



News and views from the School

Twice termly: Issue no 11



Welcome to Issue No. 11.

I hope you will enjoy the three articles in this issue, all contributions from students in the School worldwide:

- Living with Ficino
- Facing Alzheimers
- Marathon Man

Go to [Schoolinsight](#) for sign-up form, back issues and other material. With very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year,

Christine Lambie, editor



Marsilio Ficino, the 15th century Platonic philosopher, wrote several volumes of letters which are being translated by the School. The head of the translation group, a life-long devotee of Ficino, tells of this work and his relationship with this influential philosopher.

Living with Ficino Clement Salaman, London

As an undergraduate, I passed through my university career looking for a source of real knowledge, and knowing that I had not found it. I became disillusioned and cynical. And yet underneath this cynicism there was a deep conviction that such knowledge did exist. There really was another realm though it was not generally known and not generally explored.

From the very beginning of the course in the School I felt another dimension in life. Some time after this I found myself coaching Latin to a 13 year-old girl. At this point which of the two of us knew the less Latin was a moot point. However I then acquired the ridiculously unjustified reputation of being a Latin

scholar . . .

First Introductions

Not long afterwards I was 'invited' to see Mr MacLaren. He was sitting comfortably on his favourite chair. He

greeted me with his usual affability and kindness but somehow I began to feel the iron fist just beneath the velvet glove. 'Clem, I would like you to read this'.

'This' proved to be one of the most extraordinary spiritual writings that I had ever read, 'a theological dialogue between 'God and the Soul' by Marsilio Ficino. It contained a doctrine that was entirely new to me: that the soul, the very heart of man was not different from God. Of course! No other theology made any sense. Gone were all those blessed souls playing harps to an unlikely anthropomorphic Father. Here was another God altogether, a living spirit that was at the heart of every man: a spirit nevertheless that embraced its devotees.

Renaissance Group

Mr MacLaren then added, 'I would like you to join a group of people to translate this, and any other letters from 'Mr Ficino' who seems to have been a realized man, in the West.' I was totally dumbfounded. It seemed to me that I myself was totally unsuitable in every way to join such a group.

However, as so often happens in the School, the impossible occurs. Thus on a leafy autumn day a group of some 6-8 unlikely-looking scholars assembled to translate the letters of Marsilio Ficino, a task which no lesser person than the Head Librarian of the Warburg Institute declared to be quite impossible. Of course in one way he was right. To produce a really good translation the translator needs to be at the same level as the original author.

Gradually the task moved forward and in time, 3-4 other groups were created to help the original one. Their task was to create first translations to be revised by the original group. This way of working has been applied to all the other groups subsequently formed.

Always it has seemed most important for the group to grow in philosophic stature and this has happened, often in quite miraculous ways. These groups have been bound together by mutual love. Very few people leave the Renaissance Group. The gelatine of love is too strong.

Translation

It has been obvious from the start that a translator has great difficulty in letting go of attachment to his translation. So it is a huge step when this becomes simply natural. It has become a question of learning to surrender what you think the phrase means so that the group arrives at a consensus.

The estimation in which the work of Ficino has been held has risen in the most extraordinary way. Before 1975 the purview of Ficino was only open to a few scholars, whose work was greatly admired but mainly ignored. Now his work is covered extensively in academic conferences and philosophic studies, both of which have been fully supported by members of the translation group.

Personal Friend

There is a timelessness about his words in which his translators have found the rest and harmony to complete the work: and not merely to complete it but to find just the right words which take them into that other dimension. To enter it is to acquire true creativity. Not only did he write so powerfully about love but he also brought into the English language the concept of true or Platonic Love, specifically in Spenser and Shakespeare.

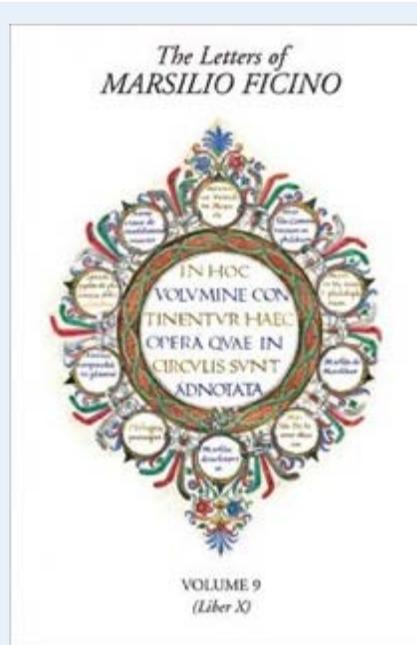
Ficino's view was that any beauty was ultimately the divine beauty of God, albeit sometimes well covered. Thus beauty should be embraced, not spurned, as it was generally in the Middle Ages, as an obstacle to spiritual work. Beauty for Ficino was the inspiration of pure love and the open door to true awakening. He invites us to step in. What we shall be stepping into is the blaze of beauty which constituted the outward face of the Renaissance and leads the way to the renaissance within. For me Ficino has transformed my personal relationships and taught me how to value without any judgement, and in all circumstances to address the divine in everyone.

It would be impossible to work so long with an author and not reflect some of the beauty of Ficino's mind. Ficino wrote at one point that you will not find yourself in yourself but in another. To worship that beauty in

body and spirit is perhaps Ficino's most important lesson.

Over the years Ficino has become a personal friend to many of us. Looking over the breakfast table I seem to glimpse another personage is there. I do not know who it is but I suspect it is Ficino. He has summoned us to the work and called upon us to finish it before it is too late. Festina lente et feliciter (idiomatically: more haste less speed)

See Volume IX of Ficino's letters below. The first volume of letters was published in 1975.



Top Tips - items recommended by readers

Ficino Letters Vol 9: From the final years of Ficino's life, this volume includes 7 letters written to Lorenzo de' Medici. As in all his volumes of letters, Ficino rises above the limits of time, place, and individuality to express the philosophy which inspired the renaissance. Available through the School bookshop or Amazon. See more at [FicinoIX](#)

2. Distance Learning: Anyone can attend a philosophy class online, and this is **now available for Macs** (not iPad) as well as pc's. See the new group starting in Spanish, as well as the Sanskrit class online. For more information on all available classes, go to [DistanceLearning](#)

Sanskrit forum – Gai Kroczek, Perth, moderates a forum for Sanskrit enthusiasts. On the site is support for exams, Sanskrit texts, translations of study texts, chanting of verses, worksheets, study aids etc You can even chat in Sanskrit to others. Go to [SanskritForum](#) and click on register to join.

4. Fruit of 20 years. The school in Georgia, USA, has produced this book detailing its work since inception. This shows what a small school can do. Available through the School bookshop.



Two New York students describe facing adversity together. Eileen's disease was diagnosed in February 2011. She is 65; Michael is 70. They have both been students in the School for nearly 40 years. Bravely, they tell of their perspectives on this situation.

Living with Alzheimer's Eileen & Michael Posnick, New York

Eileen:

At first I was surprised and didn't believe it to be true, and shortly after, horrified, deeply saddened, and frightened. I felt that I just wanted to close my eyes and disappear. I even felt sometimes that I just wanted to pull the covers over my head and die. But whenever I said this, Michael very strongly and sternly forbade me to say it again. Alzheimer's carries a stigma; when people talk to me they seem to be seeing the disease. People need to hear how to treat a person with Alzheimer's Disease - with respect and compassion. I'm still me – in spite of this disease.

My fear is that this disease might rob me of the things I love - being able to interact intelligently and coherently with people, singing, memorizing Shakespeare's sonnets (I know several of them by heart now), playing the piano and the recorder – (I play both instruments pretty well). But even with this disease, I cannot imagine that there will ever be a time when I can no longer sing and make music. Music is a magnificent balm to the mind and heart.

I exercise nearly every day on the stationary bicycle or treadmill, with earphones and iPhone, singing aloud the alto parts of Handel's Messiah and Mozart's Requiem (I have memorized both), and then on to Santana and Bob Dylan.

Courage and Grace

Strength comes from the loving care of my husband and son, the support and love from my group at the School, our friends, and our tutors. And meditation twice a day is an extraordinary gift. Since receiving the frightening diagnosis I find that meditation, and the depth of peace, knowledge and truth that it provides, offers a powerful way of facing this with courage and grace.

After so many years, and all that has been given to me, I see that the School teaching provides a viewpoint that has kept me steady and helped me to be free from the grief that still arises, though much less frequently.

I feel it is very important for people who have this devastating disease to recognize that they still have much to say, much to contribute, and much love to give. Don't forget: I'm still me – in spite of this disease.

Michael:

The 6 - 8 months following the diagnosis were extremely challenging; in many ways the world we knew was turned upside down. Eileen dropped into a temporary depressive state. She had received an excellent education, always at the top of her class, fluent in Hebrew, with both BA and MA degrees in Musicology, taught at college level, produced major musical and dramatic events in New York and could complete the Sunday NY Times crossword puzzle in short order. The thought of 'losing her mind' with no remedy in sight was devastating and paralyzing.

The initial period included more pronounced symptoms, a rash of side effects from the new medications (the benefits of which remain questionable), days of anxiety-producing neuro-psychological testing for research purposes, frequent periods of depression and anger, a deep sense of loss and grief and, most debilitating, the feeling that the life we had enjoyed for so long had changed irrevocably and that the life ahead was a dense fog of unknowns – medically, financially, legally and just in day-to-day living.

We spent thousands of dollars for legal assistance arranging wills and other legal/medical documents and, most pressing, establishing trusts to protect our retirement savings. In fact, the lawyer's first advice was to divorce, leaving Eileen with few assets and me with no legal responsibility for her care. We considered this option for a while until we realized its utter falseness and terrible emotional effect. Frequency and costs of doctors' visits rose exponentially. (Alzheimer's is only one of the age-related medical conditions we are addressing.)

Who should know?

One of the most difficult aspects of the early period was deciding who should know about the disease. Eileen has exhibited great courage in speaking about the disease, first with our group in the School and then to a wider circle. The acceptance of our situation has been healing for her and also has brought great support and love from all. So our lives have come to a kind of balance despite the unknowns.

We tutor a Part 4 class in School. I do most of the talking, but when Eileen has something to say, or even sing, as she has done on a number of occasions, she is lucid, heartfelt and on the mark - and the class listens with full attention.

These days, there are meltdowns and periods of frustration, daily hunts for misplaced objects, weekly schedules and reminders taped to mirrors and cabinets, mayonnaise in the freezer and so on. There is also deep laughter and deep appreciation for the life we have. The greatest danger is thinking ahead. The greatest comfort is living in the present moment. The strongest bonds are trust and love.

Turning point

What gives me hope? At first, the fear of the unknown was a crushing weight on the increasingly fragile present moment. I discovered expectations I didn't know I had. I wondered how to play a game I could not win. There were/are bad dreams, endless frustrations with medical, legal and financial entities, wondering what was happening to the person I married, where was she going, what would remain, watching my treasured independence dwindle as Eileen's dependency grew, trying to learn my new and consuming role as caregiver, to stay steady at work and wondering how long we were to live in this limbo of loss and loneliness.

Some mornings I awoke and realized that hope was gone. Strangely enough, this actually became a turning point. I accepted the loss of hope and found in its place the bittersweet fullness of the present moment. Many times in the midst of turmoil and frustration, I would say to Eileen: "This is it. This is what we have. This is our situation. You don't like it; I don't like it. But this is what we are facing now. We have the tools. And we are going to do this together, no matter how we feel about it." This gave us strength. We do not hope, but we are not hopeless.

Alzheimer's Disease can produce feelings of isolation and loneliness for both patient and caregiver. It is impossible to imagine what this situation would be like without the 40 years of study, meditation, group meetings, good company and guidance our association with the School has provided. In fact, as the list of what is taken grows, the list of what abides grows clearer and steadier. It is love, the knowledge that I would never leave Eileen to suffer alone, and although many pieces of our beautiful lives are falling away as memory fades, what remains is love, what endures is the gentle care and sustaining touch of the Absolute.

Love

What does 'love' mean now? In some ways, what it has always meant – to care fully for Eileen, the family, my students – no hiding, no blaming, no regret, no remorse. But now the experience is deeper, more challenging. Partly because of our age and partly due to the demands of this disease, we are increasingly aware of the preciousness of these passing moments: the stillness in group meetings, the company of friends, the little child in the restaurant, the rain, and the underlying vitality of the passing show.

I don't feel as if I am loving stronger; I feel that love is making me/us stronger. Of course, love has never been a problem for Eileen, it is her abiding gift.

Reply to Michael and Eileen: [*insightalz*](#)

Open Weekend at Mahratta, Sydney

The Sydney School hosted ***Behind the Wall***, the open garden weekend on Oct 13-14. This was an exhibition of sculpture in the house and grounds; visitors were also welcome to tour the unusual art deco mansion. The event attracted over 1,000 visitors. See more at [SydneySchool](#).





Philosophy in Action - one student describes his practice

Marathon Man

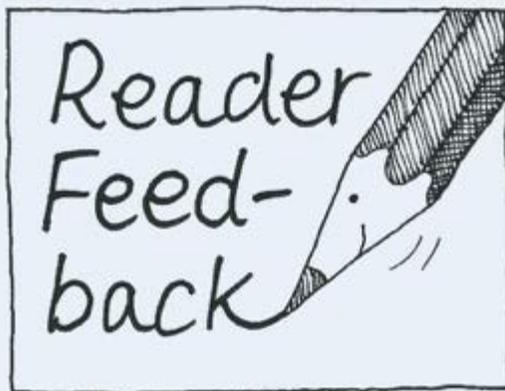
Naresh Nana, Johannesburg, has completed the Comrades ultra-marathon (89km) 24 times. Yes that's 56 miles!

I started to run the race in the dark days of apartheid when many non-whites were not allowed to participate in any sport. However, running was one of the early sports that became multiracial. The Comrades marathon became one of the symbols of unifying a nation. We are all equal when we start the Comrades marathon. There is a surrender of ego that happens to all participants of the race and there is a single consciousness that pervades throughout the course of the distance of the race. Anyone who has completed the Comrades marathon is a winner. In every run there is a moment when the runner disappears and there is only running. Body, mind and heart function together and an experience of connectedness arises.

Connecting with the soles of the feet and the touch of the earth, one experiences the coolness, softness and warmth. There is a continuous connection to the earth which gives rise to freedom. My motto for running is "when you run, good things happen".

Learn more about the Comrades marathon

Reader Feedback



*Newsletter was a great read. The Brendan Duddy article was fascinating. You really wonder how he survived - I suspect he was protected by a good daemon for a greater good. I thought the article on the Olympics was also good. I forwarded the whole newsletter to my personal trainer. I think that's interesting in itself - that I can forward it to someone outside the school and feel confident that it could actually inspire. **Melbourne***

I have been using the Insight Timer [insight No8], both for my own meditation and also to communicate with fellow meditation practitioners throughout the world. It was great to see you include in the newsletter encouragement to use it. Two terrific by-products have been both to connect with

fellow students and also to let fellow meditators know that they can join an institution such as ours to further their meditation practice.

*Rachel, who is a student half way around the world in the Sydney School connected with me through the Insight Timer. Although we have never met, we have shared ideas and experiences about practical philosophy, the school and our meditation practice. It was also so nice recently to receive from her best wishes and prayers regarding the recent storm that hit New York. My wife has also connected through the Insight Timer with a student from the Toronto school. The Insight Timer is a nice application to show that we are all one consciousness no matter where we are on the planet. **New York***

Thanks for reading

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Please keep that feedback coming. I need all your suggestions of personal stories, insights, links, articles, cartoons, video clips – anything that will be of interest to our philosophy community. Do you know someone in the School who has an interesting story to tell? E-mail me at: editor@seslondon.org. Thanks again for reading, CL

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