Learningguild Letter

2.2007

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

By the end of June 2008 I hope to have written a paper called "How should philosophers study religion?" For most of this letter I undertake a related but more limited task, a review of the book by the philosopher Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, which was our focus at Learningguild's annual day conference in philosophy of religion, held on Thursday September 6th. (The book's British edition was published by Allen Lane in 2006, and may be borrowed from the Learningguild Library.)

Let me mention here that in 2008 the conference will be on Thursday September 4th, and we shall be discussing themes from a book written in German by Dietrich Ritschl (with considerable contributions from Martin Hailer). It began from a basic course in the history of Christian theology and its language which Ritschl first gave at Union Theological Seminary, New York, in the late sixties. Its immediate occasion is one given, in cooperation with Hailer, at Basel University in the summer semester of 2005. Its value might be suggested by just two sentences: "But the cardinal theological error occurred with the early Christians – who for their part belonged almost without exception to the people of Israel – in that they applied to themselves God's electing of a people and took it away from Israel. Now they called themselves 'God's people' and 'new Israel'." Ritschl refers on this page (288) of *Diesseits und jenseits der Worte* to the "open wound" that is experienced in relations between Jews and Christians.

Dietrich Ritschl has often visited Melbourne, and has spoken at a Learningguild meeting. I hope I shall be able to visit him in Switzerland in November. It will be very valuable to have a number of Christians (including, I hope, his friend of forty years, Harry Wardlaw) and non-Christians here on September 4th to talk about those of his themes in which they have indicated a special interest. (I shall shortly be making available a translation of the table of contents.) We shall offer translations of parts of sections of the text that have those themes. I should of course welcome expressions of interest from readers of this letter.

It is revealing to compare with one another two assertions from Chapter One of Dennett's book (pp. 14 and 17):

> It is high time that we subject religion as a global phenomenon to the most intensive multidisciplinary research we can muster ….
>
> The spell that I say *must* be broken is the taboo against a forthright, scientific, no-holds-barred investigation of religion as one natural phenomenon among many.

I should prefer 'in its enormous variety' to 'as a global phenomenon', but it is clear that one could accept the first of these assertions while having reservations about the second. Not all disciplines are properly called scientific: some are historical, some literary, some aesthetic, some philosophical, and in none of these do mathematical or experimental methods play a primary role, though I certainly do not say that they are excluded. If the investigators are expected to agree at the outset that they are to study religion as a "natural phenomenon", many

will say that an interpretation of (at least) their own religion is being assumed that they cannot accept.

If we ask what spell it is that Dennett has in mind, it is revealing to consider the sentence after the one just quoted from p.17, in which he says that people plausibly fear that

> if that spell is broken … there is a serious risk of breaking a different and much more important spell: the life-enriching enchantment of religion itself.

At the beginning of the next paragraph (p.18), we have this statement:

> The first spell – the taboo – and the second spell – religion itself – are bound together in a curious embrace.

Thus it is said that religion itself is a spell, that is, it causes adherence to a view of life whose irrationality, if it be irrational, is obscured from its holders by factors they do not understand. Dennett believes that to be the case, but he does not sufficiently welcome into the discussion those (including philosophers) whose methods or whose conclusions differ from his.

His bibliography is dominated by the writings of those whose approach he takes to be similar to his own; there is no sign of a close study of (or sustained personal acquaintance with) any theologian of any religion; and the book is spoilt by the undue influence of the fact that he had (p.27)

> decided some time ago that diminishing returns had set in on the arguments about God's existence,

so that the scope of the affirmative case is reduced to the three traditional arguments (ontological, cosmological, teleological) and given just the last section of the eighth chapter. (At our day conference I concentrated on that chapter, and my short paper on it is available on request.)

There is also a tendency to exaggerate and oversimplify, illustrated in this sentence (p.154f), which shows a characteristic verbosity:

> Every minister in every faith is like a jazz musician, keeping traditions alive by playing the beloved standards the way they are supposed to be played, but also incessantly gauging and deciding, slowing the pace or speeding up, deleting or adding another phrase to a prayer, mixing familiarity and novelty in just the right proportions to grab the minds and hearts of the listeners in attendance.

The words from 'incessantly' to 'prayer' could be omitted. Is this universalized description to count as "scientific"? In particular, does it not show a failure to understand the point of a response made by the young William Temple when Ronald Knox accused him and the other authors of *Foundations* (1912) of having as their hero a "modern man" named Jones and asking what Jones might be persuaded to swallow: "I **am** Jones", said Temple, "asking what there is to eat." (See F.A.Iremonger's biography.) Dennett has not, it seemed, bothered to read and comment on any attempt by any deeply religious and thoughtful persons to explain why they continue to hold certain religious beliefs and to practise that religion.

And yet – there are points at which Dennett is much better than these weaknesses would suggest. On p.318 he asks:

> How do religious convictions differ from secular beliefs in the manner of their acquisition, persistence, and extinction, and in the roles they play in people's motivation and behaviour?

That question can only be answered by patient study of and where possible interviews with people who hold those convictions. One major question to ask is "Would you consider that you had lost your very identity, or at least much of it, if you ceased to practise the religion and hold the distinctive beliefs you've maintained for many years?" There is a passage in Ch. XXVII of Mrs Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888) in which Elsmere, unable to go on as a minister of the Church of England because he no longer believes the orthodox doctrines, is talking with his former tutor at Oxford, Mr Grey (a character based entirely on T.H.Green), and Grey says:

> I know – oh! I know very well – the man of the world scoffs, but to

> him who has once been a Christian of the old sort, the parting with the Christian mythology is the rending asunder of bones and marrow. It means parting with half the confidence, half the joy, of life!

If one really does consider one's identity bound up with one's religious commitment, then one is likely to persist with the latter and to be unwilling to regard the matter as one to be settled by a balancing of reasons, often to be done with the aid of discussion that seeks to be impartial. When I ceased in 1971 to think of myself as a Christian (and I had so thought since boyhood) I did not have any sense of change of identity. Probably that was mainly because I had long thought that one should regard Christianity as "open to doubt and faith" (that was the title of the lectures I wrote at Melbourne in 1967 for the new philosophy of religion course); but it also helped that I remained a theist and was, as I still am, deeply influenced by Kant and his account of moral goodness and the "moral law". Now, when I think of myself as agnostic and a persistent enquirer, I am not without a kind of hankering for the kinds of serious occasions of worship at its best, with a belief in a calling to a destiny not limited to this life, which I sometimes experienced. But my fundamental loyalty here is to seeking what seems to me, on balance, most reasonable. I know that some religious people would use of that attitude some such dismissive adjective as 'rationalist' or 'liberal', and another crucial question is precisely about how we should determine what our commitments are going to be and whether and, if so, in what manner they should be exposed to the possibility of revision, even radical revision.

At one point (p.313) Dennett says:

> scientists intent on explaining religious phenomena are going to have to delve deeply and conscientiously into the lore and practices, the texts and contexts, the daily lives and problems of the people they are studying.

Indeed, and the same thing could be said about historians and philosophers of religion; but Dennett then descends into bathos by proposing an entrance examination for these "scientists", set by religious experts. I recall Davis McCaughey's quoting of someone who had remarked: "The great value of a university degree is that it lets you know how little is the value of a university degree."

I end this review with a further quotation from Dennett, and in this case the length of a long sentence is justified. Discussing the question "What shall we tell the children?" he urges that nothing should be done to "disabl[e] them from inquiry" (p.328), and says on the previous page:

> Let's get *more* education about religion into our schools, not less. We should teach our children creeds and customs, prohibitions and rituals, texts and music, and when we cover the history of religion, we should include both the positive – the role of the churches in the civil-rights movement of the 1960s, the flourishing of science and the arts in early Islam, and the role of the Black Muslims in bringing hope, honor, and self-respect to the otherwise shattered lives of many inmates in our prisons, for instance – and the negative – the Inquisition, anti-Semitism over the ages, the role of the Catholic Church in spreading AIDS in Africa through its opposition to condoms. No religion should be favored, and none ignored.

More realistic to say "and none refused consideration", but what a good indication of what the historical approach that is needed by all who want to think hard and fairly about religion should involve.

Dennett's own "awestruck vision of the world" and "humble curiosity" (p.303) are closely related to his passion to understand many-sided evolution; and I, like all of us, can certainly learn much from that approach. But this book would have been better if it had had more of that humble curiosity in relation to attitudes to religion, and methods for its study, other than his own.

Yours in Learningguild,

John Howes

State Aid: an historical survey

JACK GREGORY, *Emeritus Professor of History at La Trobe University, was a pioneer in writing the history of policies adopted in Australian States towards schools. His M.A. thesis led to a much-cited article in* Melbourne Studies in Education *(1958-9) and later to the book* Church and State *(1973). The article below is based on a talk he gave to Learningguild's Friday-evening group on the 2nd of November 2007.*

The term 'State Aid' as used in Australia today refers to the policy of governments of providing financial assistance to schools that are not part of the state's own government-administered system. Most of those schools are connected more or less closely to some religious organisation, but such connection is not a condition for aid. In the 19th century the term applied mainly to the then existing policy of providing aid directly to Christian churches to help them with buildings and clerical salaries, as well as their schools, but in the later 19th century all six Australian State governments (there was no Commonwealth government) abolished this direct church aid. Although there was some protest from the major churches, there was general acceptance of the abandonment of this kind of aid, partly because the terms on which it ceased were in some States quite generous. Far more controversial was the decision, made about the same time in all six States, to cease government funding for schools administered by the churches. The Roman Catholic Church in particular insisted on its need and right to run its own system of schools and to receive some aid in doing so. Thus State aid for schools became, as it has remained, a controversial issue for Australian governments.

The British governments which, in the late 18th century, sent the first settlers, mainly convicts, to begin white Australia's history did not see education as any part of its responsibilities. In Britain itself education was then mainly provided by the Church (the Church of England), or by private (often called "dame") schools, for parents who were ready to pay for some education of their children. The State did not insist on that education, and the so-called "lower classes" remained largely illiterate, properly so in the eyes of many. Education for any children the transported convicts, or their military warders, might take with them was not part of the early planning of white settlement here, so no schoolmasters, and very few clergymen, were in the first fleets. But children were there from the beginning, over thirty even in 1788. About twenty years later, Governor Bligh reported 807 children of married parents and 1024 of unmarried, mostly "running wild". The British government then recognised "the peculiar necessity" of "interfering … to educate them in religious as well as industrious habits". So over the next twenty years or so there arose a sprinkling of schools, by no means reaching all children in an expanding settlement. Grants of land were made: 400 acres for clergymen but only 200 for schoolmasters. All these were required to be Church of England in religious allegiance, despite the fact that a sizeable proportion of the growing population belonged to other Protestant bodies or were Roman Catholic (many convicts were Irish). It was a very haphazard beginning to State aid for education, as well as for religion, in Australia.

There was an attempt, in the late 1820s, to hand over the whole responsibility for education to the Church of England by establishing a Church and Schools Corporation. This was to receive one-seventh of the surveyed Crown lands as its endowment, enough to support both the favoured church and its schools very adequately. But given the mixed religious composition of the colony's population, the presence of vigorous

critics (such as the Presbyterian the Rev. J.D. Lang) of any move towards an "established" church, and moves even in Britain itself towards greater religious equality, the corporation was soon dissolved, and this attempt by the State to put the task of providing public education in Australia in the hands of one particular church quickly collapsed.

Bourke's proposal

The State had now to devise a new approach, and in the 1830s the Governor, Sir Richard Bourke, proposed that all government-supported schools be of the "National" type recently introduced in Ireland. In these schools children were to be taught "general subjects of moral and literary knowledge" together, but could be given separate religious instruction if that was desired. Such schools, while recognising religious diversity and sensibilities, put the emphasis on shared instruction and did not absolutely guarantee that the children in them would receive instruction in the specific beliefs of any church. Surprisingly, the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in the colony at the time were prepared to back Bourke's proposals, perhaps because of its Irish origins and because separate religious instruction was permitted when joint instruction was "impracticable" because of differences of creed. The real opposition came from the Church of England spokesmen and J.D. Lang. Bishop Broughton was the most passionate, stating that schools were "to the Church as her right hand … the artery through which the life blood is conveyed to the heart … sever this and she dies". Roman Catholic spokesmen were in fact soon to express a similar view, though Lang moved the other way and came to regret his opposition to Bourke's plan. Though Bourke never gave up, no National schools were begun during his time as Governor, nor under his successor Gipps. In 1848 a beginning was made, mainly in rural areas. By that time, however, the denominational principle of separate religion-based schools was well established, and the principle embodied in Bourke's plan for "National" schools, emphasizing unity in a shared public education, would remain for some years yet greatly overshadowed.

By the 1850s Australian society and its government had changed a good deal from its convict and pastoral beginnings. There were now six separate colonies, the transporting of convicts to them ceased (to Western Australia in 1867), while gold rushes had brought increased wealth to Victoria and N.S.W. A much larger population demanded more democratic government. The liberal ideal of "a free church in a free state" was more and more acceptable in Australia, as it was in other modern societies such as the U.S.A. and Britain itself. Such Western societies were becoming more secular in outlook, meaning not that they were becoming hostile to religion but rather that they saw it as a matter of private belief which should not receive public support, whether by financial subsidy or by the imposition of any religious tests on its citizens by the State. The later decades of the 19th century would therefore see a renewed and more radical challenge than that of Bourke to the principle of a denominational, church-based system of public education. Moreover, if a wider range of citizens were to be given the right to vote, and if the economy was to become more commercial and industrial, requiring a literate workforce, then it was important for all children to receive at least a basic education. Thus the scene was being set for a compulsory, as well as for a less religion-based, system of public education.

The Acts of the 1860s

Things began to change significantly in the 1860s. By then a dual system had developed. "National" schools were seeking to fill in the gaps but also winning more acceptance in principle, especially among the smaller Protestant churches, but most schools were still denominational. In 1860 in Victoria there were 484 such schools, teaching about 35,000 pupils and receiving about £80,000 in State aid, while there were only 160 National schools, with 12,000 pupils and receiving about £25,000. It was becoming apparent that this dual system was both divisive and very wasteful of resources, because of the duplication of schools in larger towns. Acts were passed in several colonies seeking to consolidate the administration of State-provided funds and encourage the establishment of more "vested", i.e.

not church-controlled, schools. In Victoria, during the decade that this Act operated (1862-71), the number of non-vested or church schools fell from 513 to 432, while the number of vested or National schools grew from 193 to 494. The only denomination whose schools continued to increase in number (from 115 to 129) was the Roman Catholic. However, although the balance was shifting, in 1871 there were still more pupils in the non-vested schools than in the vested. A comparable situation developed in N.S.W. under its Act (1866).

"Free, secular and compulsory"

Perhaps, given time, these Acts might have established an acceptable compromise between Church and State, but many feared it would have been one which left the churches, especially the two main ones, in control of much public education. This not only ran counter to "the spirit of the age" but was also regarded as inefficient and expensive. When these two churches strongly resisted an attempt made in 1866 in Victoria to establish a single system, which would have included class instruction on "common Christianity", a crisis point was soon to be reached. In 1872 Victorian legislators, after an election fought mainly on "the Education question", passed an Act providing for the "free, secular and compulsory" education of children over the age of six in schools to be run by a new Ministry of Public Instruction. Only such schools would receive government funding. Over the next couple of decades all the Australian colonies passed similar Acts, though most did not go as far as Victoria in forbidding teachers to give any kind of religious instruction. There was some uncertainty about what exactly 'secular' meant. Even in Victoria a half-hour of non-denominational religious instruction, given first thing one day a week by voluntary instructors, came to be a normal part of the system, although Roman Catholic children were excused. I remember looking enviously at them out of the window as they played while I was subjected to the weekly dose of "lidgy". The class readers included several extracts (e.g. from *Pilgrim's Progress*) of a religious kind. To be "secular" was not to be totally non-religious. But direct State aid to church schools was abolished throughout Australia by the end of the 19th century.

Change in the 1960s

There was no State aid in the 20th century until the sixties when, as in the same decade a century earlier, policies began to change significantly. This time the shift was back to rather than away from State support for a dual system. Church and other non-government Schools had not disappeared after the passing of the secular Acts. The Roman Catholic Church in particular made great efforts to maintain and expand its own comprehensive system of parish schools, although, since education was now compulsory, many had perforce to attend State schools at least for a time. In 1879 the Catholic bishops condemned secular schools as "seedbeds of future immorality, infidelity and lawlessness", but many Catholic children (and teachers) seemed to survive quite well in them. One can respect the dedication and sacrifice that went into building up a separate system, but still wonder how vital it really was to the continued well-being both of the church and of society.

At the secondary school level, church and private schools (some, confusingly, called "Public") remained more numerous and prestigious than State-run "high" schools until well into the 20th century. The idea of an all-embracing system of schools, such as perhaps Bourke and certainly some of the legislators of the secular Acts hoped for, never came close to being achieved in Australia. But for nearly a century, although the Roman Catholic community and a few others protested, the policy of no State aid for non-government schools remained firmly entrenched, no less so, it seemed, than the White Australia policy. The 1960s were to see both these policies overturned.

The Commonwealth government led the way in making a radical change of policy. Such a government had not existed when the secular Acts were passed: it was created in 1901. Education was not an area in which it was expected to legislate, and until mid-century it did not do so. But the stresses of two world wars greatly increased

its powers, especially in finance, and after the Second World War it began to intervene in the education field, at first only at the tertiary level by funding university growth. Primary and secondary school policy remained the preserve of State governments. In 1960, when asked whether his government favoured State aid for denominational schools, Prime Minister Menzies replied that it was "outside the jurisdiction of this government".

However, a few years later his government did begin extending some aid to such schools, at first by offering scholarships open to any student at secondary level and also matching grants for science laboratories, libraries and other capital works. Per capita grants followed, plus an offer to share with State governments a commitment to provide up to 40% of the estimated cost of educating a child in a State school. By 1973 Commonwealth grants to non-government schools totalled over $40 million. The States followed this lead: Victoria for example began per capita payments in 1967 and committed itself in 1972 to the 40% proposal. By then State aid was firmly back on the agenda of all governments in Australia, and it has become a major area of public expenditure.

New needs and new attitudes

As in the mid-19th-century, major social and political developments had prompted calls for change in education. A flood of European immigrants and a post-war baby boom had put a strain on all educational facilities, not least the system of parish schools the Roman Catholic Church had built up. Without increased resources, that system, teaching about 20% of primary school students, might well have collapsed, so putting still further strain on State systems already struggling to cope by portable classrooms and the like. The longstanding Catholic campaign for a renewal of aid intensified and, with the emergence of the Democratic Labor Party, after the mid-1950s split in the Australian Labor Party (over communist influences more than State aid) it gained a strategic political voice. When the Menzies government came close to defeat in the 1961 elections, the support of the DLP became very important, and this probably helped in the changing of policy. But by then it was becoming apparent that something needed to be done about the Catholic school system — either to try to absorb it or to rescue it. Moreover, sectarian animosity, which had soured the mid-19th-century debates over the secular Acts, and had also been apparent during World War I in Protestant doubts about Catholic loyalty, had softened a good deal. After WWII there was no such question in the Cold War against Communism. Finally it is worth adding that the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1947) had laid down that "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children". The implication was that the State should not rigidly impose any system, especially on parents who had already made some sacrifice to assert their right to choose.

Thus, by the 1960s, human rights principles plus educational and political realities, as well as changing social attitudes, combined to bring about a shift in Australian policy on State Aid.

This change of direction had taken place mainly under Liberal party governments, both State and Federal, but the Labour Party, which in 1972 came to power in Canberra under Gough Whitlam, also moved decisively away from its traditional opposition to State Aid. However it was concerned that aid be given on some kind of needs basis, and not simply per capita. In 1973, after the Karmel Report, it set up a Schools Commission to administer an increasing flow of Federal aid (over $200 million by 1984) on such a basis. State aid had become a policy accepted by both major political parties, not just by the DLP. But in contrast to the 19th-century situation it was now provided for any private or "independent" school. Support for the policy, which up to about 1960 had been mainly Roman Catholic, became generally middle-class, ready to favour help to any parents who for whatever reason — not necessarily or even usually religious — chose to opt out of the State's system. The supporters of non-government schools have created one of the most powerful and successful lobby groups in Australian history. In 1976 an

OECD review of Australian education expressed surprise at how "remarkably muted" was criticism of a policy of extensive public subsidy of non-government schools. In 1981 a High Court challenge, claiming it contravened Section 116 of the Commonwealth Constitution, which forbids "establishment" of any religion, was mounted through an organization called Defence of Government Schools. ('Through' rather than 'by', since technically the Victorian Attorney General, acting for them, was the appellant.) This challenge was rejected by all but one of the judges. So Commonwealth-funded State aid, by the 90s no longer distributed through the Schools Commission, continued and is now in the billions. Total State aid is approaching 100% rather than the 40% which, as noted above, was proposed in 1972. State Governments' expenditure on education is still mainly for their own systems, but they too provide significant amounts for private schools. 19th-century legislators, led by Bourke, had tried to curb, if not abolish, the dual system of education, but it had been kept alive under the direction of the Catholic bishops. In the late 20th century it gained greatly in strength and seems likely to continue to do so well into this 21st century.

The Liberal Federal government that came to power in 1996 under John Howard (one of the listed opponents of the 1981 DOGS appeal) abandoned the needs-based approach favoured by Labour governments and introduced a new principle known as "Socio-Economic Status" which distributed aid on the basis of a kind of postcode analysis of parents' dwellings, taking no account of what resources a school already had or the fees it charged. The Howard Government also relaxed regulations limiting the number of schools that could be set up in any area, claiming to justify this as allowing more choice for parents. More "independent" schools have been set up, many linked to religious groups, and the SES system has encouraged ambitious building programs in some larger schools. Some of the religious schools are exclusivist. (In a recent letter to *The Age*, Linda Robinson wrote that she had discovered that the Federal Government had given $20.7m in 2006 to schools run by the Exclusive Brethren. "How is it", she asked, "that my tax money funds a group that shuns all association with me?") All this aid has stimulated the growth of the private system, which now has nearly 40% of the total school population, a far higher percentage than anywhere else in the developed world.

A better path taken in New Zealand

The history of State aid in Australia is, as I see it, a depressing one, demonstrating how the things that divide us can triumph over the things that should unite us. It makes a mockery of any claim that ours is a society which stands for a fair go or any approach to equal opportunity. We came to an educational fork in the road in the 1960s and, led by both our main political parties, chose to go down the path that led us away from equality and unity. That choice stands in contrast to the opposite one made by our near-neighbours in New Zealand who, after much debate and compromise, thrashed out an Act (1975) which brought most of their private schools, especially the Roman Catholic, into an integrated public system. There is choice within that system, but one to be preferred by far to the divisive kind of choice now encouraged here. It can be argued that the debate over State aid is virtually over in Australia, especially since the 1981 High Court decision and the strong growth of the private system. Certainly it will be very difficult to wean our "aspirational" middle classes, whether Catholic, Protestant or other, away from the benefits they see it giving them, and at present none of our political leaders seems to want to try to do so. Mark Latham in 2004 gave signs of such a desire, but was savaged from all sides for his pains. But the processes of change will surely work in this century as they did in the 19th and 20th, and we may yet see in Australia some approximation to the system New Zealand has adopted, and so some diminishing of the divisiveness and extreme inequality of our current system.

Some relevant reading

A.G.Austin, *Australian Education 1788-1900* (1961); J.S.Gregory, *Church and State* (1973); M. Hogan, *The Catholic Campaign for State Aid* (1978) and *Public vs Private Schools* (1984); S. Marginson, *The Collapse of the 1973 Karmel Consensus* (1985); R. Sweetman, *A Fair and Just Solution?* (2002: a history of the integration of private schools in New Zealand).

More train and tram routes for Melbourne

JIM RICHARDSON, *who wrote in the last issue about his visit to Taiwan, is a retired electrical engineer.*

This article comprises a brief history of the development of Melbourne's train and tram networks, a description of their current extent, and some proposals for their extension. It also asks why some obvious solutions have not been implemented, and makes a few comparisons with other cities.

Beginnings and changes

The first train line in Melbourne was constructed in 1854 between Flinders Street Station and Port Melbourne (then called Sandridge), thus linking the city centre with its principal connection to the outside world. It was the very first railway built in Australia, and was soon followed by a link with St Kilda. Sadly, both were converted to tramlines in the 1980s and their bridge across the Yarra became redundant. It was scarcely surprising, therefore, that there was no sesquicentenary celebration of rail in Melbourne in 2004, as there was in Sydney a year later. Its first rail line, between Sydney and Parramatta, opened in 1855. I attended the celebration, which was opened by the Governor.

Both in Melbourne and in country Victoria, the rail system was rapidly expanded during the next half-century, superseding the much slower horse-transport and preceding the advent of cars and trucks. The next major change was the conversion from steam to electric, on the line between Sandringham and Essendon in 1919. This change, progressively implemented throughout the suburban system, resulted in a great increase in patronage which continued until the 1950s. However, with the increasing popularity of cars, there was then no great rise until the last few years, when higher petrol prices caused many commuters to take trains.

The first tram lines in Melbourne were constructed fairly soon after the train lines, commencing within the Melbourne CBD and venturing to the inner suburbs. The initial mode of traction was by underground cable, which was superseded by overhead electric wire in the early 1900s. That change made longer routes possible. As with trains, people are now using trams more, and the increase is likely to continue well into the future. The tram network in Melbourne is currently the second largest in the world. It was fortunate to survive the 1950s, when tram networks in all other capital cities were replaced by buses, with a minor exception in Adelaide, the link between the city and Glenelg, which has recently been extended to the central station. A tram line has been constructed in Sydney from Central, through Darlinghurst, and further eastwards along an unused goods line. It will be interesting to see if other tram routes are restored.

Current situation

The train and tram networks are certainly quite extensive, but there are a few major weaknesses. One is the absence of two major radial links, namely to Doncaster and to Rowville and then on to Ferntree Gully, and the complete absence of circumferential links. (I am using the words 'radial' and 'circumferential' a little loosely, to mean the same as 'outwards from the centre' and 'non-radial and at some distance from the centre'.) It is significant that the two major radial links were specified in the Melbourne Transportation Study of 1969, which also included the City Loop that was eventually constructed. To the tram network a few more extensions are still needed, for example from North Balwyn to Doncaster Shopping Town, along with some other links to connect existing lines and make overall improvements.

The different "penetration" of train and tram lines is evident from these four categories of suburbs:

i. those with both trains and trams, such as Caulfield and Camberwell and those in the

Brunswick-Coburg and the Northcote-Preston corridors;

ii. those with trains but not trams, such as Heidelberg and Eltham, as well as those in the corridors Oakleigh-Dandenong and Moorabbin-Frankston;

iii. those with trams but not trains, such as Kew and North Balwyn;

iv. those with neither, including Doncaster and Rowville.

The principal explanation for such differences is that the Doncaster and Rowville areas were once mainly agricultural, with orchards and market gardens respectively. When those and adjoining suburbs were opened up for residential development in the 1960s, car ownership had markedly increased and there was little demand for public transport. The suburbs favoured with both train and tram were the very early ones to be settled by residents, in times when car ownership did not exist or was quite rare.

Over the past half-century there have been only a few extensions to the rail network, such as between Altona and Laverton and from Upper Ferntree Gully to Belgrave. Sadly there have been some reductions, including the Port Melbourne and St Kilda lines already mentioned, the line between Hawthorn and Kew, the spurs from McLeod and Springvale, the link between Royal Park and Rushall, and, most significantly, the link called the "Outer Circle", originally between Fairfield and Hughesdale through East Camberwell and East Malvern. Only the Camberwell-Alamein portion remains in use. The dismantling of the Outer Circle started well before 1950.

The tram network has fared better: no significant reductions and two major extensions, to Bundoora and to Vermont, as well as the replacements (called "light rail") of rail lines to Port Melbourne and St Kilda.

Future developments

It is clear to most train and tram travellers what needs to be provided to overcome the obvious weaknesses: two more radial rail links, several circumferential ones, and a few more tram extensions and interconnections. An extensive well-connected train/tram network is the ideal.

Why then are the new lines not being built? At successive State elections transport policies have recommended many of these extensions, but few have been realized. In utter contrast, there has been an enormous expansion in freeways, which are very expensive and intrusive, and, as other cities have shown, do not transport large numbers of people well. The usual answers to our question focus on the powerful interests of car manufacturers, the oil industry, motor insurance, parking and repairing companies, together putting pressure on governments to maximize the use of the car. Commuters are loosely organized, and there are no major organizations to advocate extension of rail and tram services. The Department of Infrastructure itself prefers new bus routes to new train or tram lines.

However, there is some hope when one considers other cities where train lines are being constructed and services eagerly accepted by customers. Perth has seen a marked increase in train travel as the network has been renewed and expanded. The next proposed link will connect the airport. Melbourne has yet to construct such a link, although provision was made for a station at Tullamarine. Sydney and Brisbane already have airport links. The continuing uncertainty over oil supplies, the rising cost of petrol, and increasing congestion on roads, augmented by access to and from freeways, will inexorably put pressure on governments to seek alternative means of transporting people. As has been shown time and time again in many other cities throughout the world, the only long-term solution is rail.

Some overseas examples

Which of those cities has transport provision especially relevant to us? We might think of looking initially at London and Paris, Tokyo and Osaka, Seoul (in Korea) and Taipei (in Taiwan). However, all six are more compact than Melbourne, and all but Taipei have a much larger population. In addition, Oriental

culture puts more emphasis on the community than does Occidental, which favours the individual, and so communal solutions to transport needs are more likely in the former. In the latter, people like to have their own cars, which are regarded as much more than a means of transport: they make "statements" about their owner's status, wealth and style.

Nevertheless, although Melbourne is one of the most widespread cities in the world, its population and housing density are increasing. Quite a number of new estates are being opened up in outer suburban areas, e.g., Craigieburn and Patterson Lakes. Reliance on freeways and private cars alone was tried in Los Angeles, ultimately with poor results compounded by severe pollution. In nearby San Francisco, a partially underground rail system was installed, called BART (Bay Area Rapid Transport), which proved to be very popular.

In Tokyo, a densely populated city of approximately 12 million in its metropolitan area, there is an excellent subway system comprising about fifteen radial lines passing through the city centre, plus an impressive circumferential line known as the Yamanote loop. Trains run frequently and take about an hour to complete the loop, connecting with all the other lines. In Osaka, also densely populated but with about half the population of Tokyo, there is a similar arrangement. These lines are well patronized, the trains punctual, the stations clean and readily accessible – one might say "a train traveller's paradise".

In Melbourne, a circumferential link could be constructed between Frankston and Werribee. Such a line would go to Dandenong via Cranbourne, then to Ferntree Gully via Huntingdale and Rowville (a new line), and then to Ringwood; on to Eltham and Greensborough (on the Hurstbridge line) via Doncaster (new line); thence Epping and Somerton (where the Broadmeadows and Upfield lines converge); then from Broadmeadows to Sunshine; and finally across to Laverton and on to Werribee. Four parts of such a link already exist: from Cranbourne to Dandenong, from Ferntree Gully to Ringwood, from Eltham to Greensborough, and (this line now used for the transport of goods) from Broadmeadows to Sunshine. Some of the proposed links would need considerable work (particularly between Ringwood and Eltham), others would not (e.g. between Frankston and Cranbourne).

This outermost link would desirably be complemented by the restored link once known as the "outer circle" (Fairfield to Hughesdale), and even perhaps by a restored "inner circle" (Royal Park to Rushall). As I have indicated, these circumferential links would need to be complemented by new radial links to Doncaster and to Ferntree Gully via Rowville, to form a comprehensive network. Timetabling must ensure that passengers do not have to wait excessively at transit stations. The State Government would have to embark on a massive shift of resources from freeways to railways, requiring billions of dollars. Potential customers would have to be convinced that it was better to leave the car at home and take a train, and that would represent a major shift in cultural attitudes. Nevertheless, I believe that such changes are possible and may eventually be unavoidable.

A Learningguild meeting in second term 2008 deserves special notice. It is open to all. Craig Smith, who over many years has illustrated many books for children, will speak and present some of his work on Friday April 18th (8 for 8.15 p.m.) at 23 Fallon St, Brunswick (Melway 29 F8). There is an attractive and informative website at www.craigsmithillustration.com

A culture of drinking in university colleges

In March 2008 **KEHELA VANDENBERG** *commences her third year at Trinity College in the University of Melbourne. She expects to rent with friends in the following year. She is completing a Science course. Here, with reference to her own experience, she continues the discussion of the prevalence in at least several colleges of an undue emphasis on activities in which the consumption of alcohol is prominent.*

I very much agree with the view of Trinity College, and colleges generally, that was given by John Howes in *Learningguild Letter* 2.2006. In particular I agree that alcohol plays a prominent part in many, or, to be realistic, most social events. It would not be surprising to find this "culture" in the majority of residential colleges. Trinity prides itself on its cultural diversity and abundant opportunities, yet falls short when it comes to social diversity and, more specifically, the acceptance of particular social avenues, such as clubs or societies or even the events held by them, where alcohol does not play a part.

I found this firsthand in respect of the Games Society which I helped to establish in 2006. I was its President in 2006 and 2007. Below is a passage that I emailed to the 2008 President of the Society on why this society was formed:

> In 2006, the Society was formed after noticing the dominant mainstream culture of the college and the limited number of Clubs or Societies catering for alternative avenues of social interaction. ... Whilst it is aimed to incorporate some of the current mainstream culture into the Society to ensure it is catering for the diversity of the college and [will] be used by the wider college community, the vision of the Society has been to still cater for the minority through non-"mainstream" events and the continuous provision of the Games Cupboard for all members of the college.

For the two years while I was President, my committee and I decided not to have any alcohol involved with the Society and its events. We were aware of the already large number of Clubs and Societies providing alcohol, and by not doing so we catered for those who were under 18 and those who preferred social interaction without alcohol from time to time or even all of the time. Consequently, we of course received criticism, were called "pansies", and had relatively few members. This may not have been entirely due to not providing alcohol, but I suspect that to be the main factor. The unfavourable view of us held by many people in 2006 was carried through in 2007 to many of the new students, the "freshers". Despite this, I refused to give in and provide alcohol, as that would have defeated the major concern that had led to the formation of the Society.

The new President and committee will, however, include alcohol this year in order to cater for the diversity of the College and bring in more members. I have spoken at length with them about this change, and I accept that eventually it would have occurred. Fortunately, the President would like to maintain the initial "vision" of this Society – or so I have been told. I only hope that they will continue to cater for the minority and not find that it avoids the Society because of a prominence given to alcohol, as in many of the other Clubs and Societies.

The above example clearly illustrates the lack of social acceptance and respect shown by some individuals and the effects of peer pressure.

Alcohol in moderation is an enjoyable feature of social interaction and social events. However, its provision is frequently abused at Trinity College and other similar colleges. It is the extent of the provision and consumption of alcohol, not the fact that it is being provided, that is the issue. In this

environment, in the current culture in colleges, people often drink to excess; they drink to get drunk. Consequently, it is not surprising that Trinity suffers from damaged furniture, holes in walls and the typical missing toilet seat after a college party. It makes one wonder whether those serving the alcohol are really sticking to their Responsible Service of Alcohol licence – though of course people are freely able to consume their own alcohol on top of what may be served from the Bar or provided at a college event.

Many people feel compelled to fit in with this culture as soon as they enter College during Orientation Week. Alcohol is abundant and served unnecessarily in some situations, such as the meetings with floor tutors and student authority figures. New students see this as the "culture" of the college: "it's cool", and a way of being "accepted". From conversations with friends and other people in college, I discovered that in fact some students, especially those from overseas, find it an unwelcome culture-shock to be so suddenly thrown into this drinking atmosphere. Those who are under 18 either sneak into "drinking" events, or are allowed to attend them and are served alcohol, or miss out on an event altogether, or are often instead given what is perceived as a less "exciting" or "cool" alternative event to attend. It should be remembered that underage overseas students who consume alcohol jeopardise their visas.

Trinity College and others with a similar drinking culture need to tone it down. If colleges want to pride themselves on being generally diverse, they need to be more accepting and less alienating of those who prefer not to drink alcohol or to look, sometimes or always, for forms of socialising in which alcohol does not play a key part. Such alternatives should be made available and be both accepted and respected by the college community. Students should not have to feel rejected or ridiculed if they decline to join in the activities of this mainstream drinking culture.

Attempts have been made to control its consequences, as when in 2007 the Dean of Trinity College cancelled all events that involved alcohol for the remainder of a semester. Obviously this type of action won't by itself have lasting effects. Students themselves need to form a new mindset, and those in positions of authority have the prime opportunity and responsibility to start changing this mainstream culture in colleges. This cannot be done quickly but requires a long-term plan. Both the reality and the image of the colleges need to be changed, so that students who do not want alcohol to play a prominent part in their own or their community's life can feel at home in a college and not alienated by its ethos.

WHAT'S A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO …
PREPARING FOR IELTS?

GILBERTO NAVARRETE *is an engineer from Colombia and a member of Learningguild. He is Production Manager at Product Makers, a company which provides flavours for juices, sweets, potato chips and bakery. He is one of Learningguild's most successful students, doing well in IELTS in 2004. He received our Rigmor Hermann award for that year.*

IELTS (the International English Language Testing System) is widely recognized by universities, government agencies and other institutions in many English-speaking countries. Overseas students or immigrants have to sit this test and achieve a prescribed score in order to obtain a university place, or recognition of their professional qualifications, or a particular kind of visa, or permanent residence.

Candidates should not only be at or above an upper intermediate level of English before they take the examination, but also be familiar with the nature of all four modules, which have to be taken at the one sitting.

You could be at that level, or even an advanced one, but if you are not familiar with the requirements of the test you may get a disappointing result because of lack of preparation and so puzzlement, stress and lack of concentration.

I took the test twice, first in 2002 to know what my English level was without any preparation, and then two years later when I was seeking recognition of my engineering degree. In that case I prepared for about a year, using Dr. Howes's methods and receiving guidance from him.

There are many books available to assist the student preparing for IELTS. The one I write about here is by Peter May, and is called ***IELTS Practice Tests***. It was published by Oxford University Press in 2004. It is intended for people proposing to sit the academic version of the test, which is more difficult than the general version in the reading and writing modules. The listening and speaking modules are the same for both. The academic version is required for overseas students enrolling at any educational institution in Australia.

May gives much of his book of 175 pages to four typical tests. Students should read the Introduction (p.4f) and the "IELTS Factfile" (pp. 6-9) before starting on any test. The latter clearly explains how the exam is divided, showing how many subsections are in each module, and describing text types, task types, formats and allocated times. Tips and hints are included here for each module, and I recommend reading them every time a section of Tests 1 and 2 is undertaken.

The most valuable feature of the book is, I think, the guidance on "strategies" found in the left margin, in purple ink, on each page of Tests 1 and 2. These strategies are very helpful: students are advised how to approach each module, build up skills in dealing with each, and avoid losing marks. This feature is very different from what we generally find in other books: here you are both working on typical tests and simultaneously learning the strategies you need to get good marks.

Strategies are related specifically to particular types and examples of sections and subsections, and they cover the wide range of variations an IELTS test may be expected to have. They are conveniently repeated from Test 1 in Test 2. They certainly make it easier to find the right answers. Putting them into practice helps students to maintain close attention during the test and to take in all instructions.

The book includes two CDs that contain the listening modules for all four tests. These are likely to present quite similar situations to those one would meet in an actual listening module. It is important to read the instructions in the book (for example, pp.10-17 for Test 1) before playing a CD, because there are no instructions there and you could become quite unsure what you should be doing.

Tests 3 and 4 appear without guidance on strategies, just as they would in an actual test. However, a remarkable further feature of May's book, covering in detail every part of each of the four tests, is the "Explanatory key" on nearly fifty pink pages (119 to 165). It illustrates, for example, how to work out which of several answers given must be incorrect and which one correct. There is also a script of what you hear in each listening module. It would be a mistake to read that script first (it is so important to get better and better at comprehending stretches of speech), but very valuable to read it afterwards, usually as you play the respective track on the CD several times. There are also eight pages of sample answers to the writing module, one for each of the two tasks in each, with comments that bring out strengths and weaknesses and give an indication of why a particular answer would probably achieve, or not achieve, or exceed Band 7, which is the level at which many students need to aim.

If you are a student looking for help in preparation for IELTS, I would strongly recommend that you obtain this book. There are many books on the market but this one goes further than others I have seen. It teaches you strategies, gives you tips and offers you full explanations. I would have found it very helpful in my own preparation.

What is Learningguild? What does it do? What does it publish?

Learningguild is an educational and social movement open to everyone who wants to go on learning and help others learn.

It holds Friday-evening discussions on a wide variety of subjects, a philosophy seminar on Tuesday evenings, an annual day conference in philosophy of religion, and social events. It provides teaching (generally one-with-one) for native and non-native speakers seeking to develop their speaking and/or writing of English. It offers a range of books, CDs and cassettes in that area, and in others, in the Learningguild Library.

Membership is by annual subscription of $11 (for couples $16.50) in Australia, and available at similarly moderate rates for those in other countries. We are grateful for supplementary donations. Subscriptions and donations should be sent to Margaret Howes, Learningguild, 23 Fallon St, Brunswick, Victoria 3056, Australia.

Members receive *Learningguild Letter* and its supplements, and the slip for each term's activities. They are entitled to a 20% discount on our other literature and on our CDs and cassettes for learning English.

Our email address is learningguild@yahoo.com.au, and our telephone number **(03) 9380 5892.** (From outside Australia, 613 instead of 03.)

At our website www.vicnet.net.au/~learngld there is plenty of information about our teaching, other activities, and publications. Numerous previous issues of *Learningguild Letter* may be found there, and information about past supplements. Read about the book *Making up Sentences* and its six CDs, and the booklet-and-CD *Sounds, Words, Sentences*.

At "Certificates" on the website, find out about the half-yearly and repeatable examination for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression. The March 2007 paper and the related report, and the same pair for September, may be found there and downloaded. (Members who would like paper copies of these may have them free.) More information, along with recommendations of the examination, is in the green leaflet available on request.

In the previous *Learningguild Letter* (1.2007), John Howes's letter to members set out six features which he hoped were, and would increasingly be, characteristic of Learningguild: sustained membership, study, discussion, assistance, vigour, and fellowship.