

Sources No 10



Religion and Philosophy

Most people in human history have been religious in some shape or form and most have asked religious and philosophical questions, such as: 'Who am I?'; 'What gives my life meaning?'; 'Why is the world as it is?'; 'Is this world all there is?'. Nowadays in Britain only a minority of people are linked to religious organisations, but the majority of people still claim to believe in God and to be interested in spiritual issues. Research has shown that the word 'religion' is offputting to many, but books and courses on 'spirituality' attract much interest.

There are many motives for studying religion and philosophy. Church-going Christians may wish to gain a deeper knowledge of their faith, by, for instance, studying the bible or church history. Alternatively, they may want to sharpen up their pastoral care or evangelism skills. Some church-goers simply want to study religion and philosophy for their own interest; others prefer to use their study to become more effective participants in the Christian enterprise. But interest in religion and philosophy is by no means restricted to church-goers or even religious believers. There are many ways into studying these subjects, suitable for those of any faith, or none.

Perhaps the most predictable, and potentially the dullest, way of studying religion and philosophy is to break the subjects down into their traditional sub-disciplines, such as: 'Moral philosophy'; 'The Early Church Fathers'; 'Reformation Theology'. The subjects are most likely to come alive if study is focussed on the life and thinking of specific individuals, such as, Marcel Proust or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or particular themes, such as 'Celtic Spirituality' or 'Why do good people suffer?'. These approaches are more holistic and will draw on several different wings of these subject areas.

The key to any adult learning is to start where your members are. What are their concerns and interests? Why might they be interested in pursuing religious and philosophical themes? If this is your starting point, when designing courses, you may find that religion and philosophy interests a wider constituency than

you might predict. Take a group which has just returned from a tour of classical Italy, for instance. They may be full of religious questions, such as: 'Who was St Paul... St Peter... St Francis... St Clare?'; 'How did Christianity survive in the Roman Empire?';

'Should the Vatican be so rich?'; 'What makes Catholic and Protestant Churches different?'. Why not

construct a course around these kinds of questions? Equally, avid readers of English literature may sometimes be puzzled by, or miss entirely, references to the bible or other religious texts. They may be attracted to a course that spells out some of the connections and thereby enriches their reading.

Some of the most fascinating approaches to religion and philosophy may well draw on other disciplines too. A course on 'Mazes', for instance, stimulated initially by seeing the maze at Chartres Cathedral, might draw on church history, Greek mythology, architecture, mathematics, art history, and even moral philosophy. A course on 'Who is Jesus?', for example, might draw on the history of art, literature and music, as well as biblical study and theology; how, for example, do people of non-western cultures depict Jesus? Of course, if religion and philosophy are about life's biggest questions, then they may pop up in any U3A course, in any discipline!

Web sites proliferate in this field. The best place to begin is at a 'web portal', such as

<http://www.stets.ac.uk/portal.htm>

Philip Richter,

Educational Development Officer, Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme



In the next issue

The next issue of SOURCES will be mailed to those on the database in February 2001 and will have science subjects as its focus, physics, chemistry, mathematics, mineralogy, meteorology. What else? Contributions from U3A groups on how they pursue these science subjects must be submitted to SOURCES at the National Office not later than 13 December.

- Any U3A member may receive SOURCES at home by sending their full name and address (in capitals) with postcode to the National Office.

Religion and Philosophy Groups

Comparative Religion – Harrow U3A

Two years ago, I was asked to take over as a Group Leader, and this has proved to be an enjoyable occupation, providing speakers from all different branches and offshoots of various religions. Each afternoon brings a new speaker to be bombarded with questions after telling us about their customs and

beliefs, traditions and education. The sessions would carry on well past the appointed hour if I did not tactfully bring the meeting to a close, to a somewhat deafening applause of thanks to the speaker every time.

Our subjects have been extremely varied, covering the Seventh Day Adventists, Sikhs, Masorti Jews, Brahma Kumaris, Bahaiis, Quakers, Catholics, The Three Faiths Forum, Greek Orthodox; a Bishop talking on religions in Africa; a hospital chaplain; the Council of Christians and Jews, Buddhists, Humanists, Unitarians, Theosophists, the Salvation Army, Latter Day Saints, Zoroastrians and Salvatorians.

Last year the group visited Canterbury Cathedral and Chatham Synagogue, and later this year we are hoping to visit the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum. It has been suggested that sooner or later we will run out of different religions to discuss. So far I have managed to produce a very varied programme for each term, and hopefully will keep getting new ideas and the co-operation of speakers to give us an insight into their beliefs. What we have all discovered is that, basically, we are all following the same path, albeit in a slightly different way, and that deeper understanding promotes tolerance. Hopefully, in our small way, we may impart this knowledge to others and contribute to eventual peace on earth!

Joy Collins

Room for Thought – Boston U3A

The Room for Thought Group was formed to stimulate members who had not done any research for some years to satisfy their curiosity about a wide range of subjects. The subjects are chosen so that each member can take one facet of it, do research and then bring the results to the next meeting. For example, the Solar System was one subject and each member was given the task of finding out as much as they could about an individual planet. The result was a collection of facts which were so interesting that a small booklet was produced. Other subjects included "A famous scientist and his/her most important discovery", "A famous artist and the member's favourite picture" and "The Twenties" with each member looking at one facet of that decade.

The subject for the June meeting was Religions of the World, which produced a fascinating collection of information. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Shintoism were some of the religions which had to be described in no more than 10 or 15 minutes. Some of the members brought along illustrations or relevant objects and there is no doubt that, by the end of the meeting, every member had learned something new. Every member has felt the satisfaction of digging out facts by their own research, and have used a wide range of sources, including newspapers, libraries, encyclopaedias and, of course, the Internet.

John Richards

Philosophy – Hall Green U3A

Our Philosophy Group is small but stable. We meet in each other's homes, and in the three years since it was started we have developed an informal 'discussion group' structure which seems to work well.

We read aloud to each other in turns from whichever work, chosen by mutual agreement, we are presently studying. Anyone can call for a halt while we express opinions or query an obscure hypothesis. An overview of the subject was originally obtained from a set of audio tapes, with notes, made by an Australian professor of education for home use (Australian U3As) but it is equally suitable for our needs. When this source had been explored we turned to specific writers. One book, which we found particularly useful, was Bertrand Russell's History of Western Philosophy. We did not find ourselves in agreement with all his conclusions!

One philosopher's theory seems to lead progressively to another's, so we have by now discovered the personal opinions of diverse thinkers from Plato to Marx and beyond, and how much, if at all, their theories were influenced by the times in which they were living.

The Australian tapes and some videos made by the BBC are obtainable from the Resource Centre and are recommended as a start-up strategy for prospective groups, as well as for those already up and running. It's a fascinating subject.

Cora Jacobs

About philosophy – Sutton U3A

I believe that philosophy can be a very absorbing subject for U3A groups. Of course there are many aspects of philosophy one can study, from the history of philosophy to more difficult specialisations such as logic, mathematical logic, and linguistic or conceptual philosophy. Last year I started a group in Sutton, which proved to be very rewarding, covering ancient Greeks and progressing to Hellenistic philosophy. We read original texts of Plato's Republic, Karl Popper's criticism of the Republic, as well as parts of Aristotle's Ethics, all of these are very acceptable texts and easy to study. We are progressing to the more general history of ideas and exploring how ideas of great thinkers influenced western civilisation.

The Sutton U3A, as well as our neighbouring U3As, is comparatively small, about 250 members and as such we meet mainly in private homes where everyone is encouraged to participate and contribute. There are also good philosophy groups in our neighbourhood. Banstead U3A has a long tradition in philosophy; last year they were doing ethics and this year ancient philosophy. There is also a successful group in Merton. This year we were doing Existentialism which proved to be very popular and last year we studied Brian Magee's book, Confessions of a Philosopher. U3A in London has a very successful group led very ably by Ralph Blumenau who has very large attendances, of about 100-150 members and yet manages to have a discussion. I know from experience that this is not an easy task.

Philosophy not only has interesting subject matter but is conducive, more than any other subject, to the acquisition of higher mental skills such as clear thinking, analytical thinking, decision making and problem solving. Perhaps U3A philosophers could also solve the problem of the meaning of such words as 'group leader,' 'leader,' 'instructor,' 'tutor,' 'organiser,' 'convener,' etc.

When I became chairman of the Sutton U3A last spring, I gradually visited most of the groups, as I am

especially interested in methodologies of teaching. All the groups were differently structured and the most popular subjects seemed to be those dealing with some aspects of history. Social studies were also much in demand. Relevant suitable materials in sociology, politics, economics and psychology could make that a subject very appropriate to U3A groups who generally like to contemplate the world of 'reality' but are also interested in the world of 'appearances.'

Katherine Sun

Is philosophy relevant? – Canterbury U3A

As a seeker after "the meaning of life and everything ..." I have tried, by devious means, to involve other members in my search. This has produced different courses, each of which could be seen, perhaps, to embrace philosophical investigation in its broadest sense.

An initial ten week course was entitled "Is Philosophy relevant?" This introduced a series of questions such as what do we know? how do we learn? who, what, or why are we?, supported by quotes from classical Greece and opening up for guided discussion. These were doggedly debated by a small group who rose to the challenge, but admitted, finally, to exhaustion. Were the sights too high? The following year the syllabus proposed "The Perennial Philosophy" using Aldous Huxley's references as starting points, but that got only minimal response. The choice of title was probably too heavyweight and the faithful unprepared to resume deep investigation.

Looking for another approach, there came to light a repeat of the BBC TV Open University programme, "The Long Search" presented in 1976 by Ronald Eyre. This is a wonderful, ever-relevant, series of interviews in situ with believers of mainline faiths worldwide, sensitive, non-dogmatic and thought-provoking. It proved highly productive and engaging. Each session began with a ½hr video followed by animated discussion.

Taking yet another tack, we turned to "Myths and Legends", embracing folk and fairy stories, a long-time personal interest. We explored essential strands in main world traditions, uncovered universal themes and discussed their possible significance. "Myths and Legends II" concentrated on Celtic themes and the Arthurian Legend; and "Myths and Legends III" later this year will delve deeper into British hero-figures and fairy stories. Next year, who knows?

There is also a Debating Group, called "What Matters?" which takes an agreed topic each session and allows a broad exchange of views and experience. Members attending one type of course are not necessarily the same as those following another, which widens the scope.

Philosophy, as the "love of wisdom", is a vast subject and can give great satisfaction whichever path of enquiry one takes.

Joyce Bonotto

•• *"Learning may not put a penny in your pocket but it will bring you great happiness, a fuller life and a feeling of accomplishment." Alan Wesencroft, aged 87* ••

World Religions - North Coast (Devon) U3A

We were formed in 1992 and have met for eight monthly sessions each year from October to May on Monday mornings. We are fortunate in having the free facilities of the Ilfracombe College Community Centre, The Lantern, with a comfortable club room and coffee bar where we can have a welcome break between the two morning sessions, the first tending to be a straight lecture and the second for discussion groups or question sessions. About 20 people regularly attend and from their wide experience make very positive contributions. Sadly, we lack representatives from the ethnic minorities, but members can draw on their experiences both from overseas and in other British communities.

My own experience has come from involvement in teacher training during the time that Britain became multi-cultural. In schools, we had to adapt religious education to meet the needs of a changing society and in London one became involved in inter-faith dialogue with the emerging religious centres of Asian faiths. Although North Devon has almost no direct contact with other world religions we have had visits from Buddhists (European) and have visited the Exeter Synagogue through our Local History Group.

Our topics have been wide ranging, from straightforward introductions to the six main faiths represented in our society to problems of belief and the dimensions of religion (echoes of Ninian Smart). Materials intended for schools have been welcome here with slides and artefacts. One year we looked at the Hebrew Bible in English and followed it up with studies of Christian History: "597 and All That" in 1997 (early Christianity in Britain), and then "Christian Europe?" (the question mark being important: what would Europe be without Christianity? and what would Christianity be without Europe?).

Last year we prepared for the New Millennium with "A Future for Faith?" considering the prospects for the main world religions in the coming millennium. This year we plan to look back over the last century in "Post-Christian Europe?" (again a question mark, taking such topics as Existentialism, Humanism and Marxism, with Christianity from Karl Barth to the Sea of Faith).

Although most of our members would not call themselves regular churchgoers, their interest in religious matters is deep and informed. This is the kind of discussion that should be taking place in churches, but seldom does. Thanks to U3A it can happen among those who would not readily adopt a religious label.

Jim Bates

Philosophy – Fairford U3A

When Fairford U3A came into being in 1995, I was asked if I would lead a group to study theosophy or philosophy. From childhood I had been interested in and read about philosophy. I had never studied either subject academically but had certainly realised the potential strength of the latter and so chose it for the group subject.

As the group started, I attended a series of lectures on philosophers, including Socrates, Aristotle, Plato and Nietzsche, at a local college. This led to some more modern thinkers with John Rawls, Hobbs, Rousseau and Sartre. To start with I used my college notes, along with some computer information a group member supplied. The latter included a summary of many of the world's leading religions.

The group, once having eleven members, currently has six, which we find a good number when it comes to our lively discussions. By common consent we make acquaintance with philosophers through the ages by studying books of popular appeal relating to the subject. We have one original member who supplied the computer input, who happens to be the only male member. Interestingly Aristotle said, "Philosophy and women do not mix".

A popular book with us all was Leslie Weatherhead's "The Christian Agnostic." Currently we are reading "Why Me, Why This, Why Now" by Robin Norwood. It is opening minds to many new ways of thinking and of looking at life and its problems, how to make sense of them, to face them and work through them positively. It is educational and widens perceptions.

Dorothy Grobecker

Thinkers through the Ages – North Norfolk U3A

This group, which meets monthly, was one of three set up in 1989 when North Norfolk U3A started. It is now one of more than thirty. We decided that philosophy was too narrow and too laden with mystique for what we wanted to do, which was to examine the influence on history of thought rather than action.

Our style is different from the pattern described at the U3A Conference 2000 at Norwich, which I suspect is more the norm. We do not have an expert teacher, rather we use the interests of members and what can be gleaned by reading. Two members have had training in philosophy but they are not expected to be dominant. The main resources used have been books, including those borrowed from the local libraries, and encyclopaedia, including Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Having heard of the popularity of the philosophy stock in the Resource Centre we may use this in the future. Sometimes one person will make a five or ten minute introduction about an individual, always followed by general discussion. Sometimes each member will make a five minute statement, followed by discussion. This approach works particularly well with a theme such as Guilt.

Last year we studied thinkers, including Michael Faraday. Discussion themes included "Class and Society: what they are and what changes have occurred down the ages", "Magic and Mysteries: do they still exist and, if so, in what form?", "Guilt: what it is and is it healthy?", "Choice of an individual who has stood out during the last Millennium."

A.H.Cox

Philosophy – Worthing U3A

Since our group of ten came together in 1998, we have tried three different approaches to the subject. During the first year we took turns each fortnight leading a discussion on an '-ism' of our choice, e.g. scepticism, hedonism, atheism, determinism, intuitionism, environmentalism, postmodernism etc. Most of us found this hard going. As none of us was well versed in philosophy, we did not always know where to look for material.

So we spent the next year discussing Nigel Warburton's "Philosophy: The Classics" (1998 £8.99). This lucid book introduced us to twenty key works, from Plato's "Republic" to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations" but it suffered from being wholly western, male-oriented, and only marginally concerned with such basic issues as the nature of mind, the roots of compassion or the reality of 'the self'.

This year, therefore, we are changing tack again, and will be looking at the ideas of nineteen modern spiritual thinkers from both the east and the west, using Anne Bancroft's compelling "Twentieth Century Mystics and Sages", (1978 but sadly out of print).

Our present group still contains five of our early members. One of those who left us remarked that philosophy has too much supposition and not enough fact. I think she put her finger on what, for many of us, is its greatest appeal!

Don Jameson

Philosophy – Inverness & Nairn U3A

We run a programme between September and June and a series of philosophy discussions has formed part of this for these past eight years. As leader, I prepare a list of questions in one of the recognised fields - ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, epistemology (about knowledge and belief), - with a book list for enthusiasts. One book is recommended for basic reading. Most members will read it and some will buy it.

We remind ourselves

Ø that doing philosophy is not about having cosy chats

Ø that philosophy has a history; the work of great thinkers, past and present is accessible in

books, papers, radio, TV programmes,

Ø that we may challenge some of our own long-held beliefs

Ø that we can have new thoughts, i.e. new to us, if not to mankind

Ø that there may be no definite answer or conclusion-- but the search is worthwhile.

Margaret Ferguson

Comparative Religion -Tynedale U3A

Our Comparative Religion Group was begun in the mid 1980s. Just over a dozen of us meet in each other's homes about once a month. An hour's talk, with discussion, is preceded by coffee, biscuits and informal chat. In the past one member usually gave the talk, but in more recent times two or three members have undertaken to research and present the topic of the day.

We have studied the major religions of the world, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, etc.

Various Christian heresies have been dealt with and also a number of outstanding figures in the history of the Church. Outside speakers have been invited from time to time - a Buddhist doctor/farmer, a member of the Baha'i faith, a professor from Newcastle University who spoke about Islam, and a humanist. A wide remit has led to stimulating forays into areas such as mysticism, and even New Age thinking.

But to make the most of such broad subjects there is a serious need to structure and plan for several meetings ahead. This is something we have not, on the whole, made time to do. Reference books we have used include the Open University course on the major religions, Ninian Smart's *The World's Religions* (CUP), Richard Cavendish's *The Great Religions* (WHSmith), and *Comparative Religion* by Dr AC Bouquet.

Norman Hill

Philosophy – Tynedale U3A

Encouraged by the announcement in the last issue of SOURCES that philosophy material on audio cassette and video was now available, we asked in our Tynedale U3A newsletter whether there was enough interest to consider starting a philosophy study group here. It turned out that there were half a dozen members who had a long standing interest in philosophy, some rather more knowledgeable than others, and we held our first meeting in April this year.

As an introduction, we listened to an audio cassette by Jack Cross, an Australian academic, which was an

overview of how the seminal ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Christ and others gradually came to form what is known as the Perennial Philosophy of Western Education. He spoke very slowly and deliberately, which was a style of delivery we had to get used to, but it did help us to follow his argument.

We recognise that this is a difficult subject, which we cannot hope to cover in depth, but we decided we should begin with a chronological study of the Greek philosophers. The earliest material we could get was another audiocassette by Jack Cross on Aristotle's modifications to Plato's ideas. This turned out to be altogether too difficult to digest and we decided to try the video on Plato for our August meeting. This set of videos is recorded from a BBC series of discussions between Bryan Magee and eminent academics on "Great Philosophers". In the programme on Plato, he was talking to Myles Burnyeat. This was much more user friendly.

Jean and Barry Berkley

Bible Studies – Buxton U3A

We are in the third year of our Bible Study group and are studying the Acts of the Apostles, using commentaries by Foakes Jackson, William Barclay and John Stott and the four videos on Acts from the Visual Bible (Nelson). We have also found superb the BBC Education videos, The Images of Christ, taken from Seeing Salvation (BBC2), on art and Christianity with book material by Margaret Cooling (BBC Education £23).

Don Sparkes

Philosophy – Salisbury U3A

The word philosophy has Greek roots meaning "love of wisdom". Its history stretches over 2,500 years, and includes some of the greatest names in Western culture, such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes and Kant. I am very much the amateur, in love with the subject but without any formal training. My career was in medicine, and my interest in philosophy stems from a paradox I observed many years ago. Philosophy, in common with most disciplines, has its own sub-specialities including the philosophy of science. Yet the vast majority of working scientists are both ignorant about and scornful of this topic. Yes, there are exceptions, notably Albert Einstein, but the generalisation remains true.

But how can this be? Surely philosophy could only improve scientific practice? But the facts appear to speak otherwise. In seeking an answer to this seeming contradiction I have read fairly extensively into the philosophical literature; and whilst not sure of the reason, I believe I am closer to an understanding.

It's not easy to define what we mean by philosophy today. The simplest definition is "thinking about thinking", which is too glib. I prefer this quotation "The human intellect is a limited instrument and philosophy's task is to turn it back on itself and discover its own limitations". All of us have some personal philosophy, because there are many matters, views, and opinions which we take for granted. When these are

examined they are often found to be philosophical in nature. The philosopher's task is to reveal and critically examine these beliefs.

According to Bryan Magee, traditionally, there are three ways of introducing philosophy to newcomers. He labels these as "Works, Problems and History". The first is to study a classical text, Plato's "Republic" is often used. Secondly, one can discuss various topics in philosophy, which constitute its agenda, such as the nature of truth and belief or how we form ethical judgements. The third method is the historical approach beginning with ancient Greece and extending to the present. I prefer the last method, but bring in the second by introducing those topics of particular interest to the historical dramatis personae. I found the best introduction to the subject is Bryan Magee's *The Great Philosophers*.

I have now been the leader of three courses, having previously run equally pleasurable courses on "Understanding Medicine". The subjects we have covered are very wide ranging. For instance, a recent session on the philosophy of Karl Marx led to discussing, among other things, the morality of capital punishment, nature versus nurture in human development, who should rule us, and what should be done if a democratically elected government then abolishes democracy?

David Hume, the greatest British philosopher, wrote "We are placed in this world, as in a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event, are entirely unknown to us". In retracing the thoughts and visions of two and a half thousand years of mankind's endeavour to understand ourselves and the world we inhabit, philosophy can, at its best, show us, as in Bertrand Russell's phrase, "all the noonday brightness of human genius".

Interestingly, Russell elsewhere refers to religion by writing, "Philosophy, as I shall understand the word, is something intermediate between theology and science".

Peter Sutton

Religions and Modern Thought –

Caterham and Oxted U3A

This group has proved popular and has continued non-stop since we started in 1985 as one of the first few study groups of our U3A. We felt that the title "Comparative Religion", although in use at the time, gave the impression that one religion was to be compared favourably or unfavourably with others. This was not our intention. Our aim is to study the origins, main principles and teachings of the world's major faiths, and the impact of thinking and actions of its adherents in history and modern times.

Our sessions consist of a presentation of aspects of a religion followed by a free flow of discussion to help understanding and to clarify questions. As our knowledge grew so did the range of our discussions. Visits were organised to a Buddhist monastery in Sussex and the Hindu temple in Neasden in north London.

Reference books recommended were "Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths" ed. R. C. Zachner and "The Religious Experience of Mankind" by Ninian Smart.

Last year we ventured into philosophy using Nigel Warburton's "Philosophy, the Basics," a useful introduction to the subject with a topic-based approach. Encouraged by news of teaching aids from the Resource Centre, we embarked on a study of Plato with the help of a cassette. This has been both successful and enjoyable. We shall be moving on to other influential thinkers in the history of philosophy, eventually, we hope, reaching contemporary ideas and thinkers.

Jean Pardoe

Looking towards the Mystics – Sheffield U3A

There have been mystics in all ages and parts of the world, and in all religious systems. They reveal a particular type of insight or knowledge of God. Evelyn Underhill defines mysticism as the art of union with reality, or God.

For the past eight years a small group of us have met, first monthly and then fortnightly, to talk together about the writings of the mystics. Whilst mainly reading works of Christian mystics, we have also looked at those of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. It would seem that mystics of all faiths say more or less the same things. At the heart of the universe is a mystery whom the Christians call God, and the mystics' writings are about man's relationship with God in an area beyond logical reasoning. Man's intuition and knowledge of it can affect his life on this planet.

Most of the group members have grown up in one of the Christian traditions. We read chapters from chosen books, going through them together when we meet, exchanging comments, questions and ideas. Taken from F.C. Happold's "Mysticism", we have learnt of, among others, Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, St. John of the Cross and Eckhart. More modern writers have been Thomas Merton and Dag Hammarskjold. Other readings have been from the Buddhist "Dhammapada" (Penguin Classic), The Upanishads, the Bhagavada Gita, and selections from Sufi poets. Last winter we read Bede Griffiths' "New Vision of Reality", in which Griffiths, living much of his life in an ashram in India, finds a basic unity within the world religions.

Our meetings are by no means solemn events, for whilst taking our subject seriously, we cannot take ourselves too seriously. For this is an amazing universe in time and space, and we believe also in an eternity.

M. Shirley Haworth

Resource Centre News

Religion

We have recently started to acquire material in the Resource Centre which supports the studies of groups interested in religion, either Christian or comparative studies of many beliefs. From the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford we have three sets of slides with accompanying notes, covering Buddhism, Hinduism and the gods and goddesses of Ancient Egypt. All slides are of items in the museum and might also be of interest to art and history groups.

In video format we have a series of thirteen videos called "Triumph of the West", which tell the story of western civilization and the impact it has on the rest of the world. Videos relevant to Christianity deal with the impact of the Crusades and the movement of Protestants to the New World. Other videos cover Islam, its history and its reassertion in the West. There are also videos which deal with changes in religious thinking such as "A new direction - religious beliefs in a secular age" and "Age of light - scientific and intellectual ferment."

There is a new Religion Resource List and anyone who would like a copy should contact the Resource Centre.

Philosophy

Many groups already know of our philosophy resources but for those who are new to SOURCES I will mention the set of twelve audiocassettes with notes by Professor Jack Cross. These are ideal for beginners as they cover the subject from Plato to Existentialism in a clear and easy way to understand. They do not need to be used in chronological order as each cassette includes all the background information needed to understand the subject matter.

More advanced philosophy groups might like to use the set of fifteen BBC videos we have where each programme features a contemporary philosopher who, in conversation with the presenter Bryan Magee, discusses the world's most influential thinkers and their ideas.

A full list of all these items is available from the Resource Centre.

Human Rights

We have two interesting slide sets on Human Rights which might well be used by any of the aforementioned groups as part of their programme or to initiate discussion and ideas. Part I is entitled "Political and Civil

Human Rights" while part II deals with economic and social aspects. Each set contains thirty slides, written notes and an audiocassette. Both sets touch on religion and philosophy in a wider context and, although designed for senior school pupils, could easily be used by U3A members.

European Legislation

We are grateful for the donation of a video entitled "The European Parliament at work." This 15-minute video is the English version of a German film which shows the Parliament at work in Strasbourg, how it is organised and its role in European Legislation. As we are all affected by this process no doubt many groups would find this little video a useful aid to their studies.

Metropolis

Not the science fiction film, but a fascinating six video series which traces the historical and technical evolution of the components of a modern city. Covering such diverse subjects as the development of high rise building, the sewerage system and city lighting, it also deals with the contentious problem of traffic congestion and the history and organisation of the London Underground. If your group is studying architecture, town planning or urban history you might like to borrow some of these unusual and entertaining videos

Exercise

Following the publication of the last issue of SOURCES, which featured outdoor and healthy activities, I have had requests for exercise videos. There are hundreds of these on sale but we now have some relevant to Third Agers. If you would like to try the "Easy going workout", "Exercise in a chair", "Fitness over forty" or "Exercise to beat Arthritis", please contact the Resource Centre to arrange a loan or to receive the full list of relevant titles.

Elizabeth Gibson, Resource Centre Manager

U3A National Office, 26 Harrison Street, London WC1H 8JG (0207 837 8838)

Modern Design Group

Architecture, art, social history, science and technology, but where does modern design fit? Here at last is a chance to squeeze it in.

Three years ago a few members grouped together to look at a range of ideas beginning with the Festival of Britain 1951. Clearly the Festival did not spring into life from nowhere; it was post war and a younger generation (our generation) was looking for fresh ideas. In our initial discussions it soon became clear that the Festival was only a feature of changes already tried in the earlier part of the century. We looked at the Bauhaus and the strange influence of the Larssons in Sweden and realised that design goes back, at least, to the 1890s and is an inter-related subject with other disciplines.

As the group enlarged we redefined our aims to include changing fashions, urban design in the modern city, industrial design and packaging, communications technology and modern art. This enabled each member to find a place of special interest and it placed an emphasis on their contribution to the programme rather than relying on guest speakers. We found the Resources Centre a great help especially in the loan of videos on architecture and modern artists.

Fortunately we have a close link with Sheffield Hallam University whose design tutors offer advice and allow us to visit their degree courses. In turn we help third year students with designs for an older population and are now part of U3A's Design Age network.

The success of the group stems from its flexible origins. We did not label the group Architecture though this forms an important part. Our strength lies in cross-linking, taking a central topic and forming a web of interests around it. There is a danger in emulating old grammar school timetables and university departments too closely and not treating knowledge in a more divergent manner. I would like to hear from other U3As where design forms part of their activities, possibly in modern architecture or Design Age interests.

It would also be encouraging to know of other co-ordinators who work from a web chart and consciously jump subject boundaries in their programme planning. This helps to make activities livelier and may stimulate new directions of interest.

Peter Barclay, Sheffield U3A

Finding and Retaining Study Group Leaders

Most U3As are built around the concept of a range of study groups covering a number of different subjects

or activities. Like many other U3As, Richmond upon Thames was and is constrained by finding group leaders and, to a lesser extent, retaining them.

We speculated that a number of our members could be persuaded to "have a go" to lead a group if we could make it easier for them to get started. We decided to focus on the process of organising and running a group, rather than on subject areas, since that had a wider application.

In a purely pragmatic way we identified, from current practice, several different ways of working.

- (a) Discussion - based on a current affairs group
- (b) Workshop - based on participative literature groups
- (c) Language - based on foreign language conversation groups
- (d) Appreciation - based on music groups

These are not mutually exclusive categories but they do assist in analysing and clarifying the distinction between process and content. Leaders will pick-and-mix according to the subject focus, their increasing experience and confidence, and the composition of the group. Further experience with this classification may change it, but the essential character of pragmatism and simplicity should be retained. The initial approach has been refined, consequent upon further experience gained in seminars for potential group leaders elsewhere in the UK.

The U3A Standing Committee for Education has held several Leaders' Days for Course Organisers and Group Leaders, some based on subjects and some to enable new leaders to explore these processes of learning. At the National Conference at Norwich, delegates examined them at an evening session under the following classifications.

- (a) Discussion as a mode of learning:

exploration of discussion methods, from formal debates and seminars to brain storming.

- (b) Hands on learning:

encompass the wide range of third age sessions in which participants expect to learn by doing (singing, writing, computing, dancing, painting, calligraphy).

- (c) Learning the language of a new subject:

sessions in which members must learn a new 'language' in order to progress (a foreign language, the

languages of mathematics, psychology, computers) by more formal learning.

(d) Learning by appreciation:

sessions in which members are presented with an artefact (novel, film, play, painting, piece of music) and encouraged to articulate responses.

(e) Learning during outside activities:

survey approaches to learning out of doors, from field trips to walking groups by informal learning.

Having engaged willing volunteers it is essential to retain them by providing ongoing support. This could be achieved by providing an initial mentor to start the new group. Subsequently, for all groups, a dedicated member of the executive committee could provide for group liaison. More tangible support could be provided in the form of a start-up grant from general funds until the group has got over its initial funding problems.

In Richmond we have bid for funds from the Borough's Life Long Learning Partnership for group study materials which, after group use, will be donated to the Adult College Library for wider use and library management. Bids for a subsidy for room hire have also been successful. An annual gathering of all group leaders with a buffet lunch provided an opportunity for saying thank-you for their essential contribution and for exploring common issues through discussion.

Ron Salmons, Richmond U3A

Philosophy Network

Since becoming the Network Co-ordinator for philosophy earlier this year I have met many members of groups dealing with philosophical subjects, and some who hope to deal with subjects in a philosophical manner. My overall impression, from these and Study Days in York and Chester, is that there is great enthusiasm and interest amongst U3A members.

There are some very successful and long running groups who are eager to share their expertise. Some have told me of the difficulties they face and have even expressed a doubt that philosophy is a suitable subject for U3A. I firmly believe that it is, and I hope that together we might address some of these problems during the coming year. I hope to do some research during autumn and spring and present a development plan. I would like as many interested people as possible to be involved.

•Around Christmas, a questionnaire will be sent to all U3A secretaries. If you are interested in starting a

group, becoming part of one, or are already a group leader, please make sure that you ask for it. Your response would be much appreciated.

- Philosophy will be offered at the Study Days at Exeter University on 19-22 July 2001. The provisional title is "The Greek Philosophers in the Twenty First Century."

- In autumn 2001 I plan to report on development recommendations. If, in the meanwhile, you would like to contact me, I would be glad to hear from you on

01200 426103; email: margretshaw@talk21.com

Margret Shaw,
Philosophy Network Co-ordinator

The Learning Power of Museums

"The combination of leisure and learning that museums can offer is a most valuable asset." That is to be found in the foreword to a policy document published jointly by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Education and Employment. *The Learning Power of Museums* sets out a vision for museum education whereby local and national museums and galleries can enhance their unique capacity to provide us with opportunities for appreciation, reflection and learning. "Through their education programmes," states the publication, "museums can help to realise the objectives of the DfEE and the DCMS in promoting social inclusion, fostering creativity and developing the attitudes, aspirations and abilities of children and adults."

Museums have the power to inspire learners. If they will develop their education departments and liaise closely with schools and teachers to provide new and varied ways of advancing literacy, numeracy or other subjects in the National Curriculum, they will be making more fully available their "rich storehouse of unique objects and interpretative materials."

There are case studies in the document to illustrate how some museums have used novel and creative means of communication with hands-on and interactive models. By arranging exhibitions to focus on local history or manufacture or costume, they have created a learning experience for new audiences. The Arts and Heritage Centre in Rochdale has arranged activity days for maths and a family numeracy programme. The Museum of South Somerset at Yeovil developed a project to introduce primary schools to the history of games, which had the sound educational benefit of improving their mental arithmetic as well as giving them an enjoyable experience of a museum. How many U3A members remember visits in their earlier years, on a rainy holiday, to a dim and dingy display of dusty glass cases?

This policy document is not about the learning power of museums applied only to children, although it aims to stimulate both museums and the education authorities to co-operate in exploiting the power lying undiscovered close-by. Presentational techniques need improving and educational theories need thinking through. Standards need to be set and finance made available to see the policy turned into measurable achievements. It is all part of the drive for life-long learning. Museums and art galleries can touch the minds of any age to inspire, to understand and to create.

To "provide a study resource for students in formal education and adults with special interests engaged in independent learning" and to "encourage adults who find formal education intimidating to take the first step on a learning journey" are two of the objectives within the reach of museums.

This is where U3As can ally themselves with the learning power of museums. As the education officers are preparing programmes and resource packs, U3As could link them into their own study group programmes. A history, literary, art or geological group might both contribute to the formulation of a museum's or art gallery's ideas and use the materials for its own course. The theme of life-long learning must not end on retirement from work. U3As, no less than schools, have the opportunity to form a partnership with museums and forge a link with, as the publication says, "voluntary associations of self-directed learners." That's us!

Len Street, the former U3A Chairman, has pointed out that U3As have linked with the National Trust to research a garden layout, have recorded oral history of a town and are engaged in a project to create an oral history archive of 20th century technological developments. Other U3As could assist museums in local research, cataloguing, using members' technological knowledge about processes and equipment, restoration work, role players or room stewards.

U3As with art groups have given accounts of their visits to galleries in *SOURCES*, and archaeologists and historians have used the museums' resources. This Government policy publication will add impetus to the growth of a learning society of which all U3As are a part.

Lip Reading

At some point after we are sixty, about a quarter of us may have to use a hearing aid, but we won't get the best results from that alone and should combine it with lip reading. Coming from a family with a great grandmother (90ish) needing us to put lips close to her ear and yell to make ourselves heard, a grandmother profoundly deaf from age five because of measles, and an aunt who began to lose hearing in her teens, I am not surprised to experience hearing loss.

With the number of us in U3A over sixty, many can benefit from improving our lip reading. I say improving our lip reading because so many people who have come to classes already have been doing it without realising that they were. It just came naturally. I don't know if grandmother was taught to lip read, but she was an expert, and there were very few people she did not understand. When I picked up my first hearing aid, I saw a notice about lip reading lessons being offered at a small hospital in Bideford. I asked if any other

U3A member would care to go, and found one other pleased to do so. That must have been ten or more years ago.

After a few years, the space at the hospital was no longer available, and I thought how good it would be if others with hearing impairment in our U3A could try to learn to lip read. I wrote to Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf, 1417 Volta Place, N.W., Washington, DC 20007 USA for materials. A most useful book is Winifred Brinson's *Deafness in the Adult*. I also use Rose Feilbach Broberg's *The Lipreaders' Calendar*, which contains practice material to take you round the year in 40 days, and contains many helpful hints to teachers of lip reading. John Chaloner Woods' *Lipreading: A Guide for Beginners* encourages watching yourself in the mirror, but, I always think, I already know what I am saying! We use games to lighten the learning and to provide some fun.

Our first classes were held at my house before finding a local centre for the disabled and elderly. We had a loop system installed, which makes hearing a lot clearer, cutting out extraneous noise, so we are all more comfortable. Except in summer, we meet weekly as we need a lot of practice. My associate takes some classes, and I do the rest. Because we spread the load, it is not a burden on any one of us

While an emotional reaction to deafness is understandable, tackling it in a practical fashion, by learning lip reading makes it less of a catastrophe. This means hard work, constant practice, intense concentration and helpful advice. But it is worth it.

Caroline Patch, South Molton U3A

An Organ Group

In the Farnham U3A we have an Organ Group which studies the history of the organ, its construction and the music written for it. Nobody attending the group is required to play the instrument, although there is no reason why they should not if they wish to do so.

The organ is by far the oldest keyboard instrument of all time, having been invented around 265 B.C. by Ctesibius, a hydraulic engineer living in Alexandria. Although documents describing the first millennium or so of its history are patchy, it is clear that there has been continual development of the organ as a musical instrument right up to the present.

Before the Industrial Revolution the most complex pieces of machinery were clocks and organs, and the construction of the organ and the way that has developed is a fascinating part of the history of technology, as is the way in which new technology and traditional crafts impact upon one another. There is a second aspect of the history of the organ and that is as part of musical history. There seems to be more music written for the organ than any other instrument. Every period of musical history, gothic, renaissance, baroque, classical, romantic and modern is represented in organ literature.

We visit places where they have organs, mainly churches and cathedrals, but we have also visited organ builders' works and one museum. Such buildings often have their own interest, of course, and members enjoy visiting them. The authorities at such places are almost always very welcoming.

How do we find interesting organs? Writing as the leader of the group, I obtain a lot of ideas from our local organists' association, with which I am closely connected, and I am always on the lookout for new organs to visit. It is particularly welcoming if the resident organist is present to take over the afternoon and relieve the group leader. *John Mansfield, Farnham U3A*

Dowsing

We have been running a Dowsing Group for six months – a somewhat unusual subject! We started off by locating water pipes in members' gardens using a hazel twig and rods. This was later extended to determine the depth and quality of water in the pipes. Other services were then investigated.

One wet afternoon was spent on the mysteries of the pendulum, its peculiarities when tested on male and female members of the group, and its use in answering questions.

We have dowsed for water in a field belonging to a U3A member, with the intention of providing, eventually, a drinking trough for his sheep. Indications of water were found but to prove it source holes have to be dug and that takes a little longer.

More recently we have spent time on Exmoor looking, with some success, for ley lines around stone circles and linking these lines up with antiquities.

Martin Wiseman, Barnstaple/Taw U3A

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In the last issue of SOURCES readers were invited to contribute an account of unusual study groups in their U3A. Thank you for these reports on Lip Reading, Organs and Dowsing. Let SOURCES know of other minority interests.

National Events – Study Programme

LEADERS' DAY

Economics: Thurs. 30 November at the Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London. There is no charge for the day, which includes a sandwich lunch. Booking Form from U3A Secretaries

STUDY DAYS

Law and Order: Wed. 22 November at the Community Centre, Sevenoaks, Kent. Fee £10, including sandwich lunch. Cheques, payable to "U3A Sevenoaks", to John Bonnet, 87 Well Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN14 1PT.

Languages: Tues. 10 April 2001 at Southampton City College, 10 a.m. to 4.00 p.m., booking details from Gloria Blackburne, 20 Abbey Mill, Church Street, Bradford on Avon BA15 1HB

Science: Mon. 23 April 2001 at The Royal Institution of Great Britain in London, a unique opportunity to take part in three lectures and discussions in the famous Michael Faraday Lecture Theatre (scene of the annual Children's Christmas Lectures), and a tour of the historic building. Speakers: Professor Susan Greenfield (Director of the Royal Institution, neuroscientist, TV personality) on brain, memory and ageing; Dr. Frank James (Historian of Science at the Royal Institution) on Ri and Michael Faraday; Professor Malcolm Longair (cosmologist). Cost: £10.00 per person. Enquiries to Paul Clasby (01590 674127) or Glenys Tuersley (0208 950 3030). Booking Forms from National Office.

Art Appreciation: Wed. 25 April 2001 at The Barber Institute, The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, B15 2TS. Theme: "The Painter's Eye on Social Life", three lectures and visits to galleries,

11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Enrolments open from December 2000 by application to The Barber Institute, envelope marked "U3A Study Day 2001". Cost: £20 (incl. lunch and refreshments).

U3A/PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE 7-8 April 2001

"Are we Europeans?" - historical, political, cultural and economic aspects. Further details from John Newcombe 01822 834274

SUMMER SCHOOL 19-22 July 2001 at Exeter University

Twelve subjects are on offer: Architecture, Bird Watching, Botany, Drama, Embroidery/Fabrics, Garden History, History of Art, Literature, Mixed Media Painting, Philosophy, Portrait Painting and Science. Full details will be published soon.

The Standing Committee for Education provides support to Group Leaders and arranges Leaders' Days on various subjects in London. Classics will be the subject for one day in the autumn. Requests for Leaders' Days in other subjects should be sent to the National Office. Self-financing Study Days, organised in the Regions, may be published in the February issue of SOURCES. Copy must be received by 13 December.

