

# Commensal

## The Newsletter of the Philosophical Discussion Group

Number 94

November 1998

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**Subscriptions** : Membership is £5 in the UK, for those not choosing *PDG* as one of their two "free" SIGs, £7.50 elsewhere. Cheques payable to *British Mensa Limited* and sent to the Editor.

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Published 1998 by the Editor for the *Philosophical Discussion Group of British Mensa*. Printed 1998 by *British Mensa*, Wolverhampton. Distributed by mail.

**25<sup>th</sup> October 1998****Theo Todman****EDITORIAL**

You might well be asking yourselves what happened to September's issue of *Commensal* ? Well, I got too busy at work. I was nearly ready at the back end of August, with the issue drafted & the margins replete with annotations ready for transfer. I'd decided to pause for breath before pouncing on Roger Farnworth's latest offering, when suddenly the 15-hour days hit me and I had neither time nor energy for anything else.

Roger phoned me up yesterday to ask what was going on & gave me the good advice to just get the issue out, minus annotations, lest we all lose the thread. So, I've abandoned the September issue & any commentary. If I get time, I'll post remarks on this edition's contributions along with the rest of you in the next edition. As things stand, I can pretend we're early with the November edition !

So, on we go. Apologies for the delay. It'd help me greatly if you could send me contributions for the January edition on diskette, or at least in high-quality typescript. Otherwise, your contributions will have to queue until next year when I've hopefully got the time to re-type them.

**New Members**

As usual, we start off by welcoming new members to the SIG. Eight new members this time, so welcome to :-

- Kelvin Clayton
- David Fisher
- Nicholas Cade
- Aleksander Kowalski
- Ms J. Johnstone
- Ms A. McLeod
- Ms V. Rose
- Robert Bucknor

Unfortunately, I have to report that a number of former contributors to the SIG have failed to renew their Mensa Membership, or have otherwise decided enough is enough. These include Sheila Blanchard, Nina Burton, E. Ron Kermode & Peter McCarthy. Best wishes to you all.



### **PDG Conferences**

The date of our first conference is settled on 7<sup>TH</sup> – 9<sup>TH</sup> May 1999 This is not the “default” date announced last time, but is the other possibility I gave. My preferred date had been booked in the interim.

Thanks to those of you who responded to the questionnaire. I had thought there were 6 of you, but researching my records reveals only 5 (Aleksander Kowalski, Leslie Haddow, Mike Rossell, Michael Nisbett & Roger Farnworth). All reasonably keen & two supplying cheques. What about the rest of you ? For the convenience of those who didn't get around to it last time, I attach another copy of the questionnaire. The invitation has now gone out to ISPE, though two of the above respondents are in ISPE (Aleksander & Roger).

One important point. A few of you were boggled by the question “would you be prepared to present a paper”. The event is a small, informal event, so this is not an idle question – if no-one has anything to say, then nothing will be said. Don't be intimidated though.

### **RIP LECTURES**

Please note the start of this season's Royal Institute of Philosophy lectures, listed below. Annoyingly I forgot all about them and so missed out on Bernard Williams' lecture last week. I'll definitely have to make the last in the series, given that it's on “the fact-value distinction”, one of my hobby-horses !

#### **Royal Institute of Philosophy Annual Lecture Series, 1998-9**

##### **The Good, the True and the Beautiful: Enquiries into Contemporary Value Theory**

#### **1998**

9 October	David Wiggins <i>Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Value</i>
16 October	Paul Horwich <i>Norms off Language</i>
23 October	Bernard Williams <i>Epistemic Values, Normativity and Naturalism</i>
30 October	Simon Blackburn <i>Battering, Gilding, and Staining</i>
6 November	John Leslie <i>The Divine Mind</i>
13 November	Ronald Hepburn <i>Values and Cosmic Imagination</i>
20 November	David Evans <i>Beyond Reality: Plato's Good Revisited</i>



- 27 November Robert Hopkins  
*Beauty and Testimony*
- 4 December Anthony Price  
*Criticising Values*
- 11 December Roger Fellows  
*Enchantment*

### **1999**

- 15 January Sebastian Gardner  
*Value and Idealism*
- 22 January Jonathan Dancy  
*Reasons and Values*
- 29 January John Haldane  
*Spiritual Values, Consolation and Abandonment*
- 5 February Timothy Sprigge  
*Is the esse of value percipi?*
- 12 February David McNaughton and Piers Rawlings  
*Deontology and Value*
- 19 February Anthony Savile  
*Aesthetic Value*
- 26 February Stephen Mulhall  
*Cavell, Murdoch and the Fact- Value Distinction*

***All Lectures to be given at 14 Gordon Square, London WC1 at 5.45 pm.***

### **Next Issue of Commensal**

I had written the following ... "You will see that I've caught up the schedule to issue at the beginning of the month. Helped by your prompt responses !".

Well, by a subterfuge, we have, so we'll try for **15th December** as the closing date for contributions to **C95**.

Best wishes,

**Theo**



7th August 1998

Anthony Owens

**PATTERNS OF LIFE ..... and DEATH (?)**

**Patterns of Life:** Boris Pavlovitch Belousov was investigating the Krebs cycle, a metabolic pathway by which living cells break down organic foodstuffs into energy. Mixing citric acid, potassium bromate, sulphuric acid, and a catalyst of ceric ions in a largely inorganic approximation of the process, he produced a solution which oscillated between being colourless and yellow-hued. His manuscript was rejected in 1951 as impossible. Some ten years later, Anatoly Zhabotinsky replaced the ions with an iron reagent and changed the oscillation to between red and blue. The reaction gained acceptance, becoming known as the BZ reaction. Using the chemical ruthenium bipyridil as catalyst it can be excited into action through the influence of light. It is an example of self-organisation in a system far from thermodynamic equilibrium. So are you: or rather you are a myriad of such systems, some extremely complex.

When I read about this, in **Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield's** superb '**The Arrow of Time**', **W H Allen, 1990**, a book which has been mentioned by Theo in the past, and which is a remarkably comprehensive tour of science using the arrow of time to stitch it all together, I speculated, in typical OTT fashion, looking for oscillations in human behaviour. How would we look to a life-form so alien that to it humanity was no more than a slime-mould. It would see something which, largely, was mobile during the day and dormant at night. It would detect oscillations in many of the population as they set off from where they rested at the same time each day to the same place and returned at the same time in the evening. What would it make of the sudden, but regularly sudden, switch of behaviour at the weekend? It would also have to find a reason, not for the annual August migration to the Costas, but for those who do not take part in it. Would it devise a strange attractor in its mathematical models, searching for patterns of randomness in what it saw as deterministic chaos? We would have an advantage over it. We know what we're doing, don't we? Of course there is the little matter of the 'readiness potential' (**New Scientist, 1.4.89**), by which the electrical potential of the scalp is reported to change before we make a decision. Do our brains simply note what is about to happen and then come up with some reason for it which we swallow like ice cream at a children's party? After all, our dreams only seem fantastic when we wake up and are able to make comparisons. It puts a new slant on the expression, 'You'll believe anything', doesn't it? Perhaps you will !

**Abortion:** I'll try to respond to **Stef Gula (C93/25)** without using the words 'scrape' and 'barrel'. How many abortions have been carried out on twelve year old gang rape victims ? When is it valid to use extreme cases to set general laws ? How much of the girl's difficulty is due to: 1) the brutality; 2) the rape; 3) society's reaction; and 4) carrying the child to term ?



Do I detect support for my 'licence to populate'? 'Being married' is 'obvious' because it shows the necessary commitment.

My 'provocation' was precisely because I think it a serious matter and was directed at those who work in abortion clinics, whom I might most kindly describe as examples of retrograde evolution. A new dominant male animal will often kill its defeated predecessor's offspring, but then it is driven by the need for its own offspring to be born and survive in a world governed by fitness. What these persons' excuse is escapes me. To ease suffering? Fine: let's napalm Africa; or form an orderly queue at Beachy Head perhaps? It can't be done any other way because suffering is relative. Theo has just about said it all in response to **Sheila Blanchard (C93/30-32)** and I am most grateful. I have the greatest respect for Sheila and wholeheartedly endorse the idea that agreement on meaning is vital: witness the nonsense in much debate about Artificial Intelligence. Nevertheless, I feel that in the case of 'murder' and 'killing' one might say that anyone who uses the word 'murder' is implying disapproval of the particular form of 'killing' in question and that this enhances communication, which is the purpose of 'meaning' in this context. I take **Martin Lake's** point (**C93/42**), but then it isn't 'fair' that women should be the ones to have to bear children. It's just bad luck, but all persons are ultimately responsible for their own well-being.

**Anthony Owens**

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**10th August 1998**

**Frank Walker**

Dear Theo,

I cannot get to Mensa at Braziers, which is a pity because the topics for discussion interest me hugely. I enclose a note of two sides for the first topic. Can you see that they get introduced one way or another, please.

### **THE SOURCE OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR**

*"Why does our society, through its ... education system ... produce so many of its members who go in for criminal behaviour?"*

The big rise in crime per head of population, after fluctuations caused by the 1939-45 war, seems to have begun in the late 1950s and to have increased at an accelerating rate until the 1990s and is showing some signs of flattening out at present. No doubt there are many interacting causes. This short article suggests two.

First there has been peace in Western Europe since 1945. Such wars as have been fought have been short and limited. Effectively there has been no occasion for armed forces (or any other forces) to do what they are trained



for. Some young males seem to have a need for violent, lethal occupation. In earlier years they could join the Army or Navy with likelihood of active service in war until they were old enough to enjoy a peaceful life. Nowadays some become mercenaries in other parts of the world, others turn to violent crime for excitement and probably gain.

Secondly, at school and university in the 1920s and 1930s there were a great many rules of behaviour that seemed stupid and pointless. Rules about dress and where one must or must not be at particular times : petty rituals like doffing one's cap to a teacher, etc. Teenagers and those up to mid-20s are rebellious against authority and tradition. They have a need to express this rebellion by breaking rules, and trying to escape detection, and punishment. From about 1950 onwards most of these rules were swept away. The only ones retained were aligned with the general criminal law. So if a schoolboy or undergraduate wants to break a rule he can now only do so by criminal behaviour, with serious consequences for the victim. No one was a whit the worse off if an undergraduate failed, or refused, to wear a gown after dark. But he got quite a lot of satisfaction from flouting the rule, showing his rebellion to the proctor, and testing whether he or the bulldog was fleet of foot. We should earnestly consider bringing back "silly" rules.

**Frank Walker**

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**10th April 1998**

**Graham Dare**

### **IS ABORTION RIGHT ?**

In western societies birth control, and abortion, have become widespread, and generally legal, in spite of the Catholic Church being against both. Most other religions are also against these (such as the Muslim religion, etc.).

There is no question that abortion is killing a living being, whether one considers the foetus to be human, or not, at such an early stage of development in the womb. It is certainly true that if you look at a human foetus very early in development it has the same shape as most animals do, but, in any case, most abortions are carried out past this stage.

The foetus could not feel pain until the nervous system is developed, but is pain the issue as to whether one can kill a living being ?

Once the first brain cells have developed, one must assume that the spirit has entered the body so at that point it is certainly killing.

The strongest evidence that abortion is wrong is the serious depression that most women experience afterwards, which is either their bodies telling them that it is wrong, but more likely it is spirit telling them through their consciences.



Of course, the child may have a poor quality of life if it was unwanted, but there is a long list of couples wanting to adopt.

If there is something definitely wrong with the baby, the body will usually miscarry anyway, but if it does not we should probably help nature with this. But this is even more difficult if there is only a possibility that something is wrong. If we had the courage of our convictions we would let nature take its course, give birth, and then decide whether to kill the baby if something is wrong, but the law does not allow this, even though evolution by natural selection has ensured this in the past. The only answer is to follow our consciences, and ask spirit to help.

In the case of contraception, the key question is whether using the contraceptive pill (or anti-spermicidal solutions (*sic*, *Ed*)) we are killing a sperm, which is swimming along, and therefore presumably alive (possibly having a spirit inside it already) that would have fertilised the egg and lived to form a human being. Physical barriers do not have this problem so directly. But on the other hand we look at Catholic South American countries which have so many unwanted children that live on the streets. We must therefore think carefully about contraception and what method, if any, we use.

Editor's note : Graham writes from and for Battersea Spiritualist Church, which gives the background to the otherwise unexplained allusions to "spirit" in the above.

9th August 1998

Michael Nisbet

### COMMENTS ON C93

First, in response to your comments on **Sheila Blanchard's** contribution (**C93/32-33**), I would like to jump on my 'moral philosophy' hobbyhorse once again.

### MURDER & PERSONS

You criticise Sheila's "if it is not illegal it is not murder" notion, pointing out that this was the Nazi defence to the charge of genocide at Nuremberg. I would contend that the Nazi defence was legitimate within its own moral and legal frame of reference, but not within the - moral, even if not yet at that time enshrined in law - frame of reference of the Allies. I would contend this not because I believe morality to be a wholly subjective, culturally determined matter, but because the Allies assumed a broader definition of the person. And, as I have argued before, 'we call that moral which tends towards coherence among persons', however 'persons' may be defined within a given social group.



You mention the particular doubts that attended the prosecution of Nazi military commanders, and such doubts are justifiable. For any soldier to fight effectively it is necessary for the enemy to be depersonalised in his mind: that is, for the enemy to be decisively excluded from the person category. It is just possible that this is becoming increasingly difficult, due to the general dissemination of information about categories of person other than our own, and to the relative ease with which people can now move about the world. This may give some justification to **Martin Lake's** contention that "we are slowly becoming more civilised" (**C93/42**), although there is plenty of room for doubt here.

You also mention the question of capital punishment. It seems to me that the fundamental justification for the death penalty - even if this justification was not articulated - was that the murderer (or whatever) had by his act excluded himself from the person-category (being the category of entities akin to ourselves (whoever we may be)). His act might even be seen as revealing what he intrinsically was: a murderer, not a human being. To execute him was therefore not murder, -only a person can be murdered- but simply a way of emphasising and rendering absolute his exclusion, and reinforcing the general self-conception of the rest of society as 'decent' people by way of contradistinction.

A possible definition of murder would therefore be: to kill a person maliciously is murder, a person being an entity admitted to the person category. Entities who have at one time or another been excluded from this category include murderers, enemy soldiers, Jews, blacks, homosexuals etc. etc. etc.

The question then becomes 'What determines who we admit to the "person" category ? This is where the matter of culture and cultural identity comes in. The number and type of entities admitted to the category seems to bear some sort of inverse relation to the strength of the cultural identity of a given group, or to the extent that a given group is prepared to place its identity within the context of a broader definition of the person. If we are more tolerant than some, it could simply be the result, not of moral superiority, but of a weaker sense of cultural identity.

### HUMOUR

Secondly, and with reference to your comments on my **C93** contribution (**C93/13**), I believe that my trouble in fitting examples of humour into Bergson's theory (my **C92** contribution refers) has probably more to do with laziness and analytical ineptitude on my part than with any inadequacy in the theory.

As mentioned in my **C93** contribution, Bergson's "central image" is that of "something mechanical imposed on something living" and I argued (**C93/11**) that this relates to the subject-object dichotomy.



I would contend that the essence of humour is the ambiguous or paradoxical nature of the human person as simultaneously subject and object. This is the ur-ambiguity, just as the fact that we - conscious selves - have bodies - objects among a multitude of things - is the ur-joke.

Humour involves an ambiguity that, both as being an ambiguity (ultimately traceable to the ur-ambiguity) and by its nature in any given case, relates to the subject-object dichotomy or to the organic / mechanical image that develops from that dichotomy in so far as 'mechanical' or 'objectified' behaviour among humans derogates from their subject-status. (One of Bergson's contentions is that the social function of humour is to prompt the avoidance of 'mechanical' behaviour).

To take the 'Eye drops off shelf' headline that you mention (**C92/12**). This involves:-

- (1) an obvious verbal ambiguity in the word 'drops' as both verb and noun.
- (2) a reference to something organic (the eye) being made subject to 'the mechanical' i.e. dropping like any other object subject to gravity; ( - the eye is being treated in isolation from the rest of the body, thus emphasising its status as an object as against something directly pertaining to a conscious subject - ) and
- (3) the unconscious (or deliberate?) gaffe of the journalist in behaving, or pretending to behave, in a 'mechanical' (unconscious) way in not realising the implication of his / her words.

Through the ambiguity of 'drops' (a blunder that involves the mechanical or unconscious behaviour of the person who perpetrated it) the object-status of the eye - and by implication of the subjects that eyes pertain to - is emphasised through the process of falling.

As for the other headline you mention, "bridge held up by red tape", this also involves various obvious and less apparent ambiguities. However, the ambiguous nature of the human person is less concretely represented and more difficult to tease out, which possibly accounts for that fact that you find it less amusing. I shall nonetheless attempt an analysis as follows:

- (1) The metaphor 'red tape' has reference to the mechanical behaviour of bureaucrats. This cliched metaphor is by virtue of the gaffe, given a literal application, thus emphasising the object-status of
- (2) the 'metaphier' (to borrow a term from Julian Jaynes) and by replication of the bureaucrats whose behaviour supplies the 'metaphrand'.
- (3) Then there is the obvious ambiguity of the expression 'held up' i.e. as both 'hindered' and 'supported', whereby the blunder is perpetrated.
- (4) 'Red tape' sounds like an inadequate sort of support for a bridge. Thus reference is made to the frequent inadequacy of the human subject in the



face of the stubborn object-status of both him / herself and the world of things that he / she inhabits.

### **HUMAN LIFE**

Lastly, and if anyone is still awake, I would like to end with a few comments prompted by **Stef Gula's** response to Norman Mackie (**C93/25**).

My answer to the question "...What is so unique and distinct about human life that the power which creates and regulates it is excluded from the laws of Nature... ?" would be 'the fact of reflexive awareness', which, as discussed in previous contributions, and although it may exist to a limited extent in other animals, is only fully present in humans. It is reflexive awareness that is 'unique and distinct about human life', that separates us from 'nature' (the sum-total of organic functioning in the absence of reflexive awareness), and that, via the existential crisis that it precipitates (the subject rendered object due to its subjection to bodily existence), constitutes "the power that creates and regulates" human life.

**Michael Nisbet**

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**11th August 1998**

**John Stubbings**

### **REPLIES TO ART CRITICS**

**Theo (C92/10)** : Humpty Dumpty words. Hmmm !

This phone-call issue. I think it's clear what I'm saying. It's not possible to draw a line between what communications are or aren't art. You can only make a subjective statement regarding the quality. I'm sure many people don't consider these to be art : sharks in formaldehyde, thirty sanitary towels, the electrocution of fish in a bowl, a couple of hundred bricks or an installation based on the arrangement of the contents of six dustbins. I saw this one : it was rubbish ! These clearly demonstrate that art cannot be confined in terms of medium and some of the above demonstrate in my view that art can be completely without merit !

You mentioned the music of J. S. Bach. Mr. Bach produced a number of works, some of which are considered better than others I'm sure. I bet he composed some mediocre music. I bet he also composed some crap music. Learning is after all part of any artist's career and the production of less worthy works part of the learning process. Indeed crap work crops up during periods when artists are producing their finest work. Now are these works of art and who is the judge ? If some of his works are considered better than others at what point do they become so crap that they cease to be art ? Who is the judge ? That is the big question. Here's another question. At what point in his life did he become an artist ? I say that from the moment he was



born, perhaps earlier, (Dali was always referring to his pre-birth experiences) he was learning things that would contribute to his later works. In fact you could say he started composing at birth. Otherwise tell me when Bach became a composer. The date, the time. Perhaps he was whistling badly on the way to school. Perhaps when his whistling was a little more tuneful. Perhaps when he first hit a piano keyboard. Perhaps a little later or maybe a lot later. Draw that line if you must but it will be your line and open to criticism. When does a writer start a book ? He needs to learn to write. She needs life experiences to draw upon. Ideas formulated years, decades before pen is put to paper contribute to any book. Good ideas, bad ideas and mediocre ones too. If you do draw a line between non-artist/artist it is just your opinion, and that is precisely the problem with non art / art.

You say "A scientist may use art in the delivery of his message, but this then is the medium rather than the message itself". Now were getting to the nitty gritty. I think you are confusing art and medium. Art is in the message. Art is not the medium. Art is an abstract concept. Note what you are saying here the scientist is trying to get his ideas across better. The better the presentation the more artistic you consider the scientist to be.

Its just a quality of transmission issue. Artists frequently use science as a medium but the result is considered to be art. The shark in formaldehyde for instance. This throws up a question. Anyone who has seen a foetus in formaldehyde in a science lab cannot have failed to have asked themselves the same questions about life and death that the pickled shark is meant to invoke. So why is the shark considered to be art ? Well this brings me back to intention. Mr. Hirst intended to communicate these feelings and invoke these questions and does it very well. The foetus was pickled for other reasons. It may be used to communicate to students in a lecture perhaps and this comes back to the quality issue. Mr. Hirst's work is considered to be great art. It is just a quality issue! Great art again. It's an illusive bugger ! Consider this. Mr Hirst could take the foetus, put it in an art gallery and it would be considered to be great art. You see the medium is irrelevant. It's Mr. Hirst's message that's art. Not the shark, the formaldehyde or the fish tank. The same with music. It's the passing from one mind to others' minds communications (feelings, expressions) which we all understand but which are poorly explained by the written word or other mediums. That is why different mediums are used. Communications about rhythm, feelings, what its like to feel alive can be made more effectively using mediums that appeal to our less rational instincts. We just get it ! But the medium is not the art just the vehicle of transmission.

"Where, thereby, is the difference between the arts and the sciences". Well there are no lines to be drawn here. Clearly both the arts and the sciences attempt to communicate. The sciences are considered to communicate objectively but really they describe the world using abstractions like mathematics. Mathematics is just another medium. It communicates some things extremely well and others extremely badly. Mathematicians speak of



the beauty in certain equations. They understand the medium and the message. They Get It ! Just like abstract art or 'modern' art you often need to understand the medium to get the message.

### **A FEW MORE REPLIES**

**Valerie Ransford, C93/14 :** "Art is for Art. Who disagrees?" Profound. How could I disagree. On reading this I attained instant enlightenment.

**Albert Dean, C93/15 :** If I fully understood what you're on about I think there might be some merit in what you're saying. I think if I understand you correctly that you think Art starts when craftsmanship goes to a higher level. It somehow transcends mere craftsmanship. Oh how this definition appeals. How I would love this to be correct. How right it would be. How just. Of course if you are an expert in a particular medium you are more likely to know how to get your message across, but it's not necessary for an artist to have done the full apprenticeship before he / she can produce a piece of great art. Craftsmanship can get in the way of art ! Art exists in the real world and is a reflection of it. Chance plays its part. Spirit too. For example the punk rock era was born of boredom with long guitar solos and technically intricate music that had existed for about a decade before in popular music. Punk music and fashion wasn't born out of craftsmanship but had a passion and spirit sadly lacking at the time. You see great art isn't just a revered holy cow it can be an old cow too.

**Anthony Owens, C93/22 :** "Are cave paintings Art ? Undoubtedly, because nowadays they have no purpose. Great art is always 100% useless"

What's useful ? What's purpose ? What is the use and or purpose of you writing such cynical twaddle ? As to your remarks about the use of cave paintings, why not just pick any idea out of thin air ? Perhaps they were just decoration for their equivalent of the local night club ! Perhaps if you used less inspiration and more perspiration you could achieve some insight into the various roles these paintings played. I suggest you might better understand the paintings by observing the role art plays in primitive cultures nowadays and in the recent past. Native American culture might be a good place to start.

**John Neary, C93/33 :** Good point and no I'm not confusing "an art" with "art". But we are communicating ! Perhaps I'm not making myself clear. It's not easy because the word art is commonly used in relation to medium. It's difficult when writing to make clear when you are using the word art as in art-form, "an art", a discipline using a particular medium, or art as in abstract concept. I'm not prepared to redefine art in order to avoid offending anyone either. The "art of torture" and the "art of war" have their great artists. Alexander the Great (Artist). Violent people express themselves in violent ways, that's how they communicate. The variety of artistic mediums is subject only to the inventiveness of the human mind.



Oh gosh don't I go on.

**John Stubbings**

13th August 1998

John Neary

**COMMENTS ON COMMENSAL 93**

Just received C93 thanks to the efficiency of Mozambican Postal services. I am taking a bit of a break before I plunge into year 2 of the studies so I haven't really got my mind in a philosophical groove and therefore I will only comment on others' work this time instead of trying to raise any hares.

**Norman Mackie (C93/7) :** I hope some way can be found for Norman to continue to contribute.

**Kevin Arbuthnot (C93/8-9) : PDG on the net :** I agree that PDG on the web could create a two tier society but I think Kevin's idea of Web Commensal extract, perhaps as a supplement to Commensal, could work. And just think, Theo, you'd never be short of copy - just pull something down off the net! :-). I have no problem with editorial privilege. It's a fact of life whatever publication you write for. Also I think that posting on a website which, by the way, could be "privatised" with a password, will encourage some people to come out of their shells. The only thing would be the cost of getting the site and then the webmaster to set it up. Perhaps that's the way to test the water. Solicit contributions for the costs. About £200 a year for a 20mb site and about £350 for a webmaster to set it up. By the way there are already a number of philosophical discussion groups on the web. Some a lot better than others. One I am currently watching is the philosophy group at [www.miningco.com](http://www.miningco.com).

**Valerie Ransford (C93/14) :** As Theo said, my question about knowledge arises from a study of Epistemology - study of knowledge. To study this one must forget conventional ideas and word forms and look at what is real knowledge as different from what you are calling knowledge which is justified belief in epistemological terms. As Theo says some epistemologists think that we really don't "know" anything at all. It also covers such areas as how we acquire knowledge and whether some knowledge can be considered as innate. There are a huge number of books on it but one good introduction is Dancy: "Contemporary Epistemology". However like many things in philosophy it's a bit mind bending at first. You could also try "An introduction to Epistemology" by Landesmann.

**Albert Dean – Mosquitoes (C93/16) :** A very interesting biological titbit, but it doesn't answer my original question - Of what use are they ? Re my **Epistemological questions and dreaming (C93/17) :** I'm not sure how to



interpret your reply - Surely a shut down body is dead and we have no known way of knowing when we're dead. Re **knowledge** : I'm not sure that I would call Dancy a cobbler especially if we refer it back to your definition of people involved in art. However, cynical as it may be, I have always used your approach to exam answers, usually reasonably successfully.

**Anthony Owen / John Stubbings (C93/22)** : Has anybody considered that the cave paintings might just be neolithic teenage vandalism arising out of boredom ? Imagine midwinter in a cave with the wind howling outside. No disco, no tele, not even scrabble or a magazine to read. Prisoners in solitary confinement draw, mark and otherwise deface the walls of their cells and maybe it is just a substitute for conversation, an effort to create a virtual third party with whom to communicate. And maybe the sorcerer was just some poor incarcerated's (if that's a legitimate word) way of getting back at his incarcerator by drawing him with an animal's head ?

**Stef Gula – dreaming (C93/24)** : You raise an interesting point about being aware you are dreaming whilst you are dreaming. It seems to throw a bit of a spanner into Descartes' theories because he said "how do I know that I am sitting reading and not dreaming that I am sitting reading". Now if you are truly aware that you are dreaming whilst you are dreaming and not applying, or maybe implying, subsequent knowledge in retrospect, it would appear that Descartes started from a wrong premise.

**Me – Democracy (C93/37)** : You're right, Theo, either I or the computer had a hiccup. It should read "....those that rule prevail."

That's about all except to say I would be a "yes" type for Mensa at Braziers if I were to be in the U.K. at that time, but it seems unlikely.

**John Neary**

**August 1998**

**Stef Gula**

### **COMMENTS ON C93**

I am in a world of shit at present. It's all change on the everything front and I'm none too pleased with any of it. The bonus is that you may be spared my vitriol for a while, at least in part. This outing then just a few paragraphs by way of reply and comment - all to do with **C93** and previous.

**Theo (C93/26)** : I think our views on abortion aren't so radically different there's much to gain arguing the toss. Maybe with ongoing developments and the odd technical breakthrough it'll be obsolete one day. Until then though I can but foam a bit when the "Right to Life" brigade start steaming in with all sorts of unwholesome nonsense. Not, I suppose, that they like my views any the better.



Re. "**Creation Myths**" (C93/27) - it's not that the "scientific" ones seem especially "extraordinary" compared to religious ones. Just that and they don't really tell us a great deal more. The tricks are the same - avoid the issues, dismiss difficult questions as irrelevant or irreverent and state the obvious ("Here we are").

Like, is there really so much difference between quantum soup and the primeval waters, or between quantum fluctuation and things just sort of popping up out of the Void ?

**Kevin Arbuthnot (C93/10)** : " ... *thin, but very necessary, veil of the social contract* ... "? More of a hypocrisy than a necessity in my opinion. If there was irony in my previous comments it was more in what's out there than how I described it.

**Albert Dean (C93/18)** : Believe me Albert I know what's in the trees.

Since I hold to a sort of "free will over limited options" view I, broadly, agree with a fair bit of what you seemed to be saying though I'm not sure about the "command" bit. Unless you're setting "the free-will" as "commander", with options limited by troop quality, supplies and resources, terrain, strength of enemy, etc.

Nor am I convinced that free-will is a terminal or objective, more of a means towards one. It's not something one reaches, but something one has (or hasn't should "Hard Determinism" rule).

**Graham Dare (C93/35)** : I once knew somebody who was allergic to lamb.

Me, I'll eat just about anything - and I've no scruples about seeing the whole process through from field to table. Only it's not always entirely practical, excepting things like rabbits, wildfowl, fish etc. - which can itself lead to all sorts of fun with farmers, landowners, gamekeepers and water-bailiffs.

**Stef Gula**

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**13th August 1998**

**David Taylor**

### **COMMENTS ON COMMENSAL 91 - 93**

**Roger Farnworth (Dualism; C91/37-39)** : I did find this item a struggle to follow, and it seems I got it wrong.

**Roger Farnworth (Dualism; C93/40)** : I didn't use the words "all that remains to be done ...", and I don't think I implied them. I think that scans



such as MRI scans will help in seeing how the various parts of the human brain work together. On the other hand they do have their limitations - on their own they will not solve the qualia problem, for example.

**Theo in response to Roger Farnworth (C93/41.1)** : You have prodded me to action. I have got *How the Mind Works* down from the shelf where it has been for months, and have started to read it.

**Norman Mackie (C92 & Farewell; C93/7)** : In case he hasn't tried already, Norman should find that if he explains the situation, he should obtain a reduction in his subscription to Mensa. I am in a similar situation, so I know how difficult it can sometimes be to find even a reduced subscription, when the gas bill needs paying.

**Albert Dean (C93)** : Perhaps we seem to take ourselves too seriously sometimes, but it's in the nature of philosophical discussion to be rather serious (even when discussing humour).

**David Taylor**

13 August 1998

Vijai Parhar

### COMMENTS ON C93 (+ C92)

Greetings to the 30% of members who are rapiers that sally forth, saliva dripping, with unsheathed pencils to draw the blood of virgin text (**C93/8**) and the 70% of members who are the lurkers who cower in the shadows waiting for their moment of glory when they strike at the quarry's temporary weakness!!!

**Peter Conway (C93/6)** : The Bible is outdated and localised. The values of the Israelites were different to the values we currently have. In 2 Kings 10 : 19-27 Jehu tricks all the Baal worshippers into gathering together for a special sacrifice. Unfortunately, he doesn't tell them that THEY are the sacrifice (to Jehovah). He promptly cold bloodedly murders them and burns them all in the Baal temple. Would Jehu have used a gas chamber if one was available at the time ?? All of this occurs with the full approval of God !!

The Bible is inconsistent, long-winded and definitely written by man (rather than by God, as some people maintain). Having said that, it is still worth reading as a great collection of books (treat it as History / Poetry & Song / Inspiration & Advice / Prophecy ). There are still many parts which scholars have yet to decipher, eg. the mysterious Song of Solomon, the prophecies of Daniel, Why did Jesus say '*My God, why have you forsaken me?*' on the cross?, who is the Anti-Christ (he is definitely not Satan).

**Norman Mackie (C93/7.3)** : There is, NO real difference between life and non-life. All molecules behave in different ways. It follows that certain molecules will be more stable than others. The stable molecules get into a positive feedback loop whereby they become ever more stable. They do this



by growing in size, reproducing and by developing energy-expensive organs which in the long run lead to greater stability (eg. the brain). These developments do not involve premeditated design but are the result of evolution.

**Kevin Arbuthnot (C93/8)** : I personally think it appropriate Theo does do immediate replies to letters. This helps to stir debate and ensures at least a minimum level of feedback. *Commensal on the Web* would not be *Commensal* ! Hard-copy Commensal is a product of its mode of operation which I currently believe is quite optimal. Maybe we can have a two-tier Commensal where those people who prefer intense discussion would receive Commensal-1 and those who currently feel daunted by the standard of interaction can contribute to Commensal-2 instead. Stratification in Commensal ?? Where will it all end ??

**Michael Nisbet (C93/11)** : Humour is a cultural by-product. Young children do not naturally watch TV - they have to be taught how to do so. Similarly, we are not naturally humorous - it is a learned response.

**Valerie Ransford (C93/13)** : JC was a great man. People fell into 3 categories in JC's eyes:

1. They were good, eg. The poor, the humble, the disabled/sick, the wise
2. They were bad but potentially good - their badness being the result of circumstances Society imposed on them, eg. prostitutes, tax collectors, thieves
3. They were bad and beyond rescue. eg. the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests of the Jewish system (and almost certainly the Romans)

Out of the 3 types, type 2 people were the important targets since they were the lost sheep and the Prodigal sons.

However JC had his limitations. The system of Christian values as he proposed it was unworkable and failed to acknowledge the base aspects of human nature. It also drew upon the false premises of a fight between good and evil and the existence of a God.

**Theo Todman (C93/14-15)** : Working out the probability of a world-view (POAWV) is all very well but it depends whether you talk about mutually exclusive states or independent ones. The POAWV would also be unduly affected by wild beliefs. If I believed the Sun was going to rise in, the West, my POAWV would unrepresentatively fall close to zero !!

**Albert Dean re Valerie Ransford (C93/16.4)** : It is interesting to compare Socrates and Jesus Christ. Both were benevolent leaders that died for their beliefs. Socrates lived about 500 years before Christ. Both believed that death was not the end of life and that their souls would continue. It is also



interesting to note the public reaction to the deaths of great people. Shades of Princess Di !!

**Albert Dean re Vijai Parhar (C93/19.2)** : I assume the sentence about chicken/egg and question/answer is linked to 'emergent properties'. Of course the answer comes last. Let's not try to cloud our thinking with apparently clever sayings. The flower is not there for the sake of my pleasure - it is there to promote its own survival via the bee. My pleasure is a second order phenomenon resulting from the way my mind works.

Tying Beauty to Sin and Pain sounds very contrived and pitifully insubstantial. If you want to bring Sin into it you necessarily bring Morals and Religion in too. What is more beautiful - a circle or an ellipse ?

**Rick Street re Mike Rossell (C92/24)** : On a related note, Rick, how is Beauty a quality (you mean, property ?) of the relationship between viewer and flower. The flower is not (substantially) aware of the viewer and so cannot relate to him. Are you alluding to the concept of Gaia or perhaps, Universal Consciousness ?

**Sheila Blanchard (C93/32)** : *"if its not illegal it is not murder"*. Surely SB is talking technicalities here. Technically speaking the Nazi genocide was not murder because it was perfectly legal. But, of course, it was murder in the common understanding of the concept.

**Theo Todman (C93/35.4)** : You allege that because few people believed in the Berean's message, it was very unlikely to be true. This is muddled thinking. The truth of an assertion is independent of how many people adhere to it. Not many people believed in the abolition of slavery but were they unjustified in their beliefs ? On the other hand lots of people watch soap operas on TV. Does this mean soap operas are the pinnacle of quality TV ? Should everyone be forced to watch them ? The best thing to do is to judge an assertion on its own merits.

**Theo Todman re Roger Farnworth (C93/41)** : 'Light operates on both its sides' : I will attempt to translate but apologies to RF if I get it completely wrong. Things happen in the external world. Light bounces around. Light hits our eyeballs. Patterns occur in our consciousness. The patterns in our consciousness are directly strongly correlated to the patterns of light from the external world. Therefore light operates on both sides. This points towards a strong link between subjective experience and the objective world. In this sense it is said to be a narrowing of the unbridgeable chasm of dualism.

**Roger Farnworth (C91/37.4)** : The thought experiment RF proposes is somewhat meaningless. Memory and emotion are an intrinsic part of the brain. It is similar to saying 'What if we take an aeroplane's wings off, drop it from a great height and see how its trajectory through air is affected' !! The dumbing down suggested makes a nonsense of the brain. Similarly David



Taylor (**C92/33.7**) says 'he assumes absence of experience implies absence of consciousness' - this is a complete nonsense because it is pointless to imagine what the brain would be like without experience.

Back to Roger Farnworth's original text **C91/38.1**. You (*ie. Roger ? Ed*) take consciousness to be different to my understanding of it. According to you, consciousness is not the same as 'the greatest complexity in the Universe'. Is consciousness the sum total of the various markers of consciousness ?

The eyeball does not see anything - it is a gateway to the visual area of the brain. The 'seeing' occurs in this area. It's quite obvious from this that the eyeball is 'more minimal than is generally believed'. Is your idea of consciousness analogous to the eyeball / brain scenario ?

My own thoughts on Dualism are as follows:

- What do people mean when they talk about the Soul ?
- If the brain degenerates (eg Alzheimer's, Senility, Progressive Mental Illness, Use of Recreational Drugs) then the mind can clearly be seen to degenerate likewise. This suggests Monism.
- Where does one draw the line with creatures having souls? Which of the following have souls: Homo Sapiens, Homo Habilis, Homo Erectus, Neanderthals, Australopithecus, chimpanzees, gorillas, whales, dolphins, trees, grass, bacteria, individual cells, DNA precursors ? When the DNA molecule breaks up does its soul live on ?

Surely the intelligent view is to see Dualism as a comfortable but entirely man-made and insubstantial idea. Bit like Religion, isn't it ??

**Albert Dean (C93/19, item 13)** : Checkmating is the GOAL of chess.

**Theo Todman re Vijai Parhar (C92/37, last paragraph)** : Theo, I see you've hit that huge obstacle called Abundance. Don't worry, everybody must confront it sooner or later. The thing to do is to realise that much of it is bullsh\*t (hello, Internetters). Also try to lead rather than follow. The world is full of followers but not many leaders.

Well, that's all folks! I can't attend Braziers, due to a shortage of 'spondoolicks'. But I host my own discussion group every fortnight in Bracknell which is entirely free. All welcome to attend. See Mensa Face to Face.

### **Vijai Parhar**

PS. I recently read about Netiquette. This is an idea for making Email on the Internet more expressive so you could judge more easily the tone of the sender. In reading *Commensal*, I feel it could benefit from more 'Netiquette'.



Carefully utilised Commas, Underlines, CAPITALISING, **Bolding** etc. goes a long way. It makes the text more readable and greatly reduces the scope for miscommunication.

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Vijai : I agree with you on the last point, provided the accentuation is supplied to me. Otherwise I may be adding to the misinterpretation by adding my own

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**15 August 1998**

**Valerie Ransford**

Thank you for C93. I am sorry that Norman Mackie is leaving us and grateful for his blessings. When I was unemployed and monetarily challenged, I got my Mensa membership cheap. Don't the Powers that Are make arrangements like this any more ?

### **COMMENTS ON COMMENSAL 93**

I don't mind if you leave Mrs. Babcock alone, Theo (**C93/14**). All this pulpit stuff came about when I said that 'The Crucifixion, or How to accept defeat gracefully' didn't offend everyone. I wasn't offended and said Mrs. Babcock's pamphlet showed J.C. was an anti-messiah. You wondered how a tract could show anything so revolutionary (**C92/17** : 'Argue' maybe .... but 'show' never.').

Well, I looked up 'Grace' in the dictionary, and according to the dear old Tractatus, 'a name stands for the simple object'. There's nothing to argue about there.

I think my 'pulpit stuff' is a collection of elementary propositions whose sense agrees with reality, and is shown to be true.

I hope I've shown how my comments in **C93** connect with previous discussions. I hope I haven't lost you any more.

It was good to read Peter Conway's question 'Did our creator imply that there are indeed circumstances where the taking of life would be permissible ?' and (*my ? Ed*) erudite answer (**C93/6**). I enjoy Exodus as you do, Theo, especially Chapter 12 where God struck down all the first born in the land of Egypt except for those who marked their door-posts and lintels. These he passed over; and this episode is remembered every year as Easter is. We can conclude from this that killing people and animals is OK, sometimes, if you're God.

If anyone is going to argue about this, one has to start somewhere. There has to be a base that is agreed on before the argument begins. As you know,



Theo, Geometers have, for millennia, been drawing little diagrams in the ground, on blackboards, or whatever, trying to show that Euclid's 5th postulate is or is not something that can be argued about. Aristotle, before Euclid wasn't arguing about it, said 'If the line is what we recognise it to be from our visual intuition, then the angle sum of a triangle is two right angles'. Well, we don't believe that the 5th Postulate is Gospel truth any more. My point is this; for centuries scholars have been happy to base their arguments on what they believe has been shown; (wrongly), that is, related to visual intuition. They had to start somewhere.

**Valerie Ransford**

16 August 1998

Kevin Arbuthnot

**COMMENT ON COMMENSAL 93**

Thank you for **C93**. As I'm sure you appreciate, I didn't mean to suggest that you should refrain from commenting on submissions merely to permit others to get in on the act, rather that if those submissions were on the net we could all do it at the same time. *Commensal* would not be quite the same without your input. No, I'm not in the Mensa news group as I find I'm quite busy in other areas. (Your opinion of it doesn't exactly send me rushing to subscribe either, but if I do in the future I'll let you know what I think.)

In your response to **Valerie Ransford (C93/13-14)** it occurs to me that the issue of "knowledge v. belief" was satisfactorily packaged by Plato in his accounts of the two levels of reality. Since reading "Republic" I have been reasonably content to accept that I can only "know" the "thing-in-itself", ie, elements of a priori knowledge, and that everything else has to fall within the realm of "belief". Therefore, I "know" that a square has four sides (etc), but I can only hold an opinion about whether my kids are in the lounge watching TV at the moment (although that's probably as near to certainty as I am likely to get in the "visible" world!). This doesn't mean that I'm heading down some path of Cartesian deconstruction, having self-doubt that I may be living a life that is merely a dream, but for the purposes of consistency in language, this will do fine. (It perhaps also means that **Stef Gula (C93/24)** hasn't really got a dilemma at all, it's just a question of labelling?)

Whilst sharing your doubt about whether it was in fact philosophy, I appreciated the article on the problems of Northern Ireland by **Alan Carr (C93/27-29)**, made all the more pertinent by the tragic events of the 15th August. Maybe there is a relevance to the question of philosophical enquiry here, inasmuch as how the pursuit of practical truths can be distorted by prejudice and historical baggage. I find it interesting that Alan does not consider the intransigence of the religious institutions to be a major hindrance to the peace process; surely their rigid position lends some kind of legitimacy



to the stubbornness of groups on both sides of the divide whose vested interests do not coincide with the objectives of the peace lobby?

I have to say that I found **Sheila Blanchard's (C93/30-32)** contribution fascinating and, in the matter of the horrors of World War II, must defer to someone who was there. However, isn't the suggestion that those who were not able to contribute "at the front" "avoided their share of the communal guilt" a little presumptuous? Is it not at least as much a possibility that they felt they had missed out on their share of the "team pride" of the fighting forces who vanquished the Nazis and liberated the oppressed, notwithstanding the sterling work done by Land Army, fire-fighters, farmers et al? Also, isn't the main purpose of army training to be an effective soldier, of which being an effective killer may be an unavoidable part, but which principally means being available to the democratically elected government of the day to do their (our) bidding in pursuit of political objectives once diplomacy has failed? Finally, on a more supportive note, I was more on Sheila's side than your's (*ie. Mine, Ed*) about the justifiability of killing human beings if it prevents more suffering than it causes. Who could doubt the sense of that when contemplating Hitler or Saddam Hussein? This has satisfying echoes of the Greatest Happiness Principle about it, but, as usual, would falter at the point where someone had to make the judgement about who had to go and who should stay; it would get particularly complex when putting historical figures like Napoleon or Alexander the Great under the microscope, given the raft of benefits to civilisation from their reigns, weighed in the balance against their warmongering and the associated human costs of that. Some form of felicific calculus, understandable to and auditable by all, would certainly be a prerequisite.

**Graham Dare (C93/35-36)** yet again provokes a response. The issue of killing animals is the easy example for the sentimentalists, isn't it? One may not be prepared to kill an animal oneself, but as a member of a society that is prepared to, one is entitled to eat the resultant product. One can choose to do this with one's eyes wide open, accepting the vicarious responsibility, and perhaps contemplate the flesh being stripped from the bone, the slaughter process etc as one is chewing, if this assuages the guilt. Or, more sensibly, one can forget that and accept the frozen, shrink-wrapped item which tastes good in the recipe simply as something that constitutes one of the benefits of living in a society. Do the hand-wringers really agonise over the chick's life that has been lost whilst eating their boiled egg? Do they agonise over the coal miners' deaths and injuries whilst warming themselves by the coal fire? I guess not. Perhaps future articles condemning the way we live, vis-a-vis our furry friends, could have a hypocrisy quotient with it? (PS; despite the opinion readers may be forming of my view of animals, in fact I like them (particularly my own five) and oppose any form of cruelty to them; its the humbug I can do without).

**Theo**; I think that in your response to John Neary (**C93/37-38**), concerning the "altruistic" voting patterns of politicians in our elective oligarchy, you ended up



saying that all voters, in whatever forum, ultimately vote for themselves and their own interests. If that is a correct interpretation of your position, I agree. If, however, we are not content with that state of affairs, and do not subscribe to the view that the best political representation is given by those who put themselves forward within the current framework of democracy, perhaps we should once again turn to Plato for guidance as to an alternative?

**Kevin Arbuthnot**

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**15th August 1998**

**Roger Farnworth**

**IS / OUGHT**

**Theo (C93/39)** : It's no good saying I am a lone voice; we're not taking a vote. But I would contend that of the innumerable moral choices of people now and in the past hardly any would be characterised as arbitrary (what the heck, I'll do it anyway) trivial and flawed by infinite regress. On the contrary I think our experience is of making a creative act in our personal relationships.

I wonder if any readers find your example is like their own experience of moral choice :

1. You, citizen, ought to want mutual prosperity
2. Co-operation and peaceful co-existence leads to mutual prosperity
3. You, citizen, ought to co-operate with your neighbours.

It is the Draconian injunction at the start which is crucial to your argument and outside my own experience, which is as follows.

What I voted for when I supported a change of government and what I support when I give money to third world concerns arise from two main sources neither of which is a prescription for what I ought to do :

1. I believe that individuals may benefit from mutual prosperity
2. I feel compassion for the impoverished and marginalised

Arising from this feeling I am determined to support policies that prioritise and target those in need so that prosperity will benefit them. From such value free beginnings, I can now say that if you are in sympathy then you ought to have voted labour and you ought to give to Oxfam. In this way, we create new values as we have done recently in the environment, child welfare, animal rights, refugees. Ethics change in a changing world. From what people considered they ought to do in the past we cannot derive what we ought to do in the present. So where does that new infusion come from ?

I would love to hear how members of PDG derive their moral imperatives. I suspect there may be a healthy plurality on this central ethical question.



**15th August 1998****Roger Farnworth****DUALISM**

**Theo (C93/40)** : You say Dualism requires extra mental “stuff” to explain consciousness. This is not so. The problem of dualism is that there appear to be two components of the world, ie. the external world and our experience of the world. No one has satisfactorily explained the one in terms of the other. So though we wish to believe that there is physical reality we remain reluctant dualists until what you call the “hard problem of what it is like to experience qualia” is resolved. I tried not to resolve solve the problem but to narrow the gap by showing the phenomena of consciousness to be more minimal, peripheral and determined than is generally thought. I still do not know whether you found any fault in these arguments.

The attempts to give an explanation for the problem of consciousness are something else. In *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, Professor Gregory lists six forms of dualism and more appear under mind body problems. Only one depends on “mind stuff”. This is Descartes famous explanation of dualism which Ryle caricatures as the “ghost in the machine”. That theory led to such confusion that I know of no philosopher that supports Cartesian dualism so it need not enter into our debate.

I will try to say in a new way for the third time what I meant by “light operates on both sides of the divide”. The visual receptors at the back of the eye are integral parts of the brain. Light acts on them in both a physical and chemical way and much of the organisation of the brain and mind results from a direct consequence of this. I maintain that most of the information in the brain is reducible to the evidences of the senses of which the perception of light is the overwhelming part. In the selection of essays *Modern Philosophy of Mind* (Everyman) Hilary Putnam writes :

“Strange as it may seem to common sense and sophisticated intuition alike, the question of the autonomy of our mental life doesn’t hinge on and has nothing to do with the old question about soul stuff. We could be made of swiss cheese and it wouldn’t matter. Functional isomorphism is the key to unravelling the mysteries of the philosophy of mind. Two systems are functionally isomorphic if there is a correspondence between the states of one and the states of the other that preserves functional relations”.

This is what I was correlating when I wrote :

Consider a black and white film of a day’s outing. Shifting white light conveys the totality of all data. Predetermined patterns of interpretation operate away from the screen but the raw data itself has been entirely controlled by the physical world. The



distribution of light on the film varied directly in accordance with the light waves on the day of filming. The contents of consciousness are determined by the outside world in the same manner as the surface of the film.

You may object to the phrase "light operates on both sides of the divide" but what are your objections to the explanation.

On dualism and is/ought we are in total disagreement. Is this a situation in which your suggestion of a mentor could come into its own ? I would be most pleased if Professor Hanfling could review what has been written on these subjects and make a final reply.

May I add to your reading list *How Brains Think* by William Calvin (Weidenfeld) - a thrilling read.

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**15th August 1998**

**Albert Dean**

### **THE THINKING PROCESS**

In addressing an issue one might put down a starter, chew on it, add a little more, chew on what has formed, and continue in such a way until some end is reached. If applied generally that is of course bad practice because it often leads to something out of balance. However, it is not always an avoidable practice, and, because it means dealing with small things quite slowly, it can possibly be quite illuminating of the thinking process. For a sort of case study suppose one is attempting new thought. Here one begins with the problem one can only perceive the merest snippet of something. If one can assume anything at all it is only that what one can see is most likely not a beginning, middle or end. So, immediately, one is forced into bad practice whether one likes it or not. Here the best practice probably is to just slap down the snippet which is in the mind and then fiddle about both in and around it until the snippet turns into a something more like a concept. But how does the fiddling process operate. What appears to happen is that work begins fairly crudely. This is probably because not yet having a reference to work against the mind instantly develops a huge error signal causing it to try major alterations of the snippet to get basic information about it. According to what it finds it then tries minor variations. With a sentence for example, the mind looks to see what happens if it uses different words, then what happens if it inserts extra words or takes some out, and then it might try for the effect of changing tenses and so forth. By this stage it has done many sub- and super- snippet property tests and usually discovered much about the snippet in question; what field of knowledge it is in, how significant it is, places where it can start to take the snippet apart more or attach more to it, and, perhaps most importantly, which directions the snippet seems to prefer going in when prodded. With that and by adapting subject and method examples from its repertoire, one's mind



starts working on the snippet to create a structure pointing away from it. The construction begins tentatively, but at some stage the content itself starts to point the new thought towards a goal. Work then becomes easier and quicker so that, with luck, the end of the new thought practically boots itself into the net. Presumably, as all this goes on, one's mind incorporates what it is discovering into one's memory, reworking some of what is already there and fashioning the new material so as to maintain compatibility of information as it works. Even rejection would still imply that. The compatibility indicators "always", "sometimes", "sometimes not", and "never" either would be found already attached to things the mind looked at for use in possible changes, or the mind would attach them to the snippet where appropriate. Whenever it found a "never" it would certainly nip off to look at something else it might use instead. This then points to the view that even one's boldest thinking is in part limited by what is already in one's memory, and, perhaps even more importantly, by what one's mind has been preconditioned to allow as valid. Suggesting it is perhaps impossible to set up a thought which is truly recollection independent and mental process independent. Not just in the simple sense that the mind must be able to call up a few related and defined words and arrange some grammatical ordering of them, but in the more subtle sense that the memory must have at least one thought in it before it can argue out a second thought, and the mind must be able to ignore rules in order to be able to argue at all. Concrete example of all this is to be found in what happens with Commensal itself. It is perhaps not obvious because lead text can be followed separately by commentaries as discussion evolves. But the different contributors to a topic do chew on it, find a direction it favours, and then inch it forward to a conclusion, with none knowing in advance what that will be. And, still with Commensal, that conclusion is reached only because at least one other provides a second thought, even though that "other" might only be a notional representation of everyone and the other "thought" might be no more than "no further comment". Also, insofar as rules are concerned, even the entirely innocent Commensal itself affects things. As soon as one thinks to begin a piece for it one is inevitably very gently propelled toward particular topics and approaches. Then one is left with the tweaking, and one could easily test for eternity in tweaking. However, as soon as one's mind has hacked away sufficiently to produce something apparently complete an old rule comes to assist in escaping the tweaking addiction: Publish and be damned! Always; some will not care, some will like it, some will not. And thus a provisional end to a thought is reached.

**Albert Dean**



15th August 1998

Albert Dean

**COMMENTS AND RESPONSES**

**Theo Todman (C93/21)** : Dump or change my stuff as much as you like, you're doing the work. And by all means feel free to comment as much as you wish.

**Blitzkrieg (C93/22)** : Shorter OED 1977 Vol II Addenda: Blitzkrieg: See Blitz. Blitz: a shortening of Blitzkrieg and can be used to mean a series of intense air attacks carried out over a longish period. Taking a year or so of ground war (5mph) as about equivalent to a week of air war (250mph), and allowing a series and six months for the original "Blitz", I don't think I cast Blitzkrieg out too far. And hardly that much further than I had to reach to catch the term snide, where, in 93/22, its user got so lost in his argument he actually ended up admitting he threw it wide. I would say the score is one all, but I won't mind if you want to post it as 0.8 to 1.2 and leave it to posterity to sort out which way round to read it!

**Kevin Arbuthnot - Your Comments 93/8-9**: In your comments you touch variously on the quality of man. To summarise what seems your essential point, you say you rose to your present giddy height because of your aggressive nature and great skill in killing, and you find it disappointing when in effect I fail in any way to meet the standard you claim for yourself. Now, I would say this standard you claim and promulgate is but some garbage of misplaced faith. Taking your extreme to illustrate. The appendix we carry and the wear marks on the teeth of our ancestors indicate we lived more on vegetable products than meat. This suggests a species which if left unstimulated is not particularly aggressive compared to many others. Secondary evidence is we run slower than almost every other animal there is, certainly slower than everything which is of comparable size to us or larger. That suggests we were originally rather timid. Also, almost every creature out there larger than a football, and many that are smaller, can destroy us directly or indirectly more efficiently than we can destroy them. Standing up probably enabled us to see and avoid them better. We were never really designed to resist or attack. The evidence is in what is not there, we have no horns or claws, our teeth have always been small in killing terms. Weight for weight we are not very strong. We have a long record of tool making. From that you might argue that it is our brains and armoury which make us superior. But that is also not a matter of fact. Compared to simple minded fighters we are in fact very slow and clumsy with the weapons we make. And what is in old cave paintings and the long cold ashes of ancient camp fires makes it perfectly clear that when we did manage a kill it was usually by ambushing something infantile or long past its prime. Surely, being good at trapping the odd baby or geriatric is not the mark of the overlord, the vast majority of what the ambusher would like to get never comes within reach. Further evidence against our not having amazing ability to asses and destroy the opposition is also to be found in more recent times. Ten thousand years of civilisation and



still there are many who do not mind sewage in their water. And a few interesting facts and figures from the killing fields. In WWI we did indeed occasionally kill efficiently, but they were our own, and it was only because the species threw itself on its own weapons. That does not mark the clever or the carnivore. It only shows a species which from time to time is prone to be most incredibly stupid. Curiosities from WWII are that the war effort cost America 250,000 civilians killed in industrial accidents, 50% of Luftwaffe losses were due to crash landings in bad weather on the eastern front, only 5% of armed troops fired on an enemy they could see, the vast majority of kamikaze hit only the Pacific Ocean, and all of Bomber Command was lost on Berlin. There you have the measures of our efficiency in making, deploying, launching, succeeding, and forgetting. To test your sentiment further, and the aerial warfare of that time offering further important insight into ourselves. As an example of how we rationalise: Reconnaissance and trials showed it was necessary to send 10 bombers each with ten bombs to get one bomb within 100yds of the target. This was not good for the moral of bomber crews nor did it sit well in press releases. It meant each target would need 25 raids. So the average force dispatched became 250 bombers. But what happened with the 249 bomb loads that did not drop on the target. It became rather embarrassing to explain why so many schools, churches and hospitals were being gutted. The definition of target was therefore changed. Mass raids began and targets became entire cities. All acceptualised on the basis every city surely would have something about it of a military nature. So there is no misunderstanding of my view: It was an event in which in the species some bought others the luxury of being able to praise or insult those caught up in it. Given the scale remarkably few deserve insult. The survivors of things like that become marked one way or another, having won or lost their personal battle between fear and confidence. In retrospect most say they would rather be elsewhere next time and very few come to wish anything like it on anyone else. And that shows in reality how we became so successful. We bred like rabbits and given half a chance ran from what we couldn't handle, usually straight up a tree from where we shouted a lot and threw nuts and twigs at the thing until it went away. Then, screeching victory cries to the world, many said good-bye to it by falling out of their trees, doing themselves in and whoever they happened to drop upon. To emphasise the last. In Britain we have recently noted the 500,000th death by motoring accident and the discovery of drug resistant bacteria. So, it turns out we are really quite good at killing ourselves or others by chance, not very good at killing each other intentionally, hardly able to kill anything else unless we have it at such a disadvantage we can't miss, and almost completely unable to kill off anything which is a real threat. In truth, about the only creature we are really good at clobbering is the fish. But the problem is that the fish has never been a threat to our survival at all, though not having any might be. There is a lot of other killing we do of course, but it would not count here as your comments were centered on awareness of other parties and relative precision in what we do. This last aspect of killing I have in mind is were we do creatures in just by destroying their habitat or chucking chemicals about. It is too much to class that under accidental killing, the term accidental too often drawing in



awareness and skill factors. To call it just incidental killing would perhaps serve better. The fact is until we interfered so much with things quite recently hardly anything out there has ever presented much of a threat to us, and still we are not much good at controlling the mechanisms of death. But in our numbers we have just now changed into a randomly dangerous disease. Perhaps the people you complain about are the ones most likely to notice the mutation and in time see it reversed, so we might continue with a planet for a home rather than find we end up gasping our last in the autoclave nature seems to be preparing for us. If you listen you will hear her whistling while she works. Your claim you are the planet's finest is fiction. Now draw your heavy pen, load all the mighty cries of your gods and devils, and launch your inky darts. As the master of greatness prove the greatest risk I run is not that you might fall out of your tree while I happen to be under it. But remember, should you score even a single blot it will likely be just by chance, and, as it will be on one of your own, might well prove my point rather than yours.

**Albert Dean**

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**20th August 1998**

**Rick Street**

**A LUCKY ESCAPE FOR THE KITCHEN SINK**

**Theo (C93.5.5) - Monthly Newsletters** : With this regard your failure is greatly appreciated.

**Norman Mackie (C93.7.5) - Life Is Sacred ?** Viewing all life as being sacred is a lovely idea but unfortunately rather impossible. Like it or not you must draw a line between what you consider 'life' and what you don't. For example, rats. If we viewed rats as sacred we'd be overrun with the things. Or locusts!? How about mildew? That's a living fungus, with every bit as much right to exist as you or I. (?) And my own personal favourite... the salmonella bacterium. Face it Norman, its them or us!

**Kevin Arbuthnot (C93.10.4) - The Paranormal** : Another lurker steps from the shadows and disagrees with me. All is right with the world.

There are sceptics and there are people who are merely sceptical. You may call yourself a sceptic but your acknowledgement of the possibility that you might end up wearing a daisy chain and flip-flops betrays the fact that you are actually too open-minded to be a true sceptic. What I think needs to be avoided is not constructive debate but the all too commonplace slagging matches that the people I call sceptics (perhaps I should call them cynics) seem to love. People who don't understand the paranormal should approach the subject with the attitude of a student who is eager to learn not with the attitude of a tutor who thinks he already knows everything. I have seen people who know nothing about UFO's trying to convince people who have actually



seen them that UFO's don't exist and thereby implying that the witness must be stupid. Unfortunately such people are enormously plentiful but thankfully absent from the Aquarian SIG. If you wish to discuss paranormal issues then I suggest you join the Aquarian SIG, just as anyone wishing to discuss cats should join the Feline SIG (or whatever its called), and provided you treat the existing membership with the kind of respect that you'd expect from them, then I'm sure your observations will be most welcome. Any discussion about paranormal issues in this newsletter should be confined to their philosophical aspects. For example, the difference between evidence and proof. Only an idiot would deny that there is evidence for the existence of extra-terrestrial life but at what point does it become irrefutable proof? If a UFO landed on the White House lawn would that actually prove anything? How many people need to believe in something before it becomes real? Etc...

**Michael Nisbet (C93.11/12) - Humour :** There is some merit in viewing humour as a living thing in so far as it is undeniably dynamic. Any attempt to analyse humour as a concept must first take into account the fact that what's funny changes from decade to decade. Great comedians of yesteryear are simply not funny anymore. (One of Paul White House's characters on the Fast Show illustrates this point perfectly.) And I'm told that in their day some of Shakespeare's plays were considered *comedies*. Such attempts as I have seen by philosophers to define the nature of comedy always seem entirely too rigid to permit this phenomenon.

Furthermore it must also be remembered that what is considered funny in one country may well not be so elsewhere. The Larry Sanders Show springs strangely to mind.

**Michael Nisbet (C93.12.3/4) - Self-Awareness :** Thank you for trying to help with the macaque dilemma but I'm not sure that its done much good.

You say that monkey's "have negative perceptions of themselves". Are you saying that creatures that are not deemed 'self-aware' are however aware of what they are *not*, if not actually aware of what they are? And do other proponents of your broad viewpoint also agree on this important detail?

You also say that "a monkey ... in so far as it is conscious of its own existence at all, perceives itself as 'a monkey that is not another monkey'." So you do acknowledge that a monkey is in some way conscious that it exists and that it is a monkey. Perhaps the dilemma stems from a question a degree. You seem to be saying that all animals are self-aware but some are more self-aware than others. Is it therefore possible for a monkey to be aware that it exists but not have a 'self'? Perhaps we need to clarify what the term 'self' actually means before we speculate any further about whether or not monkeys possess such things.

**Valerie Ransford (C93.14.2) What's the Difference Between Art and Mosquitoes?**



The use of a mosquito may be, simply, to be a mosquito, but art is fundamentally different in that we don't make mosquitoes. If a man were to make lots of mosquito's he could be accused of wasting his time for his creation serves no purpose. Of course some would say that artists waste their time by creating art but plenty of others appreciate the efforts of the artist. A man-made mosquito could potentially be intelligent enough to disagree that it's creation served no purpose but a work of art has no such subjective viewpoint. Art therefore, unlike mosquitoes, should and does serve a purpose, even if in some cases, only to its creator. Perhaps God has a purpose for mosquitoes that we don't know about but that is for him to discuss with his peers if such entities exist.

I hope that clears that up for you. (???)

**Valerie Ransford (C93.14.3) What's The Difference Between Knowledge And Belief?** : I have heard it said that the first step towards wisdom is to admit your own ignorance. Perhaps the existence or at least the overuse of the word 'knowledge' is holding back the development of mankind?

**Theo (C93.15.1) Infinite-Valued Logic - Mathematical Proof Of Mankind's Ignorance** : As 'i' is infinite and all of the values in {Pi} are fractions the product will always be zero. Therefore nobody actually knows anything. Everyone's world view is equally worthless.

**Anthony Owens (C93.23.5) - The Evolution Of Nit-Picking** : As with Michael Nisbet, my thanks to you also for trying to answer my macaque dilemma. So are you saying that a monkey doesn't know where its flees live? It simply picks off its own flees as a conditioned response to being bitten and thereby derives satisfaction from grooming itself. Once its finished grooming itself it can then derive a similar satisfaction from grooming any nearby furry object. The decision of the first monkey to groom another monkey was based on a desire to experience the satisfaction of grooming rather than on sympathy to the plight of its comrade.

This does seem to explain how monkey behaviour could develop as it has without the need for monkeys to be self aware but we are still left with the problem of how creatures intelligent enough to figure out reflective surfaces could fail to realise the fact of their own existence once confronted with their own reflection. The real problem is that a monkey can look down at its body and see itself. When it sees this body reflected in a mirror it should recognise it as its own. Perhaps it cannot grasp the concept of there being two of itself. Maybe it perceives the reflection of a food item as a second food item that points to one that can be eaten but a second monkey pointing the way to its own location is still a monkey other than itself and should be treated as such. Problem solved? I doubt it! Any further ideas most welcome.

**Stef Gula (93.24.3) - Justifiable Smugness** : Thank you for offering me the courtesy of having the last word and I promise not to take it as a sign of



victory by default. After all there is no victory to be had because the only argument was between you and Theo and with all due respect you were both wrong. I can say this with some certainty because you were arguing about what I meant. However if you are gonna start levelling accusations at me then obviously I'm gonna defend myself.

Basic factual error... Pah! Who said I was using a biological term? I am not a biologist, this is not The Biology SIG, therefore I used a simple English word as defined in simple English dictionaries. And you are most welcome to check my usage. I have nothing to fear. 'Bat' is a species of animal. The fact that there are many species of bats is irrelevant.

**Theo (C93.27.6) - Creation Mythology & Scientific Analysis :** You say that if the scientific model for the origin of the universe is incorrect then the failure of quantitative predictions will prove it so. Is it your opinion then that this has already happened to earlier religious motels ? Or are such mythologies exempt from this kind of scientific analysis?

**Theo (C93.33.1) – Murder :** You seem to think that Sheila is condoning killing simply because she states that legal killing isn't murder, but, it seems clear to me that she is not saying that all state approved killing is OK. This debate isn't about ethics but merely semantics. You define murder as 'unethical killing' whereas Sheila defines it as 'illegal killing' and I'm inclined to think that she is probably on firmer ground. It does appear to me though that her more technically correct usage does leave a gap in her vocabulary. So...

... **Sheila**

What word would you use to describe *unethical* killing if the word murder is to be restricted to purely legal terminology?

**John Neary (C93.34.1) - Population Control :** You say that the Chinese use of compulsory sterilisation for men who have fathered two children is condemned by the western world as a deprivation of human rights but as a member of said western world I have to say that I am not as quick to condemn the practise as you might think. There is little doubt in my mind that in some cases population control is necessary. Over-population is a very real problem that can potentially destroy the quality of life of millions of people, and too few individuals have sufficient social conscience to restrain their own primordial instincts. Having said that I don't relish the idea of being sterilised against my will but this prospect would be an adequate deterrent to prevent me from having that second child. With some people having only one child this would balance out the inevitable imperfections in the system that allow a few individuals to slip through the net and propagate illegally. Unfortunately a long term side affect would be the evolution of the human race towards criminal tendencies.

**John Neary (C93.34.2) - Crime and Banishment :** I have also long considered the banishment of criminals to some uninhabited island to be an



obvious alternative to prisons and many sci-fi writers have elaborated on this concept. However, like all good ideas, it is not without its problems.

Firstly you must decide if you are going to have one island for men and a second island for women or if you're going to have a single mixed island. One island is obviously cheaper and provides a more natural environment for your chaos society to develop but gives rise to the tricky problem of children. By creating this artificially lawless society you must accept responsibility for its consequences and an inevitable consequence of a mixed society would be children. These children would be innocent of any crimes themselves and yet condemned to grow up in a society run by hooligans and psychopaths. A solution is to sterilise all inmates before they are incarcerated, however this is but one small step from imposing our own set of rules on the society, which is what you seem to wish to avoid.

The other problem is that of the threat to our own society posed by an alternative lawless one. You may think that without the rule of law this society would be incapable of forming an effective enough infrastructure to support the kind of war machine needed to pose a threat to our own world but consider the advantages they would have, such as slavery for example. The strong would undoubtedly enslave the weak and a highly effective tyrannical power structure would emerge. You may also think that no one, economically isolated, little island could pose a threat to the vast nations of the rest of the world but do not forget the power of modern weapons. If this society could manage to create a biological, chemical, or nuclear device and find a way of deploying it, you could be looking at millions of innocent casualties. But why would they bother? What good would it do them? It probably wouldn't do them any good but the ruler of this society would inevitably be a criminal, quite possibly a psychopath who may simply view it as sport. Do we really want to give such an individual the opportunity to rule a country? And could we control such a country enough to protect ourselves from it?

**John Neary (C93.37/38) - Democracy :** Fascinating! True Athenian democracy sounds pretty good in a sexist kind of way. And could potentially re-emerge in the virtual world where it is possible for 4 billion people to assemble. What you don't mention though is what happened in 322BC to bring about its downfall. I have a vague recollection of a Persian invasion and subsequent reign of Alexander The Great happening about then but I'm probably mistaken. If such a system could re-emerge we'd do well learn to from the eventual failure of the original version.

**Martin Lake (C93.42.2) - Civilisation :** If a civilised population is one that "puts aside its instinctive reactions and substitutes more considered, and less violent, responses" then perhaps its time we had something better than civilisation. Suppressing our instincts is no solution. What we need is a social framework that allows us to live according to our true natures without harming others.



**And Finally...**

I was going to add selected comments on C92 at this point but that might be construed as out-staying my welcome. See ya...

**Rick Street**

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**22nd August 1998****Tim Dedopulos****THE NECESSITY OF EVIL**

I thought I'd break my six months lurking with a short rant on good and evil, given that it seems relatively topical.

Free will is often seen as the universal justification for evil - "There has to be evil if there is free will". But is it possible to make a choice between good and good? Only against a background of greater evil, I suggest.

A friend once claimed that "If there were no evil, I could still get up, get dressed (choose what clothes I would wear), eat breakfast (choose what breakfast to eat), paint a picture (choose what to paint and how to do so) and so on. There isn't just one 'good' thing for someone to do - the choices are infinite."

That isn't necessarily true. If you are talking about specific actions as defining good and evil, then you are fixed into cultural relativism. What is good becomes what is most accepted by that culture at that time, and what is evil becomes what is most reviled by it. These definitions change with time and space, often radically. To claim that any current set of definitions is the pinnacle of goodness is presumption.

Society will generally decide that the ultimate expression of evil within itself is whatever it finds most abhorrent in current experience or memory. This is entirely relative to how bad things are. As the degree of background evil decreases, the measure of what is abhorrent also decreases.

For an example of this, look at European history over the last 1000 years. A millenium ago, Europe was in the Dark Ages. Slavery, serfism, poverty and abuse were all commonplace, and seen by the privileged (and sometimes by the abused) as the natural order. Evil was mainly the province of the supernatural; demons and monsters to destroy the soul. A bit later, the Inquisition performed all sorts of heinous acts to combat what they considered evil. If we come forward to the seventeenth and eighteenth century, serf bondage is largely eroded, and many earlier excesses are considered out of line. Slavery presents no moral problems however, and neither does discrimination on grounds of sex, colour or status. Perhaps the local gentry are no longer free to rape any local they feel like, but there is still a huge



divide. Evil has supernatural components still, but it has also become a very human past-time.

The same trend can be seen in small-town "morality" versus big-city "cosmopolitanism" - the narrower the range of experience around a person, the harsher their judgements against things that fall outside the accepted norm.

At the moment, we have eroded a lot of the old injustices. Poverty, exploitation and casual violence are seen as evils, whereas previously they were merely facts of life.

But where does this procession stop?

It is known that colour has an effect on mood, and that certain cuts of clothing provoke certain reaction. Is it so difficult to postulate a future utopian society where wearing certain styles and colours of clothing would be considered a psychological violence upon those around you?

In order to function most effectively and to be as contented as possible, good nutrition is vital. In fact, an optimal nutritional strategy can be easily worked out for any person. This would dictate all intake. To eat anything else would be to reduce your efficiency and happiness; conceivably, anti-social if the good of the society were to be carefully balanced.

The media around us strongly conditions the way we feel. The correlation between the normalisation of violence on TV and the increase of anti-social behaviour in society is currently being researched. Surely, then, our theoretical utopia may well ban certain artistic depictions as a root cause of violence?

Your clothes, your breakfast, your paintings; everything can be evaluated as being more or less good given the simple criteria that "the greatest benefit to the greatest number is good, and anything less is evil, because it causes unnecessary harm." When all greater evils are eliminated, then the smaller evils will be turned on and re-defined for elimination. These are very broad definitions of good and evil. You could set aside an arbitrary banding whereby the 10% most widely beneficial possibilities were good, and the 10% most widely harmful ones were evil, and everything in between was neutral, but as you eliminated great Evils from the world, the range of options would narrow and narrow, and the bands would need recalculation. Eventually, you get back to the same place as the broad definitions.

As our utopia gets better and better, it gets more and more restrictive. And what when differences in personality cause friction? Friction of that sort is stressful, and stress is extremely harmful to the health. To irritate another person is just another form of violence. The only way to avoid it is to avoid personality clash; the only way to avoid that is to avoid personality, period.



There is only one possible result of 'ultimate' good; it is exactly the same as the result of 'ultimate' evil - a universe entirely without life at all.

Don't get me wrong. I hate evil actions. We all do, with a few tragic exceptions. But as long as there is to be diversity - as long as there is to be life - there have to be differences. And in every difference, there will be a 'winner' and a 'loser', and while there are losers - even if only to the level of disliking the colour of your blouse - there will be evil.

### **Tim Dedopoulos**

21st August 1998

Sheila Blanchard

### **MORE MURDER**

There was once a song which went, I think:

He says "Murder!" he says, every time we kiss,  
He says "Murder" he says, "Keep it up like this !"  
And that "Murder" he says, in that impossible tone  
Will bring on nobody's murder but his own.

Now it seems to me that in the first two lines the word "murder" is used metaphorically and in the last line it is used literally.

When I write poetry I frequently use metaphors. When I try to write for a philosophy newsletter I try to use language literally. Maybe I don't always succeed but to me it's part of what philosophy is about.

I'd like to write more but haven't time this month. And you've made some of the points already. It really would take too long to cover the subject as it deserves. I have a ten thousand word essay on Justice and Law somewhere, so if I can find it I might send you that instead !

I will share with you a comment from the current issue of *New Zealand Geographic*, though. The writer described how a beautiful area he'd known as a boy was being commercialised and needed protection. Before leaving he took (I'll quote, but without the names) "one last look at the beach and across to the Island, where one of my ancestors 'tidied up' the neighbourhood by having a few of his rivals over for a barbie. Literally."

He doesn't say when but most likely, I should think, round about the eighteen twenties. Which is not long ago on the time-scale of the development of civilisation. We can't assume that our moral values are and always will be shared by everyone in the world.



**Sheila Blanchard**

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To allow easy detachment of the questionnaire that follows

Sorry, trees !



## **MENSA AT BRAZIER'S : 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> May 1999 : QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please answer the questions below (tick the appropriate boxes) :-

1. Are you interested in attending *Mensa at Braziers* ?    Yes ....    No ....
  2. Can you make 7<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> May 1999 ?    Yes ....    No ....
  3. Would you be prepared to present a paper ?    Yes ....    No ....
  4. Would you be prepared to take part in a debate ?    Yes ....    No ....
  5. Would you still attend if you had to stay in B&B ?    Yes ....    No ....
  6. Would you be willing to share a room ?    Yes ....    No ....
  7. Would you appreciate a "Key Note" Speaker ?    Yes ....    No ....
  8. Should the Conference have a Theme ?    Yes ....    No ....
- ... if so, and you have a preference, please describe over-leaf
9. Do you object to any of the proposals ? ('Yes' → 'I object')
  - ... Non-PDG Mensans can attend    Yes ....    No ....
  - ... Invited Non-Mensans can attend    Yes ....    No ....
  - ... Joint with ISPE    Yes ....    No ....
  10. Do you have any other ideas (please give these over-leaf or on a separate piece of paper)    Yes ....    No ....
  11. Are you willing to pay a deposit **now** ?    Yes ....    No ....

**The cost is £92 full board, with £5 off for those willing to share rooms. Non-residents pay £54** (inclusive of all meals other than breakfast). Note that these costs might vary for those in B&B & would increase slightly if we had a Key Note speaker whose expenses we had to defray. If you are a 'Yes' voter, please put your money where your mouth is and send me a cheque for **£20 (£7 if you intend to be a non-resident)** payable to *Braziers Park* **NOW** !



**MENSA AT BRAZIER'S - MAY 1999 - QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Brazier's College, Ipsden, Wallingford, Oxon., OX10 6AN.  
Phone 01491 680221.**

**Suggestions for the Conference Theme :**

**Any Other Ideas ?**

