

# Commensal

The Newsletter of the Philosophical Discussion Group

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7<sup>th</sup> February 1999

Theo Todman

EDITORIAL

Firstly, you'll notice we've shifted to a new font (Times New Roman). New member **Alan Edmonds** reckons it is easier to read. This is the "official" font we use at work, so I have an in-built, albeit irrational, aversion to it. However, I agree with Alan that it may well be easier to read, so we're giving it a go.

Secondly, and this should probably have been the first point, the Newsletter is a month late – an advance on last time's, which was two month's late, but hardly a return to normal service ! Today, I received a letter from Anthony Owens asking how SIG members can know whether their failure to receive a newsletter as advertised is due to the dysfunction of the SIGSec or Mensa House (Anthony put the question more kindly and subtly, of course). As it happens, he's suffered from a two-pronged attack – my fault for *Commensal* & (presumably) Mensa House's for *PhiSIGma*. Anthony suggested a page in Mensa Magazine listing the SIGs & their latest newsletters. I'll suggest this to the SIGs Officer, Mark Griffin, who'll read this anyway as he's a member of PDG. I've occasionally thought that I ought to send a letter out on schedule (ie. in the first week of the month) saying that *Commensal* is going to be late (if it is), but presumed that some of you (mainly the "paying members") would object to the frittering away of funds. Maybe I should just try to get the thing out on time.

New Members

As usual, we welcome our new members to the SIG. Nine new members this time, so welcome to :-

• Tony Hill	• Dr. Alan Edmonds
• Jim Crockett	• Cy Hinton
• Sheila Chadwick	• Karin Reinmueller
• Steve Brown	• Kyle Cook
• Barbara McGoun	

PDG Conference

Thanks be unto **Roger Farnworth** for suggesting the format for the May '99 Conference at Braziers. I've left it much as he submitted it in November last year, except that I've removed references to the guest speaker, whose favour I have curried insufficiently, I expect, to engage him this year. Everything is provisional, so let me know your thoughts. Also, see the notes following the draft schedule of events.

Friday	07/05/99
18:00 – 19:30	Arrive
19:45	Supper
21:00	Introduction "in the round"
21:30	Debate on <i>Determinism or Freewill</i> (Roger Farnworth & ...)



Saturday	08/05/99
08:30	Breakfast
09:45	Plan afternoon discussion - choose two subjects
10:00	Talk and Discussion: <i>Consciousness</i> (Theo Todman)
11:00	Coffee
11:30 – 12:45	Talk and Discussion (eg. on <i>Philosophy of Science</i> or <i>Ethics</i> )
13:00	Lunch
Afternoon	Free
16:15	Tea
17:00 – 18:45	Two subjects raised at the morning's planning meeting
20:00	Informal Discussion (Pub, Lounge, ...)

Sunday	09/05/99
08:30	Breakfast
10:00	Talk & Discussion: <i>Is it Rational to be Religious ?</i> (Theo Todman)
11:00	Coffee
11:30 – 12:45	Talk & Discussion: ... any volunteers ??
13:00	Lunch
14:00	Planning next year's Conference
14:30	Departure

Notes	
1.	The programme makes provision for plenty of spare time for informal discussion in the pub, at meals or in the lounge.
2.	Roger Farnworth will arrive at 19:00 on the Friday and meet all guests as they arrive & show them to their rooms.
3.	At the Friday's introductory session we will encourage flexibility throughout, and seek to have each session chaired by a different volunteer.
4.	We need a volunteer for the <i>Free Will</i> side of the opening debate. Any takers ? Failing that, any alternative topics – with a volunteer to debate.
5.	A person by the name of Theo Todman is down to talk on two subjects. The first will be an update on <i>Consciousness</i> , straight from the King's College London conference noted below, at which several of the internationally renowned experts will hopefully have appeared.
6.	My second talk, on the philosophical issues associated with adopting a religious outlook on life, is a topic of great interest to me but may not be to others. Anyone not liking this topic is welcome to suggest another, provided they deliver the talk on their chosen subject, that is !
7.	Volunteers are required for the other remaining Saturday and Sunday slots. Braziers is a small, informal conference, so no-one need fear being insufficiently professional or profound. A high level of participation by attendees is, however, essential for the conference to be a success.
8.	In default of volunteers for formal talks, we'll discuss the various hot potatoes that have arisen in <i>Commensal</i> over the last couple of years.



## PDG Conference Administrative Details

I repeat here some details from previous issues of *Commensal*. The conference is to be held at Braziers College, Ipsden, Wallingford, Oxon., OX10 6AN, over Friday – Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> May 1999. Braziers College was founded in 1950 as the Braziers School of Integrated Social Research to study practical ways of living in a group. It now operates partly as a community, and partly as an adult education college. It has a country-house atmosphere, and is situated in its own attractive grounds in the Chiltern countryside. The full fee, including accommodation and catering, is £92, and early booking is advisable. Apply for further details to the College at the above address (Tel: 01491 680221). A deposit of £20 is payable. Please book directly with the College – I will keep in touch with them periodically to see how things are going. Partners, whether Mensans or not, are welcome.

## King's College London – Philosophy Lectures & Conferences

Here follows some information gleaned from the King's College London web-site (<http://kcl.ac.uk>). I'll be attending the first conference on *Consciousness*, all being well, and will report on it at the Mensa Conference at Braziers, as noted above. Please note that none of the conferences or lectures below are anything to do with Mensa ! Nor, sadly, will I be able to attend many of the events. I merely draw your attention to them as another example of the philosophical surfeit those of us within striking distance of London have to dine on. Note that for the KCL Conferences one must sit on hard chairs and be lectured at, while for the PDG conference you sit in armchairs, as befits philosophers, and participate !

### Centre for Philosophical Studies *Consciousness* International Conference 24-25 April 1999

#### Speakers and Titles:

- *Professor Ned Block* (New York University): Consciousness and Representation
- *Professor David Chalmers* (University of Arizona): How Can We Construct A Science of Consciousness ?
- *Professor Daniel Dennett* (Tufts University): The Hard Question: And Then What Happens ?
- *Professor Susan Greenfield* (University of Oxford): The Chemistry of Consciousness
- *Professor Nicholas Humphrey* (London School of Economics): How to Solve the Mind-Body Problem
- *Professor John O'Keefe* (University College London): Consciousness as a Brain Process
- *Professor David Papineau* (King's College London): Are Theories of Consciousness Misconceived ?
- *Professor John Searle* (University of California, Berkeley): The Structure of Consciousness

**Registration Fee :** The registration fee is £75 until 28 February 1999, after which a late registration fee of an additional £20 will be charged. (Cheques should be made payable to "King's College London".)

**Refreshments :** The registration fee will include the cost of coffee and tea on both days. There will be a Conference Reception to which all registered members of the conference are invited.



NEXT DEADLINE - 15TH MARCH 1999

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In addition to the registration fee there will be charges for lunch on 24 April (£14), dinner on 24 April (£18) and lunch on 25 April (£14) for those who wish to eat on campus. For those who do not wish to eat on campus there are many cafés, pubs and restaurants in the immediate vicinity.

**Accommodation :** There are fifty single rooms available at a cost of £25 per night for bed and breakfast at Rosebery Hall of Residence, London School of Economics. *These will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.*

**All enquiries to and application forms from :** Dr Tony Dale, Centre for Philosophical Studies, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS; Tel 0171-873 2585 email [a.dale@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:a.dale@kcl.ac.uk)

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**King's College London  
Humanities Research Centres  
Centre for Philosophical Studies  
Events Diary**

**Public Lectures :-**

- **Note :** Several interesting lectures are now sadly in the past, namely : Professor Anthony Flew: Could We Survive Our Own Deaths ? Dr Michael Stšlitzner (Vienna Circle Institute, Vienna): What Lakatos can teach the Mathematical Physicist. Lord Quinton: The Episode of Ordinary Language Philosophy. Professor Anthony O'Hear (University of Bradford): Popper: Science and Politics. **However the following are still to come :-**
- **Wednesday 24 February 1999**, 5.15pm, Room 35B, Main Building : Professor Robert Thomas (University of Manitoba): Reuben Hersh's Philosophical Project and Beyond
- **Wednesday 3 March 1999**, 5.15pm, Committee Room : Dr James Gasser (Universities of Lausanne and Neuchâtel): Logic and Metaphor
- **Wednesday 10 March 1999**, 5.15pm, Council Room : Dr Zuzana Parusnikova (Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic): Health and Power: The Disciplinary Gaze in Modern Medicine
- **Wednesday 24 March 1999**, 5.15pm, Council Room : Professor Christopher Hookway (University of Sheffield): Naturalism and Interpretation: Quine and Davidson
- **Wednesday 12 May 1999**, 5.15pm, Council Room : Professor John Haldane (University of St Andrews): Philosophy and the Silencing of Religion
- **Wednesday 19 May 1999**, 5.15pm, Room 228, Strand Building : Anthony Hill: Art and Mathematics

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**Lectures held in conjunction with the Philosophy Programme of the School of Advanced Study, University of London  
History of the Problems of Philosophy: The Problem of Perception**

Every Tuesday at 6.00pm, from 20 April 1999 to 29 June 1999  
Room 349, Senate House, Malet Street, WC1  
Speakers include:

Professor Julia Annas (University of Arizona), Professor Victor Caston (Brown University), Dr John Driver (Birkbeck College, London), Dr JC Field (Birkbeck College, London), Dr Marina Frasca-Spada (University of Cambridge), Professor Gary Hatfield (University of Pennsylvania), Dr MGF Martin (University College, London), Paul Snowdon (University of Oxford)

Further details may be found at <http://www.sas.ac.uk/Philosophy>. For all enquiries about this series please telephone 0171 862 8683.



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**An Event held in conjunction with the Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London and the Bimal Matilal Lectureship, King's College London**  
**Greek and Indian Philosophy: A Discussion Panel**

**Friday 5 March 1999, 5.00pm, The Great Hall**

- *Ambassador Vassilis Vitsaxis* (formerly Greek Ambassador to India): Questions based on his book, *Plato and the Upanishads*
- *Professor Richard Gombrich* (Boden Professor of Sanskrit, University of Oxford): On the Dialogue between the Greek King Milinda and a Buddhist Monk
- *Professor Richard Sorabji* (King's College London): Plotinus and India
- *Dr Jonardon Ganeri* (University of Nottingham) and *Dr Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad* (University of Cambridge): Common Concerns in Greek and Indian Philosophy

Enquiries to Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London, tel 0171 873 2088

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**Conferences**

**One-Day Conference on: Philosophy and Computing**  
**In conjunction with the Centre for Computing in the Humanities, King's College London**

**Friday 19 February 1999, 9.45am - 6.05pm, Committee Room**

**Programme:**

**9.45:** Registration

**10.00:** *Dr Peter Millican* (University of Leeds): Using Computers in Philosophy

**11.15-11.35:** coffee

**11.35:** *Dr Sylvia Berryman* (King's College London): Results from Data-Base Research in Ancient Greek Philosophy

**12.50-14.00:** lunch break

**14.00:** *Dr Luciano Floridi* (University of Oxford): Should There Be a Philosophy of Computing?

**15.15:** *Professor Donald Gillies* (King's College London): How Philosophy has Helped Computing

**16.30-16.50:** coffee

**16.50:** *Professor Peter Gibbins* (University of Exeter): The Digitization of Philosophy

There is no registration fee but please let [Dr A Dale](#) know beforehand if you are attending.

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**Next Issue of Commensal**

**15th March 1999** is the closing date for contributions to April's *Commensal* (**C96**). Apologies for the limited and selective commentary by me in **C95** – it's this or nothing at the moment, I'm afraid.

Best wishes,

**Theo**



**3<sup>rd</sup> September 1998**

**Frank Walker**

Dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter. You may publish anything I send you unless I make clear I forbid it.

Herewith four contributions. One is a reply to something many years ago. The rest arise marginally out of things said or implied in recent contributions more than once. So I have worded them as self-standing rather than a specific answer to someone else.

Use them one by one or all in a lump as convenient [*the other three are in the pot for future editions of Commensal, Ed.*].

**Frank Walker**

### **OF HOMICIDE AND MURDER**

Homicide is the killing of one human being by another : murder is intentional homicide. It is, and usually has been, recognised that killing by accident may be a crime but is much less heinous than murder. Different legal systems at different times and in different countries have done a lot of fine-tuning on that. If A shoots at B intending to kill B but misses B and kills C, is A guilty of murder because he intended to kill someone, or only guilty of manslaughter because he did not intend to kill C ? A hits B on the head with a bottle intending only to knock him unconscious but B dies from the blow ? A gives B a violent push in the chest intending only to thrust him away, but B falls, hits his head on the edge of a kerb, and dies ?

Even assuming A intends to kill B and succeeds, most systems of law have recognised three justifications, ie. making the killings lawful. **First**, killing a member of the enemy army in time of war. More fine tuning. Was the victim a fighting man or only the cook who kept him in fighting trim ? Was the victim still fighting or had he surrendered ? Had war been duly declared (remember Pearl Harbour) ? Is the civilian captain of an unarmed ship with a cargo of shells or aviation fuel or army rations fair game ?

**Secondly** carrying out the lawful sentence of a court of law. The public hangman was never a murderer at law but only a mere mechanic doing a disagreeable job.

**Thirdly**, and most complicated, self-defence. For this, there must be an attack of sufficient violence by the victim. The defence may be of the person of the killer or of his property or of someone the killer has a duty to protect; his wife, children and other relatives; his servant or his employer; in the case of a teacher, his pupils; in the case of a policeman, any member of the public. I have a duty to protect the Queen and the Prince of Wales (and have sworn an oath to do so – to live and to die).



The first of these is a special case of the last. It is the duty of a good government (whether in the person of a queen, or emperor, or president, or dictator, or a cabinet, or supreme soviet) to allow all subjects to live in peace and quiet, and specifically to defend them against any invasion by a foreign power. The King cannot do this on his own : he needs an army (and navy and, nowadays, air force). In time of peace, good government requires an armed force to be ready if war should come about, and this force will consist of men (and women nowadays, more the pity) trained to kill other human beings. In time of war if invasion has occurred or is imminent it is the duty of all subjects who can fight to join in the defence of the realm and to kill the invaders if possible. I suppose the blitz was an actual invasion. The home guard was a response on the part of those not of military age to the threat of land invasion.

There used to be a **fourth** kind of justifiable homicide, namely the killing of an outlaw. If one who had committed a serious crime was not in custody he might be declared an outlaw, ie. the protection the law affords to all human beings within the realm was withdrawn. The Sheriff of Nottingham had a duty to kill Robin Hood, but anyone else might do so without fear of penalty.

If Salmon Rushdie is assassinated, this is an example of category two or four above. In a Christian, or Buddhist etc. country it would be murder but in a Moslem country it would be no crime.

I am not sure if it is in order to quote personal experience in a philosophical discussion. If it is not, you may eliminate this paragraph [*gladly retained ! Ed*]. For the argument is of great concern to me. You see, in the dark of night of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1942, in an aeroplane, using one of the earlier makes of radar, I detected U577 some seven miles away. I directed my pilot to a position where he could, and did, sink her with a depth charge. The crew would be about 40 males, all certainly in the armed services of the Reich, and all perished. My complicity in their deaths is undoubted (it could not have occurred without my complicity). I intended to kill them. I doubt not that they would have killed me if they could, all of them. It is reasonably sure each of them had a wife, or girl friend, or parents, or young children, so something over a hundred persons will have mourned their loss. I am certainly not guilty of murder by German law or British law or international law. But am I guilty under some humanitarian notion of moral law ? Ought I to feel guilt, or shame ? Ought I to do penance or pay compensation ?

Assuming the proper translation of Exodus 20:13 is, “Thou shalt do no murder”, as Cranmer (and practically no-one else) put it, or “Thou shalt not kill” (as the rest put it), it is an interesting exercise, in the light of the three justifications above, to find how many homicides in the Bible thereafter were murder : there were quite a few before, mainly by the direct hand of God.

**Frank Walker**

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**Frank :** An excellently clear exposition, it seems to me. It does, though, appear to get off to a bad start. Homicide, at least in its popular US usage, has the overtones of illegality about it, and you appear to suggest as much by saying that murder is intentional homicide. Then, you go on to talk about justifiable homicides, which appears to be back-peddling. I'm never quite sure how sentences of the form X is Y are supposed to work. The one you've chosen strikes me as a definition – ie. in all contexts in which we might use the term “murder”, “intentional homicide” would do just as well, and vice versa. A similar statement, such as the contentious “abortion is murder” isn't a definition but (allegedly) a statement of fact, with items corresponding to the first term forming a subset of those corresponding to the second. Maybe it's only pedants like me that get muddled by such statements. The way I'd have expressed it, in tune with what you subsequently go on to say, would have been something like “murder is the intentional and unjustified killing of one human being by another”, thought I dare say this is open to objections as well.

I was interested that your third mitigation referred to “those the killer has a duty to protect”, with only policemen mentioned as having a duty to protect “any member of the public”. Don't we all have this duty ? At least we hear people moaning that so-and-so was mugged and no-one came to help, as though this state of affairs indicated a gross dereliction of duty on the part of passers-by.

You seem to have to scratch around a bit to make out WW2 as a defensive effort on the part of the British. Wasn't it all about the liberation of allied territory (others we have a duty to protect) ? Hitler would have been happy to conclude a pact with the British – he just wanted to be left alone to carve up the East & get his lebensraum. He would, of course, have continued to inflict unspeakable sufferings on peoples we had no treaty with, as well as on those we did, but which we still had a “duty to protect” – or did we ?

Just why are the ethics of the Wild West and Sherwood Forrest no longer operative, if they aren't ? Why no more outlaws or lynch-mobs ? Because the law now has a sufficiently long arm ?

Finally, can God logically commit murder ? After all, he provides the laws and the justifications for any homicides ? Clearly, on the other hand, there were many murders recorded in the Bible after Moses. The Bible doesn't claim that all its characters were righteous. The incident of David and Uriah the Hittite, concerning David's adultery with Bathsheba, is a classic case. David effectively murdered Uriah, even though he was killed in battle by his, and David's, enemies. The divine retribution is interesting, too !

I suppose my biggest concern with your approach was uncertainty as to what sort of an argument it was supposed to be. Was it a definition of certain words, a description of common usage and practice or something deeper ?

**Theo**

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30th October 1998

Anthony Owens

### A DIET and REPLIES

**A Diet to Die For:** Do you follow healthy eating advice ? Perhaps you read avidly all the latest reports on what are the best foods to eat if you want to avoid cancer, or heart disease. A potential anti-carcinogen is sulphoraphane, a compound broken down from glucosinolates found in broccoli. Trouble is the amounts available in individual helpings of broccoli tend to be erratic. Never mind: a group at the John Innes Institute near Norwich are cross-breeding broccoli with a variety of wild cabbage hopefully to increase the amount. At least broccoli aren't being genetically engineered, yet. Tomatoes are being genetically engineered. Working with a biotechnology company, a professor at the University of London's Royal Holloway College has succeeded in doubling the amounts of certain carotenoids in tomatoes, specifically lycopene and beta-carotene, which are believed to reduce the incidence of certain cancers and heart diseases. All very laudable you might think; but where might it lead ?

Laboratories in Europe are working on disease-reducing peppers, carrots, and rice. It is reported that in the U.S. a group of volunteers have been immunised against E.coli by eating a type of raw potato. Recently (September), the *British Journal of Nutrition* published a supplement on *functional foods*: otherwise known as *intelligent foods; pharma-foods; or nutraceuticals*.

The trouble is that the human body is not like a piece of machinery. The fuel to power a piece of machinery does not become part of the machine. When a machine wears out then, apart from any products of corrosion, all the bits you're left with were there when it was new. In your case almost all the bits you started with are now long gone. You are continuously being re-made out of the food you eat. Part of this process is the production of substances which protect you from disease. Millions of years of evolution have done quite a reasonable job of fixing just how much you need.

Evolution isn't a perfect system. A couple of extra arms or a third eye could be quite useful, but you are inevitably a history of what you were. If you want anything extra the answer from evolution would often be the same as that of the simple yokel asked for directions who replied, "Well, I wouldn't start from here". In your case '*here*' is a system whereby the amounts of protective substances are a balance of opposites. If you get too much of a good thing you will produce something to neutralise the excess, like blood sugar and insulin. If the good thing is being supplied as extra benefit from elsewhere the body need not bother making it at all, or worse, only make its antidote and before long the extra benefit becomes essential.

Of course, we can trust the scientists to bear this in mind, can't we ? Well, *you* can if you want, but these days scientific opinion is not so much formed as bought and paid for. If XYZ Co. plc. can produce a food which disrupts the natural process and makes you dependent on their product can you doubt that they'll be able to buy as much



scientific opinion as they need ? Any distinction there might have been between food and drugs, if ever there was any, threatens to become blurred.

Has the time come anyway to ask serious questions of medical so-called progress ? It may be psychologically beneficial to treat disease but does it make sense biologically? Putting right faults can help the individual until they die of something else; but not putting them right may remove the fault from future generations entirely. How much of medical intervention is clumsy and ill-considered? You have a streptococci infection: the bacteria thrive on the iron in your blood. Your G.P. prescribes ferrous sulphate tablets for your anaemia; but your anaemia is a result of your body refusing to release reserves of iron from your liver because of the streptococci. Of course, if you're lucky, your G.P. probably gives you antibiotics as well; but where does the benefit from antibiotics go in the long run: to the human race; or to the bacteria ? Natural Selection works in two ways on bacteria, which can evolve a lot faster than you can. In one they benefit by keeping you alive as long as possible; in two they benefit by being easily and quickly distributed, in which case keeping you alive becomes irrelevant. Antibiotics favour the latter.

The foreword to the '*functional foods*' supplement reads, '*We stand today at the threshold of a new frontier in nutritional sciences*'. This threshold looks suspiciously to me like the banks of the Rubicon: and we all know what happened to Caesar, don't we ?

1. Malcolm Macalister Hall: *Intelligent Food*: Night and Day (Mail on Sunday supplement): 6.9.98.
2. George C. Williams. *Plan and Purpose in Nature*: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson: 1996

**Stef Gula (C94/16)** is quite right to distrust the "*"Right to Life" brigade*". All "Right to....." claimants are troublemakers.

Cynical twaddle ! (**John Stubbings C94/14**) Sorry; but I can't understand art, except as a residual activity from a once-useful procedure. Pictography is recognised as a means of ancient communication and I can think of few things more important to communicate about at that time than hunting. Old habits die hard but the potential for misinterpretation of them over a considerable period of time might well make '*the role art plays in primitive culture nowadays and in the recent past*' as equally irrelevant as your '*night club*' or **John Neary's 'teenage vandalism' (C94/15)**. The pleasure we currently derive from art may not be dissimilar to that experienced by **Rick Street's** flea picking monkeys (**C94/33**), though the activity is arguably less useful: the natural selection of writing, and, much later, photography having swept past the artists leaving them chipping and daubing in the dustpan of history.

I cannot let pass the opportunity to congratulate **Frank Walker (C94/6)** on his excellent idea. If introduced promptly it might even ward off the Extermination of Criminals programme introduced after the 2030 election.



**Anthony Owens**

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**Anthony :** I agreed with most of what you had to say on diet. We do seem to steam on with an unjustifiable feeling of optimism that everything will turn out all right in the end, rather than that we've started an arms race with the micro-biotic world that, in the long term, we might lose. Maybe there is a plague on the way that will be virtually unstoppable, as the black death was. All that can be said is that we seem to have got away with it so far, and what are the alternatives ? We do, though, need strong regulatory agencies to protect us from the unscrupulous XYZ Co.

**Theo**

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**November 1998**

**Paul Cadman**

Dear Theo,

Well, my inertia cannot easily be excused, I bring up the rear in terms of age anyway (or lead in terms of how you think) better to write now than never, its been a year and a bit since I 'joined' you. I can say I have been busy with my school subjects (including taking A-levels early) and with work concerning British involvement in the European Project, but as with all things there is a time to begin and this is my time here in PDG. I have enjoyed reading the issues of PDG over the past year and I offer my apologies for not giving a contribution to it, I therefore plead with you to respond to my donation. If you are still a 'Lurker,' (I believe this is becoming a piece of PDG jargon!) and have not yet written anything, WAKE UP!! You will get something out of it.

I am preparing an article on 'Pure Choice' concerning the definition of a 'Living Creature,' and whether some creatures are any different to machines. Also, I am preparing an article on 'Pure Democracy.'

Here is my first contribution to the newsletter:

**THE WESTERN WAY IS ALSO A FLAWED ONE**

Apathy is experienced in all walks of contemporary 'western life'. When I asked a group of scientists who continually take coffee breaks in the work place whether they were in any way addicted to coffee, they answered, "No...we are just addicted to not working!" And it can be an addiction, people will do anything to escape from the claws of hard graft, even though in our capitalist state we should be compelled to work because it brings forth heavy 'rewards'. Those who do not work hard are supposed to fail and go into poverty, but how hard is hard work ? No-one applies



themselves 100% to a job because it is not worth it; we expend our energies in other worthwhile causes.

The purpose of work is to gain money to expend in activities we like doing and to buy food to survive. In our society, money is needed as much as food and is therefore necessary for life. We use it as a drug, enticing people to come and work for us; it is what makes the world go around. Money is the prime motivator in our world; people do jobs "for the money" and people get happy because of money. It seems to work well but there are pitfalls: like a drug, people develop a tolerance to money and get greedy for more. Employers need to give more money to workers to motivate them.

But is money a false motivator ? In essence it doesn't really have a natural value. Should society as a whole have to rely on this to motivate the whole public ? It is true that money can compel a workforce to work harder and more efficiently or is there a more preferable way ? Could this false motivator and 'drug' be causing profound problems in our world.

We recognise money as synthetic and unnatural. Money does not bring happiness because you always want more; it causes greed and suffering. Money can cause debt; money creates rich nations and causes poor ones. It causes wars and starvation and poverty, just the flow of money from one country to another causes stock markets to crash and virtual futures markets to collapse with the livelihood of a few million farms with it. Money has false value and is evil and corrupting.

Because money is false and 'empty', does it cause us to feel the empty and worthless ? Does it cause disillusionment in society and apathy towards government and 'rebelism' in the younger generation who wish to break out of the synthetic world. It is seen as a barrier that must be broken out of because they do not wish to be moulded into, 'model citizens.' This 'rebelism' is almost an act of self defence which gradually dies as they are standardised.

(See Frank Walker [C94/6] he goes someway to explaining this inherent disease in our state systems but the education system is only one aspect of this standardisation. The silly rules he describes are the spark that ignites 'real crime', later in life.)

People turn to apathy when they feel that they as an individual do not count for anything. In our world everything is standardised and ordered, everything is 'brought into line'. Natural variation is a recognised quality in our human race, every being is different, every soul has its different edition of how the world is presented to it. Our modern world squanders this resource and standardises all aspects of our life, our communication, our freedom and liberty until we feel as though we are but a statistic on a politician's plate. This causes the disinterest in elections and politics and results in 'rebelism' and depression of the people at large.

How can we rectify this world mess we have before us ? I don't think it would be appropriate to say, "answers on the back of a postcard..." but if we just remove ourselves from society for a moment and imagine we are an alien race looking upon



lonely earth, observing all the complex systems and communications we would see how pathetic we actually are. We would see that Third World countries are starving and in conflict because of the monetary system and greed we impose on them. They would be able to see our errors much more clearly. We discriminate against other countries because they do not conform to the "Western Way" of government, law making and humanitarian contradictions; there is no room in our world for variation.

(Isn't it interesting that only democratic countries can enter the EU ? Is any country properly democratic ? Does the fact that 'true democracy' is impracticable make it necessary to put up with a weak alternative ? Is democracy the best way to govern ? See John Neary / Democracy [C93/37-38]).

Sometimes I think that our state systems are long due a format, a wiping away of everything that has gone before in terms of monetarism and government and nonsense traditions that only serve to hold us back. An end to currency as the staple source of motivation for the workers, this is a way to destroy class and greed. Maybe people can gain their motivation from doing other people a good turn and receiving good gifts back ? For example, the farmer gives the produce to the baker who bakes the bread to give back to the farmer. Could systems like this make the world go around ? It seems to me that it would be a better world to live in for everybody, this would encourage variation in the human race because variation would be needed to fulfil all the jobs required. People would do the 'good turns' because they wanted to help someone and not necessarily get something back in return. These systems would make it unnecessary for there to be a government to oversee good business, there is no profit to be made so there is no greed. Motivation does not have to derive from self benefit.

Comments ? Have you any answers to the questions? I will update you on my latest thoughts on this matter as it matures and unravels in my mind. I thank you for being a kind reader, and I hope this will stimulate hot debate in the PDG.

### **GENERAL COMMENT ON THE BIBLE**

I just wish to comment on the swelling Christian bashing going on in PDG. I would just like to add my own experiences with the Bible; I believe it to be a simple map of the word of God, if you need answers to a problem then you can read the book. The Bible is 'only' a medium though and if you wish to gain greater wisdom and understanding you must consult God. When I was thinking about the subject I was 'drawn' to this quotation from the Good News Bible.

"When the Son of Man came, he ate and drank, and everyone said, 'look at this man ! He is a glutton and a drinker, a friend of tax collectors and other outcasts !' God's wisdom, however, is shown to be true by its results." Matt. 11:9.

This says to me that whatever Jesus teaches in the world, if people do not want to hear his wisdom then they will not hear it. To understand Christ you must first accept him.

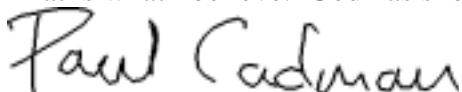


There are many problems in translation of the Bible (**C93/6**), the end of the above quotation is literally translated, "...Wisdom is justified by her children". But I do not think that precise translation is required, only a rough guide is needed to extract more of God's wisdom. (I shall elaborate another time).

Finally, in another section, Jesus is asked to explain the parables. He gives the following in answer:

"so that, 'they may look and look, yet not see; they may listen and listen yet not understand. For if they did, they would turn to God, and he would forgive them.'" Mk 4:12.

That is what I believe. God has shown it to be true by His results.



Paul Cadman - I now Join the 30%

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**Paul :** Good to hear from you, and I enjoyed your exhortation of others to take part. I look forward to your future offerings. That said, I was in less than total agreement with the substance of your articles above !

People don't desire money as such. Money, after all, is a proxy for the things that it can buy. When held in excessive quantities it brings power, again because of the things it can buy, though often only the threat of its use is necessary. So, maybe your real opponent is materialism, or maybe competitiveness. You point out all the evils of money. Yes, it can lead to debt, but only if our projects go wrong. But it does allow us to engage in projects without an immediate payback, or to buy time. Should we all stay at home with mother into our fifties, or are mortgages OK ? I might also add that money is a cohesive factor in society – in that it only has value in a stable society.

Your solution sounds a bit like Communism, and we know what a success that turned out to be. It is a fact of human nature that some are more able, aggressive, acquisitive, .. , than others. They can only be restrained by laws that can themselves only be enforced by people who are motivated to do so. Alternatively, their energies can be channelled – or they can be given the opportunity to exercise them in ways that are not overly destructive.

Utopia always seems to end up worse than the corrupt society it replaces, so lets be content with our half a loaf.

With respect to your second topic, I look forward to your elaboration of God's wisdom in due course. I was interested that you view parables as hiding truth, rather than making the teaching plain by simple stories as our Sunday School teachers would have us believe. The Bible's a complex book, requiring careful handling, as does anything else significant for that matter. I was slightly worried about the rather tenuous connection with philosophy, though. You referred to your "experience" (without describing it) and about your "beliefs" (why



should we care ?). Doesn't a case have to be argued ? When you say "to understand Christ you must first accept him", what do you mean by "understand" ? And what do you say to those who say to you "to understand, Muhammad, the Buddha, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, etc. you have to accept him".

## Theo

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**5th November 1998**

**Kevin Arbuthnot**

### COMMENTS ON C94

**Albert Dean (C94/29-31) :** Where to start ? My model (polemical as it was) applied to the genesis of man as a whole, Albert included! Therefore, I look forward to meeting him next time I'm up a tree. However, whilst up there, I would contest his understanding of the evolutionary process; he clearly reads different books to me.

For example, I accept that our predecessors may have enjoyed a mixed diet, but even if a small part of it was meat, given that there were fewer butchers around then than now, we must have had to go out and invite a smaller neighbour to donate its body to our daily protein requirement. The small neighbour will usually have done this grudgingly, therefore the meal will probably have followed a successful chase and/or fight. It follows that the biggest, fiercest, etc, of our predecessors will have generally enjoyed more meals than their more passive partners, leading to more procreation, better survival, and so on, which provides the trail all the way through to the attitudes of the leaders on the battlefields of today, which include the city trading room and the football terrace more than any actual battlefield. Whether this was done from a home base in a tree or elsewhere is immaterial.

How does it follow that if we were slow we must have been timid? I would suggest it meant we were strong enough not to have developed speed for escape, and being cleverer than the average prey, we could select and devour the slower ones. Yes, maybe one that was infantile or past its prime, but if one is hungry, sport and morals don't come into it. Ask any Great White shark.

I was going to respond in some way to the treatise on the tactical difficulties of bombing operations, but as it had nothing to do with the matter under discussion in the first place, I won't. Railing on about the insanity of mass destruction, in the context of the argument I advanced, is as off the mark as railing at the destructive power of earthquakes or diseases.

If there is a philosophical point to make out of this at all, it is probably that the exchange illustrates a point I made (or implied) in C93, that there is a gulf between the *weltanschauung* of the likes of Albert and me, and we're both probably equally pleased that this is the case. The best evidence of that is the way that he refers to the



enemy in wars as “us” or “ourselves”, when of course they are “them” or “the other”, just like the fox in the trap or the turkey on the table!

We may not necessarily be the “planet’s finest”, but we are indisputably the planet’s most successful. Enjoy !

**Roger Farnworth (C94/25) “Is/ Ought”** : a view of where our moral imperatives originate is provided by Maslow in his theory of the “Hierarchy of Needs”. Crudely summarised, if we are lacking food or shelter, we get these things where we can at the expense even of our own tribesmen. If we have these, then we progress through the next tiers of need, ie, a partner to reproduce with, onto general socialising and community building, all the way through to self-fulfilment as a philanthropist, religious leader or politician. But it is a two way track; if, from the lofty heights of our self-fulfilled existence, we perceive ourselves to be lacking any of the more fundamental requirements, all bets are off; it’s back to the law of the jungle. (Often in such cases, for “need”, substitute “greed”). Evidence? Sit in the public gallery of any court room, read any newspaper. Simplistic, but difficult to dispute. Therefore, contrary to what **Michael Nisbet** suggests (C94/9), morality is indeed a largely subjective, but certainly culturally determined matter, based usually on the lowest common denominator of what the most powerful can convince the masses that they should be permitted to get away with. Sad, innit?

**Albert Dean (C94/27) “The Thinking Process”** : a process as described, conducted alone and without challenge from external, uncomfortable viewpoints, is a little like sex for one; contrasted with the real thing it’s a tad unexciting.

**Rick Street (C94/36)** (in response to **Martin Lake**) : surely the idea of a social framework that allows us to live according to our true natures without harming others is something of a contradiction in terms, given the track record of our species; if there are no controls we eat each other. To live successfully together there has to be some kind of “win-win” situation, a social contract, and it is always a compromise over our instincts. I therefore have to support Martin’s view in this.

### **Kevin Arbuthnot**

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**20 November 1998**

**Leslie Haddow**

### **CRIME, PUNISHMENT & SOCIETY**

**(Review of Mensa at Braziers Weekend, September 1998)**

The Mensa conference on Crime, Punishment and Society held at Braziers on 25-27 September was one of the series originated by the late Eric Hills. Members of the



PDG were invited<sup>1</sup>, would have been very welcome, and would certainly have enhanced the proceedings with their ideas, but none, apart from myself, attended. Theo, who was to have presented a paper, had to drop out because of a surge of work.

The six men and seven women from many different backgrounds generated a wide diversity of ideas in the course of over ten hours of formal sessions. There was little by way of polarisation, e.g. between “left-” and “right-wing” views, as might have been expected with such an emotive subject. At one stage, we split into two smaller groups which led to the more active participation of some members who seemed rather shy of discussing in the full sessions.

In my introductory talk “Society gets the Crime it Deserves” I asked why some members of our society commit crimes? Although quite prevalent in “folk” morality, it seemed to me unnecessary to invoke some supra-natural agency. In my view, we are not born “evil” (or indeed “good”), but morally neutral; nor should we assume that some form of “en-devilment” has to occur later in life to account for criminal behaviour. I take an agnostic view on religious matters, and do not see how the idea of the soul answers the question. Again, I believe that our genetic inheritance is morally neutral, and I am sceptical of some recent reports which attempt to relate certain gene-patterns to later criminality.

We are therefore left with environmental factors in the individual’s nurturing processes. Some of the most powerful factors that determine an individual’s eventual character and personality probably occur in infancy and early childhood, when the parental influence is greatest. This process is extremely complex and little understood. It is normally followed by about a dozen years of family life and schooling. Essentially, parents and teachers are expected to take children having widely varying basic physical, mental and emotional characteristics, which are inherited but which are only vaguely understood, and to convert them into socially-adjusted, moral beings. There is almost infinite scope for things to go wrong, and for undesirable characteristics of personality development, including criminal tendencies, to be produced. Mistakes can occur, and remain unrecognised and uncorrected, through accident, neglect, or ignorance, but the results can be profound.

But crime is not usually considered in this light. Someone who has committed a crime is regarded as a “person”, an independent entity who is expected to know right from wrong, is therefore “guilty”, and has to be “punished”. How do these terms in quotes relate to the process described in the previous paragraph? In the face of misbehaviour (whether of childish naughtiness or serious crime) the popular reaction is to reject the nature-plus-nurture view, and to return, implicitly, to an image of the person as having a supra-natural or spiritual source — an autonomous being upon whom guilt can be attached, and punishment inflicted. This attitude clearly has religious overtones, but I suspect its prevalence has more to do with the reluctance of parents, teachers and others to accept that they themselves played a part in the process leading to the individual’s behaviour. (They may, of course, admit to having admonished the culprit

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<sup>1</sup> See Commensal 92/2, also 91/3



at various times, and not having been listened to.) The media and public seem to divide the law-abiding and the criminals into two quite separate species, rather than as being members of the same community, and to build up the problem of crime around that distinction.

In the conference, John Maxwell led a discussion on the problems of imposing punishment, of the difference between the utilitarian and the retribution approaches. We debated the special cases of child-killers, and killers of children, and of how to deal with compulsive behaviour like paedophilia. (If the behaviour is compulsive, what is the point of punishment?) We discussed the views of Stephen Tumin (ex-HMI of Prisons), relating to the commoner types of crime — that from the moment the convicted person goes to prison he should be actively helped to lead a law-abiding and useful life [on release].

However, just as the moral majority is reluctant to accept a share of responsibility for the production of criminals, they are generally no more ready to share in eventual reconciliation. They, and especially the victims of such serious crimes as murder, rape, etc., have the right to expect the state to carry out retribution on the offender, e.g. to impose a term of imprisonment. But should not that the same public, including the victims, have the responsibility to try to re-absorb the individual after his imprisonment back into the community, and to bring about a reconciliation? This process may not come naturally, and cannot be easy. The media could do much to guide public opinion in that direction. Instead, the media, especially the popular press and TV, more often exacerbate the situation. Given any opportunity, perhaps years later, they will interview the victims or their relatives and obtain from them assertions of continuing grief and implacability. Even the churches, whom one might expect to preach repentance and forgiveness in general, seem to make little headway in this area.

In summary, then, while deplored the prevalence of crime, we regard criminals as some kind of aliens, rather than the result of failures by society in the processes involved in producing its future citizens. And when a criminal is brought to justice, and duly punished (assuming that is the proper response) we are reluctant to re-incorporate him or her into the community. In both these areas, the media and other agencies that form public opinion tend to reinforce this attitude, and resist changes which would improve the whole moral climate.

One wonders whether crime has not become an essential part of our diet. How would our appetite for crime and punishment be satisfied if by some miracle there were a real, major reduction in the crime rate? Perhaps my talk should have been entitled “Society gets the Crime it Desires”.

**Leslie Haddow**



**Leslie** : I evidently missed a lot by my absence ! I strongly agree with you that “criminals” are not some sort of pestilential sub-species to be exterminated, which seems to be the prevalent view in some US circles. However, I disagreed with you over your apparent willingness to deprive us all of our myth of autonomy.

The maintenance of this myth is essential as a motivator. If we’re successful at anything, we want to take some responsibility for those of our actions that lead to our success. We do well, usually, because of a combination of natural ability and hard work. We resist the view that it’s all due to our genes and environment and nothing to do with us. So, if we’re to be responsible for the good that happens to us, or that we do, we, and therefore others (unless we consign them to a sub-species) have to take responsibility for the bad. I must say that I’d like to think that I’d “take the rap” for something I’d intentionally done, rather than plead insanity, diminished responsibility or make myself out to be a victim of society. I can’t bear victims who the day before were autonomous menaces ! Something for discussion at the *Determinism vs Free Will* debate ?

I was astonished by your throw away line on compulsions as exceptionally not being subject to punishment. We have compulsions to bite our nails and do other minor anti-social acts that we either manage to bring under control ourselves or do so with the assistance of punishment. Why should major compulsions like paedophilia be anything different ?

I think the problem with punishment as retribution is that it has to be “an eye for an eye ...” for it to work. The problem these days, if you take a retributive stance on punishment is that the punishment no longer fits the crime, so the criminal doesn’t “pay his debt to society”, let alone to those bereft of the victim. Killers aren’t killed, so there’s no catharsis. I agree that forgiveness, or else taking the law into one’s own hands, is the only way forward for the individual. All else just ends up as an impotent and festering rage.

**Theo**

**27<sup>th</sup> November 1998**

**Leslie Haddow**

**IN RESPONSE TO**

**“THE SOURCE OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR”**  
**BY FRANK WALKER [C94/6]**

I am sorry that **Frank Walker** (and other members of PDG) were not able to get to the conference in September. Such topics are much better discussed face-to-face, and in company with others, and, both in the discussion periods, and over meals, glasses of sherry, and walks, Braziers offers many opportunities for this. I can only partially agree with the points he raised.

We need to be very circumspect when people refer to “the big rise in crime”, comparing the present with the 1950s, the 1930s, or even the 1830s. Offences relating to drugs, motor-cars and computers used not to exist, and many acts within families and in neighbourhoods would have been ignored in the past. Are we worse off because we are now less tolerant of brutality against children, of discrimination



against women and minorities? All such factors can result in an increase in prosecutions. Also, we should not exaggerate the problem. We in the UK live in one of the most peaceful and crime-free countries in the world. Crime is brought to our attention because it is News.

Nevertheless, each criminal act is one too many. My main contention is that our attention is too often directed at the crime, the victims, and how to punish the perpetrators, rather than at understanding the source of the problem and assuming the will to deal with it. The latter course would demand some painful changes of attitude — of parenting, teaching, and community values — it would be unpopular, expensive, and would not make good News.

**Frank Walker** refers to how the more violent types used to join the Army and Navy. Pre-WW2, the more active and aggressive went out in huge numbers in the armed and civilian services and as settlers to run a vast Empire. This is not the place to argue the morality of Imperialism, and there have been immense changes in values since. However, many of the attitudes and actions of those engaged abroad were considered acceptable, if not commendable, in those days, but would be considered criminal if they obtained in this country today. By today's standards, we exported much of our crime.

I question **Frank Walker's** main theme, that from their teens to their mid-twenties young people have a need to act rebelliously, at least if by this he implies that it is in-built in the human character, and is independent of previous up-bringing. I see a continuum between misbehaviour in young children and in adults, only the surroundings are different. In the former case, it is "naughtiness" and is normally kept within the family: in the latter, it is "crime" and occurs within the community. Serious and persistent naughtiness reflects the failure by the parents to do the job for which they are intended. It is a most difficult and demanding job, almost impossible to get right all the time, and the parents may have "excuses" like poverty, ill-health, or their own conflicts. But none of these permits the underlying fault to be transferred to the child — each act of naughtiness has its precursor in some earlier lesson which has somehow gone wrong.

Just as the infant is pre-programmed to grow through childhood, and the role of the parent is to guide his/her behavioural patterns along socially-acceptable lines, so physical, mental and emotional development is set to continue through the teenage years, and parents are joined by teachers and others in the community in being required to make final adjustments to the new personality. Again, things can go wrong, and the new personality can turn out to be a monster.

**Frank Walker** sees in teenage development an intrinsic element of rebellion, something which needs to be thwarted by the imposition of rules, even silly ones. With these must come figures of authority, and punishments for transgressions — he might have added "even unjust ones".



I see these as Victorian values carried through to the end of the present century, where they do not belong. I am far from happy with the present state of affairs, if only for the waste of potential and unhappiness it produces in the youth it creates. But I regard attitudes of the past as more cause than solution.

For the present, I will leave others to take up the argument from here.

### **Leslie Haddow**

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**Leslie** : Again, I don't like what seems to be an unwritten assumption that parents are autonomous beings, responsible for their actions, while children and adult criminals somehow aren't but are buffeted along by their genes and society. I would suggest that children's initial "naughtiness" is in-built to ensure they get the attention they need in a competitive world. Too much naughtiness is counter-productive, however, as the attention received is undesirable; most children get the hang of this. It's game-theoretic and part of learning to live in a community. Of course, radical changes of rules may lead to radical changes of behaviour (see William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and the activities of Nazi collaborators).

### **Theo**

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**11<sup>th</sup> October 1998**

**Theo Todman**

### **PUZZLES**

This is a slightly modified reprint (I've removed the more chatty, anecdotal bits) of a letter of mine that appeared in the January 1999 issue of *Eaglet*, the East Anglian Mensa Newsletter, which is edited by PDG member **Annabel McLeod**. Annabel featured two puzzles in the October 1998 issue of *Eaglet* (actually, there were three, but one of them isn't worthy of making an appearance in these august pages). I include the puzzles & responses here for the philosophical issues that arise. They are both, I think, fairly well known, but if you haven't heard of them before and want to do them yourself, you'll have to restrain yourself from looking at the answers too quickly.

**Puzzle 1** : The 3 finalists in a competition for a high level post are shown 5 disks, 3 white and 2 black. They are told each will have one disk stuck to his back, and may look at the other two's backs, but not his own. The 2 disks not used are concealed. The first to emerge and state correctly the colour of the disk on his back, with an explanation of why he can be sure, is the winner. In fact, all 3 white disks are used, with the 2 black disks concealed. Can any winner emerge and if so why ?

**Puzzle 2** : A Modern Cana ? I [Patrick O'Donohoe, an East Anglian Mensan, Ed.] once heard the following story from a fundamentalist preacher, back in the bad old days of communism and the cold war : Two anonymous (and perhaps apocryphal)



Christian dissidents were attempting to defect from communist Russia to escape the regime's religious persecution. Their route took them through a desolate mountainous region, where (presumably due to appallingly bad planning) their ageing Trabant spluttered and ran out of petrol. Since they were many miles from civilisation and hence fuel, and could not reach their safe destination without the car this left them somewhat in a pickle. After a brief contemplation of their alternatives (most of which included the word "Siberia") they turned to the Boss for inspiration. He soon obliged, and one of the hopefuls realised that they had with them half a gallon of water. With a thankful and reverent air he unscrewed the filler cap and poured the water from its container into the petrol tank- Then both of them knelt beside the car and offered a fervent prayer to Jesus, that He would turn the water into petrol. They then got back into the car and drove away into the Western sunset, freedom, and authorship of this story. So there we have it: proof that miracles still happen in the 20th century. Or could there perhaps be a more rational explanation ... ? **Annabel** then asks : *The water-into-wine story is familiar to us all. Do you think there is any connection ? If so, do you think this interpretation detracts from or supports the Christian view ?*

## ANSWERS

**Puzzle 1** : The first puzzle is one of my favourites. It's an exercise in recursive logic. Person A, who can see 2 white disks, says "what if I had a black disk on my back ? In that case, person B would see one white disk and one black disk and would say to himself "if I had a black disk on my back, person C would see 2 black disks, and would know he had a white disk; but person C hasn't said anything, so I must have a white disk", but person B has kept quiet, so I (person A) must have a white disk". **QED.**

I wouldn't have bothered discussing this if it hadn't been for Ian Stewart's article (Mathematical Recreations - Monks, Blobs & Common Knowledge) in August's *Scientific American*. This has a variant of the problem whereby a crowd of monks have blobs secretly painted on their foreheads in the middle of the night and are told in the morning "at least one of you has a blob on his forehead, ... do you ?". This is a more general form of the problem (isomorphic to an "n finalists, n white disks and n-1 black disks, I think). I hadn't realised that the problem generalises in this way. In a sense it does (check it !), and in another it doesn't. The moral of Ian Stewart's article is that the monks aren't told anything they don't already know – but they have to think recursively to a situation where the "no news" could, indeed be "news" (as it would be most obviously if there were only two monks) !

One of the deficiencies in the 3/2 problem is that it relies on all three finalists being of similar intelligence. If one of them is a dunce who takes half an hour to work out from seeing a white and a black disk that he must have a white disk, then nothing much can be deduced from a non-response. When we get to the 4/3 game - given that some people (and not just dunces) can't work out the 3/2 game however long you give them, very little indeed could be deduced. And even with highly intelligent people, how would you know how long to give the other finalists before they'd had long enough to do one less recursion than you ? Ian Stewart's article tries to get round this by having



a bell rung every 10 seconds, so that you're only allowed to claim a blob or non-blob every 10 seconds. I don't think this works, but maybe I'm being thick – maybe someone who read the article could convince me ?

**Puzzle 2 :** In response to Patrick O'Donohoe's "A Modern Cana" – the answer is, presumably, that the residual petrol in the tank that was below the exit point floats on top of the water, and can therefore now find its way to the engine. I can't quite see the same revitalising effect occurring with the sludge at the bottom of a wine vat, but you never know. The interesting point, though, at least for sceptics like me, is that I'd be tempted to dismiss the "petrol" story out of hand as a fabrication, especially if told it credulously as a "proof of divine action". Maybe we ignore some facts about the world because they are relayed to us by "nutters" ? Getting back to the Russian story, it is just about possible to construe the petrol event as divine intervention even if it isn't a miracle – the dissidents (presumably) didn't know that what they were doing had a logical basis, and God moves in mysterious ways, and may have put the idea in their heads ...

### Theo Todman

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1<sup>st</sup> December 1998

Albert Dean

### ON MATTERS WHICH SEEM TO BE OF FAIRLY GENERAL INTEREST

**Existence:** I wished this implies I am in space and time. I did not wish that implies there is something else in space and time. I repeatedly wish this to become this and do this but in some places at some times it becomes that and does that. Both I and the something else limit choice. I can use what I can make and can have it become and can have it do to find out what else can be in space and time, and what it can become, and what it can do, and what choice is mine, and what is random, and what I must accept. There are many somethings; some affectables, some fixed, some variables. Some somethings can choose. There is another; friend, neutral, foe, bridge, window, wall. There are others; law, politics, jaw-jaw, war-war. Note 1: If one formed a single first "I" it would imply no more than existence in a point in a moment. Note 2: With regard to the first sentence - to write a record of what one has done (the first "I") requires space; to read that record back (the second "I") requires time. Note 3: It is only to see what happens if one begins actively rather than passively.

**Probe:** Show it would be possible for a human being to make a perfect God angry.

**Life:** How might one answer the question as to whether life has meaning and purpose. The question appears difficult. No definition of life is given and there are two unterminated sub-questions. Taking a minimal approach. Life must be defined and both sub-questions must be terminated. An answer in two parts will then be required, and each part will need to be the value of a variable which one can suppose to be in the range yes through maybe and maybe-not to no, depending upon what life is



assumed to be and into which particular collections of evidences and beliefs the sub-questions are sprung. Possibly it is desirable that any answer should be compatible with both evidence and belief.

In the question life can be set to represent a composite of all living things and their activities together with associated observations and opinions. And meaning can be understood as backward looking and terminating with regard to someone, whilst purpose is taken as forward looking and terminating with regard to something. Also, because not all evidence is available, life, meaning and purpose, the someone and the something must all be seen as not entirely understood. So, whilst one might reasonably seek a partial but adequate answer, it would be quite unreasonable to require a complete and fulsome answer.

Our understanding of life in the universe is obviously limited as yet but is still substantial. These days the individual arises in an environment only half way through its development, and, in barely a moment, becomes exposed to a past saturated with raw data and existing opinions on what that data means. Clearly there is no shortage of meanings at all and the problems here are mainly; (i) determining which data is and is not sound, (ii) determining which opinions are and are not firmly rooted, (iii) gathering and refining collections of data and opinion, (iv) detecting and correcting errors, (v) overload. Meaning that any overall answer to what is the meaning of life is likely to be not entirely true.

All the same as above can be said in regard to what is the purpose of life, and something more. The individual does not know if they have become tangled up in a pile of scrap that just happens to be here or if they have been carefully placed into some kind of training camp. But, nevertheless, they try to predict some end. In doing that, overlooking that they are participants in whatever happens, they implicitly surrender themselves to whatever might then come about, and show in process that they have not yet formed any definite view at all as to what sort of end they want, let alone on how to bring it about. What does that mean but that it is still to be properly grasped the purpose of life is pretty much whatever the individual or community give it, towards achieving pretty much whatever the individual or community want. These options are certainly the common property of all life, for all individuals and for all communities, in proportion to their particular ability to look, choose and act. Here the main problem is only that any individual or community with no chosen end will of course be short of purpose. NB: Purpose can include reversion or prevention of change. For some creatures in some places at some times these two special kinds of change can be in their best interests - some animals best nip back in their burrows and wait when the fox goes by, some states best hesitate and withdraw in the event of a war.

However, from the above we can see the meaning of life is that it can do and its purpose is to do. This brings us close to a definite answer. We can see the world is a variable and all individuals and communities spend most of their time changing it. In due course the universe will be the variable. Now we need only declare that our end is to create new worlds in new universes. Hence, there is a fairly general purpose for us



in the third and succeeding millennia. And, by coincidence it fits well with what we like to do.

**Nuremberg:** Quite a lot of cherry picking was done on Nuremberg, and some gooseberries were left to quietly rot. Göring put the original nazi argument on genocide, saying a state's leadership had the political right to ignore convention in deciding what were threats to the state and how to deal with them, some groups had been considered threats and dealt with, legalities and moralities were of no relevance at all. Exploration of that view was politically unacceptable at the time. The court's pragmatic solution was to set aside what Göring said, causing all defendants to either say nothing or base their argument on law and mitigating circumstance. Now, one can argue that because they chose to do the latter ipso-facto they demonstrated recognition of the court and overwhelmingly contradicted Göring fundamental rejection of law and morality in regard to the issue. But, to suggest they leapt into legal argument is an unnecessary historical distortion. In fact, and quite rightly, they were taken very gently by the neck and most carefully lead into the legal field. Note: That Göring's proposition was not properly dealt with has always been seen as unfinished business and, over the years, many have tried to find some completely satisfactory response to it. Unfortunately, no state having a perfect record, there is no such completely satisfactory response. Whatever one comes up with always compromises at least one of the untouchables; law, politics, logic, morality, fact, faith, instinct, emotion. So, how can one respond to Göring. You might care to try two fingers extended in the naughty manner, and say exceptions exist to every rule and here is an example from the one about decorum.

### **Albert Dean**

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**Albert** : I should, I suppose, have something to say on the first part of the above, but I'll pounce on the Göring piece, as it's easier. Personally, I think the proper response to Hermann is to point to the facts of the case. It could, I suppose, have been the case that the Jews had been a malignant tumour in the Teutonic body politic, as the Nazis made out, and that it was a mere act of self-preservation to eradicate them. But, in point of fact, they weren't, as any reasonable person sifting the evidence at the time (or at Nuremberg, or now) would have had to admit. Now is not the time for entering into the psychology of anti-semitism, but one imagines that greed, jealousy and xenophobia had much to do with it, as had the convenient consequent existence of the unifying effect of an internal, punishable scapegoat for the country's ills.

### **Theo**

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**1<sup>st</sup> December 1998**

**Albert Dean**

### **COMMENTS AND RESPONSES OF THE VARIOUS KIND**



**John Stubbings - C94/13:** (i) The range of ability: You have what I had in mind, sort of. Add taking bodging down through the "do nothing" and grades of demolition worker. Bring highly artistic demolition (pyrotechnics ?) around and up to the best of finely demolished art (neoexpressionism ?), getting a sort of colour circle (disc ?). And keep in mind that most people seem to find looking at anything other than green (high craft and low art) rapidly becomes a strain. (ii) How quickly artists become artists: We rarely see any of the initial rubbish from their youth.

**John Neary - Your Comments C94/15:** (i) You ask what use are mosquitoes. They irritate us, and in WWII the RAF found mosquitoes extremely useful for precision work. (ii) With the non-awake state. Psychosomatic interaction is bi-directional and does not switch off when a creature goes to sleep. I was only suggesting what affects the sleeping mind must be compatible with what affects the sleeping body. That the dreams of all creatures must be compatible with their beds. The body can be in a "somatic" dream. The [mind ? Ed] can be in a "psycho" dream. (iii) But we must not overlook that it is essential to support an examination based education system so that those who qualify will know which parts of the syllabus to rewrite.

**Stef Gula - C94/16:** But can you depend upon the trees to tell you what it is doing. No matter, that is only an aside. Buried in the small print I think you will find I did indicate no "commander" at any node anywhere in any type of real command structure can have unlimited choice, there are always constraints of some kind on everybody. Which example might help resolve what seems a misunderstanding, I didn't mean complete freedom of choice was something we should strive for, only that the ability to choose comes in degrees of freedom between the extremes of no choice at all and the liberty to make any choice at all. Literal "free will" would be the latter, an abstract point terminating the inaccessible far end of the degrees of freedom scale. From that I would not agree "free will" is a means of achieving any objective, because "free will" is not something a human can have. But I would be happy to accept that an ability to choose, insofar as the degree of freedom permits for any actually possible case, is certainly a means towards achieving some objectives. However, the degree of freedom issue is the thing. To be quite honest I am not sure all that many people actually want completely free will. Many seek or need restriction in their ability to choose on some objectives so other objectives can be achieved. Those affected often lose much liberty; priests, fire-fighters, etc., and lose almost all liberty under conscription. Some even volunteering to terminate their genetic line. What price the free will they deny their potential descendants. Either way, many still come to say they are happiest from having done their duty, the desire for immediate liberty seeming the lesser need. I would ask what objective would you seek if you actually had "free will".

**David Taylor - C94/17:** There are 3,000 funny people spread between the poles, most were born in damp and smoky bars and cafes. The females usually present more vulgar material than the males, but the males generally cover a wider subject range. Both males and females can follow the smell of money for hundreds of kilometres at night to find a dozing audience. No one is sure what purpose they really serve. They



will live for as long as the rest of us take ourselves seriously. Looks like they will probably live for ever.

**Vijai Parhar - C94/19:** (i) **Socrates:** A psychiatrist's opinion on Socrates would be interesting. (ii) **Eggs and questions:** Only that as the first chicken came from an egg not laid by a chicken I was wondering if you might agree the first question to a human was not put by a human. (iii) **Bees:** I read it somewhere in a book on religious art. Hexagons look better. (iv) **Chess:** Checkmating is not the goal of chess. The goal of chess was to produce leaders trained in political and military strategy. Subsequently it became the goal of chess to produce people who think logically. These days it has become the goal of chess to prove computers can not play the game better than people who think well. When the computers triumph over the last three people who think well enough to still beat them, chess, as we know it, will disappear in favour of the new virtual reality games already evolving from it in response to the desire of the people to train themselves in political and military strategy. What then is the position of checkmating. If chess rules do not actually require one to play so as to checkmate one's opponent then it would seem they allow one to try to play very carefully planned genocide instead. Which means the optional requirement to checkmate is only a carrot, a device to encourage selective slaughter but discourage genocide, a device superior to law but still a perversion of morality. Unless one declares an exception. But what exception can one declare without implicitly reducing the device to a technicality beneath revised law, so that the intent of chess then fell entirely within its rules, and checkmating and its associated slaughter become just trivialities of the game. Curiously, the trials at Nuremberg offer an example of exactly that. By creating the exception, excluding morality, and declaring some slaughter illegal, other slaughter became seen as legal and moral. But we can see that is wrong. Hence, whether in the rules or not, even declaring a requirement to checkmate is immoral because of what it must bring about. The proper way to play chess is for both players to wait to be attacked.

### Albert Dean

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**28<sup>th</sup> November 1998**

**Alan Carr**

### WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY ?

Greetings Theo,

A brief exposition of my thoughts :-

A lot of what I have sent in for publication to *Commensal* has been considered by yourself and others as un-philosophical, probably a valid point. I feel that a lot of what I have written was not un-philosophical; just unrefined. In relation to the Northern Ireland article (C93/27-29), it was a reply (I think?) to the late Eric Hils about his interpretation of the current situation, which I believed argued a pro-



democracy interpretation. Now we could debate the concept of democracy in relation to our modern global society, or the interpretation of a situation (Northern Ireland) from an idealistic (democratic?) or an attempted objective reality-based assessment, but we won't go there!

The point is, we started with a philosophical debate and we extended it, where ? Towards our interpretation of reality. Is this where Eric, Theo and I ended up ? I am still not saying that what I write is philosophical, but I find it extremely interesting that I am accused of being un-philosophical in a PDG newsletter in which its members are still trying to define ART !!!

Ye must have sorted out what philosophy exactly is, before I joined Mensa !

The world is our oyster.

### **Alan Carr**

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**Alan** : Please don't go away with the idea that I or anyone else in PDG are suggesting that what you have to say is "un-philosophical" (let alone "unrefined") in any pejorative sense. There's disagreement amongst philosophers as to what philosophy is, but I think there would be general agreement that it deals with second-order ("meta") questions. That is, instead of addressing a particular problem (for instance, how "we" should sort out the mess in Northern Ireland) it would address issues like what makes for a just society (or a society at all, for that matter) or why we should seek a just society (if we should). Unless we've some measure of agreement on these general issues, we can't hope to agree on particular applications.

Anyone care to define "philosophy" ?

### **Theo**

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**4<sup>th</sup> November 1998**

**Michael Nisbet**

### **THE SELF**

Dear Theo

Rick Street asks for clarification of the term 'self' (C94/33). Agreement is improbable, but I would like to offer the following:

My *Oxford Dictionary* defines 'self' as "a person or thing as the object of introspection or reflexive action". I think the difficulty may arise because this 'object' is taken as existing prior to the advent of the subject-object dichotomy. However, it is my contention that this dichotomy only arises with the advent of a reflexive process within a field. The self is thus a reference point that arises with reflexive awareness - awareness itself being a process that is only subsequently conceptualised in terms of subject-object relations - and is reified by language. Language obviously operates in



subject-object terms, so in discussing this approach one has a constant tendency to betray oneself.

I shall try to explain why I say that the self arises with reflexive awareness - and that hence the self has no existence prior thereto - as follows:

### **The self emerges within the continuum that is the organism/environment field**

To quote from Rick's **C94** contribution: "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." (**C94/33-34**). But what the monkey sees in the mirror does not correspond to what it sees of 'itself' directly. What it sees in the mirror is an image of an entity with a head, like the rest of the monkey-entities that it interacts with. Its direct experience of its own body is of limbs and a torso extending out of - as it were - a void filled with the world. How do I know? Because this is how I - as a fellow primate - experience myself in those moments when I am able to return to a primitive, or childlike, perception of the world. The idea of myself as a discrete entity with a head, of the sort that I see in the mirror, is not something available to simple, immediate perception. In this 'headless' mode 'I' am the totality of my perceptions: I am everything. There is no dividing line, no gap, between 'myself' and - to take some traditional philosophical objects - the table, or the 'tree in the quad' or whatever. The notion of myself as a discrete entity is a construction that arises with reflexive awareness, which is a complex process involving the cross-referencing of visual and tactile sense data. It thus requires a certain complexity of neural organisation, to a degree that only seems to have been attained in the 'great apes' and humans.

The needs, actions, and behaviour of an organism lacking reflexive awareness are an integral part of the organism/environment field. Within that field, however, we might speak of a potential for reflexive awareness: a gap, not between the organism and its environment, but rather a space that arises should the monkey realise (and here I am in danger of betraying myself once more) that the reflection that it sees is 'a-monkey-not-another-monkey'. But I do not acknowledge that the "monkey is in some way conscious that it exists and that it is a monkey". (**C94/32**). This is an interpretation of the position from a sophisticated, reflexively-aware point of view. 'The monkey' is aware of a perceptual field that is spontaneously organised around certain organismic needs. Within that field 'it' is aware of other entities with which 'it' primarily interacts, and which we call 'other monkeys'. But 'it', as a 'self' is subsumed within the matrix of relationships that, through our categories, we seek to sever and reduce to rationally comprehensible order. The monkey's awareness of 'its' limbs is not self-awareness. It is an awareness of part of a process of interaction in which 'it' is fully implicated.

If I may be permitted a quote from 'Human Groups' by W.J.H.Sprott (Penguin Books 1958): "The infant has no idea of itself as a separate individual ... Psychologists who have made a close study of children are agreed on this. A distinct awareness of oneself as a separate entity, says Piaget, is the 'result of a gradual and progressive dissociation and not a primitive intuition'."



And from the Eighth Duino Elegy by Rainer Maria Rilke, as translated by Ruth Speirs (The Rider Book of Mystical Verse; Ed.J.M.Cohen,1983):

"The eyes of all the living creatures see the open.  
 But our eyes are as though reversed  
 and set around them like encircling traps,  
 round their free path that leads them outwards."

### **Art as the process whereby the self imposes itself upon the world**

Once the organism/environment field has been interrupted by the advent of the self, the self or subject, being no longer a part of a self-organising totality, seeks to organise the world around itself, generally but not exclusively as part of a social process.

To pick up on **John Stubbings' C94/11** contribution, and earlier: Art is the process whereby the subject imposes itself upon the world. 'The world' can be broadly divided into social and material environments, the former subsuming the latter. When the subject imposes itself primarily upon the material environment, through the creation of the useful or decorative artefacts with which we surround ourselves, we tend to speak of a 'craft'; where its aim is to impose itself upon the social environment (via the material environment) we tend rather to speak of 'art'. To refer to an example used by **John**, Damien Hurst's works use material means to impose themselves on our social environment by exploiting our cultural preoccupation with death and so forth (or some might say by exploiting the cultural preoccupations of a cabal of influential critics: but we swallow it nonetheless).

Of course, the practical applications of science amount to much the same sort of thing.

On a topic related to art: 'beauty' is found in an object that expresses an integrity that the subject has lost. With reference to **Vijai Parhar's** criticism of **Rick Street's C92/24** description of "beauty as a quality of the relationship between viewer and flower" (**C94/20**) I would say that, primarily, the awareness 'of the flower' does not pertain to the viewer any more than it does to the flower. There is an awareness in the context of which, or around which, the viewer and the flower are constructed as a result of the reflexive awareness that has arisen in part of the field: the human being 'who views'. The viewer then relates to the flower qualitatively as something that lacks integrity to something that is perceived as possessing it. I therefore agree with **Rick's** comment.

### **The self encounters philosophical problems of dualism that its own existence creates**

In seeking to conceptualise the world, the self is confronted with problems of dualism, which are grounded in a dichotomy of organism and environment resulting from the self's own interruption of the field. With the advent of the self or subject, the object necessarily follows, and the world is divided, understood, and manipulated by the



subject in these terms and their correlates, mind and matter. The problem largely disappears when the obvious is rediscovered: the underlying continuum of being that the child loses through the above-mentioned process of "gradual and progressive dissociation".

I think this is what **Roger Farnworth** may be getting at by saying "light operates on both sides of the divide". (**C93/40**). The phenomenon and our experience of it are continuous. Except to the consciousness that arises with reflexive awareness, there is no 'in here' as opposed to 'out there'. What operates 'within' is no less 'light' than that which operates 'without'. It is the dualistic view of the world and its historical development through religion and science that insists, however usefully, on considering light - as 'objectively' understood by the physicist and the neurologist - as something other than our 'subjective' experience of it.

### **The coherent organisation of selves is the result of 'morality'**

**Roger Farnworth** "would love to hear how members of PDG derive their moral imperatives" (**C94/25**). My response to this is that I do not derive or form moral imperatives, I am formed by or derived from them, or their absence. One more quote:

"The moral person is not an exclusive individual ... he is the organ of a common reason, and it is no mere metaphor to say that we are members one of another". (A. Seth Pringle-Pattison: 'The Idea of Immortality'; Oxford 1922).

### **Michael Nisbet**

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**Michael** : Thought-provoking stuff ! I'll consider it (probably) in preparation for Braziers. No time now !

### **Theo**

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**14 November 1998**

**Malcolm Burn**

### **MORE ON IS / OUGHT**

Dear Theo,

I would like to comment on the response to my "Is/Ought" (**C92/35**). My thanks to Kevin Arbuthnot and Michael Nisbet for their favourable comments. However, as Roger Farnworth (**C93/38, C94/25**) appears to have missed my point I shall have to answer him specifically.

By "arbitrary" I do not mean "What the heck, I'll do it anyway". OED defines arbitrary as "To be decided by one's liking; dependent upon will or pleasure; at the discretion or option of anyone". When Christian theologians, from St. Augustine to



Martin Luther, have written on Free Will they have entitled their books "De Libero Arbitrio". Using the word correctly, any exercise of free will is arbitrary.

Nor would I say that the decisions (arbitrary decisions in the above sense) a society takes as to what are to be its moral principles are trivial. They are among the most important decisions any society has to take. They are important not because they exercise the curiosity of the philosophically inclined but because they affect every aspect of the practical business of people living together in a society. Philosophically no "ought" statement can ever be incontrovertible. The decision to make some "ought" statements incontrovertible is a purely pragmatic one. There comes a time when society has to put philosophy to one side and get on with the business of day to day living. Once society has decided that 'X is something that people ought not to do' it is hard enough stop people from doing X without forever debating whether or not this is a decision society should have taken in the first place.

From a pragmatic point of view, it is quite understandable that society, having taken the pragmatic decision that a particular "ought" statement is to be incontrovertible, should then seek to put it outside the sphere of further debate by giving it a supposed external non-human authority and to pretend that it was never an arbitrary (in the above sense) human decision. A theistic society may convince itself that its "ought" statements were handed down to it by God on tablets of stone on Mount Sinai. (In the same way kings have justified their authority by 'divine right' rather than by their ancestors' success in murdering the opposition.) A society which values reason may prefer to think that, just as Fermat's last theorem can be solved solely by applying the rules of mathematics, so moral principles can be arrived at solely by applying the rules of logic. A society impressed by Newton's achievement in discovering the law of gravity might convince itself that moral laws, like the law of gravity, are part of the fabric of the universe 'out there' waiting to be discovered.

The only point I wanted to make in my original letter was that "ought" statements all derive ultimately from human decisions and human likes and dislikes, what Hume calls "moral sentiments". The fact that we discover what we like and dislike by trial and error does not alter the fact that our likes and dislikes are arbitrary. To many of your readers this may be obvious but I thought the point worth making as so many moral debates (abortion, euthanasia etc. ) are argued as if one side was validated by some external authority that put the matter beyond doubt and outside the area of legitimate debate. To this way of thinking my reply is that all attempts to find a moral code 'out there', immutable for all time, universal in application and independent of human decision, are myths - useful and perhaps necessary myths certainly, but myths all the same. I claim no originality for the thought. Hume said the same thing more eloquently and before him Hamlet mused "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so".

### **Malcolm Burn**

P.S. I am keeping an open mind about the weekend at Wallingford but am reluctant to commit myself too far in advance. I do not drive so I would have to find out about



public transport (bus from Oxford?). You may be interested to know that Rewley House at Oxford, which I mentioned previously, runs philosophy weekends. I have never been so I cannot tell you what they are like but I assume there is information on their web site: <http://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/>

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**Malcolm** : I think I may have sown confusion here ! In **C94/35**, Roger is arguing against my comments on his response to you in **C93/38**. I introduced the “what the heck” slogan and said that our ultimate moral principles are trivial. What I meant was that they aren’t derived or discovered, just chosen, however much we might value and fight for them. So, I’ll exit from this dispute as I seem to be muddying the waters. However, I’ll try to answer Roger at some point. Enough to say that I’m in substantial agreement with what you have to say, not that this will impress Roger !

Thanks for your suggestions about Rewley House - I’m sure it, and many other centres of learning, offer “Philosophy Weekends”. However, the purpose of the Braziers weekend is that it is our weekend; it isn’t run by anybody other than us. Braziers provides the accommodation and the setting, but doesn’t run the course. Also, the PDG Gathering has at least a double function - to help rescue the *Mensa at Braziers* meeting from terminal decline now that Eric Hills isn’t around any more to lead it as well as, obviously, to provide an annual gathering for PDG (and maybe ISPE). To fulfil the former aim it has to remain at Braziers. I expect we’ll be able to do something with respect to team taxis to the nearest point of civilisation.

### **Theo**

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**December 1998**

**Stef Gula**

### **WITH REFERENCE TO C94 AND ON-GOING**

Straight in at the deep end again this outing.

**Anthony Owens (C94/5)** : Since you were kind enough to try to avoid using the words “*scrape*” and “*barrel*” when considering my comments I’ll try to avoid using the words “*talking out his arse*” considering yours. It seems we hold each others views on abortion in similar high regard. I don’t think we’re likely to convert each other.

On a more constructive note, you are indeed correct in suspecting a degree of support for your “*licence to populate*” idea. I still don’t see why being married should be taken as showing the “*necessary commitment*” - the less so when one considers divorce statistics. People marry for all sorts of reasons that have nothing to do with raising children. I’m not sure there are any criteria that are “*valid*” save retrospectively - such as having raised decent law-abiding, well-adjusted offspring.



And what does one do about folk who go right ahead and populate anyway ? Abort any unlicensed foetuses perhaps ?

**Michael Nisbet (C94/11)** : “ ... *the fact of reflexive awareness* ... ” ? Now, I’m not necessarily disagreeing with your general argument - but is reflexive awareness actually a fact any more than “soul”, “spirit”, “free-will” or whatever other label one cares to hang on the thing ?

And how do we know it’s unique to, and a distinguishing feature of, “human life” ? Indeed how can it be if you’re prepared to consider that it may be present, if in differing and “lesser” degree, in other living things ? You seem to be making a somewhat quantitative, rather than qualitative distinction here, almost Orwellian.

**John Neary (C94/15)**: Descartes Rules - and my “knowing” I’m dreaming is no less suspect (or retrospective) than any other claim to “know” anything. I could simply be dreaming that I’m aware that I’m dreaming that ... etc. Can we be said to be “truly aware!” of anything ?

**Rick Street (C94/34)**: If you’re taking “species” to mean “any group of related animals” then “Bat” does indeed, I grant, count as “*a species of animal*”.

If however, as was implicit in the frame of reference under consideration, “Bat” refers to flying mammals, members of the Order Chiroptera, then as a general term it could refer to any one of - or a number of - species within that Order, or the whole Order.

Thus the fact that there are many species of bats seems perfectly relevant (although the fact that “*Bat is a species of animal*” may not be) since, as you rightly point out, this is a philosophy based SIG. Obvious now ?

### **Stef Gula**

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**10<sup>th</sup> April 1998**

**Graham Dare**

### **IS THERE A GOD ?**

Science has for centuries been disproving the teachings of religion, from the Earth going round the Sun, to evolution.

But now science has reached the frontiers of knowledge, physicists are coming around to the idea that there is a God. Why ?

The scientists have discovered two things :-

Firstly, before the big bang that created the universe, the laws of physics did not exist; eg. There was no time, no rule stating infinite density could not exist, and so on. But



these laws of physics could only have been created through divine action. (Also, given the huge nuclear power created by destroying the atom, imagine the divine power to create all the atoms in the universe.) Therefore if one considers the spirit world to be a dimension outside the universe, where we are before (and after) life in the universe, then the spirit world is outside time also, and this is why spirit can tell us the future, and why the issue of how a spirit can be created (or die) does not apply without the constraints of time.

Secondly, the miracle of life, in all forms, being created from a mass of atoms, has the same probability of being created as a Jumbo Jet being assembled by chance from a whirlwind passing through a scrap-yard.

Therefore, now that science is looking for answers to questions it cannot answer, it is time for religion to take over the lead again and give scientists the answers so they can try to explain life in scientific terms. Before long they will discover the energy source that is spirit (and God) itself in some far end of an unknown spectrum, in an unknown dimension.

### **Graham Dare**

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**Graham** : I'm not in sympathy with the above contentions, which may be no surprise to you. When you use expressions like "could only have been created through divine action", what evidence have you for this assertion, and what does the introduction of this *deus ex machina* actually explain. What do you mean by "dimension outside the universe" so that it might act as an explanatory concept ?

The Jumbo Jet analogy is oft-quoted. There's much that we don't know about evolution, and in particular about how the first DNA and cells arose, but the correct response to this situation is "don't know ... working on it", not something like "spirit explains it all". The reason is that we know even less about "spirit", even if it exists, than we do about the mechanisms whereby chance events allied to natural selection lead to the complexity about us (if this is the correct story). If "spirit" does explain anything, please spell out the details for us. If "religion", as you conceive of it, can give scientists answers, please go on and provide them. I must say I thought your final sentence was poetic nonsense.

### **Theo**

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**10<sup>th</sup> October 1998**

**Valerie Ransford**

### **COMMENTS ON C94**

Dear Theo,

Seasons' greetings and welcome to new members.



The best in **Commensal 94**, for me, was **Albert Dean's** *The Thinking Process* (**C94/27**). It's going to be incredibly useful. Ideas like these are what one joins Mensa for.

As for **John Neary's** advice (**C94/15**), I'll read Dancy's *Contemporary Epistemology* as soon as I find it. At the moment, all I know about epistemology is in the *Oxford Companion to the Mind*. Here J.G. Cottingham reminds us of the question : "In what sense does a person who has knowledge differ from one who has a belief that happens to be true ?".

I am grateful, too, for **Rick Streets'** messages on **C94/33**. I do, I do admit my own ignorance whenever I think of Descartes. What's new to me is Rick's idea that overuse of the word *knowledge* is holding back the development of mankind. Smashing. I'll remember this for ever and quote it often.

As for **John Stubbings** (**C94/13**); it is always rewarding to enlighten someone. I believe he is mistaken about mathematics, however. Unless one believes with Marshall McLuhan that "The Medium is the Message", (and J.S. clearly does not) mathematics is not "just another medium" as he puts it. He's probably a bit mixed up, confusing mathematics with statistics or accounts. Mathematics, like other Arts, is for itself. More enlightenment ?

Have fun. Happy new year.

### **Valerie Ransford**

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**Valerie** : having a mathematical background, I think I ought to say something about your parting shot to **John Stubbings**, though I'm not too clear what your point is ! I'll leave John to defend himself against the charge of confusion and proceed to the ontological status of mathematics.

Most working mathematicians are, it is said, Platonists, who believe that Mathematics is discovered rather than invented. But, in this case, where is the undiscovered mathematics ? Hence the reference to Platonism. The form of the true circle is out there somewhere, and all real-life circles are but pale reflections of the "really" real thing. However, I believe it's easy to get confused between mathematics as an end in itself and mathematics as a description of the world. Also, between the mathematics and its theorems. The mathematics is invented – in the sense of the mathematical game we want to play – with its axioms and transformation rules for generating theorems. Given the invented mathematics, the theorems are discovered; but these are not discoveries about the real world, but only discoveries within a mathematical world of our own devising.

The world, however, is out there, not invented. The remarkable thing is that it is, at least sometimes, describable by mathematics. If this is the case, then the theorems derived from mathematics also correspond to facts about the world, at least if we make the correct "simplifying assumptions" and ignore second order effects and other issues that make the



mathematics intractable. Kepler's approximate laws are explained precisely by the mathematical theorems associated with inverse square laws operating in Euclidean space.

The role of beauty differs between mathematics and the sciences. In mathematics, beauty is allied to elegance and economy, and applies either to the mathematics itself, or to the manner in which the theorems are proved. The mathematics – the axioms and transformation rules – may be more or less quirky. A true theorem may be proved more or less elegantly, and an inelegant proof, while maybe not invalid, is “wrong”. On the other hand, a physical theory, however, elegant, is not thereby correct, being disproved by that famously ugly fact. Physicists are, though, led, and sometimes misled, by a search for beautiful (that is elegant) theories.

Anyone know why the world should be subject to mathematical description, and why at least some correct physical theories should be mathematically elegant - other than the old favourites of the faithfulness of God and Kant's intuitions, which deny that we perceive the world as it is in itself, but only in conformity to our faculties ?

I look forward to a repost from Alan Edmonds on this one !

### Theo

