

# **Intelligent:**

**But  
Not  
Smart  
Enough**

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John D. Boenke

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John D. Boenke was born in 1926 in Rossford, Ohio and grew up during the Great Depression. He served in the U. S. Army in 1946 - 47 in the Medical Corps. In 1951 he received a degree of Bachelor of Science in Physics from the University of Michigan. After college, Mr. Boenke worked in research and engineering for the General Electric Company. Later he was the Manager of an engineering test laboratory for Lau Blower Company, then Chief Engineer for Halsey Taylor Water Cooler Corp. and Senior Design Engineer for The Werner Ladder Company. Before retiring in 1989, Mr. Boenke also owned and operated a small motel in Ashtabula, Ohio.

Since retiring, Mr. Boenke has been interested in reading and studying in the areas of Cosmology, Theoretical Physics and Philosophy. In addition, he has an interest in the origins of religions. He has privately published several short stories and some poetry.

Intelligent: But Not Smart Enough

is dedicated  
to those intellectually  
brave people  
who will lead the Human Race  
away from extinction  
at some time in the future

# INTELLIGENT: BUT NOT SMART ENOUGH

By John D. Boenke

“My dear Mondrain! Certainly you cannot be serious. What has led you to that position?”

The setting was the subdued environment of the elegant library of the Mondrain. P. Hemple mansion. The haunting quiet was broken only by the soft monotonous ticking of a huge cherry wood grandfather clock which stood just inside the entrance door of the library like a sentinel guarding the precious books and artifacts which were discretely placed about the large room. Henry Armbruster spent more Sunday afternoons with his friend, Mondrain, in the Hemple home since the death of Henry’s wife, Alice. Neither of the men was interested in the physical activities of many of their counterparts. Chasing a little ball across the grass or working up a sweat on a tennis court did not particularly appeal to them. .

The two had been retired for several years from very successful business careers, but one can never completely disengage from the financial world as even retirement requires a certain amount of attention to maintain a modicum of control on the investments. Weekdays were reserved for that activity. Weekends though were to be enjoyed in any way they saw fit. Often the two gentlemen took pleasure in watching a good opera from Mondrain’s video collection or even listening to recordings of memorable performances of classical music. An occasional short trip or outing was another favored activity.

Today however, they had found quiet conversation to be relaxing, and the atmosphere of the library was very conducive for that. Mondrain took a minute to contemplate before replying, and then spoke. “I have been thinking very seriously about all that goes on in this world - this life, and I do believe that as smart as we humans are, we are not smart enough.”

Henry rejoined, “Oh come now. I disagree. We have advanced the human race from living in caves to enjoying all the comforts we can imagine. There is no aspect of our world, our universe, or ourselves that is not being studied and conquered. It is the everyday business of science to investigate physics, chemistry, biology, mechanics, medicine, and all the aspects of life itself to push out the frontiers of our knowledge. How can you say we are not smart enough?”

“It is very simple. Listen. We are not smart enough.” Mondrain paused to exhibit his impish smile then continued, “Consider this, if we were smart enough, there would be no wars, no need for war equipment, no poverty, no enmity between groups, no crime, no suffering, no mistrust among nations, no advantage to charlatans who wish to misguide us, and no need to lock doors. We would all eat healthy food and experience active interesting lives, and the world would be a perfect place.”

“But what you suggest is impossible. Human nature is such that there will always be these problems.” Henry sat back in self satisfaction at having explained the situation.

“Don’t look now Henry, but you have just conceded my point.”

Henry was taken aback. After contemplating this response a few moments he answered, “Perhaps we need to define better what we mean by “Smart”. Is it just the ability to acquire and use knowledge, or is it being able to control our environment, or is it the quality of being able to adapt to the needs our environment imposes on us?”

Mondrain added, “Or is it all of the above? For me, smartness is the everyday word we use as a substitute for the term, Intelligence. The definition of intelligence is the capability to acquire and discover knowledge, and then to apply it using our intellectual skills to all life situations. The end result hopefully is the betterment of the human race. But to me, being smart means much more. It also involves being practical and being able to use reason to find solutions to problems. It means being able to recognize and accept facts. Smart is also pragmatic and hardheaded. It implies the ability to carry ideas through to the end and to solve the problems. Now I know you are going to ask immediately what it is that I consider to be the betterment of the human race. Right?”

“Right.”

“And there you have me. That is a very complex idea. What is betterment for one may not be the betterment for others, and some things we consider to be improvements we may discover actually to be working to our detriment when we know all the facts.”

They both fell silent. The early afternoon Sun illuminated patches of the deep maroon carpet and contrasted it with the surrounding gleaming light oak flooring. The warmth of the colors contributed to the comfortable quality of the room and confirmed it as an oasis in the hurly burly of life. It was a calm place - a contemplative place. It was a place and time when profound thoughts could be considered. The ticking clock became a major factor in the ambiance until Mondrain continued, “I believe you are correct though. We ought to carefully consider what we mean by being smart, and perhaps look at how this applies to various aspects of our lives. Possibly we can then decide whether we are intelligent enough or not. For a starter, may we agree that our intelligence has evolved along with our biological evolution? Through the years of evolution our biological structures became more complicated, a natural process which was driven by our interaction with the environment.

“This growth or change contributed to better chances of survival, and so it persisted. The side effects were greater interconnectedness of the senses and the greater complexities of our brains. This resulted in new relationships with the environment and with each other. We developed emotions and abilities to communicate and relate to each other. Even the so called, lower animals, seem to exhibit some proto-emotions and they certainly use tools for obtaining ends which contribute to survival. Ends such as obtaining food and protection from the environment are very helpful. The use of sticks and clubs as weapons and levers, stones for hammers were all possibly inherited or passed on by enculturation to us from previous species. Later on, the eventual use of wheels and the controlling of fire were all milestones in the interaction of the developing humanoid with its environment. This evolution of practical skills also probably served to enhance the development of the brain.”

“I agree with you, that is essentially what happened, and we can hardly deny that in every stage of our evolution we were smarter at that time than we were previously. I think it is also fair to say that the more advanced and complex animals are smarter than the less complicated ones. Biological evolution of the humanoid paralleled the development of the humanoid’s ability to favorably interact with the environment and thus have a better chance of surviving. To me it seems the evolution of the brain was a self reinforcing process. More brain, better survival and opportunity to develop. More development, more brain.”

The two men were again quiet. Over the years of their friendship they had found in each other a very compatible persona. They seemed to be at ease in each

other's company even when there was nothing to say, and they could individually explore their thoughts. There was no anxiety for them in silence.

But the present subject was interesting enough, it could not be dropped. "I still believe, Mondrain, that we are smart enough for the world in which we live. If we would only exert ourselves to a greater degree, we should be able to solve the problems of society."

"Oh? What about wars? Ever since a man threw the first rock at another man or used a stick as a club, we have been fighting with ourselves. We have not really learned to settle our differences with anything but wars. Where is the smartness in that? All that wars prove is the greater power can prevail, not that the winning side is necessarily correct. This is simply the global expression of the individual conflicts we hear about every day. People fight because they have not learned sufficiently well how to negotiate or to use reason to reach agreements. We know it is more productive to be concerned and caring about the other person's position and use compromise to reach a peaceful arrangement, but this is violated extensively every day and transgressed most egregiously at the national level. Nations which try to be considerate are looked upon as being weak and are thus the targets for exploitation by all the less enlightened nations."

"But would you not agree that we have progressed over the ages in spite of wars? You are correct. We should be smart enough to solve by negotiation and diplomacy all problems including those disagreements which cause wars. But when others refuse to be reasonable, what do you do? Does this not leave force as the only option to protect yourself or your interests?"

"Yes Henry, that is the crux of the problem. How do you reason with an unreasonable person? How does a nation deal with another, nation which does not abide by the normal conventions and is unreasonable? This is exactly what I am trying to say. We are not yet smart enough to deal with this on a commonplace quotidian basis. Experts skilled in interpersonal relationships may be able to handle the situation of unreasonable individuals, but the man in the street cannot generally do so, and this reflects on the actions the larger group then takes."

"Would you not agree though that wars do end? Somebody wins, or eventually, some event or weariness on the part of the participants brings them to a peace conference, or there is an interdiction or interposition of forces which brings the conflict to an end. Even changes in other conditions in the World may influence the conflict. Does this not display a certain amount of smartness on the part of the adversaries?"

"Well, yes. But why is the same smartness not exhibited at the beginning of the fiasco and thus avoid all the misery and destruction of a war? That would be even smarter, and I would start to be proven wrong in saying we are not smart enough. Even if a war is brought to a so called peaceful conclusion, there are usually remaining animosities which continue into the future. Certainly you can think of situations wherein hostilities are ended, but the sub surface hostilities go on for generations."

Henry took a few minutes to digest these comments before replying, "This comes back to my original response. Human nature constrains us. Perhaps that is the stumbling block. What is it in human nature which causes us to be irrational? We have these fine brains which can do so much useful thinking for us. Why do we then let ourselves be controlled by irrational behavior?"

"That is a good question. In my view, this reaction is related to evolution just as much as everything else is affected by evolution. Life has evolved over billions of years. We hominids have come into the picture only a few million years ago, and humans are even more recent arrivals. But even being relatively newcomers, the time

period has been extremely long, almost unimaginable. As we have been evolving biologically, the developing mental processes have aided us to survive in two ways. One, of course, is the automatic reactions we have developed in the natural selection process. Our automatic physical reactions to pain, loud noise, bright light and other such things have contributed to our survival over the years. Our automatic physiological and psychological reactions relate in the same way to environmental events over similarly long periods of time and are thus also deeply ingrained. We laugh and are happy or cry and are sad automatically. All of these reflexes are firmly enmeshed in our psyches. They are expressed by our emotional reactions and are largely uncontrolled.

“The second way we have been aided in survival was by the newly developing process of thinking and planning. In other words, rational thought. But rational thought in this second part is a rather late comer on the scene. The irrational responses first mentioned, have had millions of years to perfect themselves, probably through the total time span of the evolution of life. Now, how long has rational thinking been around? “

Henry reflected for a few moments before he replied. “I remember years ago in college, my philosophy professor maintained that critical thinking did not begin until the Greek Philosophers had time to sit around and contemplate the world. Plato, Socrates, and all the rest, these were the original thinkers. Although others claim there were serious thinkers back into Babylonian times also. In any case, we have been rational thinkers for only a few thousand years at most.”

“Precisely. So which influence do you think is the strongest in determining our actions?”

“Obviously, the more deeply entrenched emotional ones.”

“Yes, that is what I believe also. That is why I say we are not smart enough. The rational approach is not as strong as the emotional approach.” Mondrain thought a moment then added, “This is turning into quite a discussion, Henry. What would you say to a little refreshment?”

“I would say that would be enjoyable and perhaps conducive to more clear thinking.”

Mondrain chuckled, “I will go along with the enjoyment. I am not sure about the thinking.” He pressed a small button on his side table. A moment later a soft tapping at the door was followed by the immense solid oak door quietly swinging open to admit a smallish man in a plain black suit.

“Alfred, would you bring us a couple of brandy glasses and one of the bottles from that case I brought home last week?”

“Certainly, Sir.” The Alfred person faded through the doorway, but then reappeared so quickly it was almost as if he had anticipated the request and had prepared for it. He carefully placed a small tray on the side table, opened the bottle and poured the two snifters with a small amount of the brandy, then stood back. “Cook asked me to remind you she has left a cold supper for you as requested, and that she will be away Monday and Tuesday as she had discussed with you previously.”

“Yes Alfred, I remember that Cook will be gone. And I will not require much from you while she is away, as I plan to be out for dinner both days. Thank you Alfred.”

“Yes, Mr. Hemple.” Alfred silently withdrew and the men began to enjoy the bouquet of their brandies.

“This is a wonderful brandy Mondrain. Where did you discover it?”

“I was visiting a friend of mine in Cleveland last week, and he served it. Did you know the northern area of Ohio is a great wine area? Lake Erie provides a moderating influence on the climate which helps to produce fine grapes.” The men enjoyed sipping their drinks, and the clock mechanically noted the passing of each second.

As Henry stared into the amber fluid he became very thoughtful and finally remarked, “I am thinking of what you said previously about the emotional influence on our behavior. I am thinking about the old saw. It goes something like; if you don’t want anything done, appoint a committee to do it. As you are well aware, there is so much misunderstanding, arguing, intransigence, territory protection and ego safeguarding that goes on in a committee meeting, it is a wonder that anything ever gets done at all.”

“Yes, you are quite right. As more people are involved in decisions, it seems the less gets accomplished. That is why government is so difficult, especially in a democracy.”

“But democracy is supposedly the fairest form of government guaranteeing equality to all. One man, one vote and all that sort of thing.”

Mondrain felt compelled to enlarge on Henry’s ideas and comments. “That is the basic idea, but it is fraught with practical difficulties. I think it was Churchill who said something like, ‘Democracy is the worst form of government until you consider all the others.’ Think about the fact that all persons in a democracy may not be fully informed on issues affecting governmental decisions, nor may they be equally adept at understanding them. Also personal situations may vary which have an influence on their decisions. These things all conspire to make consensus difficult, and may result in a consensus by a group to take an action which is totally inappropriate for the problem at hand. In the past, I have heard it claimed that a Philosopher King is the best form of government. I think that is another name for a Benign Dictator. The idea is that, if decisions are vested in one person who has the best interest of the total community as the first and foremost aim, then the government will serve the people most fairly. It requires a person who is totally informed, totally smart and totally free of emotional constraints. That is, it is as impossible as any other form of government. Such governing arrangements deteriorate into domineering dictatorships which are not wise and not benign. Then people and nations suffer as a consequence.”

“Yes indeed. Many such situations exist in the world today, and not only do the people suffer, but the nation involved declines further and becomes a burden and a threat to its neighbors. But to respond to your comment about democracy, the basic premise is excellent. I think everyone should have whatever control is possible on their own destiny. The main idea is commendable, but the devil is, as they say, in the details. As you pointed out, not all members of the social group may be equally adept at understanding the group problems. What about a citizenship requirement for individuals to have some basic level of comprehension of governmental processes to participate in the governing process? Could voting be allowed only to the people who understand the problems?”

“No! No! Then it is immediately not a democracy. By definition, everyone has to participate in a democracy. That is the whole idea.”

“I disagree.” Henry replied. “There are those who do not participate now. Some, by choice, do not vote or express themselves on civil issues. There are even some religious sects which disapprove of involvement in the mundane affairs of state. Also, it is almost universally accepted that convicted felons and other such anti-

social persons or mentally incompetent individuals cannot vote. And of course, underage persons are excluded from the voting process. If everyone does not share in the duties, how can you call our existing system a democracy?”

“Well, our government is a democracy in the generally accepted meaning of the word.”

“No, if you look closely, it is not actually a democracy. It is a republic. We vote for representatives who go off and do the governing. They make rules, pass laws and other such things. In a true democracy the citizens are more directly involved with the running of the government. When was the last time you voted on an expenditure or a tax bill? We control the government only indirectly through our representatives. True, we can vote for the President. Otherwise, we vote only for those candidates which are presented to us. How much control do you have over that? In the early days we were not set up as a democracy either. Voting was restricted to male property owners. There have always been restrictions on who may participate.

“My point is that if you can have some restraints on who is a voting member of the group, why cannot you have other restraints such as a minimum level of education? Why not require voters to be high school graduates? We already require people to be adults to vote. Does not this imply a certain amount of education and intelligence as a requirement? I think a high school diploma is certainly a reasonable qualification to participate in our government. Or even require adult members to show understanding by completing a governmentally administered exam on the general principles of the law and governmental powers. Why should voters not be required to understand what they are doing rather than being swayed by the passions of political rhetoric?”

“What you are suggesting is a form of Elitism. I can see it resulting in a self perpetuating in-group which prevents membership status to dissidents. Who then will speak for those who have no voice in the affairs of the governing body?”

A silence again settled on the room. Sunlight worried the dancing dust motes which it caught in its rays, and sent them scurrying into the darker recesses of the plush surroundings. The gentlemen took the opportunity to replenish their brandy and retreated into a time of contemplation. It was quiet enough that the drone of a bumble bee flying against the screen of an open window dominated the character of the ambiance and contributed a little liveliness to the almost somber although luxurious setting. Henry was the first to end the hiatus. “I believe the existing conditions of various governmental agencies which are created to oversee and facilitate the activities of many disadvantaged groups would still function as their advocates. Also institutions in the private sector which represent minority groups would still be active. We often hear a hue and cry from various committees or institutions bringing to light an unacceptable situation with their group. That would still be an avenue for the unheard to be heard.”

“But uninformed voters are not the only problem with our system. What about the massive amounts of money needed to run for office? How should we handle the influence of lobbyists? Another problem is term limits, or rather the lack of them. We limit the length of time the President and most Governors can serve. Why not make it more of a citizen government the way it was originally and limit the number of times anyone can hold a certain office? Is it right that one person can dominate a representative position for as long as they can get enough money to be elected, or while they curry enough favor among powerful constituents or lobbyists to remain in office? Why should we not restrict the length of time they may serve also? Do we need career governmental representatives? There are further problems with conflicts between personal business interests and public government business.”

Henry raised other question. “What do we do then to keep the really honest and good legislators? However, you have certainly touched on a multitude of problems

with our government. Perhaps it is time to rethink our whole election process. Would it help to have a limited time for the election cycle and provide government funded elections? Or perhaps we need to eliminate political parties and require everyone to run as independents with their own set of principles and policies. We could have primary elections wherein anyone with certain minimal backing could run, and then have run off elections with the top three winners.”

“That sounds like it has a lot of merit, but as soon as it is suggested, I predict the right wing Republicans will start their old bugaboo cry of socialism and scream and stamp their feet so that nothing can be done. It is often discouraging that some small groups can block all social advances because of their own irrational fears. Again, that is one of the flaws of democracy as it is practiced today. But it also supports my thesis that we may be intelligent, but we are not smart enough to overcome our pettiness and work for the greater good. I do like the government funded part though.

“Concerning your comment, I would even go so far as to make it absolutely illegal for government employees or representatives to accept any gifts of money or any sort from pressure or advocacy groups. That is a major flaw which causes much twisting and misdirection of the governing and law making process. Such groups should be limited only to providing facts, arguments and proposed actions to open sessions of government. Private dealings behind the scenes should be absolutely illegal.”

Letting Mondrain’s words sink into his consciousness as the aroma from the glass in his hand captured his attention, Henry lapsed into a meditation which he silently followed in his thoughts. “Mondrain has indeed aroused my curiosity. He evidently has devoted a lot of thought to this question. He has always been more of a scholar than I have been. We naturally have different interests. He reads more than I do. But then, he was born into this world of advantage, and I had to work my way up to it. He had more time for the arts and the esoteric things of life, while my pursuits have been more mundane.” The thought gave him a reason to smile as he continued his personal digression. “I wonder if Mondrain has ever actually cut the grass or worked on the plumbing. I think I would rather be myself and be a practical person than to be completely divorced from the realities of life.” He suddenly realized he had been addressed and snapped back into the real world. “I am sorry. I guess I was day dreaming. What did you say?”

“I said, ‘You have not pursued me on the betterment of the human race subject.’ Have you accepted that or given up on it?”

“I guess I have not really thought about it. What do you mean by the phrase?”

“Well as I indicated originally, besides deciding what actually is betterment, there is the problem that betterment for one may not betterment for another. I suppose I mean it in the general sense of developing greater time and energy saving devices, or in making life easier or more pleasant in general, or in discovering more fundamental truths. It is fine to make life easier and make ones work more productive, but what then is the limit? Do we really need all the gadgets we have these days? Do we definitely need all the free time the conveniences allow us? Can we truly justify that we have a right to them, and can we afford the loss of environment and resources they represent? Can the Earth afford for everyone to have the latest automobile or disposable electronic invention, and how do you justify discarding the old superseded product which is almost as good?

“On the practical side there can be difficulties such as when competition develops for natural resources, or when a good new highway or other development is useful for some people, but seriously disrupts other equally deserving people. How do you decide which persons rights take precedence over others?”

“Those are all interesting propositions, Mondrain. They all raise important issues. It has often occurred to me that some advances do not do us the great good

they are supposed to. Just the great convenience of the automobile has its down side. We depend on it for even the briefest trips, and we do much less walking and other such exercise that would be healthful. That is one reason we are overweight, and it may be why we are more subject to chronic illnesses. Is it better for us that we do less physical work during the day, and then spend extra time going to health spas and exercise rooms, or more usually, just sitting around doing nothing?”

Mondrain looked out the window thoughtfully. “It seems to me many modern, so called advanced cultures, have lost contact with the natural world. We live in enclosed spaces, travel in enclosed spaces, and work in enclosed spaces which are located in completely unnatural paved and manufactured habitats. That is why I enjoy my home and find great pleasure in caring for my roses and touring my grounds. I regret that many people do not have the opportunity to do those simple things. They have great value in reminding us we are a product of, and are still a part of that natural world. Ultimately, we cannot escape it.”

The muffled sound of the telephone interrupted the conversation. In only a moment there was a light knock on the door, and it again swung open allowing the little black suited man into the room.

“Yes, Alfred?”

“Sir, there is a gentleman by the name of Harold on the telephone calling from Geneva. Are you at home?”

“Yes, Alfred. Tell him I shall be there in a moment. I will take the call in my office.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Excuse me Henry, I shall not be long.”

“Don’t hurry. I need some thinking time anyway.”

The two departed, leaving Henry alone in the large library room. He stood up to stretch and began circumnavigating the space looking at book titles and examining some of the artwork. He mused quietly to himself. “Mondrain and Margaret have certainly acquired a wide variety of interesting artifacts during their lifetime. I believe it was mostly Margaret who provided the driving force in their acquisitions. She had an educated eye and could spot the uniqueness of an art object when others seemed to overlook it or considerate it mundane.”

He stopped in front of a Van Gogh painting and reflected, “That is one of their prizes. I remember when we first saw it in Munich. Can that be ten years ago now? Yes, it was several years before Margaret died. The four of us were traveling in Germany.” He paused and his mind wandered recalling the time when he and Mondrain traveled together with their wives. He stared blankly at the picture as the past raced through his consciousness. The painting was from the Arles time of Vincent Van Gogh, and it contained all the requisite components; towers, the yellow house, and church spires, but it was not outstanding. However, Margaret had liked it particularly well.

He stood unmoving for several minutes, until the clock striking the quarter hour brought him back to the present. He smiled. "I remember Margaret's reaction when she first saw the painting. Something about that particular picture grabbed her interest. We practically had to drag her away from it." Then he laughed aloud. "And when he learned it was coming up for auction at Sotheby, Mondrain told his agent in no uncertain terms, 'Go, and buy it. Don't come back without it.' I am sure the poor man was stressed out until he had won the final bid. And here it is as a remaining tribute to Margaret. I know Mondrain values it highly."

Henry continued around the room, pausing to regard the art objects which intrigued him and passing up the rest. The Hemple's house was much more spacious than the house which he and Alice had decided to purchase. Although the Armbruster house was smaller, it contained all the space they had needed, and it had very adequate servant quarters also. A staff of four did not require a large amount of room. Henry reflected on the spaciousness of Mondrain's mansion and wondered why he kept it after Margaret died. He thought, "Mondrain certainly does not entertain like they used to do. Margaret was always finding a reason to have a party. Alice and I have spent many an entertaining evening here. He has kept almost a full staff even since Margaret's death. Naturally it takes many people to care for all the grounds and the buildings. Then there are all the living requirements of the occupants. Of course, most of his staff is like Alfred. They have been here for years, and they would have very little likelihood of finding similar positions if Mondrain were to cut back on the number of employees he had. Come to think of it, there were a couple who left, and he has not replaced them. It is too big a building for the living quarters of one person, but I know he would not be happy anywhere else."

"Some people just cannot accept responsibility." Mondrain was agitated as he pushed through the heavy oak doorway. "When I outline a job for someone to do, I expect they will use their best judgment in doing it and get it done. Especially if they are the supposed expert, they should act without constant need to discuss irrelevant details." He sat himself in his favorite chair and poured another splash of brandy from the open bottle.

As Henry sat down again in a very comfortable chair, he asked. "Is that the Harold person with whom you were talking?"

"Yes, I have engaged a genealogist in Switzerland to do a little searching for me. He keeps coming back with questions about items I have already discussed with him. I wish he would just get on with it."

"I suppose he wants to be sure of doing a good job for you."

"Oh, I guess you are right, but I get annoyed. I wish he would just go ahead and get it done. Enough of that though, what were we talking about?"

We were on the subject of the betterment of the human race. What does that mean?"

"Yes indeed, what does it mean? Is it better to pamper ourselves with all the comforts of modern life, or would we live more healthfully and perhaps be more free from worries in a less advanced environment?"

"I do not believe we can escape from worries, Mondrain. Different levels of development or sophistication carry different kinds of worries. Being sentient beings and having a brain we are very aware of our world and it worries us. It is part of what we are. Whether we worry about the value of our investments, or whether we worry about being eaten by an approaching bear are entirely dependent on the environment in which we find ourselves. The human brain worries. That is a product of

evolution and in the past it contributed to our survival. The proper question concerns what things are really worth worrying about. Where is the balance between our level of development and the amount of worrying that level requires?

“But aside from worries, the real consideration is the balance between the advantages and the disadvantages of any change or if you will, betterment, of our condition. For instance, we learned many years ago that there were very great benefits to washing ourselves and keeping clean to avoid disease and discomfort. In later years we have learned that too much washing destroys the beneficial skin bacteria with which we are naturally endowed, and may even make it easier for other noxious bacteria to attack us. What is the proper balance?

“Or consider all the ads we see on television these days. I mean those which concern wonderful new drugs capable of curing all sorts of maladies, some of which I did not even know I had. The trailer to the ad enumerates all the bad things the drug might do to you if you are one of the unlucky ones for whom it does not work. These unfortunate results can be almost anything up to and including killing you. Where is the proper balance there? This practice of pushing drugs onto a gullible populace is one I consider to be completely wrong. The drug companies are preying on the emotional side of people to want the drug. The populace is then led to pressure their doctor for a prescription. Now there is an instance where I can understand we are not smart enough. I wonder how many harried doctors are unduly influenced in prescribing drugs which may have a marginal benefit for the patient. All it may result in is a great benefit for the pharmacists and the drug companies. We should be smart enough to be more circumspect than to be suckered into thinking we need items which are pushed by the influences of Madison Avenue techniques.”

Mondrain took a moment before replying, “I hear you saying that betterment may be a relative quality. We exchange one set of conditions for a new, different set of conditions. It is an individual judgment whether that is a ‘betterment’ or not. I think you are correct. It is probably unavoidable that what is good for one person or group of persons is not necessarily good for others. But then what should we do? Should we avoid all new ideas and those things which give us an advantage over our mindless environment?”

“I believe society has already answered that, Mondrain. We forge ahead on the basis of doing what seems to be the best for the greatest number of people. That is why democracy is so popular. It satisfies the most individuals and gets the most support. Democracy is ingrained in the basic social development of mankind. Once the idea is understood, it overthrows all varieties of repressive régimes. But furthermore, being a scientist, I think in terms of betterment being greater knowledge about the physical world --- the Universe. That is where the most amazing and awe inspiring discoveries are. Learning about the structure and evolution of the Universe is perhaps the most fundamental way we can better ourselves.”

“But how is that making us better in any way?”

“How does it make us better? There is nothing more mind expanding than considering the vastness of space and time. Most people have no concept of the immensity of it all. Do you know that our own little galaxy, the Milky Way, is 100,000 light years across? That is, it takes light traveling at 186,000 miles per second 100,000 years to cross from one edge to the other. View this in terms of our own Sun which is 93,000,000 miles away. It takes light from the Sun 8 minutes to reach us. The next star in our galaxy which is closest to us is still four and a half light years away. What miserable little specks we are compared with the size of our galaxy. And remember we are only one of billions of other galaxies. Physics has brought us a long way in understanding who we are and where we are, and the outlook is daunting. In the process we have learned how to control our environment here on Earth to some degree. Physics and Chemistry are the moving forces to progress, or perhaps what we are calling, ‘Betterment’. It seems to me that knowing more about the real world helps us to cope with it in more productive and satisfactory ways.”

“You are probably correct. The more we know, the better we can contend with the natural world and thus the more likely we are to survive. Perhaps we may even feel more useful and happy.”

“So what else do you consider to be the betterment of the human race, Mondrain?”

“I would have to include the arts. You and I both enjoy good music, good plays, good opera, and art of all types. Being that we as a race have conquered supplying our basic needs without much difficulty, at least in the developed world, we have found ourselves with excess spare time. We would experience all this extra time as boring and a great burden if we did not have the distraction and enjoyment of art. I would also include leisure activities and hobbies such as my rose garden. Even the luxury of just sitting here talking and exchanging ideas is a fringe benefit of our betterment.”

“Yes, that sounds right also. Just the basic ability at human interaction is without a doubt an improvement in the quality of our lives. Indeed, all the various ways of human interacting are part of it. Sports, games, hobbies, travel, volunteering for social improvement functions, and all manner of civic actions are all part of being better in the sense of experiencing life to a fuller extent and in that way enjoying it.

“This high level personal interaction is the major quality which distinguishes us from what we call the lower animals. We have found all manner of ways to involve ourselves in life beyond the mere activities of survival. That is, we do much more than only engage in eating, sleeping, mating and reproducing. We have a much more profound experience of life.”

“That is mainly true. However, there are those who do deal on a daily basis with surviving. Every day is a challenge to a large proportion of humankind. You and I are among the fortunate ones who have all our needs met, but many in the world do not have that luxury, and in fact are desperately poor.”

An open window allowed the distant wail of a siren to invade the hushed atmosphere of the library and its lavish furnishings. Mondrain looked up and remarked, “There is another area in which we are not smart enough.”

The blank look on Henry’s face showed he did not understand. “What do you mean? What area is that?”

“Health care! Our healthcare system is an abomination. It needs massive overhauling.”

“We have the best health care in the world. Our technology is the most advanced. Our doctors are the most thoroughly trained. Why do you say it is an abomination?”

“Yes. Our technology and most facilities are the best in the world, but I said our healthcare system is an abomination. Many people do not have and cannot get health care. Many of those that do have it pay an exorbitant amount for it. The care is not equitably distributed nor is it delivered efficiently. And in many cases there is not enough to go around for everyone to get what they need. The insurers, the drug companies, the hospitals, the pharmacies, and the specialists all take a whack at the available dollars and in the end the delivered care is less than it could be. Other industrialized nations deliver better, more all inclusive care to their citizens than we do.”

“What do you propose we should do about it? How can it be made more efficient and still provide the controls which are necessary to avoid any charlatans from taking advantage of it?”

“I believe the answer is so obvious that people do not want to recognize it. You and I can easily afford whatever care we need, but we still rely on Medicare for the basics and the beginning point in our care. To me it is only reasonable to expand the Medicare system to cover everyone. Many people do not stop to consider how efficient health delivery has been under this system. It conserves much of the value which is otherwise drained from the system by the middlemen. Extremists scream ‘Socialized Medicine’ whenever this government sponsored system is suggested, but I believe we already have socialized medicine, and it is in its most inefficient arrangement. When those who cannot afford health care get desperately ill they end up in the emergency room of a hospital and society ends up footing the bill anyway by the most expensive method possible. How much better it would be to have a system which included everyone and pressed for preventive care and early intervention in illnesses to keep the costs down. Dealing with the extremes which result from neglect is the most expensive method to treat disease.”

“That certainly sounds reasonable to me and appeals to my sense of fairness. We are all uniformly valuable citizens, and we should be treated equally in receiving the benefits of government. How would such a system be paid for?”

“The answer is again obvious. Healthcare should be basically funded within the existing tax structure. The fairest way to support government is in a progressive tax system. Those who benefit the most from our system of government and gain the most in wealth from their use of the society should pay a greater part of the costs of the system. A truly progressive income tax allows everyone to participate as far as they are able while still permitting those who have the expertise to command greater success and reap more of the fruits of the system to retain progressively more of their wealth for themselves. It should be the intent of any such system that those who earn a low wage pay low tax, while those who earn much higher amounts of money pay a relatively higher percentage. The rich still end up with more overall.

“The problem is the basic greed of most people who want all they can get regardless of every one else. Again we are not smart enough to produce a sensible system, since there are loopholes and exceptions which turn the system on its head and the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. We are both part of the problem, Henry. We have all that we need and more. If the ordinary wage earners pay ten percent tax, we can easily pay thirty or forty and still have much more than they. I do not know what the exact and proper rates are, but the concept of progressive tax should be the basis for raising the adequate funds to run a government just as well as any successful business is run. Governments should be able to pay for the basic needs of their citizens.

“Just consider how early humans learned to live together. The group looked out for all the members of the group. This included shelter, food, protection and yes, even concern for the well being of all during sickness and child birth. This government was paid for by everyone doing all they could to make it work. Each individual was responsible for the group and each individual shared in the largesse. Even in our complex societies today, these should still be the aims of government. Providing health care should be a fundament purpose of government.”

“There are those who say the Medicare system is riddled with fraud and waste. What do you do about that?”

“Unfortunately fraud and waste are found in all systems. What you do is to have governmental oversight groups to keep tabs on the system and open public watchdog groups watching the oversight groups. Where there are enough unrelated people watching the system, fraud and waste can be kept at a minimum. Even so, that should not preclude having a direct public responsibility for health care,”

“I think most reasonable people would agree with you, Mondrain. If we could have such a sensible system, perhaps more of us could live to a comfortable old age,”

“Well that brings up another area where we are fairly stupid.”

“Oh? What is that?”

“Longevity, excess population, and what do we do about it. The population explosion of the twentieth century has only become worse in the twenty first century. We are stripping the Earth of its capacity to support us all. It reminds me of a thought I had as a small child. This is an idea that has returned to me many times during my life, and the analogy to me is quite profound. I saw once a place on our walk in the yard where a bit of food had dropped. Perhaps it was ice cream or some such soft blob. I noticed that something had started to grow on it and over several days I watched it progress in stages. First a small clump of greenish matter, then a vigorous and rapid growth, then some wilting and deterioration as the food was consumed, and finally it dried up and blew away in the breeze. Over the years, it has made me wonder whether we are doing the same thing here on Earth. We have had a marvelous run from single celled plants and animals to the complex structures which we as humans represent. Now we are depleting our environment and increasing our population to great extremes. We are doing this so much so as to threaten our very existence. Are we condemned by our ingrained biological greed to eat to the last morsel of food, and then die out as a species and perhaps take the rest of the living world with us?”

Henry took a sip of Brandy before he responded. “I hope not Mondrain, but you make a good point. That is a real possibility. I was not thinking of the population issue, and it is a real concern. It seems inconceivable that we would be able to deplete the Earth. The resources are so vast and the space so large it appears we should be able to go on forever, but I know we cannot. There are limits to growth. The current awareness of global warming highlights only part of the problem. Excess population results in greater stress on all aspects of the life process. But how can we limit population? How do we decide who should have children and how many? The current effort in China of one child per couple still will not begin to decrease their population immediately. And it has fallen under extreme international criticism. Is not procreating one of the joys of living? You and I have done what we could by deciding not to have children, but most people want not only one, but several progeny. How do we convince the least thinking person in the most remote part of the world to limit reproduction? It seems impossible.”

“Well, that may not be necessary, Henry. From the continuing information of new and more aggressive deadly diseases coming out of distant parts of the world, perhaps Mother Nature is working on the solution in her own way. After all, starvation, disease, and natural catastrophes are the way populations of all living things have always been controlled in the past. It is part of the evolutionary process. Before there were humans, Mother Nature seemed to protect herself in all these ways.”

Henry replied, “And do not forget wars. Wars do their bit in limiting population. When populations bump up against each other and they feel threatened or they decide they need more room, they regularly resort to war. Genghis Kahn improved on the system by killing all that he conquered. That definitely had an effect on the population problem.” Henry smiled a wry smile to indicate his ridicule of the inhuman performance of the ancient Kahn. “But those methods are so drastic. Is there not some better way to control population?”

“I do not know. You are highlighting my original statement. We are intelligent, but not smart enough to solve the big problems.”

“I did not mean to do that. Perhaps your arguments are having an effect on me. There is always the possibility that governments could go beyond the China model.

What about licensing couples to have children, and allow only as many as needed to maintain a proper population. There could be good side effects also. Successful completion of courses on child rearing could be required and this may alleviate some of the social problems associated with deficiencies in the current system. It is patently ridiculous to assume that just because anyone attains the age of majority that they are automatically adept at raising well adjusted offspring. Modern life has defeated the closeness of home life which existed in primitive times when such skills were passed on to the next generation by close contact and observation of the process. Our young people grow to adulthood and often have no experience at all in the subtleties of rearing children.”

“Come now Henry, what kind of hue and cry do you suppose suggesting such a thing would raise among the populace. We have the socialism problem again. There is not a politician alive who would put his or her continued public service on the line to enact such legislation, no matter how reasonable it might be.”

“We come back to the consensus problem.”

“Yes, we are not smart enough to choose a difficult and challenging solution.”

“Are we then doomed to continuing excess expansion of our population?”

The words crumpled silently on the Persian rug. The lengthening Sun rays cast long shadows across the floor and reflected noiselessly against the far wall. The tall clock looked down haughtily on the men and continued its inexorable counting. Mondrain considered the amber fluid in his glass, and his mind drifted back into time. History presented many approaches to the problem, but none ever seemed to have made a difference in human behavior. As his mind rambled he almost carelessly said aloud, “I guess old Malthus was correct.”

“Who do you say?”

“Thomas Robert Malthus, the British Economist and curate who wrote *An Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798 CE. He said populations increase exponentially, but food production advances only arithmetically. This serves as a natural check on the population of all species. Quantity of food and starvation are major controlling factors.”

“Oh yes, of course. But he was not aware of all the advances science would develop to make fertilizers for the soil which enables farming to be more productive, thus maintaining the food supply.”

“Nevertheless the principle he propounded holds true. He said that populations will always increase to the point of requiring starvation to reduce them. This happens in the lower animal world all the time. It is Mother Nature’s way.”

“But is this realistic to expect for the human population?”

“No one can predict what will happen, Henry. Fortune tellers are notoriously inaccurate. I am thinking though, that starvation is exactly what will happen unless we

change our view of the population versus the limitations of the planet. My point is clearly supported as you well know. Even as we speak there are some areas in a starvation mode of existence where the population has exceeded the available food supply, and the resources are not enough to purchase and bring in food from the rest of the world.”

Henry thought before he spoke, “What disturbs me is the fact that many people have great numbers of children without any thought of how they will be supported or be given a decent life. Time and again we read of multiple births to people who do not have the resources to raise them to adulthood. In early times large families were desirable because of high infant mortality and the need for workers to tend the family farm or lands. Several generations remained together and prospered. That is no longer the way we live, but people cannot get rid of the notion that large families are desirable.”

“There are other methods of reducing population short of governmental control. Education is one way, but it requires a good deal of rationality and takes extreme time and effort. Abortions are another way which is a method immediately available and effective.”

Henry looked a little shocked. “Are you advocating abortions now, Mondrain? That seems a little extreme to me.”

“I am not advocating anything. I am merely suggesting that some day abortion may become an imperative. Given the strong sexual drive we humans have, if citizens insist on having children without a permit from the government; abortion may become the norm rather than the exception.” A wry smile betrayed Mondrain’s lack of seriousness.

“Do you think it could really come to that?”

“If we do not take positive steps to eliminate the problem, it will continue raising its ugly head. As I said before, I am not a fortune teller. Who knows what will happen in the future? Certainly one possible scenario is government control of the birth rate as we considered earlier. Ultimately the human animal will do anything to protect itself and assure its survival in the future by some means or other. I feel the most humane approach is through education, but that is a monumental task. Many areas do not have sufficient education now to provide basic living skills. How much more effort would be needed to educate the world to minimal standards, and then convince it to moderate the birth rate. The drive to have children is one of those deeply ingrained urges which has allowed the human animal and all animals to evolve to the present state.”

“It would seem there must be some less radical measures available.”

“Perhaps so, but I do not see them. Neither of us will be around then, but I predict that sometime in the future there will be government control and enforced abortions for violators.”

Henry responded, “Then we are back to the benign dictator and a fascist state.”

Silence descended once more on the room as the two drifted into their own thoughts. Mondrain took a sip of brandy and began wondering. His thoughts

progressed rapidly in his brain as he followed along silently. “I had not quite realized how much I have thought about this ‘Smartness’ problem. Henry is helping me to see it all more clearly. It will be interesting to go over all aspects of it. Perhaps we can even do something about it. In fact, now I am beginning to hatch a course of action. Hmm, I wonder what Henry would think about that? We need to discuss it very thoroughly. Henry is the perfect foil for these thoughts. He is smart, a clear thinker, a great friend, and very accepting of new ideas. We go back a long way. We have shared a great deal of joy and, yes, a great deal of trouble also. I do not know how I would have survived at times without him. And here we are both left as widowers. I guess we have a lot in common.” The hushed atmosphere of the gracious environs grew heavy with contemplation and latent rumination. It seemed as though time had stopped and some drastic action was necessary to restore motion. In mounting quietness and almost in desperation, the grandfather clock broke through the barrier and obligingly started to chime. The tones of Westminster were followed by four deeply resonant gongs. In the large well carpeted library room the sounds were mellowed and easily dissipated, but Mondrain was moved to speak. “My friend, it seems there is much more to discuss. Why don’t you stay and have supper with me? Cook always leaves plenty of food, and I would enjoy your company.”

Henry was well aware of the quantity, quality and variety of Cook’s offerings. Before her death, he and Alice were frequent beneficiaries of Cook’s talents over the years. “I really should not Mondrain. I told Jules I would be home this evening. In fact, I should be calling him soon to come and pick me up.”

“But there is so much more that we need to talk about. Why not call Jules and give him the night off. Have supper with me and stay here. I am sure one of the guest rooms is made up and ready.”

Henry was well aware of the hospitality and comfort extended by the Hemple household. He hesitated just a moment, but then agreed. He had done this on various other occasions, so he was no stranger to the routine. He knew Mondrain would not ask him to stay if he did not truly mean it, and Henry enjoyed the experience also. “Fine Mondrain, I will stay, and I thank you. But I need to call Jules.”

“Use the phone out in the foyer. Do you know where the light is?”

Henry smiled, “Yes, I believe I remember using it at many other times.” Henry left Mondrain sitting comfortably in his plush chair and went in search of the telephone.

Henry exited the library through the oak doorway. He marveled at the ease with which the door moved considering its massiveness. Every time he had occasion to use it, he could not escape appreciating the well constructed frame and the absolute quietness of the hinges and lock mechanism. There were carvings in the panels on both sides of the door. They appeared to be ivy on the outside and ferns on the inside. The dark stained wood gleamed as if to proclaim that it was a valuable and well cared for essential part of the house. The door itself was as much a work of art as many of the other artifacts in the mansion.

The hallway was as softly carpeted as the library and decorated in subdued hues of brown and red. Directly across the hall was an entrance to the servant’s quarters. To the right the hall extended to the rear of the first floor towards the dining areas. To the left a shorter passage conveyed one to the front of the house and to the foyer next to the front entryway.

The telephone was located on a little desk attached to the opposite wall of the foyer next to the door to Mondrain’s office. Crossing through the spacious foyer

Henry passed in front of the wide sweeping staircase which gave comfortable access to the second floor. A gleaming cherry banister complemented the gentle elegance of the curving structure which had been an architect's nightmare to design.

An ancient light fixture above the desk gave all the light that was necessary to use the telephone which by contrast was a very modern instrument. After dialing the number well entrenched in his mind, he heard a familiar ring and waited for the answer which followed the third ring. Then he spoke. "Jules? --- Henry here. --- Jules, I have decided to stay at Hemple's for supper and the night. --- That's right. --- Mondrain and I are having a good conversation and we do not wish to stop. --- No, no, do whatever you wish. I will not be home. --- Would you then come for me in the morning, say about ten o'clock or so? --- Fine. --- I will see you then. --- You, too --- Have a good night. --- Goodbye."

Returning to the library, Henry found Mondrain attacking a tray loaded with a Vermont cheddar cheese and a bowl of salsa dip. Triscuits and various other crackers and chips were also in abundance. All of these goodies had appeared during his absence.

"Dig in Henry. Alfred has put together a little appetizer for us."

Henry laughed, "You are lucky to have such talented staff."

"Yes, it is lucky we all have different skills. Or is it because of the different ways we have been educated? Do you think it is natural talent or is it our early training and experience that determines our interests and our skills?"

Henry applied cheese to several crackers on his plate and retreated into his thoughts. After a minute of serious enjoyment of the excellent tastes the snack provided, he deigned to answer. "I think most developmental Psychologists would say it is a combination of both. We are definitely born with certain genes which produce greater or lesser abilities in individuals, but from the moment of birth we are all indoctrinated by the effects of our particular culture. It is inescapable. The actions of our parents, siblings, friends, and the people we contact in the culture all have some effect on us which is rapidly and easily absorbed by a young and open mind. Later on, when we enter the so called 'Age of reason' it is difficult to change our early learning and attitudes. Although it is not impossible to change them, it is only difficult.

"We often see great musicians coming from families which are already musically inclined. I believe there have been many great voices and instrumentalists from families which have a history of good musicians. It is my opinion much of this results from environmental factors. That is only my impression, but it seems reasonable to me that a young mind forming before birth and immediately after birth can be influenced by hearing music in the environment. We know the brain is developing rapidly during this period of time and perhaps the musical ambiance helps the proper brain circuits to develop to a better degree. This is only my speculation. I do not know that any scientific studies have been made of the possibility."

"Do you mean a scientist like yourself can have an opinion which is not entirely based in fact?" The twinkle in Mondrain's eye revealed his playfulness with his friend.

Henry smiled and retorted, "I blame it all on my early indoctrination."

“Seriously, how can we tell whether an attribute is genetic or learned?”

“I do not know. You will have to ask someone who works in that field. All I know is that there is much work going on in area of exploring the human genome just as there is in all fields of science.”

“Yes, science is a big portion of our economy, and a good thing too. We need more good Science and more sound facts to counteract the fad for Pseudo-science and other nonsense which is floating around these days. But we have come back to the reality that we are all different. How do you design an educational system which will accommodate a variety of needs?”

“Well, Mondrain, my ideas on that subject have evolved over the years as I have experienced all kinds of people in my work. It seems to me those persons that are most effective in whatever they do have a broad basic knowledge so that they understand the World. Everyone should have a smattering of math, mechanics, physics, chemistry, history, geography and other such things.”

“That sounds nice, but it leads me to what I think is one of the biggest failings of our educational system and illustrates how we are not smart enough. When everyone is required to learn a little of everything, that leads to standards and norms to be met. When students must engage in activities foreign to their abilities they may often fail. Forcing them into failure results in their reacting badly. The result is that they hate the activity or subject. All the effort in forcing this knowledge on them is demoralizing and counterproductive. To me, this is not smart.”

“I disagree there. Everyone needs to know something of where they came from and what the world we live in is like. And they need some basic skills in order to exist and compete in the culture. As a matter of fact, I can remember many cases where some of my friends have expressed an appreciation for ‘old so and so’ requiring them to learn some skill which they later used to good advantage.”

“Well, perhaps I have overstated it. But there has to be a balance somewhere. I can remember as a child not being able to write well and in fact, I still cannot. My ‘old so and so lady teacher’ at that time insisted we hold a pencil a certain way, and write with a sweeping motion of our arm. I could not do that. The only way I could control the pencil was with squeezed up fingers and using my hand. She insisted we all must make a perfect alphabet before we could write a story, and I never did. All my writing was labeled as scribbling. I remember I had some simple story in mind and never got to put it down on paper. I forget what the story was now, but at the end of that semester my father asked me why I got a D in writing. I said it was because I could not write, and I believed that until many years later.”

“I am sure the methods have changed since your time, Mondrain. I believe modern methods of teaching are very good.”

“Then why do we have excess dropout rates in many schools? We read every day about kids who get discouraged, drop out of school and get into trouble. If modern methods are so good, why do so many students not learn the subjects better? Why do they find the learning process so difficult?”

“Probably because we do not engage the best teachers nor do we make teaching a highly prestigious profession to attract qualified people. Also I think it is more a

matter of funding in many cases. We do not make education a high enough priority. Everyone talks a good game, but when it comes to the actual funding, education often gets short shrift.”

“Then I am still right. We are intelligent, but we are not smart enough. We do not have the will to generate sufficient tax money to fund necessary government activities such as education. We are not sufficiently concerned with ensuring we have well educated citizens in the future that we are willing to pay the price. People come last and wars come first.”

“Well Mondrain, Just as in everything else we need a balance among the various domains of government. Government has the obligation to protect its citizens from all threats of physical harm and to provide an environment which assures fair treatment to all. It must also provide protection from the hazards of cultural disadvantages and to afford access to educational excellence. Perhaps we can agree that there is a middle ground. Students need some sort of broad base of knowledge, but after that they need to be allowed to follow their natural talents and inclinations.

“The basic need is to develop communication skills. Reading, writing, and speaking are absolute essentials. Equally important with them are the interpersonal relation skills. We need citizens who are able to deal with each other effectively, and to communicate with each other usefully. I would include basic math there also. But after that perhaps the subjects are less important and can be tailored to individual interests. Nobody needs to be expert in all of them or even like all of them.”

“Then why are students still graded on the peripheral topics and made to feel inadequate if they do not absorb them?”

“I am sure there is room for a new approach. How about presenting the peripheral information in an entertaining and engaging way to keep the students interested, but not make the material it presents as part of the testing system. I can see where some knowledge is necessary for facing real life and other information may be useful and mind expanding, but not essential. Why not have two categories of learning?”

“How would you accomplish that, Henry?”

“I visualize a necessary amount of time spent on the core knowledge of which I spoke. After that students should be allowed to find the areas that interest them particularly. They should engage in activities wherein they can succeed. They should then be given all the resources, support and encouragement they need to do their best. Learning is not just collecting facts. Learning is also discovering how to learn, how to use resources and how to find out the answers to the questions they themselves generate. Learning is gaining the self assurance that one can do and achieve the things which one wants to do. This must be graded in a different way. Not by standardized norms of achievement, but by demonstrations of their accomplishments.”

“That sounds fairly idealistic. Do you think it will work?”

“Nothing works until you try it, and it is given a reasonable chance to succeed. Where do you get this cheese, Mondrain? It is very tasty.”

“Alfred orders it from someplace in Vermont whenever we run low. It is made in a little home dairy in the wilds of New England. I am not sure that the location is widely advertised. Secret family recipe and all that sort of thing you know. It is something Alfred has known about for years.”

“I will have to remember to tell Alfred he is a genius.”

Mondrain did not reply. He lapsed into a silence. Sitting back with his eyes closed, he contemplated the thrust of the conversation. Henry waited. Mondrain’s facial features gave clues to his thoughts. His face was very expressive and it frowned, smiled, questioned and showed satisfaction as he reviewed ideas in his mind. After several minutes he returned to the conversation. “I think your ideas have a certain amount of merit. What you have said interests me for a variety of reasons. I have been considering the future lately, and I am reconsidering the plans for the use of my resources after I no longer need them. Possibly the area of education would be a good place to leave them. But in addition, I was wondering about your emphasis on the communication skills. Do you think the World should have a universal language, and if so, what should it be?”

Henry reflected for a few moments before replying. “It seems to me a universal language is something that just happens without planning. English has become almost a universal language just because the United States has controlled so much power in the World in terms of trade dominance. That situation can change however, if someone else out maneuvers us. I think English is the best universal language, not just because it is the one we use, but because I believe it is more expressive than others. Consider that English has words in it from many other languages. There are a great number of groups of words that mean the same or almost the same thing. This provides the opportunity for many nuances of meaning and much more precise sense in describing many situations.

“I know English is a difficult language to learn if you do not grow up with it, nevertheless many countries use it in international business. Of course, the flip side of that argument is that there is great cultural value and beauty in the multifarious languages of the World. It would be a shame to lose all of that. In addition, I believe there is educational value in knowing a second language. It is something everyone should be encouraged to do.”

“What else do your ideas on education include Henry? Language is important, but it is not everything. What do our students need to know to survive in the modern world?”

“I believe one subject which is largely overlooked in the modern world is logic. Too often these days people are fooled by charlatans who befuddle them with distorted reasoning. Years ago logic and reasoning were part of the curriculum. Judging by the way people are often misled, I do not think logic has much emphasis these days. For instance, is the following syllogism true? All A’s are green. X is green. Therefore X is an A.”

“It certainly sounds true.”

“Ah, but it is not necessarily true. Saying all A’s are green does not exclude other things from being green. So it is bad logic. If it were stated a little differently as, Only A’s are green, X is green, therefore X is an A, it would be true.”

Mondrain chuckled, “I guess you got me on that one, but then I do not recall ever studying logic.”

“My point exactly. I believe that qualifies as one of your areas where we are not smart enough. We should have training in logic. We have to know how to reason correctly in our culture today as we are besieged with bad logic on all sides. All manner of people and institutions use bad logic. They play on our emotions and use

propaganda to lead us into many kinds of ridiculous positions.”

“I see what you mean. If we cannot pick apart what is true from that which is not true, we will inevitably make bad choices. And we need to make choices every day. There are always new and challenging ideas coming at us, and we need to be able to respond appropriately. It seems our modern scholars need to be skilled in many areas.”

“You are entirely correct. As I have indicated, I am a great believer in the three R’s, Reading, ‘Riting, and ‘Rithmetic, except these days they are more like Reading and understanding; Writing and all other communication; and the Math - Science continuum.”

“What about guys like me who are not particularly good at math? I do not think I could do a calculus problem anymore even if my life depended on it. What am I to do?”

“Well,” Henry conceded, “Not everyone has to be an expert at math, but certainly the very basic math operations should be conquered. Adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing are everyday needs, and I do not think they are beyond most people’s understanding. They should be one of the tools everyone uses, and I do not mean only by little hand held computers. Electronic gadgets are great for convenience, but the skill to get along without them should be second nature. Math and mathematical operations are the epitome of logical thinking. Mastering them gives an excellent basis for confronting and deciding all of life’s situations and problems. Knowing how to think clearly gives one an advantage over those who use fuzzy thinking and who then arrive at dubious conclusions.”

“I agree with you there all right. Most of the population doesn’t realize how much of their thinking is influenced by their emotions which undermines the rational process. In fact as I implied previously, it is my opinion that most individuals are slaves to their emotions and they are not aware that they are constrained by them... But there is a further problem with not understanding mathematics. That is the great ignorance of the branch known as statistics. Practically every day we are assailed with promotions which quote statistics of one sort or another and yet the statistics can be twisted in their interpretation. They can even be ignored or explained away if they do not help in proving a point. If people were wiser in understanding and interpreting statistics we could avoid a lot of bad or misleading information being accepted as true.”

“Yes Mondrain, I am beginning to get your message that we as human beings are not smart enough, even though we are quite intelligent.

The front door chimes had sounded during their conversation. Now, several minutes later, there was a light knock and Alfred appeared from the hall door. “Excuse me sir, but there is a young lady at the front door selling Girl Scout cookies. Are we interested in buying any?”

“Girl Scout cookies? Yes indeed, the Girl Scouts are a good institution. I contribute to them regularly. How much does the young lady want for her cookies?”

“I understand they are three dollars a box, sir.”

Mondrain dug into his wallet and pulled out a twenty dollar bill. “Here Alfred, take this to the young lady and buy six boxes. Tell her to keep the change and thank her for her efforts. The cookies are for you and the staff. I do not really need them.”

Accepting the bill, Alfred retreated with a gentle, “Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”

“There are many good institutions, Henry, and I contribute to a goodly number of them. I know you do also, but recently I have been reconsidering which ones are the best to support. As I indicated earlier, I am also reviewing the final use of my wealth. What are you doing in that respect?”

“Inheritance?” Henry turned thoughtful and remained silent. He stared at the floor and was absorbed in thought. After a bit he spoke, “Well after Alice died, I was upset for quite a while and did nothing. Finally my attorney got after me and persuaded me to change my will and the Trust to do something definite about it. My plans are nothing very creative. I simply gave him a list of charities to share equally in the residual estate.”

“Yes, I am not very specific either, but I have been thinking recently about how the money could be best used. In view of my current thoughts, I believe I will be more specific. Something in the area of human learning and understanding seems more appropriate to me now. Perhaps some colleges or research foundations would be a good choice.”

“That sounds reasonable to me. Science needs all the help it can get. Maybe that should be a consideration for me also.”

“Science certainly deserves help. Consider how far science has brought us in the last two centuries. The entire modern world has evolved from it and we are continually dependent on it. Science has quite a history. The old alchemists were motivated more by profit than by the search for knowledge, but their activity is what tweaked the interest in Chemistry and along with the Astronomers, they propelled scientific interest into all the rest of the scientific world. Alchemists were looking for a way to turn lead into gold and they never succeeded. They would be amazed today with the exotic synchrotrons that physicists use. It is not only possible to change atoms but to create new ones. The process is hardly a commercially viable one though, if you are interested in monetary profit. The old alchemist would still be disappointed.”

“Yes, Mondrain, the early scientists were hardly the epitome of the scientific method. The investigative protocol grew and evolved along with them. The early method was trial and error. It works, but it is slow. Did you know that Edison went through dozens if not hundreds of materials before he found a suitable filament for the electric light? And after he found one that worked, he kept on until he found the best one which is still used to day, Tungsten. Nowadays the physical sciences are among those which use the most exact methods in the search for knowledge.”

“True, they are well organized, but I believe there is still some luck and certainly a lot of hard work involved. One of my favorite little sayings is, ‘By brute force and awkwardness, Science triumphs again.’” Mondrain chuckled at his own satirical wit.

“Are you saying that scientists are fumbler?” Henry displayed an amused grin and continued, “You are offending some of my favorite Quantum Physicists. Just because they cannot touch and see the things they work with doesn’t mean they do not know what they are doing.”

Mondrain laughed, “No indeed, I have the utmost respect for the experts in the various scientific fields. I suspect though that they are all amazed at times by the

sudden realization of some new idea. New ideas are what it is all about, isn't it?"

"Certainly!" After a brief pause to demolish another cracker and cheese, Henry continued, "It is fascinating to me that the macro-cosmic and the micro-cosmic fields have grown to such a complex array of knowledge. There have been truly great minds at work in those fields. Because of their experimentation, and following certain rules of behavior which are not represented by anything physical they can visualize, they are able to explain the actions and outcomes of reactions on the micro-micro miniature scale of nuclear structure. These are absolutely the smallest things of which we are aware. Quantum Mechanics presents the most mind boggling ideas that I have ever encountered. I believe it was Mr. Quantum Mechanics himself, Richard Feynman, who said something like, 'Anyone who says they understand quantum mechanics, does not understand quantum mechanics.' He meant of course, that even though we can calculate and describe what happens on the subatomic level, we do not necessarily know why or how it happens. Electrons and protons and the other subatomic particles are crazy little entities, and sometimes they are not even particles but just waves or clouds or whatever."

"These cutting edge Scientists are all extremely intelligent persons, Henry. Did you know that studies have shown that persons with higher levels of education and training tend not to believe in myths and supernatural ideas as much as less educated persons? Greater numbers of atheists and agnostics are found among college graduates than among the general population. The discipline of careful thinking helps them to see through the religious nonsense that surrounds us. Even so, my 'not smart enough' thesis extends even to them. The mind is a very complex structure, and it is able to compartmentalize ideas. While one area can be strictly rational, another area can be subject to irrational and fabulous thoughts which have no foundation in fact."

"That is not surprising to me. Once you learn how to be inquisitive, skeptical if you will, it is simpler to examine all manner of situations and ideas. You and I both know that religions and other ideas based only on speculation and fanciful stories of ancient soothsayers and necromancers are only as good as the charisma and the persuasive powers used by their initial proponents. But even so, habits are difficult to change and feelings run deep, as they say. Once someone believes an idea to be basically true, even irrefutable facts often do not change their mind. It takes a great degree of discipline to be able to reject something which previously seemed obviously correct. More highly educated persons tend to have more of this discipline and so they are better able to accept new evidence and base more rational decisions on it.

"Even so, I believe it is extremely difficult for the Theoretical Physicists. I do not understand how they can stretch their minds to deal with the distances and times involved with their studies. From the impossibly large and staggeringly overwhelming masses, speeds and distances of the macro universe to the ridiculously micro minute sizes and times involved with the structure of atomic nuclei, these scientists must indeed have a great deal of discipline to comprehend such gross, practically unbelievable deviations from our everyday world."

"I am interested to hear you say that, Henry. You have been much closer to the world of science than I have, and it is beyond my understanding. This group as a whole must be the most intelligent of the human race so far. And yet even among them, there are some religious folks who are happy to go along with impossible ideas in the metaphysical realm. In my mind they are not smart enough. Their minds are still compromised by the emotional appeals of religion." Mondrain selected several of the various crackers on the appetizer tray and applied a generous slice of cheese to each. Henry also prepared himself some more snacks and the two sat quietly enjoying their tantalizing tidbits.

The clock sounded the quarter hour. As the Westminster chimes died away, Henry commented, "Your old cherry grandfather clock has been around a long time. I

do not recall that you ever said how you acquired it.”

Mondrain reflected a few moments and smiled before replying. “When Margaret and I were planning on getting married, my uncle Roger asked what we wanted as a wedding present. Without a moments hesitation Margaret replied, ‘Oh something simple will do. How about the most beautiful grandfather clock in the world?’ I remember how he laughed at that, but he took it up as a challenge. I am sure he looked all over the continent without luck. Then by chance, he stumbled across this one in a little Boston shop. He knew immediately it was the right one, and Margaret always adored it. Poor old Uncle Roger. He was a delightful person. He never had any children, so Margaret and I benefited from his largesse. The cherry case of the clock is a work of art, and the mechanical works, I believe, are Swiss. The pendulum is temperature compensated and the clock is remarkably accurate. These Swiss are great mechanics and craftsmen.”

“It is an extraordinary and distinguished looking clock. I have always enjoyed listening to it when I am here. Mechanics is one of the more exact sciences. It is interesting that the quantity it measures, time, we think of as being so precise gets to be a little fuzzy when we extrapolate to cosmic distances. Doctor Einstein threw us a real curve when he came up with a revised view of the universe combining time and space.”

“Well Henry, if you understand Doctor Einstein, you are a better man than I am. His ideas fascinate me, and I know they are correct as they have been proven so. But I really have trouble wrapping my mind around them.”

“I think you have touched on an area where I can more easily agree with your proposition that we are not smart enough. The human brain tends to think in rectilinear terms because that is our entire experience with the environment. Things are up or down, right or left, in or out and reliably so. When we start dealing with relative speeds and maximum speeds regardless of the observer, or warped space and straight lines which are straight or not depending on who is looking, then the human mind begins to have problems. As with Quantum Mechanics, we fall back on the mathematics and equations which work and worry a little less about what is actually happening. As a practical matter it is unimportant. The Sun will rise in the morning, and the clouds will rain on us whenever they find it convenient. We will still have to eat, sleep, work and deal with the boss. Our brains are good enough for everyday events, and it is only when we get into esoteric realms where we may flounder. For most persons it does not matter that we are not smart enough about some fields of Physics.”

“Well Henry, what you say has limited application. That is fine in Theoretical Physics, but we live in a real space- time. Everyday affairs are where not being smart enough causes the problems of the world.”

There was a gentle knock on the oak door and Alfred appeared in the doorway. “The time is 6:30 Mister Hemple, and supper is ready as you requested.”

“Ah. Thank you Alfred. We shall be there directly. Are you ready to take a pause, Henry, and partake of some nourishment?”

“Sounds good to me, but first I think I would like to ‘Go and wash my hands’ as the saying goes.”

“Fine, I’ll meet you in the little dining room.”

Henry again headed toward the front of the mansion. The guest lavatory was next to the foyer, but it was entered by way of a short hallway which provided a modicum of privacy. The room was not small, and it was well planned with more than adequate facilities which were simple but elegant. There were plentiful towels and many small personal items a casual guest might find necessary. The room was lighted by a large high level window augmented by suffused indirect illumination from electrical fixtures. Everything pointed to the care and thoughtfulness of guests and their needs.

It caused Henry to think again of Margaret, and the many ways she had honed the art of entertaining and catering to the needs of friends and even casual guests. Margaret and Mondrain had the self-confidence to be at ease in any circumstance, and they conveyed that feeling to those around them. It was not possible to be ill at ease for long when they were obviously accepting and concerned with the well being of their company. Henry thought of the hundreds who had passed through these halls and who must have been changed by the experience. The Hemple's had been an extraordinary pair, and Mondrain himself still exuded a sincere interest of those who were in contact with him. Drying his hands, Henry could not help but notice the embroidery in soft silk in the edge of the towel. The words were, "For Our Guest." That exemplified Margaret's touch.

Henry exited the lavatory and crossed the foyer. Turning into the long hall extending to the back of the house, he proceeded to the small dining room. The hall was wide, and the soft indirect lighting illuminated the various pieces of art. The walls were lined with old portraits. He had never looked at them very closely, but understood they were all ancient relatives. Mondrain kept them because there was nothing else to do with them. Most were done by obscure painters who had the technical skill to produce a fair likeness, but who were not renowned in the art world. The paintings were mostly of sentimental value. As Henry walked toward the bright light at the end of the hall he felt the eyes of generations of Hemples follow him inquisitively. Other double doorways and sliding doors on either side of the hall were closed, but from previous experience, Henry knew they concealed the large living room and dining room areas.

The hall opened suddenly into a moderate sized room which would have been dazzling from the light of the large windows on the opposite wall, except for the clear sun screens which moderated the glow from the outdoors. The glass wall looked out on the landscaped rose garden and gave the feeling of being outdoors without the associated inconvenience.

The table, which could easily accommodate ten persons, was set with two places, both looking toward the windows and the beautiful scene beyond them. The décor was simple elegance. Large white napkins, a minimum of tableware, large ice filled water glasses, slender white wine glasses already poured with an aromatic sauterne, and a small vase of fresh flowers on the side was arranged so that it did not obstruct the view. Henry was aware of Alfred's attention to the details. He had evidently anticipated that Henry would be there for supper. Being a thoughtful person, he had prepared for that eventuality in advance.

There were covered dishes on the sideboard, pitchers of juice and water, the bottle of sauterne and a bottle of chardonnay, bread, butter, condiments and all the accoutrements necessary for a fine meal. As he looked out the window admiring the roses which were in various stages of blooming, the door to the kitchen swung open and Alfred appeared carrying yet another covered food tray. Mondrain followed closely behind.

"Here we go Henry. I think there is enough food for both of us until the end of the week, if necessary."

Henry laughed, "I am sure you would kick me out long before then even if I did decide to stay."

The two men filled their plates with potato salad, sliced ham, cold pickled beets, fresh bread and other delectable concoctions which were the trademarks of Cook and her expertise. Alfred withdrew and left the gentlemen to their supper. Conversation became sparse as the soft sounds of silverware on china, and the necessary sounds of eating prevailed. The late afternoon Sun began disappearing behind the orchard trees and high bushes of the back gardens. Its harsh rays were moderated by the sunscreen, but they still glinted carelessly around on the mirrors, serving equipment, glasses, and candelabra bringing a bright and comfortably warm aura to the room. The diners were oblivious to the pervading life giving radiation pouring into the room as they satisfied their appetites.

Downing a final morsel of food, Henry sat back and sighed, “Enough. It is enough. You are most generous, and Cook is a genius.”

“Thank you. She does have a way with the comestibles doesn’t she? Of course, she comes from a long line of cooks and servants. She can trace her ancestry back to the middle ages, and they worked for some of the most famous houses of Europe.”

“Oh? I did not know she had such an illustrious background.”

“Yes, she is quite proud of it. Good food, good service and loyalty to those who employ her talents are sort of a cultural thing with her. She has said, ‘Providing the comforts of life is good for the Soul.’ She is a conscientious person and a joy to have around. She is also a good Christian, but I do not fault her for that. She seems to practice the good aspects of those ideas and reject the small, mean ones. I believe actions speak louder than words, and her actions are always those of a reasonable caring person. I do not know what fantasies she carries in her head, and I do not care.”

“She evidently believes in Souls. Is that not part of your position of not being smart enough?”

“Ah, Touché. Your proposition is ‘Does it matter whether people have weird ideas, if they do not display them in public, and they do not let the ideas affect their logical thinking?’ Is that what you mean?”

“Yes.”

“I guess I will have to concede the mind is almost impossible to regulate. Ideas come upon us spontaneously. Emotions are very difficult to manage, and in fact I do not think they should be suppressed. We must however recognize them for what they are which is automatic responses to external stimuli. The best we can do is to turn them to our advantage or usefulness. You have undoubtedly heard some say they felt better after a good cry. I think that is true. When you need to cry, you should let yourself cry. Whatever the emotion is, you should experience it. What you should not do is let the emotion overwhelm you. Let the emotion out then re-approach life with a rational outlook. This is difficult, but it can be learned.”

“So it is all right that she believes in Souls? Does that mean that Souls exist?”

“Hardly, although I should probably modify that. We all have a perception of ourselves. We all have the impression that we are something real beyond our physical

makeup. I prefer to think in terms of my having a Psyche. This is the name I use to describe all that I am. It is what you experience of me. It is a result of my physical make up plus my actions and ideas. It exists because I exist. But when I die my body stops working. There are no actions and ideas being expressed any longer. The biological material which is me deteriorates, and the biological functions which you had experienced no longer take place. My Psyche dies with me. It no longer exists. All that is left are the memory patterns of me in your brain, and they will disappear when you die. Psyches do not have an independent existence beyond the living biological material which senses them.

“Those that believe in souls however do claim the soul lives on. This is impossible by any known physical process. Having the need to claim eternal life is where the lack of smartness enters in. It results from the human brain not comprehending that it might at some time not exist. That misconception is probably unavoidable. The human brain never experiences a time when it does not exist. From the moment we are born, our consciousness grows and never stops until we die. We are never exposed to non existence of ourselves. It is no wonder that non-existence is a difficult idea to understand and to accept.”

“You are saying that souls or psyches or whatever are a product of advanced brains, and they have no actuality if a living brain is not present to sense them.”

“Precisely, the lack of knowing the non being state engenders the idea that it will never happen. That is what leads to the concept of continuing life or afterlife. It results in a denial of reality which is not constructive or helpful in dealing with the real world.”

As they were talking, the lights went out.

“Damn! Now all the clocks will need resetting.”

In only a moment, Alfred appeared out of the kitchen. The dim light of the evening showed him the way as he carried flashlights and candles into the room. The small dining room was also meagerly lit from the glow of an emergency light coming from the open kitchen door. He busied himself with lighting the candelabra and arranging extra candles on the table and buffet.

“Thank you, Alfred. Since the lights are out, we may as well remain here where we have your warm candle light. You may clear the table, and I do not think I will need anything else tonight. Don’t worry. We have several flashlights, and I will blow out the candles when we retire.”

“Very good, Sir.” Alfred retreated to the kitchen, and almost immediately returned with a woman assistant carrying trays. It took them only a couple of minutes to clear, clean and neaten the table and buffet. Only the coffee and a tray of cakes and cookies were left.

“Good night, Alfred.”

“Good night, Mister Hemple.”

Mondrain continued, “It is not just the clocks. In fact, many of them are battery operated, but there are timers and several pieces of equipment that need special attention when we have a power interruption. Alfred will supervise the process in the morning, I am sure. It will be a little extra something the house help and the maids

will need to do. But where were we when we were interrupted with the failure of our modern society?" This last was accompanied with an impish smile.

"I think you said something about the belief in afterlife being a denial of reality."

"Oh, yes, the denial of reality seems to be the most popular form of entertainment. It also is unfortunately the way most people adjust to life. Just consider that fiction is the most well liked literature. A large chunk of that is fantasy. From the earliest times, myths, fairytales, unreal adventure stories, plots with magical happenings, and accounts of fantastic monsters have captured the attention of all ages. They are our escape from the harshness of everyday life. Admittedly life is largely uncontrollable and at best benignly indifferent to our well being. There is much in reality from which to escape. But escapism is no foundation for facing life and making the most of it. Life does not deal with fairy stories. Working in the real world demands using facts and reason. Wishing does not make things so. It takes intelligence and hard work to succeed in the life environment."

Henry stared pensively at a tall beeswax candle flickering in the room air currents. Many visions came to his mind, and he responded, "We both know the necessity of hard work and the seeming arbitrariness of life changing situations and accidents." Both men were silent as they recalled their feelings of helplessness in the face of past events which had taken their wives away. That was one of their common bonds.

Margaret Hemple had been in a tragic automobile accident. She had routinely been a little cavalier in her driving. It was an interesting experience to ride with her. Mondrain had always done his best to encourage her to have the chauffeur take her on her rounds. She however, liked to be independent and often drove herself. It was on one such outing on an open country road that the accident happened. However, it was not in any way her fault. A young driver coming the other way was busy talking and texting on her cell phone. As the two cars approached each other, the young driver drifted suddenly across the yellow line. Although Margaret swerved right as far as she could to attempt avoiding the collision, there was not enough time. The head on impact was very violent. Both were dead at the scene.

Mondrain was disconsolate for many weeks. The Hemples had been very sociable people and were involved with many activities. The let down for Mondrain was enormous. He avoided meetings and work and other usual events where interaction with others was involved. He became a recluse and was absorbed with his sorrow. It was not until he came to Henry's side while they helplessly watched Alice succumb to a fast acting Leukemia that Mondrain seemed to recover his perspective on his existence. Because of his recent experience, he was able to help Henry with the same readjustment to life after Alice died. The two had become much closer friends following those two unfortunate events.

Henry continued, "It would seem we ought to do the best we can with the resources we have to aid in the rational approach to life. The human animal needs much help to correct the egregious mistakes of the past."

"Yes, nothing is perfect. That is the reality of the world." Mondrain added, "If we could do something to make more people understand reality, it would be a step in the right direction."

"That is a tall order. It seems most of the population enjoys fantasy much more than reality. I do not watch most television because the programs these days seem to be about rather bizarre and mystical themes. They do nothing to instill the value of science and reason in young people."

“There are many scientifically and factually accurate shows on public television. They are a shining light in the darkness, at least.”

“Yes, I watch them, but how do we get more viewers for public TV? I think they turn people off with their constant need to appeal for funds.”

Mondrain stated emphatically. “I admit that is a detriment, but it is also an argument in favor of greater governmental funding.”

“Ah, but then the man in the street would call it government propaganda, and he would still not watch it. There is one positive activity in the darkness. I am thinking of the game shows. They require the exact correct answer to win or advance in the game. Fantasy and speculation are of no use with them.”

“True, but the bulk of television entertainment is of the fantasy type. I believe it is in fact overwhelming for most people. How about popularizing sound scientific ideas in otherwise fantasy situations. Perhaps that would attract the attention of the bulk of the people.”

“Great idea!” chuckled Henry. “Now tell me how you can mix fantasy and reality in any meaningful way.”

Mondrain was silent. Then with a sigh he added, “Well that brings us back to outright efforts to educate the World as a whole to Science, logic, facts and reason. As I have been emphasizing; we, that is the common people, are not smart enough. We have not learned to go beyond emotion to use reason. Our decisions would be much better if we could overcome our automatic emotional responses. We are hampered by where we have ended up in the evolutionary process.”

A more profound silence settled on the two men. The flickering candle light lent a warm, but somber character to the cozy dining room. Beyond the darkness of the hall a muffled grandfather clock sedately played its tune and followed with resonant gongs. As the last one sounded, almost on cue, the lights flashed on, and they were bathed again in the magic of modern electricity and the scientific age.

Henry laughed, “Maybe we are finally seeing the light. Perhaps the only realistic answer is in more education. It appears that we must be more creative in how knowledge is presented so that it is enjoyable, interesting and convincing to otherwise resistant attitudes.”

Mondrain nodded. “The human race certainly has the ability to learn and understand. That has been amply proved over the ages. The process must be extended further and we have to get smarter. However, we need to be able to solve the practical problems of living together in the modern world or we shall all perish. Now that the lights have come on, we can go to bed.” Mondrain arose and began circling the room. Cautiously he blew out the candles which Alfred had carefully lit earlier. He added in an appreciative sounding tone, “I know Alfred will be in later to check that they are out, but I am trying to convince him I can be responsible too. Come, I will go upstairs with you. Which room do you think you would like for the night? Let us go to see what is available.”

Upon ascending the stairs, it was apparent which was to be Henry’s room. Down the hall a door stood ajar and light poured into the hallway illuminating a clear pathway. “I will see you in the morning, Mondrain, good night.”

“Good night, Henry.”

Mondrain entered the large room at the top of the steps, and carefully closed the door behind himself. It was a corner room with full length windows on two sides. The windows were made more attractive by elegant gold colored drapes of a heavy cloth. The theme woven into the damask drapery was oriental. It consisted of pagodas and misty mountains. The double drapes next to the window were of a thinner silk voile material for daytime use. The large bedstead was of carved mahogany protected by a high canopy fringed with golden silk tassels.

Mondrain went immediately to the large walk-in closet and changed into his night clothes. His wardrobe was on the right side of the closet. The left side was still full to overflowing with dresses, coats, blouses, skirts and other miscellany. Mondrain had never allowed himself to part with Margaret's belongings and personal effects ever since her death. He felt more comfortable with familiar items surrounding him. He thought the bare shelves and hangers would be depressing. He periodically questioned himself about this aberration, but could not bring himself to do anything about it.

He then sat down in an overstuffed chair and picked up a book he had been reading. Lately he had gone back to re-read some classic works. Mondrain admired the visionary figures in history. Persons such as Copernicus, Galileo, da Vinci and other such great minds captured his imagination. This book was Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* which predicted much of the use of submarines, nuclear power and deep sea exploration. In only ten minutes he found himself nodding, and got into bed.

But sleep did not come easily. Lying in bed, he began to review the things Henry and he had been discussing. Silently he pondered, “Henry is a perfect foil for my ideas. His background in science and in business has given him a very broad view of the world. He seems to be understanding and appreciating my concern with the fate of the human race. Ah yes, my concern for the human race. Is it really worth it? Humans are still fairly primitive animals considering all the horrible things they do to each other. Not just in the past as we began maturing, but even today segments of the population are completely immoral and unethical. Masses of individuals are still controlled by the fanciful ideas of a few powerful groups. Reason and a concern for facts are usually subjugated to vested interests and culturally ingrained emotional biases.

“Unless something drastic happens to set us on the right course, I see a cataclysmic destruction of our world and ourselves. Of course, that is Mother Nature's way. Is it possible that we will suffer a great devastation which eliminates much of what we have today? Will a better adapted few individuals survive the catastrophe to deal rationally with the resulting world? Are we worth saving? What can we do so that a greater number of the more rational persons can plan on surviving the oncoming disaster of overpopulation? Is this the method of the generation of the next species, Homo Logicrous?” Mondrain laughed out loud, but his thoughts continued, “Where did that idea come from? When indeed does one species merge into another? If it were possible, could today's Homo Sapiens mate with the first Homo Sapiens? How different are we? What would a new species be like? Could it shed the Homo Sapiens penchant for excessive emotional responses to everyday events? Would a less emotional more thoughtful species evolve?

“But ultimate calamities aside, we should do our utmost to solve our current problems. How is the best way to do that? How? Yes, how? Are the customary charities doing the job? Or do they just perpetuate the status quo and cause further increase the population? Or should I support more of the educational efforts? Certainly, I would not want to support the religious organizations. They are mostly interested in propagating their own narrow agendas of mythical beliefs. I wonder how Henry feels about that. Perhaps we might do something together to pursue that endeavor. It seems to me the basic problems are recognizing reliable information, logical thinking and the negative constrictions of religion.

“Religion! How relieved I am to have been able to shed my own crazy irrational ideas. We are all enculturated from birth. We have no defense against it. The young human brain quickly absorbs the surroundings and becomes like them. Yes, I am pleased to be released from that nonsense. I can remember when I began to doubt. It was that summer they sent me away to camp for a month. Was I ten or eleven? They allowed us to go into town on some evenings. It was only a cross roads but the little gas station and store had candy and ice cream bars. It was only a mile or so, but it was over a rural road which went right by a cemetery. Then there were the evenings we supposed to go to bed, and I snuck out anyway. No one else was brave enough to come with me, but at least they did not tell on me. One night my flashlight failed and coming back past the cemetery I was scared. I held into my thumb. Somewhere I had heard that holding your thumb was good luck and protected you from evil harm. I was not able to get new batteries, but I went to town alone at night anyway. The next time I ran past the cemetery. I was so distracted that I realized afterward I had not held my thumb. I had survived in spite of that. By the end of the camp period, I could walk at night past the cemetery without a concern. Thinking back on it later, I realized there had not been anything to harm me and nothing to protect me from it. Then I started questioning all the religious beliefs.”

Mondrain’s wandering thoughts merged into his dreams and a smile spread across his face. He relaxed. He slept.

Henry awoke slowly from a particularly sound sleep. As he looked at the strange surroundings, it gradually came to him where he was, and why he was there. He basked in the comfort of an accommodating bed and pleasing décor until he was fully awake. As he awaited the dawning, he went over in his mind the conversations of the previous day. Mondrain seemed to be particularly obsessed with this idea that the human race was not able to realize its full potential, that is, to be smart enough to take the best actions in life. He whispered, “I wonder what is driving him to be so involved with this just now? He seems to have gathered a lot of information and to be very absorbed with it. What is he thinking about?” The silent room did not answer his question and Henry was left mulling over the possibilities. “We are both getting on in years. I wonder whether that is affecting his thinking. We both have more than enough to support ourselves. Neither of us has any close relatives. Is he concerned with the disposition of his estate? I have made arrangements to have my assets donated to some local charities, and I suppose he has done the same. What can be bothering him then?” There were no obvious answers for Henry, and he continued to luxuriate in the extravagant comfort of the bed.

After a time, he arose and began facing the day. In the bathroom he was impressed again by the thoroughness and thoughtfulness that were the remnants of Margaret’s touch on the house she had shared with Mondrain for so many years. From the provision of guest pajamas to the individual throw away razor and tooth brush, the aura was that of welcoming and catering to a guest’s needs. The huge fluffy soft towels confirmed the charming consideration of persons away from their own familiar surroundings.

As he bathed and dressed, Henry thought of Margaret and how much she had meant to Mondrain. The two had seemed inseparable, and when she had been killed in a tragic accident, Mondrain was distraught and depressed for a very long time. Henry thought of how he and Alice had done all they could to support and help Mondrain through the bad times. He seemed to be conquering them when suddenly the tables turned, and Henry went through the grief and despair himself when he lost Alice to her disease. He looked at himself in the mirror and thought, “I will never really get over that. It was not fair. She had so much more of life to live and was enjoying it to the fullest. If stem cell research had come along sooner, perhaps there would have been a cure for her. Perhaps there will be a cure for others with complex illnesses in the future if the politicians can ever decide to agree on allowing extensive research in that area. But research is the first thing they cut whenever there are money problems. Long term solutions do not have the immediate appeal that many other actions have even though they may have greater value. It is like saving money. It is difficult in the present when there is no threat of poverty, but it is nice to have the bank account in the future when disaster strikes. Then again there are the narrow minded extremists who cannot tolerate any actions contrary to their own little religious beliefs. They fume and act like children until they get their way. Then they and

everyone else suffer.” He stood in complete silence for several minutes with his eyes closed as he remembered Alice. For a while he felt completely suspended in time. The slow beating of his heart was his total consciousness, and nothing else was happening. It seemed as though the whole World had ceased to exist. There was no sound, and there was no light. Only his mind - his awareness of himself still remained. Eventually, shaking his head, he came back to reality and finished dressing. Since those difficult times the two men had become much closer and found solace in each other’s company.

Henry had slept in one of the corner rooms. It was at the end of a long quiet hall, and it was a little larger than the rest of the guest rooms. It was one he had used before and he liked it because it had a magnificent view over the grounds. He had a passing thought wondering how Alfred had known he preferred it. Henry paused a moment when he opened the drapes to survey the rear yard. In the farthest part just inside the hedges was the orchard. Mondrain had an assortment of fruit trees which received the best of treatment the year around, and provided delicious additions to the evening buffet. In the foreground were the vegetable gardens and a couple of formal flower gardens which always looked neat and clean. Henry mused, “Mondrain certainly devotes a lot of time and expense to keeping the place looking good. But then, that was what Margaret had liked and he did it for her, I guess it is difficult to change some habits.”

As he walked past the oil paintings adorning the walls of the wide upper hall, he noticed that the solarium doors were open and a maid was inside watering plants.

“Good morning, Jane.”

“Good morning Mister Armbruster. Did you sleep well?”

“Very well, thank you. It was quiet and comfortable. Also, I always appreciate all the little goodies that are available for my use here.”

“It was something Mrs. Hemple always insisted on. She was extremely thoughtful of her guest’s comfort.”

“Well, it does make the room very welcoming. Thank you for keeping the room so nice.” Noticing the soft shades of pink in the plants Jane was watering, he commented, “You have some lovely blooms there.”

“Yes, these were Mrs. Hemple’s favorite. They are African violets. They are somewhat fussy plants, but we enjoy keeping them healthy.”

“I am sure Mrs. Hemple would be pleased by that.”

Jane looked at the plants thoughtfully a moment before speaking. “I miss her very much, but keeping her flowers growing is like still having a bit of her here. I know that does nothing for her, but it helps me a lot and I think Mr. Hemple appreciates it.”

“I am sure he does, Jane. I hope you have a good day”

“Thank you Mr. Armbruster.”

The mansion was extremely quiet as he descended the wide front staircase. The elegant cherry banister was as smooth as glass from all the hundreds of hands which had rubbed it while going up or down over the years and from the care which the staff lavished in it... There was no apparent activity downstairs. However the aroma of coffee was in the air, and he determined it was coming from the small backroom dining area. Passing the Library, he peered inside, but it was vacant. Entering the small dining room, he saw it was again set with two places and there were a variety of trays on the side board. The coffee pot was emanating warmth and an inviting bouquet. As he was fixing himself a cup of the warm elixir, the kitchen door opened.

“Good morning, Mr. Armbruster. I hope you slept well.”

“Yes, indeed Alfred. The bed was very comfortable.”

“I am pleased that you found it to your liking. May I fix you some eggs and bacon or anything else?”

“Thank you Alfred, but I think not yet. I will wait for Mr. Hemple to show up. The coffee will be fine until then.”

“Very good, sir. There are some rather good little rolls on the side there if you wish also.”

“Well, I may indulge, later. But for now, I will just sit and contemplate your beautiful garden.”

Alfred withdrew with a, “Very Good sir,” and Henry was left to enjoy the ambiance of the room and the view.

The rose garden was in full bloom and was very impressive. There were many shapes and sizes and colors, each in its own way more glorious than its neighbors. Henry decided to take his coffee outside and find pleasure in the blooms from a closer perspective to get a more intimate experience of them. The heavy metal - glass door to the outside opened easily and he found himself almost overwhelmed by the fragrance as he exited. Walking up and down the pathways made him realize how seriously Mondrain was involved in this hobby. Although Henry knew Mondrain had a very adequate staff to care for the plants, he also knew that the master of the house enjoyed doing much of the pruning and cultivating himself. On many occasions Henry had heard his friend speak about being particularly fond of a new or rare variety of rose.

The atmosphere of the rose garden caused him to muse quietly, “I am amazed at the many forms and colors and aromas. It is rather astounding that all of these beautiful blooms have evolved to this complexity only by having sufficient time to do it. Natural Selection is certainly a powerful mechanism when it is working unrestrained.” His mind drifted back to moments when he and Alice had wandered among the roses. Alice had not been adept at raising plants, but she appreciated the skill of others.

The sound of the door closing made him turn to see his host approaching. “Good morning, Mondrain. I am appreciating your flowers. There is such a variety. Flowers are amazing things and seem to find many ways of expressing themselves. I noticed the African violets also while I was speaking with Jane a few minutes ago.

She was lavishing care on them and enjoying them. It is amazing what a great range of diversity there are of all these ephemeral works of art.”

“Dear Jane. She always worked with Margaret in caring for the plants. I appreciate her very much for still doing it.” Echoing Henry’s recent thoughts, Mondrain continued, “Flowers are wonderful, aren’t they? It seems almost impossible that such beauties could be produced by simple evolution. Of course, there are others who say evolution is not simple, and even more people who say evolution is a farce, and it was all done by a divine power. That is sheer nonsense, but many people prefer to believe it.”

“Yes, it is disconcerting how many people prefer nonsense to rationality. Now there is a real area where we as a species are not smart enough.”

“I agree. Shall we talk about it over breakfast? I have taken the liberty of asking Alfred to produce some scrambled eggs with mushrooms. I think I have seen you enjoy them in the past. Is that all right?”

“That is fine. I have learned over the years that anything Alfred makes is always good.”

The two friends meandered back into the small dining area as Alfred was dishing up the eggs, bacon, toast and all the niceties that go with them. As they ate, serious conversation escaped them, and they exchanged comments on the current events of the day.

A small television set in the corner of the room was tuned to the national news. The weather, sports, and local crime were all covered in great detail. Mostly the two friends did not pay attention as they enjoyed their food. Then the national news was covered, and the daily disasters were being reported by very serious news persons. The report of an earthquake in Asia commanded their attention, and stark videos conveyed the extent of the tragedy. The prominent scenes displayed were quite graphic and disturbing.

Mondrain watched the program, and his face showed a good deal of dismay. Pushing his empty plate aside, he reacted. “Why do people live in such dangerous places? Even worse are those who live in areas which are annually inundated or flooded by monsoons. Why do they persist in returning to such risky areas?”

“I believe it is because they have nowhere else to go. It is the only life they know, and there are too many of them not to use the available land.”

“Well you have just enunciated the basic problem. There are too many people entirely. Over six billion and growing exponentially is too great a population for this old planet. We are intelligent enough to grow, but we are not smart enough to control the population limit.”

“You have to consider also Mondrain, that most places on Earth have some sort of natural disaster waiting to happen.”

“True, but some areas are worse than others. If there were fewer people, they could be more selective in where to live and they would be able to avoid a lot of troubles.”

“But people are always going to push the boundaries of the possible. That is old human nature coming through. We have made progress through the ages by attempting more than we can usually do. Sometimes we succeed, and humanity is advanced. Isn't it a bit unrealistic make certain areas off limits to habitation? There will always be renegades who will do as they wish.”

“I suppose so, but then why does society go rushing out to save them when they do get into trouble?”

“Again, that is human nature coming into play. We really cannot abide seeing others in trouble and not help. It is the ‘preservation of the species’ thing which is part of our cultural makeup.”

“It sounds as though you are saying we are captives of evolution. We do what we have to do because those reactions are ingrained in our automatic responses to the environment. We did not have any choice in the matter during the early evolution years, and now we cannot prevent our reactions. Whatever happened to free will? Where is the freedom of choice? Don't we have any control over our behavior?”

Henry smiled, “Interesting that you would ask that. I was reading the other day about free will. There are some fascinating ideas floating around in the literature about what free will is in humans. Perhaps some of the current ideas are showing that we are becoming smarter along with our greater intelligence. Would that help assuage your complaint that we are not smart enough?

“It is proposed that the old philosophers were incorrect and too narrow minded in their construction of the free will question. The problem is stated this way. If we live in a completely deterministic world where all events proceed inexorably from previous events, how can we have free will?”

“Well, doesn't it have to be one way or the other? Either events are completely determined, or we have control over them and ourselves, don't we?”

“Not necessarily. The problem is that as in many comparisons they are comparing ‘apples and oranges’, as the saying goes. In the purely physical world, except on the quantum level, events do follow naturally from what has gone before. They are simply following the laws of physics.”

“So? Are we not part of the physical world and do we not have to follow the same rules? Reality consists only of basic physical particles, and what we experience is the result of them operating in an orderly manner.”

“Yes, we are part of the physical world, and we do follow the laws. However, there is a new factor thrown into the game. In the purely physical actions, there is no memory of the past. Everything takes place in the present with the conditions which exist at that time. There is likewise no knowledge or understanding of the future. The future is whatever happens.”

“Well, Henry, I do not see what you are getting at. How is that different when we decide to do anything?”

“If you stop to think about it, it is vastly different. We are complex biological structures. We have these amazing gadgets called brains. They remember, and they can speculate about the future. If they have been threatened by a bear in the past, they know to avoid bears in the future. If a rock comes flying at them, they know to

duck.”

“But most of the higher animals can do similar things. That is how they survive.”

“I am saying that we are not just physical matter, we are alive. It is our much more complex brain which is the new factor. Human animals act in more than just the present. At each step that we decide to do anything, it is no longer mindless automatic reaction to physical conditions. With our brains we consider the past and the future to make decisions. Lower animals do this to a degree. It is the way to deal with life in an hostile world. This is not a simple procedure. All of our memory is in play whenever we proceed with a life action. There are many streams of memory in the brain. We are influenced by all of them in the present to some extent. Our memories can be influenced by how we are feeling or by the surroundings or how recent the memory is. Forgetfulness can enter into process, and who we are dealing with can influence us also. I emphasize, there are very many and very complex streams of thought with us continually.”

“Moreover, this is still an evolving process. Evolution has not stopped, but it has moved on to more complex actions. Our brains evolve and change by many methods. We are interacting with the environment all the time. Experience, learning by reading or listening, observation of others, and the internal musing or reflection on those things we experience all affect the brain. People can be brain washed by repeatedly being told something. Eventually it becomes part of them, and they act using the information forced on them. The brain we have today is different than the brain we had yesterday. No two situations are ever the same. Our brains can also be arbitrarily and capricious. Have you not ever heard anyone say, ‘Oh, I always get chocolate. Today I’ll get vanilla.’ or something similar?

“There are many other factors also. I submit that we are all open to making mistakes. We can accidentally push the wrong button, or turn the wrong way, or day dream and react in uncharacteristic manners. These things invariably can affect the future. This great variability and the attribute of consciousness allow us to select what we do. That is the basic process. What we are doing is our freedom of choice, or if suits you, free will.”

Mondrain considered what Henry’s words and was silent for a while. He closed his eyes and sat in deep thought. Then he rejoined seriously. “What you are saying is that we go beyond simple determinism in our activity. The basic physical reactions are modified by the fact that we are aware of both the remembered past and the future possibilities. This allows us to go further than just the rudimentary physical actions, and we can modify them to our liking.”

“That is correct. I believe the source of our freewill lies therein. What we call the present is more than an instant. It always carries the baggage of past memories and future speculations. We do not operate in a vacuum. Consciousness is a result of all the present influences on us. That means we react not only to the current physical stimuli, but also to the brain processes which we are experiencing at the moment. That is much more complex than simple Determinism.”

“But is there really any choice involved? Doesn’t it still depend on how we are feeling or what we remember at the moment? Does that not still result in a deterministic process?”

“Well perhaps it would, except that human brains are problem solving devices. We love puzzles. We can find the correct numbers to put into squares to satisfy certain beginning conditions. We can select the shortest route or the most scenic one. We can find the path of least resistance. We solve all manner of logic puzzles and get pleasure out of finding the right answer. We can predict the most advantageous course of action. We can know whether an action is best for us or best for someone else. We can postulate what the future will be, and then select what action to follow based on any number of criteria. And then we can be capricious. All of this contributes to the choice process.”

“There are those who say we are deterministic because of Freudian Slips. The unconscious still controls us and the unconscious is deterministic. Is not that true?”

“Well, let us consider Freudian Slips. These are accidents of the mind. We do or say things we do not rationally mean. We are immediately remorseful or embarrassed, because our rational self recognizes that is not truly what we are striving to be. Think about it for a moment. Freudian Slips occur due to a lapse of our conscious control. I consider Freudian Slips to be the greatest proof that we do have free will. They do not really represent us and our Psyche.”

“You are beginning to convince me. I know I always feel as though I have freewill.”

“I believe that is true. As children we are necessarily under the control of our parents or other adults, but as we grow up, we mature and the brain evolves into being its own thinking and planning device. That is, if it is allowed to. Some cultures have been so controlling, that individuals could not readily escape from the will of others. Unfortunately, that is true in many places yet today. Many people are trapped in their local culture. It is extremely difficult to break away from the customary ideas and functions. That is one of the major obstacles to a more rational society.”

“You mentioned consciousness. That is one of those philosophical problems that has plagued the intelligentsia for ages. What do you do with the mystery of consciousness?”

“Start at the early onset of life. Beginning with the first amoeba to the slightly more complex multicellular creatures, the ability to sense food or noxious substances in their watery universe was the beginning of consciousness. They reacted to the environment. That was primitive consciousness. This ability grew in many ways as animals evolved leading not only to tactile senses but to sight, sound and odor or taste senses in the higher animals. Consider how much more complex we are with our elaborate senses. Add to that our marvelous organ called the brain which I mentioned before. It does more than just work in the present. It remembers the past and projects the future. While we are awake it does this continually. The sum total of all our senses acting and our brain searching and comparing the past and the future with the present is consciousness. Consciousness is nothing mysterious. It is a natural product of evolution.”

“So evolution has not stopped, but it persists even today. We keep changing as physical entities, and even our brains continue to evolve.”

“Of course. Evolution is a continual process. You must remember, it occurs very slowly. Even the implied rapid changes in Punctuated Equilibrium Theory discussed by some scientists were not instant events. They were ages long processes although they seem much more rapid when compared to the extremely long periods of little or no change.”

“Speaking of slow progress reminds me, I must call my attorney. It seems like we are done with breakfast, and I would like to go to my office for a few minutes. I need to deal with a particular situation.” Mondrain looked at his watch. “Yes, he should be in by now. How would it be if we reconvene in the library in a few minutes?”

“It would be fine with me. I’ll refill my coffee cup and see you there.”

As Mondrain left, Henry refreshed his coffee at the buffet. While he was involved with the process, Alfred entered from the kitchen. “Is the coffee hot enough Mr. Armbruster?”

“Yes, it is fine, Alfred, but we will be going to the library.”

“I believe I will make a fresh pot and bring it in there. I am sure Mr. Hemple would want me to do that.”

“I think you are probably right, Alfred. He will appreciate your thoughtfulness.”

The two men went their separate ways. Henry chose another Danish roll, and with his cup in hand meandered up the hall past the ever watchful eyes of the ancient relatives. As he entered the library and closed the door, he was impressed anew by the soft quietness of the facility. It certainly was a refuge from the confusion of life in the outside world. Holding his warm coffee cup, he felt a sense of relaxation and the cares of the world seemed to fade away. He looked around the room and absorbed the feelings of tradition, values, and security. Mondrain was the last representative of several generations of successful business men. The Hemples had been a major force in the life and culture of the city for many years. Local museums, arts and other institutions were in the debt of the Hemple generosity.

It was the Hemple Room at the art museum which housed the most treasured artifacts. Henry mused, “I believe it was Hugo Hemple who initiated the fund drive which over the years has resulted in a sufficient endowment that the Art Museum remains open to the public without charge.” He placed his coffee cup down on the side table next to his chair and wandered over to a darker corner of the room where there was a high glass enclosed display case.

Carefully opening the glass door, he picked up one of the artifacts inside. It was a jade ball intermediate in size. It was half way between a golf ball and a baseball in diameter. The ball had six holes drilled in the sides. The jade had then been carved away to form another ball inside. Yet inside of the second ball was a third one. It was a ball within a ball within a ball all carved from one piece of jade. Henry recalled it very well. On one of their Mediterranean trips with the Hemples, Alice had picked it up in a little gift shop. Alice had seen Margaret admire it, so Alice bought it to save for Margaret’s birthday. Holding it in his hand brought back many memories. Although they were pleasant, fun times, the thoughts reminded him of his lost wife, and a wave of sadness swept over him. Cautiously he replaced the ball on its special stand and closed the door. Returning to his chair, he sat quietly with his eyes closed.

Meanwhile, Mondrain had gone to the front of the house and entered his office. The entrance was on the opposite side of the foyer, and the immediate feeling on entering the room was that of comfort. The chairs were large and soft, and the desk was against a side wall where it was both convenient and unobtrusive. A large front window gave soft illumination to the quiet blues and gentle greens of the room décor. He went directly to the telephone and dialed a number from memory. After a moment he spoke. “George? Any results yet? ---- That sounds good, will you follow up on it? ---- Fine, and let me know as soon as you learn anything. ---- Okay, and by the way, I want to give you a ‘heads up’ on a decision I have made. I want to change a few provisions in both the Trust and my Will. I’ll be in sometime next week to talk. ---- Yes, have a good day. Goodbye.”

As Mondrain was walking back to the Library and passing by the front door, the door chime rang. Alfred appeared from the hallway, but Mondrain assured him, “Never mind, Alfred. I will answer it.”

“Very good, sir.” Alfred disappeared quietly into the staff quarters.

Mondrain opened the door to the entryway and closed it again behind himself. The entryway was a modest sized room, but large enough to allow the removal of coats and boots when the weather demanded their use. In addition to two small benches, there were hangers for coats, a shelf for hats and an umbrella stand with a variety of that item neatly disposed within. It was a cozy room with a rough brown carpet. The imposing entrance door was overly wide and was decorated with stained glass panels depicting a woodsy scene. Small vertical windows on both sides of the door were similarly paneled in matching stained glass. A small vanity and mirror completed the accoutrements. Glass electric fixtures emitted an amber glow to greet visitors, and the whole atmosphere was one of warmth and welcoming.

As Mondrain opened the front door, he was met with the vision of two average sized men neatly dressed in some sort of uniform. “Good morning gentlemen. What may I do for you?”

“Good morning, sir. We are spreading the word of our Lord, Jesus Christ today. Are you saved?”

“I beg your pardon. What do you mean?”

“I mean have you accepted Christ as your savior? Do you look to him for the guidance you need in your everyday activities?”

“Well, my dear sir, I must admit I have some problems with your Jesus and the Bible in general. I have found the content to be highly contradictory from one part to another, and I do not see the sense of believing in obviously impossible mythology. Do you really believe that the occurrences depicted in the Bible are true?”

“Certainly, the Bible is the word of God, and it is the truth for all our lives.”

“Do you know that none of the Roman and Jewish historians and writers of the first century and immediately thereafter make any mention of Jesus or the miraculous events which supposedly happened then?”

“But they were the enemy. Why would they write about Jesus?”

“That is interesting. I did not know we were called the enemy. I thought we were just the misinformed. The old historians did not know they were to be called the enemy either until much later. That would not have stopped them from writing about the strange events and radical people with the new ideas anyway. Would you like me to give you some references to scholars who can enlighten you on the real events back in your ‘biblical times’?”

“There is no true source except the Bible.”

“The Bible is a figurative work put together by men who had an agenda and a purpose in mind for controlling their people.”

“We believe you are wrong. We have the true vision of what Jesus wants from you and what he offers you.”

“And I think you should do some independent investigation of what you are talking about. You might find it very enlightening. Using only one source is no way to find truth. You would do better to look further. I am sorry, but I have company at the moment, and I really do not have time to educate you now. You will have to do it yourself. Good day to you.” Mondrain terminated the conversation by firmly closing the door.

As he made his way to the library, he muttered to himself in an agitated way, and as he burst through the door he exclaimed, “It is amazing how blind some people can be. They wrap themselves in self satisfying delusions and are stuck forever.”

Henry was startled. He looked up a little dazed as he came out of his long reverie. “Oh! Mondrain! You are back. I am sorry. I was lost in thought. What did you say?”

“At the door just now two religious klutzes were trying to sell me their belief, and they were not interested in what I had to say. That annoys me. I wish they would either keep their weird ideas to themselves or be willing to listen to the thoughts of others, also. They think they have the right to disturb the general public with their childishness whenever they want to.”

“One of the basic tenets of most religions is to spread the good word to the uninformed. Unfortunately they consider you ignorant and lost. They are only trying to show you the true path.” Henry accompanied his remark with a sly smile.

Mondrain laughed, “I have had enough of being shown the true path by charlatans. I have been misled by religion enough from my childhood through to my early adulthood. That caused me to make it a major study for myself as you well know. I think I understand what religion is and is not, and I do not want any part of it.”

“Well Mondrain, I agree with you, but what can we do about it? That seems to me is one of your areas where people really are not smart enough.”

“Yes, it disturbs me. The human race is destroying itself, because people are letting themselves be driven by whims of faith ideas. Without solid foundations in fact, good choices in societal actions are impossible. Government cannot attain reasonable legislation for providing for the common good when fundamental extremists block all action. Many legislators are not interested in good laws. They want only to do legislation which promotes their own narrow minded views and those of their constituents.”

Henry took time to refill his coffee cup. Returning to his chair, he commented, “If irrational opinion, or Religion if you prefer, is the basic cause of our troubles, what is going to happen to the human race in the future? Are there not enough rational forces to promote the kinds of change which are necessary to provide for our survival?”

“Believe me Henry, I am thinking more and more of that problem.” Mondrain’s words were interrupted by the clock sounding the half hour. Both of the men became lost in their own thoughts. It was several minutes before he continued. “The problem with religions is that they are both good and bad. While the majority support

good moral and ethical codes, they also claim their religion is the one true religion. Thinking that they are absolutely right leads to trouble. The more seriously involved religious people tend toward being fanatics. In fact, I think that is an inherent flaw in the system. It is foolish to believe blindly in myths and secretly not really to be sure of them. The believers have the need to convert everyone to their ideas to make themselves feel more secure. They think their brand is so good that everyone should share it. Those who do not convert must be punished. Non-believers will ultimately suffer dire consequences from the nonexistent great powers. I suspect this is related to the insecurity of the self appointed prophets who promulgate the religion. But then, I am not a psychologist. There are probably more complex reasons than that.”

“It interests me that you say there are inherent flaws in religion. What do you mean exactly?”

“Well, consider what religion is. Religion is the result of early peoples trying to make sense out of their environment. Evolution caused them to have a brain which demanded answers. Primarily they needed answers to the question ‘predator or prey?’ That is a fairly basic situation and the wrong decision was sometimes fatal. This helped establish the need to know as a very strong influence to their thinking. This attribute though interacted with less important questions, such as ‘Why is there light and dark, why does that bright ball go across the sky everyday, why do plants grow out of the ground, why is it that animals and old people become still and do not move anymore?’ All of these ideas bothered them and they had no way of knowing the facts to answer them.”

Henry nodded. “I understand all that, but what does it have to do with inherent flaws in religion?”

“Let me continue. As you know, the early humanoids made up answers to assuage their curiosity. They postulated that those actions they could not explain were caused by unknown great spirits. They eventually called them gods. Because this feeling of needing to know the answers to questions very accurately was so strong, they fell into the trap of believing their answers to be absolutely correct. It was the easiest of steps to then say, ‘I am right and everyone else is wrong.’ This is where the trouble comes in.” Mondrain paused.

“Yes, go on. I follow you so far.”

“I conceive that early humans lacked self-confidence and their psyches were weak. They were constantly under pressure and they were challenged by the hostile world around them. So they were greatly relieved to think they had found a satisfying answer to a major puzzle of the environment. When it was challenged by others, they were inclined to defend the veracity of the answer forcefully. The answer could be a made up story or myth with no factual basis, but because of their insecurity, they were led to defending it more vigorously. This inevitably led to conflict. Strongly held convictions are imbedded in the brain, and they result in conflicts between groups which do not agree. This built in attitude still exists today, and that is an inherent flaw in religion.”

“I perceive what you are saying. This is where we get hell and damnation preachers and suicide bombers.”

“Precisely! Moreover, these fanatics are then motivated to impose their views on the uninformed and the intellectually vulnerable. Consider a child’s mind. The brain is still developing after birth and the experiences of the first five years usually determine the mind set of the individual for life. The saving grace here may be that the brain continues to develop during life. It is possible to correct crazy ideas as people grow up, but it is difficult. There are two problems, Henry. First, many people have difficulty recognizing reality. The second is that even if they know the real facts, they often cannot bring themselves to believe them because of the interfering ingrained

emotional responses of early life.”

“Why is religion so popular? It seems all cultures and peoples have some form of religion.”

“There is more to it than just the security factor. There are other nebulous advantages. A great convenience is that religion offers an escape for ones actions. Spirits can neither be held responsible nor punished for the actions they supposedly cause or demand of an individual. How often do we hear the excuse, ‘the devil made me do it’ or ‘it is necessary for my religious belief’ from various miscreants? That means their god tells them to do it. The individual then assumes he or she cannot be held personally responsible. Another advantage is that religion offers a social group of like minded persons. I have heard many people say about their church. ‘What I believe is not as important as having good friends there.’ Of course, the church was the center of daily life for hundreds of years.”

“What do you do about spirituality, Mondrain? Do not many people claim to find a spiritual component which enhances the experience for them?”

“Yes, I imagine many find some solace and help there. Remember though, spirituality is a mental exercise uniquely human which results when one concentrates on their senses, feelings and emotions. These are electro -chemical -physical actions in the brain. They can be useful by being satisfying and enjoyable. They can also be a method of releasing grief or dealing with anger and other human reactions, but they are not driven by any special or mystical or unusual force. Spirituality has no meaning beyond the immediate individual experience. When the brain dies, these reactions no longer occur and the spirituality is no longer experienced. Unfortunately many feel the emotions and spirituality are strong enough that they still exist after we are no longer living. They refuse to recognize the impossibility of that situation, and they are mistaken.”

“Is religion the main obstacle to progress then? From what you have said, it seems we would be better off to eliminate all the fanciful ideas from the civic realm and demand that our governing agents justify all their actions on the basis of reality and facts.”

“You are exactly correct. Although this is a practical impossibility. There are those who would say that Intelligence has already lost the battle. There are too many people existing now for the Earth to support. The least aware and uncaring persons and groups will keep on reproducing until we are overwhelmed. The population bomb is real, and there is no stopping it. Even if there were a moratorium on births for the next ten years, I doubt that it would make a difference.”

“What can we do then? What is the solution which will bring people to recognize reality and start behaving in rational ways?”

A soft knock on the door was followed by the appearance of Alfred. “Excuse me sir, but Jules has arrived to pick up mister Armbruster.”

Henry replied, “Thank you, Alfred. Tell Jules to take his time finishing his coffee and donut. I will meet him out front after a little bit. . We are not quite done here. “

“Yes sir. Thank you, sir.”

Henry smiled as he turned toward Mondrain. “I do not want to rush Jules. I know that he and Alfred enjoy each other, and they deserve their time together also.

Actually, I suspect Jules has been here for a while already. It is still well before ten o'clock."

"But where were we? What will happen with the condition the world in is now? It seems as though it is too late to do anything constructive. It makes me think of the long course of evolution. Old Mother Nature has been dealing with this problem for billions of years. She just has never had to deal with animals as intelligent as we are yet. I would suggest that her usual methods will catch up with us. In the past overpopulation has been controlled by competition, starvation, disease pandemics, natural disasters and the emergence of more adaptable animals. Now we have thrown the factor of religious belief into the equation. That has certainly added to the ills of the Earth."

"You are probably correct. I feel strongly that society's ills are a result of actions based on emotions and illogic rather than facts and reason. When you stop to think how long the religions of the World have been fighting each other over which set of nonsense to believe; it destroys the idea that mankind is intelligent at all. Basic instincts control and manipulate the human animal to do irrational things. They are then justified as being divinely guided.

"We have already seen mass starvation in parts of the world. Who can deny we are beset with some major disease problems? Global climate change will very likely precipitate gross weather changes. These changes along with the loss of arable land may well be the wave of the future. Starvation is a very effective population control. Yes, you may be correct, and that is sad. It would seem we ought to do something about it."

A silence descended on the room. The two men became lost in their own thoughts, and the clock seemed to tick more quietly. It was as though it recognized they were struggling with perplexing problems, and it respectfully attempted to avoid disturbing them. The silence allowed quiet reflection and acted as an incubator for ideas. Both men sat and indulged in speculation on the scenario they had just propounded. Their visages expressed the seriousness of their thoughts and the weightiness of their considerations. The morning Sun began the job of warming the air and the inexorable business of destroying the materials in the room with its radiation. Gradually the awareness of birds singing outside and insects buzzing at the windows invaded and eased the quietness of the room.

Henry was the first to speak, "It seems there ought to be something we could do, Mondrain. Is there nothing going on to reverse or correct this condition? With the wealth we have, we ought to be able to make a difference. I think we are both intelligent. How can we be smarter? How can we work together to prove your thesis wrong?

"Interesting that you should ask. I am just now considering changing some provisions of my Will and the Trust to get money to more organizations which will work on these situations. My immediate problem is in deciding which organizations are best oriented to do that. I had been planning on distributions to educational and scientific institutions, but I am re-thinking that decision. Now I am more of a mind to fund the major Atheist organizations. Religion is the problem. Promoting reality might be the solution. The greatest task now is learning how these inherent and instinctive influences affect us, and then taking steps to deactivate or control them. A first step would be to prevent the indoctrination of our youth into any religious or fantasy based belief system. As a practical matter this is next to impossible. From the moment of birth, a child is influenced by those around it. By word, deed, and action, the belief system of a parent is indoctrinated into an offspring. It is simply impractical to go against the actions and desires of a parent and attempt to avoid an infusion of that parent's beliefs and ideas into the child. Through the early years and most of the adolescent years a child is under the control of the parents in all ways. Physically, emotionally, and culturally the child's environment is imposed by the parents."

Mondrain paused to let his comments be absorbed. Soundlessly, his ideas echoed and reechoed in the luxurious silence of the large room. After a moment, he continued. "What then do we do? If we cannot control the enculturation and education of children through these critical learning times, we must do the next best thing.

We must train and educate persons of all ages but particularly the youth. People of all ages and circumstances must be made aware of the realist view of life. This can be accomplished by books, magazines, films, news sources, public events and undoubtedly by other creative means yet to be developed to expose the entire population to a philosophy based on reality.”

“What you say certainly has merit. Education is effective if people are willing to learn. How will this be received though? Do we have the right to initiate an extensive education effort?”

“Are we of such low moral turpitude that we would not do whatever we can to help save the human race? I believe it is as serious as that, and we must act aggressively to illuminate the problems.”

“I think Mondrain, we are both atheists. You however, seem to be more passionate about it. I am content to let the foolish persons believe whatever makes them happy. You seem to want everyone adopt your viewpoint. How can you justify that? What is superior in the way you see the world that makes it necessary for everyone to see it the same way?”

“Everyone will not see it in the same way. In all situations there are honest differences of opinion. But if fanciful ideas can be put aside and facts can be agreed upon, logic should find acceptable answers. I am supportive of facts and reason. That is not an extreme viewpoint. It is only the most rational method of attacking problems, including society’s problems. When the idea is presented properly, everyone should be able to understand the usefulness of reasoning using truth and reality.”

Henry arose and again filled his coffee cup. He was slow and deliberate as he did so. He seemed lost in thought, and after he sat down he stared into the brew for a few moments before speaking. “Perhaps you are right. We should put our money to some good use. It will assuredly not be doing us any good when we are dead. Maybe I ought to do something more potent with my resources than just to support the usual eleemosynary institutions.”

“Well, take some time to think about it. I am talking to my attorney next week and intend to make some changes.”

“I am trying to think what Alice might have thought about how we should dispose of our resources. It was not something we had ever taken the time to discuss. Alice was full of life and the idea that she may be gone suddenly never crossed our minds. We should have done better planning, but it just never occurred to us. When her disease took hold, there just was no time to plan.”

Mondrain replied somberly, “I understand. Margaret and I did not discuss it very much either. I have more or less just designated as beneficiaries those institutions which we had always supported. I am not sure that is the best thing to do. At least, I have been thinking about it recently.”

“You have impressed me that we should become more responsible and give some clear thought to the future. I am inspired to give it a good shot now. Suddenly there seems to be all kinds of worthwhile avenues to explore. Thank you dear friend. Jules will meet me in front in a few minutes, and I shall be on my way. It has been a wonderful visit, and I will carefully consider all we have discussed.”

“Yes, do that, and let me know your ideas on my suggestions. By the way, I have just dug out a copy of a letter relating to our conversations. It is from an old friend whom I consider to be one of today’s clearest thinkers. You may find it useful in deliberating about your actions. Take it with you to read at your leisure. Let me know what you think of it after you have read it. It bears on what we have been talking about.” He handed Henry an envelope.

“Thank you, Mondrain. I will give it a good look. Don’t get up. Goodbye, I will see myself out.” Henry smiled, “I think I know the way.”

Henry Armbruster had begun to take to heart some of the information on global warming which was prominent in the news. He had forsaken his limousine and other vehicles. The older cars had been traded in, and he had invested in three hybrid cars for his personal transportation, and for the use of the staff. As he exited the front door of the Hemple mansion, there was a very well polished dark blue sedan waiting for him. Jules was standing at the edge of the circular drive. He opened the front passenger door when Henry approached. Henry had an understanding with Jules. When they traveled for most informal trips, Henry told Jules he would like to sit in front with him just to make it simpler for the two of them to talk while traveling. Henry would save the back seat for formal occasions. Although it seemed there were not very many formal occasions these days.

“Did you have pleasant time with Mr. Hemple?”

“Fine, indeed. And you? Did Alfred have a good donut for you today?”

Jules laughed. “You know us too well. As a matter of fact he had Danish rolls which are even better.”

Jules closed the door after Henry had entered. He then walked around the shiny car to the driver’s side and got in.

As they drove off, Henry asked, “Did everyone enjoy having a night off without the boss around?”

“Sure. Actually, we had a party. A birthday party.”

“Oh, that is right. It was Audrey’s birthday. Did you drag out of her how old she is?”

No. That is still a well kept secret. We will probably never know. But we had a nice cake and delicious ice cream.”

“Fine. Did you give her the card I left with you?”

“Yes, and she appreciated the check very much. I am sure she will thank you the next time you see her.”

Jules was younger than Henry, and he was a cautious driver. They made their way along the narrow streets of the upscale older section of town out to the main road. The roadway was lined with many large old trees. Mondrain’s mansion was one of the first buildings to have been built in the area. It had been there many years

before the development boom had even begun. The surrounding houses were all similarly large and impressive. Some were even larger than the Hemple homestead, but none were older. The Mondrain mansion stood out clearly over them and seemed to survey them with condescending approval. When they reached the highway at the bottom of the hill, Jules turned away from town.

“Thank you for coming for me, Jules. I no longer enjoy driving myself, and you are a great help.”

“I try to do what you tell me, boss.” Jules replied with a grin.

“Well, I appreciate being able to go where I want whenever I want. Mondrain is an interesting and wise person. I enjoy being with him.”

“So what was so interesting this time?”

Henry laughed, “Oh, I think we touched on all the problems in the world.”

“Did you solve any of them?”

Henry laughed again, “No, there are too many to solve. But we took care of the major ones.”

It was Jules turn to laugh, “Well I will sleep easier now knowing they are in good hands.”

As they passed a large shopping center, Jules volunteered, “Did you know there is a new organic food store going in here? They will be getting a lot of their produce locally also.”

“That is good to hear. It is a praiseworthy endeavor. Tell Audrey to try shopping there when she can. It will probably be a little more expensive, but that is all right. It is something we should support, and I believe items we get there may be better for us also.”

“Okay, will do.”

Henry became silent and reflective. Watching the scenery go by, he thought of the many times he and Alice had traveled this road. He followed his silent thoughts. “My life has become much more mundane since Alice had her illness. Yes, I read and have some outings. I deal with the investments and oversee the household, but that is no effort. I need to have something more to do. I wonder whether there is anything more active I could do relative to what Mondrain and I have discussed?” He stared blankly at the passing countryside without really noticing it.

After about five minutes Jules made a right turn onto a broad boulevard lined with large old shade trees. Spacious lots with wide green lawns were arranged at comfortable intervals along the winding road. Shrubbery was abundant and served to soften the lines of otherwise large and sometimes cumbersome structures. In the

second block he turned into the circular driveway of a gray stone house with large front windows and came to a stop. Henry was immediately out of the car, “Thank you, Jules. I will be in my office if anything is needed.”

“Okay, boss.” Jules drove the car around to the back of the house. Henry approached the front door and proceeded up the three stone steps and across a small porch. The big door opened easily. He noticed that it no longer squeaked, and he realized Jules must have done some work on it. Walking to the back corner of the first floor, he entered the open door of his home office and sat down at a rather large Mahogany desk.

He began attacking the morning mail and discarded a great deal of it. Part way through his sorting, Jules appeared with a tray holding a pot of coffee, a cup and cream and sugar which he set on a small table on the side. “Audrey thought you might like a little coffee to keep you going until lunch.”

“Thanks Jules, and thank Audrey also. I appreciate that the front door is fixed. The squeak will not be missed.” Jules smiled in acknowledgment as he retreated to the pantry. Henry sorted and stacked the mail. Then he poured a cup of coffee and doctored it to his liking. Moving into his comfortable reading chair, he just sat for a few moments and collected his thoughts. He recalled some of the conversations with Mondrain. Half aloud he mused, “Mondrain seems to be quite involved with this idea of the human race not being smart enough. I must say I can understand that, and I tend to agree with him. He has done a good job of persuading me. It would help if more people would realize this.” His train of thought reminded him of the envelope Mondrain had given him, and he removed it from his pocket. It consisted of a letter and several additional sheets. He began reading:

Christine Owellah, PhD.  
Oxmoor Place

My Dear Mondrain,

I hope this finds you in good health. I am sorry not to have seen you in several years, but traveling is something I just do not do anymore. I miss you and your lovely home where I have spent many happy moments with you and Margaret in past years. I remember especially walking in your beautiful rose garden, and being wrapped in all those wonderful aromas. Margaret and I had many interesting discussions over tea there.

But my purpose in writing to you today is this. I have been asked by our organization to do a short article for their fall issue of the Journal. The subject they gave me was “The Meaning of Life”. I am sure you can anticipate what my thoughts are, and I would appreciate it if you would review with your critical eye what I have put down on paper. I have enclosed a copy for your use. Mark it up however you wish. Please give me your reaction, and do not hesitate to point out any faults you see with the content. You can take your time. I have several weeks until the submission deadline.

I do find it pleasant to be asked to share my thoughts once in a while. It is a grand change from the old days when a good many of my colleagues held me in low esteem. I am certainly not main stream, but it is satisfying to be respected, right?

Thanks in advance. I know you keep yourself busy, but this is really a trivial job, I am sure.

Love, Your friend.

Christine

## The Meaning Of Life By Christine Owella

The philosophers over the years have loved to struggle with the so called “big questions.” Perhaps the grandest of these is “What is the meaning of life?” Here we are, a vast number of sentient beings trying to find our way in basically hostile surroundings after having evolved to the degree of having a thinking mind which is aware of ourselves and our environment. This evolved “intelligence” as we call it has enabled us to conquer a good deal of the environment and bend it to our wishes.

We have prospered in all parts of the Earth, and we have learned much of the scientific construction of the world and universe. However, as a species, we have not learned how to control our emotions and to live together peaceably, nor have we mastered the art of conserving our resources, nor have we discovered a method of

dominating and regulating our animal instinct of exponential growth of the species. Here in the beginning of the Twenty First Century, we are facing the results of all these failures. Why have the great philosophers been incapable of guiding us? Why can we not work together to assure a comfortable life for all without destroying our Earth?

Perhaps we should look at this “meaning to life” in a different way. The total of the human animals is a small fraction of all the living entities, both plant and animal, that inhabit this planet now or ever existed in the past. Since the inception of life from the first proto bacteria through all the evolution of greater and more complex living matter, the questions of “meaning” or “purpose” were never raised. Life simply evolved by the mechanisms of mutation and natural selection. Life did very well without a purpose. The “Meaning of Life” had no definable sense without the complex organic structures necessary to conceive it. Before human brains existed, the meaning of life was a non issue. Life just was. It was a factual reality, and it needed nothing esoteric to explain it.

Nothing has changed. The meaning of life is still a non issue. Just because the human brain is beset by demons of organic functions which result in fanciful ideas and nebulous concepts does not bequeath them any reality. There is no mystical meaning in life, and we must accept this fact. That will finally give us a reliable beginning point.

It is most arrogant, conceited, and self - delusional to consider that we are special in any way, or that there is even a meaning to life. We are simply the most complex animal that has yet evolved. We have developed the capabilities of converting the resources of the Earth to our pleasures and use. We do this very well and have by several orders of magnitude a more easy and enjoyable life than any other living thing.

Throughout the billennia of evolution the only purpose or meaning to life was to live it as best as possible, to adapt to the environment, to protect ones own kind, and to propagate to the maximum. Unfortunately for the environment, humans have expanded and perfected these activities to the point we are able to affect the environment beyond its capability to compensate. We have been able to make ourselves immune to many of the environment forces which would drive less adaptable species to extinction. We are discovering this intelligence was only a delaying tactic though. Our intelligence is gradually leading us to a more grand and more massive extinction. What we need is to be smarter in applying our intelligence.

We are greatly in need of a reality check. Letting our delusions of the mind be the guiding forces in our lives is leading us to the destruction of the fabric of our society and to the demise of our world. It is time to throw aside the comforting cloaks of fantasy we have created for ourselves, and to begin using facts and rational thought to solve our problems. Emotion and inherited biases and delusions have to be exposed and disempowered as guides to “proper” living. Understanding the reality of our situation and acting rationally on it is the only viable path possible. We must act to avoid this impending expiration of the human race.

We probably have the tools to prolong our survival. If all the peoples of the World could find the moral courage, self-discipline and determination to act, we might be able to come to terms with Mother Nature and not make the planet unlivable. We must realize that the odds are against us, though.

We must adopt the original inferred meanings of primordial life listed above. Then we must take the next step. With our greater knowledge which is tempered with a consideration of reality, we need to reexamination our place in the world. There is no meaning to life. If we wish to have a meaning beyond just existing, it must be self imposed. To maintain our sanity in an uncaring universe, this is probably a very good thing to do.

What sorts of meaningful things are there? First and foremost is the enjoyment of life. We are here. We should enjoy the beautiful parts of nature. Scenery, changing seasons, wildlife, natural events and even the sounds from birds singing to the roar of thunder or water falls can be captivating. It is meaningful to enjoy other people. Physical and intellectual interactions with other humans are the everyday activities of life. All that we can do to improve our abilities in these areas will add to our greater sense of meaning and enjoyment. Reaching out to others and helping those who need support are satisfying ways to experience life. Many people devote their entire existence to this one effort alone.

But further than these very basic actions, greater meaning in life for individuals can be experienced in attacking the worldwide problems. Even small efforts give meaning to those who will engage in alleviating hunger or disease or educating the disadvantaged or promoting responsibility in population control or preserving the environment by re-cycling and reducing consumption of resources. Engaging in the Arts or Science to push out the frontiers of knowledge and experiential passions is meaningful to many persons.

This is the short list. Everyone can find their own way to advance that oldest of all recommendations known as the golden rule. A basic cultural value, this behavioral rule enunciates the proposition that we should treat others as we wish to be treated. The idea undoubtedly developed in the first small groups of humanoids. It is a cultural technique for better chances of group survival. It evolved as a practical behavior long before the advent of religions. Most religions have adopted it in one form or another as a basic guiding idea. They have adopted it because it is a good human trait and results in a better life. Due to that attribute it is easier for them to sell the other ideas they espouse. Therefore, religions find it useful to promote it. We all understand or should understand the values in ethical behavior, cooperation, and conservation of resources. It is the implementation of this concept which is at the heart of finding meaning in life. It is each individual's responsibility to develop their own meaning. The golden rule purpose is to promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people. It also implies being responsible for maintaining the environment to be useful for all. Expanding this to the logical conclusion leaves us with concern for the whole world. Hopefully it will lead us to working on ending or easing the stress on the planet. This can be accomplished by reducing population, increasing conservation, reducing waste, reducing pollution, and attempting to make the Earth a more

enjoyable space for everyone. We must bring our living requirements within the capacity of the Earth. That result would be really meaningful, and it would give an excellent purpose to life. It would be a purpose in which everyone could share and which might even satisfy the Philosophers.

As he put the papers down, Henry recalled meeting Christine on several occasions. She was always a perky person and had useful ideas to share. Her remarks came out clear and understandable. She seemed to be a very intelligent and caring person who was always attentive to the thoughts of others. Her stance at the cutting edge of some issues separated her from the main stream at times, but she always seemed to eventually convince others of her truth. She was often labeled too forward thinking by her more stodgy compatriots.

Henry sat back in his chair and sipped his coffee. He found himself ruminating through his thoughts and almost whispering out loud a review of the last day with Mondrain. "Mondrain has many good ideas. He certainly has a great concern for the future. He knows how to frame questions. I always feel he knows the answer before he asks the question. Why does that make me think of Socrates? Perhaps Socrates with his questioning nature was the first really great teacher. Mondrain has convinced me that there is a problem and that someone should do something about it. There are already many good secular organizations and magazines. Why are they not succeeding better? I can think of two reasons; money and good public relations. Which means mostly money, of course." Henry finished his coffee and reclined deeper into his chair. Closing his eyes to eliminate distractions, he remained quiet.

After a long while, Henry arose and went to the telephone. He dialed a number and waited until he heard a voice on the other end. ----"Alfred? This is Henry Armbruster. May I talk to Mr. Hemple please." After a moment he continued. "Mondrain? Henry here. ---- Yes, fine. ---- I have read the article you gave me, and I have been sitting here thinking for a long while. ---- Yes, I agree, and it set me to cogitating. It seems I have used the rest of the morning chasing ideas around in my brain until I really feel physically exhausted." ---- Henry chuckled, "But that is not your fault. You know how involved I get. ---- Nevertheless, I believe it has been effective. You have convinced me we are not smart enough. Furthermore, I have come up with an idea. ---- Oh, no. I can explain the basics over the phone. ---- Yes, I am considering a variation on merely bequeathing our money to others. There is a more extensive action we can take. It will also last longer into the future. I am thinking that what you and I should do is establish a foundation which could continue on after we are gone. It would be a foundation to fund those organizations which promote reason over the religious fiction which is so prevalent. That would be its main purpose, and it would address the problem at its source. We would further the value of facts and reason. The thrust of the effort would not oppose religion per se, but it would take the positive stance of promoting intellectualism. It could then be an on going institution, and continue the work in the years to come. We could start it right now and even have some of the fun of running it ourselves. ---- It is kind of you to say that ---- Yes, I am aware of several good Atheist and Secular Humanist organizations. I will start a list. ---- Certainly, I am sure between us we could break free enough resources to make it worthwhile. ---- Oh? How many others do you know who would be interested? ---- Well, they would not have to lend their names if that is uncomfortable. ---- Yes, I am sure your attorney can do that. ---- Do you want to call it the Hemple Armbruster Foundation or the Armbruster Hemple Foundation."---- Henry laughed. "Whatever you say. That sounds impressive.. It is not important to me what it is called.---- Tell your other friends they may participate in any way they want to, but we really need only their money. ---- Okay, you talk to your Attorney. I will see what funds I can come up with, and I will start making a list of institutions and effective projects to pursue. I know a good PR guy who might be helpful, also. ---- Right, Talk to you later."

As Henry hung up the telephone, Jules came in and announced, "Audrey says lunch is ready whenever you are."

"Fine, I will come with you. I was just talking with Mondrain again. We are planning a project. I think it will be a lot of fun."

“Oh? What are you going to do?”

“Together we are going to save the Human Race and the World.”

Jules grinned, “Well, that’s good. Somebody has to do it.”