

Learningguild Letter

1.2020

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

What are we to say about the obvious prominence, in the lives of millions of Australians, of drinks containing alcohol, and about how the abuse of alcohol can be minimized? Available at “ABC Shaun Micallef alcohol” is a series of three TV programs presented by the Australian comedian in July and August this year. His major declared question was a related one, also “deliberative”: what advice was he to give his teenage sons on whether or not to consume alcohol?

The series should be extensively referred to and studied, for example by senior secondary students. It ranges wide, dealing with numerous examples of over-consumption and its consequences. Memorable are the hospital scene of a drunk no more in control of himself and his bodily functions than a baby, and the coarseness of a rural car park gathering where people drink out of boots before the party starts. However, Micallef also appreciates the camaraderie that the shared drinking often promotes, there, and for a group of young female soccer players, and in another of elderly women for whom it brightens the afternoons.

In the first program, Micallef talks with Jack Thompson about the pressure to join in the consumption of alcoholic drinks, which the latter attributes to something long deep-seated in a not uncommon kind of Australian male, which he calls “aggressive egalitarianism”, and includes suspicion of the non-drinker. There is a long history of such disfavour of the abstainer: the peerless batsman Don Bradman referred to it when he said “There were those who thought I was unsociable because I did not think it my duty to breast at the bar and engage in a beer-drinking contest.” The third program does very well in its advocacy of **respect** for the choice made by non-drinkers. (Aren’t we supposed to be a tolerant people?) Micallef notes that non-drinkers are becoming more numerous among the under-30s, and mentions the increasing tendency of brewing firms to produce beers such as the Carlton Zero.

The third program is also notable for illustrations of the point that we can help ourselves to be moderate or

abstainers by belonging to a group that sets limits or is abstinent. So we hear of places such as Norseman in WA, groups-at-a-distance such as Sober in the Country and the movement Straight Edge.

It is, however, a weakness of the series that Micallef gives too much prominence to two personal factors: his own experience of intoxication in undergraduate years, and his dislike for the taste of alcoholic drinks. He exclaims “It’s awful!” and “It’s horrible!”. Someone who enjoys having an alcoholic drink, whether occasionally or often or too often, is likely to react to Micallef’s distaste by thinking “That just doesn’t apply to me, and you shouldn’t expect or hope that your sons will react to the taste as you do.” There is no attention to the experience of many within the millions that there are alcoholic drinks that can be consumed by them **in strict moderation** with pleasure, and admiration for the craft that produces them, under most (but not all) circumstances without danger to themselves or others. I had better state the practice of my wife Margaret and myself: we are occasional, cautious, always small-quantity, and appreciative drinkers of wine and cider. We do not drink with a view to euphoria. Gideon Meyerowitz-Katz argues cogently, in his article in *Guardian Australia* of 6 May 2019, that it is unreasonable to suppose that moderate consumption has in itself any health benefits.

In a hard-hitting statement of November 2017, headed “Why aren’t we saying we’re in an alcohol epidemic?” and available on Google, the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) recognizes how embedded in Australian society alcohol is and then says:

But the darker story is the problems alcohol fosters: interpersonal violence, long-term health issues, hits to workplace productivity, not to mention the huge burden alcohol places on our hospitals and systems.

Micallef covers all those except the third and adds the quarter of road deaths attributed to being over the legal limit, and the occurrence of suicide related to drinking to get drunk. (He talks with Elspeth Weir, the

author of *Wasted*, concerning the suicide or fall of her youngest brother.) A letter-writer in *The Age's* Green Guide said there was omission of the danger of addiction, but that was at least implied. There is also that of irresponsible use of money.

About ten minutes into the second program, Micallef has an unexplored remark that, I readily suppose, tells us much about him: “Our one job in life is to make sense of the world.” That is of course an exaggeration, unlikely to be uttered by any mother; but its intention is like that of saying “We must discover what are the best things that human life makes possible”, and he presents the consumption of alcohol as a distraction from such a quest. Often, if you drink a lot, “You get tedious and boring, and I do not like that at all.” By contrast, and this is the more noteworthy as coming from a professional comedian (but not only a comedian), he says “I like being in control of myself.”

We might find it helpful to begin by asking ourselves “Apart from meeting my basic needs in respect of food, liquid and sleep, what really matters to me, and why?” One main though partial answer is likely to be “Energy, health and delight”, an answer I implied in my letter of 1.2016, not only for the sense of well-being they yield, but because without them many valuable activities will be vitiated or not occur at all. So one can recognize the folly of allowing alcohol to threaten them, and therefore decide to consume it either moderately or not at all.

It is certainly important to be well and vividly aware of the health risks of immoderate alcohol consumption. They are tabulated very clearly on the website of the ADF, at “Drug Facts”. But, apart from fearing or being serious about ill-health and premature death, what motives can and should be adduced to justify moderation or abstinence concerning alcohol? Let us turn to the two most valuable parts of the European moral tradition: **aspiration to live the best life one can, and respect for others and for the human nature one shares with them.** The first stems especially from Plato, and the second from Kant, who was influenced by Jewish and Christian traditions. Our need is first to appreciate them and then to think how they can be made more effectual in ourselves and others.

Plato regards *sōphrosunē* as indispensable to living really well. That noun is hard to translate: candidates are ‘moderation’, ‘temperance’ and ‘self-control’. Those qualities imply one another, do they not? And they require and foster self-discipline. The first syllable in the word is explained in the great dictionary of Liddell

and Scott revised by Jones (hence “LSJ”) by reference to the adjective ‘*sōs*’, like our ‘safe and sound’. *Phronēsis* is wisdom or prudence, especially in practice.

Plato’s *Gorgias* is a marvellous dialogue partly because of the contrasts it draws vividly or implies, as involved in the supremely important choice of the way in which one should live (500c). The third of the three conversations is the most intense, in which Callicles, the third interlocutor, scorns moderation and justice, claiming at 492 that “luxury and indiscipline and freedom constitute excellence and happiness” (*eudaimonia*, see below), whereas Socrates insists on order and *sōphrosunē*, and at 491 has an expression like our ‘self-control’ that he explains as, he says, most people would, as being *sōphrōn* and master of oneself and in control of one’s pleasures and desires. At the end of that part (521-7) he returns to a word prominent in the second part, ‘*kolakeia*’, best translated by ‘pandering’. He concludes at 427c: “From every form of pandering, both to oneself and to others ... one must stay far away, and engage in rhetoric and every other activity always for a just end.”

In the first conversation, with the respected orator Gorgias, Plato depicts him as valuing rhetoric because of the power over others (452d) that the orator wields (he persuades them rather than teaching them anything about how things actually are). In the second, with the headstrong young man Polus, Socrates introduces his concept of *kolakeia* as embracing four activities: the cosmetics and even the cookery of his time, in contrast with physical training and medicine, and sophistry and oratory, in contrast with legislation and justice. The defining quality of *kolakeia* is that it aims at pleasure and gratification (462bc), whether for others (in order to win them over) or for oneself, rather than what is **best** (465a) – not just good, as the Penguin translation has it. That distinction is drawn again for Callicles at 513de, where I translate “there are two ways of treating both the body and the soul ... one concerned with pleasure, the other with what is best, in the one case gratifying, in the other striving.”

“... each of us who wants to be happy must pursue and practise self-discipline”; so the Penguin has it at 507c, where ‘happy’ is apt for ‘*eudaimōn*’ only if we take it in an old sense, which I paraphrase as ‘worthy of an ultimate congratulation’. I think ‘self-control’ is a better rendering for ‘*sōphrosunē*’: one pursues self-control, i.e., largely, “control of one’s pleasures and desires”, **through** self-discipline.

I once asked one of our sons, when he was perhaps about thirty, how he would explain that he was not a consumer of alcohol or drugs. Like Micallef, he spoke of his wanting not to lose self-control.

We need one or other of the forms of self-control called abstinence or sobriety if we are to make the best of our lives, and to do so is very different from having a life full of entertainment. Those two judgments are fundamental to the avoidance of alcohol abuse. But to have them as firm principles for the governing of one's life requires that one loves certain activities, and not because they are entertaining, or means to dominance, or to being superior to others. ("Teach him", said Lewis Carroll's father to a tutor, "that the love of excellence is far beyond the love of excelling.").

We should wherever possible choose, and where appropriate encourage others to choose, activities (whether in one's main work or outside it) in which to aim to do one's best and be at one's best are so satisfying, and often valuable to others, that one delights in them, and through self-discipline develops the self-control to avoid or resist anything that threatens them.

The word 'discipline' has come to have a strong flavour of the stern teacher or sergeant who imposes it on schoolchildren or lower ranks. 'Self-discipline' does not have that flavour, but can suggest a kind of grimness: "grim determination", we say. That was not so with the Latin '*disciplīna*', derived from '*discere*', counterpart of our 'to learn', and we preserve that meaning when we speak, for example, of the discipline of history. I think we should speak also of the joyful self-discipline involved in seeking to do one's best and be at one's best (compare, for the runner, to go flat out, or to keep to the right pace). One might think also of motherhood, or fatherhood, etc., or leadership, as a discipline, where the word's meaning is a difficult process of training oneself in virtues such as kindness and so patience; reliability and endurance; and combining any criticism or guidance with encouragement. The question "What do I find entertaining?" is a quite inadequate dissuasive against the abuse of alcohol, or of anything else; the realistic one is "What must I avoid if I am to be anywhere near my best at this or that activity which I value?"

There is no effective self-discipline without specific steps. Hence Dr Erin Lalor, Chief Executive of the ADF, says in relation to the widespread increase in alcohol consumption in the COVID-19 lockdown, "Even small steps such as introducing alcohol-free days into your week, or having one less drink a day, can have a

powerful impact." (Reported in Melbourne's *The Age*, August 9, 2020.)

One can indeed speak of alcoholism as a disease, but for many persons, especially young ones, it is possible to decline to start or continue on a path, and especially one of drinking to get drunk, that increases the risk of it.

Participation in a shared enterprise, and the friendship thus made possible, are great goods, as Plato brings out at *Gorgias* 507e-8a. One excellent motive for abstinence or sobriety is a readiness to avoid any behaviour that would harm a loved one, or anyone else; another is admiration for someone who, with such a quality and others, **lives well**, in the best sense of that expression.

That brings us to the other kind of motive for abstinence or sobriety, which is **respect for humanity**. Kant famously sums up "the practical imperative" of morality: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." The use of 'end' there is neither familiar to most of us nor easy to explain other than through the negative phrase 'never simply as a means'. Here an end is a being worthy of unconditional respect for his or her humanity, that is for the quality of being a human person.

There is rightly plenty of emphasis now in schools on respect. It has to be recognized that **respect requires restraint**, of desires and of impulses, and so self-discipline. This is not only about cross-gender respect, essential though that is, but also about respect for differences in family and cultural background and in interests, and a fundamental respect, as Kant says, for humanity. You and I are not just beings with a capacity for getting pleasure, or relief from anxiety, but able to use our powers of thought, observation and sympathy to build a better life for ourselves and increase the possibility of it for others.

Respect is far more than being "nice to people". The restraint it involves is a form of personal **strength**. We rightly speak of strength of character, or firmness of resolve, because it can be so easy to "give in" to inclinations or desires that need to be resisted, sometimes in situations of social pressure.

Yours in Learninguild,

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China: Continuity and Change

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No one individual can satisfactorily describe a nation of 1.4 billion people. I have visited China five times – once 32 years ago, in 1988; twice about 20 years later, in 2008 and 2009; and twice last year. I have a long-standing friend who has lived intermittently in China for many years, and now he and his family occupy a fairly upmarket apartment in a huge and booming Chinese city. Accordingly, most of my observations are based upon his and my experiences.

I shall begin by describing two ancient Chinese traditions, scholarship and medicine, and then outline three upshots which seem to have filtered down into present-day China: medical efficiency, consensus-based decisions, and tight government controls. Next I shall attend to two characteristics that have mostly disappeared during the last 32 years, reluctance to travel and capitalistic innocence, before focusing on overcrowding, one of China's ongoing predicaments. I shall propose four other problems that face China: sinking cities, government power, rule-bending, and unaffordable housing. Finally, there are five aspects of Chinese life from which we can all learn: excellent and affordable taxis, pragmatism, education, cash-free transactions, and technological innovation.

1. Ancient traditions

The wonderful People's Museum in Shanghai highlights the longevity of Chinese culture. Whereas children in Western educational systems are taught that the first cities in human history arose during the European Bronze Age about seven or eight thousand years ago, this Chinese museum actually displays an Asian bronze axe at least twice as old. Our preoccupation with Europe and the Near East seems to have generated a group delusion that civilized society began in the West when, in fact, Chinese civilization goes back much further. Sometimes we become so focused upon ourselves that we fail to understand how and when other cultures evolved, and so fail to appreciate how such cultures have developed traditions different from ours.

1.1 Scholars

One ancient Chinese tradition was a widespread reverence for classical scholarship. It is said that some peasants would attempt to lift themselves out of poverty by seeking to become a mandarin, a government

official. They would undertake an arduous journey to the capital in order to take an exam that tested their recall of an extraordinary number of Confucian texts. They endured great suffering and deprivation just for a slim chance of succeeding in this extremely competitive contest. It is said that many peasants who could not afford candles in their native village would study by the light of the moon.

1.2 Medicine

Another ancient tradition was for medical practitioners to pay people if they became unwell. This gave each medico an incentive to cure all of their sick patients as soon as possible. Surely most of us would approve of this. We would quite willingly support our family doctor or doctors by donating a small amount of money to them each week provided that whenever we became sick they ensured that we recovered as soon as possible. Of course, the Australian Medical Association would never allow such an arrangement, nor the companies whose drugs it prescribes, nor the pathology laboratories it uses, nor the medical insurance industry. So most of our health professionals actually have an incentive to prolong our treatment rather than shorten it. But the modern Chinese medical system is like ours rather than their ancient one.

2. Continuing traditions

Some of China's ancient practices appear to have partially permeated down into present-day actions. I give examples of three kinds.

2.1 Medical efficiency.

Thirty-two years ago, in July 1988, I found myself stranded in the northern city of Shenyang, Manchuria, and I stayed opposite a small hospital for elderly men. Through its windows it was possible to peer. By contrast with Australian hospitals, most beds had nobody in them. In fact, large numbers of patients at this hospital, all of whom had plaster on their ears and elsewhere to cover their acupuncture marks, would walk to the end of the street each morning in dressing gowns and slippers, and then spend all day sitting and socializing on a large traffic roundabout. To me, they all looked much healthier than our patients do.

Thirty-one years later, in July 2019, I was at a conference in Wuhan in the middle of China, the city that has since gained notoriety as the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak. It has a population of 7.5 million and should possibly be the capital of China given its central position and its role as an educational centre – it has no less than 100 universities. It was once a major transit hub where Chinese tea was assembled and transferred onto boats, to be floated several hundred kilometres down the river to Shanghai and loaded onto the Trans-Siberian Railway to be sold eventually in Europe.

On my first night a mosquito bit me on the thumb and I woke up several times in pain, which subsided by the morning. But over the next two days my thumb turned red, blue and swollen to the point where the conference organizers, on seeing it, sent me straight away, along with a graduate student as an interpreter, to Wuhan General Hospital.

That hospital was predictably awash with people, but it was also super-efficient. The lady at the reception desk said I needed a blood test, an x-ray and an ultrasound, at which point she promptly left her computer, walked around her desk, and extracted blood from my arm. I then went to the x-ray room and the ultrasound machine in turn; we came back two hours later to get all of the results; a rather uninterested young doctor said that something must have bitten me; he sent us to the pharmacy to collect antibiotics that ultimately fixed up my thumb. In Australia, complaints from many sides would follow if such a blood test were to occur. Perhaps China's ancient traditions have kept in check the legal and financial power of both a medical establishment and its numerous beneficiaries.

2.2 Consensus decisions

Thirty-two years ago, in 1988, I was unable to obtain a train ticket to take me from Shenyang back to Beijing. The passenger rail system at the time was fairly primitive and reserved mainly for Chinese citizens visiting family members. Nevertheless, I stayed in Shenyang several days longer than planned while I tried very hard to get my hands on a ticket to Beijing. Each morning a young man would casually tuck my passport into his back pocket and wander down to the main railway station in order to spend all day, as he put it, "fighting for a ticket". But he never succeeded, and so eventually I had to fly back to Beijing as all foreigners were supposed to do.

My impression was that neither this young man nor I would have succeeded had we stormed down to the crowded station and demanded a ticket in an individualistic, frontier-society type of way. In China I would

only get a ticket if someone spoke to someone else, who then spoke to another person, and so on. If the consensus amongst this collective was that I should receive a ticket, then I would. If not, I would have no chance.

In my opinion China has always had to function this way. With 1.4 billion people, it would simply lead to anarchy and chaos if individuals were able to get their way by making strident demands. Its densely settled, cooperative, rice-growing culture, which progressed from individualistic hunter-gathering so long ago, demands that events should proceed in a consensual, precedent-guided, iterative fashion. The Western democratic approach might simply be too unwieldy in such a crowded land.

2.3 Tight government controls

Yet the ancient tradition of a strong, centralized bureaucracy, persistent throughout much of Chinese history, ensures that governments can be very decisive when they have to be. Indeed, government power has been amplified during the post-1949 Communist era. More than half a billion people had to be lifted out of poverty urgently, and so some projects had to be completed very quickly, such as the construction of China's modern railway system and the housing of hundreds of millions of labourers migrating from rural villages to the booming industrial cities.

During the SARS scare in 2009, the Chinese government built a special field hospital to which they proposed to send people for treatment and so contain the virus. It contained 1,000 beds and was built, complete with operating theatres, beds and all facilities, within just one week, a truly remarkable achievement.

It was surpassed recently in Wuhan where two COVID-19 hospitals were built in six days each, with a decisiveness that can be achieved only through absolute state control. In fact today, with face-recognition-based surveillance, and the government's emerging social credit system for citizens and companies, government's power to secure rapid compliance has been boosted. Even by 1988 that power was obvious. The young man who casually took my passport to the railway station each day would sometimes not return to the hotel until after 10 pm, and so one night, paranoid at the prospect of his losing my passport and stranding me in Communist China without identity, I made a fuss with the hotel's management and demanded to know when he would return. An old man who spoke better English took me aside and told me not to worry, saying "If that young fellow loses a foreigner's passport, he will never work again." Suitably reassured, I had to concede that

here at least was one advantage of being in a tightly controlled state.

3. Bypassed traditions

In other ways China has changed massively since I first visited in 1988. In that decade, the central government began to transform the national economy into the system known as “state-sponsored capitalism” – the system which has enabled China to become the world’s factory. Some of the old attitudes and practices were beginning to wane by 1988 and have since disappeared. In this section I will describe two of them – reluctance to travel and capitalist naivety.

3.1 Reluctance to travel

In 1988 I noticed that very few people travelled for holidays and recreation. In the general absence of a concept of tourism, it was difficult to make any arrangements for seeing other parts of the country. After much effort I did manage to find a state-employed travel facilitator, but her office was up some back stairs and along a dark corridor. Even after twenty minutes of discussion she could not understand why I would want to sit on a train, sightsee out of the window and visit the old Russian coal-mining city of Harbin in the far north. Eventually she said that if I showed her a letter from my hotel saying that I was indeed a genuine tourist, she might be able to get me a one-way ticket to Harbin. I have never managed to visit Harbin.

This attitude has changed. There is now much more internal tourism and free movement for foreigners. Chinese people are now very willing to travel on trains for holidays both within their own country and overseas.

3.2 Capitalist naivety

In 1988 I was struck by an article I read in a Chinese English-language newspaper. It praised a local farmer who was so wealthy that, unlike all his neighbours, he owned a tractor. He was praised as a fine example of someone who had fully embraced the new spirit of private enterprise and market competition that was beginning to sweep across the nation. It was explained how during winter this farmer would make the earth above his water-melon seeds unnaturally warmer by sheltering them in small tents, placing candles in these tents and covering the earth with straw. His melons would ripen earlier, so he could sell them for an inflated price at the market fully two weeks before his competitors. He published all of this in the local press. No doubt he lost his competitive advantage the next season. In today’s China, capitalism’s rule “Never give away a trade secret” has surely been well learned.

4. Overcrowding

Overcrowding has been a persistent problem through much of Chinese history. The huge population has always been confined to a relatively small area. China is predominantly a river-based nation in which people live mostly in the lowlands where rice and other crops grow best. The more heavily wooded hills and mountains are regarded as the home of ghosts and spirits, and such places are only useful for burying the dead on the gentler slopes. Trees, therefore, can be a symbol of death and bad luck. This possibly explains the absence of trees around the houses built by Chinese people in my own otherwise leafy street in Melbourne.

Moreover, in southern and central China it is so hot and humid for much of the time that three crops of rice can be harvested per year. Such a capacity to feed people does much to explain the emergence of the billion-plus Han Chinese people in China today. One upshot has been the government’s encouragement of migration to peripheral regions traditionally settled by taller people, such as Manchuria, the west, the far northwest and, possibly, Tibet (I have never been to Tibet). I did manage last year to visit one such region when I spent a weekend at a university in the city of Lanzhou.

The flight directly to the north-west from Wuhan, which is in the centre of China’s lowlands, takes two hours. The city is clean, has a population of three million, and houses a very modern and completely residential university. Five thousand feet above sea level, its 25 degrees and clear skies were a welcome relief from the oppressive summer heat, humidity and air pollution in the centre and south.

Lanzhou sits next to the famous loess plateau, so named from the yellow loess soil which is fertile enough to have sustained civilization for many thousands of years. Erosion of this yellow soil gives Lanzhou’s river its name – the Yellow River. It flows hundreds of kilometres to the sea and is referred to as the mother of China.

The city’s airport is 80 kilometres by road from the city centre, across the loess plateau, and all along this route there are rapid land rehabilitation, amusements of the Las Vegas or Disneyland type, water parks for rich people, and new towns of forty-storey apartments to accommodate manufacturing workers who have been subsidized to migrate there from the traditional Han Chinese heartland. In short, Lanzhou and its hinterland are booming, just like many other parts of China.

But China’s perennial problem of overcrowding is evident even in this remote and relatively less populated

outpost. There is a mountain at the edge of Lanzhou, to the top of which my host and a young student interpreter took me for a spectacular view of both the Yellow River and an impressive sunset. It was a Saturday evening, too many people had the same idea, so the one road on the mountain became gridlocked with traffic. Our Uber taxi took four hours to cover ten kilometres from the mountain top back to the city.

It is probably no different today in many other parts of China. On the three-hour, thousand-kilometre train journey I had taken from Shenzhen to Wuhan, it seemed that every time I looked out of the window a new city of densely packed, forty-storey apartment blocks was rising out of the countryside. I have never seen another nation building such high-density neighbourhoods so quickly and on such a grand scale.

Once the novelty of newness wears off, the residents in these high-density living environments might become resentful. Although some will argue that Chinese people are used to living close together, surely they have never been forced to live so close. To Westerners at least, that people should live so near one another, like battery chickens, seems so unnatural that in the long term it could become a source of great angst. For example, my friend's apartment is up in a forty-storey block that is just one of the towers comprising his typical gated community. Although these surround a garden area, an underground car park, an indoor and an outdoor swimming pool and a circular walking track, its density of residents is surely too high. My friend often plays a foreign ball-game in the garden area with his children and, at present, curious people stop to watch. But the children are already beginning to hit the ball into prohibited areas, and when they grow stronger that is likely to cause friction between them and other residents.

5. Other possible problems

5.1 Sinking cities

Having arrived at the conference in Wuhan last year, I noticed that the very first presenter on the grand stage was an eminent Chinese professor. He pointed out that many of the booming, high-density Chinese cities are actually subsiding. That is, they are sinking into riverine mud. This is a potentially catastrophic problem of which I was previously unaware. The lowlands simply cannot tolerate overdevelopment at such massive densities.

5.2 Government power

Western media frequently report that China's ultra-

controlling government often suppresses information and basic human rights. If this is true, history suggests that people will not tolerate it forever. In fact, there could eventually be enough Chinese students and others who have been so affected by their education in the West that they will agitate for greater freedom of expression and movement.

Against this, however, it should be remembered that some people said the same about the Chinese residents of Singapore where, for a long time, a repressive legal system meant that one could actually be flogged in public for minor misdemeanours such as littering. There has been no revolt. As suggested above, Chinese conditions and culture might actually rule out democracy as we know it in the West.

If there is a revolt, the sheer power of the current regime will enable it to resist strongly, and so there is likely to be horrific suffering on both sides. Warning signs of possible future strife have already occurred. President Xi is now in his position for life. Unlimited tenure did not end well under Chairman Mao. Most people believe that the Cultural Revolution was a disaster. Next time, if there is one, it might be even worse.

5.3 Rule-bending

Even though its government is extremely powerful, like most other political systems the Chinese is not without some corruption. There has recently been considerable publicity in the West about some bureaucrats' illegally stealing land from Chinese peasants. I do not know whether or not that is true or how widespread it is. I do know that within one booming Chinese metropolis, with its massive population and wonderful underground railway system, a major new subway line has been built to service the side of the city opposite the side where the concentration of major jobs is. The result has been intolerable crowding on an old but hopelessly inadequate metro line, and traffic gridlock on the roads. Some people say that this happened simply because of the undue influence of one powerful party official. Such rule-bending could become a growing problem for China in the future.

5.4 Unaffordable housing

A less-known issue is China's growing crisis in housing affordability. Last year I shared a car from Wuhan railway station with a leading expert on Chinese development and planning. He pointed to the huge number of forty-storey apartment blocks lining the arterial road we were travelling along, and said that most of those apartments were empty. According to him,

young people were still unable to move into them because they could not afford the prices asked.

This seems strange to us in the West, where any oversupply automatically leads to a drop in prices. Chinese people attach great prestige to owning an apartment, even if it is an empty concrete shell, and so they are reluctant to reduce their asking price, sell their apartment, and lose the security of their investment. Clearly, different ways of thinking in a different culture have led to what to us is a strange problem. But I was assured that it is a real and growing concern and its solution will require drastic and extremely expensive government intervention.

6. Achievements

I now identify what I believe to be five good things about modern China. They are taxis, pragmatism, education, a cashless economy, and technological innovation.

6.1 Taxis

China is possibly the only country I know where state control is so strong that the taxi drivers do not try to take extra money from you whenever they can. Fares have always been low and they are always automatically printed onto paper that rolls out from the meter. There is always a written record and never any argument about the price. This applied in Shanghai in 2008 and it applies there and elsewhere today.

In fact, a large proportion of the taxi cabs in one city are beautiful, four-wheel-drive vehicles which are not only very clean and extremely comfortable but also noiseless: all of them are electric. Drivers charge their vehicle's battery overnight, and that gives the taxi about eight hours of life. After a two-hour recharge at the central charging station during the day, drivers can run their vehicle for several more hours.

6.2 Pragmatism

The "can do" spirit evident in Wuhan General Hospital and government decisiveness spill over into aspects of daily Chinese life. For example, my friend's youngest child is obsessed with cars, so he is very happy whenever he and his older siblings drive the toy electric hire-cars amongst commuters and shoppers walking on the three-deck shopping mall next to the metro station outside their apartment complex. Children of all ages are allowed to do such driving.

It is hard to imagine such an activity being permitted in Australia. Occupational Health and Safety would no doubt quote a by-law that prohibits such dangerous nonsense; older shoppers would complain to their local council about their fear of being hit by a slow-

moving electric toy driven by a child; the fire department would probably object; retailers would claim that the cars are frightening customers away; and so on. Hence in many respects Chinese people and children are freer, at least day to day and locally, than we are here in the over-regulated state of Victoria. It is showing symptoms, in my opinion, of becoming a "nanny state".

6.3 Education

Even though the well-known Chinese obsession with education possibly stems partly from China's scholastic traditions, a perhaps more important cause is the country's population of 1.4 billion. With so much competition, it is vital for any individual to gain a good education, if he or she can, in order to succeed in life. Education is everything. The downside is, of course, that children are under considerable pressure within the Chinese education system. But the considerable upside is that such an emphasis on education leads to a more reasonable and sophisticated society that functions better. Obsession with education is likely to benefit China for generations to come.

6.4 A cashless society

At least in the cities, China has actually achieved something that we in the West have long talked about but never attained, a cash-free economy. Buyers pay for virtually all retail purchases by keying the price into their smartphone, which they then use to scan the barcode on the wall of the shop. Their phone's WeChat software instantly and electronically transfers money from the buyer's account to the seller's, and, simultaneously, generates a voice message in the seller's phone telling him or her the amount of money just transferred.

Of course, this requires all citizens to have a smartphone and be able to use it, and many retailers have realized that if customers' phone batteries go flat they will lose sales. Accordingly, at the front of many shops there are free docking stations for people to recharge their phones so that they can keep buying.

There is no choice about this. My friend was recently visited by an Australian lady whom he had helped in business and who wanted to show her appreciation by buying him a cup of coffee. He told her that this would be impossible because she had only cash. She did not believe him, but sure enough, when she tried to pay, the proprietors said that they had not seen cash for some years and certainly would not be able to provide the correct change. She then tried to get the right amount of money from the Seven-Eleven store downstairs, but here too there was not sufficient cash on hand to help. So she simply gave up.

6.5 Technological innovation

Tight Chinese government control over resources and processes has generated a number of innovative technological achievements. These include the pre-2009 431-kilometres-per-hour train which rushes passengers over the thirty kilometres from Shanghai airport to the edge of the central city in just seven minutes and twenty seconds. It is the fastest commercial train in the world. In fact the route is too short for the train. It can sustain its full speed for only about thirty seconds, after which it must slow down in order to stop in time. It has no wheels, but floats just above the rails by means of opposing electromagnets. Friction is minimized, so such spectacular speeds can be reached.

Another major achievement is Shanghai's off-shore container port, the world's largest. It was built from about 2008 on a rocky outcrop 32.5 kilometres out into the ocean, and is connected to the mainland by a road bridge built across the open sea.

7. Conclusions

In summary, some ancient traditions, such as innovative medical treatment, consensus decision-making and tight government controls, seem to be still reverberating within Chinese society today, whereas others, like attitudes towards tourism and capitalism, have largely disappeared over the last 32 years.

China's perennial problem of overcrowding persists. It has generated unforeseen upshots such as sinking cities and, paradoxically, unaffordable housing. Ultra-high-density living might even one day generate civil strife if a better educated and outward-looking populace begins to demand a relaxation of government restriction and less rule-bending.

On the other hand, the consensus nature of an ancient, cooperative, rice-growing culture might ensure that democracy as we know it never fully takes root in China. But if it is widely demanded the result will probably be very ugly, given the extremely strong state power which officials will be reluctant to surrender without a struggle.

Meanwhile it should be noted that China's long-lasting, settled and centralized culture has spawned some exemplary practices. These include first-rate taxi services, an indifference towards unnecessary red tape, the pre-eminence of education and a truly cashless economy.

Indeed, on a day-to-day local level, Chinese people are in some ways freer than those of us who live in an increasingly rules-bound environment, and Australians can certainly learn from this. We can also learn from

many Chinese technological achievements such as clean-energy transport, super-fast trains and gigantic automatic container ports.

Learningguild Letter and Set D of our Documents (both of which can both be found at our website learningguild.org.au) will, we intend, have further description and discussion of China. Articles and letters would normally appear in the former. Attention may be drawn, with brief comment, to books, articles, television programs, etc., that readers have found illuminating by sending references to them for inclusion in Set D.

We believe that no country, and certainly not Australia, should object to informed criticism of it by outsiders. Our infliction of delay and harsh conditions on many asylum-seekers deserves such criticism.

International students now in Australia deserve, from governments and universities, more generous aid than they are now receiving. In their own interests as well as those of others (including companionship), NESB students, i.e., those with a non-English-speaking background, should be very clearly informed, before and when they arrive, what level of English is looked for and from what books etc. they can acquire it by their own study. I wrote in detail about this in *Lg L 1.2012*, with Chinese students especially in mind, after a visit to China in that year.

We send greetings to our four Chinese members, and look forward to having more.

John Howes

Towards a Philosophy of Tourism

JOHN DRENNAN holds five Master's degrees and seventeen other degrees, diplomas and graduate certificates in many different fields. He has taught in Australia and other countries (see his second paragraph), specializing in history and English. He has developed this article from a talk he gave to our Sunday Meeting on the 21st of June 2020.

My thinking about tourism began more than 80 years ago while I was growing up in the several historic edifices that made up the guest house run by my family and founded by my great-aunt Susan McMahon (1860-1948). Tales and expressions of opinion by elderly relatives and guests, along with proto-exploration of the edifices, and tasks cleaning and repairing them, led me to a stream of awareness and investigation that transcended the dichotomy of person/place and has continued ever after. It survived the absurdities of institutional "education", and even gained a little useful input from them. Much of the story of that stream is outlined in my diaries (from 1944, and complete for every day in bound volumes from 1959).

Touristic travelling has been a smallish but important part of that process, taking me to six continents and seventy-five countries, with some years of living and working (mainly teaching) in England, Sicily and Saudi Arabia, and shorter periods in Berlin, Iceland and Denmark. As one whose main area of learning is philosophy, with special reference to its relationship to other fields of investigation, I have long been concerned to develop a philosophy of tourism (especially in the sense of "examining it philosophically").

Interestingly, my diverse thoughts and convictions thereon since c.1940 somehow merged and crystallized in my mind while meditatively lingering – alone and able to concentrate without distraction – in the Alhambra (in Spain) in 1963. My extensive travels and meditations since then have increasingly confirmed those realizations.

The words 'tourism' and 'tourist' have acquired some negative connotations in recent decades – because of the (alleged or actual) superficiality of some tourists – and 'travel' and 'traveller' are often preferred. But these are too broad for what we are talking about. You may travel for a multitude of reasons, e.g. work or commerce or migration. So I prefer to keep 'tourism' to denote the activity under discussion, viz. travelling around for pleasure and/or recreation and/or for study, self-education and understanding of the world and its people.

This matter of definition is basic to any philosophical consideration and its practical application. The concept and reality of "tourism" are not laid down by God or nature or logic. Rather, following some sparse ancient and medieval precursors, they developed historically during the last 250 years; and the concept's instantiation is conditioned by economic and other circumstances. Whereas botany is distinguished from zoology within the broader field of biology, or geometry from other areas of mathematics, 'tourism' exhibits considerable definitional fluidity and demarcational fuzziness within the field of travel.

In making practical touristic decisions you should, I think, distinguish the main purpose(s) of your travel (from those mentioned above), though others are sometimes also relevant. But do not necessarily reject all established practices for which you cannot immediately discern some purpose. And do not denigrate the choices of others with different specific objects or interests in their (partly) touristic travels, e.g. camping, cruising, nature study, charitable activities, gastronomic ones, festival attendance, life-event celebration, etc. And remember that the idea of tourism overlaps with some other types of travel, such as pilgrimage and short-term residence. Indeed, possibly the best kind of touring occurs when combined with some such extra-touristic activities. (I normally take with me, and sometimes read, a book not specially related to places visited.)

There are no overriding tourism-specific principles to be regarded as obligatory. Instead there is an overarching recommendation that you should examine your purposes and plans, perhaps in a Socratic way. Rather than principles, there are parameters involving choices for you to make.

One involves choosing between intensive and extensive, or finding some combination thereof. With six weeks to spend in France, do you stay in one place, and, if so, which? Or tour the whole country? Or something in between? It is largely your purposes that should be decisive here. Incidentally, don't denigrate very short visits. These can meaningfully enhance your

understanding of a place, even a country, about which you have previously read extensively.

Another parameter concerns goal and journey, exemplified by pilgrimage. Is the journey, say to Santiago, merely a means of getting there? Or is it the journey that is all-important, the goal being merely an endpoint? My own answer is to value both in conjunction, not as somehow opposed. To do otherwise is to succumb to a mania. Today, as ever, there are manias in many departments of life, e.g. for connectivity and collaborative activity – in religion, education, business administration, and architecture (e.g. indiscriminate planning of open offices). The manias often backfire. And there are “anti-manias”, e.g. against “dualism”. You can see here how touristic opinionation often mirrors that of life more generally.

Other parameters concern routes and timetables. It is useful to consider different ways of travelling between places in a country or region, e.g. one after another or radiating from a temporarily fixed base. This is best done in conjunction with timetables. Another simple example: if one day you visit the hills from Rome, could you return a different way, possibly stopping briefly *en route*? (But also consider the advantages of returning by the same route.) Could you return later than planned, if that unexpectedly became desirable? These are very simple examples of something with a much broader application: route- and timetable perusal, a part of travel preparation. Far from being, as is sometimes absurdly claimed, constrictive or preventive of spontaneity and desirable change of plans, it is quite the opposite. It promotes such spontaneity by indicating, and indeed expanding, the practical limits within which that can be exercised.

Now some personal reflections. Above all is my repeatedly confirmed conviction that it is best (for me anyway) to travel alone, free from the distractions and restrictions imposed by organized tour groups or companions, however relevant, informative and wise their discourse might be. Alone, in one day, I can see twice or three times as much as when thus restricted, and, more importantly, I can see it in a more leisurely, deeper, and more memorable way. My memories of those few places I visited with a directed group, or even with a companion, are mostly blurred, whereas those of the great majority of places visited, alone, are vivid, comprehensive, and lasting.

There are two reasons for this. First, on arriving at a new town, with maps and a suitable guidebook etc., my first task is to learn its topography, transport system

etc. It is like learning to swim. You have to do it for yourself. Mistakes are made, of course, but that is part of the learning process; and the results are far superior to those of being taken by the hand or having to cooperate with a companion, however competent and cooperative he or she might be. Secondly, with fellow-travellers your basic immediate society and communication is with them; alone, it is more likely to be with local people. One advantage of staying at Youth Hostels – I’ve stayed at 226 worldwide, in addition to about 200 hotels etc. – is meeting people (these days not only youngsters) in the evening, often people with serious interests to discuss. Another advantage that connects you with local life is buying your own food at markets etc., for self-cooking at the hostel.

Touring alone affords advantages parallel to those pertaining to reading a book, normally done alone, avoiding the poor comprehension and anxiety that would result from hurrying to avoid keeping your co-reader waiting to turn the page, and able to linger over passages, sometimes read more quickly, look back to some pages, pause to meditate or refer to another book, etc.

I specially value the freedom to approach a building of interest from a distance, to peruse the exterior, and its context. Almost invariably others will rush you to the entrance, often allowing no exterior viewing at all. One valued memory, from early 1959, is of walking the four miles from the Croscombe hostel to Wells Cathedral, viewing it looming ever larger. Usually far less time is needed: two or three minutes often suffice.

Visiting a museum or art gallery I like first to take an exploratory walk around the whole interior, getting an idea of its contents. Then I can select what exhibits to view more carefully, within time constraints. I like to spend at least half a day at a cathedral, if possible attending a service. (I have attended Mass at almost five hundred Catholic churches worldwide, and a good number of services at churches etc. of other denominations and religions.)

Ideally you should speak the languages of places visited. And architecture etc. should be viewed as, *inter alia*, a kind of language. But inability to speak a place’s language should not deter you from visiting it. Often you can have better rapport with local people through English (or your main language), if they also speak it reasonably well, than by struggling with a merely rudimentary knowledge of their language. Incidentally, the present indicative is possibly the least useful form of verbs. Try to remember how to form the conditional and subjunctive forms, and the words for ‘if’, ‘tomorrow’, ‘after’, ‘perhaps’, and ‘certainly’.

Nothing above should be taken to denigrate travel in groups or pairs. Considerations of safety, family arrangements and obligations etc. often make lone travel impossible or inadvisable. And many remote places can hardly be accessed other than by organized group tours. Many tour operators are trying to eliminate undesirable features of their tours. My recommendation, rather, is that group and companioned touring should be adapted as far as possible so as to approach the ideals

exemplified by the possibilities of lone travelling outlined above. Some married couples and many pairs of twins can think and act almost as one person. Pairs or groups often travel with purposes related more to interpersonal communication rather than primarily to the places visited and their inhabitants. Nature travel with children, emphasizing ecology, is especially to be commended. Finally, it is instructive to revisit places in different seasons, and after a lapse of time.

Positive Education at Geelong Grammar: the story so far and a response to criticism

JOHN HENDRY *taught at the school for thirty-six years and was particularly concerned with student welfare. He was one of those who planned and introduced Positive Education there, from which it has spread to other schools. He is now a leader in the work of Relationships Victoria.*

Positive Education is the adaptation of the tenets of positive psychology to education, particularly primary and secondary schooling. Kay Redfield Jamison, Professor of Psychiatry in the School of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University and Honorary Professor of English at St. Andrews in Scotland, has suggested that positive education has called psychology back to the wide-ranging and profound interests of David Hume and William James. This movement has promoted a greater interest in and understanding of passion, imagination, and the nature of human greatness, as well as attending to those inhibitions that deny many the chance of living a rewarding and fulfilling life. Jamison has also reported that in the last two decades the positive psychologists have brought new life and better science to the study of psychology. The study of positive emotion, happiness, excellent and optimal human functioning is now well established.

She credits Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi with steering the profession back towards aspects of human nature which enhance life and productivity, capacities that might one day prevent mental illness, not simply contend with it once it occurs. "Our message", these two wrote in *The American Psychologist*, "is to remind our field that psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best. Psychology is not just a branch of medicine concerned with illness or health; it is much larger. It is about work, education, insight, love, growth, and play." Professor Jamison considered their statement as "an eloquent call to the field".

Geelong Grammar School was concerned about the "social indicators" in Australia, for adolescents in particular. Mental health challenges were on the rise and many were in a fog of mental ill-health reaching from being anxious to self-harm, from being less resilient to losing faith in themselves and, for increasingly many, to suicide. The methods used to address these challenges were failing. The Black Dog Institute and Beyond Blue were in existence and Headspace was embryonic but growing. Geelong Grammar looked world-wide for approaches to address this concern with "student wellbeing" and to ensure that young people could do better than just coping. It was agreed to investigate positive psychology.

Martin Seligman was brought to the School to address staff, the School Council, and other interested parties, some of whom were from Australian universities. All this was the beginning of a process of developing a Student Wellbeing Centre at the School, The Handbury Centre, which was a new site for both the senior gymnasium and the School Medical Centre. Significant funds were raised and the idea was to create a centre focused on what Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi had requested of the field of psychology, not only to deal with "misery", as Seligman put it, but to strengthen the lives and confidence of all. The School contracted with Penn University to begin a serious adaptation of positive psychology to education. Some similar initiatives had begun in the United Kingdom, America and Australia in 2004. Seligman brought his family on sabbatical for six months and enrolled his children in the School. He also brought a team of academics and trainers to begin by training the entire staff, and some special guests, more

than 150 in number, for nine days in January 2008. This was a voluntary training session for staff, but all attended. All “bought into” what was seen by all as a most responsible education and life-enhancing initiative. Within this arrangement Seligman had selected two “master teachers”, Randy Ernst and Mark Linkins, who spent six months each living at the School and working closely with all staff. The first definition of Positive Education was determined under Randy Ernst’s watch. In the latter half of 2008 Mark Linkins led further adaptation and development. Visiting Scholars identified by Seligman came and stayed, some for a week, others much longer, and these were the “pinch hitters” who had worked and continue to work with the School generally within positive psychology. The contribution of these academics was significant and the sense that they and Positive Education “belonged” at the School was profound and remains so to this day some twelve years down the track.

The School began to “teach” Positive Education and to develop Teacher Courses for it. The Principal, Stephen Meek, declared that this was something the School would make available to all schools. The Geelong Grammar School Positive Education Institute was established to oversee this and has continued to do so for over a decade. Thousands of teachers have been trained within Australia at the School and within schools around Australia and throughout the world. Training has reached Europe, Canada, Hong Kong, mainland China, Singapore, New Zealand, the UK, Thailand, Dubai and of course the USA. Contributions have reached UNESCO and other international bodies associated with education. This is ongoing although Covid-19 has put a brake on it. On-line training has begun. PESA, a national association of schools in Australia, has been established.

A definition of Positive Education has been an ongoing adventure and it remains so, but the emphasis is on health and wellbeing and enabling students to gain greater life satisfaction through being more able to manage the ups and downs that life presents as they move through school. The overall object is, of course, to enable all to achieve more, to contribute more, and live meaningful lives. The take-up of Positive Education, and the investment in it, has been quite astounding throughout the world and research endeavours in this field are growing exponentially. Education courses at universities throughout the world have addressed some of the Positive Education initiatives and many universities now have courses in student wellbeing. Worldwide data suggest depression is the leading cause of disability and that over 120

million people worldwide suffer from it. Almost 9 million people die each year by suicide and well over 20 million attempt it annually. 7% of people worldwide suffer from anxiety, and children in primary and secondary school are presenting with levels of anxiety which are disturbing. The Covid-19 pandemic has heightened these mental health issues and already there are calls for more investment in mental health for children and adults. Suicide is the leading cause of death for 15-34-year-old Australians (ABS 2013), almost 75% of mental health conditions start before the age of 25 (Kessler *et al.* 2007), and almost 40% of 15-17-year-old children say they are extremely or very concerned about coping with stress (Mission Australia 2013). Royal Commissions into abuse and into mental health have found that initiatives focusing on creating more meaningful lives and more humane and healthy relationships are essential.

Positive Education and allied initiatives are beginning to assist education and foster achievement. Various models have been produced but the best known is the Seligman PERMA+ model. It combines Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement, and the plus sign refers to Positive Health. My interest has been especially in the area of relationships, for we live our lives within a galaxy of them. It is the evolutionary nature of humans to be social, and so to give and to seek approval and support. The quality of our relationships largely determines our state of mental and physical health. Loneliness precedes and accompanies isolation, depression, self-harm, and an ongoing sense of insecurity, and these may lead to suicide. I pushed powerfully for relationships to be a serious aspect of the model when Seligman was at Geelong Grammar. A year later he returned to Australia to conduct further training and to begin influencing and training staff of the Commonwealth Department of Education and his model had progressed from PEM to PERM. He had listened not only to me but to his great friend Chris Petersen, who had the mantra “Other people matter.” My mantra is “Relationships matter.” By contrast, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his play *No Exit*, has “Hell is other People.” The Seligman model grew later to PERMA, for achievement was added. This was to lead to recognition of conscientiousness as an important ingredient in achievement; it has been studied by Professor Angela Duckworth. The name *Grit* was selected as a more vivid title for a book. The model grew to PERMA+, to include health as I have said.

There is at Geelong Grammar School an approach to Positive Education which introduces students at all levels to some important processes towards health and

wellbeing and greater contribution. The object within the school is to “teach it, live it and embed it”. This means that a culture of care, a “resilient culture”, is communicated, for this will ensure that students are guided towards healthier lives within a culture where good relationships are promoted.

Mindfulness has been included, which fosters calm awareness of thoughts and emotions and becoming more aware of the present. Empathy and compassion are studied to promote the recognition of the emotions of others and caring for others as well as oneself. At the School I emphasized and wrote into the School Policies both kindness and forgiveness, and these are lived within the culture. Self-awareness is critical and here understanding one’s own strengths, talents, limitations, and goals are examined. Communication skills matter, too, within relationships and active listening and constructive responding, with the intention to honour another’s position, are taught. The nature of a good relationship is examined and all five fundamental elements, trust, forgiveness, integrity, hope, and compassion, are taught. It is pointed out that flourishing depends more on giving than on taking. Giving adds meaning to lives. Creative and critical thinking is taught. The positive role of boredom is explored as are all the forms of play. Critical thinking draws on logic and other branches of philosophy, and the Golden Rule and the Hippocratic Oath are studied. Decision-making is studied, and the neuroscience of it examined, as are such things as the creation of habits. Mindsets are also looked at closely, and the forms of praise examined and the impact these have on learning and achievement. Also studied are motivation and intention, problem-solving and resilience, and learning from successes, mistakes and failure.

Many students have enjoyed these studies, and others have struggled, but the anecdotal and now examined outcomes indicate that all do benefit in all aspects of their lives. The Positive Education courses now offered throughout the world are making a difference. Many courses and approaches are now being implemented and all are helping children and young people to be better informed about themselves, others, and their relationships with them. The end game is to help students to understand and develop the characteristics of a happy and fruitful life. To that positive psychology, and particularly PERMA+, has made a large contribution.

I have given most of my space to a chronological account of how positive education was developed at the school where I served for thirty-six years. As one of the

developers and formulators (a member of a team), I must be cautious about making any criticisms, although, as with any program, one does well to warn about dangers or difficulties. However, as in any field, one should welcome and engage with criticism, especially when it is sympathetic and constructive. John Howes wrote in that mode in his editorial letter in this magazine (the issue named 2017 and 2018). He made or implied five criticisms that I here address.

The first (pp. 1 and 2) was that there was too little attention in positive psychology to “a wide range of moral, mental and psychological qualities ... valuable in themselves”. As I have said, Chris Peterson and I both urged upon Martin Seligman and colleagues of his and of mine in the School the fundamental importance of **relationships**. Hence the inclusion of the R in ‘PERMA+’. In that context, I have long given special attention to kindness and forgiveness (or forgiving-ness). I do not question the importance of the qualities John specifies, and I know that many people have been and are working to give greater attention to what John suggests.

The second (p.2) is that positive psychology sets itself up as **the** way to well-being, rather than recognizing also the enrichment of lives that can come from such fields as moral philosophy and biography. It is true that all of us, including moral philosophers as John would agree, are prone to **over**-emphasize the value of what **we** have found valuable, particularly if it is our own “patch”. We mostly do all try honestly to improve the lot of others, and often this is not appreciated or even tolerated in our time, as in the case of Baruch Spinoza (see Wikipedia, 1.4). Most try to contribute, and the establishment of Positive Education is an example.

Thirdly (also on p.2), John aligns himself with Lord Layard's comment “Positive psychology can come over as very individualistic”, rather than immediately concerned with what John calls “devotion and service”. That can indeed be a danger, unless we understand both (a) the term ‘relationships’ as inviting us to consider the kinds of relationships (even if mainly through donations and/or the giving of time) we can practicably and ought to form with some needy people in this country and/or elsewhere, and (b) the centrality of genuinely altruistic motivation. John has drawn my attention to Kant's denial of “genuinely moral worth” to the actions of those whose motivation is simply that “they find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them and can take delight in the contentment of others as their own work” (H.J.Paton's edition, called *The Moral Law*, of Kant's *Groundwork ...*, near

the lower marginal number 10). Kant would, I think rightly, have been little impressed by pp. 20 and 21 of Seligman's *Flourish*, where he says "we scientists have found that doing a kindness produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well-being of any exercise we have tested". I agree that there is this danger of being **unduly** concerned with one's own well-being, as occurs sometimes in marriages that are unhappy for both, even when each brings the other gifts. However, being well and contented does help a person to meet another's need for assistance.

"We scientists ...": John doubts (p.3) the universality of the need for **measurement** in positive psychology or positive education. Here I agree with him. Consider the virtue of patience (the warm-hearted kind, not the grim!), often a vital aspect of the kindness I care so much about, e.g, in parents, teachers, among fellow-students, and those who care for the aged and infirm. Its depth and motivation is not to be judged by a questionnaire of the kind so prominent in *Flourish*. Measurement of these elements of relationships is not really possible.

Fifthly, John rightly resists, in the paragraph beginning with 'Both' (p.1), the presenting of schools generally as having lacked a focus on "nurturing the whole child". He quotes Jacolyn Norrish to refute that so far as Geelong Grammar's tradition is concerned. I am sure John is onto something here. We need to discover and study good practices and emphases of various times, places and kinds. John has provided me with examples. He had at the University of Melbourne an older fellow-student and friend who had been in the sixth form (year 12) at Geelong Grammar in

about 1942, and who gratefully remembered the weekly class that was conducted with that form by J.R.Darling, the Head, and called just HM. Darling wanted a wide range of questions presented and discussed by the boys, and participated accordingly. In nineteenth-century England, the famous Bishop Westcott looked back to his Head of fifty years before, James Prince Lee, and said "He claimed us from the first as his fellow workers. He made us feel that in all learning we must be active and not receptive only."

There is the danger, as with all new "orthodoxies", or (wretched word in this case) "industries", that those who teach positive education, supervise research in it, or license practitioners of it, may not encourage critical and constructive work that draws on many traditions or examples of theory and practice before and outside it. Geelong Grammar School has continued its approach to guiding the students (now girls as well as boys) in their development of the whole person. In Year 10 the students all attend lessons once a week on Values and Ethics, and participate in a project on "giving to make the world a better place". In Year 11 a two-day workshop is conducted on resilience, and in Year 12 weekly assemblies are given to this whole-person process.

We all in education are genuinely working to make the world a better place, and I assure John and readers that I warmly recognize that the contributions of many learned and responsible people are needed for a fuller understanding of what the education of the young can be. I thank him for his insights and for his important observations.

Memory, then, and will-power are two of the qualities that make a good teacher. The third is kindness. It is very difficult to teach anything without kindness. ... the pupils should feel that the teacher wants to help them, wants them to improve, is sorry for their mistakes and pleased by their successes and sympathetic with their inadequacies. Learning anything worth while is difficult. Some people find it painful. Everyone finds it tiring. Few things will diminish the difficulty, the pain and the fatigue like the kindness of a good teacher.

This kindness must be genuine. People of all ages, from careless children up to hard-working graduate students, easily and quickly detect the teacher who dislikes them It is useless to feign a liking for them if you do not really feel it.

... the kindness must be there. It may be the kindness of an elder brother or sister, even of a parent. It can well be the kindness of a fellow-student.

Hannah Arendt and civic participation

JONATHAN BURNS is retired, with a background in mathematics and software. He is interested in relations between algebraic formalism and natural language. Here he reviews the book *The Human Condition*.

Hannah Arendt published this book in 1958. (The edition I read is the second, but its preface mentions no revisions of the first besides an expanded index.) 1958 was the year after the launch of Sputnik, and Arendt takes the first satellite as a signal of epochal changes in human capabilities and purposes. How will we govern ourselves or understand the world in an age of spaceflight, genetics, automation and atomic energy? However, Arendt does not directly explore these prospects. Her purpose is to illuminate the business of political decision-making conducted directly between citizens. This, she argues, is the source of a community's political effectiveness, its genius.

This is a meandering and inconclusive book. Having announced her futuristic theme Arendt sets off on a sociological investigation, and within that locates a political theme, her major concern, before returning to the technological prospect in a kind of coda. She will present a concept and inspect it from many angles, analytically, historically and through the writings of Classical and Enlightenment thinkers. Usually writers would first sketch their main argument, giving the appropriate context for reading the particulars; without it readers may lose their way. Repeatedly I would finish a section, having been started on several different trains of thought, and wonder what I had just been reading.

Arendt's second theme, termed "activity", is just the occupations of our lives. This is promising: when one introduces oneself as a housewife, engineer or public servant, one is already saying a great deal about one's business, status, hopes and intentions. We can see this section of the book as the first step in an occupational sociology. Arendt classifies activity under the headings of "labour", "work" and "action", the last being the business of politics.

Repurposing common words like this gets a bit annoying. The reader will need to set aside accepted connotations when considering Arendt's novel definitions.

By 'labour' Arendt means whatever is dictated by necessity. From ancient times this has meant food, shelter, clothing and so on: the bare necessities. This labour was carried on in communities and households.

In modern times, of course, the prime necessity is money, and labour is carried on in the workplace. Repetition is characteristic of labour, since its product is for immediate consumption: no matter how well one does the dishes, they will be there to be done the next day. Labour is therefore menial, and labourers interchangeable.

Work, as Arendt calls it, might also be called creation. (The German word '*Werke*' should evoke English expressions such as 'work of art'.) It begins with someone's conception of a specific enduring object, and results in a finished product. The work involved is basically an individual task, and the product has both use and exchange value, as well as affirming the worker's skill among his peers. Economists from Adam Smith and Marx have remarked how much authentic work was degraded to alienated labour in the factory system.

We come to "action", which can be defined as **political deliberation as citizen to citizen**. Action is a conversation. It is the persuasive speech of those who would enlist, or are open to enlistment, of those who are taking responsibility for the running of their community. It is the location of the political 'we', as in "We the People", or "What are we going to do about this?", or the sour dissident's "Who do you mean, 'we'?" It is the speech of a ruling class, even when it takes place between the most common of republican citizens.

Action is Arendt's central theme. She brings out important properties of such conversations. Firstly, action involves self-disclosure. One does it on purpose and reveals one's own motives and judgments. An abstract recital of doctrine does not count. It takes a certain bravery, especially if one is speaking for the whole. One's commitment is at stake. Secondly, action is communication between equals. Things can be said that could not be said between a giver of orders and a subordinate. Thirdly, action presumes the speakers' sense of their common ownership of their home, as a place with familiar contents and a familiar past, a place in its citizens' keeping. And fourthly, this political decision-making is unpredictable in its ultimate consequences, since the outcome will pass through many further hands.

Arendt illustrates action with the democracy of Hellenic Athens, the Athens of Pericles' Funeral Oration and Thucydides' history. Here the citizens are equals, with equal rights to address the governing Assembly, perhaps to decide on the building of a wall, the launching of a colony, or the banishing of a malcontent.

Athens ties together Arendt's classes of "activity". A qualified citizen was expected to possess a household with slaves and family subordinates to free him from the burden of necessity. Craftsmen, even experts, were mere resources for the city to employ as the citizens decided. In some ways this paints the picture of a privileged gentlemen's club, but it was a club which understood its collective responsibility, and revelled in its scope for achievement. Political thinkers have returned to its inspiring example of human agency ever since.

Arendt does not propose that we return to the city-states, but she sees Athens as a complete expression of action, by equals and for equals. It is a very different vision from Plato's: a polity constantly renewed by personal initiative, constantly at risk. This action persists wherever people assume they have a say in their government, at whatever remove. A wholly atomized society would not have it, nor would a wholly regimented society, where all directions come down from a supreme authority. Action is manifest in all political gatherings with intentions to make policy, and it is the animating force of all revolutionary movements.

If we accept Arendt's definition, how does action fare in the here and now? Have we abdicated to parties and bureaucracies? My sense is that civic participation is alive and well in Australia, but we have it in a characteristically understated style. We know our votes give us the power to end a government if we need it. We also know that too many voices grandstanding at once would only lead to oversimplifications and the forming of tribal blocs. The business of fair and effective government is complex, and so we are happy to assent to soulless cost-benefit analysis and lukewarm compromise, as long as they seem to work. Nor are we deprived of the interpersonal qualities of civic participation. Melbourne alone hosts thousands of local groups of concern, from volunteer agencies to local governments. We have a general etiquette for action, in these small groups. Show up and get into conversation. Listen to the more urgent discussions, get a feel for the issues and the language and assumptions which people are using. Don't stand out, unless you are ready to take on commitments. Judge whose positions might win your enlistment. Applaud the ones with the courage to speak

as if for the whole. All too soon, you will be the one standing up addressing the room. In short, we conduct our democracy at a low simmer, and are far from being atomized.

To return to Arendt's second theme, her classes of occupation, for myself this falls apart as soon as I question it. Household labour can be done with creative flair. If a song is enjoyed and finished up, and there to be sung again, is it labour or work? In peasant villages, the harvest was once the soul of the community, carried out in unity, rich in skills and traditions, and yet its purpose was necessity and it would remain to be done year after year. All three kinds of activity were combined in one communal act. I cannot help thinking that Arendt has formulated her classes just so that she can explain what kind of place Athens was, and that they only become confusing if applied to other times and places.

What of the post-Sputnik world, then? Arendt returns to this in the final section, where she explores ideas of technological alienation. Our society is dependent on science and culturally informed by it. She likens this to Archimedes' fulcrum: we have found a place from which to move the world, but where in the world are we?

There are hits and misses among her examples. It is true that modern transport and communication have diluted our attachment to place, so that society is no longer anywhere in particular. But Arendt sounds strange when she suggests that space travel is motivated by alienation from the Earth. If anything, the Earth seen whole from space has made it clear that it really is our only home. Arendt scores a hit when she suggests that expert discourse has become so mathematical that only a refined caste of initiates are able to make decisions. In respect of basic science I don't think this holds true, but I have come to worry that artificial intelligence systems working on large data sets are reportedly producing valid results which arise from no theory whatsoever, and so cannot be theoretically criticized.

It seems to me that Arendt was trying to set up a compass for Western civilization, as it set out into a changed world. Her book was not supposed to resolve the big questions, but to inspect them and propose new ones. I have found her exploration of civic participation to be acute and worth adding to anyone's store of political concepts. For the rest, the reader can expect a unique essay in fruitful perplexity.

An extraordinary radiologist

JIM RICHARDSON talked about this man at our Sunday Meeting of the 7th of June. Jim is a retired electrical engineer and church organist. He and **JOHN HOWES** have combined in this review of a biography.

The Japanese radiologist Takashi Nagai (1908-1951) cared for survivors of the atom bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki, even though, having earlier developed leukemia as a result of his work in radiology, he was further weakened by the radiation from the bomb. He went on writing books, articles and letters, and caring for his two young children, even when confined to bed in his final years.

We learnt of him from an article in *The Melbourne Anglican* by John Steward, whose source was the notable book on which we too have relied, *A Song for Nagasaki*, by an Australian Catholic priest, Fr Paul Glynn, who spent 25 years as a missionary in Japan. There is a copy in the Learningguild Library, and we recommend this book to anyone concerned with medicine, or interested in someone's moving from atheism to Christianity, or simply ready to read a book about an utterly devoted, unassuming and resourceful person.

We distinguish four parts of the book. The first is from the first chapter to the ninth, and presents a contrast. There is the young Nagai "passionately believ[ing] in science, sure that science held the key to every door that barred human progress" (p.27). There is also the Nagai shaken by his mother's death, challenged by the *Pensées* of Pascal, including his warning against an exclusive trust in "reason", as against what he called the reasons that "the heart" has, and impressed by the Christian family whose hospitality he had sought and gained, and in which the father had a long ancestry of often persecuted Christians.

The next part covers the period from 1933 to some of 1945, and runs from Chapter 10 to Chapter 18. Paul Glynn masterfully combines his accounts of the daughter in that family, a saintly young woman named Midori, who was a schoolteacher, vegetable-grower and dressmaker, Takashi's adoption of the Roman Catholic form of Christianity, his and Midori's path to marriage, his military service and disillusionment with Japanese militarism, his becoming a professor of radiology, notable for his devotion to both teaching and research, and his learning that from his work he, like some other pioneers in it, had developed incurable leukemia.

On August the 9th 1945, an atomic bomb was

dropped on Nagasaki. This terrible event, which caused the instant death of Midori and about seventy thousand of the two hundred thousand people of Nagasaki, and its aftermath of further deaths and desperate attempts to save survivors are the subjects of Chapters 19 to 22, along with Nagai's recovery in October, one which he regarded as miraculous, from atomic sickness and a broken artery.

The rest of the book (from Chapter 23 to Chapter 30 and an Epilogue) portrays and amply quotes from this man who after the war not only helped visitors and correspondents such as lepers (p.217f) but wrote twenty books, most of them after he had been obliged from November 1946 to live out his life in bed. Glynn recounts his last days and hours, and ends with reflections on his life as a whole. Lengthy quotations are included (pp.187-190) from the address he was asked to give at the open-air Mass in November 1945 that took place by the ruins of the cathedral in Urakami, the suburb in which Christians had for centuries lived. He held for the rest of his life (see p.257) to the astonishing view he put in that address, outraging some who were present:

God's Providence chose Urakami and carried the bomb right above our homes. ... Was not Nagasaki the chosen victim, the lamb without blemish, slain as whole burnt offering on an altar of sacrifice, atoning for the sins of all the nations during World War II?

Three characteristics combined in Nagai were fascination with medicine and with scientific possibilities (e.g. the use of atomic energy to remedy Japan's dependence on imported oil: p.210f), awareness of our dependence on others (we are told on p.236 that he used the navel as a reminder of that), and the regular practice of contemplative prayer (p.213). He is quoted (p.234) as writing:

examining a patient, taking an x-ray or giving an injection is part of the kingdom of God. When I realized that, I found myself praying for each patient I treated.

Whether prospective readers are Christians or not, there is much in this book from which they can benefit. There is a pair of pages of universal value in which Glynn draws upon another biographer, Professor Kataoka, a friend of Nagai since 1934, who, he says,

“writes that [he] combined warm tenderness with tough-as-steel commitment”. On the one hand Kataoka is quoted as follows (p.232):

He possessed a strong sense of responsibility toward those who have gone before, bequeathing to us our culture and civilization, and toward those who will follow us, to whom we must hand on what we have both received and worked to improve.

On the other hand (p.233), Glynn quotes these words from Nagai:

first we have to create a heart that is both serious and light. ... Children play all out in their games because they know freedom and joy. And didn't someone tell us we have to become like children?

An appreciation of a good nursing home

LOUISE JOY, *who has long been a member of Learningguild, writes about a community of care from which there is much to learn. It is the Uniting Age Well Nursing Home, Box Hill, Victoria.*

There is a ripple of languages. There are unusual accents of English, from South Africa and Czechoslovakia. I asked my nurse the language she was speaking to another: Tibetan. Another spoke Nepalese, and there are many speaking Hindi, in which I was fluent as a child, but now have only a few words left. One of the nurses jokes with me as she delivers my medication: “Azamgarh”, “Dehra Dun”, “Mussoorie” – the places of my childhood. My son, David, who is here with me, always calls one of the staff “Mr Mauritius”.

The handyman, Sean, has put up my pictures and, over my couch, a wall hanging of a rustic pink necklace. I now have six paintings and six prints decorating my room.

My daughter Rosie has given me a couch, covered in a bright green bedspread with two floral cushions. The cards I have been sent, which I keep, add to the decorations and remind me of friends.

I don't drink tea or coffee any more, but I love my Milo with three sugars which comes at the end of a meal, mid-morning, mid-afternoon and for supper, accompanied by biscuits and sometimes a delicious curry puff. When I exclaimed with pleasure, the cook gave me two.

I love watching the staff making the beds, a task that I find difficult. They are always alert to a need for fresh sheets or pillowcases.

David joins me for breakfast in my room and together we go to the dining room for lunch and dinner. Before and after meals we play Chinese Chequers, often with a draw as the result because of our familiarity with the game.

I always feel we are going up to the dining room, as if on a ship, because of the verandah outside. I never eat the hot food, because I enjoy the salads of ham, lettuce, tomato, orange, grapes, and today avocado.

How fortunate to have different specialists caring for us: the optician, the hairdresser, the dentist, the podiatrist, the physiotherapist, as well as a chaplain and a doctor. As a surprise, a staff member came to give me a massage!

I feel very fortunate to be ending my days here.

We warmly invite any readers who are not yet members of Learningguild to join us, and all readers to encourage friends to do so. Membership is open to everyone who wants to go on learning and help others learn. For those outside Australia, there is no subscription: we simply ask of such members that they send news and/or views to *Learningguild Letter* at least once a year. Details for subscription are on our website learningguild.org.au, on the page 'MEMBERSHIP' and the accompanying form. Main uses at present of our funds from subscriptions and donations are to publish printed copies of our literature; to enable members in need to purchase books etc.; to develop a vegetable garden in memory of a refugee member; and to add to the Learningguild Library. My contact details are learningguild@gmail.com; 61 3 9380 5892; Learningguild, 23 Fallon St, Brunswick, Victoria 3056, Australia.

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