

# *Vision*



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## Editorial

As I sit down to write this editorial the words of the young child from Ficino mentioned by Karen Crompton in her article later in this issue arise unbidden each time I look out my window. The “gloryness” of creation... yes, the creation is indeed glorious. The fresh blooming of our pohutukawa trees delights the senses and stimulates a sense of gratitude that we live in freedom in such a beautiful country. The red blossoms visible now bring a sense of summer, warmth and lightness and are a potent reminder of the seemingly unchanging patterns of seasonal change. We see these blossoms as a signal of summer, but we also know that our summer will not be consistently warm and dry – there will be wet and windy days, both physically and metaphorically. Our challenge will be, moment by moment, to see these too as part of the glory of creation that we can delight in.

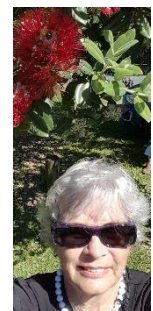
As the year draws to a close, one is often drawn to reflect on events, achievements, moments of joy and moments of sadness. For some the year 2016 will be always be linked to the international political and economic upheavals which have led to a media frenzy in which fact and fiction are becoming hard to distinguish. As Tessa Stephens notes in her article, Post-Truth, named as the Oxford Dictionary’s ‘Word of the Year’ for 2016, is in itself, alarming concept. For others, 2016 will be the year that we were reminded yet again that the forces of Nature can shake the ground we walk on, and what we think we know can change in an instant.

The year has undoubtedly also offered moments of joy and happiness, at many levels. In reflecting on what is real and lasting, I am reminded of the adage “This too shall pass” which originated with Persian Sufi poets. Presented to a powerful king by his wise men to be ever in view, this sentence is true in good times and bad.

Words of wisdom have the power, when brought to mind, to bring one back to the present moment, and open the view. We are blessed as members of the School of Philosophy to have access not only to the words of the wise in the form of scripture and the teaching but also to good company in which we can put these into practice.

To those who have contributed to this issue, many thanks. As editor, I am always appreciative of the generosity of those who are willing to share their thoughts and passions with us. As we go forth into the holiday season, may we remember that beautiful prayer:

***“May all be happy,  
May all be without disease and  
May none be in misery of any kind”***



Liz Godfrey

## Shakespeare: ‘He was not of an age, but for all time.’

(Ben Jonson. preface to the First Folio of 1623)

A recent online course reawakened a love of Shakespeare and a recognition of just how important are his works. Great art has the capacity to instruct, expose, enrich and enliven, but more importantly, to evoke Truth. Currently, in everyday life, Truth is often elusive.

More than ever, one understands what Orwell had in mind when his ‘1984’ protagonist Winston Smith awoke with the word ‘Shakespeare’ on his lips. This word conjured misty images of a long-lost, *better* life; a life that Newspeak and Big Brother sought to expunge from living memory.

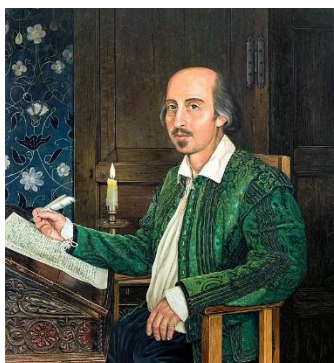
Today, we don’t need Big Brother or Newspeak. We seem to be in grave danger of creating mental straitjackets all by ourselves, as witness the irrational chants of “Lock her up!” during the recent Presidential campaign and strange new words coming into common parlance, such as ‘Post-Truth’ and ‘Adulging’.

‘**Post-truth**’ is an alarming concept. This word is the Oxford Dictionary’s ‘Word of the Year’ for 2016. It is an adjective defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’. The EU referendum in the United Kingdom and the Presidential election in the United States helped to spike usage of the term. In fact, the Oxford Dictionaries’ website told readers that ‘post-truth’ could be “one of the defining words of our time.” Yikes!

Consider another neologism: ‘**Adulging**’. This is a noun describing someone behaving like a responsible adult, the implication being that this is just a temporary lapse from a permanent state of adolescence! In days when more and more people use social media for news and where misinformation abounds, abdicating responsibility seems a likely concomitant.

This is why we need Shakespeare. He is an antidote! Personally, there is enormous relief gained from basking once more in the beauty of words which go to the heart, images which fire the imagination, ideas which re-open corridors in the mind and spark questions.

Shakespeare is, in fact, the most popular dramatist and poet the Western world has ever produced.



<http://www.geofftristram.co.uk/shakespeare.html>

Between 2 and 4 billion copies of his works have been sold and his plays have been published and produced in more than 75 languages. His stories transcend time and culture.

Marchette Chute, had this to say: *“Shakespeare told every kind of story – comedy, tragedy, history, melodrama, adventure, love stories and fairy tales – and each of them so well that they have become immortal.”*<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, almost every composer or artist you care to mention has produced work inspired by Shakespeare’s plays.

No wonder then that one may reach for the Bard to arm oneself against the latest assault on Truth. But how does this ‘arming’ work?

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction from “Stories from Shakespeare”, by Marchette Chute. First published 1956.

What follows is a personal view.

Firstly, so many of Shakespeare's characters alert us to the propensities of human nature. His insight into character is most illuminating. A few examples: He strips away hypocrisy and illusion exposing the underlying truth. Take Feste's words to Orsino in *Twelfth Night*:

*"Now the melancholy god protect thee and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta for thy mind is a very opal."* (*Twelfth Night* II.iv) Orsino may fool himself but not the clear-sighted clown.

Consider Shakespeare's strong women, Portia, Rosalind, Viola, Kate. Wit, intelligence, and straight-talking is their common characteristic. Even Cordelia who, unlike her sisters, would not sugarcoat her words to serve her own ends provides an example to inspire. She withstood her father's arrogance and anger despite the fact that she knew Truth could pay a heavy price.

Shakespeare also reminds us that words of truth are hollow unless connected to underlying substance. For example, it is ironic that in '*Hamlet*', Polonius' sententious pronouncement has been taken out of context and passed down the centuries as great wisdom.

*"This above all. To thine own self be true  
And it must follow as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."* (*Hamlet* I. iii)

Undeniably it is a profound statement. However, in the context of the play it reminds us that Wisdom in the mouths of the unaware only goes skin deep.

Iago provides an interesting lesson in human behaviour. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous phrase, "The motive-hunting of motiveless Malignity," leaves us wondering if there is any point asking why Iago did what he did. Is he merely someone who does ill without much reason?

Almost any part of '*Hamlet*' gives pause for thought, but in particular, Hamlet's indecision invites one to look closely at 'taking arms against a sea of troubles'.

*"And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry  
And lose the name of action."* (*Hamlet* III i)

And what of sound? Who can forget the inspiration in those speeches from Henry V as the young king rouses his troops before Agincourt. This is the voice of leadership and it makes us realise the importance of the sound that goes out. It was no accident that Winston Churchill collaborated with Lawrence Olivier in the 1944 production of *Henry V*, specifically aiming to raise public morale.

Sound is also an aspect of Shakespeare's Imagery. Imagery creates atmosphere; a mental and emotional environment for characters to move in and for us to imbibe. The reward is that this tends to stir or reawaken our own dulled senses, blunted by too much of everything.

The strength and power of imagery is that it can create unity out of diversity by uniting elements on several different levels. By juxtaposing disparate elements you show up the connections between them. For example, take these lovely lines that Romeo speaks when he first sets eyes on Juliet. In this scene, as in the whole play, the dominant image is 'light'; many aspects of it.

*“O! She doth teach the torches to burn bright.  
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear;  
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!  
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows  
As yonder lady o’er her fellows shows.  
The measure done, I’ll watch her place of stand,  
And touching hers, make blessed my rude hand!  
Did my heart love till now? Forswear it sight!  
For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night.” (Romeo and Juliet I.v)*

We see how things show up more vividly when set against their opposites. Juliet’s purity and beauty irradiates and casts into shadow all others in the room. Her beauty is so dazzling it flashes like a sparkling earring in the ear of a black man. Romeo wants to touch her hand so that his own will be transformed; made holy.

In these few lines many things have happened. We have learned something about Romeo; the cast of his mind. Something of the beauty and innocence of his own nature emerges through these words. Moreover, Shakespeare makes clear the transforming power of love.

Thus the effect of this passage is to tune up the atmosphere. The profane is made sacred. There is reverence; a sense of awe and wonderment about it. The experience for us becomes spiritual; transcendent. We rise above the tawdry.

No wonder then that so many artists have striven to capture such words in memorable images. Take for example the 19<sup>th</sup> century painter, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s depiction of the meeting of Antony and Cleopatra based on the speech of Enobarbus.



**The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. (1836-1912)**

Sourced from: <http://www.alma-tadema.org/Antony-and-Cleopatra,-1883.jpg>

Here is Enobarbus' awe-struck description of his first sight of Cleopatra.

*"The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,  
Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;  
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that  
The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,  
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made  
The water which they beat to follow faster,  
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,  
It beggar'd all description: she did lie  
In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,  
O'erpicturing that Venus where we see  
The fancy outwork nature: "*

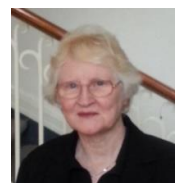
The images in the speech of Enobarbus are wonderfully conveyed by Alma-Tadema's painting. We note the sensuality, the allure of Cleopatra, the wonder and reverence on the faces of the attendants. Thus we understand how the hardened Roman Antony could fall under her spell. Egypt thus emasculates, even while 'Nilus' slime' suggests fecundity and growth. The richness and magnificence of the imagery in both words and oils captures the mystery and magic of Egypt. Powerful, evocative imagery spurs creative endeavour through the centuries.

Transformation is perhaps one of the central themes running through the plays. We need to remember that Shakespeare's own world was in a state of flux. Dramatic changes in art, science, religion, exploration were all part of his context. The characters in his plays are part of a world which moves from stability to confusion through to a resolution of some sort. In *The Tempest*, Prospero uses magic to change the lives of his enemies. In the process he is transformed himself, a desire for vengeance giving way to forgiveness and mercy.

It all seems to have a familiar ring, like the cycles in our own lives! Thus, Shakespeare unmasks us

## Conclusion

It is a strange time in human history. There has been a seismic shift in living and thinking due to the rapid and pervasive introduction of new technologies. These have changed the way we communicate, shop, work and socialise. If the Oxford Dictionaries' officials say they chose post-truth as Word of the Year because of its rising popularity then it is obvious we must counter current trends and furnish our minds with quality, integrity and Truth at all costs. More and more we need to remember that Shakespeare is for *all time*. He provides another reminder of who we really are.



Tessa Stephens

The portrait of William Shakespeare used here is a new portrait (March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016) by English artist Geoffrey Tristram. He aimed at producing the most authentic likeness of Shakespeare to date. He based the portrait closely on the etching of Shakespeare by Martin Droeshout used as the frontispiece to the collected works of 1623. Shakespeare's friend and fellow-playwright Ben Jonson said this most closely resembled him. Geoffrey Tristram also used the death mask and a painting from 1810 attributed to John Taylor, known as the Chandos portrait.



*The Way of Go, by Desmond Meraz*

*Mountain monks sit playing go  
Over the board is the bamboo's lucent shade  
No one sees them through the glittering leaves  
But now and then is heard the click of a stone.  
Po Chi (772-846)<sup>2</sup>*

## **Go on, have a go... at Go!**

Go is an abstract strategy board game for two players. The object of the game is to control more of the board than the opponent, a simple goal that leads to the elegant and fascinating complexities of Go. Playing the game can even aid in the search for enlightenment!

The game was invented in ancient China more than 5,500 years ago. It is said to be the oldest board game continuously played to this day. It was considered one of the four essential arts of the cultured aristocratic Chinese scholar caste in antiquity (the other three being calligraphy, painting and music).



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<sup>2</sup> Sourced from <https://sites.google.com/site/shusakugoclub/go-books/the-way-of-go>

Although the game is much older than Buddhism, it was quickly recognized by Buddhists as a useful tool for Buddhist practice. The game was popular as a means of instilling the virtues of overcoming fear, greed, and anger among the samurai whose instructors in Go were Buddhist monks. Its capacity for making its players better people is part of the reason Go is still widely popular in Japan, Korea, and China, where millions of people play regularly.

The playing pieces are called stones. One player uses the white stones and the other, black. Play begins with an empty board. The players take turns placing the stones on the vacant intersections (named "points") of a board with a 19×19 grid of lines. Beginners often play on smaller 9×9 and 13×13 boards. The rules are the same no matter what the size of the board is.

Go is a game of territory. The Go board is like a piece of land, an island, to be shared between two players. Go differs from most Western world board games by being a constructive game, not a destructive game like chess or many other well-known board games where the winner takes all, like Monopoly and Risk, for example.

The game was initially called 'yi'. Today, in China, it is known as 'weiqi'. A legend traces the origin of the game to the mythical Chinese emperor Yao (2337–2258 BC), who was said to have had his counselor design it for his unruly son, to favorably influence him...

Weiqi was introduced to Korea sometime between the 5th and 7th centuries CE, and was popular among the higher classes. In Korea, the game is called 'baduk'. The game eventually reached Japan in the 7th century CE – where it is called 'go' or 'igo' and became popular among the general public by the 13th century. Go did not start to become popular in the West until... the end of the 19th century!



Artist: Yashima Gakutei, Title: THE FOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS: PLAYING GAMES (GO)  
Edo period (1615-1868) Source: <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/207533>

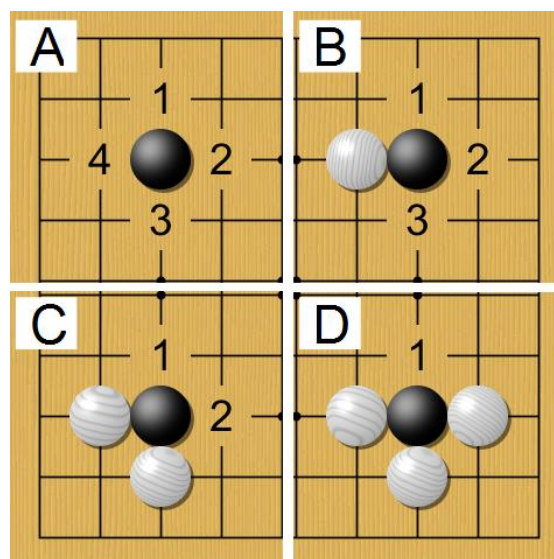
I was introduced to the game in the 1990s by a German friend. I have been playing sporadically since then. I introduced my family to the game much later. My wife did not seem able to enjoy it,



but my sons did. But, be warned, especially if you have smart kids: in no time, they will start 'beating' you. I do not mean they will be winning more games than you (even if they do).

No, I mean that they will play Go as if they were playing chess or any other destructive board game and focus mostly on removing your stones from the board! Not only is that not the point of the game, it keeps you in a wrong mindset that blocks or prevents the natural flow of good strategic forward thinking. I guess all games have the power to channel our mental energies. Whether they lead to enlightenment or the reverse is a matter of detachment.

The aim of the game is not to destroy, but to build territory. Single stones become groups, and groups become organic structures which live or die. A stone's power depends on its location and the moment. Over the entire board there occur transformations of growth and decay, movement and stasis, small defeats and temporary victories. Once placed on the board, stones may not be moved. But some stones are removed from the board when "captured".



Source: Wikipedia

Capture happens when a stone or group of stones is surrounded by opposing stones on all orthogonally-adjacent points. Such points are depicted in the image A above for the Black stone as 1, 2, 3 and 4. Those points are called 'liberties' in Go. No stone can exist on the board without any liberty. If Black's liberties are reduced one at a time by White stones (see B, C and D below) and if a fourth White stone is then placed at point 1, the Black stone will have lost all liberties and will be captured and removed from the board.

The game proceeds until neither player wishes to make another move; the game has no set ending conditions beyond this. Games may also be terminated by resignation. In fact, that seems to be how professionals end their games, judging from how the games in the historic 'man versus machine' match earlier this year ended.

Indeed, in March 2016 Google DeepMind's program AlphaGo challenged Lee Sedol, a 9 dan considered the top player in the world at the time, to a five-game match. Leading up to the game, Lee Sedol was confident that he would win. However, AlphaGo defeated Lee in four of the five games, Lee winning the fourth game only.

Apparently, Lee's win followed as a result of his 39<sup>th</sup> move ('White 78'), which was a brilliant and completely unforeseen move. Some called it a "divine move" or "the hand of God"! Lee described

his win as “invaluable”. Did he mean for him, for Go or for humanity? You can study the whole match (five games) here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AlphaGo\\_versus\\_Lee\\_Sedol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AlphaGo_versus_Lee_Sedol).

AlphaGo versus Lee Sedol is comparable to the 1997 chess match of Deep Blue versus Garry Kasparov. IBM's Deep Blue computer's defeat of reigning champion Kasparov is the symbolic point where computers became better than humans at chess. And now, they are better at Go! Is there any hope for humanity? Well, actually, looking at the math involved here, one quickly realises that this was inevitable and only a question of time with Artificial Intelligence (AI)...

Since each of the 361 points on the board can be either empty, black, or white, there are a total of  $3^{361}$  possible board positions on a full 19×19 board. Not all of those positions would be legal (no stone without liberty can exist on the board). But even if only 1% of those were legal, we still get a total number of possibilities like the number 1 followed by 170 zeros (or  $10^{170}$ )!

Consider that a trillion has only 12 zeros ( $10^{12}$ ) or that the observable universe is considered to have ‘only’ about  $10^{80}$  atoms, i.e. far less than the  $10^{170}$  positions on a full Go board, and the mind truly boggles at the sheer scale of possibilities presented in any single game of Go... But, let’s get back to what ‘playing’ Go is all about.

The point of the game is not so much for one player to overcome another, but for both to engage in a kind of cooperative dialogue (‘hand conversation’, they used to call it) with the aim of overcoming a common enemy. The common enemy is, of course, and will likely always be, our very own human weaknesses: greed, anger and stupidity.

It is said that an anonymous Go player once wrote: “The Go board is a mirror of the mind of the player as the moments pass. When a master studies the record of a game he can tell at what point greed overtook the player, when he became tired, when he fell into stupidity, and when the maid came by with the tea”. You can observe this for yourself to be so true, when playing.

Go is the essence of simplicity and the ultimate in complexity, all at the same time. Sounds familiar? Like meditation, learning Go is easy; mastering Go is a never-ending challenge. If you have not yet played the game, then I can only encourage you to do so: go on, have a go... at Go!

Louis Boulanger



## A Philosophical Journey

The Watsons were invited to attend two weeks studying Plato and Plotinus at Townley Hall in Ireland, led by Dr David Horan. Having visited Townley Hall for a night 15 years ago and heard glowing reports from Mr Preston and Simon Laurent we were looking forward to our Plato studies and to viewing the building renovations.

We spent a few days in Dublin before the weeks. Our first early morning walk in summer clothes ended with a return to the hotel for jackets. (The average summer temperature in Dublin is 16°C and it often rains, accounting for all the green grass).



*Page from Book of Kells*

We visited Trinity College during their summer break and were fortunate to be given a guided tour by animated students. The 'Long Room' in the Old Library is magnificent, featuring vaulted ceilings, thirty classical busts and 200,000 of the library's oldest books which are filled to the ceiling ordered by alphabet and size. The 'Book of Kells' is housed here and was the key feature of an exhibition 'Turning darkness into light'. The book is a lavishly illuminated Latin text of the four gospels, over 1,000 years old, probably produced by monks originating from Iona (off the West coasts of Scotland). Whilst in Dublin we visited a number of beautiful Cathedrals and churches. The anniversary exhibition of the 2016 uprising was very interesting and much like the Te Papa Gallipoli exhibition with similar national sentiment.

We inspected John Scotus Primary School and travelled with other international students on the school bus to Townley Hall which is about 50 kms North of Dublin. Following the School's purchase of Townley Hall, by fortunate coincidence, the EU subsidised the construction of the M1 motorway which conveniently runs within 2 kms of the site. The Hall is accessed by a 2km rising, tree-lined drive, sits on 60 acres (originally probably 10,000 acres) and was constructed in the 1790's. This was one of the architect's early works but has been referred to as 'Francis Johnson's Classical Masterpiece'. The house consists of basement and three floors of 90 foot square. The school has rebuilt the old kitchen extension into a large dining hall and there are plans to add en-suite bedrooms above this.

The building was built to the highest architectural and construction standards and as a consequence of the economic downturn in the 1800's has had a very low level use and consequently suffered little wear and tear. The School has renovated much of the building interior (including windows which match the exacting original joinery detail and the spiral staircase). There is a brochure about the house and excellent photos and information about the history of the Hall are available on the Townley Hall website. The spiral staircase is a masterpiece of engineering and has just been re-certified as a similar staircase had recently collapsed.





*Townley Hall*

The two weeks were attended by 74 students from around the world. Accommodation options included the main house, very nice apartments in the converted barns (which we shared with some of the Australian's) and an offsite motel. The weeks were supported by an inhouse chef and student service. We met in several of the five magnificent large rooms for main meetings and study. For service it was downstairs in the kitchens (imagine Downton Abbey). We studied Plato's Protagoras and Plotinus Ennead with particular emphasis on the virtues and their meanings in experience. In the evenings a series of visiting Professors delivered fascinating in-depth talks on Plato, Plotinus and Aristotle.

In between the two weeks about half the students utilised a lay day to cross the virtual border and visit Belfast's new Titanic interactive museum (this is highly recommended).

On the final night we were treated to a house concert which revealed a range of international talents. The acoustics of the dramatic entrance hall and dome was used to good effect to enhance the singers' voices.

Just prior to the concert we were relieved of dishwashing and invited 'upstairs' to meet the Reverend Townley (descended from the builder). He lived in Riddell Rd, Glendowie for 10 years!

We sadly left behind Townley Hall and the many new friends and travelled to Budapest. The weather here changed from the Irish standard of 15-19°C and rain to 30°C and three weeks of clear skies. Having developed a taste for Universities after Trinity College, we visited the University of Budapest (on enrolment day!). We found the Universities in Europe were located on some of the best city viewing sites and offered budget lunches!

We visited the Budapest School of Philosophy which was established about 15 years ago by Miklos Verity-Berty of the Sydney School. It currently has 75-85 students. Ildiko presented the full set of His Holiness's conversations which she had translated into Hungarian (including a Sanskrit dictionary) to a large group. These translations are the culmination of 16 years work. Animated discussion and questions regarding the translations and use of the dictionary followed. The Budapest school includes a strong contingent of teachers (both public and private schools) and they asked for a

briefing on Ficino School, which was very well received. There was particular interest in the use of the pause and how this could be used in both environments.

We visited Esztergom (about 150km NE of Budapest on the Slovakian border) where one of Europe's most magnificent Cathedrals looks across the Danube to Slovakia. This was quite a trek in the midday sun, as the train station is about 5 km from the town and does not synchronise with the buses. A 45 minute walk was the solution. This was followed by the obligatory climb to the top of the cathedral, about 250 steps, for a magnificent view. (The cost for these privileges increases by the number of steps and no challenge was forgone!)

Debrecen in north western Hungary, near where Ildiko was born, was our next destination and after



*Interior Debrecen cathedral*

enjoying the magnificent cathedral climbed to the top of the bell tower. This consisted of a lift for 5 floors and then about 150 rickety wooden steps which would not pass NZ health and safety standards! (Several people had vertigo and had to be guided down). We also given a personal tour of the Greek Catholic church in the small town where Ildiko was baptised. Interestingly the priest commented that the churches which are thriving are those where the priest 'lives among the flock'. This appears to be reflected in the Budapest churches as well.

In Budapest (which is actually two cities, Buda and Pest, straddling the Danube) we visited the magnificent castle on the Buda hill several times. This is a huge area

containing the president's palace, museum, art gallery, Hilton Hotel, restaurants and the recently renovated Matthias church. The church has just completed the final of many renovations necessitated by destruction from the fires of many sieges and World War II bombings. Built into the rock under the castle is a complete German war time hospital complete with two operating theatres.

Many of the treasured buildings in Budapest and Europe have recently been renovated with support from the EU. This includes the Parliament buildings on the Danube bank.. With new lighting on these buildings and the many Danube bridges the night view from the castle is magnificent. On any summer evening the river has 15-20 tourist launches circulating amongst the long distance cruising boats.

Following Budapest we travelled to Vienna and again were overwhelmed with magnificent churches, buildings and history. A walk in the Schönbrunn palace park (the residence of Franz Joseph when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was pre-eminent) offered forests, squirrels and relaxing open spaces interspersed with magnificent architecture and sculpture.



*Schönbrunn palace*

We travelled from Vienna to Zurich by train, an 8 hour journey but seemed much less. The train travels through Austria and Germany at speeds of up to 230kmh and then slows to 50km to pass through the Alps. The train passed along the edge of very deep valleys and alongside Olympic ski jumps. We were very fortunate to have two passengers

volunteer local information. The first lived in Salzburg and suggested we look left as we crossed the bridge leaving town to see a river/city view which would make a classical postcard photo but otherwise would have been missed. The other passenger had visited NZ and lived in the Alps on the Swiss border. He was a keen European tramper and cross country skier, which provide an insight into life in the Alps and the effect of seasonal changes.

In Zurich we again visited the University (on enrolment day) which has a fantastic view over Zurich and the lake. In light of probable changes in Europe their first public seminar for the year is based on Winston Churchill's first European post war speech, which was held at the University. He spoke about the urgent need to reconcile country differences, integrate the stateless and develop a strong united Europe to guard against a repeat of the dreadful conflicts experienced in the half of the twentieth century. The day in Zurich concluded with another magnificent cathedral visit and the obligatory 150 steps climb (now the minimum standard).

We have been privileged to enjoy philosophy, good company, and magnificent architecture across Europe, but in particular to be reminded of the universality of the Schools around the world.

Bruce Watson

### **Book Corner Christmas news.**

Well its almost Christmas again and the usual problem of finding a suitable gift arises. This is easily solved with a book. Carefully chosen it not only provides information and entertainment for the lucky recipient, but also is a gift of "time out". That is, time needs to be put aside to read and enjoy, which seems such a rare commodity these days. So we can help with this by providing a reason to step out of the busyness for a period through the gift of a book – ourselves included.

So what may suit this? Allowing for personal favourites and the individual natures these may be worth looking at:

- *I Am That* – Nisargadatta. A long time choice, its always amazing how just the right question comes at the right time.
- *Consciousness and the Absolute* – Nisargadatta. The latest addition to add to his teachings.
- *A short History of nearly everything* by Bill Bryson – informative and entertaining
- *Viewing Meister Eckhart through the Bhagavad Gita*
- *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*. Both of these books providing a different view of the teaching.
- *Teachings of His Holiness* – the marvellous new Red book from the Study Society
- *The Fourth Way* – a history of the teaching brought to the West. Quite remarkable really how the "coincidences" fell into place at exactly the right time.

And lastly for those heading off on a long road trip why not listen to something from the selection of CD's put out by the Irish school – that would have to be better than a cricket test!

Good reading and a safe and relaxing holiday to all.

Geoff Long

## The ‘Gloryness’ of Creation – Philosophy Lessons with Class 1



On Monday mornings in Class 1 (5 year olds) at Ficino School we have a philosophy lesson. It lasts for about half an hour and consists of some reading, discussion and mindfulness practices. This term we have been looking at the story of creation based upon the Circle of Nine Points which is at the core of the Advaita teaching.

To begin our new topic, I reread a story which the children had had earlier in the year. It was a book called *All I See Is Part of Me* by Chara M Curtis in which the children were introduced to the concept of unity. The child in the story, through the help of characters Mr Sun and Sister Star, finds a light within his heart and then finds that same light everywhere. The child asks, “Sister Star, how can it be that I am you and you are me?” Sister Star replies, “You’re larger than you know. You are every place there is to go. You have a body – this is true – But look at what’s inside of you!” The children in Class 1 love this story, and when we pause throughout the day, they often talk about resting in that place where the light is. From this point I felt it was an excellent place to begin our discovery of the story of the Circle of Nine Points.



*Panel 6 Air*

In the school hall at Ficino there are five beautiful panels, painted by Ngaire Bennett, depicting the story of creation as it unfolds between the numbers 1-9. To accompany the panels is a wonderful book called *Ficino Panels* (available in the School of Philosophy bookshop) which explains the meaning of the panels simply and clearly. I used this book and the panels to teach the class about The Circle of Nine Points.

Each week we looked at one number, starting at Number 1, and read the corresponding part of the book and discussed it. The next week we would recap what we learnt the week before and then read about the next number. In this way the children became very familiar with the terminology used to describe the different stages of the story. Numbers 1-4 relate to the world of spirit and mind. At number 1 there is Consciousness, at number 2 Knowledge, at number 3 Bliss, at number 4 Universal Feeling of Existence. Numbers 5-9 relate to the physical elements and their corresponding senses. At number 5 Space and sound, at number 6 Air and touch, at number 7 Fire and sight, at number 8 Water and taste and at number 9 Earth and smell.

At the beginning of each lesson I would draw a large circle on the board from which the numbers 1-9 would be slowly introduced. I also read to them Chapter 7 of the Bhagavad Gita in which there is an exert where the Lord says ‘... in Me all this world is woven; it hangs upon me like clusters of pearls on a thread...’ Throughout our study the symbol of the circle became more and more important, and the children began to see how everything was connected and that nothing would exist without Consciousness.

The children loved to learn the Sanskrit names for the first three numbers of the circle. After providing



*Panel 9 Earth*

me with all the different names for God they could think of, they then learnt that God can also be spoken of as ‘Sat’ meaning forever free and eternal. They were enthralled to find that Number 2 is mysterious, as it is the place of All Knowledge (a place where the knowledge of how everything is made is kept until called out into creation) and known in Sanskrit as ‘Chit’. And Number 3 is the place of All Bliss, the happiness that does not depend on any other and is eternal. This is known in Sanskrit as Ananda. They loved to say the Sanskrit words again and again and even though these three words are talking about something we cannot see the children seemed to feel their effect.

The essential knowledge the children came away with after studying this particular part of the creation story was that their essential nature was full of light, knowledge and happiness.

The week we studied Number 4 - The Universal Feeling of Existence - was one of those special lessons where the children seemed to really connect with the words they were hearing. We started the lesson by recapping what we had already learnt and then I asked if anyone could remember what was at Number 4? I drew the symbol of a candle flame at number 4 to help them. One of the children called out excitedly (after a little prompting by me ‘The’ ‘The Uni’...) “The Universal Studios!” He had just been on a trip to America. We all laughed and then someone remembered it was the Universal Feeling of Existence. They related this concept back to the story All I See Is Part of Me where the light shines in each of us. I then read them what Mr MacLaren said about this feeling of unity. “The light of this One Self shines not only in each of us, but in all of us at the same time. It shines in all creatures, all the time, and it is One and single” (The MacLaren Lectures Volume 1 September 1077 page 57.) The response to this from the class was very moving. One child said “You are not alone you are with the Light.” Another said “I never knew that I was never alone, now I know I am never alone.” Another child said “And when you are at the top of the light, there is a present, a present of all the ‘gloryness’ of God.”

It is a very wonderful privilege to be able to be part of philosophy lessons with young children as they see things so simply and share so generously. I have found myself frequently referring to creation as ‘all the gloryness’ especially as life starts to become a little hectic at this time of year. To simply stop, pause and remember the ‘gloryness’ is the best remedy to stop the rush.



*Karen Crompton*



## **“It’s the Question, Neo. It’s the Question that drives us...”**

“What is...”

This talk as presented at the spring Cultural Day really has its roots in a couple of ideas given to the students at the 2015 Plato Event in Delphi by Pantezis Tzelemanis, Dr Horan’s assistant in translation. A gifted academic in his own right, Pantezis is very, very knowledgeable about Greek history and philosophy.

Those ideas gave rise to a line of enquiry which evolved into this investigation into Neoplatonism.

Neo-platonism simply means new-platonism, as distinct from middle-platonism and old-platonism. New in this case, is very relative, it refers to a loose collection of philosophers spread over the 3rd - 6th centuries AD. They were adherents to an evolving philosophic code derived from the original writings of Plato, as distinct from the Stoics, Sceptics, Peripatetics (Aristotelians) and Pythagoreans.

Plato (428-347BC) was a direct disciple of Socrates and these two are the most important figures in classical Greek philosophy. Socrates, who famously maintained he knew nothing, taught nothing, never wrote anything down, and was put to death on (false) charges of corrupting the youth and heresy, was nonetheless so significant that the period is divided into pre-Socratic and post-Socratic times. Of Plato, the 20th C philosopher, A.N. Whitehead commented that “all subsequent western philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato”.

Following close behind in chronology and importance is Aristotle who essentially gave the world the first scientific methods. In fact, Aristotle’s output while veering somewhat away from the more metaphysical (spiritual) emphasis of Plato and Socrates, was so great and detailed that it wasn’t until the 19th C that the last of his theories were tested.

Prior to Socrates and Plato, was Parmenides, whom Plato never knew but venerated by portraying him as the young Socrates’ mentor in the seminal dialogue, The Parmenides. In actual fact, Socrates was about 10 years old when Parmenides died so Plato was probably stretching things a bit.

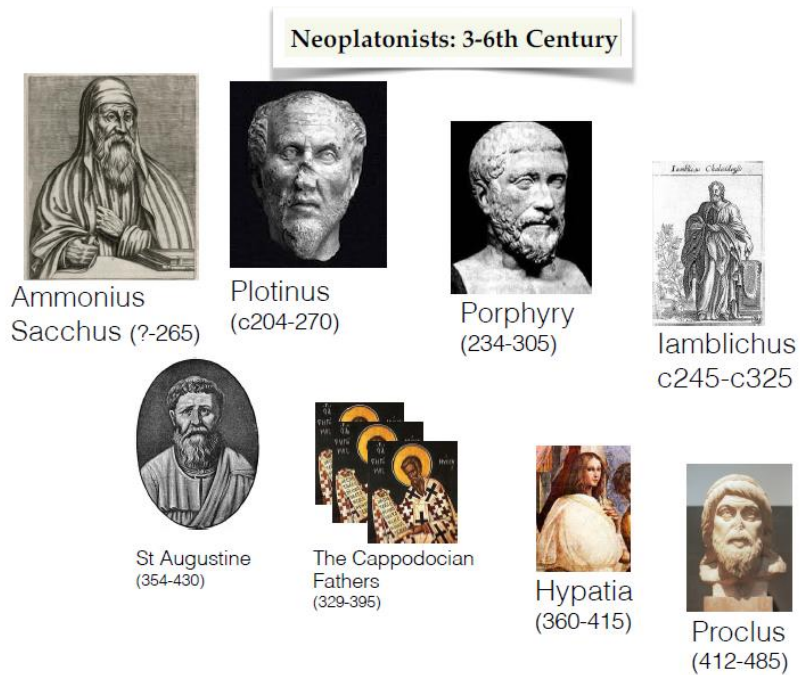
But Parmenides, revered as he was at the time, highlights another key issue in the study of the ancients: extant-ness. Parmenides apparently wrote many works but all we have left is 186 lines of a poem that was apparently 3000 lines long. We need to remember this as we proceed, our knowledge is totally bounded by what is extant. We can’t know much about texts that are no longer in existence.

OK, lets jump forward in time about 5-600 years and leave Greece for northern Egypt where a young wannabe philosopher had arrived in Alexandria to learn great things. He had spent a year getting more and more dissatisfied with what was on offer when a friend invited him along to a lecture. He was so struck by what he found that he exclaimed to his friend “This is the man I have been looking for!”

The teacher was Ammonius Sacchus, and we know nothing more about him than he tutored that young man for eleven years and a couple of his contemporaries.

The student, Plotinus, was moved to strike out east in an unsuccessful attempt to study under the eastern philosophers of the day and eventually ended up in Rome where he became what posterity regards as the first Neoplatonist.

Plotinus has the unique distinction of being both tremendously influential and almost completely unknown. His work is called “The Enneads” and is a revised compilation of post-lecture notes that he wrote, primarily for his own benefit and for circulation to a small circle of peers. As such they do not represent a structured exposition of his work. In addition, his disciple and biographer, Porphyry, who was charged with tidying the papers up, complains at length about Plotinus’s disinterest in spelling and grammar. So, not an easy read. Yet to quote the people who have read all of it;



*“More meaning than words” – Porphyry*

*“Superabundance of sentiment”, “Tremendous terseness”, “Even more profound than Plato”*

Ficino

*“This is the Advaita Vedanta of Shankara” – Swami Krishnananda*

Porphyry was no mean philosopher himself but his was a more worldly mind and he gave the world the basis of the classification system we now regard as taxonomy. He disliked the emerging Christianity with a vengeance. Perhaps its emphasis on faith offended his extremely logical sensibilities.

Porphyry’s disciple was Iamblichus and he took the work in an interesting, if perhaps misguided, direction by giving the world “theurgy”, a system of esoteric rights and rituals designed to aid the Platonic soul on it’s ascent. Maybe he was trying to compete with Christianity for the minds of people?

Jump forward another hundred years and the emerging schism between Christianity and the Greeks becomes rather more violent. In Hippo (in modern Algeria), St Augustine experiences an extremely emotional conversion to Neoplatonism on reading Plotinus but some years later and under considerable pressure, converts back to Christianity and eventually becomes a persecutor of 'pagans'<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, his contemporary, Hypatia, is in Alexandria (just down the coast). She is a Neoplatonist, a mathematician and astronomer. She is flayed alive by Christian hordes and her corpse dragged through the street. Moving further east, the Cappadocian Fathers, St Basil, St Gregory of Nyssa and St Gregory of Nazianzus are invited to attend the first Council of Nicaea. The Councils were convened by the Emperor Constantine who realised he needed a new religion to bind together his increasingly fractured empire. The intent was to set out the ground rules for the new consolidated 'state' religion.

### **The First Idea**

Now it gets interesting, according to Pantezis. The Cappadocians were academics and while Christian by birth, were trained in Neoplatonism, which 100-150 years after Plotinus, was the dominant philosophic system of the day. Their stated aim was to prove that the way of faith was every bit the equal of the Platonic ascent of the soul (or any other system for that matter). As such they argued strongly for a very specific definition of the Holy Trinity. In Pantezis's view, this reflects Plotinus's core contribution to philosophy; the doctrine of the Three Primary Hypostases, or three stages of reality<sup>4</sup>.

It is arcane and esoteric, but I think I can see what he means. Interestingly, the definition of the Holy Trinity was the theological ground for the later schism between the Eastern Orthodox churches and Catholicism (there were some politics at the time as well). Within the bounds of my scant understanding, I think maybe the Eastern churches were closer to the Cappadocian view and thus Plotinus.

At the end of the Neoplatonist period rose the mighty Proclus. His work is extant, respected and studied right up to the current day. He was apparently also a details man. Where Plotinus saw three realities, Proclus defined around 150 and his work represents a systematic detailing of this. I haven't read Proclus but there is a point in this extrapolation where he lays out a series of seven sub-realities between the first and second hypostases. This would indicate that either he fundamentally disagrees with Plotinus or he just didn't "get it".

Now jump forward to the beginning of the Florentine Renaissance. The last great Byzantine Neoplatonist, Gemistus Plethon, is in town for a conference and manages to convince Cosimo de Medici to sponsor a revival of Platonism. Medici selects the five year old son of his personal doctor to lead an Academy and so Marsilio Ficino is trained and installed as the leader of the Platonic Academy in Florence. A child prodigy, ordained priest and academic, Ficino does great work in reconciling Christianity to Platonism and "in his spare time" manages to translate both the entire works of Plato and Plotinus's *Enneads*. I believe he is the only person to have done so.

By contrast, a little earlier, the great St Thomas Aquinas, hugely influential in Catholicism, spent some time refuting paganism on account of its 'mystic' (spiritual) overtones. Maybe he thought this

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<sup>3</sup> 'pagan' was a generic term to differentiate Greek philosophers from Christians. It was originally used interchangeably with "Hellenes", which is Greek for "Greeks".

<sup>4</sup> Three Primary Hypostases, refer to note at the end of this article.

was properly the province of faith. In any event he used the ideas of Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (another Neoplatonist) to defend his position.

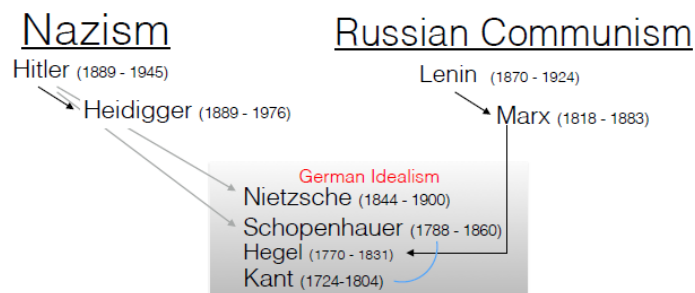
Lastly, from that late-medieval/early renaissance period, I would include Meister Eckhart, head of the Dominican order in Paris, and one of the finest Christian mystics. There is no extant evidence at all to show what inspired Eckhart. But if you read his German sermons in all their passion, back to back with Plotinus; there can be little doubt that they are singing from the same song-sheet.

### The Second Idea

Leaving the ancient world behind, let's now work backwards through the 20th and 19th centuries.

The two most disruptive Western political movements of the 20th C took place in Russia and Germany. It would be useful to have a brief look at some of the people involved and where they got their thoughts from.

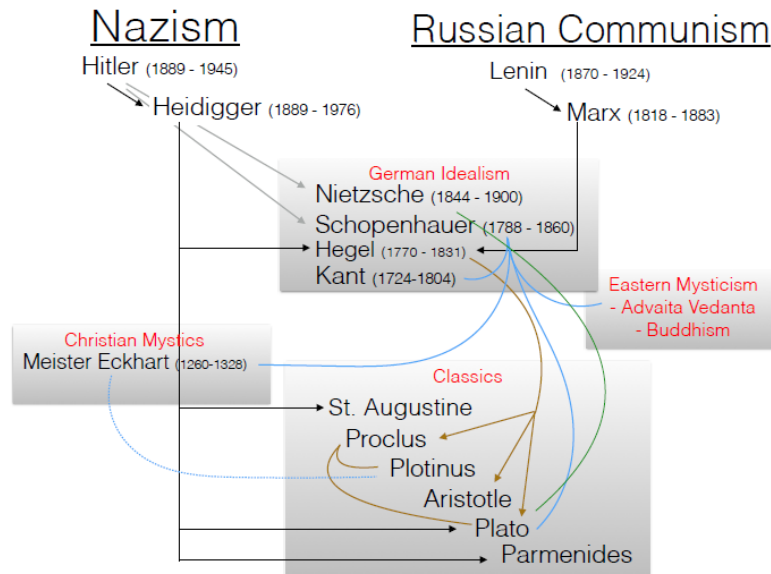
On the one hand, of course we have Hitler, a deeply troubled soul if ever there was one. Curiously, a close associate was the respected German philosopher, Heidegger. Hitler had also read directly from the earlier German philosophers Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.



On the other hand, we have Lenin, who followed the teachings of Karl Marx who in turn listed Hegel, another 19th C German philosopher as a primary influence.

It should be noted that while Hitler, Lenin and Marx may have read and been influenced by the works of these earlier philosophers, that does not imply that the earlier thinkers in any way espoused Nazism or communism. In fact, in the case of Marx, we know that although he liked Hegel, he rejected Hegel's mysticism. This is significant...

But first we need to learn a little more about the Germans. Immanuel Kant, who was apparently the very embodiment of a dry academic (one of his contemporaries remarked that it would be impossible to write a biography of Kant because he didn't have a life!) put together a series of interesting thoughts at the beginning of the century which gave rise to a lively debate (German Idealism) that continues to this day. While Kant was essentially atheistic in his view, Hegel and Schopenhauer were essentially mystical in their view. Nietzsche, whose ideas were appropriated by the Nazis, was confrontational, self-contradictory, inflammatory and went mad.



So where did they get their ideas from? Kant it seems was an original thinker for better or worse. But Nietzsche and Hegel were well read in the Greek philosophy and Schopenhauer was an early expert in The Upanishads as well as Plato and Meister Eckhart. But here is where it gets interesting; none of them cite Plotinus as an influence, not even Heidegger. Hegel, in particular, was well-read in Proclus, but Proclus was a more mechanistic thinker.

Why did nobody pay attention to Plotinus?

Well, according to Pantezis, two 19thC translators did a poor job of translating The Enneads. They concentrated on the mechanical aspects to the point of even omitting some of the more mystic/spiritual passages. Presumably, this made it more palatable to Kantian thinkers, but less valuable.

It is intriguing to think what might have been, if only people in those times had access to the full power of Plotinus's work. We all know, how a single idea can change our lives. What might have happened if Marx had heard something different in Hegel, something that made mysticism less unattractive to him. Or Hitler, if the thwarted artist in him had heard something to counter Nietzsche's rantings.

It is only a theory.

Curiously enough, however, I came across the same idea in an American translator's foreword to The Enneads, written about 100 years ago. I don't know whether he was referring to the same translation or another one, but the message was the same; the Germans got it wrong.

So, having summed up the last 2500 years in a single hour, and blamed everything on the Germans, let's close by going back to the beginning: What was the question that drove all these philosophers.

And for that, we need to go all the way back to Parmenides' poem where the goddess instructs the aspirant thus;

## “The Way of Truth”

### Fragments 2, 3

*Come now, I will tell thee—and do thou hearken to my saying and carry it away—  
the only two ways of search that can be thought of.*

*The first, namely, that It is, and that it is impossible for it not to be,  
is the way of belief, for truth is its companion.*

*The other, namely, that It is not, and that it must needs not be,—  
that, I tell thee, is a path that none can learn of at all.*

*For thou canst not know what is not—that is impossible—  
nor utter it;*

### Fragment 8

*Our judgment thereon depends on this:*

*"Is it or is it not?"*

A long time ago, the introductory course used to pose three questions;

Who am I?

What is this Creation?

What is my relationship to it?

Underneath all of those, is the essential question: “What is it that is?”



Matthew Roscoe

### The Three Primary Hypostases of Plotinus

Hypostasis (Greek: ὑπόστασις) is the underlying state or underlying substance and is the fundamental reality that supports all else. In Christian theology, a *hypostasis* or person is one of the three persons of the Trinity.

Neoplatonists argue that beneath the surface phenomena that present themselves to our senses are three higher spiritual principles or hypostases, each one more sublime than the preceding. For Plotinus, these are the soul or World-Soul, being/intellect or Divine Mind (Nous) and the One.

According to Plotinus, the soul attains virtue by devoting itself to the Intellectual Principle. Wisdom and understanding are attained by contemplation of the Intellectual Principle. The Intellectual Principle is a higher principle of reality, through which the Soul can be released from the body.

Editor’s note: This brief definition of Plotinus’s Hypostases was sourced from Wikipedia but sent me reading much further and whetted my appetite to know more. Thank you Matthew.

## Steps to Sanskrit Week

There is a traditional Sanskrit verse which essentially says, “take one step at a time”.

It’s a kind of discipline of living in the present and meeting each situation fully and with trust. Doing this, I’ve found you watch the universe unfold in front of you.

This year, taking one step at a time, I went to England to attend the International Sanskrit Week. This event was held in early August at Waterperry House near Oxford. And it was aptly named: it was a week long, attended by 150 people from all over the world and it was full of Sanskrit!



I took the opportunity to ask about the “Step” verse during one of our sessions. Some of the experienced Sanskrit scholars conferred and then said the precise origins are unknown but it is part of the Advaita Vedanta tradition.

पदं पदं प्रतिपदं अर्हति इति प्रातिपदिकम् ॥

Padam padam pratipadam arhati iti prātipadikam.

Step by step, at every step there stands waiting – quite still – that which is appropriate to each step.

I had read and heard from others of the beautiful setting of Waterperry House and the warmth and hospitality of the Sanskrit weeks and my experience confirmed these reports. It was a real and very special pleasure to spend time in the company of people who not only study Sanskrit and love the language but who also put into practice the wisdom they discover in the course of their studies. Warwick Jessup and Paul Douglas were two well known Sanskrit scholars who so generously shared their knowledge and experience.

Warwick Jessup led the international Sanskrit week. He is a Sanskrit teacher and head of the English School's Sanskrit faculty. Beside him is a statue in Waterperry House of a sanyasin (renunciate). A picture of this statue was featured on the cover of the *Tattvopadesha* which he translated (published in 2015).



Anthea and Paul Douglas, organisers of the International Sanskrit Week. Paul is the author of the popular book *Language and Truth*, published in 2010.



Jackie Bedford

**From the Editor:** Contributions and suggestions for articles of interest for the next issue of *Vision* are most welcome.

It should be noted that the views expressed in this document are not necessarily those of the School of Philosophy Auckland.