Learningguild Letter

1.2007

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

What are to be characteristic features of Learningguild? I offer this as one answer: sustained membership, study, discussion, assistance, vigour, and fellowship.

Some comments on the grammar of those sentences! The question is of the kind called deliberative: it invites a serious answer about what we ought to be and do, one that would guide our decisions on what activities we arrange and how we conceive of and describe them. Deliberative questions are often such that it's wise to seek others' thoughts about how to answer them, and I invite the expression of yours. There is no 'the' in front of 'characteristic': I am not attempting an exhaustive list that might unduly restrict our development. The participle 'sustained' is intended to be taken with every one of the six nouns following.

1. Sustained membership. "School-days are passing, and we must away." That's a line in Melbourne High School's song, which I sang as a boy at assemblies and have sung at Old Boys' reunions. It is unsurprising that educational institutions are commonly thought of as related almost entirely to particular **times** in the lives of people who have attended them. At the end of such a time one "leaves" school or university, "goes down" as they say at Oxford or Cambridge, and begins a new stage in one's life. Certainly, one is often called an alumnus or alumna: the words are originally Latin, and convey the idea of being nourished, but it is supposed in most modern usage that the time of such nourishment is over, and so the word is used for a "graduate or former student" (*SOED*).

Davis McCaughey (whose first degree was from Cambridge) once gave a graduation address at Melbourne under the title "Don't go!" He wanted graduates to think of themselves as graduate members of their university. Oxford and Cambridge have succeeded in inculcating that conception of oneself, especially by being collegiate and by the dispatch by colleges to their "old members" of an annual report including reports of scholarly research as well as of undergraduate activities, lengthy obituaries of tutors and others, and "News from Old Members" (running to 60 out of 192 pages in the Christ Church publication for 2003). A very good university magazine, such as *Oxford Today*, is also important. Few non-collegiate universities have had such success, and few if any residential colleges of Australian universities. Those universities and their colleges need the financial and/or other support of their alumni but have to recognize that there is not the tradition of giving it which some American universities enjoy. As Davis McCaughey would have insisted, sustained membership is not to be desired simply for financial support.

What combination of factors is conducive to sustained membership at its most valuable? That is a question for schools, universities, and residential colleges (which at their best have been deeply educative rather than places of partying and excess), and also for us in Learningguild. I propose three. First, the years in which a student has frequent contact with teachers or supervisors ought to be "a time of happiness and mental expansion which glows in the memory" (to use again the words I quoted, at the end of my last letter, from Sir Walter Moberly). Of course, that it should be so cannot be taken for granted: it depends so

much on, and varies so much with, the particular teacher(s) or supervisor(s), and on the individual student, for education can only be offered (as attractively and accessibly as possible), not "delivered" or even "ensured".[1] Secondly, there should be both encouragement of and provision for further study, discussion and assistance (to use our next three nouns) as part of a sustained membership in relation to which some modest subscription is required and donations and/or other reciprocal assistance invited. It is extremely unsatisfactory that, after obtaining a first degree, people find that virtually the only continuing provision for them is in the form of graduate programs unsuitable to most. They should be encouraged to sustain deep and wide interests, with some help from their *alma mater* in such forms as the use of libraries, weekend conferences, and continued contact in letters and conversation. People should be engaged who, preferably themselves also scholars and teachers, see such encouragement as a major part of their work. Thirdly, students should be asked on applying for enrolment whether they are willing to see themselves as entering upon a membership which they expect to sustain for their own sake and that of others, so that, for so long as they have reason to think that the institution or movement they are now joining is a valuable one, they will want to be part of it and contribute to it.

I have gone on using the verb 'sustain' here, rather than 'continue' or even 'maintain', because what matters is the year-by-year readiness to stay involved and to give support (even if not extensively in either case). Such sustaining is not to be taken for granted, but implies purposefulness as well as gratitude on the part of the member and warm and personal fostering and appreciation on the part of teachers and/or administrators. Again I mention that when I write of study, discussion, assistance, vigour and fellowship, those are all conceived of as sustained.

2. Study. In our quarter-century so far, Learningguild has welcomed talks at our meetings, and articles (often springing from those talks) in *Learningguild Letter*, over a very wide range, and we shall go on encouraging and wanting to hear about the various enquiries of our members and others. However, the present major emphasis in Learningguild's educational work is on what was called in the Middle Ages the *trivium* (set of three ways or disciplines) of grammar, logic and rhetoric, and on philosophy. Even in our philosophy seminar, which also ranges widely, we shall next year critically consider, in reference to actual or conceivable objections, whether and why the general features and the detail of what is presented in my booklet *Reasoning*, which perpetuates Victoria's tradition of "Clear Thinking" (it lasted, in senior secondary English courses, for about forty years until the mid-eighties), and in my book *Making up Sentences*, are needed in serious education, along with the kind of testing provided by the repeatable examination for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression.

When we think of secondary education, we tend to associate it with the 11-to-18 age-group. Certainly one task for Learningguild is to provide materials in reasoning and expression usable by young people, and to offer tutorial guidance and encouragement to some of them (two of our Melbourne members who have received it are now completing Year 12). We should also campaign for a renewed emphasis on the study by teenagers of clear thinking and grammatical and attractive communication in speech and writing. However, secondary education is something in which, in particular areas, one may be engaged at any time in one's life. (Just now, in my early seventies, I am learning the basics of Hindi.) In respect of reasoning and English expression I think also of three groups of people, none of them still at school, who are held back by lack of experience of systematic, cumulative and wide-ranging secondary learning in those areas, and Learningguild must go on assisting people from all three.

The first group are undergraduate or graduate students in universities and other tertiary institutions. So many, including many for whom English is their native language, do not consistently write grammatical sentences or say clearly what they

would like to say. This year, in seeking to assist two native speakers, I have found that there can be unfamiliarity with even the process of finding and then applying the relevant section of a textbook. Seldom does secondary-school English now lay foundations for understanding how English works, so that, for example, it has come to be supposed that you can put in a comma wherever you might pause, rather than for grammatical reasons that would justify some of the pauses desirable in good speech. It is scandalous that students from other language backgrounds are not required and systematically helped to develop their speaking and writing of English during their courses. Numerous such students have been assisted by Learningguild, for example by annotation as they work right through one of Murphy's grammar books, adding related sentences of their own.

Secondly, there are people who have graduated from an English-speaking university and joined a company or some other agency, where they find that they are not able to write satisfactory reports or letters and/or to speak clearly enough to be readily understood. This year, the company GMK Centric, whose work is in accounting and business advice, has engaged me to assist some members of their staff, especially but not only some who have come from other language backgrounds. This has flowed from an initiative by Chris Wookey, a partner there and one of our members, who has testified to the value to him of taking the Learningguild exam until he obtained an A. (To encourage others, he took it also on later occasions!) Karol Zdravevski, the Senior Manager for Human Resources, wishes to foster in GMK Centric a pattern of staff development in reasoning and English expression, using the Learningguild exam and its related materials and with individual guidance. She wants to be able to point to that pattern as a model, not only in her contacts with other companies but also when she meets careers people from universities, where she realizes such development is not yet taken sufficiently seriously. She has also said that one reason to value it is that it will enable people such as herself to take a more active and competent part in the education of their own children. I have already written to one staff member, from Sri Lanka, "Perhaps in about three years <u>you</u> will be assisting people in your situation who join GMK Centric!"

The third group is the vast one of people who did not have much satisfactory secondary education (or little or none in an English-language milieu) and would like to write and/or to give talks but are conscious of their present limitations. Like a couple of the members of our philosophy seminar, they may be widely experienced and either still engaged in or retired from some area of employment in which they are or were extremely competent, but they can see in our discussions, and the enquiries and writing I invite them to engage in, a way of providing what they have missed. Our retired policeman, Norm Piper, a longstanding member of our seminar, often notes that police would benefit from this or that aspect of the reading and critical discussion we engage in. So we can say to people "It is not at all too late to build up your skills and sensitivities in reasoning and expression." Any education worth the name requires exercises, checking, normally a teacher's annotation and hence, often, guided self-correction; and that discipline at its best deepens satisfaction and brings delight, because of the sense of progress, as of cooperation, it makes possible.

Such study should, of course, be of the kind that people will want to sustain. If they have worked through *Making up Sentences*, they can go on to Gowers's *The Complete Plain Words* and even to Burchfield's *New Fowler's Modern English Usage*, and enjoy discovering and appropriating words from their wide reading and listening that will help them to express precisely what they want to say. (A good dictionary, setting out uses, is vital.) The booklet *Reasoning* may help to build up the confidence, so lacking in many people, to formulate their own arguments and give their own thoughtful views, as well as to read with more appreciation a classic on criticism such as Chapter Two of Mill's *Liberty*.

3. Discussion. That chapter gives us some of the best reasons for valuing discussion, though again here we should

emphasize the satisfaction and delight to be found in it as an intrinsic good. In his seventh paragraph Mill says:

> [Man] is capable of rectifying his mistakes, by discussion and experience. Not by experience alone. There must be discussion, to show how experience is to be interpreted. … In the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct.

How rare and how valuable it is to be genuinely open to criticism of both, and especially for those in positions of leadership, at a time when there is such a tendency, as well as the standing temptation, to blow the trumpet of one's institution or ignore or put a spin upon inconvenient facts.

There is so much to be learned about discussion as well as from it. One great advantage of sustained membership in a movement such as Learningguild is that one has the opportunity over many years to participate, to learn from the manner and the matter of others' contributions, to notice how a good discussion will enable a person or group to see the significance of something or place it in a context that makes it more intelligible, and to develop one's skills and sensitivities both in putting one's own present view and in doing justice to the contributions of others. Moreover, discussion occurs not only within structured meetings but in conversations, for example during the suppers that follow our Friday-evening meetings. How deeply influential such conversations, and the memory of them, can be. One might say that education depends on them as much as it does on clear exposition in books or lectures, which themselves often need discussion to bring out their value and/or their faults.

We need more discussion within *Learningguild Letter* itself. It was good to have Hans Eisen's letter in our last issue, in which he said that, rather than pinning hopes as I had said I did on Kim Beazley's prospects of leading Labor to victory in the next election, one should look to Kevin Rudd. In this issue we have a valuable confirmation from Don Barrett in Brisbane of the danger that residential colleges can pose to the educational and personal development of university students. How precious it is, by the way, to have continued discussion with people one first met long ago. Hans was School Captain at Melbourne High in 1950 when I was in the fourth form (Year 10); Anthony Clunies-Ross (p.14) I got to know in the mid-nineteen-fifties; Don Barrett was a colleague at the University of Queensland in the early sixties.

4. Assistance. In the first *Learningguild Letter*, published in 1989, seven years after Learningguild began, I took as my theme "our emphasis on mutual help", and gave numerous illustrations. (I wrote about responsive cooperation in 2.2005 and its supplement.) One example of the mutual help that Learningguild makes possible is provided by the participation this year of one of our new members, Rosalie Leonadas. She and I review in this issue the recent and very valuable *Oxford Basic English Dictionary*, and, as a Learningguild Assistant, she has been helping three of our members with their pronunciation of English (often while I look at their exercises from Murphy) and then sitting in as I explain some points of grammar to them. She has also given me work she has done on sections of a past paper in the Learningguild exam. She and Balthasar Kehi have joined our philosophy seminar. He is originally from East Timor, has a doctorate from Columbia, New York, spoke at a Friday meeting last term, and is studying pronunciation with me. I found it valuable this year to ask members of the seminar to give answers (preferably written out but otherwise from notes) in the following session to chosen or allocated questions among those set for it. A good seminar is one characterized by both individual preparation and responsive cooperation.[2]

We need to develop an efficient system for collating, folding and stapling this *Letter* and other publications, and of distributing it and our activities slip. I am very grateful to Yvonne Gu, who played the piano for us at the meeting of October 19th: she spent a

whole afternoon this week folding and stapling about a hundred copies of the supplement to this issue while listening to a CD of Mozart sonatas!) We could also do a great deal more sharing of seedlings, garden produce and the gardening itself. One difficulty is that many students now have little spare time, so that they may come to their one-with-one tutorial in a short interval between a course they have to attend in English and their employment, for example, as with many Colombians, in cleaning.

One of our members has asked for further help, for which he will pay, from a Colombian student he has supported who is also a member. It is important, for self-respect and self-development as well as efficiency, that help should where possible be mutual, but we should not make a fetish of that. It should above all be plain both to those who become and to those who continue as our members that in Learningguild you are sure of a context of respect and friendliness, and a steadfast readiness to learn and appreciate your particular situation and to give you, if you are a student, the needed advice, materials, annotation, wider help and encouragement.

Assistance from Learningguild goes also, through publications, money and visits, to people in other countries (India, Cambodia and Indonesia) seeking to offer a good education, and we should seek to do more for them and to hear more from them, some of which we would publish in this *Letter*. (We have just received an annual report from the Freedom Foundation based in Bangalore.)

I should like to express my hearty thanks to all our members for the assistance to Learningguild that their sustained membership gives, and especially to those who undertake particular tasks for us, not least to one who, in his eighties, not only spoke at our meeting last night (Nov. 2nd: we had a record attendance of 28), but also has offered to join me as a marker in our exam.

5. Vigour. The member just mentioned, and another, almost ninety, who with his wife has continued to provide a welcoming hospitality for a couple of meetings each year, are exemplars of continued mental vigour. There is a Latin noun '*vigor*', but commoner is the verb '*vigēre*', which Lewis and Short define thus: '*to be lively* or *vigorous*; *to thrive*, *flourish*, *bloom*; *to be in honour*, *esteem*, *repute*, etc.' We might note how much it can contribute to one's vigour (though one must not become dependent on it) to know that one is held in esteem, respected and valued for one's warmth, friendliness, help and ideas. Many people, old or adolescent, men or women, fail to thrive partly because they lack that sense of being esteemed.

Without idolizing either physical health or mental dexterity, Learningguild should be a locus of vigorous development of body, mind and character. How seldom that combined development is sufficiently emphasized, explained and exemplified in upbringing and education, or in the media, today. If you have experienced it and the alacrity and delight it fosters, you are unlikely to suffer that sense of emptiness or desire for the sensational or "way out" which so often leads to drug-taking, alcohol abuse, and/or a preoccupation with "entertainment". If you maintain it, you are unlikely to fear old age and can regard children, teenagers and adults alike as your contemporaries with whom you can cooperate.

On Sunday the 18th of November we shall have a picnic by the Maribyrnong in Avondale Heights, and there will be opportunity for a walk by or high above the river and for some cricket. We should seek to provide such a combination of good talk, exercise and scenery in each term.

I find, as a student, a teacher and a runner, that there is so much to learn and enjoy about both new and old ways of doing things. Both as an individual sportsman and as a father and grandfather, I value participation and self-developing activity, both by oneself and with others, rather than watching professional sport with its wretched tendencies to the worship of victory and hence to drugs and to "sledging". I look forward to a time when, I hope, we shall have a t-shirt as well as our excellent pen as a sign of membership of Learningguild!

6. Fellowship. My use of this word has religious roots, certainly. I used to think its frequent use by those Christians called Methodists, of whom I was one, tended to the sentimental, but I value the warmth and openheartedness which Methodist fellowship had as its best. The exclamatory hymn of Charles Wesley beginning "And are we yet alive,| And see each other's face?" expressed delight in meeting once again, both at a conference and informally, those with whom one shared a common mission, one that often incurred persecution or scorn as well as calling for persistent devotion.

In the Student Christian Movement there was the sweet and meditative song "Lo, here is fellowship", often sung after periods of silence, stressing a common focus and including the line "Either for other to suffer all things".

The relevant entry in the *Shorter Oxford* is "Friendliness; the spirit of comradeship; an instance of this", and the two citations make a remarkable contrast: from Robert Louis Stevenson, "Life forces men apart and breaks up the goodly fellowships for ever", and from R.H.Tawney, "A band of comrades, where fellowship should be known for life".

What then are the marks of the fellowship we should wish to develop, widen and deepen in Learningguild? First, a recognition that study and discussion among us are open to **anyone** who wishes to join us and, as we say, "wants to go on learning and help others learn", and that each member, from whatever background and however shy or awkward, is welcome, appreciated, and where appropriate assisted. We have here a great advantage, that we are not in any way limited to those who have previously studied within a particular institution; but that gives us a special responsibility to value diversity and enable people to feel at home. Secondly, gratitude for teaching, talks, discussion and friendships enjoyed and an eager expectation of their continuance: thus people find in Learningguild a warmth and enthusiasm that can be infectious. The third mark comes nearer to a religious dimension, though Learningguild is not a religious body but one concerned to study and discuss religion as well as much else in history, cultures and societies. It is a deep and widespread conviction that it's wonderful to be able to learn, to develop, to think for oneself, to ask and seek to answer both elementary and far-reaching questions, to communicate clearly the results of one's thought and experience, to cooperate, and to build families and family-like societies in which members really care about and care for one another.

Yours in Learningguild,

John Howes

NOTES

1. I have recently read an advertisement (*The Age*, 20 October) from the University of Melbourne for a "Manager, Student Experience" in the Faculty of Economics and Commerce, declaring, in ludicrously poor English: "You will be responsible for high level leadership and support to the new Student Experience team in delivering programs and services that will ensure students at Melbourne experience a distinctive and positive university experience." Whatever valuable ideals we may rightly have, the efforts of those who hold them dear cannot bring about and should not aim at one kind of "experience" for all, let alone one that is "distinctive".

2. In our last issue (p.2) I wrote that I proposed more promotion of our seminar. That has not yet occurred, not least because of time spent in preparation of materials for this year's seminar itself, but we must ensure that it goes on widely during the coming months before we begin again in February with the scope described above (p.2). I also said that I would emphasize to my pupils in English, native speakers or not, that they should reach a level at which they could teach others. I have sometimes made that point to people who have begun with us in recent months, and will seek to do so always. It is too early to predict the result. Most pupils are concerned to get a satisfactory result in IELTS, and may then concentrate on establishing themselves in their careers in Australia and/or looking after their families. This week I have had a letter from Claudia Orejuela telling me that she has gained the 6½ she needed in IELTS, and three more people, also Colombians, have asked me to teach them. The expansion of Learningguild will depend on the further development of their English by members such as Claudia, and their willingness to teach.

Palliative care and medically assisted dying on request

DR RODNEY SYME *presented his case clearly and movingly at our Friday-evening meeting on May 18th. He is a surgeon and also Vice-President of Dying with Dignity Victoria. He was later invited to write for* Learningguild Letter *on the question of whether it would prove practicable to combine a palliative care clinic with a doctor's readiness under certain carefully defined circumstances to do what Dr Syme believes ought not to continue to be contrary to law – to enable a patient to end his or her life. This is his response.*

Many people might think that those who, like me, advocate voluntary euthanasia (or, as I prefer to say, medically assisted dying on request) and palliative care (PC) practitioners are vigorously opposed to one another. Actually, both groups have fundamental areas of agreement. We both respect the autonomy of the individual in medical matters, and we both accept the extreme importance of the relief of suffering at the end of life. These are the essential pillars upon which both groups stand. I fully endorse the work of palliative care and believe it is one of the major medical advances of the second half of the twentieth century.

Given the alignment in principle between the groups, and the excellent work that PC does, I believe that the ideal place for the practice of medically assisted dying would be within PC. This would ensure that dying people would get the very best of holistic care, but would also provide them with a choice to request medical assistance in dying if their suffering was not being relieved effectively. Unfortunately that is sometimes the case. Palliative Care Australia's position statement on euthanasia says that it "acknowledges that while pain and other symptoms can be helped, complete relief of suffering is not always possible, even with optimal palliative care." Palliative Care Professor Michael Ashby writes: "the idea that modern palliative care can relieve all the suffering associated with death and dying is a flawed approach". His colleague Roger Hunt says: "the hospice ideal of providing a pain-free, comfortable and dignified death is usually unachievable and should not be promised". This is not surprising: the process of dying is complicated as many bodily processes collapse. Of perhaps even greater significance is the psychological and existential suffering that is profound and less obvious. It is extremely difficult to palliate, except by giving the sufferer control over his existence.

Review of the refereed palliative care literature reveals the reality that

- "there are two or three pain syndromes that are particularly difficult for us to treat, nerve pain, bone pain, and pain that is largely comprised of suffering in the psychological sphere";
- "23% of patients (in palliative care) still had unacceptable severe pain on their last pain assessment";
- "cancer pain can be effectively treated in 85-95% of patients";
- of terminally ill cancer patients 7 days before death, 15% had severe breathlessness, and 8% had horrible breathlessness;
- "weight loss, exhaustion, loss of appetite and nausea are among the most common symptom problems afflicting patients with advanced cancer". (It is added that "This complex ranks at the top of physical causes of suffering and contributes to psycho-social distress";

- 83% of palliative care patients presented cognitive failure on average 16 days before death;
- "for many people who are dying, it is not just a question of comfort or absence of physical suffering, but a loss of function, independence and role that is hardest to bear";
- "the lack of control of physical suffering among cancer patients in the last days or hours of life is a common medical problem, but is rarely discussed in an open fashion".

I could go on, and on, and on, but it would become boring and very depressing.

In the face of this misery, it was a boon when the practice of deeply sedating suffering people was introduced into palliative care in 1988. It rapidly became widely accepted. In 1990, from Italy, Ventafridda wrote that 52% of home palliative care patients required sedation that induced sleep on average two days before death, and in Australia Burke wrote in 1991 that sedation "provided a readily available means of controlling symptoms and overcoming patient distress where no feasible alternative existed previously". Roger Hunt said: "When analgesics and sedatives are infused, the patient enters a kind of 'pharmacological oblivion' and appears at peace – it is usually assumed that in this state there is freedom from pain and distress. The patient cannot eat or drink, has a dampened cough reflex, [and] develops retained airway secretions which 'rattle' and become infected, all of which hasten death. This is also true in a subjective sense: permanent unconsciousness is, in the patient's view, similar to being dead."

The concept of "terminal sedation" (as it is now known) is widely accepted by most in palliative care. Comments from refereed PC literature confirm this:

- "It may be safely said that escalation of symptoms related to cancer is common and frequently requires sedation."
- "symptoms requiring sedation included breathlessness, pain, general malaise, agitation and nausea".
- "Patients with persisting distress, despite an initial respite, and those whose death is imminent, may elect to be deeply sedated until death ensues."
- "Many clinicians who care for patients in the advanced stages of terminal illness are probably gratified about the increasing acceptance of terminal sedation as a therapeutic approach in these situations."
- "This approach recognizes the right of dying patients to adequate relief of unendurable symptoms and the right to choose among appropriate therapeutic options."
- This approach has "unavoidable untoward consequences, the likely diminution of interactional function and the potential for hastening death."
- "Terminal sedation is justified to alleviate pain and suffering whilst [it is acknowledged] that death is not only a risk but a likelihood."

It is clear that the PC response to intolerable and unrelievable suffering is terminal sedation, which can effectively control suffering but clearly hastens death in some circumstances. Why, then, is there a need for any other form of medically assisted dying?

Palliative Care Australia (PCA) says "palliative care practice does not include deliberate ending of life (euthanasia) even if this is requested by the patient", and many in PC fear that terminal sedation will be seen in this light. Janet Hardy, in an editorial for the *Lancet*, said: "There is concern that sedation as the best means of symptom control in the dying patient may be underused because of fear of employing 'terminal sedation' (that is, treatment which might hasten death)." Another group of clinicians said "We regard psychological and existential suffering as an indication for sedation" and "In 10% of cases death was not imminent." There is no doubt that some in PC with strict

religious and moral views are challenged by this practice. It will then be used very sparingly or not at all, or a very slow induction of deep sedation occurs, such that suffering is not relieved for some days, and coma and dying may be a prolonged process. Often the decision for sedation is not discussed with the patient, and the opportunity to say goodbye is lost.

Although PCA states that it "recognizes and respects the fact that some people rationally and consistently request deliberate ending of life", it does not respect the choice of those people by responding to their request. Compare the manner of dying if they did so to that currently provided by terminal sedation. After a careful dialogue with patients in each individual case to ensure that their request was rational and persistent and not made under duress, that it was not derived from treatable mental illness, that they were fully informed about all aspects of the situation, and that a second medical opinion confirmed these facts, then the PC doctor could prescribe medication that patients could take by mouth, in their own time, to end their life, with security and dignity. It would give sufferers full control over the end of their life, as to its place, time and method. They would be able to say goodbye to their family and friends, and go to sleep quickly, and die quickly, at home in their own bed, surrounded by their family, if they so chose.

This scene is one that, as Michael Barbato said, is "one of those deaths that we in palliative care hope to see but rarely do". The distinction, in my opinion, is between having and not having control.

How different things could be if such medically assisted dying could be integrated into the best palliative care. In my opinion, the community's acceptance of palliative care is diminished by practitioners' known reluctance to show full respect for the choice of suffering individuals. Unfortunately, for this full integration to occur, PC would have to alter its ideological opposition to assisted dying, but at present there are many in PC who have strong moral and religious beliefs that make this unlikely. However, with the increasing secularization of PC, it may well occur gradually in the future. I sincerely hope so.

As I said at the outset, advocates of medically assisted dying and practitioners of PC have considerable common ground. The latter respect your autonomy, and seek to relieve suffering, only so long as doing so does not directly bring about death, even if you are prepared to do that yourself. They fail to accept that hastening death may be the only way that suffering can be relieved, and that providing control to patients is often the best palliation they can have.

From the book And a Time to Live *by the American cancer rehabilitation specialist Robert Chernin Cantor (Harper and Row 1978), which may be borrowed from the Learningguild Library:*

For me the issue is clear. Our life is our own possession. It is ours to preserve and it is ours to surrender. The choice for life or death cannot rest with doctors, families or the government. Freedom of choice is our greatest human endowment and that freedom must extend to life itself. [Elizabeth] Kübler-Ross expresses the concept succinctly: "If a terminally ill patient has accepted his own finiteness and has put his house in order and then wants to terminate his life, we cannot prevent it and we should not judge his decision." (p.122)

‘Republic’ a less misleading word than ‘democracy’

JOHN WILLIAMS, *a philosopher who deals* inter alia *with economic and political theory, explains why those who laid the foundations of American government preferred to think in terms of a republic and the kinds of laws appropriate to it than of a democracy in which the policies implemented or just promised were those that gained the votes of a majority.*

The so-called “founding fathers” of the United States of America rarely spoke of democracy. Both Jefferson and Madison, to mention but two, were suspicious of it. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and, later, what we today call the Bill of Rights established a republic, not a democracy. Madison told his compatriots that he and his colleagues had given them a republic, but added the haunting words ‘for as long as you can keep it’.

What did he, Jefferson and others fear? Not, I think, that their fellow-Americans would revert to a monarchy! The Declaration of Independence, which in its substance far exceeds its title, embodied ideas and ideals on human liberty and human rights articulated in the Putney Debates of the leaders of Oliver Cromwell’s army in 17th-century England, and subsequently in the 1689 Bill of Rights, which made parliament rather than a monarch the real sovereign. It owed much to the impassioned prose of John Milton and the measured reasoning of John Locke.

The Constitution of the United States of America built security amongst the portents of danger and possible failure. The first nine amendments to it, which make up America’s Bill of Rights, were the culmination of what had begun with Magna Carta (1215). Not only were citizens not servile subjects of an absolute monarch: they were not powerless subjects of each other, or of the State, or of any government they had established.

I revere the Declaration, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.[1] Along with George Washington’s Farewell Address, they set out for me “the American Way”, which I admire almost unreservedly.

The founders built upon millennia of human struggle for and hard thinking about human liberty. There is little in their own thinking not to be found in the writings of those usually designated the “radical Whigs”. In particular, they were familiar with a word first uttered in the 5th century BCE, ισονομια (*isonomia*), meaning equality of all people before the law and suggesting rule by law rather than by a tyrant’s whim or a mob’s caprice. Whilst for the most part deists or Unitarians or atheists or agnostics, they were aware of the insistence of many a Hebrew prophet that rulers and ruled alike were subject to a rule not of their own making. (The assertion that the founding fathers of the United States of America were Christians, and thus that the United States they established was and is a Christian nation, is simply false.) They built upon what others had begun. But build they did, and did so superbly.

They had reservations about unconstrained “democracy”, reservations seemingly not shared by President George W. Bush. When we use the word, we need to be clear whether or not we mean what is called liberal democracy, which involves **limited** rule by the majority. Do individual men and women, and sets of them, possess some liberties not to be curtailed or proscribed by a majority of their fellow citizens, whether directly or through representatives of that majority? Or does the word ‘democracy’ signify unlimited rule, directly or indirectly, by the majority, with regular and basically fair elections characterised by all but universal suffrage? Initially, President Bush seemed to laud and seek to extend “liberal democracy”. His emphasis, however, changed. He began to embrace “democracy”, with the meaning just given.

In my opinion, the most perceptive volume addressing issues of political philosophy is *The Federalist Papers*. In that work (1787-8) Madison and others articulate in some detail their opposition to unconstrained democracy and their anxiety about whether the republic for which they had striven would be "kept" by their fellow citizens.

Madison feared the emergence of what he called "factions" – not in political parties but in the voting populace – and the departure by representatives from the rule of law classically defined. He feared that "democracy" would mutate to unconstrained "majoritarianism". The key to the concept of the rule of law espoused by the founding fathers of the USA is that laws should be purely general, applicable to all, specifying no particular individual or set of individuals, and not designed to produce any predetermined, "engineered" state of human affairs.

To illustrate Madison's fear of factions, let us imagine an electorate of a hundred citizens. Fifteen form what we today would call a "special-interest group". The members of this information-rich and organized group promise to exchange their votes for a candidate or party that will support a "law" advantaging them – one which departs from the rule of law classically defined. Let us call this faction or special-interest group A. Three other factions or special-interest groups each of 15 members are formed: B, C and D. It might be supposed that members of A would not favour laws advantaging the members of voting-groups B, C and D. Yet a special law advantaging A is "worth" more to its members than the taxes they will pay for laws advantaging the other groups. After all, their taxes will be supplemented by the taxes paid by some of the 40% of the electorate who do not form a faction. A politician or political party yearning for election or re-election has only to do his or her sums, and to present a platform of special laws advantaging factions A, B, C and D. Does such a politician or party have the real support of the majority? Possibly a law thus contrived enjoys the approval of but 15% of the electorate. Eureka! Concentrate benefits upon folk who know what they are receiving, but disperse costs upon those who do not know why they are paying. A politician's dream!

Present-day public-choice-theorists, as they are called – the best-known is Dr James Buchanan, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics – have resurrected the insights of Jefferson and Madison, albeit avoiding the word 'factions'. They are frequently characterised as insisting first that politicians, like market participants, seek to further their own utility, and secondly that "government failure" is at least as likely to occur as "market failure".

So what has "democracy" given us? Yes, a peaceful transition of political power, which certainly is to be desired. But have we reached the point where rule by the real will of the majority or its representatives has become a myth? I, almost despairing, believe that democracy perverted has cursed Australia and other supposedly "liberal democracies" with the politics of manipulation, wherein voters are viewed not as thinking persons but as faceless units in voting blocs to be had for a promise of a special benefit and a smile.

The politics of manipulation is a truly vicious cycle of blurred images, compliant faces, hollow forms, spin, vacuous promises and "core" and "non-core" undertakings. It is mathematically inevitable that, assuming two main parties trying to satisfy interest groups, each will do their sums and move to "the middle ground". It's not fashionable to say it, but I'm not an enthusiast for democracy, if that is how it is conceived. For a genuine republic, yes – though I don't object violently if a few institutions are not subject to control by the majority, even if that state of affairs is sustained by the myths surrounding a constitutional monarchy.

NOTE

1. Volume 6 of *The New Illustrated Columbia Encyclopedia* (which may be consulted at 23 Fallon St) includes the text of the Constitution and all the amendments, and quotes extensively from the Declaration.

A brief stay in Taiwan

JIM RICHARDSON *describes one of the countries he has visited this year. At our Friday-evening meeting on November 16th, and with particular reference to public transport, he will be saying more about Taiwan and also telling us of his subsequent experience of Perth (Western Australia) and of Greece. Jim is a retired engineer, and is convenor of the committee of the Friends of the Library at Queen's College in the University of Melbourne, where he was a resident in the 1950s.*

In April, for about a fortnight, I visited Taiwan. My only previous visit had been in 1970, and then only for a few days on a guided tour. Great progress has been made over the ensuing decades not only, as one would expect, in the economy, but also, rather surprisingly, in the political structure. Nowadays Taiwan has high living standards and is an effective democracy. There is one major problem: the proximity of the world's most populous country, China, and its desire to re-unite with its former province. The Taiwanese take quite a different view, having been separate for more than a century, and have scant desire or need to re-unite. Nevertheless, attempts have been and continue to be made towards a closer relationship. Many consider that some form of re-unification will eventually occur. One thinks of Germany and Vietnam and, by contrast, of Ireland and Korea.

Taiwan is an island shaped like a leaf, approximately 400 km long and 140 km wide at its widest part. Its area is only 36,000 km^2, stretching along a general north-south axis through which runs the Central Mountain Range. Jade Mountain is the highest peak at almost 4000m. The range divides the island between the fertile plains along the west coast, where most people live, and the rocky cliffs along the east coast, which is sparsely populated. The total population is around 24 million: 98% are Han Chinese (mainly Fujian and Hakka) and the remainder Aboriginals (there are ten tribes, either coast- or mountain-dwellers). Due to differing elevations, Taiwan has various climatic zones, from tropical through subtropical and temperate to alpine. These zones engender a wide variety of plants and animals, especially birds.

The two Chinese characters constituting the name 'Taiwan' mean a platform or dais and an inlet or gulf, presumably in reference to an impressive harbour. Another name is '(Ilha) Formosa', 'Beautiful (Island)', arising from the first European discovery of the island by a Portuguese fleet in 1544. The first inhabitants came to it around ten to fifteen thousand years ago and their descendants are the Aboriginals. The first significant change was in the early 15th century when Chinese fled from Fujian Province because of political turmoil. During the next hundred years other Chinese arrived, originally from Hunan province, where they had been persecuted.

After the Portuguese there came the Dutch in 1602 and, for a brief period, the Spanish in 1626. Eventually the Qing Dynasty regained control following the defeat of the Ming, but in 1895 Taiwan was ceded to the Japanese, who occupied Taiwan for the next fifty years and built much infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, roads and railways. Following the defeat of Japan in 1945,. Taiwan was returned briefly to China, which soon became engulfed in civil war between the Nationalists (under Chiang Kai-Shek) and the Communists (under Mao Tse-Tung).

After the Communists won, the Nationalists fled to Taiwan with an enormous collection of Chinese art now on display in the capital, Taipeh. Their leader Chiang Kai-Shek ruled autocratically and dealt brutally with dissent. However his son,

Chiang Ching-Kuo, allowed an opposition party to form and by 2000 it had gained government and still holds power. These changes constitute a remarkable transition to a democracy now well established. Today Taiwan is indeed an impressive nation. Both Communists and Nationalists regard Dr Sun Yat-Sen as the Founding Father. He became the first President of the Republic of China in 1912 following the demise of the Qing Dynasty.

Most of the cities lie on the arable west coast. In the north is the capital, Taipei, in the middle Taichung, and in the south Tainan and Kaohsiung, an industrial and port city. The suffixes after 'Tai' match our 'north', 'central' and 'south'. Connecting these cities is a high-speed rail link, opened in 2006, as well as normal-speed railways and trunk roads. Taipei (with about 2.6 million people) is approximately 360 km from Kaohsiung (about 1.5 million), and the new train, even when it stops at major intermediate cities, takes only two hours, with an average speed of 180km/hr. I could not help comparing the average speed of rail travel over a distance of about 960 km between Melbourne (about 4.1 million) and Sydney (about 4.5 million): a mere 80 km/hr!

This fast train in Taiwan was designed and built by Japanese companies. Japan has made substantial investments in advanced technology. In fact, one often hears Japanese spoken in Taipei, particularly at the hotels. It gave me great pleasure to speak Japanese and so surprise the receptionists, who had been expecting English.

Taiwan itself has a number of interesting and impressive buildings, and I spent much of my time in them. They include the awesome National Palace Museum, with the finest collection of Chinese art in the world; the Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall; the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, in memory of Taiwan's first President (in reality a dictator); the Grand Hotel, a distinctively Chinese structure; and Taipei 101, currently the world's highest building. One can readily travel around Taipei by excellent public transport, seeing the sights and enjoying meals at the many restaurants.

From letters

DON BARRETT, *a member who lives in Brisbane and has been teaching Latin at Brisbane Grammar School after four decades on the staff of the University of Queensland (in the Classics Department and as Dean of the Faculty of Arts), wrote in relation to JH's remarks on residential colleges in* L'g Letter *2.2006, on pp.1-3.*

Your observations about the ethos of colleges struck a chord with me. I've been a member of the Council of King's College [UQ] for some fifteen years, and its secretary for about the last six years. The College has had three very different CEOs in that time, and I've no doubt that the ethos of any college depends very largely on the sort of person who heads it. He or she needs to be imaginative and sensitive, to know students thoroughly as individuals without being too obtrusive, and to be willing and able to foster intellectual enquiry and to delegate administrative trivia. Residential assistants need to be persons of the highest integrity with excellent interpersonal skills.

When I was Dean of Arts (1983-94), students living in colleges who were excluded from their courses for failure and applied for readmission almost invariably blamed college conditions. Many, in explaining why they expected to fare better if readmitted, gave as their reason the fact that they had left college. They complained of peer pressure to take part to excess in sporting and social activities, high costs, social isolation, adjustment problems on entry, noise and interruptions affecting their concentration, interpersonal friction and lack of privacy. It takes a competent, caring Head to minimize such problems.

ANTHONY CLUNIES-ROSS *(see* L'g L *2.2006, from the foot of p.3) has joined us this year, and has written from his home in Scotland about what he means by 'active humanity', a term with a meaning that he sees as akin to that of 'responsive cooperation' (2.2005 and its supplement, Part 4).*

For the good organization of the more-or-less integrated large societies in which many parts of the world's population have lived for the last several millennia, we depend upon, and need to recognize, three aspects of human behaviour, of which the third is what I call active humanity. Market institutions harness the first, our spontaneous propensity to pursue our own welfare as we understand it. Institutions of government make use of the second, our response to threats of punishment and the quest of some people for power. Much of economic discourse has gone into determining the appropriate boundaries between market and state realms. But they are interlocking, rather than independent, spheres. The good functioning of market institutions depends on government provisions such as those of commercial law. And government often pursues its objectives most effectively, or certainly most efficiently, by making use of the market rather than overriding it.

To explain the term 'active humanity', I have generally said that it means our propensity for mutual trust, mutual responsibility, and creativity; and we might well add respect, fairness, and generosity. Human society – indeed human survival – depended on the exercise of these characteristics long before there were markets or governments as we generally understand those terms. The term 'civil society', which has come or returned into frequent use in the last twenty years, refers to those institutions (in large integrated societies) that depend primarily on, and harness, active humanity. But again there is active and essential symbiosis between the institutions of civil society and those of the market on the one hand and the state on the other.

WHAT'S A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO … *ENGLISH VOCABULARY AND SENTENCE-CONSTRUCTION?*

ROSALIE LEONADAS *is a Learningguild Teaching Assistant who has been guiding some of our members as they practise their pronunciation. From a Greek-Australian family, she is a graduate of La Trobe in Italian, French and Modern Greek. Here she and John Howes review a book which numerous Learningguild members from other language backgrounds are being encouraged to buy.*

People learning a new language will undoubtedly agree that a good dictionary is indispensable: one that meets the main needs of the learner as he or she encounters the intricacies of that language. Anyone who has become able to read and understand simple explanations in English, even if sometimes with the aid of a dictionary giving counterparts in a first language, will be greatly assisted by the new ***Oxford Basic English Dictionary***. It appeared in 2006 and costs only $19.95. Some students of English will be familiar with what it has replaced, the *Oxford Elementary Learner's Dictionary*. (We shall refer to them as *OBE*D and *OELD*.)

There are certainly new features in *OBED* which we shall describe, but there is the fundamental similarity that both books not only provide meanings or explanations of words but also illustrate their use or uses, very often with whole sentences, from which much can be learnt both about the particular word and about grammatical constructions. We are telling our students that they must have such a dictionary, one they can use regularly and preferably an actual book that can be marked, rather than anything electronic.

Though *OBED* is smaller in thickness, height, breadth than *OELD*, it has 19,000 entries against the other's 15,000. Its print is smaller but not difficult to read. It has a more compact layout, designed to attract the learner's attention to as much information as possible at one glance or

little more. There is effective differentiation for various features. By far the most valuable new feature is the emphasis placed on the **keywords** (words it is especially important to learn: some 2000) which are marked by a small depiction of a key immediately after the word and in the same blue that is used for all the words that the dictionary explains. Very helpful guidance is provided, in light blue rectangles accompanied by a depiction of a magnifying glass, on grammar, word building, speaking (that section indicates what we normally say by contrast with what we may write), spelling, pronunciation, choice of a word out of two or more of similar meaning, and "culture" (for example, information about elections). All these are illustrated on pp. iv and v, which will help the user to know what to look for and where it might be. Synonyms and antonyms are shown with a small blue arrow and the locutions in blue capitals 'SAME MEANING' and 'OPPOSITE'.

The treatment of two words may be used to illustrate the value of this dictionary. After the noun 'flat' is defined, as well as given its American counterpart 'apartment', we have a blue rectangle headed 'Word Building', with "A tall building with a lot of flats in it is called a **block of flats**." For the word 'magnificent', we are told that it is an adjective with the meaning of 'very good or beautiful', and given the example 'The Taj Mahal is a magnificent building'; but then there is the "Word Building" note "Some similar words are **marvellous**, **remarkable**, **splendid** and **wonderful**."

There is an excellent central section in two parts. First, there is a set of fifteen study pages, in which students are invited to give answers (for example, prepositions chosen from a list): there is a key at the end of the book. These pages include sections on the language or type of language customarily used on the telephone, in letters formal and informal and in emails. A set of pictures comes next: eight pages provide pictures and words for transport, the body, clothes, items in and around a house, components of a school, fruit, vegetables and animals.

Comparing *OELD* with *OBED*, we are told that there are "illustrations of more than 550 words" in the former and "400 illustrations and photos" in the latter, but if we look at the pictures in the parts of the two from, say, 'hair' to 'hat', we find that *OBED*'s and their captions cover a wider range. A useful feature of *OELD* was the list of the phonetic symbols across the foot of every pair of left- and right-hand pages; but it is perhaps better for students to be encouraged to memorize them, and they are listed at the front of *OBED*. The examples given in the later book of the uses of words are often precisely those of the earlier one, as may be seen from the first page for ***A*** in each case. *OBED*'s first page adds 'abdomen', 'abnormal' and 'abrupt' to *OELD*'s stock of words, and there is an interesting change in the example for the fifth use of 'about', from the slightly old-fashioned 'Is your mother about? I want to speak to her' to 'It was late and there weren't many people about.'

Additions are only to be expected in a living language such as English. Hence we find in *OBED* not only a greater number of American words but also entries that reflect development in technology, such as those for 'email' (also 'e-mail'), 'blogger', 'the web' and 'the Internet', as well as phrases such as 'bird flu' and 'the greenhouse effect'.

OBED is likely to be found even more valuable than its predecessor, and is an excellent basis for the kind of work we in Learningguild call **SSC**, "Sentences to Study and Change". In such work a fairly simple sentence (usually from the dictionary at first), one which illustrates the (or a) use of a particular word, is copied and studied and then modified, even if only slightly, so that the word being illustrated **and** most or all of the original's structure (order, parts of speech, phrases and/or clauses) are preserved by the student, but some different words employed.

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