding and towels on overnight journeys). There are seven classes of Indian rail travel below that top class. Very few Indians use this class: plane travel is not much dearer for those who could afford it, and much quicker. Most of our trains (normally twenty carriages) had only three compartments in one carriage for our class. We travelled overnight on eight nights and on only one were all four berths in our compartment occupied; on five Fred and I were the only occupants. Most trains had a pantry carriage and we paid for the meals delivered to our compartment. The journeys were very comfortable and it was easy to sleep in our berths.

We found living costs about one-seventh of those in Australia, making it a very economical holiday. It was so educative and enjoyable that Fred and I plan to travel by rail to other parts of India in September 2004.

WHAT'S A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO …

GETTING THINGS RIGHT IN ENGLISH?

KRIZAN RADOS *is a Learningguild Scholar and a student in Year 11 at Buckley Park Secondary College in Melbourne. He has been a pupil of mine for about six years, working on the fifth chapter of* Making up Sentences *in 2002 and 2003 with the help of such exercises as the ones he describes here. JH*

Walter D. Wright's ***A Basic Course in English*** (published in 1961) offers a good introduction to grammar, punctuation, spelling and much more. It is suitable for secondary students and adult learners who have gone beyond the elementary stage. Younger learners can be led through the book by teachers or parents. For second-language learners, it would provide a path to understanding the basics of English. The explanations Wright offers of the topics covered are easy to understand.

In Section One he deals with grammar, over 25 aspects of it, from nouns, verbs, pronouns etc. to gender, compound words, tense and agreement. Each section has a number of exercises, which teach the student how to master these things. Many exercises are prefaced by a clear explanation with one or more examples to serve as prototypes. (At the very beginning, however, we are not given a clear distinction between a sentence and a phrase when we are told about a sentence that "it makes sense and has a complete

meaning". It is better to say of a normal sentence that it has at least one personed and backbone verb: see *Making up Sentences* 2:4 and 3:1.) Wright gives plenty of references to other parts of the book, and often refers to another book of his, *A First English Companion*. Revision exercises are included to ensure mastery or at least to show the student that he or she hasn't yet understood some aspect. There are also "Mark These Yourself" exercises, with answers at the back, which help us to be independent and learn good approaches for future study.

The book covers punctuation in the twelve units of Section 2. Here I particularly enjoyed the "Mark These Yourself" exercises. The whole section offers a more systematic study of punctuation, with more illustration and practice, than is commonly provided in primary and secondary school.

There are fourteen components in the section on spelling, including "Fifty Tricky Words", "I before E", and "Hard and Soft C and G".

Section 4, "Word Study", offers the student a widening awareness of constituents of English words (e.g., prefixes and suffixes) and their origins in other languages such as Latin. The exercises would be excellent for migrant students who wanted to understand how the English language has evolved over the years and to comprehend the many variations that the English language shows; but native speakers ought to find it just as valuable.

A great way to learn, at many points, how not to go wrong would be to work through Section 5, "Some Mistakes to Avoid". It begins with an exercise on 'to', 'too' and 'two', and later units include "Same Sound, Different Meaning" and "Past Tense or Past Participle?".

The remaining sections are all informative and lively: "Idioms and Common Sayings" (though for most of the exercises many of us would need Wright's *Companion*), "Figures of Speech and Poetic Devices", "In Lighter Vein" (with many categories), and "Correspondence".

A Basic Course in English teaches students all of the important aspects of mastering English expression at the secondary level. As I have said, each section contains many exercises that are well introduced. The book is useful for a very wide range of secondary-stage students, whether boys or girls or adults. I shall go on using it to gain a more extensive knowledge of English.