

March/April 2019

# SOFiA

openly exploring  
religion faith meaning

The Bulletin of the Sea of Faith in Australia



Photo R Ford

at a hotel in Ballarat

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

SOFiA website and archive of articles: [www.sof-in-australia.org](http://www.sof-in-australia.org)

SOFiA blog: [www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php](http://www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php)

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

## EDITORIAL

As you can see, I'm trying out a revised front page for the *Bulletin* (details are on pages 4 and 5). And I've added a brief introduction to SOFiA at the bottom of this page. These speculations are part of the process of reviewing our name. Discussions will be held at the AGM (see opposite)

The main work of the *Bulletin* goes on:

- Announcement of the AGM (15 June 2019 – please come)
- Details of the 2019 1-day conference (not to be missed, 15 June 2019)
- More from Lynne Renoir.

- Wayne Crich on his life's journey, in and out of religions
- Phil Roberts making the case for 'faith'.  
And the regular items of course.

I was delighted to receive all these, and I look forward to more. Please send your contributions to one of these addresses:

Robin Ford  
[robinford@a1.com.au](mailto:robinford@a1.com.au)  
or 14 Richardson Street  
LANE COVE 2066`

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SOFiA is a space for people of all faiths and none to explore religion, faith and meaning.

It began in the UK, with a name inspired by 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.

In time we set up The Sea of Faith in Australia (SOFiA). Did irony get lost with two extra words so 'faith' reverted to face value? This *Bulletin* de-emphasises 'faith' by using SOFiA as name and logo.

The *Bulletin*, produced every two months, is one part of the open space that SOFiA provides. There are also meetings (in Queensland), a web site, a blog, expeditions, and a one-day conference.

Editor and layout Robin Ford,  
[robinford@a1.com.au](mailto:robinford@a1.com.au)

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

**Sea of Faith in Australia 2019 AGM  
(2018 Financial Year)**

Saturday 15 June 2019, 2:30pm to 3:30 pm

Lecture Theatre

State Library of Queensland

South Bank, Brisbane

As usual, the AGM will follow the 2019 one day Conference.

See page 20 for nomination forms for Office Holder and Management Committee positions.

**Foreshadowed Motion at the AGM**

Here is an extract from the minutes of the Management Committee

Decision:

i. to circulate John Carr's proposal to members with the aim of generating further discussion in the newsletter to guide a decision on what to put to the AGM:

*That the name of the Australian Sea of Faith in Australia Network be changed to 'SOFIA', and the tagline/aim be changed to 'wisdom, ancient and modern', with the objective of 'openly exploring issues of life and meaning through reason, philosophy, ethics, religion and the arts', with just the short version 'openly exploring issues of life and meaning' as the motto on much of our publicity.*

In addition to discussion in recent *Bulletins*, there will be an email survey soon so members can have a say about possible changes; this process will help refine the motion.

SOFiA One Day Conference

**All At Sea On How To Live**

How should we live nowadays? Where can we look for moral guidance? Our (once) most trusted institutions (e.g. churches and Cricket Australia) have let us down, as have our councils, parliaments and banks. And when you add to this all those individuals struggling with social media addiction and abuse, our society seems to be all at sea on this issue.

Is advancing secularisation a cause of these problems, or a ray of hope? Arguably, popular culture looms increasingly large in contemporary moral guidance, from Happy Potter (**the Harry Potter Alliance**) to **superhero films**. Can the churches or civil society claw back their moral authority? What other options are there?

Fear not! This is the issue we'll be grappling with at the 2019 Sea of Faith in Australia one-day conference. Maybe we'll find being 'all at sea' is not such a bad thing...

**Event:** Sea of Faith in Australia one-day conference

**Date:** Saturday, 15 June 2019

**Venue:** Qld Art Gallery lecture theatre, Southbank, Brisbane

Watch our [website](#) for details.

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Point of View

## “Unique, Brief And Unambiguous”

Nigel Sinnott

Dear Robin,

Thanks for the November/December *Bulletin*, which I have read with interest, particularly the contributions about whether Sea of Faith Network in Australia should be changed.

I am not too fussed about whether we keep the existing name or change to SoFiA (or Sofia) Network in Australia, or to something different like Pebbles on the Aussie Beach.

What has irritated for years is the inconsistent title of the magazine.

The running title at the top of each page is *SoFiA Bulletin*, and that is what I think most people call it.

If so, why do we have an awful jumble of flotsam, jetsam and driftwood on the masthead?

At the top of the front page, centred, is *SoFiA Bulletin* in small type, followed by the date of issue.

Underneath, left, in large italics, are the intertwined letters *S O f*.

Next we have, in the middle,

Sea of Faith / Sea of faith Network in Australia / BULLETIN.

And last, bottom right, is the date again, but with the letters in capitals.

It really is an ambiguous, muddled mess.

If the magazine is the *Sea of Faith Bulletin*, this is what should appear on the masthead.

I have been complaining about it, on and off, for nearly fifteen years, but I feel I am standing on Matthew Arnold's beach, trying to spit into an onshore gale-force wind. No one has taken any notice.

I have a booklet, signed by the author, the late Jean Conochie (CSIRO), entitled *You Name It!* (1979). She appeals to editors and publishers and journals, magazines and serials to use titles that are “unique, brief and unambiguous”. I wish people would heed this request.

Happy New Year!

---

Point of View

## Anatomy Of A Front Page

Editor

To prepare for the discussions at the 2019 AGM on a possible change of name I have worked up a revised front page for the *Bulletin*. And I have added a brief history to the inside front page.

The main changes to the front page (shown below) are:

- A new logo - 'SOFiA' (or 'SOFIA')

- a link to the Facebook page
- a quote from *Dover Beach* (It balances the layout, and I like its poetic irony.)

I have integrated the tag line with the logo and moved them to the top of the page. They are more prominent there and set the tone.

You might have noticed that on the front page the logo is SOFiA; while on the page opposite it is SOFIA. I like the funky look of the lower case 'i' (not a typo), but either will do (our previous acronym SoFiA looks odd to me when combined with the tag lines.)

I reduced the font size for the words *Bulletin* and *Sea of Faith in Australia*. Neither of these is as important as the logo and tag-line. However, the full name maintains continuity, but with the smaller font is no longer prominent.

I have kept most of our existing words, but new words can easily be accommodated – for example, the tag line could be

**openly exploring**  
life and meaning

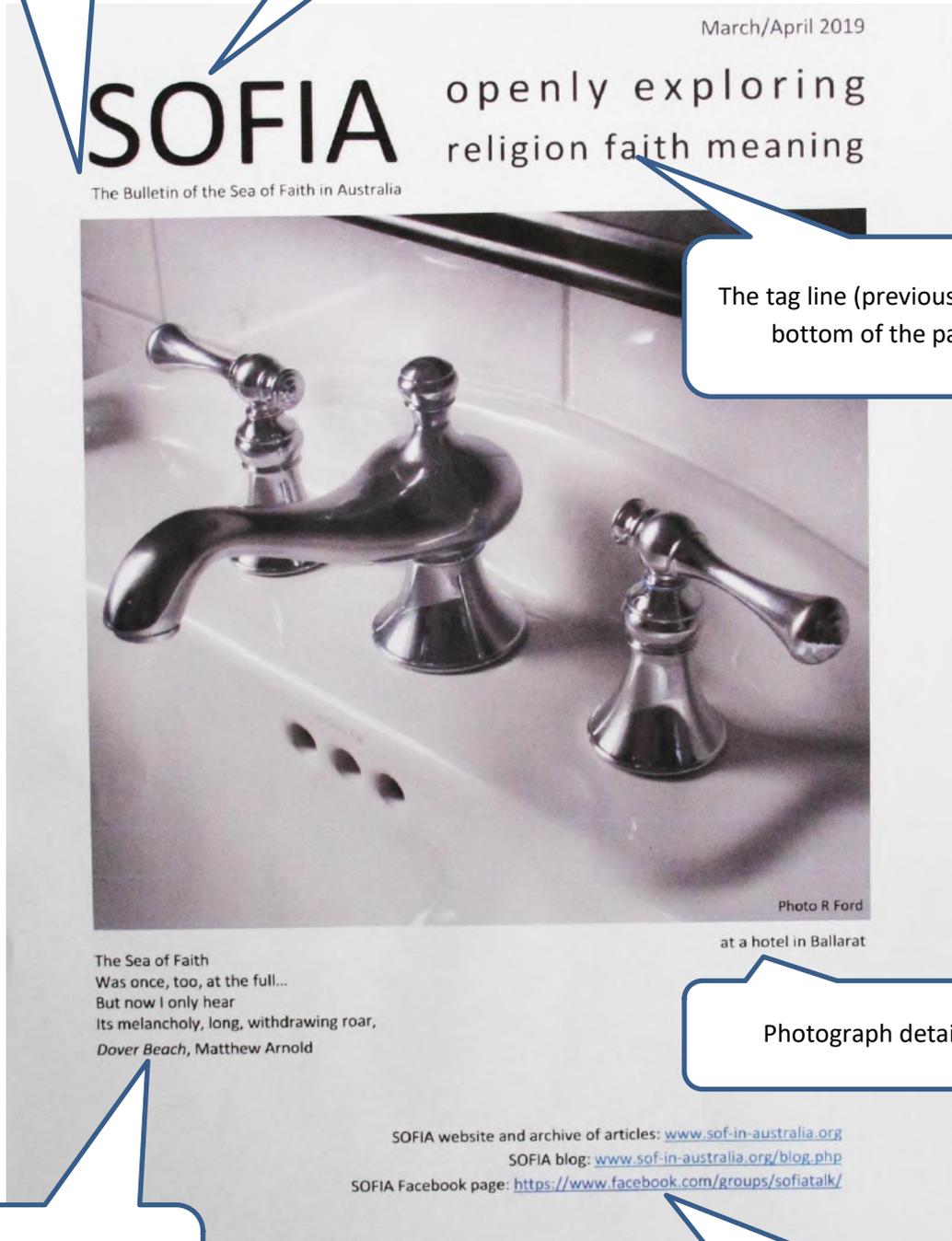
Now it's over to the AGM.

Continued below

The name of this publication and the full name of the organisation

One proposed name and logo that doesn't highlight 'faith'

Date (just once)



The tag line (previously at the bottom of the page)

Photograph details

Extract from Dover Beach

As before, plus facebook

An email conversation

## “Just An Idea”

On 23 Jan 2019, at 8:54 am, Rachel Matthews < > wrote:

Robin, was I dreaming? I was sure I had read sometime in the last month you floating the idea of changing the name of the Bulletin. I thought it was a rather strange unnecessary idea. It doesn't bear any immediate relationship to the other debates currently going on, and we have to call it something! We can hardly just refer to it as the mag or the newsletter.

But when I went back to check that I had indeed read it, I can't find it. So maybe I dreamt it after all. Would you be kind enough to put my mind at rest!

R.

----- Original message -----

From: Fords

Date: 23/1/19 12:20 pm (GMT+10:00)

To: Rachel Matthews

Subject: Re: bulletin and potential name change

Hello Rachel.

Renaming the Bulletin was an idea that a member had. Just an idea.

Decisions can wait until the AGM.

I am keen to have the members participate in the deliberations, so I am not commenting (well not much).

Robin

Sent from my iPhone

Thanks for the prompt answer, Robin. I despair of doing anything promptly these days.

That makes sense, about the name, I mean. Did they have suggestions for an alternative? We've got to have a name or how are we going to identify it? The Rag, the Newsletter? I'll shut up there.

R.

Sent from my Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 on

the Telstra Mobile Network

Feature

## A Personal Creator Or A Meaningful Universe?

*Lynne Renoir.*

One of the alternatives to belief in a personal God who created the universe out of nothing is the idea that the universe itself is the ultimate reality.

Until recent times it had been assumed that atoms were the basic form of matter. With the advent of quantum theory, particles were found to exist at a more elementary level. At the same time it was discovered that a particle is also a wave which spreads out over an immeasurable distance. But if a detection device

is activated, the particle appears to be in a specific place. Observation, it is said, causes the wave to “collapse” into a particle state.<sup>i</sup> Because of this responsiveness to the environment, matter has been described as being “permeated by a conceptual level of existence”.<sup>ii</sup>

The activity of observed particles led to a renewed interest in the relationship between consciousness and matter. Some theorists claim that everything is basically physical, so that consciousness consists merely of material interactions,<sup>iii</sup> while others hold that consciousness and matter are mutually exclusive concepts. Yet another view is that consciousness is the end product of a chain of causes, beginning with elementary particles, followed by atoms, molecules, neurons and ultimately the brain as a whole. Consciousness is thereby depicted as a product of the brain.<sup>iv</sup> Some of these theories propose that physical matter is non-conscious and non-experiential, but that when parts of it combine in certain ways, experiential phenomena emerge.<sup>v</sup> Galen Strawson challenges such approaches on the grounds that if Y emerges from X, Y must be wholly dependent on X, and that all the features of Y must be traceable back to X. Through the application of this principle, he concludes that the origin of human consciousness must be experiential in its basic nature.

From an evolutionary viewpoint, Sewall Wright contends that there is no scientific explanation for the emergence of mind from matter, and that mind must have already been present when life arose.<sup>vi</sup> Such a view is reflected in Colin McGinn’s claim that “a supernatural magician” would be required to derive sentience and consciousness from what he calls “pulpy matter”.<sup>vii</sup> The physicist Paul Davies also challenges the idea that the characteristic features of consciousness are a product of the evolutionary process. His position is that a universal mind pervades the cosmos. Describing this mind as “a self-observing as well as self-organizing system”,<sup>viii</sup> he suggests that individual minds can be regarded as “‘islands’ of consciousness in a sea of mind”. Max Planck, a major figure in the development of quantum theory, claims that matter derives from consciousness, which in his view is the fundamental reality.<sup>ix</sup>

According to the physicist David Bohm, the deepest aspect of being is “neither mind nor body but rather a yet higher-dimensional actuality”<sup>x</sup> in which these two aspects of existence are united. Any attempt to divide the universe into living and non-living things is meaningless. For Bohm, “even a rock is in some way alive, for life and intelligence are present not only in all of matter, but in energy, space, time, the fabric of the entire universe... Everything is alive. What we call dead is an abstraction.”<sup>xi</sup> Bohm’s position is that consciousness is present in a rudimentary form for particles, and at a higher level for us. In his view, we are an intrinsic part of the universe, and from this he concludes that our participation in the whole of reality gives it meaning. Similarly, Joseph Jaworski writes, “In discovering our own purpose and meaning, we enrich meaning in the universe – we create something of significance that has not been there. We are part of it and it is part of us. We are partners in the evolution of the universe.”<sup>xii</sup>

In modern Western thought, the scientific conception of the universe as conscious has arisen mainly as a result of quantum discoveries. The writers of the sacred texts obviously did not have access to such information, with the result that theists as a whole have been reluctant to accept the idea that matter is

conscious. Instead they rely on the biblical account that God formed from dust the first man, Adam, and then gave him the breath of life.<sup>xiii</sup> Consciousness or life is thereby seen as a gift that is bestowed on human beings, with matter itself remaining lifeless.

The idea that the universe is conscious creates problems both for believers in a personal God and for those who deny the existence of anything beyond the physical. As David Ash explains:

“Theists may assume the Universe is inanimate material in motion created by a prime mover and atheists may argue there is no creator or prime mover of the presumed material. However, if the Universe is mind there would be no material to move and no prime mover to move it. The very nature of mind is creative consciousness. One wouldn’t need to imagine an intelligent being creating the Universe if the Universe is a mind. The Universe would be the intelligent being! To know the mind of God is to know the Universe of energy and that is what science is all about.”<sup>xiv</sup>

Lynne’s book, *God: Challenges from Philosophy and Science*, is available on e-readers.

## References

- <sup>i</sup> Larry Farwell, *How Consciousness Commands Matter: The New Scientific Revolution*, (1<sup>st</sup> World Publishing, Fairfield, Iowa, 1999), 86.
- <sup>ii</sup> Attila Grandpierre, “Ultimate Reality and Meaning”, *The Noetic Journal*, 23, 12-35 (2000), [www.mindspring.com/~noeticj](http://www.mindspring.com/~noeticj).
- <sup>iii</sup> Paavo Pykkänen, *Mind, Matter, and the Implicate Order*, (New York: Springer, 2007), 6.
- <sup>iv</sup> Amit Goswami, “Physics within Nondual Consciousness”, *Philosophy East and West*, 51, 4, (2001), 536.
- <sup>v</sup> Galen Strawson, “Realistic monism: why physicalism entails panpsychism”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 13, (2006), 10-11.
- <sup>vi</sup> Sewald Wright, “Panpsychism and Science”, in J.B. Cobb and D.R. Griffin (eds.), *Mind in Nature: Essays on the Interface of Science and Philosophy*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1977), 82.
- <sup>vii</sup> Colin McGinn, *The Problem of Consciousness: Essays Toward a Resolution*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 45.
- <sup>viii</sup> Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1983), 210.
- <sup>ix</sup> Max Planck, “The Observer”, January 25, 1931.
- <sup>x</sup> David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 209.
- <sup>xi</sup> Renée Weber, *Dialogues with Scientists and Sages*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).
- <sup>xii</sup> Joseph Jaworski, *Source: The Inner Path of Knowledge Creation*, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2012), 96.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Genesis 2:7.
- <sup>xiv</sup> David Ash, *Vortex of Energy: A Scientific Theory*, (Berkshire, UK: Puja Power Publications, 2012), 127.

## Notes

### Notes On A Personal Creator Or A Meaningful Universe? Lynne Renoir

*These notes were produced by the Editor as he previewed this most enjoyable article. He thought others might like to read them too.*

## Page 6

I got the point of the title after I read the article.

I wondered are we seeing a form of pantheism? – god in everything? Maybe it's everything in god?

I used to have coffee each week with Dr Lowenthal, who grew up with the development of modern physics and was entranced by the history of radioactivity and the structure of the atom. We talked about it a lot. In this section I recognised an old friend.

The wave-particle duality remains a conundrum.

Observation, it is said, causes the wave to “collapse” into a particle state.

“Permeated by a conceptual level of existence” is gloriously mysterious.

## Page 7

experiential phenomena emerge.

I'm not clear as to what 'experiential' implies. Is it saying that consciousness 'just is'?

mind must have already been present when life arose.

This reminded me of “In the beginning was the word”.

“a supernatural magician” would be required to derive sentience and consciousness from what he calls “pulpy matter”

This sounds like a version of the watchmaker story, updated from Newton to Einstein *et al.*

neither mind nor body but rather a yet higher-dimensional actuality

This seems mystic.

“Islands of consciousness in a sea of mind” is wonderfully evocative.

For Bohm, “even a rock is in some way alive, for life and intelligence are present not only in all of matter, but in energy, space, time, the fabric of the entire universe...”

This is a typical topsy-turvy idea from the high priests of quantum theory.

This moves us into new territory.

What we call dead is an abstraction.

Death as an abstraction is something to ponder.

consciousness is present in a rudimentary form for particles

Consciousness for particles? Wow!

he concludes that our participation in the whole of reality gives it meaning.

A new dimension to SOFiA's pursuit of meaning.

In discovering our own purpose and meaning, we enrich meaning in the universe

We are partners in the evolution of the universe

We are part of a grand scheme.

the scientific conception of the universe as conscious has arisen mainly as a result of quantum discoveries.

Quantum theory has much to answer for!

For a fleeting moment I thought “The writers of the sacred texts” were Planck, Einstein *et al!*

theists as a whole have been reluctant to accept the idea that matter is conscious. if the Universe is mind there would be no material to move and no prime mover to move it.

So consciousness is the organising principle of the universe, and we are all part of it.

To know the mind of God is to know the Universe of energy and that is what science is all about.

However, I believe that either way consciousness is something we will never understand.

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Point of View

## The Value Of Faith

Phil Roberts

Experience together with reason gives most of us a reasonably serviceable worldview. We learn to accept, for example, that good things abound but so do bad things in more or less equal proportion. We learn that doing good often leads to good results, though chance is also at play. We learn that the world and humankind are remarkably resilient, not only surviving cataclysms but thriving; there is always cause for hope. We learn that kindness to others is beneficial not only to the recipients but to ourselves as well. And so on.

A humanist or atheist can have these understandings and live contentedly, so why should we bother with faith? What is the value, if any, of a spiritual life? Before proceeding further, we need to clarify terms. Whether we are talking about religion or pseudo-religion or New Age, there is a connection between faith and spiritual life. Faith is a mindset, an unconditional acceptance of something larger, while spiritual life is a way of living that is built around that faith. A person may feel a spiritual connection with the wind or the sea or the desert or animal life or ancestors – the list goes on – but that connection is spiritual only to the extent that it implies some sort of faith. Here the notion of something larger comes into play, for as I said earlier, faith is an unconditional acceptance of something larger. In fact, in the context of spiritual life, it is not just something larger but something positively transcendent, that is, beyond or above the range of normal or physical human experience.

A spiritual life, broadly speaking, is one that seeks and finds *through faith* some sort of transcendence. Religion, as we know, entails a spiritual life, but in this democratic age there are also non-religious people who experience spirituality. The distinguishing feature of religion is that it is collective, systematic, and generally organised. We may say that religion is communally or socially organised experience of faith. Many people find joy and comfort in this collective aspect of spiritual life, and this is perfectly normal, for we are all social beings as well as we are individuals. Indeed, I think it's reasonable to say that a spiritual life without human interaction is likely to be somewhat barren. It's all very well to commune to with nature or with ancestors but this has little value unless there is some connection as well with the here and now, the living, the delightful and less delightful people we have to deal with, day in day out.

Faith is not only an unconditional acceptance but also an embracing of something beyond, be it God, Brahma, the Tao, Nature, or abstract ideals like Love and Truth. Faith holds that ordinary rational explanations for the world are not enough, and that they provide us with an inadequate experience of life. Often, death enters the conversation as well, if only because, like deities, death or the supposed hereafter is in the realm of the unknown. The relative merits of all the arguments are beyond the scope of this essay. My focus is rather on whether faith really does enhance our experience of life, and if so how. I might just say in passing that faith is not, as some (atheists especially) claim, devoid of reason. The grounds for faith are clearly various and include perfectly reasonable arguments as well as feelings and all kinds of experiences, not necessarily limited to the mystic.

The life of faith – the spiritual life – is not, or should not be, one-dimensional. We can reasonably expect and indeed assume that it will touch the whole person. It will have rational elements as well as emotional, it will be personal (that is, private) and social, and it will have a presence throughout the range of our activities – work, leisure, eating and personal care, and so on. So much for the quantitative aspect of the spiritual life. More important and more contentious is the qualitative life. I said earlier that a rationalist or someone who rejects faith can live quite comfortably, provided that he or she has a well-formed worldview. In other words, it is not essential to have faith but faith gives an extra dimension to life, and thus an added richness. Faith gives an extra dimension more or less by definition, simply because the transcendent is involved, or as non-believers would say, the supernatural.

Clearly there are people who hold to a faith of one kind or another but who do so in a shallow, one might say one-dimensional, kind of way. An obvious example is the fundamentalist who believes in a deity but sees that deity as someone akin to a warlord, for whom the only meaningful path in life is battle and sacrifice, followed hopefully by paradise. Another example is the corporate hot-shot who screws underlings and business rivals mercilessly during the week then sings psalms on Sunday. A reasonable value-judgement is that these people (who may indeed love their families) are not, in the truest sense, people of faith.

Returning to the notion of added dimension or added richness, I confess that this is a sweeping generalisation and unprovable. Just as the existence of divinity is ultimately unprovable, so too is the supposed superior quality of life which acknowledges (some would say bows to) divinity. However, I think at least the possibility of extra dimension or richness can be seen in three areas, which correspond roughly to our understanding of the world and our different ways of relating to it.

Firstly, if we admit transcendence then we also admit a huge amount of mystery, because no one can know how the finite being – in our case the human being – actually connects with the infinite. By allowing the existence of the transcendent we allow all sorts of possibilities and give ourselves a huge minefield for the imagination. Mystery shades into wonder at how everything fits (rather than falls) into place. For some this can be an enormously transformative experience, a feeling of being born again. On the distaff side of this wonder there

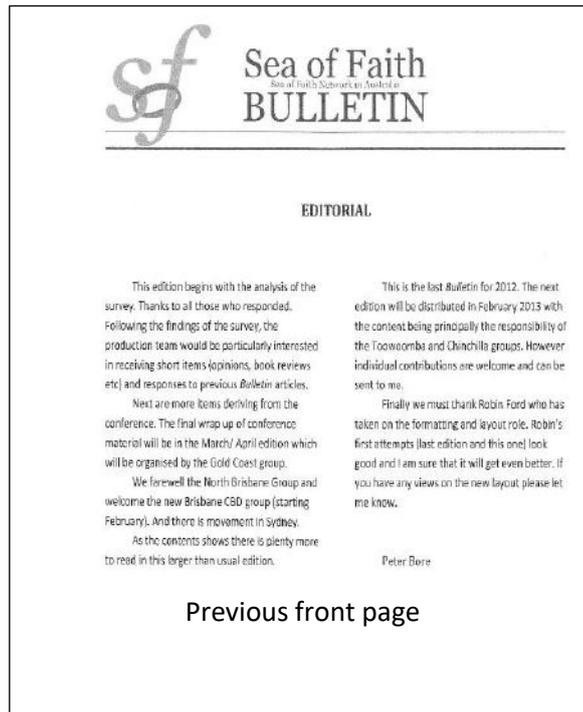
is acceptance, acknowledgement of the dark side which, so it seems, inevitably accompanies the light.

Secondly, admitting transcendence also brings into our lives the ethical absolute, the all-encompassing imperative to relate to other people, other beings, the Universe at large, in the best way we can possibly imagine. With the ethical absolute comes intensity of different kinds: the sort of intensity that has inspired the self-sacrifice of Jesus and others but also, in everyday life now, drives ordinary people to endless acts of amazing altruism. In personal relationships too, we get constant glimpses of the transcendent – insights which make us value those relationships more and which, incidentally, add to our confidence in a world that is more than mere molecules.

Thirdly and finally, if we have faith in the all-conquering power of truth and love, we have real muscle of the will and thus can take greater risks in our interaction with other people and the world in general. We can go forth and multiply, not biologically but through the endless propagation of good thoughts and good deeds. To honour the divine in everyday life, no matter what we perceive it to be, is a hugely energetic pursuit, but faith in a transcendent power is hugely energising. Such a faith is like boundless optimism, enabling a person to get up in the morning and start all over again, even when the previous day has been smelly as dung.

I have not mentioned mysticism so far because this is alien to my experience, and I have no expectation it will ever be otherwise. This is the intense state where a person feels ecstatically one with the Universe or the sacred or divine. Reportedly this feeling may be just that – a feeling – or it may entail some insights into what are felt to be hidden or ultimate truths. The ultimate goal of mysticism is or should be some sort of transformation, not just experiencing mystical or visionary states. But mysticism is a deep and complex topic best left to experts, including experts in neuroscience, as my cursory reading of Jerome Gellman's article ("Mysticism," 2014) in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* shows.

If all this sounds a bit extreme, a bit up-in-the-clouds, maybe that's the price that has to be paid for engaging with the topic of faith, for inevitably the question "Faith in what?" leads to discussion of the transcendent. I don't mind, I have friends who are people of faith – different brands of faith – who are very down-to-earth and who simply let their actions speak for themselves. They are people who, like most of us, also have doubts from time to time, but they're prepared to admit that faith is one of the powerful driving forces in their life and something that they wouldn't want to lose. And in these people I perceive to one degree or another those extra dimensions that I think faith contributes to life: the mystery and wonder, the intensity of relationships, and the creative energy. I prefer not to use the name God for I think it has become debased and largely meaningless, but I am truly thankful that I myself have faith in a divinity which enables me to have at least a small slice of the spiritual cake I've tried to describe.



**Don't forget the one-day conference and the AGM**

**Details on page 3**

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.*

### Jesus in my toast

This is an old study, from 2012, but interesting nonetheless. Participants were asked to identify face-like elements which had been worked into pictures of scenery and landscapes. Religious people and those who believed in the paranormal, it turns out, were better at the task, but they also had a higher rate of false detection. In addition, they rated the artefact faces as more face-like and emotional than did sceptics.

Web reference:

<https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.2874>

### Stewardship and climate change

A 2019 study at the University of Illinois found that Christians with stewardship beliefs were more likely to have concern about climate change as a moral imperative than fellow believers who had a dominion-type view of humans in relation to the earth.

Web reference:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/03/190311145852.htm>

### Religion and health

It's widely believed that there's a link between better health and a higher degree of religiosity. A 2018 American study found that religious context matters: "in highly religious contexts, religious individuals are less likely to have poor health, while nonreligious individuals are markedly more likely to have poor health. In less religious contexts, religious and nonreligious individuals report similar levels of health."

Web reference:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022146518755698>

### Religion and science

An American meta analysis of religiosity and its relation to attitudes to science was conducted in 2018. It found a significant negative correlation, that is, religiosity tended to be associated with less interest in, and more negative attitudes towards, science and science knowledge.

Web reference:

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0207125#sec041>



Announcements

## Umesh Chandra Voted Citizen of the Year by Brisbane City Council

Rodney Eivers

Dear Greg, Robin and Jim,

I feel a bit guilty that this escaped me. I discovered last night at our Brookfield SOFiA meeting that member of our Management Committee, Umesh Chandra with his wife, Usha, was named Citizen of the Year by Brisbane City Council in this year's Australia Day celebrations.

It seems to me that this is worthy of note in our various publications.

Rodney

You can find the details <https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/community-safety/grants-awards/2019-lord-mayors-australia-day-awards>

Regular Items

### *Digitalia*

*The Editor's review of activity on the SoFiA website, the SoFiA blog, and Facebook. See the SoFiA website [www.sof-in-australia.org](http://www.sof-in-australia.org) for instructions and links on accessing the SoFiA Facebook page*

SOFiA website: [www.sof-in-australia.org](http://www.sof-in-australia.org) . I found this week's 'God forbid' (abc Radio National) particularly interesting. James Carleton and his two guests were having fun as they enlightened me. One guest was from the USA, the other was from Queensland. Abby Stein, from New York, transitioned to a woman after at one time being a Hassidic rabbi. There are some details in this link

#### **Meet Abby Stein, the transgender activist helping people leave the Hasidic community**

(ABC News) Mar 24 – “Abby Stein grew up in New York City, with no access to the internet, no knowledge of Halloween, and only a few words of English. She is author of ‘Becoming Eve’ — My journey from ultra-Orthodox rabbi to transgender woman (out November).” The other guest, “Rev Dr Josephine Inkpin, teaches theology and history at St Francis College Brisbane. She was the first ‘out’ transgender priest in Australia and ministers in the Anglican tradition.” Those who went to the 2018 one-day conference will remember her contributions there.

SOFiA blog: [www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php](http://www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php) or via the website. This time the blog informed me that I had missed advertising *Between the Reader and the Writer* ‘A Creative Trinity: William Hazlitt, John Keats and William Shakespeare’ It took place on 03 February 2019) How about some reports from people who were there.

Facebook: Sea of Faith in Australia I was intrigued by a link to the ex-religious support network: <https://www.meetup.com/Ex-Religious-Support-Network/events/> I have tried to join (and I might have been successful). It seems to have been started as a group under the banner of ‘Meet up’, which is a social network. I’m still awaiting confirmation of my application. I’ll let you know when/if I hear back from them.

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**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.

21 March 2019

John Noack ([Carl Jung Society](#))

*"Galilean Folklore in Judaism and  
Christianity."*

16 May 2019

Leslie Allan ([Rational Realm](#))

*"The Theological Problem of Evil."*

18 April 2019

Andrew Rooke ([Theosophical  
Society, Pasadena](#))

*"Mysteries of Music in the Ancient  
World."*

20 June 2019

Dr Joe Sampson  
([Humanist Society of Victoria](#))

*"A Critique of the Biblical God."*

18 July 2019

Steven Higson ([Agnostics Group](#))

*"How the Vikings found Jesus."*

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**Postlude Part 1**

## **Where Do We Now Find Moral Guidance? Part 1**

*John Carr 'stoppeth one in three'*

As I have confessed, I have been making a pest of myself, stopping people to ask, 'Where do we now find moral guidance?' Much like the Ancient Mariner or the evangelical Christian who asks, 'Do you love Jesus?'

I recommend that other Committee members try this data collection strategy.

I also put the question to two groups:

- my Fellowship group, the Leckmy Street heretics and
- the Keperra Village Philosophy Group.

The discussion with the Heretics was quite animated and provided most of the attached comments (Part 2 below). I did not speak to the Philosophy Group myself, but asked its Convenor to raise the question at a meeting. According to him, the Group expressed no interest in the topic, but one member subsequently told me that a couple of members had shown some interest.

## **The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner**

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge

### **PART I**

It is an ancient Mariner,  
And he stoppeth one of three.  
'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,  
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

It goes on for pages

### **Postlude Part 2**

## **Where Do We Now Find Moral Guidance? Part 2**

*John Carr reveals common comments from individual and group discussions*

### **Can Google help?**

I asked Google, "Where do we now find moral guidance?":

Reply: "I don't have an answer to that question yet."

I asked Google, "What is morality?"

Reply: "Morality concerns the distinction between right and wrong, or good and bad behaviour."

### **For some "The golden rule" provides guidance**

Reasoning?

There seems to be a 'natural morality' common to all; all peoples seem to have developed some core essential moral 'rules', though these are interpreted differently in different communities: don't kill unless in self-defence; don't practise incest; don't steal, unless you and your family are starving.

### **Other sources of guidance**

Parents, friends, role models, sports coaches, popular musicians, teachers

Media gurus: Judy Judy, Oprah, the Minefield, Alan Jones.

The sacred texts of the three religions of the book, not just the Tanakh, the Bible and the Qur'an, but also the massive bodies of commentary and interpretation based on them, that continue to grow.

### **Who cares?**

**BUT**

Some people agonise a lot over questions like this, while it doesn't seem to enter into the minds of others.

We operate on auto pilot much of the time; we only search for guidance when things go wrong: illness, accident, grief, natural disaster.

Epilogue

## A Reflection 2019

*Wayne Crich reviews his religious ideas, and how they have been developing through the years.*

*SOFiA features in his story. He was an early participant, took a break and now is back.*

I felt funny being asked to write this; by myself I would not have thought to write something about my religious ideas.

I was raised a Presbyterian in Sydney. Very much a Reformed Christian, I sincerely believed all that that involved and preached regularly in my church. I read Elaine Pagels “Gnostic Gospels” and suddenly a whole world opened up. I discovered that the early church was not as I had been taught. I read a lot and realised that I had been deceived, much of what I had been led to believe was simply not true. I guess the worst part was when in discussion with various church officials I discovered they knew this and simply decided never to mention it.

That really is a very simple version of a process of reading and study that took me over 20 years. I kept a blog for many years and re-reading it now I see the anguish, anger and often hostility emerge and dissipate over time. I moved in my thinking from a Reformed position to Panentheism to atheism. The Sea of Faith helped me with that. I was part of the Sydney group and helped to organise the first Sydney conference.

It was wonderful to hear Don Cupitt speak and to spend time speaking with Lloyd Geering, a truly remarkable man. Sadly, whilst I understood Lloyds commitment to the Christian church I could not share it. I walked away from the church completely. I was content with my position on God and saw little reason to change it —until recently.

I am convinced of two central ideas:

- There is no ‘God’
- There is no possibility that a being I could call ‘God’ could conceivably exist.

The first I think is hardly a new position. The second I think deserves some explanation.

I feel that it is highly unlikely for a theistic style God to exist and then conceal that existence. I do not consider being more powerful is enough to merit the title of ‘God’, hence I feel it is close to a zero possibility that such a being exists.

So, you might ask, what has changed?

A newish conception has been slowly growing from reading and of course now from listening to the wonderful variety of podcasts. I am thinking of Yuval Noah Harari’s books and speeches, and also Jordan Peterson’s works ([Maps of Meaning](#) in particular).

The new conception is that ‘God’ is in fact shorthand for the power of the evolving human mind, in particular the power of language to describe and then create the world. So, the concept of God, and the associated beliefs, are actually a reflection of the combined human ‘mind’ reflected directly in the development of human language. This is like the idea of Tillich that God is the ‘ground of being’ except ‘God’ is shorthand for the collective wisdom of humanity embodied in our

language. It is also very much like Jung's 'collective unconscious' but again totally embodied and expressed in our language. So our highest aspirations and our deepest knowledge is revealed through our language, in our stories, in our theology, in our philosophy and also in our daily discourse.

As part of this I have been drawn again to the Christian tradition. I feel that it expresses the highest of these aspirations for me (I realise this is largely due to my own upbringing and experience).

However, when I look at the progressive Christian movement I find strong interests in Indigenous issues, the environment and gender issues. Whilst I am engaged with each of these politically, I have little interest in them as faith issues, so the movement does not draw me.

Similarly, I find traditional forms of worship very much like a pantomime and cannot honestly participate with genuine engagement. Talking with many friends of different views I find in this a common feeling—although they can see value in the Christian faith they have little to no interest in any form of worship.

As always, life goes on; thinking, reading and meditation go on and with them the march of the human heart.



In an old motel in Holbrook NSW

photo Robin Ford

**SoFiA Crossword #39**



**Across**

5. Ancient Greek philosophy following the teachings of Zeno
7. Religious mendicant
8. Roman province from the time of Jesus
10. Misplaced ruminant
13. Putative angel instrument
16. Meditation practitioner
17. Lifting of the Host and chalice during Mass
18. Radiant light around the head of a saint
19. Nation with an established Evangelical Lutheran Church
20. Pope who initiated the Crusades
22. The act of anointing for purposes of consecration
23. Repent, or else...(Lk 13:3)
24. Evil (or not so evil) spirit

**SoFiA Crossword #40** Prepared by Greg Spearritt



**Down**

1. Titan of Greek mythology forced by Zeus to hold up the sky
2. Whole community of Muslims
3. Religious ceremonies
4. Appeasement of a deity
6. Religious wars of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries
9. Make amends for wrongdoing
11. Split
12. Abyss of torment for the wicked (Greek mythology)
14. Blending of religious beliefs
15. Unprincipled
21. Roman Emperor under whom Christians were persecuted

**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.

When resorting to the web this time, most of the answers I recognised when I found them – exceptions are:

2D, 12D.

They were new to me.

Some were difficult to get; I seemed to take a while to find good search terms! 12D and 15D were in this category.

22A reminded me of an old hymn "...thy \_\_\_\_\_ grace bestoweth". I still don't understand it.

## Sea of Faith in Australia

*promoting the open exploration of issues of religion, faith 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)

### Sea of Faith in Australia Inc.: 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 *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.*

Name(s).....  
 Address.....  
 .....  
 Email.....Phone number.....

	<i>Bulletin</i> delivery	number	each	amount
Membership (10 years)	email/post		\$20	
Donation				
Total paid on line, (BSB 032 085 A/c 446904 ref your name) or by cheque (payable to SoFiA).				

Signature.....

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# SoFiA

## Sea of Faith in Australia Inc

### Notice of Annual General Meeting for the Financial Year 2018

**Saturday 15 June 2019**

**Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane: Lecture Theatre**

Written nominations by post need to be received by Wednesday 12 June 2019.  
Please post to The Secretary, C/- 14 Richardson Street, Lane Cove, NSW 2066

#### NOMINATION FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, being a member of Sea of Faith in Australia, hereby make the following nominations for positions on the Management Committee of Sea of Faith in Australia Inc. for the year commencing at the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting, 10 June 2017.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

POSITION	NAME	I agree to accept the nomination (signature)
President		
Vice-President		
Treasurer		
Committee		
Committee		
Committee		

I, \_\_\_\_\_, being a member of Sea of Faith in Australia, second the above nomination(s).

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### PROXY FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_  
being a member of Sea of Faith in Australia Inc., appoint

\_\_\_\_\_ as my proxy to vote on my behalf at the Annual General Meeting of SoFiA Inc. to be held on 15 June 2019, and at any adjournment of the meeting.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_