

Vision

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Philosophy and the Family

(From an address by David Farrelly given earlier this year)

Where do we start to promote reflection on questions such as Family, the cradle of a Nation? What are the principles of the human family? Are there lasting remedies for family stress?

A definition I have reflected on many times goes thus:

"Family accounts for all individuals bound together by love, affection and sacrifice. Happiness of the family depends on the cultural, religious and philosophic traditions of society."

(Shri Shantananda Saraswati)

Family is often taken for granted and said by some to be tested and even disintegrating under the influences and pressure of modern society: influences such as blind consumerism, corrupt relationships, sensuality and pleasure no matter what. All without accounting for the cost in the emotional, mental, and physical realms. "Live, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die!"

And yet – families endure, families continue to form and re-form, as they have done for millennia and without a doubt will continue to do so for as long as the magnificent play of this universe endures.

To lift our sights above the everyday concept of family – mum, dad and the kids – let us consider a definition of family.

The word "family" has its roots in the Latin *familia*, meaning "household; a body of persons who live together in one house or under one head; the unity formed by those nearly connected by blood or affinity". In a wider sense, "affinity" includes a race, or a group of people assumed to descend from a common stock, and can include nations bound together.

The New Zealand Family

So what of the New Zealand family, bound together by love, affection and sacrifice? Certainly its unity is forever being put to the test. New Zealand is a young country, in a manner of speaking, trying to establish its identity and place in the world. In historical terms, 150 years is a very short period of time. What do visitors say about us? "Friendly, warm, innovative, independent and naive enough to attempt the impossible". In many ways they taste the pioneering spirit, the after-glow of the attitude of our forebears, who came from far off places to make a new and better world based on Christianity and the Christian work ethic.

It is on record that many of our Maori brothers and sisters were quick to assimilate the principles of Christianity, only then to have their faith severely tested when many of the European settlers behaved unbecomingly.

Early New Zealand was very quick to weigh

into the concept of the welfare state right from its beginnings; a state which in many ways stands in place of family. It is sometimes called Socialism, very much akin to Communism, on the subject of family welfare. One of the basic tenets of the so-called "old Communism" was that the State stood in place of family.

Many of today's social engineering experiments are derivatives of this theory: "The State knows better than the families what is good for them." The outcome of this centralisation is well known to lead to a diminution of self-respect and personal responsibility.

Family is a unit.

Since long past, family was considered as a unit. Governments of the day, whatever be their form - Aristocracy, Timocracy, or Democracy - understood this and left families free to govern themselves from within, and to provide for and protect all of their members, save only that they did this quietly without encroaching on the freedom of their neighbours.

If family at the very fundamental level were healthy and guided by the eternal laws of human nature, there would be no need for the welfare state, no need for paid parental leave, day care centres, national superannuation, retirement villages, unemployment and domestic purposes benefits, etc, etc. No, the family would take care of all of that, as it would all the basic relationships, sex education, the place of marriage, children out of wedlock, thrift and economy and so on.

Marriage - The Natural Centre of Family?

There is an unspoken assumption in the ancient law and tradition of the vast majority of cultures, namely, that marriage between a man and a woman is the foundation of family, its natural centre.

In the Christian tradition we find "*Our Father which art in heaven*" and in the Vedic tradition "*The Absolute is the father of all*". So who, one might ask, is the Mother?

The traditional answer is Mother Nature, the universal procreative force, forever creating, nourishing and organising the transformation of all forms and creatures.

Here we find the genesis of relationships and roles. A reflection of this in the natural order is where the head of the household manifests love for all of the members without fear or favour, watching, keeping, guarding, protecting, and, where necessary, attacking and destroying. His wife and partner for life, manifesting this same impartial love, measures out, relates to a centre and nourishes, especially with words.

Through all this, the spirit is that of sacrifice and surrender. Sacrifice means work for the greater good and surrender entails setting aside personal preferences and prejudices for the sake of the preservation of unity and growth.

Utopia? Unrealistic in today's material and hedonistic world?

The wise say that the most important factor for harmonious development of life is the establishment of a single point relationship (whether it be husband/wife, teacher/pupil, etc), and that the object of this unity in the case of marriage is the resolution to face all situations in unison, come what may.

Almost daily there are new propositions about family and marriage, suggesting that they can be reconfigured by popular opinion, that co-habitation is equal to marriage; that "until death do us part" marriages are outdated; that marriage is only a contract, not a sacrament, and is subject to bargaining, conditions and termination almost without notice. What has this to do with unity, stability and equity? love, affection and sacrifice? keeping one's word?

Apart from those special few who sincerely are married to Truth (the ascetics) or to God (priests, nuns, monks and the like) it has been a long held principle that marriage is the ideal option for human beings. Anything less than this is courting trouble, not only now but for a long time to come.

A Special Celebration

An evening to honour the occasion of Mr John Russell's 70th birthday was held on Sunday, 2 May at 268 West Tamaki Road.

The Monday Group extended an invitation to all the groups who had met Mr Russell and a large gathering resulted. Barrie Preston was asked to propose a toast, and as it was such a special occasion it included some very acceptable reminiscences.

Barrie referred to the long association of many members present with Mr Russell, and went on to speak of his own enrolment in Philosophy 1 in 1966. His first tutor was Mr Dick Ryman, who was the then Leader of the School. Later, when Mr Ryman was unable to continue in that role, the founder of the School in London, Mr Leon MacLaren, asked Mr Russell – who was acting Leader in the School in Wellington at the time – to take up the leadership here.

It turned out to be a “win-win” situation for Mr Ryman, Barrie said, “as he not only handed on the burden of leadership to younger shoulders, but was also reunited with his daughter – Mrs Russell” !

Acceptance of the leadership was not without some considerable personal sacrifice on Mr Russell's part, particularly in terms of career advancement. Also, as a young man in his early 30's and relatively recently married, his commitments in the School entailed frequent weekend absences travelling to other Schools in Australasia, together with extended visits to London.

In these early years it was evident that a strong and enduring relationship was firmly established between Mr MacLaren and Mr Russell, and such was the regard that Mr



Mr and Mrs Russell

MacLaren had for him that when a difficult situation arose, and there were several in different parts of the world, Mr Russell was often asked to act as his emissary.

Barrie concluded his speech by observing that the students of the Auckland School have much reason to be grateful for Mr Russell's steadfast adherence to the laws governing human development, which has provided a real protection for us all. This was greeted by spontaneous acclamation from all present.

Mrs Russell then gave a warm and delightful speech based on her research into the meaning of “service”, during which she related the many facets of this word to Mr Russell's life prior to and since taking up the leadership. This speech drew another heartfelt round of applause.

Barrie then proposed a toast “to an extraordinary Leader, a man of extraordinary courage and fidelity”.

Mr Russell responded with his customary humour and generosity, then proceeded to cut the birthday cake – an enormous chocolate log decorated with an axe, in recognition of his numerous escapades with axes and logs!

July Residential Week

"This earth is like honey to all beings, and all beings are like honey to this earth. The same with the shining immortal being who is in this earth, and the shining, immortal, corporeal being in the body. These four are but this Self."

(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad)

The study of this Upanishad was one of the highlights of the Residential Week held in Auckland last July.

Attended by 78 philosophy students from Auckland and Wellington, and conducted by Mr Donald Lambie, Leader of the international body of Schools, the Week was regarded by many as one of the best yet.

This year, in a departure from custom, there were fewer visiting tutors from overseas and more groups were taken by local tutors. This resulted in a number of benefits, not least the opportunity for local tutors to work closely with Mr Lambie, and the fresh perspective afforded tutors and students alike.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad study sessions with Mr Lambie took place each morning as an enquiry into the meaning of the passages in Section 5 of Chapter 2. This was part of a full programme of study, meditation, maintenance of the house and grounds, and further meetings with Mr Lambie during which a seemingly endless variety of questions were posed!



Time for a quick cuppa

Other highlights were a lecture on "Philosophy and Parenting" delivered by the Leader of the School in Ireland, Mr Shane Mulhall, one evening, which was received with great enthusiasm (the lecture is available on CD from the School book shop). Arising from the impetus of this lecture, and Mr Mulhall's presence at the week, the Auckland School is preparing to make Practical Parenting courses as developed by him available to the general public next year.

In the midst of the varied activities, Mr David Ward, who is a senior member of the School



Laying the tables



Julia Brady, Jennifer Connor & Judith Broadwith from Wellington

in London and a pianist and musician of international repute, conducted daily singing sessions with his customary gusto. He also found time for extensive piano practice in preparation for a concert at the Auckland Museum as part of its Music Week, and taught a small choir of students at the Residential Week, who presented two items at a concert on the final evening.

The Museum Concert – an evening of late eighteenth century classical music for piano and cello played on period instruments – took place in the Apec Room on Wednesday, 21 July, filling it almost to bursting point. Mr Ward was joined by Auckland cellist Polly Sussex and the programme included works by Joseph Wolfli, Beethoven, Haydn and Helene Liebman.

A Youthful Perspective on the Week

by Samuel Ames

The July residential week in Auckland was a most enjoyable experience for myself, and the rest of our small group of four young men.

Tutored by Dr Tim Farquharson, the group of two from Auckland and two from the Wellington School, began the week by becoming reacquainted. That done, we were put in charge of serving early morning tea, lunch, pre-dinner drinks and after dinner coffee to visiting School Leaders and tutors, among other activities.

As a group, we felt privileged to be made responsible for such an important duty of service that required precision, respect and love. But it wasn't long before we were up to our usual "tongue-in-cheek" with the Leaders, who clearly appreciated the light-heartedness we displayed in a job that can easily become mechanical. As you can imagine, there was plenty of laughter, as well as the difficult task of gobbling up any stray chocolates which were left behind....

On the more serious side of things, we, as a group, had two meetings with Mr Lambie during which we had the opportunity to hear from him how it is possible to be reminded of one's true purpose in life and to reaffirm our resolve to pursue and fulfil our



From left: Joshua Dean, Michael Pointon, Dr Farquharson, John Hudson & Samuel Ames

responsibilities as human beings. It was a solemn moment, in which we were supported by everyone present at the Residential, and afterwards were joined by our parents and others for drinks and a formal lunch, where we were waited on instead of the other way around.

Before long the end of the week loomed and after a great concert on the Saturday night, everyone packed and departed on Sunday morning.

For me, the week promoted the message of love and discipline. As Mr David Ward (a visiting tutor) said at one of the last dinners, 'Even though the week is almost over, may we continue to live life as we are now'.

London Dance Week

by Rosemary Auld



New addition to St. James' Girls' School

Ficino Primary School and the School of Philosophy offer a form of dance study which is rare in its spiritual basis and grace of form.

Abhinaya dance, or Vedic dance as it is also known, is based on the beautiful and colourful Indian classical dance. Adapted to give expression to traditional prayers and stories, it is now being set to many varied texts and musical accompaniment.

In July I was able to travel to England to join with ladies from around the world who have been teaching and performing the dance in vastly different situations. The venue, on this occasion, was the St James Boys School in Twickenham, London, on the River Thames.

With interludes to watch the swans glide by, and the river boats or rowers wend their way beside the picturesque low path, we studied, contemplated and practised dances. We drew on our own experience of dance to let the movement speak through us, and then broadened our view of what was available and possible in composition through open-

hearted enjoyment of the company.

The five day course included informal performances by many participants. We saw the Flamenco of the Spanish dancers, an extraordinary solo based on the first verses of Genesis in the Bible, and accomplished young dancers from Leeds.

The evenings included a memorable visit to the Prom Concerts to hear Emma Kirkby, and The Academy of Ancient Music, and an outdoor Kathak dance performance in the spectacular Somerset House courtyard, with its fountains playing around the feet of the dancers as they spun across the stone pavement of the performance space.

You are welcome to contact myself (Ph. 412-8782) or Delwyn Wilson (Ph. 480-8127) to join the regular Auckland dance sessions. This is an accessible form of simple movements to prayers and varied music. We include an easy stretch warm-up and develop a vocabulary of movement and gesture based on the Indian dance.

Wine, Wisdom, Philosophy & Freedom

A relatively recent venture in the School is proving popular with students from first year Philosophy Groups, and a number came together in the recent term break to participate in different events.

The first occasion, an evening titled "Wine and Wisdom", was held on Thursday 19 August when approximately 30 students gathered in the Villa at 27 Esplanade Road. The idea was for any student in Philosophy 1 to 4 to bring some light refreshments - a plate or a bottle (preferably with something in it or on it!) - and for those moved to do so, to contribute something they had heard or read that illustrated for them what they had been discussing in their Philosophy group. Alternatively, anything that they felt from their own experience had contributed to their search for Truth could be offered.

After an hour or so of wine and nibbles, the presentations began. The offerings were enlightening, enjoyable and full of variety. One, by a former mariner (who arrived complete with sextant), illustrated how his life at sea navigating large container ships was not unlike navigating one's way through philosophy and the journey called "life". Another contributor spoke of the incredible problems in the world today, but that the way out was to use the principles of forgiveness and treating others as you wish to be treated. There was poetry, a prayer, and many other contributions that touched the heart.

As there is considerable interest in the "Wine and Wisdom" nights (this was the second put on for early group students), they will continue during term breaks. Anyone wishing to attend the next event from other levels of the School can contact Bob Sutherland (Ph. 622-0909).

Philosophy and Freedom

The second event was held on Saturday 28 August at Esplanade Road - a talk entitled "Philosophy and Freedom". As on the first occasion one of these talks was presented, ("Philosophy and Freedom", at the Cultural Day last March) it was an opportunity for students in the first year to hear a lecture on a particular topic, and put any questions to the tutors present.

The occasion began at 9.00am with tea and coffee. It was a glorious morning, with the warm spring sun streaming in through the window. "Philosophy and Freedom", taken largely from a lecture by the Leader of the School in Ireland, Mr Shane Mulhall, (and which is available on CD in the Auckland School bookshop) was presented by Brian Wilson. This lasted about an hour, and was well received. Following further refreshment, it was question time, and the morning finished by listening to some of the questions and answers put to Mr Mulhall in Dublin.

It is intended to offer further talks based on the "Philosophy and ..." series of lectures, and the idea of opening this to all students is under consideration. If you are interested in attending or participating in these talks, please contact Bob Sutherland or Brian Wilson (Ph. 09 - 269-0335; Fax 09 - 267-2183).

I do not think of all the misery, but of the glory that remains. Go outside into the fields, nature and the sun, go out and seek happiness in yourself and in God. Think of the beauty that again and again discharges itself within and without you and be happy.

- Anne Frank (1929 - 1944)

A Life of Courage and Sacrifice by Nigel Rankin

(This article was written partly as background material for a planned visit of Ficino School Senior Boys & Girls to the Antarctic Exhibition at Wellington's Te Papa Museum; but also from admiration for the life and work of Edward Wilson, the Head of Scientific Staff during Robert Falcon Scott's last journey to the South Pole in 1912).

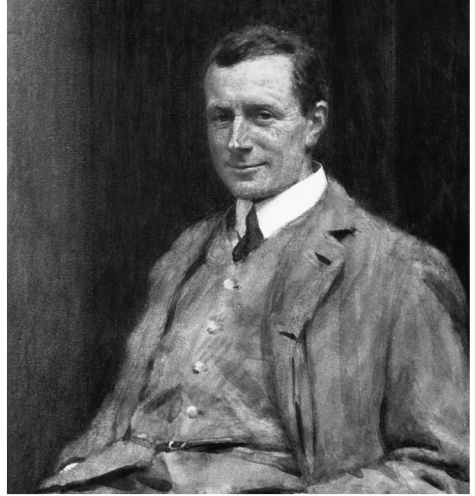
In 1901, Edward Wilson, a qualified doctor but a natural scientist, joined the first of Scott's two expeditions to the Antarctic as surgeon, artist and zoologist. He was Head of the Scientific Staff of the second, more famous journey, in which Scott's party perished in a blizzard.

Why write about Dr Wilson, rather than any other member of that extraordinary group? Perhaps because of the profound spirituality and faith, utter loyalty and self-sacrifice, enthusiasm, courage and service which he manifested throughout his life, and as he died.

Edward Adrian Wilson was born the fifth child and second son of Edward Thomas Wilson and his wife Mary in Cheltenham, England on 23 July 1872.

In early childhood he began to show both artistic skills and an interest in natural history. As a boy he lived on a farm, and spent as much time as possible observing the birds, animals and flowers around him. He was particularly interested in birds, and was said to be able to recognise any bird, and infer its occupation, by its song.

In 1891 he went to Cambridge University to study medicine. In Cambridge he was described by his father as "reserved with few friends and many acquaintances, aesthetic and very religious". In 1894 he went on from Cambridge to continue his training at St George's Hospital in London where he lived very frugally and devoted much of his time



Edward Wilson by A.U. Soord

to helping others, especially the poor children of the neighbourhood. His religious convictions were then developing such strength that he almost volunteered for missionary work. However, in 1898 he contracted tuberculosis and had to go to a sanatorium in Switzerland to recover.

Throughout this period Wilson continued to develop the personal faith which gave him the selfless reliability to sustain himself and his companions in times of crisis, but even some of his closest friends had no inkling of it.

He returned home well in 1899, married, and passed his final medical exams.

In 1900 he first met Scott, recently appointed to command the National Antarctic Expedition, and in 1901 joined the party. In Antarctica Wilson took part in many field trips to explore the coast and hinterland, culminating in the Southern Journey with Scott and Ernest Shackleton, the first serious attempt to find a route to the South Pole. The expedition returned to England in 1904.

In September 1908 Scott's plans for a second expedition to the Antarctic were well advanced and he offered Wilson the post of Head of the Scientific Staff. In 1910 the expedition left England for Dunedin, which it reached in October, finally leaving for Antarctica on 29 November 1910.

Thereafter they were beset by difficulties. The ship was all but wrecked in a great storm, and they had to use an unsatisfactory secondary position as their base. The motor-sledges broke down and the Siberian sledge-ponies turned out to be of very poor quality. However, the party set about their tasks with enthusiasm and vigour, none more so than Wilson, who was always hard at work but also always ready to drop his own work to help another. Geologist Frank Debenham described him as "quietly prominent as ever, never in the limelight if possible but always at hand", but, as physicist Charles Wright said, "not a single man from Scott down ever undertook any serious step without asking Dr. Bill's advice." Scott wrote, "There is no member of our party so universally esteemed", and Wright, "the best influence and the finest character I for one will ever meet in this life."

In the middle of the Antarctic winter of 1911 Wilson led a small party on the appalling Winter Journey in search of Emperor penguin eggs. This ghastly journey was later characterised by Apsley Cherry-Garrard as the "worst journey in the world", but it was also an example of Wilson's extraordinary powers of leadership, perseverance, endurance and care for others.

In November 1911 Scott started on his last journey, to reach the South Pole and return the next year before the winter set in. Scott's party was beaten to the Pole by Roald Amundsen, and on the terrible return journey they finally died in a blizzard only eleven miles short of food and fuel.

It is likely that it was Wilson's steadiness and self-sacrifice which kept the party going in the face of all adversity. Scott himself, in his journal, wrote, "Wilson, the best fellow that ever stepped (lived) has sacrificed himself again and again to the sick men of the party."

Sometime on March 22 or 23, Wilson died in the tent on the Great Barrier ice with Scott and Lieut. Henry Bowers. Eight months later their bodies were found by a search party. The scene was described by a young Norwegian skier, Trygve Gran, thus:

"Dr Wilson was sitting in a half reclining position with his back against the inside of the tent facing as we entered. On his features were traces of a sweet smile and he looked exactly as if he were about to wake from a sound sleep. I had often seen the same look on his face in the morning as he awakened, as he was of the most cheerful disposition. The look struck me to the heart and we all stood silent in the presence of this death".

Tributes

It seems fitting to conclude with these fine descriptions of Wilson's character:

A Chief Petty Officer in the Royal Navy said, "I never saw him excited; he was always cool and calm and collected. He was always the same; and the same to everyone. Many and long were the talks I had with him in his cabin in the winters. One came to him instinctively. One could talk to him on any subject whatever, or about oneself – he understood. He would join in any joke that was going, although he was naturally a quiet man. I never heard anyone on the ship say a word against the doctor. He was the sort of man one would give one's life for willingly".

Cherry-Garrard, after the Winter Journey, said Wilson was "gold; pure, shining, unalloyed. Words cannot express how good (his) companionship was."

An Evening at a Zen Centre

by Ulrike Stephan

During a recent trip to Germany I was fortunate to be invited to attend a Zazen (Sitting in Stillness) evening at a Zen Centre.

My sister and I drove over an hour to arrive at this country residence near a small village in rural Bavaria in the foothills of the Alps. It is a quiet, beautiful spot, located high on a ridge and surrounded only by meadows, forests and mountains. Well over 30 people attend these weekly sessions, many coming from afar.

On arrival, we take off our shoes and, equipped with a meditation cushion or a small stool, go upstairs to a large carpeted hall, the Zendo. The hall has no furniture nor furnishings. Only mats are laid out alongside the walls. A small bowl with a single incense stick, a candle and a brass gong is all I can detect. One Japanese painting decorates a wall. We all stand in silence awaiting the teacher. When she arrives we bow deeply, in Japanese fashion. The teacher strikes a gong and we all sit facing the white walls.

In a serene, slow voice she speaks to us briefly, reciting a Japanese Koan. It is about unity, the unity of all of things, of all of us sitting here, and later, when we leave this house, still being one with everything in the world.

We are silent. The teacher strikes the gong and meditation begins. We "sit" for 25 minutes.

The Zen student does not close his eyes during meditation nor does he have a mantra. He only observes the movement of his breath during his "sitting in stillness" exercise. Hence no kind of decoration or distraction embellishes the walls. Even the windows are covered with white simple cloths.

After the 25 minutes are over the teacher strikes the gong. All of us stand up rather quickly and we begin walking in single file behind the tutor, moving through the room in an orderly pattern, hands folded, not speaking. We walk with utmost attention for 5 minutes and at the gong hurry to our seats and resume our meditation posture again. The gong strikes and we sit for a second 25 minute period, followed by 5 minutes walking. The gong strikes again and the same procedure is repeated for the third time.

At last, the teacher resumes her speech, this time very briefly; in fact she only says one sentence. Again, it is a Zen Saying: "I have nothing, except my inner peace. Oh, how cool the night is!"

With this in mind we all leave the Zendo, our cushions under our arms, embracing the tutor on departure. Not a word has been spoken by us all night and inner stillness has descended upon us. It almost feels unnatural, and certainly unnecessary, to speak while we drive home.

Thanks for Contributions

Thanks are extended to students who generously contributed articles to this newsletter.

We hope there will be many more for future issues.

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Study – another way to happiness through attention, contemplation and being present

An examination of what it means to “study” reveals much that is not ordinarily associated with this word. Study is often taken to mean hard work, but not necessarily so. It can be refreshing and enlivening. Above all it is a quiet process.

Take, for example, the following definitions from two leading dictionaries:

Webster’s Dictionary Unabridged

- A state of absorbed contemplation
- a consciously reasoned effort
- something attracting close attention or examination
- to apply the mind to the acquirement of knowledge through reading and reflection, observation or experiment
- to consider deeply: meditate, reflect
- to occupy oneself with the formal study of....

Shorter Oxford English Dictionary - L.

studium, related to studere to be zealous, study

- Thought or meditation directed to the accomplishment of a purpose; studied or deliberate effort
- application of mind to the acquisition of learning; The cultivation of a particular branch of learning or science
- an artistic production executed for the sake of acquiring skill or knowledge, or to serve as preparation for future work.

A discourse or literary composition devoted to the detailed consideration of some question

- to examine in detail, seek to become minutely acquainted with or understand. To investigate a problem.

We are seeking speakers for the next Cultural Day in March 2005. This will be an ongoing series so opportunities will keep coming and help is available if needed.

It would be good if those in the Senior School could study towards producing a talk for the benefit of others, particularly those who are new to the School. It’s an opportunity to put the work into practice. Select a subject close to your heart and make a start.

In the course of study much is revealed simply by asking questions of oneself. Let those questions sit quietly within. Research through libraries and on the Internet. Take notes. Don’t rush. The answers to the questions may be quite different from what you expect. You don’t need to know a lot about something in order to study it. It’s the other way around. If you study quietly and contemplatively, the necessary knowledge will be revealed. Life is full of surprises!

(For enquiries, please contact John Denton: Ph. 520-0153; email john.denton@xtra.co.nz)

Visit to White Island

by Joan Joass

Ficino School's Senior Boys class concluded their geography syllabus volcanic studies earlier this year by undertaking a field trip with a difference.

Most of you will be aware that New Zealand is situated in an almost unique position on the globe, in that it straddles two of the earth's great tectonic plates, namely the Indo-Australian and the Pacific. The result is indeed the 'Shaky Isles', a land prone to earthquakes and intensive thermal and volcanic activity. Where else could one actively explore the crater of a live volcano?

In an attempt to encourage the boys to improve their descriptive writing skills, I have ended up producing a commentary on our visit to White Island. Perhaps you would like to share our adventure?

The Big Day

Greg, one of the crew, tosses over the mooring rope, leaps nimbly aboard and we're off. The Tait's' (owner-operators) newest 70 ft launch, "Pee Jay V", moves effortlessly down the Whakatane River. A lone seagull, perched sentinel atop a bronze statue of the Maori maiden "Wairaka" on the rocks, regards us with an unblinking stare as we head for the river mouth and the sea.

Ficino School's senior boys have been allocated deck space up in the bow, much to their gleeful satisfaction. We are sharing the boat with a number of adult passengers, also on a sightseeing trip to White Island.

Some deft manoeuvring from skipper Peter Tait and we're through the treacherous heads and away. The twin 700h.p. motors cut a foamy swathe as the boat surges forward. Ahead and to port stands Whale Island, aeons-old guardian of the Southern Bay of Plenty.



White Island

Most of the boys hang over the rail in eager anticipation, watching the bow spray cast off rainbows and hoping for a glimpse of a dolphin. In the crisp air of an early autumn morning, we're mainly snuggled into fleeces, parkas and woolly hats, awaiting the hot soup and fresh crusty bread we can see the crew handing round to the cabin passengers.

Twelve-year-old Justin remains perched in the bow, spray-drenched and clad in his summer T-shirt. When I question him, he grins and cheerfully informs me he's really a penguin!

On the horizon, a pale-blue smudge, at first no bigger than a thumb, is growing slowly larger and clearer. Our destination for the day: New Zealand's most accessible active volcano.

Destination Reached

Landing on White Island is a mini-adventure in itself, involving a rather unsteady descent into a rubber inflatable, followed by a short trip to where a rusty iron ladder still clings to an eroded concrete jetty, relics of a sulphur mining venture early last century.

We scramble up cautiously, complete with yellow hard-hats and gas masks, looking, I suspect, a little like some huge and grotesque colony of ants.

We pick our way over some boulders to the beach, where our guide, Jenny Tait, gives us a safety briefing: what to do if rocks and bombs start flying through the air. "Good heavens!" I think, "This is THE REAL THING!"

We walk, single-file and in an awed (and most unusual) silence, towards the crater. Jenny points out the scientific instruments, placed in strategic positions, which are constantly monitoring the island. Amongst them is a seismograph, thermometers and even a solar-powered camera that relays photos to a web-site every 30 minutes.

The landscape is barren, a Mars moonscape, layer upon layer of ash and grit, all in shades of red, grey, magenta, purple. The cliffs are apple-crumble, gouged and carved by rain run-off; there's precious little vegetation to prevent it, just the odd slash of green where a hardy ice-plant has a foot-hold.

The path crunches and crumbles underfoot, a garden of delicate orange-yellow sulphur flowers, interspersed with grey mud, dotted with steaming fumaroles. These latter are canary yellow in colour and many have sharp needle-like sulphur crystals in their throats: no wonder they hiss and roar!

Above and behind the crater, towering cliffs steam quietly, in direct contrast to the immediate vicinity where a bright glistening wall of sulphur houses a roaring geyser of super-hot steam, shooting some 10 metres into the air. It's like a scene from Hades, and several of us have resorted to using the gas masks for relief from the acrid odours that pervade the area.

At last we stand right on the edge of the

present crater (it apparently changes often). It's half-full of liquid, a turquoise coloured broth with wisps and curls of white vapour coiling eerily across the surface; a true primordial wizard's potion!



Steam geyser

For those with a scientific bent, Jenny informs us that the temperature is 52 deg. C and the pH is 0.7; in short, a brew of highly concentrated sulphuric and hydrochloric acid. The level is currently rising at the rate of 0.5m per week and there's some consternation that if it breaches the crater wall, the sea could get in and we'd have another Krakatoa on our hands.

Watch this spot....

Homeward Bound

Eventually we trail back to the beach, stopping en-route to inspect the ruins of the old sulphur mining works. It's a rather forlorn and ghostly place, where giant cedar beams, rusted hoppers and even a semi-buried tractor with solid rubber tyres are still discernable.

We return finally to the launch, thankful to hand over our gas masks, collect a picnic lunch and relax in the warmth of the cabin.

"Pee- Jay V" makes a last circumnavigation of the island and begins the journey back to Whakatane. The sky has clouded over and the sea is steely grey. By luck, as a grand finale, we encounter a school of some 30 plus dolphins, which treat us to a 15 minute display, leaping, diving and wake-surfing all around the boat.

The impressions of this remarkable day will last a lifetime.

The Story of the Indian Bus Driver

An Australian student of philosophy was travelling in a typically crowded rickety bus in a poor rural district of India when it stopped to pick up and drop off passengers. Just as the bus was about to move off two somewhat dishevelled urchins started to fight near the door to the bus. As they fell to the ground adopting all sorts of unsporting tactics, the driver stopped the bus, got out and separated them. He dusted them off, sat down on the entrance step, placed a boy on each of his knees facing each other and told them, "You are brothers. In Truth we are all members of the one family of humanity of which God is the father. Therefore you should love one another, stop fighting, apologise for your forgetfulness and be friends." He then wiped their faces and their somewhat wet eyes and patted them both affectionately on the head. When the boys had made peace the man set them both

down and returned to his driving. The passengers who were in on the encounter entirely approved and were not at all concerned by the delay in the journey.

Our Australian friend was deeply moved by the encounter. He said that we could safely presume that the driver did not know who the boys were, what their caste was, or who their family was or even if any member of their family was close by. None of this mattered to the driver. What mattered to him was that the boys were cared for and instructed in the ancient laws of their tradition.

Surely this is how a honourable and just society is supposed to work. This is an example of the real wealth of living philosophy.

(submitted by an Auckland student)

And a story about Elephants....

It begins with the appearance on the rim of a blue day in Kenya of some bull elephants walking in single file across a great plain, not as elephants usually do but indifferent to all about them, as if something invisible ahead were drawing them. They did so for some three hours and there was nothing to explain their strange compulsive march, until a clump of trees and bushes appeared like an oasis in that waste of land. Then came an inkling of what it was all about. A ring of lions was slowly tightening round that circle of bush, but a tall manly bull, in the lead, walked straight through the pride of lion, vanished into the bush and some time later walked out of the bush with

an elephant cow and her newly born calf, between them... The bulls took the cow and the calf into their keeping and they went off, without a backward glance. Now, how had they known?... I do not know - for me it remains a tremendously moving illustration of the caringness and the provision that is in nature, and in the animal species, to make the survival of life possible; the in-built protection of life. It is one of the most tender and caring episodes I know. I could tell you so many stories about elephants I have known. But this, somehow, is one of the most beautiful.

from "A Walk with a White Bushman"-
Laurens van der Post

Books & CDs

The series of "Philosophy and" lectures by Mr Shane Mulhall and other speakers from the Dublin School continue to be bestsellers in our book shop. The lectures are enjoyed by students from all levels of the School, and we owe a continuing debt of gratitude to the generosity of the Dublin School in making the lectures freely available. Further thanks to Brian Wilson for his tireless efforts in getting the CDs commercially produced.

Also in book shop are copies of "500 Thoughts", compiled on CD by the School's Webmaster. This is a collection of quotes from "Thoughts for the Day" and "Thoughts for the Week", and can be purchased for \$20 from either book shop or via our website: <http://www.philosophy.school.nz>

There are also copies of "Vivekachudamani", translated by Swami Madhavananda, and fresh stocks have recently arrived of the ever popular "Good Company", consisting of extracts from conversations with Shri Shantananda Saraswati.

Thought Record – Study to be Silent

I remember
handwriting in a poetical form
shows the mind to finish each thought.
Others crowding in have to wait their turn
and in the waiting comes space
clarity
and the echoing crowd fades and forgets
until the clean-picked bones
shine on the page
complete
Satisfied.
Thank you Lord.

- by Anita Hudson

In Praise of the Humble Comma

The gods, they say, give breath, and they take it away. But the same could be said, could it not, of the humble comma. Add it to the present clause, and, of a sudden, the mind is, quite literally, given pause to think; take it out if you wish or forget it and the mind is deprived of a resting place. Yet still the comma gets no respect. It seems just a slip of a thing, a pedant's tick, a blip on the edge of our consciousness, a kind of printer's smudge almost. Small, we claim, is beautiful (especially in the age of the microchip). Yet what is so often used, and so rarely recalled, as the comma, unless it be breath itself?

(Pico Iyer)

Thoughts for the Day

"Men go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motions of the stars, and they pass by themselves without wondering."

- St. Augustine (354-430 AD)

"When the mind exists undisturbed in the Way, nothing in the world can offend, and when a thing can no longer offend, it ceases to exist in the old way."

- Sengtsan (d 606 AD)
The third Patriarch of Zen

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Term Dates for 2005

	Commences	Finishes
Term 1	Monday 31 January	Sunday 24 April
Term 2	Monday 16 May	Sunday 7 August
Term 3	Monday 5 September	Sunday 27 November