Learningguild Letter

2.2006*

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

If I begin, as I do, by saying that 2006 was for me a year of dissatisfactions, I may be assailed, perhaps smilingly, by at least three kinds of retort. The first, "You're a grumpy old thing", I can readily dismiss in various ways. I have used the plural, and not all the dissatisfactions were mine. I have long found it valuable to distinguish between being dissatisfied and being radically unsatisfied, and I am certainly merely dissatisfied. The dissatisfaction of Plato and Kant with what passed for moral education among their contemporaries led them to write memorably about what it ought to comprise.[1] What matters is that one should not only feel appropriate dissatisfaction but also make creative use of it.

The second retort is not so easily turned aside. It originates from Horace's perceptive description of four ages of man: he limits himself to boys and adult males, and the latter, in these lines, get worse as they get older.[2] The old man is not only "hard to get on with, full of complaints", etc., but "a praiser of times gone by" (the Latin is famous, '*laudator temporis acti*'). I delight in and am most grateful for both the secondary education, substantially free, that I was fortunate to enjoy at a London guild school and at Melbourne High, and the participation I had in a four-year Honours course in Latin, Greek and philosophy at the University of Melbourne.[3] All that is now more than fifty years ago, and I do contrast it with much of its counterpart in the undemanding syllabuses and narrow focus on marks so common in recent years. I am, however, wasting my breath, pen or word-processor if I do not steadfastly and practicably offer or suggest the best forms of education in the 21st century that I can devise or think of, given my own and others' experience.

The third is the hardest to answer. "You are too idealistic, John Howes: you expect too much of people and institutions (such as the mainly residential colleges of the University of Melbourne, in whose life you have now decided to have only a couple of forms of limited participation), and so you are inevitably dissatisfied. Apart from your family, your reading and writing, and your running, you are putting your energies into this still fairly small movement Learningguild, which is unduly dependent on your leadership and not likely to survive you. It is no surprise at all that it is difficult to find

other teachers able and willing to engage within Learningguild in the kind of one-with-one teaching that you do and value. Even in Oxford and Cambridge it is under threat from economic forces, remorseless emphasis on publication, and a decline of the traditional concern for the whole person and his or her lifelong development.[4] Perhaps the teachers who have had much of that concern have always been few and far between. Few students are interested in more than the gaining of qualifications and having what fun they can along the way. There will never be, as you hope, many people who make Learningguild, or indeed any other institution, their continuing locus of study and discussion in which they are not paid or otherwise obliged to participate."

Like everything that is valuable in education, a reply to that uncomfortable charge must combine idealism with realism. In addition to one-with-one tuition and the promotion of our publications, twice-yearly examination for the Learningguild Certificate, Friday-evening meetings, and social events, there are two directions that I propose for Learningguild, now that I am able to devote more time to teaching within it. First, I shall ask students who request my guidance in their study of English, whether they are native speakers or not, to commit themselves to do their utmost to reach an advanced level, and then to go far enough to become able, and I hope eager, to assist other students as Learningguild Assistants or Teachers, in Melbourne or elsewhere, normally with the expectation of some payment and/or practical help from those students. Secondly, for our philosophy seminar, which in early 2007 (its thirteenth year) has nine of us as members, I propose more widespread and continuing promotion. I shall report on progress in these two areas in the next *Letter*.

Although my decision in October not to offer to continue as Consultant Tutor at Trinity College had as its main reason that if I continued I should have too little time for family, Learningguild and my own studies, it was also influenced by a dissatisfaction that I have felt since 1980 with such university colleges in Melbourne and elsewhere in Australia. A first-year Trinity student said to me at a dinner last year that there was less discussion than he had expected with people older than himself. Hilary, my brother Michael's daughter and a resident tutor at Queen's (now about to take up doctoral research at ANU), combined with me in 2006 to lead a weekly discussion group, early on Friday afternoons, that had some valuable meetings, but was seldom attended by more than three undergraduates. (I had had the same experience when organizing "Tuesday at Trinity" meetings in 1982-4.) The young and vigorous Dr Peter Tregear, for whom 2006 was his first year as Dean of Trinity, said to me that the College must not be a mere receptacle for the surrounding youth culture, whatever that is; but there is very little sign in the colleges generally that students are thinking harder and more persistently and critically, and wanting to discuss their own and others' ideas, as a result of being in college. Instead there are many social distractions, in which alcohol often plays too prominent a part. Too little individualized guidance is given. I discovered the need to have a compulsory diagnostic test early in the year (it could be the writing of an essay in an hour and under exam conditions on any one of ten topics) to reveal any extreme or comparative weakness in English, now not uncommon in universities even among native speakers, which students would then be helped individually to overcome; but I doubt if that nettle will be grasped. Neither the group tutorials nor the system of mentoring at Trinity last year seemed to me to deal sufficiently closely with individuals' own intellectual needs (or potential). By contrast with the arrangements and the personal contact in the former Honours Schools, in

which a student used to spend three or four years, there is little stimulus for the more able Arts undergraduate at Melbourne today. The colleges could, but on the whole do not, play a valuable role there in encouraging and guiding ongoing study, questioning and discussion along the most fruitful lines.

I came to the conclusion that as a quarter-time and non-resident consultant tutor I could make very little difference to the ethos of a primarily residential college. I do not think that the ethos in the colleges generally will alter unless (i) a number of appointments are made that will ensure much more individual guidance to students and promote discussion, and (ii) the pattern of many social distractions and prominence of alcohol is seriously and persistently challenged by college authorities and senior students. Whether or not such changes occur, there are activities in association with the colleges in which I am glad to continue. John Gourlay and his family have with great generosity established a visiting professorship in business ethics, based at Trinity and at the Business School of the University of Melbourne, and I hope to go on participating in related meetings. At Queen's the Friends of the Library's committee, in which five members of Learningguild have been involved, arranges three functions a year. In October Peter and Vernon Bailey, lawyer and doctor, spoke about their life's work and showed something of the influence that the College of the forties and fifties had had upon them. It was a college without alcohol on the premises, with a higher proportion of senior students, and with numerous theologs and Honours Arts students. What is needed now is not prohibition but a strict insistence on moderation and a ban on drunkenness and rowdiness, and (as the present Master of Queen's has sought to provide) encouragement of serious students to stay on and be, in effect, role-models.

In November and December I journeyed around the world, with about a week in each of Cambodia and India, three in the UK, and one in Boston. In my second visit to the Philosophy Department at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, where resources are so limited and visitors few, and in my fourth to Holy Mother Public School at Bharatpur, near the eastern boundary of Rajasthan, I felt dissatisfied again with the levels of English so far achieved by staff as well as students, but also with my own lack of correspondence from Melbourne to people there. There had been obstacles: a breakdown in availability of an internet connection for some months at Bharatpur, and the disappearance of some things I had sent by mail (it seems that mail is more likely to get through if stamps are printed rather than perforated). Now, with more concentration of my efforts, I intend to do better. James Anthony, the Director at HMPS, has asked for forty-five copies of Learningguild's *Say It Well 1*, the booklet-and-cassette that introduces the English alphabet in the phonic or short-name way instead of the long-name way used hitherto (and still so widely in English-speaking countries, as in *Sesame Street*) whereby children are expected to move from *see-ay-tee* to 'cat'. Those copies have been printed and collated, and will soon be sent. Let me here express gratitude to those who by small donations at our Friday-evening meetings or on other occasions, and in some cases by special donations, make it possible for us to give help to Indian schools and to the Philosophy Department in Phnom Penh. James has also said that he wants to resume the practice whereby he and others send to me sentences they compose alongside those they complete in Murphy's elementary grammar book.

Though I contracted dysentery in India, from which I recovered over a period of nineteen days (and especially eight spent in Scotland, with rest, reading and good talk,

at the home of my old friend Anthony Clunies-Ross), it did not prevent me from going to a most impressive sports day and picnic of the school we support in Okhla, an industrial slum of New Delhi, or from giving my paper "Kant on Education and Moral Development" and then engaging in an hour's discussion in a crowded room of the Philosophy Department at Jawaharlal Nehru University, also in New Delhi. The hostel where I was accommodated was not a good place for an English-speaker to be unwell, and I was very grateful to Romey and Savita Borges, members of Learningguild, for looking after me both by their visits to me at that hostel and in their own home. The paper was the second I had given at JNU, and again I felt the need for sustained correspondence. We are fortunate in Australia that our universities have staff from many parts of the world. There are few non-Indians in Indian universities, and wider, continuing contact is important if relative insularity is to be avoided.

Much of my reading at Anthony's home revealed others' dissatisfactions. Anthony's father, Sir Ian, had realized the inadequacy of the extent of university education in Australia in the fifties and played a crucial role in persuading Mr Menzies, the Australian Prime Minister, to set up the Murray Commission, the acceptance of whose recommendations led to a great expansion of that sector. Karen Armstrong's autobiographical *The Spiral Staircase* dealt not only with her seven years in a convent (its narrow-minded and burdensome practices are fully described in her earlier most revealing book, which Margaret and I have since read, *Through the Narrow Gate*), but also with the frustratingly prejudiced and misplaced advice that she afterwards received from a psychiatrist. In a collection entitled *Integrity*, edited following an Oxford conference by Alan Montefiore and David Vines, both Anthony and David expressed their dissatisfaction with Thatcherism and sought to articulate an alternative to a mode of capitalism concerned with little else but profit. Anthony wrote about the responsibility of employers and described some Japanese practices, and David about what he called concernedness. I want to go further and with T.H.Green to think of self-devotion to extending others' opportunities for their self-development.[5]

In Oxford I stayed at the excellent Youth Hostel just behind the railway station, visited old friends, and went to bookshops. I bought for the Learningguild Library a very good book, *IELTS Practice Tests*, by Peter May, which gives plenty of explanation of how to reach appropriate answers in the tests (important for many of our members and potential members) set within the International English Language Testing System.

I called on John Tasioulas, a Victorian Rhodes Scholar from the 1980s who is a philosophy tutor at Corpus Christi College, and we had a good talk and then lunch with his colleagues. From John I learnt of a widespread Oxford dissatisfaction. Those who teach in the humanities find that results in the British A-level exams have come to be of very little use in helping them to decide which school-leavers should be offered a place, and so there is a move towards once again setting entrance exams, of a more exacting and revealing kind, which could be taken anywhere and would provide reliable indications of who should at least be interviewed. A-levels are taken at the end of a second year in the sixth form (and so a seventh year at secondary school), and the British sixth forms and their syllabuses used to prepare people well for university study (as can be seen from a book of 1962 exam papers I have for the Joint Matriculation Board, in which Manchester and other northern universities combined). I was told that students are no longer required to write argued essays of some length (e.g., of about 7-800 words).

I spoke, and later sent an example, of our exam for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression, which in March 2007 will have its fortieth paper since its beginning in September 1987, and does test for the abilities a university student ought to have. An experienced teacher of English at Year 12 in secondary schools who was a marker in 1998 expressed the view that the exam was by then at first-year university level. There is no doubt that, as more and more students have undertaken the final school year, there has been pressure not to make its exams as demanding as they had been. There has been a reluctance to recognize that secondary students need not just a diversity of subjects but different kinds, and levels, of secondary education. In Britain there is a move to have schools specializing in this or that subject or group of subjects, but more than that is required. Some students can go much faster than their fellows in certain subjects, though perhaps unable to do as well in others. There is a great need for graduated series of intelligent and lively test or exam papers, and related documents of guidance (e.g. detailed reports on actual exams), so that students (and teachers) can see what is progressively involved in a recommended or prescribed path of reading and responding in a particular subject, and an individual student can be helped to follow such a path at a pace and in ways appropriate to him or her. Such a series could culminate, at the pre-university stage, with exam papers and reports such as Learning-guild provides for its Certificate. Oxford entrance papers could play a valuable guiding role for students and teachers, and even more so if, in consultation with teachers, other similar tests or exams were prepared for earlier stages. There are native-speaker students now at English-speaking universities who cannot yet write without mistakes in grammar or spelling, and/or argue coherently, because they did not have between 11 and 15, or later, the kind of systematic training in which I now invite such people to engage, mastering and applying successive sections of good texts. When I look back on my own secondary education, I realize how fortunate I was in that respect.

I wrote just now of a "path of reading and responding". Much of today's secondary and tertiary education is deficient in that there is a lack of stimulus to and encouragement of the student's asking oral and written questions, and presenting arguments, **of his or her own**. The use, now common, of the verb 'deliver' in connection with university education suggests the passivity that is permitted to the student in courses that are unduly dependent on lectures and/or a book of readings. Especially if they lack confidence, students will often accept a passive role. A fellow-student, in second or third year of Arts at Melbourne, said to Margaret in 1970: "I never read the books that lecturers recommend: it only confuses you." She added that she liked one of my Philosophy colleagues as a teacher because "he gives you good notes". At fourteen at Melbourne High in 1950, in fourth form (now called Year 10), I was required to study an anthology of English poetry called *In Fealty to Apollo*, and the English teacher encouraged our own oral responses, not least when we disagreed with each other. Douglas Gasking, later Professor of Philosophy at Melbourne, rightly argued in his booklet *Examinations and the Aims of Education* (which I discussed in *L'g L* 1.1999) that if secondary education is to encourage thought and individual response the forms of assessment must themselves do so, because teachers will inevitably relate much of their teaching to whatever forms of assessment are established. Although Gasking was a stimulating lecturer, I have often recalled the fact that in 1954 he set for the second-year logic course the excellent new book by Strawson, *An Introduction to Logical Theory*, as a prescribed text but did not, I think, during the course require or invite us to study and ask questions about any particular sections of it. How much I should have gained by doing so.

The day after I arrived in Boston I had a long talk at his home with my friend John Silber, President Emeritus of Boston University and a noted Kant scholar, who was determinedly and courageously recovering from a serious fall. He told me, when I asked about his early paths of study, that he had come into philosophy because he realized that he would be too unorthodox to be a Christian minister or a lawyer. He mentioned a dissatisfaction of his own, similar to mine about the colleges of the University of Melbourne. He had, he said, always resisted requests for the installation of pay TV in the residences of BU, saying that those who wanted it might as well save themselves the cost of tuition and residence by staying at home rather than being students. Since his time it had been installed at a cost of about a hundred thousand dollars. The underlying question here is whether universities or their residences can possibly fulfil their true purpose unless they engender and foster the idea of a *studium*, a zeal for enquiry, discussion and widening and deepening understanding. That ideal is counter-cultural in that it embraces a life that is disciplined in the best sense and so rejects any kind of domination by entertainment, or by popularity or careerism. Chaucer's Oxford Scholar remains the model for the true student and the true teacher.

There is so much unhealthy eating and obesity in the United States, and Britain and Australia are following suit. The best motive for a healthy diet and for fitness, as for remaining free of drugs, is a delight in vigorous activity, physical **and** mental **and** often cooperative. Fathers and mothers need to foster such delight, and so do teachers. Writing of the best in the traditions of undergraduate education at Oxford and Cambridge, Sir Walter Moberly, who was well aware also of what went wrong there as elsewhere, said of their alumni:

> They look back on these years as a time of happiness and mental expansion which glows in the memory; a time when stimulating friendships were formed, when some contact was made with one or two great men who excited reverence, when the blood ran fast and the mind exulted in a new awareness of its powers.[6]

Replacing the phrase 'one or two great men' by 'one or two devoted men or women', we have a guide in that sentence to good education **at every stage**, an education that encourages the student, often individually, to seek and find a way of life that fulfils rather than distorts his or her humanity. Primary, secondary and tertiary education can all occur in particular areas at various times of life: that is part of Learningguild's *raison d'être*. As for any educational community, what matters above all for us is the quality of the learning and of the personal relationships people experience among us.

Yours,

John Howes

1. See especially Adeimantus's memorable expression of discontent in Plato's *Republic* 362d-7e, and Kant's section on Methodology in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. My recent paper on that section, mentioned on p.4 above, is available from Learningguild.
2. *Ars Poetica*, 156-176.
3. I describe much of that secondary education in Part 4 of the Preface to *Making up Sentences*.
4. On the tradition of attention to the needs of the individual student, see in *The Expanding University* (ed. W.R.Niblett, Faber, London 1962) Chapters 5 and 8, esp. pp. 50-52 and 95-97. This book is available through the Learningguild Library.
5. See the lecture I quoted from in the last issue of this *Letter*, 1.2006, p.3.
6. *The Crisis in the University*, p.201f.

Complementary medicine and scientific testing

DR FRANKLIN ROSENFELDT, *who is Research Professor in the Department of Surgery at Monash University and Head of the Cardiac Surgical Research Unit at the Alfred Hospital and Baker Institute, gives a summary of his talk at Learningguild's Friday-evening meeting on June 2nd.*

Complementary medicine is given that name because it is widely seen as an adjunct to conventional or "Western" medicine. It is also called alternative medicine, with the implication that sometimes it is used instead of mainstream medicine. The abbreviation 'CAM' is short for 'complementary and alternative medicine'.

CAM is very widely used. Every year Australians spend $2.3 billion on it: that is four times their out-of-pocket expenses on conventional medicine. Such extensive use occurs in most of the western world. In China and India it is probably even more widespread.

There is a tension between CAM and conventional medicine. Many if not most practitioners of the latter have reservations about CAM, and some are extremely sceptical. Medical people engaged in scientific research are particularly likely to say that CAM can offer no scientific proof of its efficacy. The insistent requirement of what is called Evidence-Based Medicine is that any proposed treatment must be based on good scientific evidence, normally that provided by prospective randomized clinical trials (PRCTs), before it is accepted for general use. Because CAM is not commonly subjected to such testing, we can assume that some of its treatments are ineffective and some harmful. Sceptics may use or think of the phrase 'snake oil', which conveys the idea of a useless treatment promoted by an unscrupulous salesman.

Can this tension be resolved? Because of the powerful placebo-effect of any treatment strongly recommended to patients (i.e. feeling better after taking it though there may be little or no change in one's physical condition), most medical therapies should, if possible, be compared with a placebo in a "double blind trial", i.e., one in which neither those who ingest something nor the administering doctor know whether it is the substance under trial or a placebo. That comparison is the basis of the PRCT. Many complementary treatments have undergone this type of testing and given indications of benefit. "One swallow does not make a summer", however, and one small trial of an agent may be positive and then another negative. This is the situation for coenzyme Q_{10}, a form of CAM of which I have considerable experience (see the website http://www.coenzymeQ_{10}.com.au). Most PRCTs of it have been small and have suggested but not proved beyond reasonable doubt that CoQ_{10} is beneficial in cases of heart disease and of high blood pressure. To settle the question a large PRCT of several hundred patients, or even thousands, would be required. Such a trial would cost millions of dollars. A pharmaceutical company sponsoring one would not be certain of recouping its cost via profits from sales because CoQ_{10} is a natural and not a patented substance. Governments and universities do not think it sufficiently important

to sponsor such a trial on that scale. This situation is repeated for most CAM therapies, so progress is very slow.

There are, however, some encouraging developments. The National Health and Medical Council of Australia, at the request of the Federal Minister of Health, Mr Tony Abbott, has allocated $5m in 2007 for research into CAM in Australia. By comparison the National Institute of Health in the USA now devotes $US120m annually to research into CAM. Thus the landscape is changing, but slowly, because old habits die hard, both among medical researchers and in the CAM industry. Those few of us who try to bridge the gap have much to do in the future.

Not Beazley but Rudd

HANS EISEN, *a member who has written articles for* Learningguild Letter, *sent this response, dated November 19th, to our last issue. Early in December Kevin Rudd was elected leader of the Australian Labor Party.*

Hello John,

Your *Letter* 1.2006 was most interesting. Each article had something of value. Thanks.

You asked for comments on your own letter. I have a comment on the last paragraph on p.2. I wish that I could share your optimism in writing of a "good chance" of Labor's winning federal government. Whatever chance you perceived at the beginning of this month seems to have evaporated.

My opinion concerning your hope that Kim Beazley will replace John Howard as Prime Minister is that it would be a poor outcome for Australia. Kim Beazley lacks the strengths necessary to formulate sound policies, to secure support for them and to persuade the Australian electorate of their virtue.

Now this does not mean that I do not favour a Labor Government in place of the Coalition. I do. However, that outcome may have to wait until the Labor Party has a leader capable of winning against John Howard or whoever replaces him.

In my opinion the Labor Party missed an opportunity when Beazley was again elected leader following the demise of Mark Latham. While no alternative to Beazley might have had instant success against Howard, largely because of lack of recognition by the electorate, strategically it was important to begin to build support and recognition for a leader with the capacity to win at the next election or the one after.

Kevin Rudd impresses me as a person with the intellectual strengths necessary for one who would be a successful Prime Minister of Australia. His articles in two recent editions of *The Monthly* made interesting reading and were well argued.

Politics is a tough profession. Success requires balance, intellect and strength. Rudd in my view satisfies each of these criteria. But there may be others equally well qualified to lead.

Best wishes,

Hans Eisen.

Appreciating the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins

At the Friday-evening meeting on Nov. 17th, **ROGER PARRIS**, *who, formerly a nurse, is now a teacher's aide with children who have special needs, spoke about the life of Hopkins, and some of his poetry was read and discussed. Here Roger gives a summary of his admiration for that poetry.*

I love poetry because it is a beautiful way of portraying beauty, and it helps me to relax.

I love the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins because he reveres nature. That reverence is an expression of his religious belief, so it is a form of worship. My own belief does not have much in common with that of Hopkins except that we both in our own ways have that reverence for nature.

I see his poetry as a kind of mosaic. He chooses words to fit a pattern of metre and sound. He uses dialect words from around Britain. When all these elements are combined, the total picture has a magical effect on me. It also leads me to want to learn some of the craft of poetry and to begin to combine words in an entrancing way.

Anyone who would like to read some of the poetry of Hopkins, along with a detailed commentary on the artistry of one poem ("That Nature is a Heraclitean fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection"), is invited to borrow, via the Learningguild Library, the anthology *Poetry: Reading and Understanding*, by K.G.W.Cross and D.R.C.Marsh.

Spring in Italy, and La Scala

ETHEL FULLERTON *has been a nursing sister and is a pianist and organist. We deeply appreciate the hospitality of Doug and Ethel on many Friday evenings in that fine long room in their home. In March and April Ethel and her daughters Liz and Mardi had four weeks in Italy, including a visit to Liz's daughter Kylie in Milan.*

Thanks to Kylie's leaving her little Fiat for us on an earlier visit of hers to Rome, we travelled in it through Umbria and Tuscany and then up north to Lake Como, and even across the border to Switzerland, where petrol was so much cheaper. My daughters were great drivers and navigators.

It was spring, and I have never before seen so many magnolia trees, big and small, with purple and white flowers. They were in gardens and on the roadside, and often accompanied by large clumps of golden forsythia. We avoided the *autostrada* and so travelled through many little villages with their narrow, winding streets. We climbed hundreds and hundreds of steps.

Italy's architecture, its statues, art, ruins, history, the kindness and generosity of the people, and its language, scenery, and diversity can't be surpassed.

Because we were finishing our holiday in Milan, the home of La Scala, we had searched the net before leaving Melbourne to see which opera was playing at that time. Puccini's *Tosca*! One of my favourites. Tickets weren't cheap but for this we had to splurge. My granddaughter made the bookings.

On the day, we needed to travel from Bellagio on Lake Como down to Milan, a journey of about three hours. We arrived at La Scala full of excited anticipation.

Because Mardi and I are the opera buffs, Kylie had booked for us two front seats in a private box right beside the royal box, so that we had a perfect view of the now beautifully restored theatre. It took two years and 61 million euros to complete. There's rich, dark red velvet with gold trimming everywhere, and the chandeliers add their dazzling magic. We found we each had a monitor in front of us for the electronic system that allowed us to follow the libretto in English and/or Italian. These monitors were added during the refurbishing and it is so much better not to have to look up to the ceiling, as we do here.

Italians love their opera and there was loud applause when the conductor, Lorin Maazel, came to the podium. When the music began, the sound totally enveloped us. It was hardly believable.

An American and another Australian were in our box: interesting guys, opera buffs. It was all magic: the music, the setting and even the supper provided during one of the intermissions. My lovely family said I was glowing. It still brings tears to my eyes.

Madeleine Albright: experience and criticisms

LOUISE JOY *engaged for many years in social work and was also, from 1990 to 1994, a Councillor in the City of Doncaster and Templestowe. She is active as Secretary of a group of Friends who support the Christian Medical College and Hospital at Vellore, near Chennai in India, where her father and mother, both doctors who worked there, are gratefully remembered.*

In 1994 the Centre for Strategic and International Studies published *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*. Madeleine Albright says of that book, on p.74 of her own, that it "makes a compelling case for recognizing the role of religion in affecting political behavior and for using spiritual tools to help resolve conflicts". Accepting that case, she has written a book called ***The Mighty and the Almighty*** (published in Britain in 2006 by Macmillan, and borrowable from the Learningguild Library). She suggests on p.ix to the readers of the UK edition that they see it as

> a plea for greater understanding between Europe and the United States, between the political right and left, between the religious and secular, and among those of varying faiths.

She writes from the perspective of a lifetime in US and UN public life, as US ambassador to the UN and as Secretary of State in President Bill Clinton's administration, in addition to numerous other academic and advisory roles. But she also makes plain that she was greatly influenced by her traumatic childhood and her emergence from it. "When I was barely in my teens, the American people welcomed

my family after the communists had seized power in my native Czechoslovakia." Democracy, rather than religion, appears to have been her guiding light, and she says "I have always wanted to think of America as an inspiration to people everywhere" (p.5). This faith that she and others had in America, however, was challenged by the American involvement in Vietnam. It "muddied what had seemed so clear" (p.32).

Albright does not hide the mistaken assumption she had, even when in high office, that religious conflict was basically a thing of the past. She sometimes expresses astonishment that religion can be such a force in provoking violence. Even conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland she had thought of as past history. Although her father had served as chairman of a UN commission on India and Pakistan, dealing with competing claims concerning Kashmir, and she had learnt something of the history of the two countries, years later the continuing conflicts between Muslims and Hindus still came as a surprise. She does not mention the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya by Hindu fanatics, which all but destroyed the nature of India's secular government. On p.9 she writes:

> I found it incredible, as the twenty-first century approached, that Catholics and Protestants were still quarreling in Northern Ireland and that Hindus and Muslims were still squaring off against each other in south Asia; surely, I thought, these rivalries were the echoes of earlier, less enlightened times, not a sign of battles still to come.
>
> Since the terror attacks of 9/11, I have come to realize that it may have been I who was stuck in an earlier time.

Travelling by train between Dehra Dun and Delhi as a schoolgirl in 1947, the year of Indian independence, I experienced first-hand the communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims. Fellow-students hid under the seats. I think Albright did not and perhaps does not fully appreciate the revulsion liable to be felt between adherents of polytheistic and of monotheistic faiths, even though there is also much evidence in India of tolerance and mutual respect.

For her book she examined various attitudes taken to religion by the founders of her adopted country, and by some subsequent American thinkers and writers. (See Chapter Two.) George Washington wrote in a letter of 1790 to a Hebrew congregation: "The government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance". He said he was not concerned with whether people were "Mohametans, Jews or Christians of any sect, or Atheists" (p.17). She acknowledges that there have been Americans who have seen their country as having a divinely-ordained mission, but that is certainly not her view:

> … promoting democracy is a policy, not a mission, and policies must be tested on the hard ground of diplomacy, practical politics, and respect for international norms. Our cause will not be helped if we are so sure of our rightness that we forget our propensity, as humans, to make mistakes. Though America may be exceptional, we cannot demand that exceptions be made for us. We are not above the law; nor do we have a divine calling to spread democracy any more than we have a national mission to spread Christianity.
>
> (p.29)

That set of remarks is typical of Albright's realism, caution and moral firmness.

Knowing the difficulty of foreign policy decisions, she cites wrong lessons that can be "learnt" from experiences. A UN Mission in Somalia ended in disaster just as UN peacekeepers were sought in Rwanda. The supposed lesson of non-intervention led to genocide (p.52f). Despite the plethora of dilemmas, Albright has written a clear consistent account of American intervention across the globe.

Criticisms of US policy in Vietnam and now in Iraq she recognizes as similar. Her chapter-title "Iraq: Unintended Consequences" encapsulates what she emphasizes. Her concern, openly voiced at the time, was that Osama bin Laden would exploit the situation to recruit more terrorists for Al Qaeda, and she has seen that viewpoint vindicated. "The invasion of Iraq was intended as a demonstration of America's power; it has instead shown the limits of that power" (p.176). Like the commentator who accused the US military command of refusing to swerve from their "high tech" agenda when what was needed was conventional warfare, Albright accuses the Bush administration of a blinkered view, one in which the force of religion was not understood. Still they did not learn, merely promising "to make things better". "I think", she says, "the U.S. government has thoroughly botched its response to international terror, damaged America's reputation, and substituted slogans for strategy in promoting freedom" (p.13).

She certainly acknowledges, then, the disquiet aroused by American policies, but perhaps not that shift from love after the Second World War to hate which has been sadly noted by the Welsh writer Jan Morris, also an admirer of the US. It is a unipolar view of US power in world affairs which needs changing, says David Clark, a special adviser to the British Foreign Office from 1997 to 2001 (*Guardian Weekly*, February 23 – March 1 2007, p.15). Whereas Albright sees America's moral imperative in world affairs, though heavily criticizing its recent policies, Clark portrays the US as something of "a global freeloader, using its power selfishly and irresponsibly to the detriment of the greater good".

The end of American primacy is taken as a given by Clark, whose vision is for a multipolar galvanizing of global democratic sentiment in Europe, India and South America without antagonism to the US. He quotes Paul Wolfowitz's defence planning guidance paper of 1992: the US should "account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established economic and political order". Albright seems to me too close to this unipolar view of American supremacy.

Despite that criticism, I think that readers will find impressive her solid contributions to understanding the effects of religion in power politics and the role religion may play in dealing with them. Although she may not do justice to the nuances of religious faith, it is to her credit that she had the administrative flair to establish, in 1997, the first State Department *iftaar* dinners (breaking the fast during Ramadan), and to see that an introductory guide to Islam was developed for persons traveling on behalf of the United States to countries with a Muslim majority (p.109f). In the end, perhaps, it is such small initiatives which begin to break down existing monoliths and misunderstandings.

The Learningguild Philosophy Seminar

The following introduction has been given for the seminar's meetings in 2007. This seminar has been running since 1995. We should welcome enquiries from anyone interested in participating, whether by attending or as a corresponding member. Meetings in the second term are likely to run from April 24 to June 19, and in the third from July 17 to September 11. All meetings are at 23 Fallon St, Brunswick, and run from 8pm to 9.30; afterwards, for those who can stay for another quarter-hour, there is supper.

1. This year's seminar may be expected to run for three terms, probably the first three of Learningguild's four (which are substantially those of the schools). Our meetings in the first term will run from February 13 to March 27. People are welcome to join our seminar at any stage: please look out for anyone who might be glad to do so.

2. The normal fee is $10 per meeting. Those who intend to come to all or most meetings are invited to make one payment for the term; others, who may know or expect that they will miss some meetings, may pay for the individual sessions they attend.

3. Through all three terms I shall be inviting you to study selections from Cicero's book known as *De Finibus* (*Concerning Ultimates* [among goods and evils]) and sometimes from other writers, some from ancient Greece or Rome, some later, including some from the twentieth or twenty-first century. However, the emphasis will be on questions raised in these passages or occurring to us as we read or discuss them. (See sec. 5 below.) We shall not be attempting a thorough study of the five "books" that make up *De Finibus*. Anyone who would like to read more widely in it is welcome to ask me about that. The text I have used for many years is that of H.Rackham (2nd ed., 1931) in the Loeb series of classical texts, which have Greek or Latin on the left and an English translation on the right, but sometimes I shall use my own translations or suggest amendments of Rackham's.

4. In the first three or four weeks we shall make a close study of my article "Cicero's Moral Philosophy in the *De Finibus*" [in *Cicero and Virgil*, ed. J.R.C.Martyn, 1972], but with particular attention to the quotations from Cicero and from others. That will help participants to "get their bearings" in moral philosophy (also called ethics) and will give an overview of Cicero's achievement in this book. Because it is so important to appreciate the motivation and nature of Epicureanism (presented and discussed by Cicero in Books I and II), and to realize that we are not engaged here in something that is only an "academic exercise", we shall attend as well, from the beginning, to two other documents. One is an extract from Lucretius, the Latin poet and vivid exponent of Epicureanism, and the other an article that appeared in *The Age* [10 Feb. 2007: the author was Daniel Donahoo], which I invite you to relate for yourselves to what Lucretius has to say, but also to Cicero's and our own question about what deserves to be regarded as supreme among the intrinsic goods of human life.

5. In anyone's development in the activity called philosophy, the understanding and appreciation of questions formulated by others, and the formulation of one's own questions, are fundamental. There will be plenty of opportunity and encouragement to ask any questions you wish, for explanation or clarification or to express doubt or disagreement. Bear in mind the pattern of what is so often a valuable procedure, "Present and discuss what A says about S in P" (author, subject, place), but do so with reference to the questions the author is raising and those you and/or others want to ask in response.

John Howes

WHAT'S A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO …
DEALING WITH HIV/AIDS IN AFRICA?

MILAN RADOS *has been a member of Learningguild since the 1980s. His wife Monica and their two sons are also members. He is an Arts graduate, mainly in politics, of La Trobe University, conducts a brick-cutting business used by many builders, and has been a builder himself. He is a member of the Learningguild philosophy seminar. Here he reviews a remarkable set of passionate lectures. He will be the steward of the book for the Learningguild Library, and so it may be borrowed from him.*

Stephen Lewis is a Canadian politician, diplomat and humanitarian. From the age of 22, in 1960, he has often worked in different regions of Africa. As the United Nations Secretary-General's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, he gave in 2005 a series of Massey Lectures in Canada. The book of the lectures was published in Toronto in that year, and by Text Publishing in Melbourne in 2006. Its title is ***race against time: searching for hope in AIDS-ravaged Africa***.

During the second half of the twentieth century the departing colonial powers left Africa "in dreadful shape", according to Lewis. The Cold War between the Communist world and the Western democracies "whip-sawed" Africa, and the international financial institutions by their dogmatic policies of "conditionality" further undermined the ability of African leaders to provide a decent and relatively comfortable existence for their peoples (pp.4-6). But the most debilitating and devastating affliction that has beset African countries is the recent HIV/AIDS pandemic.

"I've deliberately chosen anecdotes as the narrative vehicle", he says (p.46), "in order to give the pandemic an accessible face, rather than relying on the dehumanizing swamp of numbers." These stories of almost unimaginable anguish describe the desperation of so many helpless dying or destitute children and adults. In places where so many adults perish, frail grandmothers are left to take care of malnourished and sick grandchildren. When the grandmothers die, there are child-led households in which the oldest children are left to care for their siblings. This harrowing situation is compounded by widespread hunger. Lewis says "it sometimes feels as though death stalks every waking moment" (p.56), and reports that leaders in Botswana, Lesotho and Zambia respectively have used the words 'extermination', 'annihilation' and 'holo-caust' in describing what is occurring (p.59).

When Lewis talks about the response of the international community, save for a few honourable exceptions, his attitude ranges from disappointment to disgust. Not a single one of the G7 countries has ever come close to the target, agreed in 1969, of 0.7% of GNP for foreign aid, not even Canada, though it was Lester Pearson, then Canada's foreign minister, who obtained that agreement (p.27). So many solemn declarations are subject to the traps of what Lewis calls "internationalism": "no one pays attention, the media are uncritical, the commitments and obligations are expend-able, the organizations, expected to perform, don't perform and yet emerge unscathed. They're almost never called to account" (p.78). The eight Millennium Development

Goals that the UN's Millennium Assembly announced in 2000 will not, says Lewis at the beginning of his final chapter, be reached in Africa.

He has especially harsh words (see Chapter I) for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, much of whose policies he considers to have been ideologically driven and to have caused great harm to the trade and the social sector of the countries of Africa, especially in health and education. He believes that in education these two financial institutions "have a debt of their own to pay back to Africa", and that they should "foot the bill for free primary education". He says of such payment that "it should be called mandatory restitution" (p.106).

In the last chapter he puts forward a number of proposals as "an antidote to the pathetically blinkered and unimaginative current approach which holds the continent in thrall" (p.146). These are simple, clear and well-thought-out proposals, and the relevant international institutions would do well to take them seriously.

One feature of these lectures is that Lewis hardly ever talks about African men, but rather about the plight of the women and children. One is left to wonder what happens to the husbands and fathers. Many die young, but do some abandon their families, or react in some other unhelpful way?

The book provides an excellent introduction to the subject of the devastation that the HIV/AIDS pandemic has brought to the African continent. It is full of sad stories that sometimes leave the reader in despair. But there is no place for resignation in Lewis's approach, which, as well as being critical, is encouraging and optimistic. There is a memorable description on pp.63-65 of a residential school called Umoyo for girls of fifteen to nineteen orphaned by AIDS. It is in Lusaka, Zambia.

> The school itself has a good teacher-student ratio, and the staff members are uniformly first-rate. The principal is a male feminist of strong conviction. The entire atmosphere is resolute and loving. … The girls burst into song and rhythmic dance at the sight of visitors, their voices meshed in soaring crescendo, so exquisitely musical, so energetic, so joyous that you'd never guess at the tragedy that lurks beneath. And then, when you start to ask questions, as we all did, the self-confidence and brazen candour take your breath away. These are young women who will never automatically submit to any young man; young women who will insist that a condom be worn; young women who will report sexual violence; young women who will stay and work in their own communities.

These lectures can, as a Socratic gadfly, challenge governments, institutions, groups such as Learningguild, and individual readers to face the question whether there is any fair alternative to taking seriously our duty to help our fellow-human-beings in Africa in their acute need.

On Friday June 23rd, Bridgette Thorold of Oxfam spoke at a Learningguild meeting about combating HIV and AIDS in southern Africa. Learningguild is about to send a donation of $200 for this work. Oxfam's address in Melbourne is 156 George St, Fitzroy 3065, and donations may be made by phoning 1800 088 110.