# Learningguild Letter

1.2009

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Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

The main but not the only theme of this letter is sex, desire uncontrolled and controlled, and marriage. I explore that theme with reference to a chapter in George Steiner's *My Unwritten Books* and to J.M.Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* and the film based on it.[1] On May 15th our Friday-evening group listened to and discussed a recorded interview with Steiner, related to his book. We are grateful to one of our members, John Pottage, for sending the cassette, and copies can be provided along with some notes I wrote for the meeting. In June Margaret and I saw the film *Disgrace*, and we've subsequently read the book. I begin there and then turn to Steiner. It would not be fair to him (or us), in view of his wide range of subjects, to write only about the chapter "The Tongues of Eros" and the permissive view of adultery advanced there, and so (on pp. 3 and 4) I first quote and comment on remarks of his in three of the other six chapters. Finally I turn to other persons, including the English writer Dorothy L. Sayers, in reflecting, just after our Golden Wedding, on marriage as Margaret and I have experienced it.

*Disgrace* was written not long before its author emigrated from South Africa to Australia (he now lives in Adelaide), and, amid much else, it expresses some of his doubtfulness about whether what Desmond Tutu liked to call, after the end of *apartheid*, the Rainbow Nation really has a viable future for those of European descent. There are two central characters, David Lurie and his daughter Lucy. She, a lesbian, has gone to a rural area in the eastern Cape where, now living alone, she grows flowers and vegetables and sells them in a local market. Her father, at 52, is a Byronic man, and something of a Byron scholar, in an ineffectual way, and a professor at an imagined Cape Technical University, in Cape Town. There he teaches "Communication Skills" in courses for which he has no relish. The first chapter, a vivid illustration of Coetzee's power to compress much in a short space, shows Lurie's decline from a man attractive to women to one who, after two marriages and a time when he "existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity", comes to making "satisfactory" weekly visits to a particular prostitute, and then has occasional sexual encounters, bought or not, of an unsatisfying kind. By Ch. 7, as a result of its becoming known that he had seduced a young woman, a student of his, and his refusal to write what he regarded as a grovelling apology, Lurie has resigned, and he drives away from Cape Town to stay with Lucy. (I note in passing that the film depicts very well that frieze-like horizon with which Margaret and I became familiar when we travelled in rural areas of South Africa in the years when I was a professor at Cape Town, 1975-78.)

Chapter 11 is a kind of pivot for the book. First, her father seeks to explain himself to Lucy. Seeing himself as "a servant of Eros" (cf. pp.52 and 69f), he says "My case rests on the rights of desire. On the god who makes even the small birds quiver." However, asked "Have you always felt this way, David?" he replies "No, not always. Sometimes I have felt just the opposite. That desire is a burden we could well do without." I think there of the remark quoted and endorsed by the old man Cephalus, early in Plato's *Republic*, one made by Sophocles, when asked if he was

still capable of intercourse with a woman. He replied "Be silent, man: I'm very glad to have escaped from all that – it's like escaping from a maddened and wild slave-master."

On the next page of Ch. 11: "Three men are coming toward them on the path, or two men and a boy." They force their way in, Lurie is knocked down and burned, Lucy is raped, her dogs are shot, Lurie's car taken. The author gives him these thoughts, before he is sure what has happened to Lucy:

> It happens every day, every hour, every minute … in every quarter of the country. …. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. …. Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad.

"How can you bring up children when there's anarchy all around?" was a question asked in Ch.1 by a woman who had applied to emigrate. How is a person who wants an orderly life in a largely law-abiding country to live in South Africa? Perhaps South Africa is rather less chaotic and crime-ridden now than it was when Coetzee wrote, and when our son Andrew, a little later, observed the extent of robbery and of barrings of windows: but the question remains, and of course a similar one applies to many situations outside South Africa.

Lucy is prepared to give a radical answer, one that may seem barely credible. She finds herself pregnant as a result of the rape, and is resolved to have the child. The boy who was with the two men is somewhat deficient mentally: he is a brother of a wife of Petrus, an African whose protection Lucy is willing to accept, even if it means being known as the third of his wives, and becoming a tenant on his land (all this in Ch.22). Her father, who has been back in Cape Town for a while and then returned to her house, realizes he has to leave, but (in a bleak but genuine and in a way redemptive attempt to do something useful) takes a room in Grahamstown and goes on assisting a middle-aged woman named Bev Shaw in the work of killing cats and dogs, "all those whose term has come", and then taking their bodies to the incinerator.

> He and Bev do not speak. He has learned by now, from her, to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love.
>
> (Ch. 24, the last)

On Saturday mornings he helps Lucy at her market stall. In Ch. 23, Bev has said to him:

> Perhaps the time has come, David, for you to stand back and let Lucy work out solutions for herself. Women are adaptable. Lucy is adaptable. And she is young. She lives closer to the ground than you. Than either of us.

That almost all my references have been to chapters rather than just to pages reflects the fact that this is a book whose chapters should be read as wholes. It stirs the reader to admiration, and a desire to commend it to people who have not yet read it. The film is excellent too, especially in its portrayal of Lucy and her father.

Here I turn to the question what can be learnt about sexuality from the portrayal of David Lurie. There are lessons that we can learn from the greatest works of moral philosophy, those of Plato and Kant, but the portrayal of Lurie illustrates them. We all need to permeate our sexual and other desires with reasoned judgment about what is best for others and ourselves in the long term, and we need to treat others always as ends in themselves and not as mere means to the satisfaction of our own desires. Of course these lessons are not easy to learn and live by, but without them human life lacks integration, security and that deep and ongoing intimacy, in the widest sense, of cherishing and being cherished which is the best context for the sexual intercourse that expresses it and for the bringing up of children.

Someone who is wondering whether to marry, or enter an ongoing sexual relationship with, another person does well to consider how in general that other regards the range of people with whom he or she

regularly deals and what his or her delights are, other than in sex. On these criteria Lurie is deficient. When Bev Shaw says "But you were a teacher", he replies:

> Of the most incidental kind. Teaching was never a vocation for me. Certainly I never aspired to teach people how to live. I was what used to be called a scholar. I wrote books about dead people. That was where my heart was. I taught only to make a living.
>
> (Ch. 18, near the end)

To teach only to make a living, even if one is called a professional (how little that can mean), is to neglect the needs that one's students have for older people who care about them and are glad to chat with them and encourage them rather than just lecture and mark their essays or reports.

We hear nothing of any friendships with men, or any discussions, or any wide interests in books and ideas. In the last chapter, Lurie gazes at his pregnant daughter standing amid flowers in "the stillness of mid-afternoon", and recognizes how far from perceptive he has been:

> The truth is, he has never had much of an eye for rural life, despite all his reading in Wordsworth. Not much of an eye for anything, except pretty girls; and where has that got him? Is it too late to educate the eye?

Sex at its best is not only an expression of desire and physical vigour but an appreciation of the other as a partner whose interests one shares or at least respects. When children are sought or have come, it can also express a great hope and an immense gratitude, as well as the simple thought "I am so glad I have **you**!"

I turn now to George Steiner's book. Approaching the age of 80, he has composed seven chapters about seven books he would like to have written. Perhaps the most thought-provoking are the fourth, concerned with Jews and Israel (he is a Jew, grateful that Israel is a sanctuary but worried that it is "reducing Jews to the common condition of nationalist man": p.120f) and the last, in which he expresses, though with reluctance, his disbelief in God. My Christian friend Dietrich Ritschl (see *L'g Letter* 2.2007, p.1) would with anguish acknowledge the truth in these two sentences from the fourth chapter:

> But however lunatic, the accusation that the Jews had "killed God" in the person of his Nazarene son, rang down the ages. Howled by the looting mob, expounded by divines including Luther, this obscenity helped dispatch thousands of Jewish men, women, and children to hideous deaths.
>
> (p.116f)

How little our religious institutions (and those schools and colleges that have a church or other religious connection) really examine, discuss and see if they have any reasonable answer to a confession of this sort, on p.208 of the final chapter:

> I am haunted, to the point of panic, by the fragility of reason. At virtually any moment a physical lesion, a drug, processes of ageing can impair or destroy our reason. The child born mentally handicapped, the aged companion babbling because of Alzheimer's disease, frame the miraculous complexity and good fortune of rationality. It is these which inhibit me from regarding as plausible the existence of a "God" along human lines. Not to speak of a deity attending to our minuscule hopes and anguish in the trillion-fold matter of a local universe. ….
>
> What I have come to feel with compelling intensity is the absence of God.

In the chapter "School Terms", a wide and critical survey of education in many countries, Steiner says (p.133): "I owe to my *lycée* teachers so very much of what has made my life worth living".

> First and foremost, [the French schoolchild] is made to learn by heart, to memorize passages of steadily increasing length and density. First La Fontaine, later Valéry. Memorization is key. It wakes and nurtures the muscles of attention …. It initiates a community of shared reference, a shorthand of recognized inheritance. It stores within us resources of feeling …. Accurate, apposite quotation, mimetic pride in the

> legacy of great texts, rhetorical ornamentation of all aspects of civic life, establish a direct continuity between school and nation.
>
> (p.132)

He describes such memorization vividly in the interview. Recent education in English-speaking countries has lacked it, especially in poetry. Yet Steiner can also ask "Are the abstractions and conformities inherent in the French academic mandarinate atrophying?"

He is scathing (pp. 134-40) about the inadequacies of so much education in the UK and the USA. In the former,

> The system is generating a teeming underclass of semiliterates whose vocabulary and command of grammar reduce both feelings and ambitions to bleak vulgarity.

In the latter, alongside widespread ignorance of both history and geography,

> An understanding of sentences with dependent clauses is dwindling, as is the available vocabulary. … the love of the language withers under the steamroller of mass-media infantilism.

Then he suggests that the question to be asked is

> What would be a core literacy adequate to the spiritual and practical needs of men and women on a multinational, increasingly intermeshed planet?

It is a good question; but his answer is disappointingly unpractical. He admits finally that an adequate answer would require teamwork, for which, he says revealingly, he is inapt. "No committee has benefitted [*sic*] from my anarchic improprieties" (p.160). Too fond of abnormal sentences, he sums up thus on p.159 a vivid presentation (from p.151) of what he regards as an ideal curriculum for able students:

> A central curriculum in mathematics, music, architecture and the life sciences. Taught, wherever possible, historically. Starting in the milieu of early schooling, the computer can make these four realms contiguous and interactive with the mind and imagination of the student.

He does not appear to realize how fundamental to his own work, and to articulate explanation to and by students in any field, is that combination of grammar, logic and rhetoric traditionally called the *trivium* (see *L'g Letter* 1.2008). Those three arts need to be presented, over **many** secondary and tertiary years, in systematic and lively books and booklets which the student is invited and expected to get to know well, to mark and to revise, and from or in relation to which he or she does many exercises, often returned with annotation. I am confident that similar points could be made concerning effective study in any of the four fields Steiner specifies. Far from denying the value of the computer and the internet (and the printouts thereby made possible!), I add that the last five of our half-yearly examination papers for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression, and a detailed report on each of those examinations, are now on our website.

The last paragraph in the chapter "The Tongues of Eros" has these remarks:

> I have been privileged to speak and make love in four languages. …. The generative reciprocities between the linguistic and the sexual … are … a crucial but largely unmapped sphere.

In the second half of the chapter he writes in turn of "making love" – one does not have to be a puritan to find the familiar expression unsatisfactory – in German, Italian, French and English, using initials, not names, for women in those linguistic *milieux* who have been his partners. We have such sentences as "It was in Genoa that A.-M. instructed me in the litany of seduction", and 'In Tulsa, Oklahoma, my glorious ebony partner hummed at me: "Baby, you haven't seen anything yet."'

In a paragraph in this chapter is a set of sentences (p.83f) that deserves close examination. It expresses views that are more commonly held than they were, though still seldom as openly avowed as here. It explains how it is that Steiner has felt free to engage in this wide range of sexual encounters. He is in fact married, with two children (p.177).

> Men will sleep with women, women with men, men and women with each other, because intercourse is overwhelmingly a bodily function, a "*call of nature*". The imperatives of the libido unfold beyond good and evil, as do human breath or the need for nourishment, those *nourritures terrestres* hymned by Gide. Men and women will sleep with each other outside the confines of marriage. Monogamy over a lifetime is a rare abstention from the obvious. The notion of sinful adultery belongs to an historical-theological code which French sentiment has ironized or ignored from the earliest *fabliaux* to the present. Observe with what didactic malice language inserts "adult" into "adultery"; it is not some punitive fiction of "impurity" which matters, but "adulthood". In a good marriage, sexual drives will wane with time, desire will stale. The magical modulation is that toward friendship. There is that in the latent violence and acrobatics of intercourse which becomes more and more alien to the genius of friendship as it can ripen between man and wife.

Let us first be clear about 'adult' and 'adultery'. Cicero uses the Latin words from which they originate, with the same meanings as we give to the English. '*Adolescere*' is the Latin for 'to grow (up)' (hence 'adolescent') and '*adultus*' its past participle, with the meaning of 'grown', as in 'a grown man'. '*Adulter*', for the person, and '*adulterium*', for the act, come from the joining of '*ad*' ('to') and '*alter*' ('the other [of two]'), where that other is juxtaposed with the wife or husband to whom the adulterer is unfaithful. There is no "insertion" here by "language". It is not thus that "an historical-theological code" that "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is to be set aside as inappropriate to "adulthood".

'The imperatives of the libido': the phrase would have suited David Lurie. As with the demand for nourishment, or for various forms of drink, human experience shows how much all our desires need to be moderated in relation to the other desires and imperatives of reasonable beings. (Thus for the present I combine Hume and Kant.) But in the case of sex, it is **persons**, the other person as well as oneself, that are involved. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is not some arbitrary command, but related to two fundamental and related needs in human life: the need for stability and therefore faithfulness in relationships, in marriage and in families, and the need to treat others always as ends in themselves and not merely as means to one's own ends, even if each is treating the other as a means in a compact for pleasure. The sexual relationship is at best an integral part of the most important relationship of one's life, that in which one is more open to another than anywhere else, more indebted to him or her because of all the help and the delight he or she has given, and especially when he or she has given one a child or children.

Instead of the last three sentences I have excerpted here, I write this one. In a good marriage, sexual drives may eventually become less prominent than they were, but the relationship remains a unique one, not of friendship but of intimate partnership, which at best still includes a vigorous and passionate sexual union.

In about 1980 I watched a TV interview with the beautiful actress Claire Bloom, who had had two marriages and was later to have a miserable one with Philip Roth. She said wistfully that there could be nothing better than to be in a really good marriage. Most heterosexual women would agree, and, if one has to say 'many' rather than 'most' concerning men, it is because men have so often had too little emotional development. Of course it is true that so much depends on good fortune, such as mine in falling in love at first sight, in 1955, with the woman with whom I have just celebrated fifty years of marriage. (I might well be told "Don't go on about it: half your luck!")

What matters above all is not the marriage tie in itself, though that is indeed to be honoured, but the firm and joyful commitment to an ongoing relationship of cherishing love, which requires honesty and faithfulness, and what I like to call responsive cooperation, ideally in three areas: delighting in one another's company, re-

specting and assisting one another's work, and combining in helping children and grandchildren to develop, especially as loved and loving persons.

I can think of no better illustration of my case than a complex of six sentences in a memoir of the philosopher Stephan Körner. John Shepherdson writes: "He had an abiding delight in philosophy and up to the end of his life regularly attended staff research seminars. He will be remembered by his friends for his generosity and warmth of feeling. His devotion to his wife Diti was one of the most endearing things about him. …. She had a very distinguished career in voluntary work. …. Diti was a very witty woman and they shared a keen sense of the ridiculous. Tom [their son] remembers a home filled with love and laughter."[2]

It would be nonsense to claim that adultery does not tend to weaken and threaten that kind of devotion. Those who watched the two *Australian Story* programs on the life of the dashing Australian cricketer Keith Miller saw how destructive of marriage and family adultery can prove to be. Tolstoy contrasts Karenin, Anna and Vronsky with Levin and Kitty.

From the first week of our acquaintance, Margaret and I have delighted in the English writer Dorothy L. Sayers. Though it helps to have read the earlier *Strong Poison*, one can gather from the first two chapters of the great Oxford novel *Gaudy Night* something of the emotionally chaotic earlier life of Harriet Vane, Sayers's main female character, and, as Barbara Reynolds's biography makes clear, a fictional counterpart to the author. At the head of Ch.1 are set lines from Sir Philip Sydney that fit David Lurie and put a question mark against Steiner's "imperatives of the libido".

> Thou blind man's mark, thou fool's
> self-chosen snare,
> Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of
> scattered thought,
> Band of all evils; cradle of causeless
> care;
> Thou web of will, whose end is
> never wrought:
> Desire! Desire! I have too dearly
> bought
> With price of mangled mind, thy
> worthless ware.

At the end of that novel Harriet embraces Lord Peter Wimsey and his longstanding invitation to marry him, and in its sequel *Busman's Honeymoon* are words, first of Peter and then of Harriet, that Margaret and I shared before we married, and have remembered:

> Laugh, lover, laugh. This is the end of the journey and the beginning of all delight.
>
> … it *seems* like a miracle to be able to look forward – to – to see all the minutes in front of one come hopping along with something marvellous in them ….[3]

No couple can live continuously on that level, and a marriage may have to deal with work commitments that may seem or threaten to marginalize it; but a partnership in which so much is shared, including especially care for and observation of children and grandchildren, not only ministers to their growth but is profoundly satisfying to the partners themselves. It would be a great loss to any society if respect and admiration for the ideal that "they lived happily ever after" were widely abandoned – and a great gain if more and more women felt free, confident and serious enough to decline sexual advances from men who as yet lacked any recognition of the wonder and central importance of a loving and devoted commitment intended to be lifelong.

Yours in Learningguild,

John Howes

NOTES

1. The copy of Steiner's book that I have borrowed from the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne (824.914) comes from New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York. The book appeared in 2008. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* was published by Vintage, Random House, London 1999.

2. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 115: Biographical Memoirs of Fellows, I, 2002 (Baillieu 306.0922)

3. Pp. 69 and 292 in the New English Library paperback edition, Hodder and Stoughton, London 2003. The three novels mentioned were first published by Victor Gollancz in 1930, 1935 and 1937.

# Measuring the contribution of volunteers

**DUNCAN IRONMONGER** *spoke to the Friday-evening group on June 19th on this subject and here summarizes what he had to say by asking and answering a series of questions. He is Director of the Households Research Unit at the University of Melbourne and an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics.*

Although volunteers contribute to every area of society, there are differing opinions on what exactly constitutes volunteering. Definitions of it are rather mutable and elusive. Many volunteers may be unaware that their activities are considered to be volunteering. For instance, a family member who provides care to an elderly person or a member of a sports club committee may not consider himself or herself a volunteer.

There are a wide range of interpretations of what constitutes voluntary work. Recently, the United Nations has adopted specific criteria to distinguish volunteering from other forms of behaviour that may superficially resemble it. According to the UN, volunteering is an activity undertaken of one's own free will, and not primarily for financial gain, and it brings benefit to a third party as well as to the volunteer.

### *Why collect statistics on volunteering?*

Collecting statistics on major activities, such as volunteering, is an integral part of the functioning of any modern society. The collection and publication of statistics are basic to the process of informing the community on how it operates. Statistics on volunteering can form the basis on which society can make improvements to it. They inform us on the various types of volunteering activities, which sections of the population volunteer, and how much time is spent in volunteering, and can indicate the value of volunteering to the community in monetary terms.

### *Which method of collection is most revealing?*

There are three main methods of collecting statistics on volunteering. All depend on people responding to questions put to them by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) either in sample surveys or in the population census.

The statistics from special sample surveys of organised volunteering (conducted in 1995, 2000 and 2006) show that about one-third of adults in Australia do some form of volunteering through an organisation or group in the course of a year. This "organised" volunteering gives on average about three hours per week per volunteer – an average of about an hour a week for the total adult (15+) population.

In addition the ABS sample surveys of time use (conducted in 1992, 1997 and 2006) show that Australian adults provide "unorganised" volunteering: informal unpaid help and care within the personal networks of family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances. This is not mediated through an organisation. It includes regular, spontaneous and sporadic help that takes place between friends and neighbours, such as giving advice, looking after others' children or helping an elderly neighbour. About twice as much volunteer time is unorganised as is organised.

For the first time in the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing, in 2006 the ABS asked the whole adult population a series of questions on both unorganised and organised volunteering. Participation in unorganised volunteering, which included support of adults and of children, was obtained through questions about "caring for a person who has a disability, long-term illness or problems related to old age" and "caring for a child/children (including own child or other child)" (Questions 49 and 50). The next question, on "voluntary work through/ for an organisation or group", investigated the level of participation in organised volunteering.

***What difficulties are encountered?***

The 2006 Census showed an organised volunteering rate of only 20 per cent, just two-thirds of the 30% rate shown in the 2006 voluntary work survey. The difference may be due to the fact that the 2006 Census data were collected via a single question on a self-completion Census form rather than by a series of questions asked by trained interviewers. Self-reporting is considered to be less reliable than an interviewer's asking questions about voluntary work, often with examples, as many respondents may not think of their unpaid work as volunteering, and so self-reporting tends to give much lower rates than interview surveys.

Despite this limitation, Census data should be highly valuable in examining **relative** volunteering rates at the small area level, such as statistical divisions and local government areas within states. The small sample sizes of most surveys, such as the Voluntary Work Survey, do not provide estimates for such regional and local areas.

The 2006 Census has also provided data on unorganised (informal) volunteering for these small area levels, which is not available from any other source. The 2006 Census data will become more useful for comparison when the next Census takes place in 2011, if the same questions are asked again.

***What can governments do to promote volunteering?***

Governments at all levels – Federal, State and local – depend on volunteers to augment the resources available to help people, for example in hospitals, schools and emergency services. Local governments throughout Victoria are major providers of support via "Meals on Wheels" and other services for frail aged and disabled residents on behalf of the Commonwealth and State governments. Victoria's State Emergency Services has a permanent staff of less than 100 but more than 5,000 volunteers in 145 municipally based and supported units throughout Victoria, which are on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

By ensuring that volunteers are adequately trained and have good conditions of engagement, governments can promote volunteering as a way of providing both essential services to the community and opportunities to volunteers for worthwhile personal satisfaction, involvement and social contact.

***What kinds of value does volunteering have?***

It certainly has great value. The 2000 ABS survey of volunteering asked respondents for their reasons for becoming a volunteer. Although altruistic reasons were frequently given (47% said they wanted to help others/the community, 30% to do something worthwhile), self-interest was perhaps more frequent (43% said they volunteered for personal satisfaction, 31% for personal and/or family involvement, and 18% to have social contact with others). These responses add up to more than 100% because some volunteers gave more than one reason. It is difficult, if not impossible, to put a monetary value on these "process benefits" that accrue personally to volunteers.

Volunteering is obviously valuable for the community, and it is possible to put a monetary value on the services provided to others by volunteers. This is done by estimating the total time given by volunteers for both organised and unorganised volunteering and imputing a market wage rate that would be needed to hire paid workers to provide the volunteer services.

The Households Research Unit in the Department of Economics at the University of Melbourne has made these estimates for various state governments (Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia) covering years from 1992 to 2006. They range from 5.6% of Gross State Product (GSP) in WA in 2006 to 10.2% in SA in 1997. In Victoria the estimates were 6.7% in 1992 and 7.6% in 1997.

Looked at another way, the value of the volunteer time as a percentage of the total compensation of employees (wages, salaries and other benefits) was approximately another 15% per year.

The following references indicate the kind of work done in this field.

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Ironmonger, D. (2000), "Measuring Volunteering in Economic Terms", Chapter 5 (pp. 56-72) in J. Warburton and M. Oppenheimer (eds.), *Volunteers and Volunteering*. Sydney: Federation Press.

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# Personal Rapid Transit (PRT)

**RAY WYATT**, *a member of Learningguild, has long been engaged in research and teaching in urban planning at the University of Melbourne. On May 1st he talked to us, as he writes here, about his favourite solution to the growing problem, in Melbourne and elsewhere, of over-reliance on the motor car. He thinks this solution will eventually be implemented everywhere, but probably not for a long time because of various objections people have to it.*

Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) is a technology that combines the advantages of public and private transport. Personal carriages, about a meter wide and able to carry three people, or perhaps one person and a bicycle, are conveyed along thin and spindly guideways, concrete grooves that snugly house the wheel of each carriage. The wheels are turned by electricity from the inside walls of these grooves, which are hoisted to about four meters above the ground by a pole every 30 metres. The system, therefore, uses almost no land space as it conveys carriages everywhere at a non-stop speed of 60 kilometres per hour – far quicker than any other form of urban transport.

Everything is driven by one power source, which could one day be based on renewable energy. Because every carriage is computer-controlled, it can be sent along the shortest possible route, given the positions of other carriages at that instant.

Stations, where carriages queue for passengers rather than *vice versa*, are located on spur lines off the main routes, and so the controlling computer is able to slot each occupied carriage into the main stream of traffic, with gaps between moving cars that are far smaller then would ever be safe for independently driven vehicles. This is the secret of PRT's superior carrying capacity and speed.

Contrast such a system with more conventional types of urban transport. The private motor car is well known to be extremely polluting, dangerous, noisy, intrusive, and responsible for losses of up to 30% of ground space to roads and car parks. It is

anti-social in that it limits one's range of meeting with others. On the other hand, public forms of transport – trains, buses, trams – are more socially acceptable but expensive to operate, often uncomfortable, often not taking you exactly where you want to go, and slow because they almost always have to stop to pick up and put down fellow passengers. Taxis overcome these disadvantages but are too expensive for regular use. Walking and cycling or motorcycling are not suitable for all people or weathers and can be too slow for many people's needs.

PRT has none of these disadvantages. Those using it will experience no driving, no waiting and no standing. A fast, safe, comfortable, uncrowded, spacious and private journey sheltered from the elements will always be available to them. Moreover, the city will have fewer accidents, fewer terrorism targets, less pollution, less energy usage, less noise, more mobility for seniors, children and the disabled, and smoother movement of goods, mail and rubbish during off-peak periods.

Perhaps best of all, PRT removes the need to have roads at all, except for a few carriageways carrying freight vehicles and some temporary rights of way for emergency vehicles. It therefore enables about 25% of the total urban area to be reclaimed from ugly tarmac and redeployed in the form of parks, gardens, forests, bike paths, jogging tracks, sports grounds, lakes, amphitheatres and urban farms.

PRT may be said to constitute the last step in bringing natural amenities back into the city – a process begun by the founders of the garden city movement over 100 years ago. This strategy was successful only so long as everyone lived within walking distance of a train or tram stop, and so it could not survive the emergence of car-based, sprawling metropolises from about the middle of last century.

But if PRT is so overwhelmingly superior, why has it not been implemented anywhere, apart from a pilot scheme at London's Heathrow Airport and a network within a proposed "city of the future" to be built in the desert of a United Arab Emirates state? In my opinion, it is because past proponents of PRT have made at least two fundamental errors.

First, they have suggested carriages so large as to require elevated guideways whose cost limits their number, so that many of the inflexibilities and disadvantages of conventional public transport remain.

The alternative of carriages of minimal size which travel over a rich network of light and cheap guideways, instead of large monorail systems, is the only way to gain all of the obvious advantages from PRT at a reasonable cost. But most planners have not suggested the lightweight option.

Secondly, proponents of PRT have nearly always laid out a complete system for community appraisal. This means that even though PRT is relatively cheap to build, because there is little need for grading or right-of-way purchases, it still costs $10 million per kilometre and so, if a whole city is to be covered by a network, the total cost will still be so astronomical that people will reject it out of hand.

It would be better, therefore, to propose a more limited PRT system which fed into and utilized existing public transport infrastructure, and then to extend it gradually, if it is successful, over a considerable period of time in order to decrease the impact of its construction costs.

Accordingly, I have published some research which involved designing a prototype PRT system that feeds into Melbourne's metropolitan train routes.* It would encourage residents who live just beyond walking distance of a train station to leave their car at home and instead take the PRT to the railway station from which they could complete their regular journey to the city.

By using a Geographical Information System (GIS) and journey-to-work statistics, it is then possible to conclude that such a system, for $7 billion, would be guaranteed to reduce car-based peak-hour air pollution within the Melbourne CBD by at

* http://publications.epress.monash.edu/doi/full/10.2104/ag060012.

least 16%, and would also save considerable time and fossil fuel and reduce congestion.

Moreover, this system stands in contrast to many proposed freeway projects around Melbourne which, all costs considered, are just as expensive as the proposed PRT system but, unlike the latter, are certain to **increase** peak-hour air pollution in the central area of the city.

In short, I believe that PRT beats all of the other forms of urban transport by such a huge margin that its eventual implementation is inevitable. Before this happens, however, three main objections and three more subtle ones will have to be overcome.

First, people sometimes worry about the supposed ugliness of PRT carriages, noiseless, safe and non-polluting though they would be, moving along in elevated positions close to private bedroom windows in green and leafy suburban streets.

The prototype system I have proposed has its guideways only along major roads, such as Mt Alexander Road and Bell Street, because amenity here has been severely compromised already. There are enough such roads in Melbourne to make it unnecessary ever to have to run a PRT guideway down any quiet suburban street.

Secondly, people are concerned that PRT stations, with their need to store lots of elevated carriages waiting for passengers to access them, will be difficult to fit into the existing urban fabric.

The proposed system stores carriages only above freeway breakdown lanes, along railway reserves next to the line, and above railway car parks. This may mean that when a passenger presses a button at a PRT station their carriage may take a few minutes to reach them from the nearest freeway, railway or car park. But with the prospect of going non-stop and directly to one's destination at 60 kilometres per hour, this is unlikely to be of major concern.

Thirdly, some people suspect any such system for mechanized movement, insisting that human error will make breakdowns and disasters inevitable.

Given that a prototype PRT system has operated in Germany since the 1970s without a single accident, and that dysfunctional parts of a PRT network are far easier to section off temporarily and divert traffic around than road- or rail-based systems, such concerns are just as misplaced as those about elevators moving up and down high-rise buildings – these are similarly mechanized but entirely fail-safe.

Finally, there are at least three objections to PRT that are more subtle. They are harder to refute because they are not met by the design-type arguments offered in previous paragraphs.

First, PRT is seen by many transport planners as a "retro" kind of idea first suggested during the 1960s but promptly sidelined by the general enthusiasm at the time for more and more road networks. If PRT could not compete then, why should it be able to do so now?

The answer is, of course, that since the 1960s cars have actually begun to "eat up" the amenity of Melbourne, to the detriment of its once proud reputation as one of the world's most attractive cities. It may be advisable, therefore, to think again about this radical PRT idea from the sixties.

Secondly, many people simply like cars, trams, buses, trains and bicycles for nostalgic reasons – they remind them of their childhood. Such people tend to resist the imposition of alternative forms of transport such as PRT because they simply do not feel comfortable with such radical new concepts.

There is little anyone can do about such feelings, except perhaps expect that they will diminish over time as problems, including those associated with one's own favoured transport mode, continue to escalate.

Thirdly, and perhaps most insidiously, people seem to have simply accepted the presence of roads within our cities. Roads are here now, paid for by the community over the last 170 years; so it seems simpler

to send more cars, buses and trams along them than to replace them with a PRT network. Maintaining and upgrading existing roads seems far cheaper than building a PRT system from scratch.

Realistically, however, if we factor in all of the costs of upgrading and maintaining existing roads, as well as the private and so often undocumented costs of building, maintaining, cleaning, registering, insuring and repairing the vehicles that traverse them, PRT is actually much cheaper over the long term. Moreover, its adoption will bring nature back into the city as well.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to doubt whether people will prefer a landscape covered with small PRT carriages gliding along elevated guideways on the skyline to the existing ground-level roads and rails which currently carve up our cities.

I suspect that PRT's advantages will not be sufficiently appreciated until, weary of trying to navigate around existing, traffic-scarred environments, we realize how great are the possibilities it brings for moving freely and easily beneath the guideway network.

But for now, people have learned to tolerate the increasing discomforts of conventional transport infrastructure, simply because it has been there for a long time and it sits at the familiar ground level.

Perhaps PRT will be embraced within the lifetime of some of our readers' grandchildren. Time will tell.

# Dying and the Law

**DON BEHREND**, *a retired prosthodontist and member of Learningguild, reviews the book* **A Good Death: An Argument for Voluntary Euthanasia,** *by another Learningguild member, Rodney Syme. The book was published by Melbourne University Press in 2008. Dr Syme's article "Palliative care and medically assisted dying on request" appeared in* Learningguild Letter *1.2007. He has kindly donated a copy of the book to the Learningguild Library.*

It is hardly surprising that the subject of euthanasia has engendered a great deal of writing, for all of us have a very personal and direct interest in the manner of our eventual death. Indeed, the literal translation of the Greek word '*euthanasia'* is 'good death', although opponents of the practice would probably say that this is a euphemism expressing a morally objectionable and socially dangerous concept. Furthermore, the mere consideration of the topic raises profound and contentious questions. Is our own life a gift – or rather a loan – from God, which we have no right to terminate? Would the legalization of any deliberate measures to shorten the dying process for suffering patients launch our society onto a slippery slope, and lead step by step to the "putting down" of the helpless aged and sick?

It may be because of the prominence of such questions in public discussion that most of the books on euthanasia have been written by theologians, philosophers, bioethicists and social theorists. Or perhaps cause and effect are the other way round, and it is the authors of these books who have set the terms of the debate.

Since euthanasia is in most countries illegal, there are obvious reasons why books by doctors who have had direct involvement in assisting patients to die are very rare. The author of *A Good Death: An Argument for Voluntary Euthanasia* is a surgeon who has

specialized in urology and has forty-five year of medical experience, which has included, inevitably, treatment of the terminally ill. He is critical of some who pronounce judgement "from the sidelines" on the ethics of physician-assisted dying.

*A Good Death* is essentially an account of Rodney Syme's personal journey from his first contact with a patient suffering from incurable cancer and experiencing extreme and intractable pain, through a series of encounters with other persons asking for help in dying, to his present position as Vice-President of the organization Dying With Dignity Victoria and active campaigner for legal change. He describes with frankness – and, in view of the legal situation, some courage – how he has assisted a number of patients to carry out their decision to end a life of hopeless suffering. In most cases this was achieved by the provision of a large dose of sedatives to be taken if and when the patient chose to do so. In some others it was by voluntary cessation of eating and drinking accompanied by sedation sufficient to prevent suffering from hunger and thirst. In no instances was a lethal injection used.

Syme defines voluntary euthanasia as

> an action taken by, or at the request of, a rational, fully informed individual, whose intention is to be relieved of intolerable and otherwise unrelievable suffering, that hastens death in a dignified manner.
>
> (p.30)

It becomes clear on reading Syme's accounts of his interactions with patients that he places great emphasis on the autonomy of the individual and that he spends considerable time, over several consultations, in establishing that the patient has a clear understanding of his or her situation and has arrived at a rational decision. It is apparent that he does not by any means accede to every request for assistance in dying.

Against the argument that voluntary euthanasia presumes a power over life and death which is not rightfully ours to exercise, Syme points out that, in the present age,

> … the idea of a natural death is becoming something of an oxymoron. The occurrence of a natural death, uninfluenced by medical intervention, is increasingly uncommon, at least since the 1960s. Such deaths are very sudden, or occur during sleep.
>
> (p.19)

In developed countries, life is almost always prolonged by medical treatment or, approaching its end, perhaps shortened as a side-effect of sedation and pain control. An extreme view would be that in all such cases the dying process has been prevented from following its natural course, and that this constitutes an unwarranted usurpation of divine right. It is clear that, in practice, there are few if any in our society who take this position. In respect of a more moderate view, is it reasonable to claim that life may legitimately be prolonged, but never shortened, by artificial means, even when these means are controlled by the person concerned?

Another objection frequently raised against the legalization of voluntary euthanasia is that the elderly or sick may be influenccd to request it by impatient family members. In relation to this concern, Syme writes:

> Whilst accepting that this is a possibility, I can say that over the last fifteen years, when I have been counselling many people about their end-of-life options, I have never even once come upon this situation, and I regard the possibility as quite remote. If such a suggestion comes from the relatives rather than the individual, it should be very carefully assessed, but it would not be difficult to establish whether the sufferer fully concurred.
>
> (p.194f)

Syme strongly supports the provision of palliative care for patients with terminal illness. In Australia and elsewhere this has become a specialized form of medical care conducted by full-time practitioners, often in dedicated facilities. Some of its proponents claim that good palliative care, by giving end-of-life patients a comfortable and dignified death, obviates any need for voluntary euthanasia. Syme believes that this is so for

most, but not all, patients and that physician-assisted dying should be available within the system in those instances where palliative care cannot meet its objectives or is rejected by the individual. Again, he stresses the primacy of patient choice.

Voluntary euthanasia in some form is now legal in the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland and the US states of Oregon and Washington. The present situation in Australia is that physician-assisted suicide is illegal, but in practice a "blind eye" is turned and prosecutions are hardly ever pursued. There is evidence that many Australian physicians quietly accede to requests by dying patients for an accelerated death. However, Syme is convinced that this state of affairs leads to much unnecessary suffering by patients who find themselves under the care of a highly circumspect doctor, or confined within a hospital system where privacy is lacking. Furthermore, the covert nature of the practice prevents doctors from obtaining a second opinion from a colleague – a precautionary measure which would be mandatory under legislation proposed by Syme. The form of legalization he favours is one which would allow a physician, after following well-defined procedures, to prescribe lethal medication in oral form but not to administer it, so that the individual remains in control. This provision seems to allay the concern that involuntary euthanasia must inevitably creep in.

Most impartial readers of this book would conclude that its author is a compassionate physician whose actions over the years have been guided by what he is convinced are the best interests of each patient. The book is strongly recommended, especially to those who have reached a position opposed to voluntary euthanasia based on religious or social grounds, or perhaps on limited experience with a family member or friend. Rodney Syme may or may not change the opinion of such readers, but will almost certainly give them a new perspective on that most fundamental question: whose life is it?

# Thoughts on teaching and learning

*Last year a retired surgeon and historian of surgery,* **WALFORD GILLISON***, at whose home in Somerset, England, Margaret and I stayed, became a member of Learningguild. He has made these comments on the subject I discussed in my editorial letter in the last issue, in which I began by rejecting the view of university education expressed in the remark to students "Now you're on your own." (JH)*

Your letter implied the need for teachers and students to "get on the same wavelength" so that they can learn from one another. I used to say, when appointing a new trainee, "While we hope you will learn some things from us, we certainly hope to learn from you."

I don't think there is one formula to suit all teachers and all students. They are often very different.

I believe that teachers are analogous to gardeners planting seeds into adequate soil, nurturing, protecting, and finally harvesting and relishing the end-products. They have different ways of aiding students to find that fire in the belly which R.D.Wright, the professor you quote on p.5, looked for.

Some teachers are born orators and should use and develop their skill. (But no lecture should run for more than 45 minutes!) Some quietly and even cynically niggle and tease students to stop and think whether what they have in the past believed to be right really is right. Some are brilliant at jokes and anecdotes which serve as pegs

on which to hang the proverbial tale, and give a bit more colour to the students' learning. Some crystallise their main messages into handouts, not only to direct students to look things up, but also to help the sluggard who couldn't get up in time for the lecture! These handouts are very useful when you are anxiously revising several months later.

So one has to understand teachers' very different strengths and build on them. No one size fits all.

Students too are very disparate in my experience. I am sorry for those who feel they need spoon-feeding. They do exist and have to be weaned off the spoon somehow. I found many juniors from Asian countries came along that route, but most got over it. It was not an ethnic trait, but the result of defective education from early schooldays. Others are so bright they can afford to be a bit arrogant and "go it alone". That's fine for theoretical subjects but hopeless for practical matters such as examining patients. One chap in my year reversed his sleep pattern so that he slept all day and then lived and worked in the library all night so as not to get disturbed by frivolous contemporaries like me! (He became Professor of Anaesthesia at the Medical School in Cardiff.) Some students are like Gladstone, the nineteenth-century British Prime Minister, who could read a whole page and memorise it perfectly. Many have a pictorial or photographic memory, as I do. With a bit of luck I could visualise a whole page of my notes in my mind in order to organise my answer. For that reason people like me used diagrams, graphs or flow charts as *aide-mémoire*. The great bonus regarding human osteology was that you could learn to identify the various bones of the human skeleton with your eyes shut as you felt the shape, length, weight and the muscular ridges through your fingers and hands.

It is nowadays not so important to remember things by heart, but to know how and where to look them up.

I found it was essential that, whenever a serious trainee had done well, he or she was told so. I and people like me got a huge "buzz" when the trainee saw the light, or had got the main principle. For example, when he or she had mastered the purpose, preparation, pitfalls and safe closure of a particular operation; it was a cause of delight to be assured that such mastery had been achieved. That, I allow, suggests one generalization about teachers and students.

# An energetic and idyllic holiday in Japan

**HANS EISEN**, *a member of Learningguild, is retired and has wide interests. Here he describes a trek he and his wife Gaby undertook this year, journeys they had (mostly by rail) and places they visited.*

In March, Gaby and I left Red Hill for travels to several countries. Their duration grew from Gaby's initial interest in a trek in Japan late in that month and my interest in attending a performance of Wagner's Ring Cycle early in Vienna in May. I had visited Japan often, though mostly for business rather than touring.

We flew by Cathay Pacific to Hong Kong, and then by Dragon Air to land at Fukuoka on Japan's south-western island of Kyushu. At Hakata railway station, close to Fukuoka airport, we obtained Rail Passes and travelled immediately to Nagasaki. It was a comfortable train, clean and stopping at only a few stations.

Nagasaki was virtually completely destroyed by the atomic bomb attack in August 1945. As a result it is today a modern city. However, it was the first Japanese city to be

settled by Europeans and there are still some buildings which evidence earlier Portuguese and Dutch inhabitants. We visited the Atomic Bomb Memorial and also the Gower Gardens, which were established by an English trader who married a Japanese woman. Their son continued the family business but committed suicide following the atomic bomb explosion.

Another visit was to a recreated village of the former Portuguese trading post, most impressive in extent and detail. We stayed in a "business hotel" close to the railway station, as we did in some other places. All were comfortable though generally the bedrooms were small. Another feature of this and other cities we visited was the tram system: quite small when compared to Melbourne's and much older, if we except the few remaining "Rattlers".

From Nagasaki we had planned to take the 6.30 am train to Akita, highly regarded for its Kyushu pottery. However, on arrival at the station we were advised that this train had been cancelled because of an "accident". Later we found that the problem was signal failure. So we spent another pleasant morning sightseeing in Nagasaki.

We returned by train to Hakata and met the young Englishman who would be our trekking guide. Llew Edwards had spent two years in the Okinawa Islands teaching English at a secondary school. In that time he had become fluent in spoken and written Japanese – a remarkable achievement. Together we travelled by express train to Usa, where we joined three other hikers, an Australian family, for a seven-day trek through the Kunasaki Peninsula. Older readers may remember products manufactured in Japan after World War II and marked "Made in Usa". They were generally of inferior quality, but the use of 'Usa' had been intended to delude purchasers about their origins.

Our "Kunisaki Trek" was initially to follow the route of devotees visiting shrines and monasteries located around the rim of an extinct volcano. In Usa we were accommodated in a Japanese inn where we had our first of many thermal hot spring baths. The chef at this inn spoke excellent English and delighted in explaining to us the "culinary pleasure" of each of the many dishes served for dinner.

The next morning, after a Japanese breakfast, we commenced our trek through small hamlets leading to a forest path. That path led to a dam with cherry blossom trees in full bloom – a sight which we experienced every day we were in Japan. We then climbed Yayama, an imposing tent-shaped mountain, passing charcoal kilns and reaching Iwato-ji, a temple known for its colourful gardens. Our route was past a number of temples and buddhas and finally to Matama Onsen, another inn, with separate communal hot spring baths for men and for women, and again a delicious dinner washed down by Japanese beer and saki.

On the third day we climbed another mountain, Inomure-yama. At the top we saw a giant stone circle which now has Shinto associations, though its origins are obscure. This was the only day on which we experienced rain, and our trek that day was somewhat truncated. We travelled by taxi to Imi Port for a ferry journey to Hime-shima, a pleasant island in the Inner Sea of Japan. Gaby and I visited a fine gallery and by good fortune met the 93-year-old aunt of the owner. She asked for our address in Australia and then, though not speaking English, wrote her address in immaculate Roman script. That night our inn was elegant and old, again with hot baths and a tasty dinner.

In the morning we returned to Kyushu Island by ferry and trekked initially through the extensive grounds of Kyu-Sento-ji, a once powerful temple featuring two impressive Nio guardian deities. Then more climbing with the benefit of panoramic views across the Kunisaki Peninsula to Hime-shima and beyond to Honshu, the largest of the Japanese islands. We climbed steep stairs to Monjusen-ji, a temple guarded by more deities, and our accommodation for the night. We were welcomed by the resident priest, a charming man who with his family lived there for much of the year. Dinner that evening was typical temple and vegetarian cuisine, preceded by a hot bath, though this time more limited: the ladies had

the privilege of the bath before the gentlemen.

The next day brought more climbing: steep cliffs required the use of chains fixed to the valley walls for ascents and descents. Again we were on the rim of an ancient volcano. We passed temples and shrines as we descended to a hikers' inn for lunch. Then by bus to our hot-spring lodgings for the night, Baien-no-Sato. Here the clear though very cold night enabled us to view distant stars and galaxies through a 65cm reflecting telescope.

Gaby and I skipped part of the trek on the following day and instead climbed another approach of many steps to Kumano Maigai-butsu, where we viewed two giant relief buddhas carved into the side of a cliff. Then by bus to Kitsuki, an old castle town that retains the flavour of earlier eras, where we visited one of the houses of the samurai quarters. Beppu, a larger city, was our destination for the night and this time we had a "business hotel" – so no hot-spring bath, but a fine dinner at a fish restaurant.

The last day of the trek required our assault on Mount Yufu (1583m, though we started our climb at 750m). By that day my legs had had enough at half-way to the summit. I waited for Gaby and the rest of our party to return, and then we descended to Yufuin, to stay in a ryokan, a traditional type of Japanese inn, and to celebrate with a fine dinner.

Yufuin is a pleasant tourist town, with a clear sight of Mount Yufu. We spent a further day here, lunched in a delightful tea-room, visited local tourist attractions, and enjoyed another Japanese dinner, though this time alone as our trekking companions had left to return to Australia.

We had, before confirming the trek booking, enquired whether at ages 75, with a recent hip replacement, and 71, we were too old for the severity of the trek. While the response was that others in their 70s had successfully completed it, the reality was that the route, in which we walked on narrow rock ledges and used chains for ascents and descents, was too difficult for us to fully enjoy the lovely scenery of the areas we traversed. I was in fact the oldest person to make that trek with Walk Japan! Nevertheless we had persisted and were proud to have completed it, though with an injury to Gaby's knee.

On reflection we would recommend the Kunisaki Trek to others because of the beauty of the scenery, the experience of rural Japan including its charming inns and ryokans, and the efficient tour arrangements and guiding provided by Walk Japan. We would, however, suggest that this trek is better suited to people younger than we are: perhaps one should be both fit and not over 65. Other treks arranged by Walk Japan can be viewed at www.walkjapan.com. Possibly we should have selected another.

From Yufuin we travelled by a series of trains to Hagi on the north-west coast of Honshu: an express train to Kita-Kyushu, then a Shinkansen Fast Express to Ube (the Shinkansen are the Japanese bullet trains, which can reach speeds of 300km/h), followed by two single carriages, first to Yamaguchi and then to Hagi. These last trains have seating along the sides of the train, which cannot be reserved, and generally a driver/conductor only. It was a great help for us to be able to reserve train seats, where that service was available, and otherwise to obtain train tickets through our Rail Pass, without added expense.

Hagi is the centre for the manufacture of unique pottery, and a pleasant smallish town with a strong samurai history. Here we had the pleasure of meeting a Danish potter who had lived there for 35 years with his Japanese wife and children. He told us where to find other leading potters. We also visited a recently constructed and well designed museum, there to be somewhat pressed by the English-speaking Director to receive his brief history of Japan and of the Hagi district. Hagi contains many elegant houses and properties, some the former residences of samurai and of wealthy merchants. The Hagi castle is in ruins but the substantial surrounding moat contains numerous large multi-coloured carp, well fed by tourists. In Hagi we spent two nights at a ryokan which must have seen better days. I

had identified it through my internet search as owned by a very helpful older man who, however, had only limited English.

We took more local trains to Matsue, changing at Masuda. These cities are on the picturesque coastline on the Sea of Japan. At Matsue we stayed at a quite luxurious ryokan with splendid hot spas. As elsewhere, each guest room provided yukatas, dressing gowns for men and for women, jackets for warmth, and slippers for use strictly outside the room, and hence not on the tatami matting. Special "toilet only" slippers were also provided.

Matsue, on a peaceful lake, is the site of one of Japan's larger wooden castles. It was also the home of Lafcadio Hearn for a short period. His descriptions of life in Japan at the beginning of the 20th century are sensitive to the environment and informative. We visited the regional art gallery and sculpture park. The latter was interesting, but the former, which had on exhibition the work of a local artist, was probably well liked by the Matsue public, but not attractive to us. The design of the museum was impressive. In Matsue too we used the tram service, very efficient and inexpensive.

We went by train to Hiroshima. This time, after an express to Okayama, we changed to a Shinkansen. By this time we understood the train information and booking systems, aided by the helpful Rail Information and Booking offices at each station. Again we enjoyed a "business hotel" and the tram service, this time in more modern carriages.

Hiroshima is the site of the first atomic bomb explosion in 1945 and is now, like Nagasaki, a modern city well laid out. Its Peace Park and Memorial are most impressive in its design and its symbolic statues. The museum provides extensive information about the bombing and the terrible aftermath, and of the militaristic history of Hiroshima. Lacking is evidence of the territorial aggression of Japan and her entry into World War II, and of the case for the decision to drop the atomic bomb so as to hasten the surrender of Emperor Hirohito and his armed forces.

Miyajima, an island in the Inland Sea, was our next destination. The dramatic red Tori Gate stands in the sea, and is cited as one of the marvels of Japan. It is a favourite tourist destination for the Japanese themselves. An interesting sight, at low tide, is the search for pipi shells. I caught a cable car to the top of a mountain from which there was a wonderful sight of other islands on the Inland Sea, while Gaby toured the shops. The walk down from the mountain was steep but the steps were very well contructed. On the way I came across monkeys and deer. The latter wander around the streets of Miyajima nudging tourists to provide them with food, a practice which, though publicly discouraged, is much in evidence.

Miyajima is home to outstanding temples. Our experience of a ryokan here was poor, but that was largely my fault in not searching further on the internet. We cancelled our second night of the reservation, and returned to Hiroshima by ferry and by local train – all thanks to the Rail Pass.

A helpful tourist agent at the Miyajima ferry port located a business hotel for us at Hiroshima station, fortunately because it was in a holiday period.

From Hiroshima the next morning we took the Shinkansen to Okayama, and went on to Takamatsu, again by train. The track included a 13km bridge. An overnight stop gave the opportunity to visit the Naguchi sculpture studio and museum. The sculptor, who in later years lived in the USA, had designed and built an outstanding gallery and residence in a rural village outside Takamatsu.

By ferry (this time without the aid of the Rail Pass) we went to our penultimate stop in Japan, Naoshima, another island in the Inland Sea. It featured the outstanding hotel Benesse House and an art gallery designed by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando. Both structures are beautifully designed. The Art Gallery, featuring just four artists, is in part underground. Benesse House too has an outstanding art collection on display in its corridors and purpose-built galleries. The surrounding gardens had more sculptures, as did the shoreline in front of the House.

We took the ferry from Naoshima to the mainland of Honshu, and then local trains to Okayama, and Shinkansen to Tokyo, where we changed to the Narita Express, which stopped intermittently (not at any stations), and ran well over its scheduled transit time. One of those stops was directly opposite the hotel I had reserved, but all we could do was stare at it. Another fifteen minutes or so of travel time brought us to the Narita Air Terminal, which was being reconstructed and provided the tourist with a major challenge to find the exit, and in our case a taxi stand.

The website of the hotel in Narita had advised "courtesy transfers to Terminal". I had not realized that Narita was a town and not an air terminal. An expensive taxi ride taking perhaps 45 minutes was my reward. Then we experienced the only dirty accommodation of our three weeks' travel in Japan. Gaby was unhappy, to say the least, but kindly forgave me.

The highlights? Cherry blossom, Kunisaki Peninsula and its charming inns and ryokans, Hiroshima, and Benesse House on Naoshima.

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*Many readers of* Learningguild Letter *will be interested in our current arrangements for tuition. Here is a copy, in reduced size, of our new slip. See also 'Tuition' on our website.*

## Learningguild

is an educational and social movement based in Melbourne. We have members from many countries.

We offer **programs of tuition**, **especially in learning English**, worked out with the individual student to meet his or her needs. (For details, see the other side.) There are also two kinds of occasion, free of any charge, when students can get together with one another and with teachers.

**Every Tuesday** until Dec. 8 (except Nov. 3) there is a lunch at 1 for members of Learningguild, with opportunity to ask questions about English.

On the **first Saturday** of each month there is a class from 3 to 5.30, with afternoon tea at 4. On Nov. 7 and Dec. 5 we shall talk about the pronunciation of English. This class is intended to assist both native and non-native speakers to become able to help others learn English.

The place: **23 Fallon St, Brunswick** (Melway 29 F8).

**Many people who join us want to develop their writing or speaking of English, or their ability to write a good essay. Some want to get a particular score in IELTS.**

When people ask Learningguild for help, the President, Dr John Howes, normally asks them to write a short letter to him about themselves and what they see as their needs. Then he will make an appointment with them and suggest a program, often including his booklet-and-CD on pronunciation and also the **SSC** method ("Sentences to Study and Change"), related to the excellent ***Oxford Basic English Dictionary***. Normally individual tutorials will be arranged in relation to such work.

Fees for tuition usually range from $20 to $30 an hour, unless the student is employed full-time.

The annual subscription to Learningguild is kept low at $11 ($16.50 for a couple). People who ask for tuition are expected to commit themselves to sustained membership, with a view to becoming able to teach others and doing so.

**Telephone Dr John Howes or his wife Margaret at 9380 5892. For advanced-level guidance in English, essay-writing and reasoning, go to reports at 'Certificates' on our website www.vicnet.net.au/~learngld**

# Faith

## an invitation to a Learningguild enquiry

I invite any reader who is interested to join me in what we might call a Learningguild enquiry into **faith**. The word is used with diverse meanings in a variety of contexts, as are related words in other languages, such as the Greek '*pistis*', Latin '*fides*', German '*Glaube*' and French '*foi*'. Some of our study should certainly include uses of those words.

My own primary but not exclusive interest is in the uses of 'faith' and such counterpart words in the contexts of different religious traditions, and my desire is to involve both people who would be called "believers" and people who would not.

I am not a believer, but used to be a Christian one: I am an enquirer, with a longstanding propensity to think about faith. At the age of 18, in 1954, I became a candidate for the ministry of the Methodist Church within Protestant Christianity, studying Arts and theology, and realized the importance of distinguishing between faith and knowledge. I was unhappy about the traditional Methodist emphasis on assurance, and also convinced that any faith needed to be defensible as reasonable. Later, in my early years as a philosopher, I was resistant to John Hick's presentation of faith as a form of knowledge. In recent years I have been much influenced by the Jewish writer Martin Buber, and have written, as a supplement to *L'g Letter* 2.2002, a summary and analysis of his *Two Types of Faith*, in which he contrasts faith within classical and prophetic Judaism with the Pauline form that became dominant in orthodox Christianity.

Lately I have been stimulated by dissatisfaction with a treatment of *Glaube* (the word can be translated by 'faith' or 'belief' according to context) by my friend Dietrich Ritschl in Switzerland. He is discontented with the word, mainly, it seems, because he thinks of it as now associated with credulity and irrationality. (In the group of philosophers known as the Vienna Circle, it was not unknown for people to say "*Glaube*? *Aberglaube*!" "Faith? Superstition!"). He attempts to characterize what has been meant by the word and its counterparts in much of Christian thought in two sentences which I translate as follows:

> The word *Loyalität* ['loyalty'] expresses exactly what is meant here. It embraces what Augustine, the great Doctors of the Middle Ages, and most certainly the Reformers called *Glaube* [faith].[1]

He adds that it is more difficult to say to whom or what the loyalty belongs, and proposes that "it belongs in the first place to the language itself in which the old truth can become newly heard", and then to one's own particular Christian denomination (*Konfession*) and community. Ultimately it is "to God in the presence of his Spirit". There is no use here at all of the names '*Jesus*' or '*Christus*'.

My response is that the indispensable first task, whatever one's own views, is accurate **description** of what '*Glaube*' has meant within forms of Christianity, of Judaism, etc. I think that Ritschl has been influenced away from that task by his own decreasing emphasis on believing theological propositions and on trust in Jesus Christ.

He once looked somewhat askance at the attention I give to the 20th-century Anglican priest and writer Alec Vidler, not a theologian widely known and respected as such. I value especially those parts of his work in which Vidler set out for students in systematic series of addresses what he regarded as a reasonable case for Christianity as he understood it. (Davis McCaughey assisted him in the preparation of a series of such addresses at Cambridge in 1947.) In his series at Oxford in 1938, there was the paragraph about Christian faith that I quote below. I quote it all not because I want to say something similar: the passage is impressive in the accuracy (and the vividness)

of its summary of faith within the broad Christian tradition.

> But consider only the countless multitudes of men and women in generation after generation who have lived by faith in Christ, who have lived, that is to say, on the basis of the conviction that Christ is a contemporary person, one with God in His character, in His teaching, in His love, in His action – men and women, you will observe, of all sorts and nationalities, rich and poor, learned and simple, men of thought and men of action. And it appears that in proportion to the sincerity and assurance of their faith their characters have been changed and transformed, they have wrought noble and heroic deeds which otherwise they are sure would have been quite beyond their powers, and again and again they have been put to death rather than deny their allegiance to Christ as their divine Master. They have put their whole trust in Christ, and in spite of worldly misfortune, failure and defeat, they declare with absolute conviction that their trust has not been in vain. Christ, they say, has been to them and has done for them what God alone can be and do.[2]

There he is representative of traditional Christian thinkers in at least five ways: he sees faith as involving (i) belief and (ii) trust (*Vertrauen*), each specifically related to the one called Christ, and, surely because of this belief and this trust, (iii) allegiance or loyalty, even under threat of execution. Then there is (iv) transformation of the characters and powers of many of those whose lives have been imbued with such faith, within (v) a wide-ranging and exemplary tradition. It needs, however, to be added that Christian talk of faith has also had a much less attractive aspect: the demand for it as a necessary condition of avoiding an eternal condemnation. Both Buber and Ritschl (and I), not least on the evidence of Matthew, Mark and Luke, would prefer to Vidler's a version of Christianity in which faith was construed as in Hebrews 11.1-12.2.

Vidler's emphasis in numerous places, one which I share, on the question of reasonableness is probably influenced, even if not directly, by John Locke, the English philosopher of the 17th century. Discussing the relation of faith and reason, Locke has this sentence:

> Only I think it may not be amiss to take notice that however faith be opposed to reason, faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind; which if it be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything but upon good reason, and so cannot be opposite to it.[3]

One might well demur at "faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind", but otherwise I submit that Locke is right. Let anyone who disagrees explain why he or she does so. Good reasons, we should remember, may be far from giving us knowledge, or even great confidence.

I end this invitation to study and discussion with some questions, and the offer of space for answers and further questions. In whom or what do we have faith, and why, and what do we mean? Is loyalty very closely **related** to faith, not only as prompted by it but also because anyone thinking of discarding faith is likely to feel disloyal (and/or like a fish out of water) if he or she begins to do so? But does loyalty deserve to be set aside unless one has good reason to maintain it? And what are we to say of the view that no one can give an "objective" or impartial answer to the question whether or not he or she has such good reason? My own answer to that would take up the emphasis that Mill puts on wide-ranging discussion in which one "[seeks] for objections and difficulties" (*Liberty* Ch. 2, para.7) and can find oneself saying "You've got something there".

John Howes

NOTES

1. *Grundkurs Christliche Theologie* (published by Neukirchener, first in 2006 under a title that is now the subtitle, *Diesseits und jenseits der Worte*), IV.2, the subsection "*Loyalität – im Sprachstrom bleiben*".
2. *God's Demand and Man's Response*, Geoffrey Bles: the Centenary Press, 2nd ed., London 1946, p.34.
3. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Ch. 17, p.354 (Oxford 1924).

(Photocopies of these pages available on request.)

# WHAT'S A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO …
## *THE STUDY OF ENGINEERING?*

**ELEANOR WALSH**, *a longstanding member of Learningguild, was a student adviser in the Department of Electrical Engineering at the University of Melbourne for twelve years.* *During this time the University placed much more emphasis than before on assisting first-year students to adapt to the transition from secondary school to tertiary study. The book* ***Studying Engineering at University – Everything you need to know*** *considers this transition for students of Engineering, and Eleanor finds merits in it but also a fundamental deficiency.*

Before embarking on a review of this book, it should be explained that throughout Australia the Engineering course is a four-year professional one, unlike an Arts or Science course, which takes three years. The professional body Engineers Australia accredits the degree, and so confers professional registration on successful graduates, who are then able to apply for employment as registered engineers. The professional body, in consequence, attempts to influence the design and content of the courses, and complex negotiation with academic staff often ensues. Subjects studied in an Engineering course are much more tightly specified in content and sequencing than in a more general one. For example, mathematics, physics and computer science are normally required to be taken in the first two years, as they are the basis for higher-level subjects.

One of the authors of this book, Christine Tursky Gordon, has experience as a registered engineer, and the other, Clare Rhoden, assisted students in Melbourne's Learning Skills Unit. In the Introduction, the authors acknowledge that the profession of engineering, the numerous disciplines it encompasses, and the career paths which can result are not well understood in the wider community, nor in secondary school. The book usefully includes brief contributions from current undergraduates and recent graduates, and practising engineers, to illustrate the diversity and breadth of the profession.

My overall impression is that the book attempts to offer students an efficient pathway through the course, while encouraging them not to neglect the importance of relaxation through sport, social events and, for many students now, essential part-time work. I would call this "project-managing one's way to a degree": a student following the advice presented here could reasonably expect to obtain the degree in minimum time, and then be ready to seek employment. While this is certainly an understandable approach, given the background of the authors, I think it misses the central point of university study, as I shall explain later.

As a student adviser, working with diligent students undertaking a difficult and complex course, I found that those who completed the degree in minimum time, without any failures, needed to maintain an academic average of 75%. A further point, which the authors also include, is that students entering tertiary study who are used to being at the top of their class may find themselves further down the rankings in the new environment, and can take some time to adjust to this.

The book has fourteen short chapters covering practical topics such as note-making in lectures, organizing the week with timelines for submission of laboratory reports and assignments, technical writing and report writing, and the all-important preparation for examinations. It also includes some advice on writing resumés for employ-

ment interviews, and making good use of opportunities within the study program to improve presentation and communication skills. These aspects of the book are clearly set out, useful and unexceptionable.

One misunderstanding I would seek to clear up is the belief that the examination is no more than the sum of the tutorial questions studied through the semester. For examinations, academic staff are setting tasks which seek to discriminate between the different abilities of students to apply the problem-solving skills they have acquired in new situations. This approach becomes clear when one peruses previous examination papers, usually available on-line. It is regrettable that not many students take up this opportunity in the earlier years of the degree.

I would have welcomed some extended reference to the relationship students can establish between themselves and their lecturers in particular subjects. They are experts in their fields, can normally explain them well, and are responsible for assessment in them.

It is usual now for lecturers to make a particular time available during the week for students to come to their offices with questions and problems. People teaching a subject on which they have lavished enormous energy and enthusiasm over the years are usually very keen to include eager students in discussion of it. By engaging in such discussion students can obtain useful insights into the areas of engineering in which the department specializes. As the course proceeds, getting to know your lecturers, and the engineering disciplines in which they are specialists, is a very useful preparation for the later years of the degree, when you will need to narrow your focus and select the discipline you are keen to explore in depth. Ultimately, it can lead to a career in research.

Visiting your lecturer regularly, from the beginning of a semester, gives valuable feedback to the teaching staff on how well students understand the lectures, and allows students to discuss aspects of the subject which particularly interest them and lecturers to suggest further reading which extends the range covered in lectures. On the whole, however, students do not make much use of this opportunity until about two-thirds of the way through a semester, when examinations are looming. Understandably, lecturers may conclude that such students are purely exam-focused, and not interested in the wider opportunities which would have been available to them had they taken the trouble to approach their lecturers earlier in the semester.

I wrote earlier that I considered that the authors had missed the central point of studying at a university. By this I meant that they had generally covered the points a student would find helpful for succeeding in the course, but I found no enthusiasm for guiding really good students, usually those who enter university with top marks from secondary school, on how to excel in their studies. Surely, if the university has been diligent in selecting the best academic staff to teach the course, then students should be encouraged to aim for the best results they can achieve. Still more important, I could not find any reference to those who have not yet excelled but have the potential to do so if they are carefully encouraged by their teachers. Students with respectable, rather than top, entrance scores and a strong desire to immerse themselves in the subjects they study can make extraordinary progress if they are willing to apply themselves.

The most exciting aspect of any university study is the potential for students to grow intellectually during the course, even to the point of abandoning the first course chosen and taking up a different one. Universities which engage with overseas institutions in providing exchange programs for undergraduate students can encourage further intellectual growth in a different setting. Coming to understand the requirements of a top institution abroad and taking

part in the intellectual cooperation and competition can be a salutary experience. I recall a number of students who, after taking a semester or a year's study in another country, returned home to complete their course and then found employment in that country. For some years now, about 5% of Australia's population have had extended professional employment abroad and engineers tend to be in the forefront of this expatriate activity.

In summary, I think this book valuably explains to students the nature of the transition from school to university, what to expect in the new situation and how to get oneself organised to launch into it. My regret is that the book fails to enthuse about the exciting intellectual experience students are embarking on, or to encourage them to engage wholeheartedly with their teachers.

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