

Learningguild Letter

2.2016

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

In my previous letter I said that this time my subject would be “**truth-seeking**, in relation to religion, politics, education, ethics and personal life”. I invited comment on whatever a reader could reasonably cover in three chapters of Huston Smith’s *The World’s Religions*, Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s *Infidel*, and Sir Walter Moberly’s *The Crisis in the University*, and added: “I shall recommend and illustrate what is called a hypothetico-deductive approach, which I explain in my booklet *Reasoning* (obtainable from Learningguild), and a readiness to engage in critical examination of assumptions (see Plato’s *Republic* 533f).”

The three books made too daunting a reading list, especially since I am not here leading a class! Unsurprisingly, I have received no such comment. Looking to our next issue, I invite members and others to read one chapter, the fourth, called “Flourishing and Positive Education”, in the book *Positive Education: the Geelong Grammar School Journey*, whose author is Jacolyn Norrish (though there are numerous contributors), and as much more as they can of the rest of the book. A Sunday Meeting is scheduled on June 18th related to that chapter especially, but others too, and I should be glad of written comments before or after. Thus assisted, I shall write the editorial letter for our issue named 1.2017, to appear in the second half of the year. (Contributions on other subjects are of course most welcome, preferably sent or brought by the end of August.) As a stimulus, I ask “Is it insignificant that the words ‘failure’ and ‘criticism’ or their cognates do not appear in the subject index?” and invite attention to the entry for ‘happy’ in *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, where so much appears before we reach explanation or examples of the most common meaning today, the fourth.

The hypothetico-deductive approach (I shall abbreviate that adjective to ‘HD’) often requires first a readiness to make intelligent guesses. Then there must be the careful stating of a hypothesis, i.e. a proposition that could conceivably be true and is perhaps but not necessarily believed or seriously entertained by one-

self or some other person(s). After that comes the deduction of implied or consequential propositions: what would **have** to be true if this hypothesis were true? Then we try to find out whether they are true. If they are, that certainly does not prove the hypothesis to be true, just as (to use my favourite example) the truth of the proposition that its brakes work is required by the hypothesis that the bike is safe, but is far from being enough to guarantee its truth. Only if we have done so much testing that we reach a point where we can say that if it were false at least one of its implications would probably have shown up by now as false can we begin to think that it might very well be true, and even perhaps to believe it, though on the lookout still for any implication that proves false and therefore (normally) falsifies our hypothesis: a kind of progress indeed, expressed in “That can’t be right.”

“Since the HD method has been most often propounded and illustrated in relation to science, why not begin there?” I had the extreme good fortune at Melbourne High School, at 15 in 1951, to be introduced to these matters, and so to what was called Clear Thinking, by the book *Thinkers at Work*, in which Prof. A. Boyce Gibson and A.A. Phillips gave us chapters called “The Art of Guessing” and “The Art of Testing”. In the latter the excellent example is the work of Major Read of the American Army Medical Service, in (or from) 1900: he tested the hypothesis that yellow fever was carried by a particular species of mosquito. Bryan Magee summarizes Karl Popper’s exposition of HD thinking and testing, much but not only concerned with science, on pp. 57-68 of *Confessions of a Philosopher*; Sir Peter Medawar expounds it in *The Art of the Soluble*.

My omission of science is probably to be explained by the fact that I want to urge the relevance and even the indispensability of the HD method in the five areas I specified. However, one should first note that the reaction expressible in the words “That **can’t** be right!” may take other forms than “That hypothesis can’t be right”. It may be described as rejection, and of course rejection is not justified simply by its being rejection. When it is justified, that is often because one

is outraged (what a thought-provoking word!) by the violation of something one has rightly come to regard as fundamental to human goodness, such as respect for persons.

In his marvellously perceptive book *Belief* (1969), an Oxford philosopher, H.H.Price, asks his readers to imagine themselves as a man living in the sixteenth century who had been brought up to believe that heretics deserved capital punishment.

But then one day you leave your remote valley and go to London. And while you are there you actually witness the burning of a heretic. not only do you fail to approve of it. You go farther. What you feel is the strongest disapproval, which could be expressed by saying 'what is being done here is utterly abominable'.

That is on p.402, in the second of two lectures called "Moral Beliefs", in which Price develops what he calls an Attitudinarian Analysis of moral judgements. Both deserve to be read, and on the same page he draws a parallel:

Something rather like an empirical test has been applied to this general approval of yours, and it has not stood up to the test.

A great deal of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's book *Infidel* expresses reactions like that of the shocked observer of the burning of a heretic. But shock and outrage are no more self-justifying than is rejection. Such attitudes are felt by some Muslims to Ali, particularly when she denies the infallibility of the Quran or criticizes Muhammad himself. Hence arises the question "What **deserves to be** for me unquestionable, in that it is by reference to it that I am to recognize or decide how some question is to be answered?". 'Deserves to be', not 'is': so nothing is completely unquestionable. Plato's *Euthyphro* can be read as Socrates' attempt to enable Euthyphro to question theological and moral assumptions he had previously thought unquestionable.

I invite readers to study the 14th chapter of *Infidel*, called "Leaving God", and to notice that Ali, in Leiden, Holland, early in 2000, at 29 and about to graduate in politics, still thinks of herself as a Muslim, but with "all sorts of un-Muslim ideas" (p.263). As the chapter continues, she explains her successive changes of standpoint or orientation towards that religion up to the point in May 2002 when she realized that she had become an atheist. She became indignant when on TV an imam said that homosexuality was "a contagious disease that could infect children", and she then, in a published letter, not only opposed that view, but also held that

"the sexual morals of Islam can only lead to suffering" for some women (p.266f). When the planes were directed into the World Trade Centre, she could not accept the common view among liberals that it had nothing to do with Islam (268f). She knew many Muslims who were like, or would have sympathized with, 'Mohamed Atta, the hijackers' leader [who] had instructed them on "how to die as a good Muslim"' (269f). She found that Osama bin Laden had indeed drawn from the Quran hostile remarks against Jews and Christians (270f), and so she came to the view that to regard the Quran as an absolute authority was impossible for her, incompatible with the Enlightenment from which she, like the West generally, had benefited so much (238f, 272-5, 282). Hence she came to disbelieve in the existence of Hell and of Heaven (274, 281), and even of God (280-2).

Underlying HD testing when the hypothesis (or theory, or doctrine, or policy) is doubted, and reactions such as those of Price and Ali, and Socrates' procedure with Euthyphro, is the principle "**Seek and consider objections.**" Almost everyone is or would be happy to press that principle on someone with whom he or she disagrees! It is less attractive, but essential to truth-seeking as to fairness, when one's own beliefs are brought into question.

One valuable supplementary approach here, whether or not you are confident in holding this or that belief or attitude, is to take seriously the fact that, unless you do take objections to it and responding to them seriously, those who advance or are influenced by them are unlikely to be moved by what you say.

"... on every subject on which difference of opinion is possible, the truth depends on a balance to be struck between two sets of conflicting reasons." So Mill in *On Liberty* Ch. 2, in the first of the paragraphs (23-25) in which he urges the need to learn the grounds of one's own present opinions in contexts of open discussion with those who reject them. It would be more accurate to say not 'the truth' but 'the reasonable apprehension of or approximation to the truth'. He also points out that such discussion may lead one to recognizable goods such as abandoning one's opinion as false, allowing for truth in other views from which the truth in one's own opinion may be supplemented, and even grasping the significance of that opinion. (See the summary near the close of the chapter.)

Because I seek to maintain and advocate that Millian perspective, I am opposed to the approach, in his famous book *The World's Religions*, of Huston Smith, the American scholar and prolific author who

died at the age of 97 on the 30th of December 2016. He portrays it as to be descriptive of what he takes to be best in each religion. But, because such description is not coupled with attendance to objections, even to what he regards as best, he oversimplifies concerning the tenability of what he holds up for our admiration. So, in a rhetorical passage (p. 282 of the second and third editions), he not merely describes but commends the Judaic theism expressed in the prophets:

What are the ingredients of the most creatively meaningful image of human existence that the mind can conceive? Remove human frailty – as grass, as a sigh, as dust, as moth-crushed – and the estimate becomes romantic. Remove grandeur – a little lower than God – and aspiration recedes. Remove sin – the tendency to miss the mark – and sentimentality threatens. Remove freedom – choose ye this day! – and responsibility goes by the board. Remove, finally, divine parentage and life becomes estranged, cut loose and adrift on a cold, indifferent sea. With all that has been discovered about human life in the intervening 2,500 years, it is difficult to find a flaw in this assessment.

Consider the question “Given that you disbelieve in God, do you think of your life as ‘estranged, cut loose and adrift on a cold, indifferent sea?’”. It is not unlikely that someone who had earlier believed deeply and trusted in God might indeed say “Yes, sometimes, or something like that.” But a thoughtful atheism or agnosticism may go along with a propensity to wondering, in both senses of that word, and a delight in the development of human capacities for good, such as those that serious enquiry involves, and in fellowships (plural) that do not depend on religious belief as a condition of membership. What, it may be added, does ‘divine parentage’ mean? Isn’t ‘parentage’ a metaphor there? Doesn’t ‘Father’ in ‘Our Father’ involve a metaphor? Are there good reasons for applying it to describe a supposedly omnipotent being in a world in which such suffering and deterioration occur?

One great need in human life is to represent the position of another fairly – to oneself and to others. It is not only as a necessarily large part of a genuinely intellectual (a better word than ‘academic’) training that traditionally students have been asked to “present and discuss” the view of some eminent writer. Huston Smith virtually begins a section on Jesus’ teachings with the much-discussed question how far they were original, and continues:

Possibly the most balanced view is that of the great Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner. If you take the teachings of Jesus separately, he wrote, you can find every one of them paralleled in either the Old Testament or its commentary, the Talmud. But if you take them as a whole, they have an urgency, an ardent, vivid quality, an abandon, and above all a complete absence of second-rate material that makes them refreshingly new. (p.324)

The index tells the reader that Klausner was quoted on that page, the only one on which there is a reference to him. He was not. The “Eighth Book”, the last, in his *Jesus of Nazareth* (1922; English trans. 1925), is entitled “The Teaching of Jesus”. It consists of pp. 361-414. Ch. V of it, from 381 to 389, shows the many parallels. The nearest I can find to Smith’s last sentence is this one, which begins Klausner’s last paragraph (p.414) in the Book: the emphasis is mine.

But in his ethical code there is a sublimity, distinctiveness and **originality in form** unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code; neither is there any parallel to the remarkable art of his parables.

Smith does not even mention the severity and breadth of Klausner’s reasoned **rejection** of so much of the substance of Jesus’s message and even of his ethics. For that, read all of the Eighth Book. It is written by one who believed it essential to Judaism that it be concerned, as Jesus was not, with “national culture, the national state, and national life” (p.374). But the criticism goes wider, to the implications for his teaching of the “two-fold misapprehension of Jesus – the nearness of the kingdom of heaven and his Messiahship” (p.405: that and the following page sum up Klausner’s criticisms). Because a major concern of the teaching of Jesus was (as Albert Schweitzer also and rightly stressed) that he and his followers should proclaim an imminent change to the present order of things, one that did not in fact occur, Jesus inevitably, as Klausner maintains, gave too little attention to the ethics of ordinary and especially of family life, and, I add, of friendship, cooperation, breadth and depth and extension of education, and tolerance of the holding and expressing of different beliefs. Hence a religion that has involved so much intolerance and persecution, has included a Church that fell into and has maintained the terribly distorting mistake of requiring maleness and celibacy for priesthood, and has too often confused devotion to a good cause with self-abnegation. These objections are still too little considered.

In today's political discussions and parliamentary outbursts (seldom deserving the name of contributions to debate) how rare is the recognition of the truth of a proposition Mill regards as familiar:

In politics ... it is almost a commonplace, that a party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life; until the one or the other shall have so enlarged its mental grasp as to be a party equally of order and of progress, knowing and distinguishing what is fit to be preserved from what ought to be swept away. (*Liberty* Ch. 2, para. 36)

Tim Colebatch's excellent biography *Dick Hamer: The liberal Liberal*, presents a man who, as Premier of Victoria 1972-81, came close to that ideal. An underlying question in interviewing, as before voting for or supporting, a politician or candidate should be "How enlarged is his or her mental grasp of (at least) this or that subject?". One can say of mental grasp that it is enlarged by the exposure, often through discussion, of one's own and others' assumptions, and by hearing and closely considering objections to them.

Words I quoted from Mill near the end of p.2 also serve as a guide to truth-seeking in educational theory and practice. There is a "balance to be struck between two sets of conflicting reasons" on such questions as the prominence of both phonics as indispensable and (soon) of attention to "whole words" such as 'one'; kinds and amounts of homework to be required at this or that stage; the place and nature of exams; the combining of stated syllabus, large classes, small ones, and individual attention; the volumes and the requirements of teaching and research to be made of staff who are normally expected to do both.

It could be said to be a main theme of Sir Walter Moberly in his *The Crisis in the University* (1949), of which I wrote in our issue 2.2014, that university teachers needed a balance of both a "**detachment**" that enables and inwardly compels a person to consider fairly what has been or could be said for and against different views, and a **commitment**, not necessarily to one such view, e.g., Christian or atheist, but to the practice and promotion of serious discussion of "contentious issues", in particular those concerning politics, religion, and how best to live. He noted the rarity of that commitment, and hence of that kind of discussion, in the British universities he knew so well, and it is no more common today in Australian universities, in which we hear a great deal of cynicism, e.g. that students from overseas are "cash cows".

Such cynicism, and pressures of time and money, militate against serious discussion of anything, even of curricular work, and limit horizons to "getting through" and getting a job or promotion. The warning of Psalm 146, "Put not your trust in princes", might be extended to universities and even their colleges, much as one may wish them well and support them. There is seldom a commitment to **ongoing** discussion and to the promotion, partly one-with-one, of that mental development of many a person, younger and older, in reasoning and expression, and in the widening and deepening of their range of concerns, which will give them both confidence and capacity to engage well in thought about and discussion of contentious issues.

That commitment must be characteristic of Learningguild, in its teaching, its publications, its meetings and sustained friendships, and the nature and promotion of the examination for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression.

The word 'ethics', like 'history', has meanings of two kinds. It may be used to mean a particular type of study and discussion, but also that with which such study ought normally to be primarily concerned: for the former, principles to guide human character and behaviour, and for the latter, notable past situations, changes and influences in human life.

In ethics as a study there is a great need to attend to the elucidating and combining of general principles and particular examples. Many would think of Kant as concerned only with those principles, but there is a wonderful passage in the Methodology section of the *Critique of Practical Reason* in which he imagines the illustrating for a ten-year-old boy of the "moral catechism" he has already learnt that enjoins the impartiality and honesty which respect for humanity and for reason normally requires. The boy is enthralled and amazed by the story of "an honest man" who went on refusing to join in the calumnies against Anne Boleyn, in spite of all the inducements offered and penalties threatened by the agents of Henry VIII.

Finally, consider ethics as consisting largely of the actual choice of and adherence to principles, for groups and also for what I have called personal life. In 2016 our Philosophy Seminar attended to parts of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and T.H.Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*. I put the view that one great need is to **combine** devotion to persons and to good causes with that care, caution, balance and stability (Plato's *sōphrosunē*) which we can call moderation.

John Howes

The legacy of Barack Obama

HANS EISEN *responds to a Guardian Weekly article expressing dissatisfaction with President Obama's policy on Syria. Hans, a member of Learningguild, was formerly a company manager and in the 1980s Director-General of the Head of the Victorian Department of Industry, Technology and Resources.*

I begin from the views expressed by Natalie Nougayrède in the issue dated 30 Sept.-6 Oct. 2016, in an article entitled “The agony of Syria will be Obama’s legacy”, but also attempt a wider view of that legacy.

Nougayrède identifies two bases against which to assess Obama’s action or inaction in response to the war in Syria. The first is the “geopolitical realism” line which he chose, largely, she says, because it fitted with “his reluctance to get involved in another war”, reluctance based on the proposition “that US or Western security interests are not at stake in an intractable, far-flung civil war that can be more easily contained than solved”. The other is “the moral imperative line” advocated by the US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, based on the doctrine of “responsibility to protect”, according to which “a state’s sovereignty can be violated when a regime slaughters its own citizens”. Nougayrède suggests that these should not be seen as opposites, and says “there is a long list of missed opportunities that might have forced Assad to the negotiating table”.

Obama’s reluctance can be viewed against both his often-stated moderation of action by the USA on Syria and on international affairs more generally, and the suffering of the American people through the death and disablement of many of her soldiers and citizens in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The former has meant that the US has appeared increasingly isolationist during Obama’s period in office. The latter underlies his frequent claim to be acting “firstly in the interests of the American people”.

In an assessment of his legacy, is his policy on Syria to be considered a culpable failure? The criticism of isolationism can be judged, over time, in relation to the incidence of American involvement in wars not of its own making. On the other hand, being isolationist may have created a capacity to focus on the economy. That too requires a longer period for assessment.

The passage of time is also important in assessing the benefit obtained through Obama’s regard for the well-being of the American people. So too with the comparisons made between the losses incurred in Iraq

and Afghanistan and earlier wars in which the US was involved – the Vietnam War in particular. Over time the American people have turned away from military involvement abroad as they have considered that the risks involved are not germane to national security. On the other hand combatting terrorism has public support conditional on the use of indirect means such as drone attacks: another type of action endorsed by Obama and part of his legacy.

In contrast to Nougayrède’s is the view of Tony Badran, writing in *The Tablet*: “Obama’s Syria policy was the best among a set of bad options, and the sensible course of action for Americans, concerned by the five-year-long slaughter, is to keep cooperating with the Russians and forget any ideas about arming the rebels or going after Assad.” Once again, time will tell.

There are other bases for an evaluation of Obama’s legacy. However, for the immediate future some are overshadowed by doubts thrown up through the election of Donald Trump as the next President of the US. In his campaign Trump stated that he would, if elected, dismantle a number of the innovations which Obama may well have hoped would be recognised as achievements of his presidency, and hence his legacy. Obamacare in particular is one such innovation, hard to secure and now at risk. Others are related to immigration to the USA, climate change, Iran’s nuclear weapons, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement.

It may not be clear until after his inauguration in January 2017 whether or not Trump, as President, will act as he claimed he would. Some guidance may be drawn from appointments he makes to key positions in his administration.

The relative ease with which Obama defeated his opponents in 2008 and 2012 contributed to the huge expectations of him after each victory. Was his ability to govern overestimated? How well did he meet those expectations?

Achievements of Obama’s presidency likely to persist as his legacies include these. He, as the first

black President of the USA, and his wife demonstrated clearly that skin colour need not be any barrier to such appointments in the future. He restored the dignity of the Oval Office and of the “First Family” following the presidency of George W. Bush. He adhered to intellectual rigour, often regardless of the supposed emotional needs of the public. He demonstrated superior skills in each of the election campaigns in which he engaged. He contributed to substantial improvement of the American economy, which was in terrible shape at the time of his inauguration. He handled very well the financial crises that arose through the intransigence of the Republican-controlled Congress, during the second half of his first term and throughout the second term.

There are other achievements that deserve to be regarded as parts of a notable legacy, but are likely to be limited or nullified by Trump: acceptance of gay people for military service; improvement to in-hospital treatment of patients by doctors; removal of pre-existing ill-health as a barrier to insurance cover; and a 2000% increase in the generation of solar energy.

One wonders why there are not more constituents of his legacy, of greater significance in their impact on the US economy and population as a whole. There is little doubt that partisan division in Congress minimised his potential achievements. His inability to bridge the divisions between Republicans and Democrats severely restricted acceptance of the legislative programs he proposed, and led to his use of presidential decrees, which in turn contributed to even more opposition from the Republicans. They blocked the important changes he attempted to make in gun control. His evident empathy on each occasion of mass shootings could not match, in the view of his opponents, the financial and political strength exerted by the National Rifle Association (NRA). As a result his entreaties for limitations, in particular, on the issue and use of automatic guns were ignored by a majority in Congress.

Irrespective of whether or not Obama’s legacy is fully acknowledged at the end of his presidency, or over time, he will be remembered for some personal characteristics and behaviour. His integrity, honesty, high intelligence, charm, and sensitivity to others place him in those respects, in the writer’s opinion, as the outstanding President since Franklin D. Roosevelt. He is perhaps the finest speech-maker since Bill Clinton, and in the grace and charm of his family the most impressive since Harry Truman.

Engaging with *The Guardian Weekly*

We began this engagement in the previous issue, and Hans Eisen has maintained it in the article preceding this brief one.

The issue dated 16-29 December 2016 was a particularly rich and valuable one, and I shall recommend to several members that they borrow it, and of course make it available to anyone who asks. There is a sequence of articles on pp. 10-25 reviewing the year in different countries, beginning with an overview by Simon Tisdall. It includes this warning:

Trump’s stated support for the unilateral waging of war, for authoritarian governance, torture, indefinite detention without trial, and religious and racial profiling of immigrants and refugees could, if copied by other leaders, destroy the universal legal and human rights protections painstakingly erected via the UN system since 1945.

Amid so many reports of conflict, often violent, there is on p.16f a series of short accounts of five women and two men who in seven countries have done astonishing good things.

Jonathan Freedland says (p.26) that *Time* magazine should have named as Person of the Year not Trump but Putin, “almost all [whose] dreams have come true”.

There is a long article (pp. 34-8) describing the strange history in the US of the uses of the term ‘political correctness’, and ending “Trump is anti-political-correctness gone mad.”

Katharine Viner, editor-in-chief of the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, describes on p.56 their support, in their annual appeal, for three charities helping child refugees.

Shirley Jackson has a rather shallow article (p.12f) on Australian politics. She describes “the Australian Coalition’s agenda” [views of desirable policy?] as “rigidly divided”, adding the sentence, ill-ordered and ill-punctuated, “The choice is to either stay with the US, or to pivot to China.” No Coalition member wants to abandon the ANZUS alliance: the question is rather what relationship Australia should have with China.

Tom Phillips gives a good survey (p.13) of China, noting that “Free speech was increasingly curtailed”. Australia should be a forthright advocate of it.

German-speaking archaeologists in the Pacific

HILARY HOWES, a member of Learningguild and a member of the team of examiners for the Learning-guild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression, tells of her recent research in Germany.

Since March 2015 I have had the privilege of participating as a postdoctoral fellow in the ARC Laureate Fellowship project *The Collective Biography of Archaeology in the Pacific: A Hidden History* (CBAP), based at the Australian National University and led by Professor Matthew Spriggs. Some of the main aims of this project are:

- to re-evaluate current inadequate and unfruitful theories about the settlement of the Pacific;
- to rediscover the contribution of French and German scholars to the early development of Pacific archaeology;
- to recover the considerable amount of archaeological excavation that took place in the Pacific from the 1870s until WWII;
- to redress the neglect of the role of women archaeologists working in the region; and
- to learn more about the now largely forgotten agency and contribution of indigenous scholars and interlocutors to wider awareness of a Pacific past.

As an historian by training, I have found navigating the world of archaeology in some respects surprisingly challenging. Perhaps I had underestimated the differences in research methodology, specialist terminology, and theoretical developments between the two fields. However, the challenge to date has certainly been an enjoyable and fruitful one.

I spent just over five months of 2016 undertaking archival research in Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, visiting institutions in Basel, Berlin, Leiden, Munich and Münster. I particularly enjoyed my week in the archive of the Sacred Heart Mission House in Münster-Hiltrup, where I hoped to find documents related to Father Otto Meyer M.S.C., a German-born Catholic missionary who spent most of his life on Watom Island in the Bismarck Archipelago. Here, in 1909, he found “two fragments of vessels similar to pots or pitchers” on the beach near his mission station. His article describing this find is considered to be the first published description of what is

now known as Lapita pottery, the most recognisable material legacy of the Lapita people. These highly mobile seaborne explorers and colonists travelled from Taiwan to the Bismarck Archipelago, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa over the period 2000 BCE to 500 BCE; they are thought to be the original human settlers of Melanesia, much of Polynesia, and parts of Micronesia.

The archivist at the Sacred Heart Mission House, Sabine Heise, was keen to assist and very generous with her time. Her colleagues catered assiduously to my temporal welfare, insisting on bringing me coffee and biscuits when I arrived for the day’s work, and inviting me to share in their midday meal. I read and photographed numerous interesting documents: surprisingly lukewarm reports on Meyer’s progress as a priest-in-training, grateful letters written to him by European and North American beneficiaries of his ornithological collecting activities, even an early monochrome photograph. During a subsequent visit to Basel, I was fortunate enough to hold in my (appropriately gloved) hands the potsherds Meyer had found more than a century earlier. Striking fragments of brick-red, dove-grey and black pottery, incised with a great variety of intricately beautiful geometric patterns, they had been acquired by the Museum of Cultures in Basel in the 1970s from the Hiltrup Mission Museum through a private collector.

Further treasures came to light in the Berlin Ethnological Museum, where the curator of the Pacific and Australian collections, Dorothea Deterts, kindly produced for my inspection a number of shell, stone and coral artefacts found by the German ornithologist and ethnologist Otto Finsch in the ruins of Nan Madol. This monumental ceremonial centre consists of more than 100 artificial islets off the south-east coast of Pohnpei, eastern Micronesia, constructed between 1200 and 1500 CE from columnar basalt and coral boulders. The islets are linked by a network of canals, so that some refer to Nan Madol as “the Venice of the Pacific”. Its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List emphasises “the huge scale of the edifices, their technical sophistication and the concentration of megalithic structures [which] bear testimony to complex social and religious practices”. Though poorly known in comparison with the *moai* (stone statues) of Rapa Nui/Easter Island, Nan Madol has been a source

of enduring fascination for travellers from many lands. German-speakers featured prominently amongst these, partly as a result of German trading and colonial interests in Micronesia. In 1873-74, only a few years before Finsch's visit, the Polish-born collector Johann Stanislaus Kubary published the first detailed ground plans of Nan Madol's key sites, together with local oral traditions concerning their construction and use. At the University Library in Leiden, I read through some of Kubary's letters, obtaining glimpses of his extraordinary life and lonely death.

Clearly there is no shortage of material on which to base a history of German-language contributions to Pacific archaeology. On the contrary, I sometimes feel I am at risk of drowning in what the French call an *embarras de richesse!* However, I am slowly working through the mass of documents I have already transcribed, photocopied or photographed, and am in the process of planning a second period of archival research later this year. I hope to track down materials relating to Paul Hambruch, who conducted early archaeological excavations at Nan Madol as a member of the Hamburg South Seas Expedition of 1908-10; Father Wilhelm Schmidt S.V.D., a German-born ethnologist and founder of *Anthropos*, the journal in which Meyer and many of his fellow missionaries published; and Margarete Schurig, one of the first women in the German-speaking lands to obtain her doctorate in ethnology, whose dissertation *Die Südseeöpferei* ('Pacific pottery'), published shortly after her untimely death at the age of 36, quickly came to be recognised as the standard text on the subject, retaining its influence for decades.

A special issue of the *Journal of Pacific Archaeology*, featuring publications by members of the CBAP team, is due to appear later this year. In the meantime, <https://cbaphiddenhistory.wordpress.com> will provide updates.

Our website learningguild.org.au is maintained by Professor Stephen Howes of ANU, to whom we express our gratitude. Members are invited to become well acquainted with it, and draw the attention of their families and friends to it. Learningguild Letter 2.2014 deals with the nature of a genuinely tertiary education, in or out of a university, and takes seriously the difficulties in finding it today. It also has six pages on the remarkable couple Davis and Jean McCaughey.

Learningguild's day trip to Heathcote

XIN ZHAO is an Associate Professor of Education at South-West University, near Chongqing, in China. For a year ending in August 2017, he is a visiting scholar in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. A member of Learningguild, he has been studying English with John Howes, who happens to have visited his university in 2012 (see Lg L 2.2012, p.2f).

I have wanted to see something of rural areas and life in Australia. Fortunately Learningguild had a day trip to Heathcote on Saturday the 29th of October.

It is a small town in central Victoria, on the Northern Highway 110 kilometres south-east of Bendigo.

Seven Learningguild members came, including Lu, another Chinese academic. We were welcomed by Louise Joy, long a friend of John and Margaret, and her partner Daryl Grubb. We enjoyed a picnic lunch in a beautiful garden and had pizzas for dinner.

Pink Cliffs is a visually amazing place close to Heathcote. I wandered through intriguing mini-gorges and cliffs of fine pink clay. I checked Wikipedia and found that Pink Cliffs was created by early gold-mining activities: sluicing work in the 1880s revealed the "pink" hills. We found a variety of stones at this geological reserve including smooth ironstone with a distinctive volcanic appearance. It's a great area for bushwalking and photography, and for exploring the unique landscape, discovering wildflowers and wildlife: kangaroos, butterflies, and even snakes.

Many thanks for the hospitality of Louise and Daryl. I am very glad to have enjoyed this trip with other members of Learningguild. I hope to have another before I return to China.

"We conclude then that, at every research university, teaching should be valued as highly as research, and good teaching should be an equally important criterion for tenure and promotion. To expect faculty to be good researchers and good teachers is a demanding standard. Still, it is at the research university where the two come together, and faculty, at such universities, should contribute effectively to both."

Ernest L. Boyer, *College*, 1987, p.126.