

Learningguild Letter

2.2009

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

My theme is **self-education** and its motives and fostering. Two sets of words from our current slips make plain that if we are not practising it and promoting it, we are hypocritical. Almost from our beginning in 1982 we have said that membership of Learningguild is “open to everyone who wants to go on learning and help others learn”. (How ridiculous it would be to say it was open to everyone who wanted to go on being taught and help others to be taught!) In the slip for 2010 on the tuition we offer is the statement “Learningguild emphasizes **guided self-education with discussion**”.

With this issue comes as a supplement a revised edition of scripts of two talks of mine under the heading “Educating our children and ourselves”. They were originally recorded and copied on cassettes; soon they will be on CDs. The second explains the anxiety that may be associated with the question “Can I educate myself?” and seeks to answer it. As could be predicted by someone who noted those words ‘guided’ and ‘with discussion’, the answers are of the forms “Yes, but ...” and “Yes, if ...”. The advice I give in that second answer (pp. 6 & 7) I have found to be appropriate at any stage of secondary or tertiary education, whether one is undertaking a course or seeking to educate oneself, or indeed for any serious and sustained enquiry.

Many people have little or no interest in self-education. That can be explained by their lack of experience of it and its satisfactions, both intrinsic and instrumental. They have not found in it what William James called “the expulsive power of a new affection”, a love and delight which makes many other things (e.g. preoccupation with entertainment, wealth or prestige) seem petty or unsatisfying. Their experience of school or of university may never have given them anything

like the memories that Sir Walter Moberly describes of those most deeply indebted to undergraduate years at Oxford and Cambridge:

They look back on these years as a time of happiness and mental expansion which glows in the memory; a time when stimulating friendships were formed, when some contact was made with one or two great men who excited reverence, when the blood ran fast and the mind exulted in a new awareness of its powers.¹

Yes indeed, men and/or women, and not necessarily “great”, but devoted both to scholarship and to guiding their pupils. That juxtaposition of ‘happiness’ and ‘mental expansion’ deserves to be remembered.

The question has to be asked how the schools and universities we know stand when judged against such criteria, and so whether they promote self-education. Is there much personal contact with teachers? Does this or that course require and foster mental expansion? Does it require precision of thought and language? Is it teacher- or lecturer-dominated, so that little is heard of the ideas that secondary or tertiary students should be exploring good libraries for themselves, that the assessment will reward those who do (as well as mastering set texts worth mastering), but also that such exploration is in itself one of the best things one could be doing, something to continue in lifelong self-education?

There can be no doubt that the criteria proposed here are the ones that the best kind of education satisfies, and we must never suppose that whatever is done at a particular time in schools and universities is somehow unimprovable or to be taken for granted, or even that schools and universities as we know them are the only loci of serious education. There is a need to experiment

with combinations of personal guidance and the best books and internet sites we can find, whether there are examinations related to such study or not.

The desire for the further development of one's own powers of mind is, then, a major motive for self-education, and one has and maintains that desire primarily through experiencing such development, often initially on a small scale. Our youngest grandchild, at two-and-a-half, runs and runs in parks and streets, and jumps from steps, because he finds that he can, and that he loves it, and because his sister does it, and also because he likes to show what he can do. So with learning.

A second motive is the desire to understand something better, and therefore to read widely as well as deeply, so as to become acquainted with different views and why they are held. (Moberly does this in his university book and in *The Ethics of Punishment*, and in the former writes of "the obligation to approach controversial questions with the temper of the judge rather than of the advocate or the notorious 'expert witness'".²) Perhaps one wants to understand better the nature of some quality important in human life, or to see some controversial matter from more than one standpoint. Let me illustrate. In 2009 I was particularly concerned, as p.20 of 1.2009 shows, with religious faith and kinds of loyalty. How valuable it was to happen upon the two sentences that follow in books that I had not taken up with a view to learning more about either faith or loyalty. In a sermon in Westminster Abbey in 1943, W.R. Matthews, the Dean of St Paul's, made this remark concerning the Pharisees (of some of whom he says, with a very serious and harmful over-simplification, that they "opposed, and ultimately killed, Jesus"):

Many of them, it seems, were sincere and deeply religious men; their tragedy was that their exclusive loyalty to "the tradition of the elders" prevented them from accepting the new truth which God was revealing.³

By contrast, the Jewish author Martin Buber, writing in 1929, has a remarkable sentence in which he sympathizes with the Pharisees more deeply than Matthews does, though also thinking of them as Jesus regarded them:

Even Jesus obviously loved of "sinners" only the loose, lovable sinners, sinners against the Law; not those who were settled and loyal to their inheritance and sinned against him and his message.⁴

How much we need to ask, without myopia, "What is my **inheritance**? What are the most valuable things that have been made available to me, or can become so if I search, and in what forms or respects should I accept or reject the traditions in which they have come?" I think that biography and autobiography, as well as the study of philosophy and religion, have been major contributors to my pursuit of those questions. To me as a scholar and teacher the memoirs concerning Fellows of the British Academy, with their different fields and traits, have been especially revealing of lives of enquiry and guidance.

Thirdly and finally, I should adduce the two-fold motive of wanting to **share** with others something one knows or believes to be valuable, and to juxtapose and compare their view of it with one's own present one, and wanting to **find** and so have something of that kind to share. How limited is a marriage or a family or a friendship in which there is little of such sharing, or a staff common room in which there is no interest, or only a patronizing or cynical one, in new ideas or the rediscovery of old ones.

Much of the activity of Learningguild is to exhibit the power of these three motives and so to encourage lifelong enquiry and discussion. We do that by our philosophy seminar, and by such meetings as the one in November when a young doctor, Anthea Lindquist, talked about her work in indigenous communities and in Fiji. We do it by sustaining this magazine, with its wide range of contributors. We do it through the examination for our Certificate in Reasoning and Expression, which requires no course and rewards wide and critical reading as well as clear thinking and good English. We do it especially through some group teaching and plenty of individual guidance and encouragement, related to the student's reading and written work. We can always do it better.

Yours in Learningguild,

John Howes

NOTES

1. *The Crisis in the University*, SCM Press, London 1949, p.201f.
2. p. 124.
3. *Strangers and Pilgrims*, Nisbet, London 1945, p.58.
4. *Dialogue*, one of several works translated and introduced by Ronald Gregor Smith in *Between Man and Man*, Fontana, London and Glasgow 1961: p.39.

Babysitting and interior design

The writer of this essay is SOPHIE LUBIN, a student at George Washington University, in Washington DC. It is a revised version of the one she wrote, for which she was given the very high mark of A-, in the examination of September 2009 for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression. She was one of the twelve at GWU who took that exam with the encouragement of Michele Friend, their logic lecturer and a member of Learningguild. The topic Sophie chose was: “As you get into it, you discover how fascinating it is.” Describe for the general reader, and take illustrations from, two specific activities or fields of study in which you have had that experience.’

From the tiny window of an airplane, the scenery — whether it be foliage, industrial parks, or bodies of water — looks homogeneous, void of detail, and sometimes uninteresting. When the plane begins to land, however, and you get a bit closer, some details may slowly begin to emerge. Once you land, step off the plane, and begin to actually explore some of the scenery you once glanced at from afar, that is when things really get interesting. I have experienced this phenomenon many times in my life, but most notably when I worked as a nanny, and when I delved into my major (Interior Design) in college. Both experiences have certainly shown me that “as you get into it, you discover how fascinating it is”.

I began babysitting in my neighbourhood as a way to make money, never expecting that I would gain so much insight into family dynamics, the role of the parent, and relationships among siblings. Last summer, I worked five days a week as a nanny for three children: a five-year-old girl and twin two-year-old boys. The mother, who didn't work, needed me mainly to be there with her and entertain the children so that she could accomplish things around the house. I quickly saw the marked differences between the twin boys: one thrived on attention, was independent, and loved people, while the other hated noise and crowds, constantly wanted to be around his mother, and preferred to play by himself. The little girl was clearly threatened by the attention her younger brothers received, and as a result exhibited babyish behaviours to get attention. Learning how to balance my attention between these three very different personalities was quite a challenge. Another interesting one that arose was how I should behave while the mother was home. My authority as the nanny was constantly undermined by her. I truly struggled with this aspect of my job, because I never knew when to assert myself or to surrender to my employer.

Though most people scoffed at my summer job, insisting it was the easiest way to make money, I learned a whole lot about family dynamics, what kind of mother I hope to be, and children in general. It was a mind-opening experience that was truly more “fascinating” than I ever could have anticipated.

As a teenager, I was always interested in art and design, and decided to major in Interior Design when I came to college. As I began taking an introductory course to the program called Foundations of Interior Design Theory, I began to realize that this field is much vaster and more involved than I had thought. As an interior designer, you are responsible for thousands of details that the majority of the population would not recognize or consider. A designer must take into account acoustics, safety and security of a space, lighting design, spatial flow, textile choice, colour theory, the function of the space, furniture arrangement, the numerous elements of design, the way people will react and behave in a space, and details of things as seemingly minute and inconsequential as cabinet knobs. Every day in class, I learned something new that opened my eyes to the vastness and complexity of the world of interior design. The completed and beautiful room that people appreciate is the product of thousands of details that may not be obvious, but work in harmony to create a successful space. As I delve deeper and deeper into my desired field, I appreciate more and more how fascinating it is.

There are so many things in this world that are not at all as they seem. A job that looks enjoyable could be utterly mundane, while a seemingly dry and boring activity could turn out to be thrilling. From my personal experience, however, the more I have learned about baby-sitting and interior design, the more fascinating they have turned out to be.

Hajj: pilgrimage to Makkah

JAWAD NAQVI, who comes from Pakistan, is a member of Learningguild and a social worker in Melbourne; much of his work concerns children who are at risk. In November he began a period of leave in order to go on the famous pilgrimage and also, with his wife and two children, to stay with family members in Pakistan.

Hajj is the pilgrimage to the House of Allah (Ka'bah), with the performance of all those worshipful acts which have been ordered to be performed there. According to Islamic law it is obligatory on a Muslim to go once in his or her lifetime, provided that certain conditions are fulfilled.

Hajj is not obligatory for insane people or slaves, or for children until they are nine years of age, for girls, or fifteen, for boys. No act prohibited in Islam, such as stealing or lying or trade of alcohol, can be engaged in as a means of proceeding to Makkah for Hajj, nor should any obligatory work be forsaken. The obligation does not apply to Muslims for so long as they are incapable of fulfilling it. They need to possess provisions and means of transportation, if need be, or have enough money to buy them. They should be healthy and strong enough to go to Makkah and perform Hajj without suffering extreme difficulties. If the way is closed, or if they fear that they will lose their life, or honour, while on the way to Makkah, or be robbed of their property, it is not obligatory on them to perform Hajj. However, if they can reasonably reach Makkah by a route that is not the shortest, they should take it. They should have enough time to reach Makkah, and to perform all the acts of worship in Hajj. They should possess sufficient money to meet the expenses of any dependants and any servants. They should be sure that they have some means of livelihood on their return from Hajj.

In November I went to perform my first Hajj. For 25 years I had wished to go but I had had to wait until it became practicable. I always imagined performing Hajj whenever people returning from it shared their experiences and stories with me. Again and again I heard of a new experience, a different feeling, of an individual who talked about the crowd, or described the rituals about Ka'bah when hosts of pilgrims were circumambulating it, and the sacrifice to commemorate the act of the prophet Ibrahim (A.S.) when he was asked

to present a thing to GOD which he loved most, and he brought his son, the Prophet Ismail (A.S.), to sacrifice, and GOD replaced his sacrifice with a sheep. ('A.S.' I use to abbreviate 'Alay-e-Slam': 'May GOD bless him with peace.'). For me Hajj was a very special *ibadit* (an enslaving of myself to God) with a very specific meaning: I experienced something very different from anything before and very special. I perceived Hajj in my own way: one person's experience is likely to be different from another's.

The tour I joined (there were fourteen of us) was organized by a person expert in arranging Hajj tours. He arranged our visas and our accommodation and meals in Saudi Arabia. It is recommended that pilgrims go to the holy city of Madinah and perform the *ziyaraat* (salutations) of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and his family members (A.S.) in the Jannatul Baqi (the graveyard of Baqi). We went to Madinah for this purpose before the Hajj and stayed for six days.

Before starting the journey for Hajj it is recommended that pilgrims go to a *Miqat*, a place where they change their clothes and put on *ihram* (two unstitched pieces of cloth for men, and clothing for women which covers their body except for their faces and hands). Near the city of Madinah there is a mosque named Masjaid-e-Ali, which is one of the *Miqat*. The journey starts from there. Now pilgrims are required to leave behind any signs of their identity or status, or of anything of which they are proud. Who you are, whence you come, what your family or wealth is, what skin colour you have – these things no longer matter. While wearing *ihram* it is forbidden to go hunting, use fragrance, or engage in any activity which gives sexual satisfaction. (There are books on going to Hajj which give a complete list of things forbidden while wearing *ihram*.) So everyone needs to be pure, free from human desires, oriented towards GOD with full submission, to be part of one big whole, and to act as GOD commands us to act.

The pilgrims ask themselves whether they are ready to go to Hajj. Since they are, they say loudly “*Labaik, labaik, Allahumma labaik ...: Here I am at Your service, O Allah; here I am at your service! You have no partner. Here I am at your service. All praise and blessings belong to you. All dominion is yours and You have no partner.*” These are the words of the *talbiya* (response of readiness) that Muslims recite after they have put on *ihram* for Hajj. At that time individuals begin to be part of a great whole: the Pilgrimage to Makkah. Then bowing to the supremacy of GOD is the ultimate goal for everyone, and people promise to restrain themselves from committing sins any more, and to follow the principle of equality and maintain respect for fellow human beings, and in particular older people, women and children. In Hajj suppressed people have developed a hope to be looked after by others and they dream of the alleviation of injustice, insults and humiliation. “Oh GOD!” we say: “Forgive us, forgive us, forgive us, we have not followed the principles you commanded us to follow to maintain harmony and peace. We have committed sinful and shameful acts, intentionally or unintentionally, against our fellow human beings, and made the world a place miserable to live in. We have transgressed. Forgive us, forgive us, forgive us, we are coming towards you, give us peace, harmonize us with your purposes and your will for our lives. Bless us with peace and keep us in peace for ever.”

Once the pilgrims reach Makkah they need to go to Ka'bah. They walk around Ka'bah seven times and do *saaye* (running between the mountains of Saffa and Marwa) seven times. The circumambulation (*tawaf*) is to help the pilgrims to get assimilated to the others, to become part of the whole. *Saaye* is for the purpose of showing the intention that you will remain in Makkah until Hajj finishes. Now the pilgrims are told: “Change your *ihram* and do *ibadit* as much as you can, and prepare yourself to participate in Hajj when it starts on the ninth day of Zilhaja” (That is the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.)

Hajj is always performed between the ninth and twelfth days of Zilhaja. On the eighth, all the pilgrims once again changed their clothes and wore *ihram*. On the night when the date changed (according to the Islamic calendar that is after the

sunset), we went in a bus to the Ground of Arrafat, some 18km from Ka'bah. Now we were among the three million pilgrims who had come to Makkah for Hajj. From the ninth to the twelfth the pilgrims are mainly away from Ka'bah except for the time when it is obligatory to go there for *tawaf* and *saaye*, any time after the tenth. In our camp we spent a day in the Ground of Arrafat. Then we moved to Muzdalifa, about 5 km towards Ka'bah. There we spent a night in the open air. During the last two days we remained in our camp at Minna, about 12 km away from Ka'bah.

Finding a camp allocated to our group at Minna among thousands of other camps was not an easy task. We walked for four hours as our camp was close to the far end of Minna. During Hajj, access to public transport was near to impossible, so pilgrims usually preferred to walk when moving from one place to another. Walking 14 to 20 kilometres a day is onerous, especially for an older person. The reason why we walked so much was an obligation to go to *Jamarat* for *rami*, the hitting with stones of pillars known as Satan. During these four days pilgrims had liberty to spend the time according to their own choice: they could do *ibadit*, meet with the people around them, or even have a sleep. That's how we spent our time in the camp. On the eleventh day we went to Ka'bah for *tawaf* and *saaye*. Finally on the afternoon of the twelfth, after *rami*, our Hajj was completed.

Back in Melbourne, I often think about my experience of Hajj and what I have learnt from being part of it. I had to make efforts every day, and I knew that other people around me were making similar efforts, with varying degrees of discomfort. There was an old lady in our group who could not walk fast or carry all her belongings, in particular water and a sleeping bag, and we helped her in carrying her luggage and provided some comfort. In our daily life, people around us are often struggling to fulfil similar aims to ours, e.g. to earn a living and provide stability for their families and themselves. I ask myself this question especially: “What have you done, and what are you doing, to make other people's struggles or journeys more comfortable?” To ask myself that question is one main thing I have learnt from my experience of Hajj.

More on medical education

*In L'g L 2.2008, I wrote about the need of tertiary students generally for more guidance than is commonly given. In the following issue (1.2009), Walford Gillison, an English surgeon, wrote in response about the diversity of valuable approaches to the teaching of medical students. Here are some further comments in the same area of education from another Learningguild member, the Australian surgeon **RODNEY SYME**, whose recent book was reviewed in 1.2009. JH*

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It is almost fifty years since I was a medical student, and I have been out of clinical teaching for ten. Thus I am not a good authority on present practice in medical education.

Most medical courses are unusual in this respect: they are more intense than most others because of their particular combination of structured teaching and practical sessions. They have no essays or project deadlines: the only testing is at the end of the year or semester. They combine traditional lectures and tutorials with a lot of practical work, and in the later years much clinical bedside teaching. This last is provided by doctors, who teach according to their views, and do not follow a curriculum but attend to situations that their patients present. It is all rather uncoordinated. Students need to do a lot of work on their own to fill in gaps. In my youth, there was an abrupt change from school to university, although at Melbourne Grammar we were warned of this and to some extent prepared for it. I did a second year of Matriculation, which allowed me to mature, develop investigative study methods, explore issues beyond the classroom, learn to use the library, and become self-reliant. I had no trouble with the change, but no doubt some did.

There was virtually no support for young medical undergraduates fifty years ago. I cannot say with certainty that there is more now, but I am confident that there is an attitude of trying to pro-

vide it. There are certainly mentoring systems in postgraduate surgical teaching. I think the Dean's office is more attuned to helping students in hospitals. Given the shortage of Federal funds for university teaching, I suspect that support for students is not much better than when I was a student.

At that time undergraduate clinical teaching was quite disorganized. The teachers were essentially successful specialists, and they were not given any direction about the aim or process to be adopted. There was no guidance on teaching as a discipline: everyone did it in his or her own way. Some taught students how to pass the exam. I thought that was appalling, and later, in my own teaching, sought to show students how to think in medical terms, how to behave and practise as a doctor, how to solve a clinical problem. I thought that if they could do that then they should pass the exam without any difficulty. I asked lots of questions concerning the particular case or problem, seeking to make students find the answer, with useful leads where they seemed not to be making progress. Some colleagues would give lists and notes to be learnt. Ugh! John Howes's letter (2.2008, p.2) expressed a justified distaste for any kind of spoonfeeding. I encouraged students to ask questions, because asking questions normally shows intelligence rather than ignorance, a thoughtful rather than a blank mind.

Our gratitude

In the first column of the last *Learningguild Letter* (1.2009) I thanked John Pottage for his gift of a cassette of an interview with George Steiner, a gift that led both to a Friday-evening meeting of Learningguild and to my editorial letter in that issue. Later in 2009 John, aware that he was probably near to death, gave Learningguild many

of his philosophical books and some others. He was a member, and a keen and not uncritical reader of our *Letter*. He died in February 2010, and there will be a tribute to him in our next issue. Here we express our warm gratitude and appreciation for his thoughtfulness, participation and generosity. JH

Music during the Renaissance

JOHN DRENNAN, a member of Learningguild who has numerous degrees and diplomas from Melbourne, Monash and London, gave us an illustrated talk on December 4th on the development of western music during the Renaissance. Here he provides an introduction to the subject in which he recommends the first volume of the Norton Anthology.

Palestrina (c.1525-94) is probably the Renaissance composer remembered best. Even greater popularity attaches, in some circles, to Victoria (c.1549-1611), with his often more florid and dramatic music. These may be seen as representing the culmination of two centuries of development of a style which then gave way to Monteverdi and the Baroque. It had started soon after 1400. Unlike the visual arts, whose main origins were in Florence and neighbouring north Italian city states during the early Quattrocento (15th century), the new music began (about the same time) in the north, especially in the Netherlands and in Burgundy. An Englishman, John Dunstable (c.1390-1453), is often regarded as the first Renaissance composer.

Most lovers of classical music are familiar with representative works from the succeeding periods: the Baroque of Monteverdi and Corelli, Bach and Handel; the classical (in a narrower sense of the term) of Haydn and Mozart; the Romantic and beyond. Renaissance music is less well known. But recent years have seen a revival of interest and scholarship, as well as performance and recording in which authentic period instruments are often employed. The Renaissance period separates the Middle Ages, characterized by Gregorian chant with its familiar and rather austere single line of melody, and by often rather bizarre secular melodies, from the Baroque of the 17th to early 18th centuries. Much of the most beautiful music ever composed comes from that Renaissance period, and I heartily recommend becoming familiar with it.

A useful set of readily available CDs, six of them, to get one started — and indeed more — is the *Norton Recorded Anthology of Western Music, Vol.1: Ancient to Baroque*. Norton is the publisher (New York 2006). The set even begins with some brief re-creations of ancient Greek music, and ends

with some rather variant renderings of works of Baroque composers such as Corelli, Rameau and Handel. Remarkably, every selection has some sort of popular appeal. (It is undeniable that some Renaissance music would appear rather boring to the ordinary listener, one not specially trained in music. That is true of later composers too, from Haydn even, to Brahms, and to Mahler and beyond.) The selection includes a good balance of secular and sacred music. The former includes English madrigals — a form which came from Italy after an interesting development from the frottola and other forms influenced by Spanish and Neapolitan song forms of the fifteenth century.

Many of the most sublime musical compositions, both in the Renaissance and in other periods, were composed for the Mass, the central act of worship of the Catholic church. Such music includes the fixed parts or movements of the Mass, i.e. the Ordinary (Kyrie, Sanctus, Agnus Dei etc.) and motets, which are more incidental. The Norton Anthology includes a variety of Mass selections — and some works by Luther as well. A Mass which I particularly recommend is the *Missa Pange Lingua* by Josquin des Prez (1450/5-1521), perhaps the leading composer of the musical High Renaissance. Josquin was a near-contemporary of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). He came from what is now Belgium and spent considerable time in Italy, combining in his compositions Italian aspects with the Franco-Netherlandish tradition inherited from Dufay and Ockeghem. The *Pange Lingua* was composed about 1514, the year of death of the great Renaissance architect Bramante, whose work is perhaps best typified in the Tempietto in Rome, a building characterized by perfection of balance of different elements. Josquin's compositions seem to exhibit a similar balance, together with a kind of restrained sensuality reminiscent of another near-contemporary, the painter Botticelli (1445-1510). I would

recommend the following recording of the said work: Josquin des Prez: *Missa Pange Lingua*. A Sie Voce. Dir. Bernard Fabre-Garrus. Astree CD 8639, 1999.

If you listen to that CD, rather than just the selections in Norton (CD3), you will be able to compare the singing of the plainchant (Gregorian chant) hymn, sung at the beginning, with Josquin's own composition based on it — an interesting object-lesson in the relation of the two styles of music. Some other Masses were based on secular melodies such as “The Armed Man”, which must have been used hundreds of times by different composers. It should be mentioned, too, that Masses were “based” on other compositions (sacred or secular) in different ways, e.g. by using the melody as a *cantus firmus* (fixed melody) which was “held” by the tenor, or by another voice register. But the *Missa Pange Lingua* does not follow this procedure. It is known as a “paraphrase” Mass. You may care to try to work out how Josquin's movements paraphrase the hymn: not an easy task.

Much of the scholarly literature on Renaissance music is difficult for the ordinary reader to understand: it reflects the extraordinary complexity of theory underlying music at that time, with its multiple “modes” and so on. But this should not worry you. Just listen to the music and try to perceive its beauty. A few background considerations might help, which I present summarily.

Apart from cathedrals, the chief homes of new Renaissance music were royal and ducal courts, including royal chapels. An “aristocratic” flavour is often not hard to discern. Leading composers, incidentally, were often highly paid.

Compared with plainchant, with its single line of melody, Renaissance music was characteristically **polyphonic**, i.e. made up of several (usually three or four) different voice registers (superius, alto, tenor and bassus), each with a recognizable melody in its own right. Music of later periods often used harmony rather than polyphony: each register other than the leading one supported that leading voice, but what it sang would make little musical sense if sung or played by itself.

There were several **modes**, and these affected the “feeling” of each composition. Modes were almost abandoned some time after the Renaissance. They survive, however, as our major and

minor scales. Most listeners would, I think, recognize the former as bolder, more confident perhaps, and the latter as sometimes tentative, mournful, or sombre. These scales are the survivors of the Ionian and Aeolian modes respectively — and even they only received recognition in the 16th century, though they were to some extent used earlier. The four “authentic” modes of the Middle Ages (surviving into the Renaissance) were the Doric, Phrygian, Lydian and Myxolydian. You can hear them by playing the eight successive white notes on the piano beginning respectively on D, E, F and G. (But modes should not be confused with keys. Each mode can begin on any note, provided you supply the appropriate sharps or flats.) There were also four “plagal” modes, beginning three notes lower: hypo-Dorian, hypo-Phrygian, etc.)

Cultural historians sometimes speak of a continuum of artistic styles ranging from “ideational” (typified by the more austere examples of Byzantine art and architecture) through to “sensitive” (strong emphasis on sensuality, often frivolity, typified in art by the Rococo). A sort of happy medium is called “idealistic”. (These terms were coined by the early 20th-century Harvard sociologist Sorokin. While their adequacy and their application in Sorokin's research work have been criticized, they do, I believe, provide a useful — albeit imperfect — basis for seeing different styles in comparison.) Renaissance art and music would usually be thought of as fitting very much into the “idealistic” category. You may like to consider, when you listen to it, why this is so.

Finally, in order to understand Renaissance music's place in history — and indeed as a means of appreciating the music itself — it is good to bear in mind the importance attached to music in **education** during the Middle Ages and beyond. It was one of the four (higher) liberal arts composing the *quadrivium* which followed the three subjects of the *trivium*, grammar, logic and rhetoric. Influenced by Plato and those who in some ways followed him, especially Boethius (480-525), the theoretical study of music was much in evidence in medieval and later universities. It was once thought that such study was of too theoretical and technical a nature to have much connection with, or influence upon, actual musical composition and performance. But that judgment has been much modified. Apparently the nature and content of music, as part of the *quadrivium*, varied considerably among the different universities. Whatever the precise connection in any place, it is evident

that music was generally seen as an important aspect of human development, one to be held in balance with other aspects such as competence in oral and written expression, reasoning and calculating. Listening to Renaissance music can contri-

bute to our understanding of Renaissance ideas about humanity and how it ought to be perfected. Conversely, an awareness of the perceived educational relevance of music can enable us better to appreciate that music itself.

WHAT'S A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO ...

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION?

BEN DEKATOV, a member of Learningguild who is preparing for examinations set by London University for its Diploma of Theology, writes about a wide-ranging textbook.

Religious belief is a significant factor in the lives of most people in the world today. Some understanding of the nature of particular religious beliefs and an ability to engage in discussion on the subject in a thoughtful and reasoned way are, in an increasingly globalized and diverse society, perhaps even more valuable than they have been in the past. Living as we do in a nation which is notable for its extreme secularity, an approach to the discussion of religious beliefs in a philosophical way could be an attractive option, and I suggest that reading Brian Davies' *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* might be a good way to start.

The 2004 edition is a second revision of the initial 1982 publication and is used widely by undergraduates. It is the introductory companion to *Philosophy of Religion: a Guide and Anthology*, compiled by Davies, which includes important essays containing what he refers to in this book as the key arguments.

Over the past thirty years or so, contributions to the philosophy of religion have benefited from the release of renewed energies in the areas of logic, epistemology, and metaphysics which, drawing on Wittgenstein's insight into the uses of language in particular contexts, caused the demise of logical positivism. Until the positivistic principle of verifiability, which imposed a tyranny of strict empiricism, was shown to be inadequate, even for science, the intellectual climate was such

that, according to the philosopher Michael Peterson, "it was difficult and even embarrassing for any self-respecting intellectual to take religious claims seriously".*

This is not to say that the philosophy of religion is a new branch of philosophy, and indeed the greater part of Davies' book examines the "natural theology" arguments of the patristic authors and the scholastic philosophers, notably Thomas Aquinas, and those of a range of thinkers from the eighteenth century, notably David Hume, to the present day. Recent studies are represented in the arguments of Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga amongst many others, and also notable are the contributions of Elizabeth Anscombe, to whose memory the book is dedicated.

The first chapter is called "Concepts of God" and sets the stage for much of the following theistic (as opposed to theist-versus-atheist) disputes by describing two opposing viewpoints. The more traditional of these is "classical theism", proposing the concept of God as simple, omnipotent and eternal that is founded upon his being the Creator. The other, which Davies calls "theistic personalism" (pp. 9-15), is a position held by many modern theologians and rejects classical theism for a variety of reasons. Some argue that it is "logically indefensible or in some way incoherent", but the reason usually given is that the God of classical theism it describes does not conform to the "biblical picture" of God.

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Introducing these two approaches in this way is, I think, not entirely fair, as the “theistic personalist” position is made to seem less objective in the light of its dependence on Scripture rather than reason. Even Aquinas, in his meticulously logical *Summa Theologiae*, makes regular appeals to Scripture as the inspirer of his hypotheses.

The next chapter looks at the views of different schools of thought about what constitutes a justified conclusion about God, what a meaningful statement is, and what can be accepted as evidence. Davies concludes this chapter with an interesting discussion on the theory of “belief without evidence”, after quoting on p.37 Alvin Plantinga’s claim that “it is entirely right, rational, reasonable, and proper to believe in God without any evidence or argument at all”. After these arguments and commentaries upon them, the central questions which the philosophy of religion seeks to throw light on are presented in turn, chapter by chapter, in a reasoned progression beginning with a chapter on the cosmological argument for the existence of God and ending, nine chapters later, with a very curious chapter on life after death.

All of the arguments are presented in detail, with attention paid to all important claims and objections so that no pedant might be frustrated by an unturned stone. The confined nature of a short introduction does not allow for the varied affirmation of single ideas, but Davies’ sentences, despite the abstract nature of his subject, are always clear in their meaning. So he sums up Descartes’ ontological argument: “If God is by definition something supremely perfect, and if existence is a perfection, it follows that God exists and that to deny that this is so is to contradict oneself” (p.100).

It seems that part of the work of theistic philosophers is to repel the attacks of atheistic philosophers by rebutting their confident objections to the possibility of God. In doing this Brian Davies, a Roman Catholic priest and a Dominican friar, with all chivalry and fairness in an honest spirit of enquiry, certainly proves his mettle.

* M. Peterson *et al.*, *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, OUP, 3rd edition, New York 2007, p.2.

Dear John,

It was good to read Hans Eisen’s detailed description (*L’g L* 1.2009) of his travels in Japan. I offer two corrections.

The gardens he mentions in Nagasaki are called the Glover Gardens, not the Gower Gardens. They take their name from the Englishman Thomas Glover (1838-1911), who ran an arms-importing business, was involved in the Meiji Revolution, and built the first tram line in Japan.

The Japanese rice wine is not called *saki* but *sake*: the first vowel as in ‘arm’, the second as in ‘hen’. ‘*Saki*’ has several meanings: it can have that of ‘promontory’ or ‘spit’, as in the name ‘Nagasaki’.

Yours,

Jim Richardson

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