

*'...depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion': Francis Bacon*

**By Dr Peggy Morgan  
 Mansfield College  
 Oxford University**

**Q**uestions of definition can seem dry at first, but with a word that we hear as often as religion, everyone has their own views and associations, so discussion is lively.

Some people are sympathetic towards religion and some are hostile. For people from a Christian cultural background, religion may first and foremost be a matter of what people believe and in particular what they believe about God.

The term philosophy has a similar ring of 'thinking about' and may be the preferred term for Buddhists and Advaita Vedanta Hindus (remember there are many sorts of Hindus). Their focus is not on a personal God.

But Jews and Muslims may say in a startling way: 'Judaism / Islam is not a religion', and continue, 'It is a way of life'. God is interested in what you eat, what you wear and who you marry'.

Religion here is a doing and belonging word not just believing. It is orthopraxy (doing the right thing) rather than orthodoxy (believing the right thing) that is the key that defines your community.

It involves not only food and dress but deep roots in geographical places and nations; educating children; the jobs you do; how you use income; responses to suffering; the celebration of festivals which mark the year; life after death and the related needs in terms of hospice and other medical care; and how members of extended families relate to each other and the roles of women and men.

As you can see from the above the field of religious studies is wide and ideally involves attention to worldviews, philosophies or life-stances beyond what we mean by religions, since the boundaries are permeable.

# The Study of Religion



**A strange thing about religion is that we all know what it is until someone asks us to tell them**

For most people, religion is still primarily an identity, a label, a badge of allegiance to a group: Protestant or Roman Catholic in Ulster; Hindu and Sikh in the Punjab; Sunni and Shi'a Muslim in Iraq; Jewish Israeli or Christian or Muslim Palestinian.

People claim these identities or have them forced upon them to show which side they are on. One writer, Wilfred Cantwell Smith in *The Meaning and End of Religion* suggests we need to distinguish talking about cumulative traditions to which we give the monolithic names of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and so on and the faith of women and men.

Learning about religions is to learn about the actions, emotions and beliefs of individual people and of whole civilisations.

The study of religions is important for

understanding international politics; human history; what the issues might be (for different people) if Alan in the Archers wants to marry a Hindu; what you might cook if your daughter brings home a Muslim partner; and what might be involved if you are invited to a Jewish wedding.

It is relevant whether people are involved in the health services, leisure industries, education, the foreign office, legal professions, police force, in a charity, have family members from a variety of traditions, or just wish to live in an informed way and get along with their Hindu and Buddhist neighbours.

I have been approached by a home decorator and a taxi driver to give them both a course on what they need to be aware of when their work brings them into contact with people from a variety of religions.

**Continued on page 3...**

*Sources* is published by the Third Age Trust  
 19 East Street, Bromley, Kent BR1 1QH  
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### In the next issue

The next issue of *Sources* (No 28) will be posted to those on the database in June 2006. The special themes will be on Producing a Newsletter, and Information and Communications Technology.

Contributions are considered for inclusion by an editorial panel. Please submit them not later than 9 April 2006 – via the National Office or direct to the editor.

You can send them by e-mail to tony.thornton@virgin.net (preferred), on disc or cleanly typed suitable for scanning (but hand written words are also acceptable). Every effort will be made to acknowledge them. Looking ahead to Issue 29 in November 2006, the focus will be on Educational Field Trips.

### How to receive *Sources*

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You can also subscribe online at u3a.org.uk

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### Feedback

If you have any comments on topics in this issue, please write to the editorial panel, c/o U3A National Office or e-mail the editor at: tony.thornton@virgin.net Tel: 01228 670403

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Welcome to a bumper issue. The response was so great I needed four extra pages to fit everything in.

The religious groups have come forward in surprising numbers and I wonder how many other groups are out there unknown to their Network Coordinators.

You can contact them using the list in U3A News – you'll be surprised at the help and advice they can give. This will help the National Coordinator to better disseminate from the

top down and weave a strong network without a few slipping through.

A reader points out that adopting a themed approach to *Sources* means that the subject isn't discussed again for years. Don't be misled by this. You can write to me on any topic, especially if your group is distinctive and has traits that can help others.

The same goes for feedback. The panel is keen to hear your views. The letters we receive are carefully considered and acted upon.

## In my view *Tony Thornton* Editor

The next issue covers ICT and newsletters. These are new subjects for us but relevant as more U3As are broadcasting news and information using computers.

(Did you know that the subcommittees are saving money by holding video meetings from homes?)

Note that we are interested in the content of your newsletters rather than the technicalities of production.

And we would like to know about the successes (or otherwise) of ICT groups that provide facilities for computer learning and Internet access.

Finally, I would like to thank retiring panel chairman Chris Dickson for her help and guidance during the years.

She is succeeded by panel member Barry Davies who pledges to lead *Sources* ever onwards and upwards.

...continued from page 1

The many dimensions of religion, which influence each other, include rituals such as a Christian funeral; experiences, such as the Buddha's Enlightenment; narratives, such as that of the Exodus or creation; doctrines, such as the belief in an all-powerful and all-good creator God; ethics, such as the Jain teachings of non-violence; social institutions, such as Jewish synagogues; and aesthetic expressions, such as Hindu dance, or Muslim calligraphy.

To do justice to these many dimensions, the field of the study of religions involves a variety of skills and approaches. A favourite area for philosophers who work on religions is the issue of the problem of evil. In the past, most philosophers of religion have had a western background and philosophical theology has been Christian dominated, but the area is now broadening (see Ninian Smart and David Cooper who have both written *World Philosophies*).

Philosophy and ethics are two of the most popular subjects in schools. Some philosophers of religion have examined the relationship between religions and how one might try to discern whether they could be paths to One reality (see John Hick *An Interpretation of Religion*).

Historians (see Sources issue 26) look at the past and theologians articulate the perspectives of those who belong to traditions (insiders).

There are also sociologists of religion who look at community life; psychologists who are most interested in social and individual experiences; and anthropologists who tend to undertake small-scale studies of particular communities – for example Jains in Leicester or Pakistani Muslims in Oxford or Buddhists in Bath.

In literature, novelists such as Susan Howatch or Chaim Potok explore important themes on which group discussion can be based.

One of the most important areas in the growth of the study of religions, as some of the above references indicate, is this focus on Diaspora communities that have been transplanted and change accordingly.

## Mansfield College, Oxford



### ***Philosophy and ethics are two of the most popular subjects in schools***

Gender is another important focus, whether it is work on the forgotten queens of Islam, on goddesses, or on the feminine in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent. There is also more and more being written on indigenous religious traditions such as Maoris, Australian aborigines, shamanism and paganism.

The study of religions is a field that encourages debate. Critical historical work on texts and the sciences have thrown up major challenges (see insights in Edmund Gosse *Father and Son* and Mrs Humphrey Ward *Robert Ellesmere*).

There are different sorts of sociologists and anthropologists, and although one of their ways of working engages empathy and observation through participation, some psychologists' and sociologists' analysis reduces religion to entirely human roots in terms of obsessional neurosis (Freud), or the projection of societies' needs and laws (Durkheim). But the philosopher and psychologist William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience* counters this.

So in conclusion, there is a breadth of material and approaches here which engages with everyone's existing expertise and interests.

**Peggy Morgan** is lecturer in the study of religions at Mansfield College, University of Oxford. She is also involved in continuing



education in different parts of UK, developing the work of various centres for the study of religions in Oxford and in local and national interfaith activities.

Formerly she served as Honorary President of The British Association for The Study of Religions, Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre and Chair of the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education.

Her publications include *Six Religions in The Twenty First Century* (with W Owen Cole; Stanley Thornes 2000 and *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* (with Clive Lawton, EUP, 1996, 2nd edition due 2006)

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**New Religious Movements:**

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Morgan, Peggy and Clive Lawton eds.  
**Ethical issues in Six Religious Traditions**

**W**hen I became coordinator in 2002, I discovered that there were all sorts of study groups around – as suspected. No doubt there are even more as yet undiscovered (or not yet started).

A few ask for help but most just get on with it. I hope to promote sharing between groups and to encourage more leaders to take the plunge.

Some of the groups call themselves Comparative Religion, but there are many other titles, such as On Religions, Ancient Wisdom, Religion and Philosophy, Religion, Spirituality and Society, Religions in the UK, Current Religious Writings, Common Roots of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Exploring the Spiritual Dimension, and Religion, Philosophy and Mythology.

Some are based just on one faith, such as Islam or The History of Christianity – an Alpha group and a Cana group (Christianity for those who are unhappy with traditional churches). Some groups start with one theme and then develop others as it suits them.

## Phil Silk: World Religion Coordinator

**Three years ago, I was leading a study group on World Religions and noticed that there was no national coordinator for religious studies. As often happens when you make a suggestion, you get the job!**



I was delighted to be contacted recently by almost 30 leaders of religious groups. I was surprised to find that most seem to meet in houses, which, according to one leader, seems to please the visiting speakers as well as being cosy. Others find public places, sometimes free.

The longest running group is 14 years, the shortest – a six-week unit. Monthly seems the main pattern and numbers attending vary from five to 30.

What seems clear is that the U3A system works. People with a keen

interest, experts or not, can take the initiative and share their concerns with others in many satisfying ways.

So if you have an interest connected with religion (or any other topic), have a go. It's up to you to decide how the group should be run and what to name it.

Note that there is encouragement and mutual aid available should you want it. Moreover, others could benefit from hearing of your adventures.

Best wishes,

**Phil Silk**, World Religion Coordinator.  
(Or should I call it Religion/s?)

## Exploring religious writings

**Minehead U3A's Current Religious Writings Group began in 2003 – a year after I joined the U3A**

**I**t seemed to me that religion was missing from the groups at Minehead. I had retired from many years work in Quaker religious education so I suggested reading and discussing contemporary religious books.

I stressed that this was for general interest, not to back up any particular denominational or theological position, or for personal spiritual nurture. All were welcome, believers or not, religious attenders or not.

Buying or borrowing the book would be necessary and in U3A style we would take it in turns to introduce a section of the book. Meetings would be monthly.

Since Rowan Williams was in the news as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, I looked at his titles and proposed *Lost Icons*. Six people joined and we spent the next six months working through it. We found it tough going but rewarding. Fortunately there were TV programmes of him that fitted in well and we watched them for part of several sessions.

Then we each read a different book

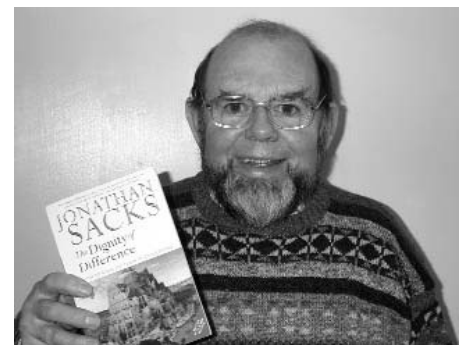
### Chris Lawson: Minehead U3A

from my shelves and discussed them. That wasn't so interesting. So we went for the big one and took on Karen Armstrong's *A History of God*. That took us most of a year but it broadened our understanding of the development of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

A recording of her talk about fundamentalism was passed around. This brought her to life, as did reading her biography, *The Spiral Staircase*. Our public library got hold of several of her books so some of us did extra reading.

After that we relaxed (nay, were deeply absorbed!) by watching the video of the programme with Robert Beckford about the making of the Bible that went out on Christmas Day 2004. His interviews and observations fitted well into our reading.

By then we wanted something from a writer from a tradition other than the Christian one, so we are enjoying *The Dignity of Difference* by Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi. This is an easier read



than the previous two and full of interesting observations and fascinating thoughts in the exposition of his title.

With each book, I delved into the resources available on the Internet and got some additional articles and biographical material. The diversity of people in the U3A and being away from a church setting is working well and we have some good discussions.

We are not worried by how much or how little we get through at each meeting. Getting into the book and enjoying discussing the issues raised is more important.

There are now eight in the group, quite enough for some good discussion. We shall be looking for a Muslim author next, I think, or at least wanting to get a better understanding of Islam. Any suggestions?



Jean Waddell:  
Old Basingstoke and District U3A

# Exploring the Spiritual Dimension

I think you will agree that most of us look to religion to answer our doubts and ignorance. I got proof of this through my small U3A group that I lead under the title of Exploring the Spiritual Dimension

We have been meeting for more than a year with a nucleus of around five but with many comings and goings.

Our monthly discussions started with the many ways in which the Spiritual Dimension can be found. While some find spirituality in religion and worship, others find it in Nature, Music and Art – even Science.

We spent several meetings studying *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity* by John Polkinghorne. The science was not easy but we felt the effort was worthwhile.

We are now embarking on Spirituality in Religion, using Claire Disbrey's *Listening to People of Other Faiths*, and our number has risen to 12. However, I am hoping that this study will continue to be part of our wider exploration, not just an academic study for information.

Here are a few words of wisdom that I have found helpful:

'Religion is the sphere in which man surrenders himself to something greater than himself'.

Ian T Ramsey in his book *On Being Sure in Religion* put into words what I feel deeply: 'We are not looking for criteria which will enable us to appeal to finality, centrality, certainty. We are looking for criteria by which to live our lives authentically, by which we can be true to ourselves, true to those among whom we live, and responsive to the needs of the world, with our gaze fixed on a purpose, aim and goal transcending this, which is worth striving for'.

Montgomery-Watt in *Religious Truth For Our Time* writes: 'The essential criterion for the degree of truth to be found in a religion, when considered as a whole, is its fruits in the life of its adherents. There is much truth in all the great religions – this is proved by their fruits, the quality of life seen in their adherents'.

I can also echo what Montgomery-Watt says about 'Dialogue' – a word looked on with great suspicion by many. He writes: 'Part of the purpose of dialogue is to enable members of one

religion to learn from members of another what they find of value in their religion, and so correct the negative images they hold while at the same time attaining to a sounder appreciation of some aspects of their own faith. A precondition of true dialogue is that there should be no attempt to convert members of the other religion, but to be well rooted in our own faith'.

Professor John Hick is a bit more controversial. In his *God and the Universe of Faiths* he writes: 'A shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre, to the realisation that it is God who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around Him'.

I don't remember any period in my life when I have not believed in God, so I have never experienced the dramatic moment of conversion. But step by step, as I have faced crises in my life, as we all have, my vision of God has grown.

But always with Gerard Hughes's warning in mind. In his *God of Surprises* he writes: 'In turning to God we must first acknowledge that whatever and however he is, he is mystery. We can never with our finite minds, adequately grasp who he is, and if ever you do find a neat and clear definition, you may be sure that it is false. We may construct a most elaborate and ingenious religious system, but if it is not grounded in this basic truth that God is mystery, then our elaborate system becomes an elaborate form of idolatry'.

I find that a dreadful warning.

Here are a few hints that have helped and refreshed me in my search for a true vision of this mystery.

George Appleton in *The Word is the Seed*: 'A Presence that fills the universe, that penetrates every corner, every prison cell, every lonely room. Wherever the spirit of man is awake and receptive, though often unrecognised, waiting for welcome'.

That description of God as 'Presence' helped me to appreciate William Blake's *The Divine Image*



William Blake by Thomas Phillips 1807

## The Divine Image

To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love  
All pray in their distress;  
And to these virtues of delight  
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love  
Is God, our Father dear,  
And Mercy, Pity Peace and Love  
Is man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,  
Pity a human face,  
And Love, the human form divine,  
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,  
That prays in his distress,  
Prays to the human form divine,  
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,  
In heathen, Turk, or Jew;  
Where Mercy, Love and Pity dwell  
There God is dwelling too.

Religions wrestle with the ultimate questions of existence: what it means to be human and flourish; moral and spiritual authority; divine reality; and cosmic relationships. How these questions are explored and answered by the world's religions provides endless areas of research and debate



Gwyneth Little: Lutterworth U3A

# Religions in the UK

Lutterworth U3A started in April 2003 and the number of interest groups has grown steadily.

In late 2004, I offered Religions in the UK with a little trepidation as to the response. As a teacher and lecturer in Religious Education, I had been used to captive audiences. Would anyone be interested in such a voluntary study?

Religion is regarded as a controversial and often sensitive subject in a world from which it usually gets a bad press.

For me the study of religions, starting in my 40s with an Open University degree, has been a source of intellectual expansion and personal fascination.

In our initial meeting in February 2005, 12 enthusiasts decided on a trial format of one religion at a time – a short three-session course on Islam to start. Most participants claimed to have little knowledge of World Religions. One put her level at ‘Ladybird book standard’.

Some are members of local churches; some are disillusioned non-attenders; and several claim to be ‘not at all religious’. It doesn’t matter because they appreciate the importance of the role of religion in the modern world and the need to understand the nature of multi-faith Britain. There is also an element of personal search, a sense that people of faith may have something to offer in a confused and confusing world.

Members of the U3A are a group whose school education took place before the multi-faith aspects of Religious Education became compulsory. Religious Instruction, Scripture, even Theology were on the timetable and the content was entirely Christian. ‘Heathen lands afar’ often coloured the attitudes of those doing the teaching.

But U3A members are open minded

and committed to life long learning, so they recognise that the UK is a different society from that in which they grew up. They are prepared to investigate, learn from, even celebrate those differences. After all, what is there to lose?

The group decided on a format of a basic introduction to each religion during the three sessions. An introductory lecture is followed by a visit to a place of worship and a final lecture/discussion session to explore aspects in more depth.

This format was followed in the spring as we studied Islam and the summer when we looked at Judaism. The autumn course on Hinduism required two introductory sessions.

Clearly only the fundamentals of the religion can be covered in this time, but some participants borrow my books and conduct personal research as their interest develops.

Numbers have fluctuated. Islam was attended by up to 32 people, Judaism by around 20 and Hinduism averaged 25. I was surprised at the level of interest from a small market town.

Being only 15 miles from Leicester, one of the most multi-faith cities of the UK, gives us wonderful opportunities to visit places of worship and meet people in their special surroundings.

Visits to mosque, synagogue and temple have been enjoyable and highly successful. Having taught RE in the area for several years and having been involved in Interfaith activities and groups, I have a core of people to approach whom I can rely on to be interesting, stimulating and non-threatening guides in each community.

Preparation in the session beforehand created an awareness of what to expect. The welcome we received in each place was warm and much appreciated.



Visit to Leicester Hebrew Synagogue

I am aware that creating opportunities for such an experience would be much more problematic in other parts of the UK. I would highly recommend the *Religions in the UK Directory*, published by the multi-faith centre at the University of Derby in association with the Inter Faith Network for the UK. This lists places of worship and associations in the UK with contact details.

I also invited members of the faiths to share the final sessions on Islam and Hinduism. There is no substitute for this experience. Listening to and questioning these friends has taught group members far more about the realities of being part of different faith communities than I, as an outsider, ever could.

This has just been a beginning and where we go from here will be largely determined by the wishes and choices of the group. We shall hopefully tackle other major religions: Sikhism, Buddhism, Christianity.

There are other possibilities; Jainism, Zoroastrianism or the Baha'is. A possible programme of visits in the summer may include Coventry cathedral, Bhaktivedanta Manor, Neasden temple or Leicester Jain temple and museum. The list of possibilities is exciting.

Britain's religiously diverse society provides wonderful opportunities for engagement, dialogue and understanding. Our 'religions' group has put a toe in the water and is prepared to go swimming.



Donald Elliott:  
Brent U3A

# Studying the Religions

With the encouragement of members, I started a group meeting fortnightly for the 2003/4 session. We used *The Religions and Living Spirituality* as the course title

For our approach, the cue was taken from the book *The Christians - their practices & beliefs* by Peter McKenzie of Leicester University (SPCK, 1988) which is an adaptation of Friedrich Heiler's *Phenomenology of Religion*. We aimed to study phenomena or aspects which occur among all or most of the established world religions.

Initially we looked at such things as: Vocation, Ritual, Symbol, Devotion, Story, Deity, Dogma, Destination and Sacred Space.

The motivation for the study could be summed up in the following quotation (Dr Karam Singh Governor of Kashmir): 'The intelligentsia underestimate the power of religion. Secularism is fine as an antiseptic for the State but not for the individual. The inner light is not touched by secularism'.

The method we used held that: 'Relations between the faith communities should be explored more by "heart" than "head" i.e. by the use of story, symbol and imagination', David Bosch, South African Christian theologian. (My emphasis.)

We started in by considering religions and communities, identifying the 'tribes and territories' of the religions around the world, by listening to particular stories of Orthodoxy in post-communist Russia and of Hindu nationalism in India.

Our method was to take two specific stories from different religions for each topic. Thus, on Religions and the State, we heard the controversies over Shari'ah law in Nigeria and over proposals for religious representation in the reformed House of Lords.

On Vocation, we looked at the Burmese Buddhist monastic tradition and we were addressed by a guest Rabbi on his personal calling to the rabbinate.

In the second year, we focused more on changes occurring in the religions, and visited the new golden Sikh Gurdwara in Southall, designed by a Christian architect.



The golden Sikh Gurdwara in Southall

We noted the huge spread of Pentecostalism in Christianity and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood with its repercussions today.

We considered sex and the religions, and listened to findings from our research into Spirituality in the contemporary West.

This year, we are meeting only twice each term. We are looking at reformation movements (Ijtihad in Islam, and Dissent and Democracy in Christianity).

We hope to visit the Brick Lane Mosque (once a Huguenot church, then a synagogue). Next term, we will discuss the religious ethics of stem cell research and of assisted dying.

In the summer, we will study the writings of two so-called 20th century existentialist theologians on 'God' and 'Grace' respectively.

This sounds heavy, which it is. But we have a steady group of about 12 persons. We have used excellent BBC videos supplied by U3A Resource Centre, in particular: *Living with Islam 3 - Struggles with Modernity* and *Triumph of the West 2 - a New Direction, Religious Beliefs in a Secular Age*.

We have shared personal examples of religious art and symbol. But the major source of information has been via the Internet - used with discrimination and the checking of sources.

## Resources for Religion

U3A Resource Centre (see page 21)

U3A Groups - List from coordinator:

Phil Silk, 1 Bala Grove, Cheadle  
Staffs ST10 1SY Tel: 01538 757020

International Interfaith Centre

2 Market Street, Oxford, OX1 3RF  
Tel: 01 865 202745

E-mail: [iic@interfaith-centre.org](mailto:iic@interfaith-centre.org)

[www.interfaith-centre.org](http://www.interfaith-centre.org)

They have a video interview series for sale and may have other resources.

**The World Congress of Faiths**

London Inter Faith Centre

125 Salisbury Road

London NW6 6RG

[www.worldfaiths.org](http://www.worldfaiths.org)

They have various resources including a good quarterly journal, *Interreligious Insight*. £30 to join, less just for the journal. They run conferences too.

**The Inter Faith Network (UK)**

8a Lower Grosvenor Street

London SW1W 0EN

Tel: 020 7931 7766

[www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

They have a list of interfaith groups

**The International Association for Religious Freedom**

British Secretary Peter Samson

11 East Road, Lancaster LA1 3EE

Tel: 01524 66559

**Religions For Peace UK**

Hope Cottage, Micheldever

Winchester, Hampshire SO21 3DG

E-mail: [hopeis@btinternet.com](mailto:hopeis@btinternet.com)

[www.religionsforpeace.org](http://www.religionsforpeace.org)

**U3A Online Course:**

Religions of The World

£7.50 no tutor. [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

Click on Online Courses

**Various Resources** can be found at:

[www.worldspirit.org.uk](http://www.worldspirit.org.uk)

I hope this is of some use to you

I wish you well with your group.

**Phil Silk, coordinator**

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The Teaching Company sells subjects at reasonable prices presented in half hour lecture modules in straightforward and accessible language by eminent academics. These include World Religions - Ancient and Modern, Classical Mythology, History of Christianity, Biblical and Apocryphal Studies, and Christian Mysticism.

Some can be downloaded from:

[www.teach12.com](http://www.teach12.com)

# Comparative Religions



Sheila Epps : Maldon U3A

Our group started in 2004 as The Islam Group. We borrowed BBC videos from the Resource Centre that were somewhat one-sided, but gave us a glimpse of the Muslim World.

This was followed by a presentation of the Muslims arrival in Spain from 770 CE until 1492, when they were expelled.

To assist us in our understanding of the Islam Faith, two Muslim women were invited to a meeting. The younger was born in the UK of Pakistani parents, whilst the elder, baptised in the Church of England, is a convert to Islam.

A devotee from Leicester also gave his account of being a Muslim, but he was considered to be rather doctrinal.

Our fortnightly meetings were rounded off by a visit to the Central London Mosque in Regents Park. This was established in 1944, opened by George VI, and presented as a gift by the British people to the Muslim Community. We were conducted into the main hall where we sat on rugs under the magnificent gold coloured dome.

We were joined by a young British convert to Islam who explained the basic meanings of the religion. He also explained that Islam means submission (to Allah), that the laws were spoken to Muhammed, a prophet of Allah, whilst the former was in Medina. These were transcribed into the Qur'an. We also learned that Jihad is not a pathway to war but a route to peace.

## Buddhism

Our group then investigated some of the World Religions. We commenced with Buddhism, which included a video of an interview with the Dalai Llama.

We learned that Buddhists do not believe in a 'Superior Being' but that God (or Good) is in all of us. This study culminated in a visit to the Buddhist Temple (Stuka) in Colchester. This is a converted house and, although standing in a quiet street, has enlivened the area by its brightly painted exterior.

We experienced a homely, relaxed atmosphere, especially when we spent some time in the calm of the meditating room. Our Buddhist guide explained that

**And our coordinator said unto us: "Go forth and seek all religions and thou shalt find all sorts of interesting beliefs."**

he had become a student of this Belief in his search for an answer to the purpose and meaning of Life. Yet two years on, our host, who plays a leading role in the Colchester Centre, is still searching.

We were impressed by his quiet mien, sincerity and non-dogmatic attitude. He welcomed questions and his replies were not glibly nor automatically given, even though the same queries had been posed many times.

Unfortunately, we did not have the chance to participate in a period of meditation, but we were encouraged to attend the centre's open sessions.

## Jehovah's Witnesses

Last November, we settled down at our host member's residence to watch a video on the subject of Hinduism. To our surprise, there was a knock and on his return to the room, our host led in two women JWs, who unwittingly chose his house to proselytise it to their ways. They found themselves subjected to many questions, but in a polite manner.

The younger of the two had been brought up as a Jehovah's Witness from childhood and accepted the dogma as an ordinary part of life. However, her companion was a convert to the creed and was more dogmatic. She certainly knew her bible and where to find answers to thorny questions. We received a nice letter after their visit thanking us for our indulgence.

We then moved on to Hinduism. With videos and slides, we tried to understand this religion, which has 330 million Gods! – together with a Divine Sound: AUM, the first sound of Creation from which life emerged. Its chanting generates energy in all three states of the mind, viz. JAGRUT: walking,

SWAPNA: dream, and SHUSHUPTI: deep sleep.

Hinduism is a liberal religion and to Hindus there are no heathens or enemies. It does not set man a limit of one life but offers many. It is a strict belief and makes man feel responsible for every action he performs through the Law of Karma. The first scriptures of the human race were the four VEDAS: eternal truths. A Veda means knowledge.

*And our coordinator said verily, arise and come to me at the Maldon football stadium.* There we took a motor coach to Neasden in London to visit the Hindu Mandir (temple).

This is a remarkable building that was built in just five years without the use of steel. The marble used was from India and Italy, made up of 26,300 pieces, which had been hand carved in India and then shipped to the UK. The pieces were numbered and put together on site like a giant jigsaw.

We were received in a meeting room, minus our shoes, and shown a video of the construction. We put questions to the official then attended the daily ceremony of worshipping the three Murtis: marble idols ceremonially infused with the divine presence of God.

*For out of 2006 we shall go again to the house of a member, when we shall gather again.* We shall welcome speakers from the Hindu and Jewish faiths, as well as a speaker on Humanism.

We also have plans to invite an Anglican Priest to one of our meetings, as well as a visit to the Greek Orthodox Community at Tolleshunt Knights, a village close to Maldon.

AMEN



# Religion, Spirituality and Society



**Mike Reveley: Dacorum U3A in the grounds of Glastonbury Abbey researching the mysteries of the famed Isle of Avalon**

The Dacorum area (Hemel Hempstead and District) U3A World Religions group has been running successfully for ten years with a programme of speakers talking mainly about their own religion.

I have changed the title to Religion, Spirituality and Society to broaden the scope and with selected speakers have adopted a more thematic approach, though we shall invite back representatives of particular beliefs.

This group has met monthly for two hours as a secular enquiry group in private homes – mine at present for up to about 20 people.

Here are some extracts from last year's programme of events.

In May, Lutheran Minister John Evenson gave a fascinating account of his involvement with the African liberation movement in SW Africa.

His personal and powerful testimony of faith and works in action was followed by discussion of how faith/belief systems and political movements are susceptible to malign tendencies.

Only by adhering to the highest standards of human behaviour – as John cited in the Declaration of Human Rights (adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948) – are abuses of power to be avoided.

The June meeting was eloquently led by Alan Naylor who focussed on the Gospel accounts of Jesus's resurrection and ascension. Alan's radical review of the evidence, while rejecting the miraculous features of the story, described how the disciples/apostles underwent a great transformation in their lives to see Jesus as the centre of their message. Largely through their commemorative communal meals, the apostles became emboldened to proclaim the gospel of forgiveness.

Alan's book is entitled *Christianity and Humanism - A Critical Examination*.

Our July meeting took us back 5,000 years to the Mesopotamian/Sumerian (now Iraq) myth of the goddess Inanna. Lyn Hill with Avril Porter gave us a descriptive talk on the story and character of this ancient mythical goddess whose exploits were recorded in cuneiform writing in about 1750 BCE although oral versions of the story would have existed much earlier.

Lyn, who is a psychotherapist, explained that the archetypal portrayal of human behaviour and experience, in the beautifully poetic stories such as that of Inanna, are relevant for individuals' self knowledge in every age.

Martin Nathanael gave a stimulating talk in September entitled *The Way Of Knowledge*. He drew on his wide experience of mainstream religion from a Jewish and Christian perspective, and described a mystical tradition often suppressed in the West. A Sufi saying was among many quotations he gave: 'In order to become who you are, you must step out of who you are'.

In October, Zeyla Alarcon described her religion of choice, the Baha'i World Faith. Little known in this country, it has probably two million members worldwide but does not seek converts. It is a monotheistic religion drawing on the Shia tradition of Islam and Zoroastrianism, but also claims heritage with Judaism and Christianity.

The things that have made it attractive to many people especially in South Asia and Africa are: its tolerance; democratic structure; emphasis on the relativity of religious truth and the underlying unity

## **Our recent programme:**

**Full Circle. Women's Spirituality**

The Mystery of Rennes-Le-Château  
(A PowerPoint talk)

**Who was Mary Magdalene? Lover,  
Leader, Legend, Libertine, Literary  
Invention? (My PowerPoint talk)**

Philosophy and Religion

**Church and State**

Jesus's Resurrection and Ascension:  
What happened?

**Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth**

The Way of Knowledge:

Esoteric Spirituality

**The Baha'i World Faith**

Glastonbury: Myth, Mayhem, Mysteries  
and Mountains Green (PowerPoint talk)

of all things and all religions; the crucial importance of the education of women (as well as men); and general service to humanity.

For the November meeting I gave an illustrated presentation describing the many local geographical features, events and personalities that have given the small Somerset town of Glastonbury such an extraordinary history and reputation. Its long-standing popularity as a pilgrimage destination continues, particularly these days, for followers of 'New Age' spirituality.

I am in the process of arranging the programme for Spring/Summer 2006, including presentations on Joseph Campbell and Myth, Anthroposophy, Reincarnation, The Mysterious Origins of the New Testament and What is Spirituality?

# Museum of Garden History

## A U3A Shared Learning Project

Who, me?



I hesitated before agreeing to lead the U3A Shared Learning Project at the Museum of Garden History (MGH).

Max de Boo  
N London U3A

I am an amateur gardener with no expertise in either botany or history. But I need not have worried. The people that joined the project were enthusiastic, inspiring and committed.

The 12 weeks duration felt more like surfing a great wave than swimming against the tide of my own ignorance.

The group members came from several U3As located in the Greater London area, meeting fortnightly in the converted church museum lying alongside the Lambeth Palace.

The venue was thought provoking – a little museum and a hidden garden beside the River Thames. There were major roads with noisy traffic rushing by on two sides. Inside we found a strange island of calm.

Our remit, negotiated with the MGH Officer for Interpretation and Education, was to explore plants and artefacts and provide a range of interesting information: historical data for local and international visitors; details about botanists and knot gardens for the specialist gardener; garden trails for school parties and families; and poetry to inspire adults and children.

We left the study of the Tradescants (father and son) and Captain Bligh – buried in the churchyard – to the next wave of enthusiastic U3A members.

What follows is a brief sample of what we discovered.

Brenda and Jill found out that, up to the early 19th century, Londoners were fed from local nurseries and market gardens, larger than anywhere in Britain.

The soil was rich! Gravel, dug up and sold for ships' ballast or street repairs, was replaced by the 'filth of the city', that is, human waste and horse dung.

There was plenty of manure plus water from rainfall and streams. Hotbeds (dung covered with soil) produced artichokes, asparagus, cauliflowers, lettuce, spinach and broccoli – out of season for polite London society.

The poor had to eat root vegetables.



Londoners were supplied from local nurseries and market gardens  
Illustrations by Marcellus Laroon

By the late 19th century, most of the market gardens were built over. If you attend a cricket match at Lords today you are sitting on one of the sites.

Visit Myatts Fields in Brixton and you will find the last survivor of a London orchard – a single elderly mulberry tree, planted 200 years ago.

Elizabeth and Barbara looked at the involvement of London children in gardening in the first half of the 20th century. Many of the readers, like us, have stories to tell about evacuation to the country during the Second World War and Digging for Victory.

Every bit of available space in London was used for growing food, even including the moat of the Tower of London. Evacuees were encouraged to pick acorns for pig food, conkers for gas masks (conkers absorb poison gas), and rose hips for syrup (that contained Vitamin C) at 3d per lb.

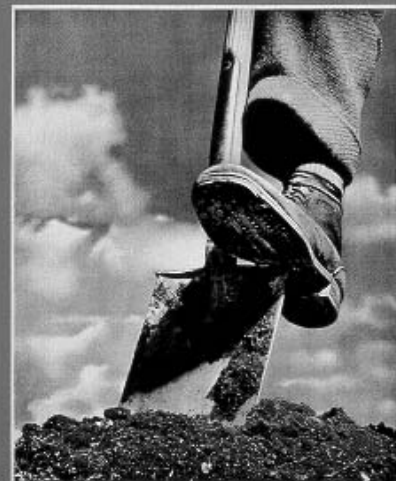
The school curriculum at the start of the century included Gardening, to equip children who left school at 12 years to become agricultural labourers.

Hop picking in Kent combined a break from polluted London streets with earning a bit of extra cash.

At the other end of the social divide, the development of the 'knot' garden was the reserve of the rich landowner. A knot is where low-growing hedges are woven together in a design. The first diagrams for knot gardens were published in Venice in 1499, subsequently appearing in Tudor England.

>>>

# DIG FOR VICTORY



**Extract from Gilbert White's  
Garden Kalendar, 1751 - 1771**

Feb 28 (1752). Made a very stout hotbed above three foot thick for the melon seeds & to forward the Cucumber plants, with 8 cartloads of dung: Saved about two barrows of dung, & made a Celeri-bed for one Sandglass.

March 4. Sunk a wine Hogshead in the field-garden for a well.

5. Sowed some Asparagus seed to mend the beds that are decaying.

Very dry weather & severe frost.

8. The seedling melon-bed, tho' made so strong, would not come to any Heat.

**From: The Georgics, Book 4  
(completed in 29 BCE)  
Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro)**

I would perhaps  
Sing of the pride that careful husbandry  
Can give to fertile gardens, of the rosebeds  
That bloom at Paestum twice a year, and how  
The endive revels in the brook it drinks,  
Green banks delight in parsley, and the gourd  
Twists through the grass to swell into a  
paunch,  
Narcissus the late-flowering would be sung,  
The curly acanthus' stem, the pallid ivy  
And seashore-loving myrtle.

**Participants**  
Max de Boo: North London  
**Elizabeth Dack: Croydon**  
Brenda Davies: Wandsworth  
**Janet Green: Bromley**  
Ann Hammad: Sutton  
**Jill Henderson: Sutton**  
Freda Hussey:  
Billericay and Basildon  
**Margaret MacGuire:  
Billericay and Basildon**  
Barbara Maycock: Croydon  
**Mary Southey: Harrow**  
Jill Whiteman: Bromley  
**Janet Wilkes: Bexley**

Janet G discovered that knot gardens existed in classical times or even earlier. Cardinal Wolsey laid out ingenious and impressive designs at Hampton Court.

When Henry VIII took over, he ordered an H (Henry) and an A (Anne Boleyn) to be woven among the knots with the spaces between the hedges filled with flowers (spring and summer) or coloured earth (autumn and winter).

Most knot gardens have disappeared with the changing fashions in garden design but you can still find one at MGH and another at Hatfield House.

Ann studied one of the greatest botanists who ever lived, William Curtis (1746-1799). At 30 years of age, Curtis was an apothecary, entomologist, ornithologist, botanist, gardener, writer and plant collector. He established several gardens (one became the present Kew Gardens) in Lambeth, Brompton and Kent for the culture of indigenous plants. His book *Flora Londinensis* (with

The garden at the MGH is small but contains a variety of native and exotic plants, herbs and trees, the knot garden and plant collectors' tombs.

It is not easy to know what to look at or why. Children need guidance during their visit but need something more stimulating than just 'fill in the missing word' exercises or 'colour the picture'.

Max and Mary used the garden to create thought-provoking trails for families, and for schoolchildren aged from three to 11 years. The trails encourage children to look closely, think and explain, and acquire knowledge and understanding.

For example: 'Draw this banana plant then predict where you think the bananas might grow on the plant' and: 'People have used herbs (such as these) for thousands of years. Suggest two reasons why you think people like to put herbs in their food'.

Gardens, flowers and garden creatures have inspired us, especially artists and writers. Four of the group (Jill H, Janet W, Freda and Margaret) found it almost impossible to make a selection from the wealth of wonderful poetry.

The verses they chose (such as the three included here) were delightful, moving, informative and funny.

**Haiku: Wendy Cope**

Looking Out of the Back  
Bedroom Window without My Glasses  
What's that amazing  
new lemon-yellow flower?  
Oh yes, a football.



Illustrations by William Curtis: King's College London



Nymphaea Rubra

At the end of the project we had learned a great deal, coped with obstacles and frustrations, and enjoyed the laughter, friendship and insight of fellow members of the U3A.

If the above ideas stimulate you as much as they did our group, go and join a Shared Learning Project or gee up your local region to initiate the process. Riding the wave is an excitement not to be missed.

**Worm: Spike Hughes**

Today I saw a little worm  
Wriggling on his belly.  
Perhaps he'd like to come inside  
And see what's on the telly.

# Museum Projects in Northern Ireland

## A U3A Shared Learning Project

Part of my job as Learning Support Officer for Northern Ireland is to promote cooperation between U3As and public bodies and to encourage new ways of learning. What better way than to start a shared learning museum project?

Joyce Gibson  
North Down  
and Ards U3A



So it was, encouraged by Jenny Clark, Keith Richards and Belfast's Ann Hayes, that I approached our fine Ulster Museum to see what could be done. The helpful staff came up with three suggestions.

The first reiterated the usual 'Object of desire' theme but with a twist. The second was scientific, an area to be encouraged, and the third looked at contemporary local artists.

After a joint meeting, amazingly attended by 40 members from Belfast U3A and North Down & Ards U3A with two museum staff, we had enough supporters to start work on all three.

Some, who as children or young adults had coveted oranges, bananas or a family car, produced memoirs to be displayed as part of a WW2 Exhibition in May 2005 or on the museum website.

A second group looked at a long-forgotten meteorite collection, found gathering dust in a geology department drawer. It needed sorting out with some research into the origins of the meteorites from many parts of the world.

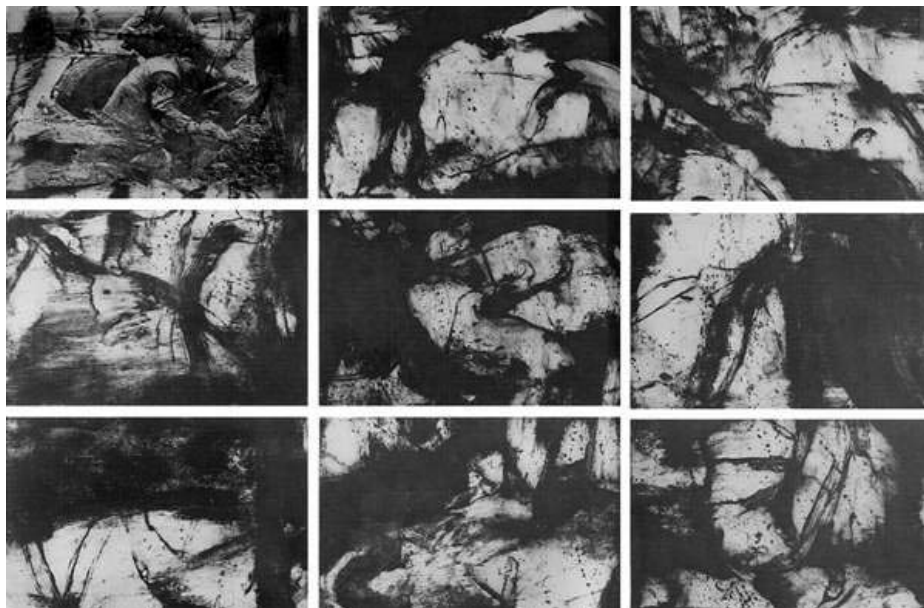
Those found in Ireland, surprisingly numerous, were naturally of interest. The two keen geologists took on the project with the help of staff, working together to produce a report which was acclaimed, accepted and filed by the museum for future reference.

A third U3A geologist, together with a lay assistant, started work on a valuable Blue John vase. Although the report was not completed owing to illness, thanks to U3A interest the museum geologist was persuaded to repair the beautiful vase that is now on display.

Our third venture, taking a look at Contemporary Ulster Artists, was the longest running and achieved a most satisfactory outcome.

Twelve members from both U3As interviewed in pairs the chosen artists, meeting in the museum to review results and plan the way forward.

*The Wrestlers: Hughie O'Donoghue - Purdy Hicks Gallery*



Colleen, the enthusiastic Art Historian chaired the meetings. Targeted artists included Neil Shawcross, currently exhibiting there, Carol Graham, John Breakey, Hector McDonnell, Hughie O'Donoghue, Rita Duffey, Anthony Green and Clement McAleer.

We sent a letter usually resulting in an invitation to the recipient's home or studio for a chat. Questions, mainly concentrating on the pictures targeted, included why the artist had chosen that particular subject. How was it executed? What were his feelings about it?

Each pair wrote a short information sheet on each picture answering queries from A-level students or interested members of the public. Reports will be made available on the museum website or displayed beside the picture when exhibited. A presentation format will include information at the head of each piece about the U3A in Northern Ireland, a fitting reward for our hard work.

For me, the project has had a most interesting spin-off. Having spent time and effort writing up my piece on Hughie

O'Donoghue's *The Wrestlers*, I was delighted to find his pictures on display in the Victoria Art Gallery in Bath. In my excitement and pride, I dragged members of my family there to share my discovery. Hughie O'Donoghue now has a special place in my psyche.

Sadly, work on the project must be put on hold. Next summer the museum will close for two years for renovations and access to the gallery stores is no longer possible. We hope to continue later, but even if we don't, our project will leave a lasting legacy, be appreciated by many art lovers and, during its closure, help to keep the museum in the public eye via the Internet.

It should help the public to understand that we are not just 'a wee pensioners club' as one prospective member put it, but are still fit and able to make a contribution to the common good.

Meantime we have contacted the Municipal Museum in Lisburn, the centre of the Linen Industry and full of interesting aspects of life in this Province. Every cloud has a silver lining!

# Resource Centre News

Elizabeth Gibson describes the available material for groups studying religion and philosophy, and how the centre is acquiring more DVDs to cater for increased demand

## Religion

During the past few years, I have noticed a considerable increase in the number of groups studying religion. The majority seem to be looking at the major religions of the world, especially Islam, to gain a better understanding of world affairs.

I also noticed that, since the death of the Pope, there has been considerable interest in the material we hold on the Catholic Church.

If you lead a group studying religion, or are thinking of starting such a group, please contact us to ask for our list of resources. We hold material on the major world religions, mainly on video but with some slide collections with notes.

We also have some sets of videos that could be used to run short courses, such as the *Living Islam* series of six videos, or the *Long Search* series by Ronald Eyre: 13 videos that survey the major religions of the world.

Another popular series *Triumph of the West* looks at the history of western civilisation and the effect of religion upon it. The set consists of thirteen, 50-minute videos, which is written and presented by JM Roberts.

## Philosophy

In our collection of Philosophy resources, we have several sets of material that are popular with U3A groups. For beginners in the subject, we offer a set of audiocassettes with notes by the Australian academic Professor Jack Cross. In a series of 13 lectures, he explores Plato to Postmodernism in a way that requires no previous knowledge of the subject, and in a clear and easy-to-understand manner.

More advanced groups use the series *The Great Philosophers*: 15 videos covering the subject from Plato to Wittgenstein. They are introduced by Bryan Magee.

In September 2005, we acquired the series *Men of Ideas*, in which 15 distinguished modern thinkers discuss their ideas and beliefs with Bryan Magee to explain the main developments of Western philosophy from the 19th century to the present day. For a list of philosophy stock, please contact the Resource Centre.

## U3A Promotional Material

For some years now the U3A video *Getting into Groups - the work of the Group Leader* has been available on loan from the Resource Centre. Recently there has been considerable interest in this useful, 18-minute film, which can be used to encourage new group leaders to come forward.

It is recommended in the U3A booklet *Size Matters* which has been sent to every U3A in Britain. We have copies on DVD available for loan and a limited number of DVDs for sale at a price of £7.50. The price includes postage and packing and orders should be sent with a cheque made out to 'Third Age Trust' and addressed to Elizabeth Gibson at the address below.

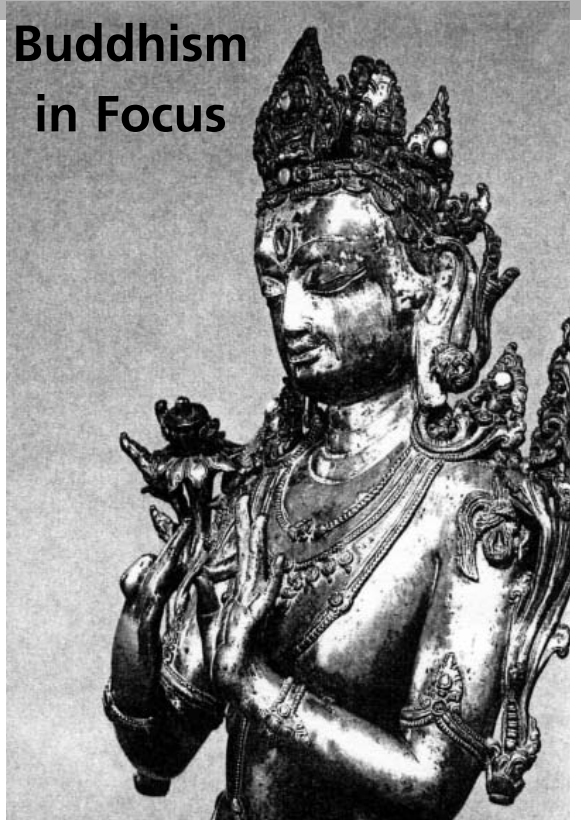
## DVD purchases

In my last article in *Sources*, I mentioned that we had been buying as much material as possible in DVD format. We notice that there is now more enthusiasm for using them with U3A groups than in the past.

We have bought the plays of Shakespeare in this format and a great number of operas.

For the first time we have added some DVD material to our Architecture collection in the form of the *Grand Designs* series from Channel 4.

## Buddhism in Focus



Each DVD contains eight programmes presented by Kevin McCloud on the design and construction of original houses. They even include computer-generated images of the interiors, which allow the viewer a virtual walk through each home.

For Art groups, we have DVD material on the work of various modern artists such as Rachel Whitread and Tracy Emin as well as *A complete guide to Modern Art* that includes 90 minutes of material on a range of recent work.

We have produced a list of our DVD stock that was sent to every U3A group in early 2005. If you would like free copies of the list, please contact the Resource Centre.

If you are contacting us by e-mail, remember to include your postal address and the name of your U3A. The lists will be sent only by post.

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# Philosophy of religion or Religious philosophy?



Terry Thomas: Abergavenny U3A  
National Philosophy Network Coordinator

I was aware that there was a fundamental difference between what I did and what my colleagues in the philosophy department did. I never had any schizoid tendencies in this respect.

After retirement and a break from academic work, I joined the U3A and immersed myself in philosophy. I knew exactly what I was doing. I was 'doing' philosophy, not 'religion'.

I sometimes hear people talk of philosophy as if it was akin to religion or vice versa and I react negatively.

Just as when I go into a strange bookshop and ask where they display philosophy books and am told: 'Round the corner with religion.'

I react even worse when I am told to find philosophy in the section titled 'Body, Mind and Spirit'. Therefore, part of what I want to say in this article has to do with the clear water that should be kept between philosophy and religion.

That is the current and the recent historical situation, but it was not ever thus. Looking back through history, philosophy of religion is a recent description of what the term represents.

In Ancient Greece, the gods were frequently topics of discussion, but this was just part of 'philosophy' or 'metaphysics'. The Greek philosophers were neglected not to say wiped out when Christianity took over. Were it not for Islamic philosophers, the main Greek texts would have been lost.

In the medieval period, with the texts again available in Europe thanks to the Islamic scholars, Christian theologians proceeded to re-interpret the texts to propogate Christian doctrine.

During my professional life I taught the study of religion for a longish period in a secular university. In addition I spent a long time reading and researching a scholar who combined theology and philosophy in his teaching. I never thought of my own work as being philosophical. What I did involved the study of religions, what some called the history of religions, others the science of religions and yet others simply religious studies

During the Renaissance period, the texts were looked at again for what they had to say and so we saw the emergence of humanism and the Early Enlightenment. But still no philosophy of religion, although the philosophy related to religion was sympathetic to the Christian agenda.

The first major anti-theistic philosopher was David Hume (1711-76) and his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* 'are typically regarded as the charter for modern philosophy of religion'. The term 'natural religion' is the direct ancestor of the term 'philosophy of religion'.

Hume is followed by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) whose *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* invited controversy over the censorship that attended its publication, and led to a reprimand in the name of the Prussian emperor, Friedrich Wilhelm II.

The other important philosopher of religion was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) whose philosophy of evolution led to the conclusion that Christianity was at the summit of perfection.

Thereafter Darwin's *The Origin of Species* had a profound effect on the philosophy of religion, raising as it did severe questions regarding the doctrine of creation and philosophical arguments in favour of design in the creation of the universe.

In the 20th century, we find much more sceptical and downright atheistic philosophical treatment of religion.

Also, even those philosophers who are sympathetic to religion or are propagators of religion, are divided into those who are 'realists' – that is to say those who argue for the justification of religious belief that conforms to traditional religion – and 'anti-realists' or those who wish to radicalise religious belief almost out of recognition.

During a period from early modern, science became detached from philosophy and its former identity as natural philosophy.

Linguistic philosophy in the 20th century severely questioned the language used to express belief in God, and philosophy of religion suffered badly at the hands of such philosophers as Alfred Julius Ayer.

However, as the 20th century progressed, philosophers of religion regained some of their confidence, and apart from the fact that there has been a revival of philosophy of religion going on for the past 30 years, the amount of this philosophy has grown to sizeable proportions.

Meanwhile, questions of design in the emergence of the universe are again at the heart of philosophical arguments concerning the existence of God.

The science of the Big Bang and the apparent fine tuning of the universe, produce arguments for and against God's hand in this. So philosophy of religion is

big and growing.

This brings me to the question that exists in the title of this piece.

From my reading and observation, I would argue that there is a serious question to be asked of philosophers of religion in Britain and America. Are they philosophers of religion or merely religious philosophers as they were in the medieval period?

There are few philosophers of religion that appear genuinely to be arguing in an objective, uncommitted way, and letting the reader or listener judge where the balance of truth may lie.

At a recent conference of

'philosophers of religion' I heard one of the leading English philosophers read a paper in which the message was one of complaint that religion was not getting its due respect in public life.

Hardly philosophy to some minds. The message – from the evidence of an established church, bishops in the House of Lords, government support for so-called 'faith' schools, and other recent developments – seemed to me bizarre.

No one in the audience raised a contrary question in the discussion period. Nowhere have I been face to face with a 'religious philosopher' in just this way before.

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## Philosophy Summer School 2005

It was a pleasure to attend the summer school and meet others who share an interest in philosophy. To argue throughout the day, over lunch and over dinner and into the bar in the evening, was relaxing and invigorating. What better holiday could you want?

Reading lists were published beforehand and although I was unable to obtain the books, I read enough to be able to take part in the debates.

The two perennial topics were Mind and Consciousness. From my own simple viewpoint there seems little to discuss. After all, we know what the mind is – it is the immaterial part of us that does the thinking. But the path chosen by Vernon Ward (page 16) was to cut into the ideas from various directions so that problems abounded.

'Dualism' in various forms appeared to be the biggest problem – whether 'mind' and 'brain' were the same things. If not, then can an immaterial thing exist and how can it affect a material thing?

Many views were expressed on these ideas and many abstruse arguments were introduced to accommodate them.

But not everyone was looking for the best solution. Some were content to savour the additions to the landscape provided by writers from our reading list, such as Martin Davies, David Armstrong, Thomas Nagel, Jerry Fodor and Daniel Dennett.

There was considerable interest in the connection between thoughts and measurable effects on the nervous system, even though this seemed to be an

attempt to incorporate qualia (mental and physical states such as happiness or nausea seen as objects of thought, or the elements of conscious experience) into the world of physical science and hence out of the world of philosophy.

Much progress has been made in the area of mapping mental events on to specific parts of the nervous system and a detailed picture is coming together. By contrast, philosophy, I think, has made little progress in this area from the times of Plato and Rene Descartes.

In accordance with the policy of viewing problems from various perspectives, we touched on mental representation, intentionality, behaviourism and other aspects of mentality that brought varying degrees of response from the group.

The move to 'consciousness' was not a move to a disparate area but more of a slide along the bench. Both ideas are closely linked. In general use the notion is simple and clear. We are conscious when we are awake and aware of what is happening around us.

More broadly we classify things in the world about us according to whether they react to events around them. People and dogs for example are conscious while trees and stones are not. But if looked for, problems can be found.

The central problem chosen was the location of consciousness in the physical body. While this might be regarded by some as a category mistake, it led once again to discussion of behavioural effects in the nervous system.



### Roy Anderson: Settle U3A

There was a strong feeling that a full knowledge of the workings of the nervous system and a complete mapping on to qualia would clarify everything but I think this is a mistake. Fascinating though the picture will be when it is achieved, consciousness will still be outside it.

It was not the aim of the conference to come to any sort of consensus but merely to broaden our awareness of the area. In this it succeeded. I left with my picture of the world a little disrupted, and with the determination to do some more reading and put it together again.

The overall effect was stimulating. Much of this was due to the excellent organisation of the event. The seminars were well prepared and the meals and accommodation were of a high standard.

I hope I have conveyed some of the delight that this short holiday has generated. My intention is to give a flavour of the discussions that took place for the benefit of those who were not present. It is a personal account biased towards my own interests. If I have inspired others who were not there to sign up this year then my writing will have been worthwhile. Personally I am looking forward to it.

# What is Philosophy?



I am sure I am not alone in finding that, every year, a number of people come to philosophy once, perhaps twice, then decide that it is not for them.

I suspect that this is because in joining a philosophy course they are expecting, at some not-too-precise level, to do what many people imagine philosophy to be – engaging in beautiful thoughts about the Meaning of Life or Happiness.

Perhaps they'll hear some words about how to live in harmony with the universe – possibly get some sort of spiritual guidance from a guru figure.

When they turn up they find they are discussing Descartes's duality, Plato's *Theory of Forms* or grinding through some of the ideas in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Not what they expected, and frequently not what they want.

Which raises the interesting point: what exactly is philosophy? A pretty good question, and one not easily answered. My trusty Concise Oxford explains that it is 'seeking after wisdom or knowledge, esp. that which deals with ultimate reality or with the most general causes and principles of things'.

Which is alright if you happen to know what 'ultimate reality' is, or what 'general causes' might look like, but not much help otherwise. In any case, things like epistemology, ethics and the philosophy of science don't seem to have much connection with any of those things. So exactly what do we do in philosophy, and why?

I daresay that people have different answers to those questions, but for what it is worth, I think that what we try to do is increase our understanding of the world we live in.

In the past, philosophers tried to find out things about the nature of the world and then make some sort of sense of whatever it was that they thought they had discovered.

Today, finding things out is the job of natural and social scientists, which leaves philosophy to try to make sense of those findings.

It is not just professional philosophers who do this – everybody does it some of the time. Philosophers just do it more consistently and thoroughly than most.

For example: if Newton tells us that the earth is not the centre of the universe, and we discover that it is just a bit of detritus left over from the making of the sun, what are we to make of that?

If Darwin tells us that we seem not to have been specially created and put at the top of the Great Chain of Being, but evolved like slugs and buttercups, how are we to feel? If somebody finds other life forms 'out there' in the wider universe, what are we to think?

Come to that, if someone claims they want to spread freedom and democracy round the world, just what is it that we are to imagine that they are spreading?

Around the beginning of any U3A year, people join courses to see what they are like and find out what goes on

## Terry Baker: Ferndown U3A

And what exactly (or even approximately) do we mean when we talk about 'the mind', 'the self', 'the soul' or 'the truth'? And how about 'the meaning of life'? What's that about?

People frequently have some ideas about stuff like that. But equally frequently, the ideas are not worked out thoroughly. Often too, the ideas are not consistent with each other. And I think that that is what philosophy tries to sort out. We look at these questions and then try to sort out what they mean.

Once we get that sorted – if we get that sorted – then we can go on and see if there might be some answers lying around somewhere.

Perhaps they're buried (deeply) in Hegel or (less deeply) in John Stuart Mill. Perhaps David Hume has the right answer or even Wittgenstein if we could understand him. Perhaps we will just have to work it out for ourselves.

Either way, I think that is what philosophy tries to do. To increase our understanding of things, to work out the meaning and significance of some of the blooming, buzzing confusion that surrounds us.

Do we succeed? Well not yet. But we are getting there – I hope. And anyway, the journey is fun – if perhaps in a slightly masochistic sort of way.

## U3A History of Philosophy

This course of the History of Philosophy covers the thinking in western Europe from the classical Greeks up till the present day, from Socrates to Derrida, and lectures encompass all aspects of philosophy: Ethics, Theology, Logic, Aesthetics, Epistemology, etc.

They form a course of sessions that takes us students through a cycle that lasts for around six years – and so for most of us it is, as Danny Kaye quipped in one of his films, "A film that starts in the middle – for the benefit of those who come in – in the middle."

Ralph Blumenau is not only a most erudite lecturer with his encyclopaedic knowledge – but these lectures are enhanced by his being a natural performer, thus adding great colour, grace and humour to his presentations.

His sessions are, at his frequent invitations, peppered with questions, comments and personal opinions from his audience – all of which, whether enquiring, informed or merely egotistical – he deals with in a generously thoughtful way, and has the ability to allow a wide ranging discussion to develop often taking the ship well off

## John Brandenburger: U3A London

course – but he has this uncanny knack of always bringing us back to the point where he wishes to continue – without any apparent effort.

Lectures are supported by his excellent notes – which are continuously being amended and amplified – but for most of us 'Blumenau Groupies', as we become after attending his lectures over time, his book, *Philosophy and Living* (Imprint Academic, paperback, £19.95, which is based on his lecture course) is kept fairly close to our elbow at home as a helpful reminder of, or indeed as a preparation for, the sessions.



# Philosophy and/or Religion?

**To the average thinker (third-age or otherwise), it would seem that the subjects of Philosophy and Religion are inextricably mixed, and that any group of people proposing to tackle one will be led into the realm of the other. Ideas have no boundaries and they tend to carry their illuminating lamps into the shadowy corners of many aspects of reality**

Experience of discussions within our U3A has shown that reason and belief may often touch and interact naturally, energising the mind and the heart to the benefit of those that make the effort to participate.

It has therefore not been considered productive to label a group activity or course as either philosophy or comparative religion, if the purpose is to attract the tentatively enquiring mind into a new path of investigation and personal expansion.

Thus, the titles we have chosen during the years have been deliberately vague, such as: *What Matters?*, *A Way With Words, Signs and Symbols*, *Myths and Legends*, and only occasionally

interspersed with *Is Philosophy Relevant?*, *The Long Search*, or *Testing God* (based on TV programmes).

At this stage in our long and varied lives, we need to draw on past experience and examine what we truly believe, or at least hold to be reasonable.

Surely this is why we come together in the manner of U3A and go away again with the little grey cells activated and healthier for it.

The presentation of what philosophers have argued can be useful as a basis on which to consider what we understand as an acceptable view of the world – a practical and moral framework for action. However, they can often be later revealed as partitive, inconclusive and

**Joyce Bonotto: Thanet U3A**

often contradictory, so that many tend to dismiss philosophy as pointless.

This is a great shame – for it should present an exciting challenge to our innate power of reasoning, an invitation to engage with living ideas that are vital to our existence.

Similarly, it is in the testing of the core beliefs of the great world religions that we discover their possible relevance (whether historical or enduring); their purpose in trying to elevate the human consciousness; and the manner in which man has tended to misinterpret, abuse and obscure their universal transforming message.

We have much to engage us in the ongoing dialogue of physics and metaphysics. They open up wider and deeper fields for mutual consideration.

Myth, philosophy and religion present us with endless avenues of self-discovery, and the third age is an ideal time to explore what makes sense to us.

But perhaps we need to dispense with specific labels and segregation, and embrace the whole field of knowledge that is available to us as members of this human race to which we seem to belong.

## Philosophy: chapter by chapter

Our Philosophy group began some years ago, looking at the ideas of various philosophers. Then it gradually moved on to more general topics, an eclectic mix that included equality, laughter and tears, multiculturalism and Buddhism.

Eventually the group attracted a much wider membership as it developed into a discussion group with a firm philosophical base, each subject being chosen by a group member who distributed notes at the meeting and led the discussion.

This format proved successful, until our pool of presenters ran dry and some of us had to confess that we found the prospect of repeatedly providing new material a little daunting.

Then in the Spring 2005 edition of the Philosophy Network Newsletter, we noticed a book review by Maureen Furniss: Ludlow U3A, of *The Little Book of Philosophy* by André Comte-Sponville, describing how her group had taken this book as their basic text, each member leading on a specific chapter, with great success.

This seemed like an answer to our problem, and after some discussion we did likewise, though we widened our scope by also using AC Grayling's *The Meaning of Things*.

We now have no lack of presenters – some have their own copies of the books, which others may borrow.

Both books present their brief chapters under general headings such as morality,



**Jean English: Coordinator  
Lancaster & Morecambe U3A**

love, death, education and prudence, and are written in a relaxed and simple style.

Chapters are chosen by the presenters and some like to elaborate on them. A few still like to choose their own topic, but we find the basic texts provide ample material for discussion.

It is a system we can recommend to other groups, and I feel that its success within our group is a tribute to the practical usefulness of the Philosophy Newsletter and to its editor, our Network Coordinator Terry Thomas.

# Thought Experiments in Philosophy

**A thought experiment is an experiment that cannot be carried out for some reason (lack of equipment, unsuitable conditions, or ethical considerations) but which, if it were to be carried out, would answer the question posed, or at least advance understanding of possible answers to the question**

The purpose of this piece is to draw attention to thought experiments, and to encourage the use of them to enliven and stimulate interest in certain philosophical topics.

In the words of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy they are ‘a device of the imagination used to investigate nature’, or using the Wikipedia they are ‘an attempt to solve a problem using the power of the human imagination’.

The technique is well established both in philosophy and in the natural sciences where two of the most famous thought experiments were proposed in the 1930s: Schrödinger’s Cat thought experiment and the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox (see Gribbin).

Galileo offered an early scientific thought experiment that sought to show that Aristotle’s claim, that a heavy object would fall to the ground faster than a light object, was incorrect.

Imagine, he asked, a cannon ball (H=heavy) and a musket ball (L=light). Aristotle claimed H will fall faster than L ( $H > L$ ). Imagine them joined together and dropped from a height. What would happen? On Aristotle’s view the compound object (H+L) would fall faster than the cannon ball (H) alone. So,  $H+L > H$ . But if Aristotle is correct, the lighter musket ball (L) must act as a parachute and hold back the compound ball so it would fall more slowly than the cannon ball alone. So,  $H+L$  is slower than H. ( $H+L < H$ ). What we have is an inconsistency:  $H+L > H$ , but  $H+L < H$ . So Aristotle cannot be correct. In this case, it also points to the correct answer: that  $H=L=H+L$  in terms of the rate of fall. As we now know, objects fall at the same rate due to gravity.

In philosophy the use of such ‘experiments’ has a rather longer history, although in Greek thought the distinction between philosophy and science is less clear than it is today.

There is a question whether Zeno’s Paradoxes are of the same kind as thought experiments (they do have some of the qualities). Certainly Lucretius’ spear thrower thought experiment is useful. He poses the problem of whether space is bounded or infinite.

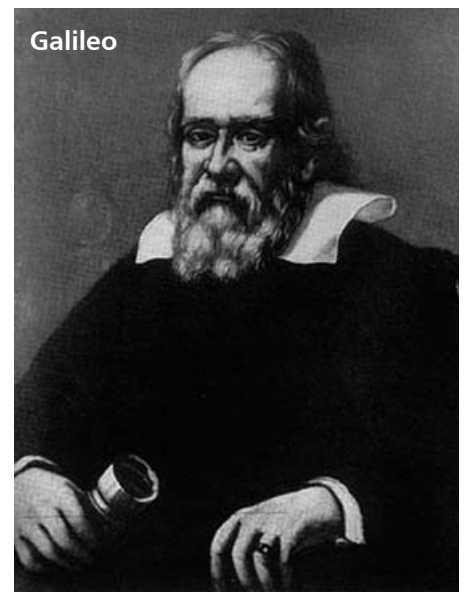
Imagine then a spear thrower standing on the edge of space. He throws his spear and what happens? Well, either it sails out into space – in which case space is not bounded but infinite; or it rebounds off the edge of space – in which case there is a wall or other boundary located somewhere further in space. So in either case, space must be extended and unbounded and hence infinite. Lucretius used the argument to show that space was infinite but again in this case the fallibility of the thought experiment is shown in the contradiction – space cannot be both unbounded and bounded (by a wall or whatever) and be infinite.

Perhaps the most famous thought experiment in philosophy is that of Descartes’ evil demon known affectionately today in a newer version as the ‘brain-in-a-vat’ thought experiment.

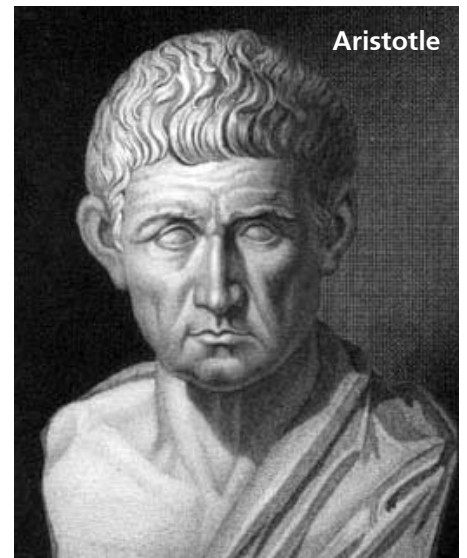
Imagine that you are captured by a mad scientist and placed in a dark room with your head wired up and stimuli are controlled by the scientist. Could you then distinguish ‘real’ events from the ‘simulated’ or ‘virtual’ reality imposed upon you? Is there a difference between what you can think (yourself) and what you can know or think you know, only through sensations that are controlled by the scientist or evil demon?



Vernon Ward: South Bucks U3A



Galileo’s scientific thought experiment showed that Aristotle’s claim, that a heavy object would fall to the ground faster than a light object, was incorrect.



Descartes wanted to show that, while we can be misled by our perceptions, we must think for ourselves – even if we doubt if we exist – and so the act of thinking shows that we do exist. *Cogito ergo sum*. So we humans are ‘essentially’ conscious beings.

Lichtenberg, a century or so later, argued that this was not so: perhaps only ‘something’ thinks – not necessarily ‘you’ or ‘I’. But most people think that a thought has to have a thinker and the likely thinker of my thoughts is me.

The modern version of this experiment focuses on the scepticism induced by the fallibility of sensations as a guide to knowledge. If we cannot tell whether we are a brain in a vat or not, then we can have no knowledge of the external world. This view has been challenged by Putnam and others but the thought experiment remains a way of exposing the issues and is found in introductory texts on theory of knowledge.

Another famous modern thought experiment is Searle’s ‘Chinese Room’. Searle invites us to imagine a closed room into which is fed a stream of information written in Chinese, which is to be processed by a researcher using a book of instructions and then passed out to other waiting researchers.

This mimics computer operations: input arrives; is processed according to certain rules; and then becomes output. Imagine the input information is a story and a number of questions about the story written in Chinese, and the output is the answers to these questions.

Suppose that the researcher knows no Chinese but he follows the book of instructions and passes out the answers. So good is he that those receiving the answers do not realise he has no understanding of the story or the answers. The researcher acts like the computer: he applies the rule book and having answered the questions, passes out the finished product. Does this count as ‘knowing’ or ‘behaving as a human’ or as being a ‘conscious human’?

Searle argued strongly that the answer is ‘no’. And the reason for this hangs on the distinction between syntax and semantics. It is quite possible to mimic syntax – how sentences are put together with grammatical accuracy – and in this way pass the Turing test (where a human converses unknowingly with a machine and cannot tell whether it is a machine or human respondent).



**Descartes**

A famous thought experiment in philosophy is Descartes’ evil demon, known today as the brain-in-a-vat thought experiment

But humans also have semantics – the meaning ascribed to words and phrases. Machines do not and perhaps cannot have, because usage in language changes all the time and varies across cultures. Searle proposed this experiment as a refutation of what is generally called ‘strong Artificial Intelligence’ (AI).

This position is held by many in the computing-AI field and is the goal or end point of those seeking to ‘create’ or ‘mimic’ human actions via robots. Eventually machines/robots will be built that will mimic humans so closely that they will be ‘conscious machines’ or, following the Turing precedent, the robots will behave/operate as if they were humans and maybe an observer could not tell the difference. A difference that is no difference means that the robots count as conscious beings. As noted above, Searle argued that semantics will defeat any attempt to mimic human responses by machines.

Although the experiment was originally used in the context of AI, it has also been used to address questions like: can a computer answer questions?; can someone who knows no Chinese answer questions in Chinese by using a dictionary and other language rules?; could the researchers tell whether the output was produced by a computer or by a person?; is language the key difference between machines and humans?

It is also an important element in the debate on consciousness. Searle in a follow up piece argued that what any computer must have before it can be

considered human is consciousness, intentionality and subjectivity.

A similar thought experiment was proposed by Hilary Putnam. Imagine two worlds one of which is like our own, the other similar but in which water is not formed from H<sub>2</sub>O but from a compound XYZ. When Putnam<sub>1</sub> (in our world) talks about water, is he referring to the same stuff as Putnam<sub>2</sub> (the other world), when he talks about XYZ?

Putnam argues no: the two substances are different. This is an experiment about the meaning of ‘meaning’, and Putnam’s point was to show that an ‘internalist’ account of language and meaning was better than an ‘externalist’ account (see any encyclopedia of philosophy).

The arguments have generated an extensive literature and there are several versions of this thought experiment. Like Searle’s paper, Putnam has been criticised, but the basic arguments expressed in the form of the thought experiment remain an important part of work in philosophy of language.

There are many other thought experiments in philosophy and science. A recent book brings together 100 of them (Baggini 2005).

If you Google ‘thought experiments’ you will find nearly 24 million references to the topic and most of them give examples. If someone in a U3A Philosophy Group uses an example then this article will have done its work.

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# U3A and the Philosophers' Stone

(a not entirely serious reflection)



Margret Shaw:

North West Area Representative and  
former Philosophy Network Coordinator

My first encounter with philosophy in U3A was the result of a failure to step back quickly enough, a phenomenon with which you will be familiar.

I was tutoring at the first summer school and had no idea what to expect. I wondered why anyone would want to spend time with so strict a mistress – for fun! But U3A philosophy groups continue to surprise me, by the range of subjects addressed and the passion brought to the study.

That group at York impressed me by their enthusiasm and their willingness to engage. At Exeter, I am sure that fisticuffs between elderly parties (our version of Wittgenstein's Poker) – though showing commitment to their conflicting convictions – did not please the security guard. Nor did the lock down at Cheltenham – the result of too much hot air in a restricted area.

Having passed the mantle of network coordinator over to capable hands, I have leisure to think. But it's a bad idea to give people of a philosophical bent time to think, they get into mischief. They should be kept busy.

Speakers invited to the U3A study days looked out at the crowd and asked: "Who are they?" I was reminded of a teenager who said: "I can't do with old people. You don't know where they've been."

This is so of any U3A seminar where scientists, engineers, homemakers, accountants, clergy, medics, etc. meet together, their past disguised – though the inevitable presence of teachers is given away by the squeaking of leather.

I told them that their audience would be those who, to paraphrase Coleridge, have 'allowed thought to disturb the indolence of the mind'.

They are those who have been shaken out of certainty by new ideas and by changes that they cannot ignore. Many of them will have fallen like Titans from professions whose foundations have been shaken by a new order.

Once young lions, they may have watched their revolutionary ideas go from opposition to establishment, become examination questions, and then historical curiosities.

**Whether philosophy is approached by the gentle slopes of biography, the steeper history of ideas, the moral high ground of ethics, the scree of logic, or the perpendicular cliffs of metaphysics, it will always be a strenuous climb**

Now they go to the cinema and find *The Matrix*; their children are discussing *The Da Vinci Code*; their grandchildren are reading Phillip Pullman; their politicians are changing colour before their eyes; and their parsons are ambivalent.

Their faith in reason may have been shattered on discovering that reason is a fine tool but not a universal tool, and that trying to use it to explore the aesthetic or the spiritual is like buttering bread with a scalpel.

Their faith in empiricism might have been upset by Heisenberg, their faith in their own ability to understand shaken by the proposition of more dimensions than we can know, ever trapped in our four dimensional brains.

They may even wonder if St Augustine had it right when he urged us to avoid 'the soft couch of scepticism' where men 'wasted their time and wearied their spirits with problems which man is mad enough to propose but not capable of solving'.

The next question was usually: "Why are they doing Philosophy?"

Now I believe that beneath the



Seeking the Philosophers' Stone

sophisticated spin and the intellectual chatter, most of us in U3A are looking for something to help us to understand a lifetime of experience – to address our fears. We are looking for truth, perhaps for nothing less than the philosophers' stone, and we still hope to find it. I did not of course, tell them this, because it would frighten the horses.

Medieval alchemists expected the philosophers' stone to be a physical substance with which they could turn base metals into gold. Gold was immutable and held the secret of life. It was the key to how things are.

>>>

Of course, we have a more sophisticated idea of it, for we have read Karl Popper and know that certainty is for children. We have read Richard Rorty and can manipulate pragmatism. We have read Mary Midgely and will not accept any simplistic solution.

Also, U3A members have come from spheres that have their own missing keys. They may be scientists seeking gravitons with which to reconcile relativity and quantum; they may be artists seeking a way to explain first person qualia in third person discourse; they may be educationists praying for an episteme that is of pedagogical practicality; or they may be testing their belief in God as the glue of the world.

Though we have different notions of the nature of the philosophers' stone, it is my contention that somewhere beneath the arguments, a yearning for it remains.

When we enter what Strawson calls 'that fabulous confusion of epistemology with metaphysics – the confusion between what we can know and what there is', we do so in search of clarity.

I have met few in U3A who are content to think of philosophy as pure, without application, for although they appreciate the delight to be got from manipulating closed systems, if they wanted to play chess, they would play chess. They expect more of philosophy than barren tautologies.

Hegel said: 'The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk', and perhaps it is natural that we turn to philosophy in our third age. It may be to do with the kind of patience that comes with experience, or perhaps the losing of impatience.

It is interesting to watch philosophy groups. One question is sown, it seeds and produces ten more. We learn not to expect answers, or rather to expect answers framed as more questions, for that is how philosophical enquiry works. Some of us learn to enjoy it.

We know that we should not look to philosophy to furnish new facts, though we may find some, but for a change in perspective that might be overwhelmingly profound or extremely subtle, that will help us find our balance.

We know that the most we should expect are small clarities and we smile at Douglas Adams when he claims that: 'the answer to the great question of life, the universe, and everything, is forty-two', as good a number as any other.

But don't we just long to stand up in a Swansea cinema and shout *That's it!* or to run down the street yelling *Eureka!*?

Don't we, in the deepest recesses, still hope for something immutable – for a fixed point to stand to see the universe?

The philosophers' stone is a metaphor, a dream – or is beyond our reach. On the other hand...

## Margret Shaw

Meg enjoyed a career in education – first in vocational psychology and then as a university teacher. She joined Clitheroe U3A in 1999 whilst working part time as a consultant on ethics in education. She was vice-chair and then chair.

After some time on the SCE, she became the network coordinator for philosophy and taught at five summer schools. She became the Area Representative for the North West in August 2005.

Meg: "Area Representatives have a wide brief, but the main function is to be the trustee of an area on the NEC. What we hold in trust are the 'Aims and Guiding Principles' of the Universities of the Third Age in the UK.

"This is an exciting time. The ever increasing membership and the change in the provision from government for continuous learning, has brought both challenge and opportunity. U3A has prided itself on being organic, growing from the roots, and this is a strength that it must now rely upon.

"If the NEC is to support and advise, then it needs to know what is the will of the independent U3As. I hope that they will feel able to talk to me about their present situation and their hopes for the future."

# Philosophy Study Group

The group was initiated by Vernon Ward in October 2000 and meets at his home in Amersham.

Discussion is focused by means of a set book selected by the members. Each book is normally dealt with in three or four sessions (and in any case not more than six) thus allowing at least two books to be chosen, read, digested, and discussed each year.

The brisk pace helps to maintain interest – or at least avoids discouraging any members who find a particular book not to their liking. It also makes members work hard to formulate in their own words their understanding of the issues raised in the books, so that they come to meetings ready to discuss the views of the author and present their own ideas.

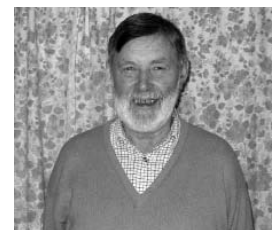
To facilitate lively discussion, group membership is restricted to 12, and we are happy with our usual nine or ten. The sexes are evenly represented and turnover of membership is low.

This method enables a wide spectrum of philosophical topics to be dealt with, and contributes significantly to sustaining a rich intellectual life and promoting a lively understanding of human affairs.

The existence of the group and its meeting programme are publicised in the bimonthly South Bucks U3A Newsletter. Would-be participants, or anyone wishing to discuss the running of similar groups, may contact Vernon.

Tel: 01494 721038

E-mail: vernon.ward70@ntlworld.com



**Duncan Macdonald: South Bucks U3A**

## Books dealt with so far include:

- Problems of Philosophy: Bertrand Russell
- Moral Philosophy: D D Raphael
- Passion of the Western Mind: Richard Tarnas
- Interpreting the Universe: John Macmurray
- Think: Simon Blackburn
- Ancient Philosophy: Julia Annas
- On the Meaning of Life: John Cottingham
- Free Will: Thomas Pink
- We are currently learning from Roger Scruton's
- Very Short Introduction to Kant

## Subject Networks

From Daphne Sirett

### National Subject Network Coordinator

There are Network Coordinators for some 40 subjects enjoyed by U3A members (the list in U3A News gives names and addresses). They have made themselves available, by phone, e-mail or letter to offer advice, support and encouragement to those with an interest in a particular subject.

If you are a new leader or convenor, then your subject coordinator is there to offer suggestions and ideas that others find useful – how to get going and where to find resources.

If you are an experienced leader, you may welcome new ideas and, more importantly, may have found ways of working that may help others. Perhaps you have found new resources or would just like contact with others who share your enthusiasm.

Your Subject Network Coordinator is waiting to hear from you. Some send out newsletters, some organise Study Days but they all have a deep interest in YOUR subject.

They are waiting to hear from you.

Daphne Sirett joined Newbury U3A in 1994 when she retired from teaching. She subsequently became Secretary, Vice-Chairman and Chairman. During her chairmanship she was responsible for organising the Regional Conference. Later, she became a member of the Standing Committee for Education and the Learning Support Group.

In 2003, Daphne became National Subject Network Coordinator. She says: "I am aiming to raise the image of Subject Networks among the members of U3As, hoping that group leaders will make greater use of their advice.

"The coordinators are also anxious to receive ideas and sources of information that they can share with the network. A number of coordinators are involved with teaching at the Summer Schools which I am helping to organise this year."

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U3A NATIONAL TRAVEL

Formerly  
known as U3A  
Travel Network

## U3A's travel service

Designed by and for U3A members

Organised and led by experienced U3A group travel organisers

- Croatia Culture and history, 3 April, 15 days, £599 Gatwick (DZ)
- Istanbul History and architecture, 4 April, 5 days, £563 Heathrow (RG)
- Uzbekistan History and architecture, 28 April, 11 days, £879 Birmingham (RG)
- Bangkok/China Temples and mountains, 28 April, 20 days, £1850 Heathrow (VL)
- Sicily Archaeology and history, 29 April, 8 days, £399 Stansted and Leeds (MB)
- Northumbria History, culture and architecture, 15 May, 7 days, £410 Leicester (DR)
- Ulster & Donegal Scenery, gardens and houses, 20 May, 7 days, £405 Preston (TW)
- Central Scotland Art and architecture, 27 May, 5 days, £364 York (RG)
- Western France Wine, history and food, 14 June, 11 days, £680 Portsmouth (MB)
- Southern Ireland Art treasures, 17 June, 4 days, £349 Birmingham (RG)
- Paris Art, museums, buildings, 2 August, 6 days, £350 Waterloo (MB)
- Iceland/Greenland Cruise Ice and wildlife, 10 August, 15 days, £1699 Tilbury/Gatwick (VL)
- Silk Road Culture and history, 3 September, 29 days, £2,800 Heathrow (VL)
- Compostela Architecture, art, walking, 4 September, 7 days, £766 London (RG)
- Krakow Architecture and history, 24 September, 6 days, £590 Luton (RG)
- Romania Heritage and scenery, 3 October, 10 days, £749 Heathrow (DZ)
- St Petersburg Art and culture, 4 October, 6 days, £799 Heathrow and Manchester (TW)
- Ravenna/Urbino Art and architecture, 4 October, 5 days, £515 Gatwick (RG)
- Luxemburg Heritage and scenery, 5 October, 6 days, £449 Waterloo (BS)
- Nepal Culture, mountains, wildlife, 22 October, 18 days, £1700 Heathrow (VL)
- New Zealand Culture, hot springs, mountains, 17 November, 22 days, £2863 Heathrow (VL)

### TOUR ORGANISERS (U3A MEMBERS)

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- Margaret Ward, 33 Masons Ryde, Pershore, WR10 1JG
- Tom Warren, 69A Freshfield Road, Formby, Liverpool, L37 7BG
- Dawn Zeffertt, 125 Ruskin Park House, Champion Hill, Camberwell, London, SE5 8TL

## Philosophy Resources

### Hitories and Surveys

#### Philosophy and Living

Ralph Blumenau 2002 Imprint Academic

#### Confessions of a Philosopher

Brian Magee 1997 Orion

#### The Great Philosophers

Brian Magee 1987

#### A Dream of Reason

Anthony Gottlieb 2000 Penguin

#### The History of Western Philosophy

Bertrand Russell 1946 Allen & Unwin

#### Philosophy: the basics

Nigel Warburton 1992 Routledge

#### Think

Simon Blackburn 1999 Oxford UP

### Publications

**Think:** The Royal Institute of Philosophy. Three issues annually £15  
[www.royalinstitutephilosophy.org/think](http://www.royalinstitutephilosophy.org/think)

#### The Philosophers' Magazine

Four issues £2.95 Tel: 01442 879097  
[www.philosophers.co.uk](http://www.philosophers.co.uk)

### Internet Encyclopedias

<http://plato.stanford.edu>  
[www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu)

### Resource Centre

Contact National Office for a copy of the leaflet, *Starting a Philosophy Group*.

# Success after U3A courses

'I was struggling but determined to get published,' admits Marion Lindsey-Noble. She soon realised that she had a lot to learn and enrolled for two U3A courses. Success followed swiftly.



I dreamt like so many that I would finally have enough time in retirement to bring my ideas to paper. The writing flowed but getting published was a lot more difficult than I had anticipated. I felt that there were things that I did wrong, which put the editors off from replying to my manuscripts.

I joined a local U3A writing group, which was interesting and entertaining, but the constructive criticism I had hoped for was not forthcoming. Who in their right mind would spoil a nice afternoon by picking holes into somebody's treasured oeuvre?

The next step was to enrol for serious studies. The U3A offered several online courses at modest fees.

My initial worries about studying via the Internet were unfounded. The U3A provided extensive technical back-up notes and a specialist team that was on call most days.

As it turned out, it was a lot of fun to bounce ideas off fellow students and

tutors and to get immediate feedback.

The deadlines for work to be submitted were sensibly spaced out, so that the course did not intrude too much into our private lives.

My first course was *Writing for Publication* tutored by *Sources* editor Tony Thornton. He took us through the elements of newspaper articles (picture captions, headlines, sidebars and story), pointed out the writing horrors and delights for editors, and taught us how to present work appealingly.

The students were encouraged to write an article which they submitted to Tony, who edited them with endless patience and insider knowledge.

My article was about the author, RF Delderfield. I had collected a lot of facts about his life and work, and it was quite difficult to compress the information into a text of 2,000 words.

Tony never failed to encourage and to suggest ways of tackling a problem. The result was a professionally polished

article which, on submission, was immediately accepted by the magazine *This England*. It was published six months later.

The second U3A creative writing course was lead by Ian Searle.

It taught me about story structure, target readership, sources for ideas, development of a narrative, editing, and the tedious but necessary business of re-writing. My confidence in my writing ability grew.

I have since completed a creative writing course with the Open University (which was expensive). I passed with 83%, which I attribute to the good foundation my U3A tutors laid.

I have also completed a biography of RF Delderfield, and have written short stories and newspaper articles for local papers, a success I gladly and gratefully share with the U3A.

## The Last Issue

A quirky and fascinating look at history can be found at **Stefan's Florilegium**: [www.florilegium.org](http://www.florilegium.org)

**BBC History** presents original content on a variety of historical topics. Includes games, timelines, history for kids, and writers. [www.bbc.co.uk/history](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history)

**Institute of Historical Research**. An important resource for scholars from all over the world. [www.history.ac.uk](http://www.history.ac.uk)

**Natural History Museum**, London  
[www.nhm.ac.uk](http://www.nhm.ac.uk)

**The Family Records Centre**  
[www.familyrecords.gov.uk](http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk)

**History World** describes world history in interconnecting narratives and illustrated timelines. You can search for events by theme, place and year.  
[www.historyworld.net](http://www.historyworld.net)

**Encyclopedia of British History**  
[www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk)

Alison Miller wrote from Grange-over-Sands in Cumbria to say that the History edition of *Sources* spurred her on to create a second group.

She said: "I found the magazine full of ideas (some I liked, some I didn't but all useful), and I have asked National Office to send me ten more copies to start the new History (probably local) Group.

"Well done!" she said. "I look forward to the next edition."  
*(Ed.)*

### Victorian Art

Lovers of Victorian Art will delight in the treasures at [www.artrenewal.org](http://www.artrenewal.org)

This gigantic online museum aims, 'To create the largest online museum on the Internet, with hundreds of thousands of high quality images of the known works of the greatest painters and sculptors in human history'.

### The Modern Antiquarian

[www.themodernantiquarian.com](http://www.themodernantiquarian.com)

This website is based on Julian Cope's epic guidebook of the same name. This is an eight-year odyssey in search of prehistoric Britain. More than 300 of the best sites have had their remains photographed and their relationship with the landscape explained.

The Modern Antiquarian takes the traveller to the first temples built on these islands, to shine a light into the shadowy past of a modern people who have been hoodwinked into believing their history began with the Roman conquest.

The essay section examines our prehistoric beginnings through the evidence of our megalithic remains and their surroundings to help us reconcile where we are.

The site has become a massive resource for news, information, images, folklore and weblinks on the ancient sites across the UK and Ireland.

## U3A Online Courses

The courses listed are available online. Visit the website, [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk) and click on the link to Online Courses.

The copyright to the courses is owned by the Third Age Trust or by U3A Online Inc in Australia.

### Course Titles

#### Beginning in March

##### Tutored courses (£15)

Venice and her Artists

Digital Imaging

Short Stories

Creative Writing: Poetry

Writing for Publication

**New:** *Building Web Pages (Tutored)*  
*In Search of the Russian Soul (Tutored)*

##### Untutored Courses (£8)

Ageing and Retirement (Aust)

Antarctica (Aust)

Artists of Spain

Astronomy (Aust)

Autobiography and Journaling (Aust)

Botany for Knowledge and Enjoyment (Aust)

Continents on the Move (Aust)

Creative Writing: Fiction

Design in Your Life (Aust)

Garden History

Genealogy (Aust)

Great Northern European Artists

Intro to Western Philosophy (Aust)

Italian Art

Maintaining Independence (Aust)

Religions of the World (Aust)

Renaissance Italy (Aust)

For details check the websites:

[www.u3a.org.uk/online\\_courses](http://www.u3a.org.uk/online_courses)

[www.u3aonline.org](http://www.u3aonline.org)

Courses available only to U3A members. U3A tutors and writers are unpaid volunteers.

### Moving House?

Will you please notify the National Office of your new address if you move house. This is not happening and copies are being returned undelivered.

### Erratum

In the Issue 26 front cover story by Ralph Blumenau, the beginning of the 4th paragraph should read:

You can jump in at almost any point: you do not have to have studied the 18th century, although of course...

## Philosophy at Summer Schools 2006

Cheltenham: University of Gloucestershire 18-21 July

**Philosophy - Classical forms of Ethics. Tutor: Terry Thomas**

### Course structure:

General introduction: discussion on metaethics

Detailed discussion on:

a) deontological ethics b) consequentialist ethics c) virtue ethics

Retrospective on the three forms of ethics

Level of ability: some previous experience would be of benefit

Not suitable for beginners

Teaching style: small group work

Seminars based on notes provided by tutor and discussion

**Chester: University of Chester 11-14 July**

**Greek Philosophy Tutor: Vernon Ward**

This is a tutored course not a seminar. No previous knowledge will be presumed, although suggested reading and course notes will be sent out in advance. The course will consider the Greek contribution to some contemporary problems such as theory of knowledge and ethics.

Although Plato and Aristotle will figure large in the course, some account of the pre-Socratics and later Hellenistic and Roman philosophers will be given.

Level of ability: the source is suitable for those who have an interest in Greek thought and current philosophical issues.

Teaching style: some exposition but mainly question-and-answer style work within the smallish (12 or so) group.

## Summer schools 2006

### Chester Summer School

11-14 July University of Chester

Courses: France, Storytelling

Architecture, Calligraphy, Craft

Local History, Oral History,

Cinema History, Heraldry

Philosophy, Writing, Science

### Cheltenham Summer School

18-21 July Univ of Gloucestershire

Courses:

Architecture, Art history, Botany

Heritage, History, Literature, Opera

Medicine in ancient times

Russia, Writing, Philosophy

Contact: 020 8466 6139

### South East U3A Forum

Saturday 1 April 2006

Shared Opportunities for Learning  
Speakers: Keith Richards & John Cook  
A regional conference for those who cannot attend the National Conference providing an opportunity to meet people from other U3As

### South East U3A Summer School

University College

Wed 28 June to Sat 1 July 2006

Subjects: Art History, Drawing

Historic Chichester & Harbour

Drama Workshop, Entomology

Earth & Space Science

Health & Wellbeing

ICT - Refresher workshop

Women poets of the 20th century

Cost: residential £225, non £135

Both events: A Browne 01293 771794

## WANTED

### Online Course Tutors

If you have followed a course, you would be enthusiastically welcomed to assist the original writer by continuing the course as an online tutor, using the existing course material.

Please contact Ian Searle:

[isearle@btconnect.com](mailto:isearle@btconnect.com)

**From Philip Bristow: Ludlow U3A**

I run a group on Horology and would like to know if similar groups exist and if it is possible for me to be put in touch. An exchange of the syllabus details would be useful. Sources of additional information could also be exchanged.

Tel: 01584 831389

[oldlanehouse@pobox.com](mailto:oldlanehouse@pobox.com)