

**the
Diagonal
Relationship**



This is the October, 1981, issue of THE DIAGONAL RELATIONSHIP. Editor & Publisher: Arthur D. Hlavaty, 250 Coligni Ave., New Rochelle, NY 10801, 914-632-1594. Consultant: Adrienne Fein. Corrupting Influence: Bernadette Bosky. All material written by the editor, unless otherwise indicated. Copyright © 1981 by Arthur D. Hlavaty. All rights returned to contributors. This is Whole Number 19; Volume 5, Number 3; W.A.S.T.E. Paper #287. DR is available for \$1 (\$2 outside the USA), letter of comment, trade, or artwork. If there is an X after your name on the envelope, you should send at least one of the above if you wish to get the next issue.

Among the Seekers

UFOs! Cattle mutilations! The Loch Ness Monster! I feel as if I have fallen into the pages of THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER. What am I doing here?

"Here" is Fortfest 81, the 9th annual conference of the International Fortean Organization. For those few who do not know, Charles Fort was an investigator of phenomena science could not explain. He himself offered explanations of some of these, which led to a certain amount of disagreement as to whether he was a crank or a wiseass. It would appear that, whichever he was, he was good at it.

All I knew before I got here was that the International Fortean Organization was interested in the same sort of phenomena. I would probably have passed up the flyer they sent me, urging me to attend Fortfest, except that it announced that the Guest of Honor was to be Robert Anton Wilson. Those familiar with this publication know that I have admired Wilson's writing for a long time, and that he now writes me letters. This would be my first opportunity to meet him in person.

But other than that, I had my doubts about Fortfest. They was the suspicion that I would be dealing with those the media associates with UFOs and cattle mutilations and such--little old ladies in tennis shoes, speakers who had to have the foam wiped off their mouths in between talking about how the commies and/or the Martians were poisoning their natural bodily fluids and projecting perverted sex fantasies into their heads. Of course, I am wary of media stereotypes, but this one seemed to fit my approach better than most.

I was born in the Secular Humanist religion. As soon as I say that, I realize that I'm starting an argument, and I'd better explain.

Most dictionaries define "religion" in terms of belief in a god or gods. They then go on to include Buddhism as a religion, even though it has no gods and nothing even resembling theology. It seems more useful to me to think of a "religion" as any total system which purports to explain everything. One advantage of this definition is that we then include things like Marxism and Nazism, which act like religions.



With any religion, there is always the problem of determining just exactly what is essential to the religion itself and what is just beliefs of its most vocal adherents. Take Christianity, for example. Many people believe that Christianity is antisex, and they can find examples from both Scripture and history to back up their contentions. Others maintain that Christianity accepts monogamous marital heterosex, but condemns all the other varieties, and they too have evidence. Still others maintain that it is perfectly consistent to be a gay Christian. One can find similar debates over the true Christian attitude towards war, politics, evolution, etc.

So there are some questions as to what constitutes the secular humanist worldview, besides the idea that humanity is the highest value there is, and that God is nonexistent or irrelevant.

Basically, Secular Humanists seem to believe that God is an unnecessary hypothesis because the Universe is an ordered self-perpetuating entity, operating on the basis of a system of rules which makes specific intervention from the outside pointless. Secular humanists tend to be materialists, though it could be argued that such belief is not essential to their system. They typically believe what Carl Sagan said in the introduction to THE DRAGONS OF EDEN: "My fundamental premise about the brain is that its workings--what we sometimes call 'mind'--are a consequence of its anatomy and physiology, and nothing more." Quite obviously, this approach puts the secular humanists in opposition to those who believe in an immortal soul which survives the death of the body. Less obviously, it tends to make them wary of any sort of psi phenomena or other unexplained mental powers which would seem to indicate the presence of something other than the brain. (Of course, it is possible for a Secular Humanist to believe that some psi powers exist, and will be explained materialistically as soon as we have more data, and indeed there are some who do believe that.)

One occasionally hears the term "religion of science," defined as a blind & dogmatic belief that "science has all the answers." This certainly exists, but to equate it with Secular Humanism is as unfair as to equate the "Moral" "Majority" with Christianity.

In any event, I was much influenced by the Secular Humanists, notably Bertrand Russell, and some time when I was in high school, I read one of the best Secular Humanist texts, Martin Gardner's FADS AND FALLACIES.

In many ways it is a first-rate book. It is intelligently and lucidly written. Gardner makes his presuppositions fairly clear, and his conclusions follow from them. His satirical remarks are usually fair and well-directed. When he comes to the really vicious doctrines, like Nazi racial theories, he is properly indignant. (And unlike many Secular Humanists, he finds Lysenko's "Marxist genetics" as offensive as right-wing errors.)

But I knew even when I first read it that the book was not perfect. It has been said then when a government agency looks for subversives, the number of them it finds is limited by the agency's budget, rather than by the number of dangerous enemies of the state^{who} really exist. In the same way, Gardner seems at times to be seeking dragons to slay, to the point where he will find dangerous cultism in such belief systems as General Semantics.

In any event, I became a (Martin) Gardnerian, and assumed the general worldview of the Secular Humanists. When I did get a theistic training, it was in Reform Judaism, which may be the theistic religion closest to Secular Humanism. (At least the contemporary closest one. Historically, there is Deism, the religion of many of America's Founding Fathers, which states that God created the Universe to be self-perpetuating & thus has not intervened in it since the Creation. I find that view operationally indistinguishable from atheism & agnosticism.)

But this did not satisfy me. I had the desire for a religion which offered more. The Secular Humanists will of course say that this meant I had some manner of neurotic needs for a Father figure or somesuch. This may in fact be the case, but it would not have anything to do with the truth of my beliefs. As I believe I have said here before, I am vastly comforted by my belief that the Earth is kept in its orbit by the laws of celestial mechanics, but the presumably neurotic satisfaction I derive from such belief does not disprove it.

I dabbled in Christianity, but its usual sexual attitudes (one area where the Secular Humanists are way ahead) insured that I would find it difficult to be happy there. But then came my synchronistic reading of Heinlein's STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND and Watts's NATURE, MAN, AND WOMAN in the same week.

ART INDEX

Linda Leach - 2 Bernadette Bosky - 7
 Steven Fox - 3 Wayne Brenner - 9
 Eric Brewer - 4 Adrenne Fein - 10
 Robert J. Whitaker - 6

The Eastern view encouraged by these books has remained with me. One thing that has led to is that I have come to accept some of the stranger interpretations of contemporary physics.

For it is generally agreed that something is going on in physics today, but there is a great deal of question as to what it means. A few years ago, the whole question of subatomic particles seemed to resemble the primordial chaos. Today, it is hoped that new discoveries dealing with quarks will solve those problems, but it is by no means certain.

And so, I find myself sympathizing with the sort of approach to physics represented by Wilson's *THE ILLUMINATI PAPERS*; Lawrence LeShan's *THE MEDIUM, THE MYSTIC, AND THE PHYSICIST*; and Fritjof Capra's *THE TAO OF PHYSICS*.

The sort of physics these books teach is either a denial or a transformation of materialism. It teaches that what we think of as the solid world in which we live may in fact be illusion, and what is real is information, or ideas, or patterns. This may offer a paradigm to describe one area in which orthodox science is being challenged--the whole question of psi phenomena.

But, returning to our original subject of discussion, this would seem to have little bearing on whether Loch Ness is inhabited, or whether the UFOs are really real.

And so I came to Fortfest not sure of what to expect, but assuming that here would be an area where my early Secular Humanist faith would not be challenged. And in a way it was not.

I arrived & met Robert Anton Wilson, who unsurprisingly turned out to be as interesting in person as he is in print. Then it was time for the program to begin.

The first speaker was a man named Jerome Clark, who called his speech "The Fortean Skeptic." This struck me as a most interesting title, especially as I was expecting to see the True Believer personality types out in force. Harking back to Fort himself, Clark suggested a suspension of both belief and disbelief until there was a sufficiency of evidence. He mentioned an idea that has appeared in these pages, too--namely that dogmatic refusal to believe does not deserve the term "skepticism." He suggested that such people be called "debunkers" instead.

I should make it clear that he set the tone for what followed. The speakers were not all entirely credible--I find it difficult to believe that what the Bible calls "Jerusalem" is actually Edinburgh, Scotland, to pick a Horrible Example--but they all seemed to ask reasonable consideration of their opinions, rather than blind belief.

And so we listened to talks on UFOs and cattle mutilations and spontaneous human combustion. I discovered that America is now alleged to have its very own answer to the Loch Ness Monster--a supposed inhabitant of Lake Champlain who has been nicknamed "Champ." The speaker was promoting legislation to protect Champ as an endangered species. My first, smart-ass, reaction was to go over to Nancy Lebovitz's excellent calligraphed-button concession (free--and deserved--plug) and order one which read *Nuke the Lake Champlain Monster*. But seriously, folks, the speaker did have a point. It is interesting that, faced with the thought that there exists an animal we have never seen before, that science has had no chance to study, many people's immediate reaction is "Kill it!"

These people are operating in an uncharted area. There is the desire to go back, to explain away the difficult evidence and return to the comfort of old scientific rules and beliefs; and comforting & cowardly as this may be, it still is the right way in some of these matters. Maybe Lake Champlain is not inhabited by something strange & interesting.

To move forward with the investigation always seems to lead to chaos, to an area where the old rules don't work, and there are no rules. This approach is strangely comforting to many people, including those who follow *THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER*.

It seems reasonable to such people, I would guess, that we live in a world that is run by a random sort of deity. The rules of science are all sloppy approximations & guesswork; actually God does all this stuff on an *ad hoc* basis, as in this artist's rendering of the one way to reconcile evolution and Creation.



But there is another approach. People like Laing & Szasz say that the mad are actually quite reasonable in their way, but are playing by rules the rest of us do not understand. So it may be with mad gods. To say that the rules of the Universe are unknown, and tend to surprise us when we think we have them, is not to say that there are no rules. I find it more elegant to believe in a God who created a lawful Universe than one who did such a sloppy job that SHE has to keep tinkering with it.

A while back, Thomas S. Kuhn wrote a book called THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS. This book theorized that the progress of science is not a smooth path of accretion of knowledge, but rather one marked by outbursts and changes of a revolutionary nature. An old paradigm is held for a while, but more & more evidence appears to challenge it. At first, the evidence is denied, or there is an attempt to explain it away. But there is too much evidence. The old & comforting ways do not work. It is necessary to move forward into what appears to be chaos. But in the move forward, someone discovers a new paradigm, a new system that includes the valid parts of the old one & still explains the anomalous data.

Kuhn's book is an example of itself, in that its revolutionary & dangerous ideas are now mostly taken as self-evident truths, and I have always felt that it is an excellent model of change in a number of fields. It certainly would seem to explain the line about "every conservative worships a dead radical," as the political revolutionaries overturn an old paradigm with a new one which itself grows old & oppressive.

There is another model for all of this--the kind of personal changes that have taken place in the Human Potential Movement. It was said that Fritz Perls could take people apart and put them back together on stage in front of an audience, and while in some cases the changes brought about may have been the Hawthorne Effect (temporary improvement in behavior caused by being experimented upon), nevertheless some changes appear to have been permanent.

But there is a catch to taking people apart & putting them back together again. The first half of the trick is much easier to do. This is the danger in any system which challenges accepted approaches, from the political radicals who are so busy planning the Revolution they don't know or care what follows it, to the Forteanes who merely want to destroy "establishment science" to my own group, the Discordians, whose liberating views can turn into a closed system wherein everyone is a prisoner in hir own private reality.

In the end, though, the step forward seems worth taking, at least some of the time. I suspect that I am not perfect as I am, and I may even need a bit of a revolution in some parts of my life.

SORROWFUL SEQUEL

We've been discussing crime and punishment, and what, if anything, punishment is for, in these pages. The discussion has taken a more personal aspect for me.

Harvey Shild was a New York City bus driver. On October 10, a man got on his bus and, a few stops later, asked for a transfer. Harvey refused, on the grounds that he was not permitted to give transfers after the fare had been paid. The alleged human being shot him to death.

I wasn't a terribly close friend of Harvey's, but I liked him, and I had enjoyed his company on a number of occasion. I feel as if something good has been taken from me.

Some other friends of Harvey's would like to get together with the killer. I am not sure precisely what they would do, but it seems reasonable to hypothesize that they would not be overly concerned with rehabilitating him, nor would they take psychiatric testimony as to his fitness to stand trial.

My first reaction was a surge of hope that they would overcome the odds & catch the man. But that was transitory. This desire may have partly come from realizing that this crime was not something totally alien to me. I have at times felt the desire to kill someone who was frustrating me by enforcing The Rules. Many of you have had that desire, and I knew Harvey well enough to be sure that he felt it. The difference --and it is a crucial one--is that we never did it.

The desire for revenge strikes me as the same sort of desire--to inflict pain as a way of getting back at the world, even if such action does not improve the situation.

Then there is the fact that I am not pleased with the idea of my tax money going to support Harvey's killer, especially since it costs more to keep someone in a penitentiary than in an Ivy League school. But then the government already does so many stupid & vicious things with my money that I find it a bit difficult to raise fresh indignation against each new one.

I sometimes think it would be a good idea, in the case of killers like these who show such loathesome disregard for the value of human life, to tell them that they are going to spend the rest of their lives in jail, and that it will not be pleasant, and leave a large bottle of sleeping pills in their cell.

I don't know. Rehabilitation would be a wonderful thing, if anyone knew how to do it. Banishment is a possible approach & another argument for the space program. But for my own sake, I'm not going to dwell on how nice it would be to Punish the bad guys.

From Silent Tristero's Empire

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I was glad to see the GoH speech, which I in general regard as a very useful and beneficial partial truth.

For instance, I think your view of the educational system is too dismal; but the tendencies you caution against are very real ones, and any further awareness of them is all to the good. I also admit that my own situation is one relatively free of many of the prejudices you speak about here and elsewhere (anti-intellectual, anti-female, pro-"equality" at the expense of mediocrity), and that indicates more that I am exceptionally lucky than that society in general does not err in ways that you say.

But look at the area of teaching, one I know fairly well from both sides of the desk. On the one hand, your identification of a "second-generation collapse" in the profession is too close to the bone; few if any teachers I know would continue teaching for worthless scrip when money runs out, as my mother and many other public school teachers did during the depression.

The problem is not merely one of dedication, but of competence. I'm sure that your mother, unlike half the current urban public school teachers, reads at better than a seventh-grade level.

On the other hand, my experience in departmental policy is that while the struggles are indeed vicious in the extreme, they are less determined by "alpha-male dominance behavior" than one might think, and more by factors such as publications, academic reputation, ability to fiercely defend one's ideas and approaches, and the like. That's also of course, in a way, a matter of bullshit and petty aggression, but it's *intel-ligent* bullshit and petty aggression. And often, also, the real movers and shakers in any department are too busy with their own projects to bother with hierarchical stuff, and those who get the impressive titles are those with nothing better to do than push papers around.

So I don't think the outlook for the intellectual is anywhere near as bad as you sometimes seem to be saying. Nor am I certain that pure intellect is the whole solution anywhere near as much as you say. Certainly, the razor edge of innovation right now is very cerebral work, and I do agree that much of that (computers, space technology, alternative energy sources) is where hope--if any--is coming from right now. But examples abound (notably in industry and the military) of the kind of ludicrous results one gets when a tank is designed by someone who's never been out in the field in one, or rules are made for factory work by someone who's never been out of a coat and tie. It's not so much that one should feel guilty for not living "real life," but that in many cases that may well be the only way to gather some of the information necessary to make vital decisions correctly.

Good point. I am certainly in favor of the kind of flexible setups where those who do the actual work make the decisions about their work, unlike the hierarchical rigidity of most large-scale structures.

6

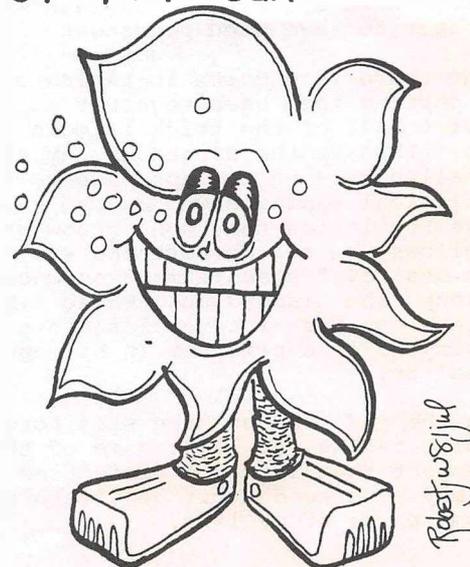
I found Mary Frey's letter very interesting, and agree with the schematic of the four kinds of women. At one time or another, I have been "typed" as each of the four, though fortunately less as the two negative versions; I think that often the man's reaction to me as one of the kinds of woman was certainly determined by his interactions with women in the past, notably mother and sisters. I think that in some people, notably men who see sex more in terms of pure communication, the good-sexual and good-asexual functions tend to be similar, even synonymous.

I agree with Avedon Carol to this extent: I've found my outlook is happy when I see (or intuit) a Whole Picture, or when I concentrate on minutiae; it's what's *in between* that's depressing. The former--almost a "bird's eye view" that allows me, however momentarily, to transcend the self as a point of reference--gives me a feeling of value, of belonging to a good and worthwhile whole, of a process that's working itself out and will work itself out, no matter what any given situation looks like. In the realm of details I can work for perfect craftsmanship, and see concrete good being accomplished. It's everything in between--mostly politics, "social issues," and the like--where I get desparate because I get the feeling I ought to be doing something, but I have no idea what.

The main use for the Mc Coy Loompanics book on starting your own motorcycle gang (*sic* for club), as far as I can see, is that if you're stupid enough to buy the book as a real resource (rather than just for sick curiosity, like my interest), you *may* be stupid enough to go day-tripping in a Real Biker's Hangout. If so, this book will at least tell you enough so you'll avoid the worst errors and get out of there in about one piece. In a way it's counter to the spirit of evolution, but I guess I'm still in favor of its working along those lines.

Have you considered using your not inconsiderable knowledge of such lore to write a book on *starting* a really tough, badass all-woman motorcycle club? You could call it THE BITCH BIKERS' GUIDE.

I LIVE IN THE "HERE AND NOW" MOMENT BY
MOMENT AND AT THE MOMENT I'M
BOMBED OUT OF MY GOURD.



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Y'know all that Jungian stuff
about the images of women?
Doesn't it ever bug anyone
that there are so many sexual

images around that seem to put all of the responsibility on The Other? I mean, the whole first paragraph of Mary Frey's letter seems to be about images which portray men as being totally sexually manipulable--that is, you can seduce a man into any sort of behavior, because apparently men aren't capable of making their own decisions and taking responsibility for their own behavior--so it's up to women to decide how we're going to use our sexuality on men. (Notice that none of these images have anything to do with a woman who might like to be sexually fulfilled herself; there's nothing in there about a woman having sex with a man for the purpose of enjoying sex with him.) Then there is the good-asexual woman and the bad-asexual women--the "good" one being a nourisher, the "bad" one being selfish--notice how a woman who gives a damn about herself is automatically bad, and the only way to be good is to be giving to the man. And nothing in any of it implies that the male ought to be willing to return something for the loving or show some interest in what she needs from the relationship.

I think these images are evil, really. The implications of them seem to negate the humanity of one's partners. The rest of Mary's letter makes no sense to me at all. When I think of Good Male Partner types, I can't divide them into sexual and nonsexual types; I can think only in terms of people I can share both sexually and nonsexually with, and I think in terms of relationships that go both ways. There are things I absolutely must have from a relationship, and there are things I absolutely expect I will give to the relationship, and there just isn't much point in *having* said relationship unless both aspects are there (sexual/nonsexual or giving/taking). Bad Men? Why, bad men are the men who would deny me any of those things--the giving or the taking, the sexual things or the things that aren't specifically sexual. Any man who thinks I should love him without having the things I want from the relationship too is a stinker as far as I'm concerned.

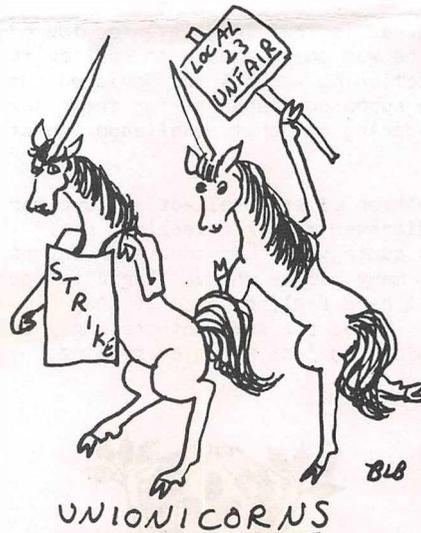
Y'see, I don't expect anyone else to make me the star of their movie--but I insist on being the star of *my* movie, and I am sick to death of people (men) who expect me to substitute them for myself in my own life. Oh, sure I was raised to think I didn't even *have* a movie (life) unless I could find some man to star in it. Most of the women I know were raised the same way. And most of the men I know were raised to expect us to be nothing more than props in the movie they were to star in. But what powerful props! The star of the movie reacts only to the props (the behavior of the props, you understand, is always motivated solely towards the star; their reason for being is to act upon the star and make him react; they have no outside motivations, they do nothing for themselves, and nothing that does not have to do with him), and in fact is *forced* to do everything he does by the behavior of the props, and thus is never responsible for his own actions. A bad man, therefore, is bad because the women in his life have not properly acted on him; a good man is good because the women in his life have been good to him. For each male action, there is a causal female action, but there is *never* the power of decision on the part of the male.

In the Garden of Eden, the Xtian myth goes, the serpent came to Eve and offered her Knowledge. Eve's intellectual curiosity was aroused, and she ate the apple because she wanted to *know*. But when she tried to arouse Adam intellectually with the same offer of Knowledge, he just wasn't interested. It is implied that she *seduced* him into eating from the tree of Knowledge because he was too fucking dimwitted to be moved by anything but sex. I find it pretty damned peculiar that for thousands of years people have accepted the premise that men are naturally the kind of people who can only be moved (and are always moved) by sex, and that women have to use sex to seduce men into behaving, and an evil woman is one who seduces men into something other than behaving. I find it even *more* peculiar that the same people who accept this rather insulting depiction of men actually turn around and declare that males are the intellectual superior of women. And more peculiar still is the fact that for the last twelve years, because I reject the notion that men are nothing but a brainless set of genitals on legs, the aforementioned believers have been calling *me* a man hater!

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I thought the antiabortionists were into punishing women for being female. The kindred spirits who want to forbid all medicinal drugs and medical treatment, recreational drugs like coffee and soda, simple pleasures like food and fucking, etc., to pregnant women (meaning all women between menarche and menopause, who *might* be pregnant without knowing it yet) "for the sake of the fetus" seem to be purely anti-female, and no doubt would permit any activity to the woman carrying a mere *female* fetus.

I suspect that you are right about the motivations of many antichoice people.



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Somewhere in the midst of reading "The Four Revolutions," I had a revelation of sorts. Morality isn't how everybody should behave. It's how *women* should behave. (When did you ever hear the terms "loose man" or "fallen man" or "wayward boy"?) If this is anywhere near true, it would certainly be tied into the old sex-leads-to-reproduction. Imposing rules for sexuality is controlling the situations in which reproduction can take place. Nothing to do with real morality, except that that's a much more convincing argument than any rational reason. (Make 'em feel guilty. Works every time.) I am reminded of a remark by Cornelia Otis Skinner: "Woman's virtue is man's greatest invention." One thing, from the "male supremacy" point of view, that birth control did that maybe wasn't so good is to take away a woman's best (i.e., most convincing) reason for saying No. "I don't want to" is hard for some men to understand, for precisely the reasons you mention: Women have something they want, and it doesn't occur to them that women may deny it to them, much less that women have a right to do so.

Ah, puritanism. I first encountered the True Meaning of Puritanism while subscribing to EAST-WEST JOURNAL. (What the heck, it was a free subscription.) It isn't just white-collar Republicans who are into that trip. Nobody's quite so repressive as the vegetarian/esoteric-wisdom/ecological/Inner Truth freaks who seem to get their main pleasure out of condemning the Western-oriented Industrialists who are ruining the world with their carnivorous habits. At which realization I suddenly got much greater pleasure out of eating meat. What's the use of being into any trip if it makes life less fun--if it gives you more and more things to disapprove, and none to truly enjoy?

Mary Frey's analysis of animus/anima is interesting, and partially useful, but is probably more a reflection of her psyche than anything close to a universal description. And I could say the same of my attempts to define the subject, or yours, or anyone else's. My animus isn't particularly my notion of "What a man should be" (which man?). It's more those parts of my personality that don't often get expressed, because of social circumstances and considerations. And I wonder if, in the absence of relatively rigid sex roles, the anim- would be the opposite sex of the individual? Or any sex?

My own guess is that Jung invented the concept because he was smart enough to realize that well-functioning women & men deviated sharply from the supposed standards for their sexes, but not daring enough to challenge the standards.

"Working definition of an intellectual: One who has to use logic to discover what his feelings are." I like, I like. May I quote you? [Of course.] Unfortunately, I know all too many people who use logic to "prove" that they don't have feelings, and if they did, they'd be irrelevant. Makes for some interestingly inappropriate conclusions on just about everything.



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Regarding Brad Linaweaver's comment, I wish he had taken my letter in context. I was responding to a loc from Harry Anruschak claiming, among other absurdities, that religion preys upon people's fear of death, and that money-hungry preachers claim, "if you don't give us money and power, you'll go to Hell." My response, including the preceding sentence, which Brad left out, was, "*Judaism does not place much emphasis on either life after death or the devil.* Its only emphasis is on the conduct of life in the here-and-now." Needless to say, I was not referring to ethical conduct as Judaism's *only* obligation, but to the focus in Judaism on life in this world, rather than the hereafter.

I enjoyed your Empiricon "speech," especially the introduction. One endeavor that I can assure you does not meet your criterion of increasing intelligence is the acquisition of a PhD. As an academic editor, I am constantly amazed at the tortuous inventions supposedly educated people go to in order to sound learned. If the emphasis in most areas of academia was on communication, rather than pseudointellectualism, this might fit your requirement of increasing intelligence. Right now, I think that most institutions which claim to be in existence for that very purpose are busily engaged in the obfuscation of same.

To head off one apparent argument, I should point out that Bernadette is engaged in the study of literature, while Janice is talking about her experiences with those who teach the social sciences. I suspect that this difference is relevant. My own editing experience, in the natural sciences, supports Janice's view, but I should point out that my publisher paid so abysmally that we got the dregs of the profession.

John P. McClimans Puritanism is everywhere, but
address in flux I'm sure that your statement
about eccpuritans is reasonable,
honest, or up to your usual standards of integrity.

Most environmentalist issues are not based on the concept of inflicting suffering on those who are happy, but rather on not allowing people to make the environment unable to support life as we know it. If the environment we have to live in will not let us live, it becomes a moot point as to whether people or the environment is more important.

I personally think that the environment is more important than the people living in it. That is because I think that the Earth is a single living organism, in which people play a part--perhaps a major part, but certainly not the only part. I see that people have reproduced out of proportion to any place they might fill within the organism sometimes called Gaea. This overproduction is a major cause of the termination of other life forms that may have had just as important a part in the overall picture as people have. I often simply see humans as a cancer on the Earth.

I repeat that I was talking about tendencies of individuals in a variety of movements, rather than condemning the movements per se. But your cancer analogy scares me. The way to deal with a cancer is to kill off as many cells of it as possible. If I felt that way about a group I belonged to, I'd start with myself.



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When I voiced my misgivings about the infamous Thoth exercise, I had no idea that so many people would rush to its

defense. It seems that there are a lot of Thoth enthusiasts out there. It's OK, folks; I don't really object if you indulge in this ritual, although I doubt that it will do anything for you. I will, however, address some of your complaints about my earlier criticism.

Robert Anton Wilson, I do appreciate the fact that you have lavished upon me one of the most baroque sarcasms that I have seen in quite a while. You are elegant as always, but unfortunately very illogical as well, in this case. Let me just throw this little paradox your way. You are telling me that I cannot possibly know anything about the Thoth exercise without first trying it. Experiment is the only source of information there is. OK. Why *should* I do this exercise? Until I do it, I know nothing about it. If I know nothing about it, I don't know that it's worth taking the time to do. If I don't know that it's worth taking the time to do, I won't do it. Nothing you tell me about it or your own favorable experineces with it will influence me, of course, since only by experimentation can I possibly know anything about it. Apparently you believe that without experimentation I *am* entitled to form a tentative favorable impression, as long as I strictly avoid any (tentative or other) unfavorable impression. It doesn't work that way. We always form opinions before we experiment because if we don't, we will never be able to decide which experiments to perform. So much for my supposedly archaic antiexperimentalist dogma.

Ed Zdrojewski has (sorry, Ed) almost completely misunderstood what I said. This may be my own fault (if we have to blame someone) for not being clearer in what I said. In any event, let me clarify. I am *not* saying that people shouldn't recognize their own godhood. Personally I believe that we are all at least potentially godlike beings, and that the truest understanding of God is simply that God is us. ("Thou art God," as Heinlein used to say.) I am saying, however, that the Thoth exercise is not going to bring you any closer to an awareness of your Godlike nature.

I also was not trying to imply that Wilson was advocating that only the Thoth exercise be used for changing oneself. I am aware that he did not say that, and I don't imagine that he even thinks it. The Thoth exercise remains an ineffective technique even if you *are* using other techniques at the same time. (If you used Thoth exclusively, you would *really* be in trouble.) It is still a waste of time. You suggest that the value of Thoth lies in "convincing the practitioner that s/he can do something on hir own to solve problems." The way to convince yourself of your ability to solve problems is to solve problems. Sitting there saying, "I *can* solve problems, I CAN CAN CAN CAN!!!!" etc. does not solve problems. If you tried to solve some and did it, you would then be persuaded of your own ability in that area.

As for the dangers of marijuana, I freely admit that it is one of the least dangerous drugs you can use, less dangerous even than alcohol. Nonetheless, if you cannot make a decision to do something and then do it, without having to first try some crude form of self-hypnosis aided by a marijuana high, you are in sad shape. Why make yourself dependent on *any* drug, even the safest? That is not the way to enhance your own ability. It is a path of degeneration, of progressive weakening. You can do your problem solving without drugs and will be stronger for it.

Lee Ann Goldstein makes what I find to be the most plausible defense of the Thoth exercise. It could just be an aid to confidence, "psyching oneself up," as popular jargon might put it. If so, OK, but I still think that you might as well save time and just make your decisions and stick by them, without having to chant them to yourself first. But if you want to do the Thoth exercise, as I said before, I don't object. If your confidence improves, fine. It may actually be worth your while.

I have a comment on one of your "New Proverbs of Hell." It may well be true that the three best ways to drive your enemies mad are to love them, to return good for evil, and to tell them the whole truth. In most cases, however, my main concern with my enemies is not driving them mad, but protecting myself from them in the first place. Furthermore, my enemies are *already* mad; that is usually why they became my enemies in the first place. Sane people may disagree with me, but generally do not become enemies of mine. If I were powerful enough that my enemies could not harm me in any event, I would feel much freer to return good for evil, etc.

One reason that was a New Proverb of Hell is that it isn't the whole truth. The three methods may not drive one's enemies mad, and such maddening may not always be a good thing, but they do tend to make the person doing them happier.





Adrienne Fein

"Doodle-wood"