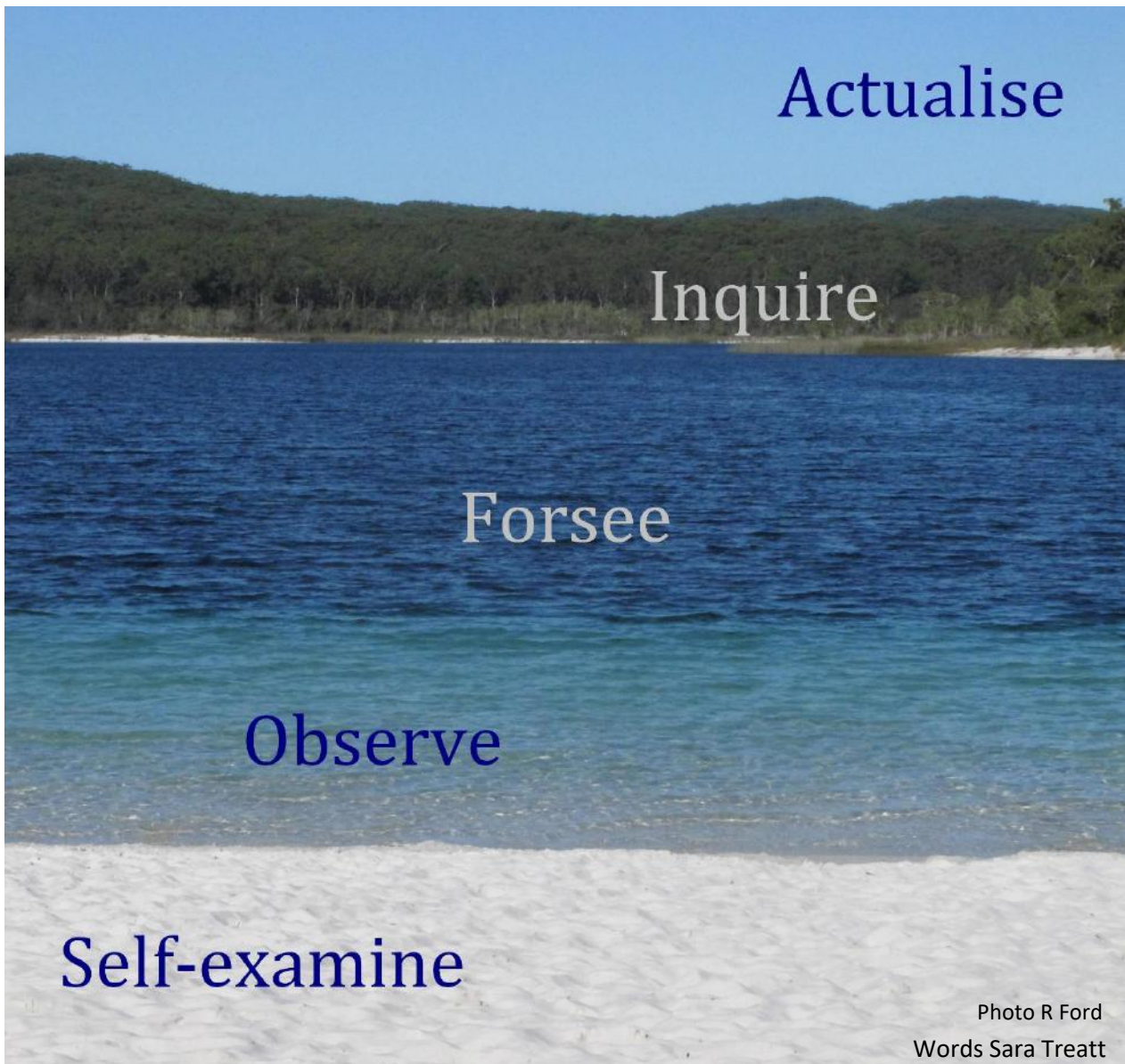


July-October 2019

the sofia bulletin

SOFIA exploring issues of life and meaning



The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full...
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Dover Beach, Matthew Arnold

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website and archive of articles: www.sof-in-australia.org

blog: www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php

Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sofiatalk/>

Origin of SOFIA

SOFIA creates a space for people of all faiths and none to explore issues of life and meaning. Religion no longer provides satisfactory answers. SOFIA is a non-dogmatic environment in which to continue conversation.

It began in the UK with a television program on religions presented by renegade Anglican priest and academic Don Cupitt. The program's name is from lines in Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach*:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full...
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

With its gentle irony, 'Sea of Faith' nicely held a tension between religion and a realisation that we humans had made it up.

Later we set up The Sea of Faith in Australia. Did two extra words undermine the irony, so 'faith' reverted to its face value? Maybe. Just in case, we de-emphasised it by using SOFIA as name and logo.

As well as *the sofia Bulletin*, SOFIA organises meetings (in Queensland and Victoria), a web site, a blog, expeditions, and a one-day conference.

DISCLAIMER

Views expressed are those of each author and not necessarily those of the Editor or SOFIA.

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EDITORIAL

This edition was delayed, as you can tell from the page header. It is a 'Bumper Edition', covering four months instead of two.

I hope you will enjoy Sara Treatt's take on our new name, where she has re-interpreted the letters in SOFIA. I was quite intrigued. Do her words express your thoughts on our name? Perhaps you have other words to suggest. How about trying your hand at this new literary form.

The most substantial item is Phil Roberts' work on an ethic of civilization, which is timely given the current turbulent times for global civilization, where conventions are under challenge from leaders such as Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. I split the article into two parts so there is a natural place to take a break if you want to review your thoughts before continuing.

Another substantial item is Rodney Eivers' script for his presentation at the SOFIA one-day conference.

At the AGM (which followed the Conference) we adopted SOFIA as our name and appointed a new President (see immediately below and on the next page). Our new president has written a brief biography to introduce himself (p 5).

You'll also find a book review, thoughts on the name change, an insight into Don Cupitt's view of religion, and all the regular items.

I can thoroughly recommend Greg Spearritt's latest crossword. It's full of old friends — people who introduced us to fresh ideas now common in progressive religion.

And, of course, please send copy to the usual addresses.

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News

Rodney Eivers hands over to Dallas Elvery

The Editor

Rodney Eivers

Rodney became President in 2015 at a turbulent time for the SOFIA Management Committee. His thoughtful approach settled us down and his skills as an enabler began a quietly productive four years that gave us one-day conferences, bus expeditions, new arrangements for membership fees and a new approach for our name.

All of this he fitted in to his already busy schedule.

Each year at the AGM we would ask for nominations for president and, with no-one else offering, he stepped in to keep our organisation going.

I valued Rodney's support as Editor of *the sofia bulletin*, and I am sure that others valued his support too.

This year, Dallas Elvery takes over as President, and his personal story of how he came to SOFIA is on page 5. Rodney can now catch his breath, although he will still be on the Management Committee as Treasurer.

So thank you, Rodney, for a job well done.

2019 SOFIA AGM

Selected items from the draft minutes, the Editor

Election of officers

Position	name
President:	Dallas Elvery
Vice-President	Glen Beasley
Treasurer	Rodney Eivers
Committee Member	Lyndell Ford
Committee Member	John Carr
Committee Member	Umesh Chandra
Committee Member	Rachel Matthews
Committee Member	Greg Spearritt

General business

1. idea of changing our Network's name and/or mission statement was discussed.

Moved

That the official trading name 'Sea of Faith in Australia' be changed to 'SOFIA'.

Proposed: Greg Spearritt

Seconded: Jed Perkins Motion carried; 1 vote against

Moved

That the Network express its mission as

"exploring issues of life and meaning through reason, philosophy, ethics, religion, science and the arts",

with this expressed succinctly, where appropriate, as "exploring issues of life and meaning".

Proposed: Helen Mason

Seconded: Glen Beasley Motion carried.

Moved

That the Network express its mission as

exploring issues of life and meaning through reason, philosophy, ethics, religion, science and the arts,

with this expressed succinctly, where appropriate, as exploring issues of life and meaning.

Proposed: Helen Mason

Seconded: Glen Beasley Motion carried.

2. The need to revamp our website was considered.

Moved

That the Management Committee allocate up to \$3,500 to upgrade and modernise the SOFIA website.

Proposed: Greg Spearritt

Seconded: Lyndell Ford Motion carried.

News

Dallas Elvery — New President of SOFIA

Dallas Elvery describes the journey to becoming President of SOFIA

Dallas' childhood was spent in rural NSW, the middle of three brothers. His parents began as small farmers, then later took waged work. Childhood was free, emotionally secure and somewhat uncomplicated, and included being part of a friendly Methodist church community. Adolescence brought challenges and tumult but was survived without any major scars. Up to school end, his ideals, values, politics and sense of religion remained little different from his parents and friends, and all totally unexplored.

At school end, Dallas moved to Newcastle to begin Engineering work and study. Dallas' engineering work included manufacturing, machine design and TAFE engineering diploma teaching. He worked in Newcastle, Darwin and Brisbane and retired in 2017.

With marriage to a feisty arts student, the challenges and stretching of parenthood (two sons), completing a graduate diploma of adult education, along with wide reading and a diverse range of friends, inside and outside the church, there has been a continued broadening and opening (and occasionally overwhelming) in his life. Importantly also, there has been a deepening appreciation of, and response to, artistic works.

At this point his life, Dallas is more interested in, and fascinated by, religion than at any time previously. It is a very open kind of interest, with an enthusiasm to explore the religious experience and practice of others. He is interested in exploring what are the truly good, things that are now so hidden. For example, exploring question such as:

- What could religion be if we stopped the noisy contesting and together allowed a patient egoless search?
- What kind of religious transcendence is possible for modern techno-humans?
- Could an essential core component of all religions, namely the sacredness of equality, be a means by which we finally begin to face the degree to which every aspect of our society's life is built on exploitation of vulnerability?

In a similar way, Dallas is becoming more aware that an essential part of living well is the work of sifting through the endlessly compromised underpinning of our lives and our societies, while continuing to grow in understanding of our social reality.

Belief systems that have been cobbled together from bits of our scriptural underpinning; the unceasing propaganda of vested interests and their media allies; and the vast array of pseudo-cognitive work, operate together to create ideas and theories that have enormous unjust consequences in the real world, and unforgiveable destruction in the natural world.

SOFIA gives opportunity for such open and inclusive searching and sifting for all of us who are involved.

Point of view

The Puzzle That Is Our Name

The editor takes a sideways look at how our name has been changed to SOFIA (see AGM page 4).

Responses to our name can be a puzzle. "Why is it so?" For a fresh angle I have expressed my thoughts in a crossword. The clues and answers are given opposite. In the text below I have linked the answers to our name.

The name of Don Cupitt's (2 D) television documentary on religions was *the Sea of faith*, taken from Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach* (22 D and 20 D).

When an organization was created in the UK to explore the ideas found in this documentary, *The Sea of Faith* must have seemed the obvious choice for its name. The Australian version took this name too.

That was then (5 D); now (23 D) things are different. Time marches on and moods change.

For some, having the word 'faith' in our name (9 D) became a problem because it gave an inaccurate impression that put off potential new members. So they proposed that we change it (15 D). On the other hand, others wanted to keep (27 A) our links with our origin (21 A).

Our membership is not increasing. Are we going to fade (16 A)? Would a name change help us to grow (26 A)? Would it attract a demographic that was young (19 D)? There is no need to panic (14 A); either route is valid. Nothing is for ever (28 A).

Our members cover a wide spectrum from atheist, through agnostic (9 A) to various forms of

theist (22 A) – with or without a traditional God (1 A). Maybe some members are 'Spiritual But Not Religious' (4 D). Whatever our thoughts it is an organisation that has helped each of us to develop our individual credo (25 A).

At the AGM we agreed to downplay our full name and instead use its initials (13 A). Maybe this will sidestep the 'faith' problem while retaining a link to our history.

We are moving into the unknown (12 A). I wonder, are we a little lost (3 A)? Maybe we are going nowhere (7 A)? But there again, perhaps 'lost' and "going nowhere" is how we like it.

For *the sofia bulletin* I will use the initials and reference the much-loved poem.

The content will, as before, depend upon what I receive. So, please send me copy.

I am interested in everything, from responses to the world around us, abstruse theory (10 D), mystery (17 A or 17 D) and lived experience. That's how we explore (18 D) meaning (6 D).

So, why not put your oar in (11 A) and row your own boat (8 D) on the seaway that is SOFIA.

Announcement

SOFIA Victoria

Thursdays, 7.30pm. Gold coin donation appreciated.

Lectures are followed by questions, discussion and refreshments.

All viewpoints are welcome.

VENUE: Carlton Library Meeting Room, 667 Rathdowne Street (corner Newry Street), North Carlton.
Melways Map: 2B J2

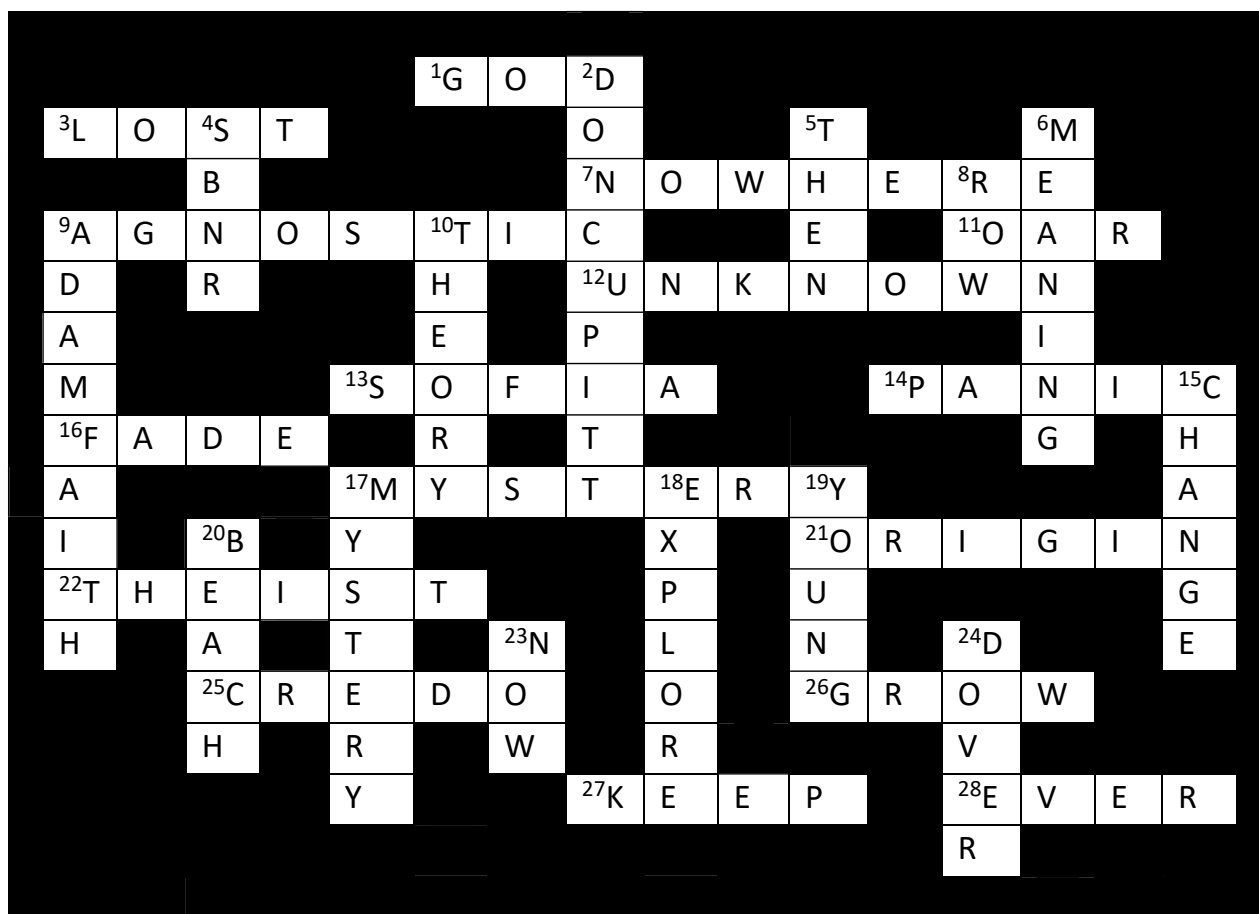
19 Sep. David Miller –
Was Saint Paul influenced by Hellenized Zoroastrianism?

17 Oct. Vanessa Thompkins –
Effective Altruism: Philosophy and Practice.

21 Nov. Rev Dr Paul Tonson –
Chaplaincy, Spirituality and Pastoral Care for the Non-Religious: Finding a meaningful common language.

19 Dec. Andrew Bush –
The Trouble with Christmas.

20 Feb. 2020 – details to be announced.



Across

- 1 Guy in the sky, 3
- 3 The Chord (Arthur Sullivan), or the... wax casting process, maybe we've our faith, 4
- 7 Samuel Butler used an anagram of this word for his 1872 novel, 7
- 9 A word used when choosing technology for power generation, 8
- 11. Used to propel a boat, 3
- 12 What explorers march off into 7
- 14 On the front cover of *the hitch-hiker's guide to the Galaxy* 5
- 16 What curtains would do in Queensland if they adopted daylight saving 4
- 17 "Behold, I tell you a", 7
- 21 Mate against mate; state against state. State of, 6
- 22 Someone who believes there is a guy in the sky 6
- 25 Statement of belief 5
- 26 What politicians claim will happen to the economy if they are in charge 4
- 27 Don't remove when decluttering, also the safest part of a castle 4
- 28 As in "What" 4

Down

- 2 The number one Sea Of Faith ticket holder, 3-6
- 4 A popular self-description when "religious affiliation" is discussed (init), 4
- 5 The past, 4
- 6 A word on the front page of the bulletin (see also 14) describing what we seek, 7
- 8 Method for propelling a boat (see 11 A), or an argument, or duck formation when you are ready, 3
- 9 English pop singer in the 1960s who chose a name that some SOFers might have problems with, 4-5
- 1. Evolution is one, also string, economic, etc, 6
- 1 Modify, or small coins, 6
- 1 Duplicate 17 A. How it happened is also the word! 7
- 18 A word on the front page of the bulletin (see also 6 D) describing what we do, 7
- 20 Site of noisy pebbles, 5
- 23 The present, 3
- 24 Town near site of noisy pebbles, 5

Moral Guidance

An edited version of Rodney Eivers' presentation to the SOFIA mini-conference held at the Queensland Art Gallery on June 15th 2019

The presentation was introduced by a video clip of John Lennon and Yoko Ono with their well-known song *Imagine*.

“Young shift away from religion” was the headline of an article in the 2018 Christmas Eve edition of Brisbane’s Courier Mail.

I read this at a time when our Management Committee was pondering a topic for the SOFIA one day conference in 2019 and they accepted my suggestion of ‘Moral Guidance’.

This has brought you here today. With the elimination of religion, specifically Christianity, what is to provide the moral guidance for young people in the future? Do we need moral guidance? Consciously or more likely, without being aware of it, we absorb principles on which we make decisions, from a variety of institutions. These can include, parliament, lawyers, schools, newspapers and novelists, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – and cricket. Until recently in the Western democracies this included Christianity.

Christianity has fallen away in the popular and intellectual mind for this generation and is now on the way out. Perhaps it is time to do away with institutional codes for living. Currently we in the Western world, for good and often ill, are living on the ethical capital of 2000 years of Judeo-Christianity.

A diversion here regarding my emphasis on Christianity in my talk with you today. In common usage we tend to use the word ‘religion’ rather than Christianity but in the Australian setting what we are talking about is Christianity. You will probably find me lapsing into that ‘religion’ convention within this gathering. But, yes it is Christianity people are talking about. There may be several reasons for this:

Firstly, our Western cultural and ethical systems have arisen within a framework that came from European thinkers immersed in Christianity. They were pioneers of the enlightenment who challenged religion, for example they reacted against the contemporary influence of Christian dogma.

Secondly, for the purpose of this discussion we are assuming the demise of ‘religion’ but, in Australia, non-Christian religions are actually increasing in numbers. Here are some figures I pulled from the Internet.

Christianity	-7.2 %
Judaism	-6.5 %
Islam	+27.1%
Buddhism	+6.6.%
Hinduism	+9.6%
Sikhism	+74.1%
No religion	+61.0 %

Growth in religions in Australia 2011-2016

So Christianity has been, and numerically still is, the dominant religious force under challenge, just as the original 'religio' was the combination of beliefs and practices which bound the Roman Empire culture and was challenged by Christianity. You may recall the story of Paul and Barnabas, and why they were brought to trial and thrown into prison. The prosecutor charged:

They are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.

I understand that historian Gibbon, blamed Christianity for wrecking the cohesion of the Roman Empire. If we were in Saudia Arabia we could discuss this issue in terms of the discarding of Islam as a community binding force, in Israel of doing away with Judaism, in India the collapse of Hinduism. In China you have Communism as a binding force and we note their antipathy towards movements such as Christianity and the Falun Gong.

It is interesting to note perhaps that the only other religion in decline beside Christianity is shown to be Judaism. Another relevant observation perhaps in specifying particular religious faiths comes from another commentary I read recently. It has been common as an aid to understanding and acceptance between religions to claim that all have much in common – promulgating one version or another of the Golden Rule, for example. We talk about the influence of Judeo-Christianity,. This commentator made the point, though, that this can be confusing. Judaism is Judaism because it is not Christianity. A Jewish acquaintance of mine made that point quite strongly some time ago. Christianity is Christianity because it is not Judaism. Similarly, one could say Islam is Islam because it is not Christianity.

What about a future world-wide religion?

Another statistical aside from the Internet:

Muslims represent nearly a quarter of the world's population and will become the [largest religious group on the planet later this century](#). Over 60 percent of the world's Muslims reside in the Asia-Pacific region. So we had better get used to it.

But let us move on. Let us roll with the current mood of Western society and dismiss Christianity. What happens when we make a fresh start?

Some take a negative view. Others read the positive into how human beings come to relate to one another. William Golding's classic *Lord of the Flies* depicts the outcome as anarchy. Anthropological studies, however, suggest that people from pre-literate societies do learn to band together and cooperate with one another. Such cooperation, though, tends to be restricted to within the tribal group. It is not necessarily the way to universal harmony. Aboriginal religion and earlier Hebrew religion were linked to their geographic locations. This is typified by the 'dream time' formation of the landscape in Australia and for the Hebrews laments such as

By the Waters of Babylon,

There we sat down and wept.

How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

These early attempts at building community were backed up by supernatural entities as typified by the pantheon of Gods backing religio in Rome. Pre-literate societies had their animistic spirit worlds to keep people in line.

But in this 21st century of knowledge, enlightenment and travel to the moon, the supernatural is not tenable. Perhaps as my colleague Greg Spearritt suggests, being adrift “all at sea” (without a rudder?) is not a bad thing. “Doing the right thing” may just come naturally. We may not need institutionalised principles.

On the other hand, if we do see a need for bases for decision and action we may still seek to find that moral guidance from our secular ideologies and institutions as millions have sought to do down through the ages. We have instituted, parliaments, law courts, schools and so on and cricket.

Nevertheless, we do individually arrive at principles which we apply when making decisions. I wish to move on, leave the broad picture and invite you to examine what influences guide you when trying to decide what to do in given circumstances. The principles may come from governments, courts and schools and cricket but let us leave Christianity out of it, especially its supernatural manifestations.

Broad examples of our sources might include, Democracy, Communism, culture (how often now do we define “doing the right thing” (by whether it is Australian or non-Australian?) family, atheism, humanism, and so on. The big one on the broad scale is perhaps nationalism. We have been reminded of this currently with the centenary of the end of World War I and the emergence of Trump, Brexit, and Putin’s hypersonic defence system. During the recent electioneering I drove past Clive Palmer’s latest bill board. “Put Australia first. Make Australia Great” it shouted.

I may expand on this later but for now you may like, particularly when interacting with your grandchildren, to reflect on how we may cope in a non-supernaturalist world. When examining the demise of Christianity and what might replace it for moral guidance I was thinking in terms of institutions. More fundamental, however, is the questions of the principles on which those institutions are based. Some institutions, of course will function with a combination of principles. All will probably like to class themselves as “doing the right thing”. The United Nations Declaration on Human rights could be seen as one attempt to introduce a universal moral code. One criticism of such an approach is that more may need to be said about human *responsibilities* to be placed alongside human *rights*.

But the principles can clash. A classic case may be where a parent believes theft is wrong but will steal bread to feed a starving child.

Some examples of principles, usually competing with each other, which may influence our decision making and lead us to make moral decisions one way or another are:

- Situation ethics vs moral absolutes eg absolute honesty.
- Doing the “right thing” – Who defines what is “right”?
- Law – state and/or theological
- Male vs female – Prime responses to erotic touch: for the female, protection, for the male, control
- What and how much tax to pay
- Punishment for criminals vs rehabilitation (eg restorative justice)
- Democracy (decision-making by a majority of 1) vs decisive political leadership

- Parental control (authority) with children.
- Reciprocity (an eye for an eye) vs forgiveness
- Self-control (hiding true feelings?) vs open (honest?) expression of feelings.
- Relationship vs self identity (eg in maintaining a marriage or friendship). Doing it “My way” may not be sustaining in an intimate relationship..
- Relative needs - Maslow’s hierarchy – eg survival vs security
- One to one relationships – What is wrong with polygamy?
- Nuclear family relationships – vs extended family relationships
- Populism vs parliament eg Australian parliaments of major parties have not been prepared to test by referendum what might turn out to be a popular vote for restoration of the death penalty.
- Electronic media vs face to face interaction.
- Cultural or national or racial identity vs global village
- Territorial integrity vs global village. A frequent trigger for war.
- Universal unconditional love, all people are treated equally
- Patriotism – Australia first, make Australia great. Extended to war whereby one kills somebody else in the hope that by killing that person it will change the minds of the rulers of that person to a state of cooperation.
- Winning vs having fun.

Here are some more Moral Guidance hypotheticals:

Assuming we have a completely neutral society in terms of religion and ideology, what guidance principles might you apply to situations such as the following:

1. Your single-parent daughter with twin breast-feeding babies, engages in a \$100,000 fraud at her employers. Nobody but she and you know that this has happened. What do you do about it?
2. A young man, like my father, in World War I wonders whether he should enlist to join his mates in killing people on the other side of the world.
3. 3.. You are a prisoner of war and your captors have told you that somebody in your group will be killed unless you own up to doing the ‘wrong’ thing. How do you respond?
4. A widow has an adult very disabled son who is never likely to have an external sexual relationship. She ponders whether she should as a loving action engage in one form or another of sexual intimacy with him.
5. You are an employer (either male or female) with a workforce with a large majority of women. You have a promotion to offer. In your heart of hearts you feel that one of the few men would be better fitted to promote the growth of the firm. What is your response?
6. Reverse, Number 5. You have a firm with a lot of men and you think a woman would do a better job in a new leadership position. What and why do you decide?
7. Three young men in their late teens, at Macgregor, near Sunnybank, Queensland murder a respected doctor in a robbery gone wrong. How should society respond?
8. Planet Earth is in a bad way and it is probably too late repair the situation. What might we do about it?
9. You have three children under the age of ten. Your wife (husband) does something which is bad either in that it hurts someone else or hurts you. If

you mention this to her (him) you fear that it will put the marriage at risk. What principles guide you here? Where do the principles come from?

10. Fudging tax returns eg residing free of charge at one's investment property and not declaring this as income

So now over to you. Where do you get your moral guidance?

To open up the topic, I will present some everyday scenarios for you to consider (see above). You can ponder the issue by yourself or, if you wish, talk to the people in the seats near you.

1. Come up with as many principles as you can that might be used when deciding what to do (you don't have to agree – you can include any the principles that might be used)
2. Suggest where the principles might have come from – there might be several origins for a principle. What has led you to think this way?

Here is the first scenario. See how you go. I may list others later and, if there is time, we can dig into one or two of those as well.

Scenario (an actual happening recently): Three young men in their early teens, happen to take a gun with them when committing an opportunistic robbery in the quiet middle class suburb of MacGregor. In being disturbed by the occupant of the house they shoot a respected doctor dead.

You are placed on a community panel concerned about the prevalence of crime in your suburb and are invited to outline the principles you would use to deal with this specific case and the considerations to be explored in dealing with long-term criminality.

(A clue: Issues of retributive (punishment) vs restorative (rehabilitative) justice.)

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End by playing *Imagine* by Yoko Ono and John Lennon.

Feature

An Ethic Of Civilisation, Part 1

This exploration by Phil

Roberts comes at a time when the conventions of civilisation are losing their hold, whether it is Brexit, or Donald Trump's disregard for tradition. Phil's timely article illuminates the questions that living in large groups bring.

Inexorably, it seems, humankind has been drawn into the state of living together. From our tribal beginnings we graduated, apparently in the Middle East, to living in cities. Now in the 20th and 21st centuries this 'living together' has reached a new level, that of the so-called global village. In this modern time we have also come to acknowledge in a deeper way the fact that we humans are, for all our extraordinary attributes and powers, only one of the multitudinous forms of life or existence on the planet and in the universe.

The word 'civilisation' comes from the Latin word for city, which was 'civitas.' In broad terms it means a high state of human development – cultural, technological and so on. As Cristian Violatti¹ observes, however:

The meaning of the term **civilization** has changed several times during its history, and even today it is used in several ways. It is commonly used to describe human societies "with a high level of cultural and technological development", as opposed to what many consider to be less "advanced" societies. This definition, however, is unclear, subjective, and it carries with it assumptions no longer accepted by modern scholarship on how human societies have changed during their long past.

Not only this, but the concept of civilisation as purely a materialistic achievement is inadequate for it says nothing about the quality of the inner life, even though that may be implicit to some degree in the word 'cultural.' I would add that civilisation is the condition where *everyone* – not just the few or the many – is able to have full enjoyment of life.

Accepting that there are different ideas about what constitutes civilisation, we nevertheless have an imperative now that we are just a global village – an imperative to find a common ground, a common ethical foundation for our dealings with each other. Our very survival gives us no choice in this matter. Fortunately, while cultural and other differences continue to militate in favour of pluralism and against the adoption of just one view, there is a large amount of agreement, expressed explicitly and implicitly in all sorts of 'comings together' around the world.

Fundamental ethical principles

Civilisation, it seems to me, rests on three ethical principles.

The first I would label as truth in living; that we adopt a whole and balanced world-view which appreciates the good while acknowledging the bad, including the shortcomings in ourselves. Albert Schweitzer described this as "taking the world as it is." This is the truthfulness in which:

...the world means the horrible in the glorious, the meaningless in the fullness of meaning, the sorrowful in the joyful².

Such a deep degree of understanding and acceptance is not given to us as of right but is acquired over time through dedicated pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. And it is not only a matter of deep insight, for it also requires us to be completely honest about the way things are. Without such honesty we cannot proceed.

The second fundamental principle of civilisation is the one commonly called the Golden Rule, that we treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated. In other words, we should treat each other with love, kindness, compassion, care, concern, tolerance, respect, truthfulness, justice, and so on. An extension of the Golden Rule is Schweitzer's concept of Reverence for Life, which is that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life, and to destroy, to harm or to hinder life is evil. This also is an ethic of civilisation, though potentially it goes beyond 'mere' civilising to a still higher state of existence, somewhere in the realm of the kingdom of God (whatever that term might mean).

The third fundamental principle of civilisation is that of continuous improvement; constantly seeking to make things better for ourselves and others. This principle rests on the belief that life, however good it might be in all sorts of

ways, is always capable of improvement. Moving in this direction requires first that we understand properly how things are at present and how they might develop (the first principle of civilisation) and then that we realise that nothing much ever gets done by just one person: we are, all humankind, a team.

Rationale for civilisation ethics

What rationale might support the three ethical principles outlined above?

Principle of truth in living

Any rationale in this area has to stand on two premises that might be regarded as axiomatic, ie self-evidently true. Both have to do with the way we deal with plurality, the fact that each person or thing is but one in a sea of many. The first is the idea that we have to assign **value** to people and things in order to live. The second is that dealing with others requires us to have an **ethic** of some sort, a moral framework on which to base our actions.

Self-evidently, the better we are at assigning value, the more competent we are in the business of living and thriving. As life gets more and more complex, the harder we have to work at competence. The full person has to be engaged – the physical, intellectual and moral person. Mindpower has to be superhuman, for we are dealing with all branches of knowledge, trying to understand and value not only things as they are now but as they might be in future. And together with mindpower there have to be diligence and absolute truthfulness: truthfulness in its largest sense, encompassing the totality of things, and rigorously and honestly distinguishing the good from the bad, the pro-life from the anti-life.

Principle of goodwill — the Golden Rule

Faced with the necessity of having to deal with other people day-in day-out, we are each forced to develop a relational ethic of some kind. Albert Schweitzer understood this when he argued that civilisation cannot exist without an ethic; and if civilisation is understood to be a high state of human development, it follows surely that the ethic must be at a correspondingly high level. In *Out of My Life and Thought*, p. 148, Schweitzer said:

But what is civilization?

The essential element in civilization is the ethical perfecting of the individual as well as society. At the same time, every spiritual and every material step forward has significance for civilization. The will to civilization is, then, the universal will to progress that is conscious of the ethical as the highest value. In spite of the great importance we attach to the achievements of science and human prowess, it is obvious that only a humanity that is striving for ethical ends can benefit in full measure from material progress and can overcome the dangers that accompany it.....

The only possible way out of chaos is for us to adopt a concept of the world based on the ideal of true civilization.

But what is the nature of that concept of the world in which the will to the general progress and the will to the ethical progress join and are linked together?

It consists in an ethical affirmation of the world and of life.

This ethical affirmation he found in the idea of Reverence for Life, that is, care and respect for all other creatures. Obviously, innumerable other thinkers have also argued the case for goodwill; normative ethics is full of such discussion,

from the ancient Greeks through to Kant and John Rawls. Religion links goodwill with the sacred or divine, which it sees as the source of all things good. The various faith traditions are united in teaching that the sacred or divine is ultimately good and that we humans therefore do best when we too are good. (The secular equivalent is that life is good and – again – we humans do best when we are good). Virtue is commonly held by the different faith traditions to be our sacred duty. At the same time, each tradition has its own particular slant, its own distinctive contribution to the overall argument. Christianity speaks of loving one's enemies; Indian religions speak of 'ahimsa' (doing no harm); religion in southern Africa speaks of 'ubuntu' (humanity towards others); and so on.

Ultimately, though, this is something that transcends argument, for it is something that comes from the heart. We rationalise goodwill but it exists and manifests itself in any case. It is almost unbelievably powerful, as powerful as the universal creative urge itself, to which we are all subject. One mark of the development of the human race is that, in principle if not in practice, we have come to deem all people as being of equal value. People may be unequal in all sorts of other ways, but their very existence makes them universally the same. Even the poorest, most unfortunate person has value in that he or she can call forth goodness in other people. The essential equality of humankind is a fundamental and very widely held tenet.

We come now to the Golden Rule, which curiously, according to Bill Puka in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,³ has received little notice from moral philosophers despite its prominence in common-sense ethics. The Golden Rule can be justified partly by self-interest for, clearly, we don't advance very far without the goodwill of others. This has always been the case, but is increasingly more so, for complexity drives us all to greater interdependence. So while complexity causes stresses and strains, it also makes us all cohere all the more, clinging to each for mutual support. Throughout the course of our history, goodwill has been institutionalised; societies have made good relations between people a legal obligation, an essential part of citizenship. Thus we are all, as we grow up, socialised into this way of thinking, that we must or should behave 'properly'. Intersecting with this pro-social ideation there is the natural instinct for altruism, the disinterested and selfless concern for the wellbeing of others. Part of altruism is the simple pleasure we get at seeing happiness in other people, not just ourselves. There is an even greater pleasure when we ourselves are agents of that happiness. And altruism is capable of the highest possible goodness by way of self-sacrifice, whereby a person can give his or her own life for others. Such acts of self-negation are typically (and symbolically) both low points and high points in the course of civilisation.

Civilisation flourishes when we give to others and enter their lives, seeing and feeling things as they do. Yet paradoxically, we also have to inflict harm in order just to live and be happy. Civilisation teaches us how to do this without unnecessary suffering; it replaces conflict with competition and makes all sorts of rules to prevent and contain discord. We enhance civilisation not by letting opposites fight but by holding them in balance or in check, and giving space for goodwill to flow. This is the extraordinary dynamic of our constant struggle to achieve a better world.

Principle of continuous improvement

We might say here that the end state to which we all aspire is summed up in the words of Robert Kennedy,

to tame the savageness of man and *make gentle the life of this world.*'

It may be said that this is not an ethical principle so much as a life urge: the urge not only to live but to live well. This, however, is a matter of degree. Meeting our basic needs such as food, shelter, companionship and so on is obviously something that is, in a sense, deeper than ethics, but it is when we enter the realm of wants that ethics cannot be avoided. Here we come to the matter of choice, inasmuch as needs are not a matter of choice but wants are, and ethics are all about choice. At some point in our progression up the hierarchy of needs, we choose to pursue things like education, fulfilment through work, material rewards, and so on, and in doing so we make ethical choices – we decide that we want to, in all sorts of ways, improve. At this point we intersect with the Golden Rule, for improvement is not possible without positive relationships with other people, and nor is it enjoyable without these relationships, for pleasure is always better when shared.

Feature

An Ethic Of Civilisation: Part 2

Part 2 of Phil Roberts' article

further illuminates the questions that living in large groups bring.

Challenges to ethics

There are five obvious challenges to the ethical principles as described in Part 1.

Firstly, there is the limitation of our own needs, namely that we have to kill and harm simply to survive. Secondly, there is the narrowness of our own sphere of interest: we are interested in the wellbeing of our immediate circle of family, friends and acquaintances, then the various communities we belong to, but we have diminished interest in strangers except for isolated instances that capture our attention. Thirdly, there is the divide between private and public ethics, for while we as individuals might commit ourselves to a certain way of living, we cannot bind others to doing so. Fourthly, there is failed reciprocity, that is, what might happen when other people let us down and fail to meet their obligation of behaving with goodwill. Lastly, there is inertia or failure to act, which one way or another holds back our creative impulses and stops us from doing whatever is necessary to make continual improvement.

Let us now explore these matters in more detail.

The human being is inescapably animal, and it therefore follows that we have to kill and harm just in order to live. This may seem, from an idealistic point of view, rather gloomy, yet it is not entirely so, for civilisation itself depends on constant renewal which can take place only through death and decay. As in all aspects of life there is room for manoeuvring. Increasing knowledge and

commitment to ethical action enable us to moderate our actions in order that other life may be protected and promoted. This is one of the glories of the environmental movement. Gabriel Langfeldt⁴ tells us that Schweitzer said:

The fundamental law of ethics ... is that we must not cause suffering to any animate being, even the lowest (unless we ourselves are having to obey the principle of necessary self-defence) and that we, as far as we are able, shall be active to benefit other things through positive action.

We accept harsh reality while appreciating that, through our agency exercised thoughtfully, there can be good outcomes.

The second challenge identified above, namely that of our sphere of interest, is also one with positive aspects. We are tribal. We look after family and friends first, our immediate neighbourhood next, and so on. This can all too easily lead us into error, as when tribalism turns into a loyalty that sees others as enemies. Nationalism is an example; nationalism has been a huge driving force for social and economic advancement, but it has also led to horrific wars and regimes of oppression. In these sorts of situations we must never forget that the Golden Rule applies to all people without exception.

A variant on this theme is that, as the population of the world increases, proportionally we disengage from other individuals. We switch off because we cannot cope with the burden of numbers. To protect our own individuality we have to put other people at arm's length or simply not see them at all. This phenomenon can be offset by philosophical (as distinct from political) communitarianism, which seeks to achieve a better balance between the wellbeing of the individual and the community. Social media also play a part here, for they enable a much richer networking of relationships between people. Thus, while my sphere of associates may be limited, there are innumerable other spheres, all of which connect. In such a connected society, no one person should be forgotten; and when it is evident that there are outsiders, there are other people who are on the lookout for outsiders and ready to bring them inside. While we cannot be all things to all people, we can at least work for good within our immediate communities, hoping and trusting that our efforts will align with others and together contribute to goodness on the grand scale.

The third challenge mentioned above, the divide between private and public ethics, is a difficult one. There is a degree of crossover here with the previous limitation, that no one individual can take responsibility for all others. Even the most generous society is afflicted with big doses of self-interest when public decisions are to be made. This is one reason why few countries are generous givers of foreign aid or accepting of large numbers of refugees. Worsening the problem is the fact that governments are typically too self-interested to push ethical boundaries in a positive direction. Yet it is the role of governments not only to gauge public opinion on issues that demand goodwill, but also to lead, to take politically courageous decisions that will in the longer term be of greater benefit than citizens are prepared to recognise.

The fourth challenge, that of failed reciprocity, is indeed a severe drain on the goodwill of people trying to make a better world. The sad reality is that bad behaviour is ever-present in human affairs. As a rule of thumb we might say that every step forward is negated by a step back, with just the barest margin of

positive effect that makes it possible for us all to advance towards civilisation, inch by inch. There is plenty of good advice here. The Christian would say to turn the other cheek, having faith that goodness will in the end triumph. History would seem to bear this out, for it is evident that, while we continue to repeat errors of the past, on the whole our race has progressed and we do behave better, even though often this is simply because we have institutionalised good behaviours, thereby making them the norm rather than the reverse. But as we all know, rules are not enough. The impulse to act out the Golden Rule has to be constantly nurtured within us all so that instinctively we behave in ways that are favourable to each other and to civilisation as a whole.

A related consideration is that the Golden Rule may not always be the most practical approach to a situation. For example, a criminal or bully might want to be treated with indulgence and repeated leniency, but this would not necessarily achieve any lasting benefit. Perhaps the best that we can hope to achieve is to align ourselves with the good in its fullest state, which is truth *and* love *and* creative action (where creative action may mean simply surviving). In other words, forgiving bad behaviour may be an act of love, but goodness resides also in truth, which may require a corrective act of justice.

The fifth and last challenge to civilisation is inertia or failure to act. This is a negation of the principle of continuous improvement and comes from apathy (which is precursor to laziness) and fear. Apathy takes many forms, from turning a blind eye to suffering, to immersion in games or social media or TV. Fear is a sadder phenomenon, a lack or loss of courage, a failure in belief that things *can* improve. The reality is that, despite these negatives which together have a huge cumulative drain on our wellbeing, we advance anyway. The commitment to continuous improvement is a force so deep within our psyche that it cannot be denied.

The ethic of civilisation or goodwill to others is already deeply rooted in human society around the world. This does not prevent it from falling under constant challenge, by way of either abuse of others or neglect. Not only this, but there are also new situations arising every day where fresh applications of the principle have to be worked out and put into practice. If we fail to keep our ethical senses alert, new violations of the principle occur without our noticing them; we have fallen asleep at the wheel. Consequently, we have a shared obligation to keep preaching goodwill, keep talking about it, keep debating the best ways of remaining ethical, and above all keep practising it, for the best means of propagating an idea or set of ideas is by example.

The goals of civilisation

What specifically are our goals when we talk about the march towards ever-increasing levels of civilisation? We noted before that the idea of civilisation is variable, changing over time and from one culture to another. Commonly we talk about advanced states of progress in science, human thought, standards of living, and so on. These ideals are in a sense crystallised in the notion of rights⁵.

In terms of rights, the cornerstones of civilisation could be said to be freedom, justice and peace, which are the aspirations acknowledged in the first sentence of the Preamble to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. In a loose

sense these three equate to the goals of the French Revolution, which were liberty, equality and fraternity. Freedom is a natural state that begins at birth, inasmuch as we are free to have our own thoughts and feelings and personality. Freedom is also the benefit that flows from justice and peace combined. Justice relates to fairness which is founded upon an essential equality; we might say it is the wise application of truth in human affairs, the outcome of a whole and balanced understanding of things. Peace is the realisation of fraternity or mutual care and responsibility; it is the ultimate harmony, the universal enactment of compassion. Peace cannot exist in any real sense without justice or freedom; all three are intertwined.

Freedom is sometimes considered the first of the natural rights of humankind, but no rights are natural, for rights are in reality a product of human thought. Thus we may say freedom, like life itself and the pursuit of happiness, is a natural condition of humankind but not a natural right. Like all of these conditions it has a variable meaning according to circumstance. Thus we are born free but cannot live or thrive without surrendering some of that freedom, giving it up for various forms of rule or discipline. When we do so, however, we attain other – higher – forms of freedom. Similarly, justice and peace are matters subject to constant negotiation; for example, we accept the tensions inherent in working with other people, collaboratively or cooperatively or in competition, in order to achieve a higher level of peace.

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, though written as long ago as 1948, serves still as a more or less generally accepted standard. As stated in the Preamble it is the agreed

...common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.

It is the starting point for envisioning a civilised society in our time. To paraphrase, the authors and signatories of the *Universal Declaration* contemplated a world where all people might enjoy (subject to the performance of certain duties):

- Freedom
- Peace and security
- Justice
- The benefits of marriage and family life
- The benefits of community membership and nationality
- A voice in government
- An adequate standard of living
- The right to own property
- A reasonable standard of education
- Employment
- Social security
- Enjoyment of rest and leisure, and
- The full and free development of personality.

This then gives us a picture of the endgame when the ethics of civilisation have been put into effect.

The truly civilised person – Homo civilis

What I have just described is the macro picture of a supposed future world. To complete the picture we also need to consider the micro, in other words what sort of people would populate this splendid world. Anthropologists hold that life on our planet has developed to the point where we, the human race, may be described as *Homo sapiens* or wise man, but should this be regarded as the endpoint in our development? One possibility is that, as the Trans-humanists would have it, we will somehow merge with our technological creations – artificial intelligence and the like – to become a new super-race. However, another idea that I prefer is that, technology aside, we will so improve our ability to live together that we will morph from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo civilis*, meaning civilised man. *Homo civilis* is a term not recognised by anthropology but a label which some use for an advanced stage of human development that remains anatomically within *Homo sapiens* (see for example Wojciech Kalaga⁶).

Thus a truly civilised person might be described as *Homo sapiens* (wise man) plus. *Homo sapiens* has knowledge and understanding but these in themselves, though necessary, are not sufficient to constitute civilisation. The essence of civilisation is *relationship*, or a very high degree of connection with other people and other forms of life. One might even say that civilisation requires connection with all existence, all that is, including the spiritual dimension of existence. Thus the civilised person has in the first place knowledge and understanding, but adds to this both benevolence (good wishes) and active goodwill.

The civilised person reflects not only the overall unity, but also complexity of the world as a whole. Thus for example I envisage this person to have qualities of insight into things, with appreciation of the good but also acceptance of the many imperfections of life and commitment to doing better. The civilised person has wholeness, internal harmony and balance. Truth and love and continual creative action are evident in the life of this person. Living with integrity, he or she applies all aspects of life in the work of civilisation: applying the confidence that comes through commitment to goodness, the vigour that comes through proper self-care, the habits of organisation that come through care for property, the personal wealth, the human connections, the learning and the wisdom. But when will we have a critical mass of people such as this?

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Review

Fredéric Martel, *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy*, Bloomsbury, 2019.

Reviewed by John Carr

In the liberal democracies, a tsunami of progressive legislation has meant that gender-diverse people are generally much better off than they were even 20 or 30 years ago. Mission accomplished? Not quite! For a start, there has been no progress in Islamic countries and many former British colonies in Asia and Africa. In liberal democracies, time is needed to make full use of the hard-won freedoms and to overcome the still widespread vestiges of prejudice. More seriously, Frédéric Martel's book presents evidence that some of the worst effects of historic homophobia have not even been recognized yet, let alone addressed.

Few people will be surprised to learn that a profession restricted to celibate men is likely to be an attractive choice for gay men. However, the size of the homosexual dominance of the Catholic Church, as claimed in Martel's book, and the massive effects that this continues to have on the entire Church are genuinely shocking. What should also be of concern are the effects on the wider socio-political life of some predominantly Catholic countries.

Martel is a highly experienced journalist and the author of nine earlier books, mostly on gay and political subjects. *In the Closet* is based on many hundreds of interviews with Catholic clergy, former clergy, seminarians, journalists, nuns, Swiss Guards and sex-workers, male and female. Many of the interviews were on the record. The book is not anti-Gay. It is anti-clerical and anti-Catholic.

Martel's argument begins with the claim that a high proportion of the members of the Catholic priesthood and religious orders are homosexual. He then reports claims that the gay proportion rises the further up the hierarchy you go, so that there are estimates of 70 to 80 percent among Vatican officials.

In other institutions, this demographic might not have any negative effects but, in the Catholic Church, it clashes with the Church's archaic, conservative doctrine on all aspects of sex. The only permissible sexual acts for Catholics are those between men and women who are married to each other, and then only for the purpose of procreation. All other types of sexual activity are considered as mortal (grave) sins – between men and women who are not married, between same-sex couples, even masturbation. So, too, are abortion, contraception, marriage of divorced people, pornography and sexual thoughts.

Taken together, these facts are a recipe for major conflict – a workforce numbering in the millions who are forbidden to take part in sexual activities of any kind, and this a workforce with a sworn duty to enforce the dogma of the Church and empowered to advise members of their flock on sexual and marital

problems. Most seriously, priests have the right and a duty to demand that members of their flock, whatever their age, should 'confess' their most intimate sexual activities and thoughts to them, in private, in order to receive 'absolution'. Leaving aside the dangers in which this combination of policies places the flock, it must also place all priests in a difficult position, ethically, legally and psychologically. The many homosexual priests are in particularly invidious position, as their sexual identity is stigmatized and must be hidden from view and, if necessary, vigorously denied. They must remain 'in the closet'.

This is Martel's central thesis, that homosexual priests and religious often decide that the safest way to avoid 'outing' is to be the most dedicated in attacking homosexuality. The most effective form of defence is attack. Hypocrisy is essential to their survival. Many of the loudest, most vociferous homophobes in the Church, he claims, are homosexual, including some who are involved in sexual activity. Within the ranks of the clergy, it is claimed, the names of 'fallen priests', whether straight or gay, is well-known. In the Curia, it seems, the community of gays is called 'The Parish'.

Martel's *In the Closet* focuses mainly on the pontificates of John Paul II (1978-2005) and Benedict XVI (2005-2013), though the current pontificate of Francis II is referred to frequently, sometimes as a contrast. For the 35-year reign of the two ultra-conservative Popes, Martel claims, the Catholic Church redoubled its efforts to enforce strict adherence to orthodox doctrine on sexual matters. Throughout the Western world, movements to liberalise laws on abortion, contraception, same-sex relationships and, to some extent, women's rights, were opposed at every step. At the same time, allegations of sexual abuse were often denied and covered up.

Foremost among the hundreds of people who are named in the book are numerous senior members of the Church hierarchy – Cardinals, Papal Nuncios, Bishops, Monsignori and leaders of orders and organisations. These are or were extremely powerful in their home countries and, very often, in the Vatican itself, with responsibilities and powers that affected the entire Catholic world. Most of these are unknown in Australia, as they and their activities rarely had direct relevance here. While the abuse of children has been a major topic in the Australian media for years, even major scandals in Italy and Hispanic America have largely remained unreported and the perpetrators unknown in this country.

The scandals described in this book, many well-publicised in other countries, were not all confined to the sexual area. In some South American countries, in particular, the Catholic Church collaborated with extreme right-wing governments, like that of Pinochet in Chile, for mutual benefit. The dictators or oligarchs were kept in power and the Church was able to fend off demands for more secular standards of morality. It, and its leaders, sometimes benefited financially. Martel reports several instances of even retired Cardinals living in royal splendour.

The reception of the book, as might be expected, has been mixed, with Catholic journals and right-wing American organisations publishing dismissive reviews.

NOTES

As far as I can see, there has been no successful litigation against Martel or the publisher. It is available in e and audio formats. It is long (576 pages), but the substantial list of source information is hived off and free to read online, see:

<https://fredericmartel.com/>

In February this year, the ABC published a substantial review by James Alison, one of Martel's informants. See

<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/frédéric-martel-and-the-structure-of-the-clerical-closet/10843678>

If you wish to gain quick insight into the *dramatis personae*, read the Wikipedia biography of the late-Mexican Cardinal Marcial Maciel.

Regular Items

Science & Religion

The intersect between religion and science seems to be one of perpetual interest. In this column, Greg Spearritt draws attention to recent scientific research that may have implications for our understanding of religion, or for religious belief and practice.

Cheating in sport

European research involving 1500 athletes has found that in a set of given hypothetical situations, those with a stronger sense of moral identity were less likely to consider taking a banned substance to improve their results.

Web reference:

www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/05/190509193338.htm

Reasonable expectations

Not always reaching your potential is okay, but overthinking it is a problem

Web reference:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/06/190620153524.htm>
www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/07/190725150952.htm

Do not covet your neighbour's house

Comparing your house to your neighbors' can lead to dissatisfaction.

Web reference:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/08/190819164342.htm>

Announcement

Conference in New Zealand

*Transforming Communities:
Finding meaning in a consumption-driven world*
All Souls Merivale,
Christchurch
Friday 1 – Saturday 2 November 2019
www.sof.org.nz

Feature

All At Sea On How To Live Where should we look now for moral guidance?

Moderated by Neil Davidson, the SOFIA 2019 one-day conference had formal presentations from three speakers, and a panel discussion. The Editor was there.

The first presentation at this conference was by the SOFIA President, Rodney Eivers. His script *Immediately* follows this short review. I will leave you to read it for yourself. It opened up the topic and, intriguingly, left it hanging in mid air.

The next speaker, Gail Parataz, addressed the topic: *Religion as Culture – how Judaism has different strands of observance within an overall religious culture.*

It was most informative. I hadn't previously been aware of the 'priestly caste'. I had however some understanding of the broad range of strands within the general term 'Judaism'. I wondered if these very different groups draw different conclusions from their literature. I particularly remember her comment as she reflected on millennia of Jewish tradition: Despite everything: "We're still here."

Our final speaker, Professor Sarva Daam Singh, spoke on *Pursuit of peace and happiness in a world riven by intolerance.* He took to his topic with passion and heart-felt commitment.

He encouraged us to be "devotees of truth" who learn from the past but are not controlled by it; who light lamps of love and hope; whose watch-words are love, peace and generosity. As for moral guidance, I was intrigued to hear him say, "morality preceded religion".

Despite his attitude of hope, my notes end with, "God is in his heaven; all is not right with the world." But overall his presentation left me with hope.

Regular Items

Digitalia

The Editor's review of activity on the SOFIA website, the SOFIAblog, and Facebook.

See the SOFIA website www.sof-in-australia.org for instructions and links on accessing the SOFIA Facebook page

SOFIA website: www.sof-in-australia.org . Big news from the website: it froze, and the webmaster couldn't access it for a while. So we have plans to upgrade it. It's working again, but these trials and tribulations have reduced the time available for adding new content. But keep a lookout for a splendid new system.

SOFIA blog: www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php or via the website. Greg Spearritt's post on [Contractual obligations or free speech? \(28 June 2019\)](#) remains current as the debate makes its way through the parliamentary process.

Facebook: Sea of Faith in Australia My eye was caught a delightful image of a flower. I had to find out why it was there. It turned out to be a flyer for an Eremos spring retreat day (9 October 2019). For more details you could track it down via our Facebook page or search the web for Eremos.

Postlude

Don Cupitt — Religion, For Or Against

Rodney Eivers

One of our SOFIA members had recently informed us that noted Bible scholar, Bart Ehrman, in his recent book on the impact of Christianity on the Roman empire made reference to Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach*. This was the poem which opened Don Cupitt's production of the BBC television series, *The Sea of Faith* and in due course led to the formation of our Australian SOFIA Association. It has been quoted on the front page of *the sofia bulletin*:

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

At a recent meeting of the Brookfield SOFIA group a brief discussion arose as to the attitudes of Matthew Arnold and Don Cupitt. Were they sad about the demise of religious faith or did they regard it as "good riddance".

I decided to follow this up in relation to Cupitt and discovered that his thoughts about the future of religion and the value of it (mainly in his case, specifically, Christianity) waxed and waned over the forty or so years of his writing.

Clem Cook in the British Sea of Faith magazine, Sofia for March 2019, however, provides a final quotation from a Cupitt article:

Religion is not primarily about supernatural belief, but about hope. It is our communal way of generating dreams, of how we and our life and our world might be made better. We prepare ourselves for the dream, and we start to think about how we might actually start to make it all come true. My suggestion ...has been that the so-called 'decline of religion' is people's abandonment en masse of the kind of ecclesiastical religion that promised comfort and reassurance in the face of death. Instead, we should see religious thought and practice as imaginative and utopian. Religion is a communal way of reimagining and remaking the self and the world. It is what we are to live BY and what we are to live FOR. At a time when political thought is very unadventurous, and when the world is becoming overwhelmingly dominated by technology, we need religion as much as ever. We need it as a human. Value-creating activity.

Epilogue

SOFIA Steps

Sara Treatt provided her insight into our name. Perhaps others might like to have a go too.

I just wanted to send you my take-away variation on the name

actualize

inquire

foresee

observe

self-examine

I'd say I have pretty comprehensively covered my first step [*Self-examine*, Ed.]

I am not so good at Observation, of myself or others, but selected this for step 2 since it goes both ways

Foresee I'm not accomplished in short term matters, but blaming my early training in geology, I tend to think way past the human scale, which makes me a real pessimist on climate instabilityreleasing methane deposits, should coal continue in use, could cross a boundary..... and I inquire as to why Venus became an uninhabitable planet....

Inquire, well our simian ancestry makes us far more inquisitive than cats

Actualise: needs work ☒

Best regards

Sara Treatt

SOFIA Crossword #41



Across

3. Fictional lawyer fighting for racial justice
7. Naturalist, geologist, biologist
9. Long-lived theologian once accused of heresy
10. United Church of Canada minister, author and self-professed atheist
13. Greek goddess of fortune
17. NT scholar, formerly Bishop of Durham
21. Former Catholic nun and prolific author on religion
22. Prominent 20th century philosopher and mathematician
23. Controversial Episcopalian bishop and author

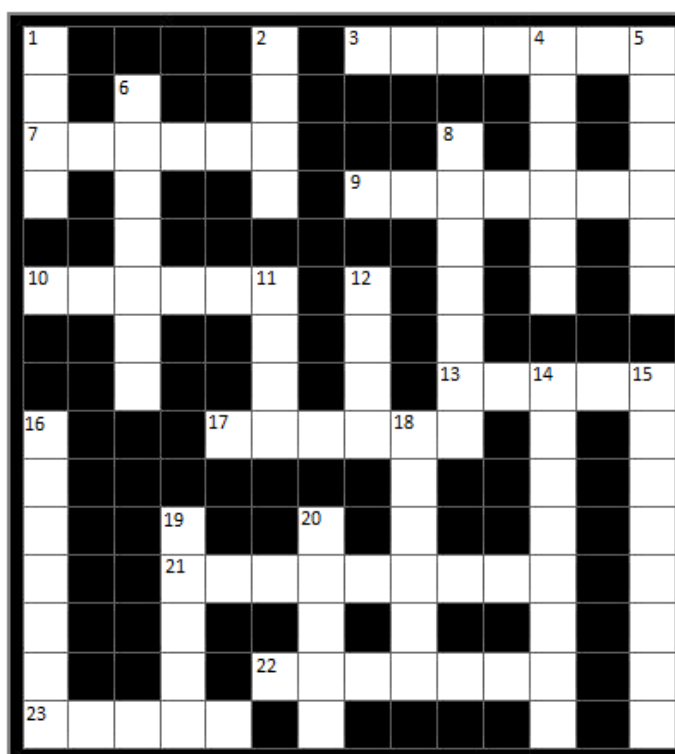
People, real and imagined, with links to religion, philosophy or history

Editor's crib sheet

When I check the crossword (a task I enjoy) I see how much I can do unaided, then I hit the web. *If you want to do it all by yourself, then read no further* but where the web alone is not enough you might find these oblique angles on Greg's clues helpful.

Most of the answers were straightforward this time, so I could just enjoy catching up with old friends. Not that I knew them through their writing and at a time when all their ideas were fresh. So you'll find Spong and Borg and Crossan and Dawkins, then Darwin and Armstrong and even Pete Seeger. There were some I had heard about before but I hadn't

SoFiA Crossword #42 Prepared by Greg Spearritt



Down

1. Founder of Christian Science
2. Last English ruler to exercise a royal veto over parliament (1707)
4. Former Anglican priest who famously took leave of God
5. 20th century American folk singer and activist
6. Former Catholic priest; author of *How to Read the Bible and Still Be a Christian*
8. American philosopher, atheist and cognitive scientist
11. American Franciscan friar and Catholic priest; author of *Everything Belongs – The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*
12. American NT scholar; author of *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*
14. Unhinged Roman Emperor (1st Century)
15. Protagonist of *A Christmas Carol*
16. Evolutionary biologist and polarising atheist
18. American neuroscientist, atheist and author
19. Author of *The Pale Blue Dot*
20. Chief god of the Assyrian pantheon

really engaged with them, such as Rohr, Russell, and Wright. And it was lovely encountering *the pale blue dot* and its famous author. There are more like these, and to fill the gaps there is the usual sprinkling of ancient gods and controversial figures from history. This puzzle is one to savour.

SOFIA

exploring issues of life and meaning

SOFIA publishes a bi-monthly bulletin. It organises conferences, public lectures and regional meetings. Through its website it maintains an archive of articles and a blog. It also runs email discussion groups.

Contact: mail: **14 Richardson Street, Lane Cove NSW 2066**, email: **sofnetwork@gmail.com**
 web: **www.sof-in-australia.org**, blog: **www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php**

Brisbane Acacia Ridge 3rd Sunday, 7.30pm. Contact: Rodney Eivers (07 3273 2049)

Brisbane Brookfield 1st Sunday, 7.30pm. Contact: Helen Mason (07 3870 8565)

Brisbane Bayside 3rd Monday. Contact: Judith Bore (07 3207 5428)

Brisbane CBD 3rd Sunday, 1pm to 2.30pm. Contact: Rachel Matthews 0408 193 872)

Chinchilla 1st & 3rd Thursday nights. Contact: Glen Beasley (07 4662 7738)

Melbourne 3rd Thursday, 7.30pm at the Carlton Library. Contact: David Miller (03 9467 2063).

Sydney Under consideration. Contact: Lyndell and Robin Ford (02 9427 7078)

Toowoomba Monthly on a Monday night. Contact: Greg Spearritt (sofinau98@gmail.com)

SOFIA Membership Application/Renewal New Fee Structure (AGM 2016)

From January 2017 SOFIA will have a single membership category.

The fee is *\$20.00 for ten years* (non-refundable).

Those who joined at or after the June 2016 AGM will have already paid for the ten years from January 2017.

The standard method for delivering *the sofia bulletin* is email. Paper versions are available on request at no additional charge (donations towards printing costs are welcome).

If your details have not changed there is no need to fill in this form. Just send your payment as described below, being sure to identify it as "SOFIA subs" with your name.

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