

The Third Arrives

“Hello!, You guys.”

“Theresa!!!”

“Surprise!, Surprise!”

“Wonderful, wonderful, here we are all together. How did you manage to escape?”

“I did, I did, I did.”

Catherine is the first to greet the arriving sister with hugs and kisses, followed upon with Lydia hugging them both as they hugged each other. Theresa looks out from the threesome toward Mr. D., urging him with her looks to join them. Mr D. smiles a thank you, but keeps his distance.

“I know all three of you must have been in a heady discussion about momentous things, so please, please, do not let me interrupt. I will feel the direction and the tempo, and maybe participate if it seems the thing to do. Please, please continue.”

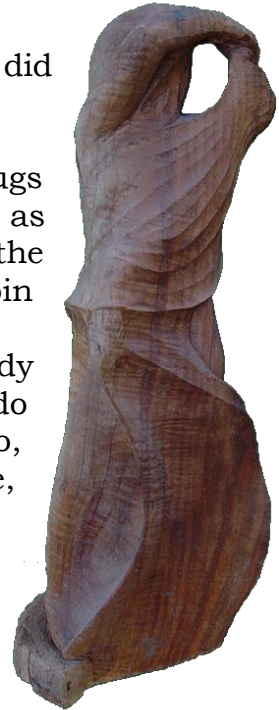
Mr. D. continues. “While I was telling of the lady from Kazakhstan I was thinking of something else illustrative of the way our conversation was going, or the way I was meandering through it.

“When my wife and I would be taking off up the freeway, usually to visit her parents, mostly during the winter around Xmas-New Years, she driving her little auto up the valley, we would pass by fields of flat green meadows, littered with grazing sheep. There was something hypnotic about this pastoral bucolic scene, as I would stare at it. I would often think the wildest, most sane, or insane, things, depending on how one looked at the world in any given moment. One might marvel at his Ignorance.

“There was something about the behavior of the animals behind their fenced enclosure that intrigued me. Often it would be raining, the fields would be wet, but one could not tell if the sheep were suffering any discomfort; some were lying down, chewing their cud, most were ruminating. I don’t know if they were meat animals or wool animals; perhaps the latter. They were unshorn. Their quiescence was notable. Lots of animals. More than enough grass. No flocking, no herding, no panic.

“Man grazing in la-la land. I was Gott surveying my flock; each of my underlings with his square fenced off.

“When I would come by a few months later, all the sheep would be gone. The grass would be growing into golden hay. After a few months, bales. Still later; some fields black from burned stubble, and still later,



On The Road To Civilization

plowed, disked fields, and once again, later still, green grass, and again the appearance of sheep. An 'eternal' rhythm?

"I had wondered where the men had gone during the lengthy maturation of the crop, or did they ever truly appear. Must have, but they certainly were not part of the enduring landscape.

"Perhaps I had it all wrong. They were meat animals; no longer men. They were turned loose for a time in the winter to lamb and to fertilize the fields; then they were led to the slaughter. What about breeding stock for the next year; where did they live?

"Then I would think how necessary it was that one kept the numbers down. La-la land was a finite place. It might mean that man is suffering under a delusion concerning after life. That his sojourn in paradise must necessarily be a short one, because there is only so much room for happiness. Crowding brings un-happiness. Even in paradise men find too many men intolerable, as it was on earth.

"When one passes through the pearly gates, Peter hands each one a brochure, instructing the relieved, hopeful recipient, to read the fine print. Bliss Is Not Ignorance.

"Where does one go when his real time comes, when it is all over in Paradise?

"Oh well, it turns out there might not be any substance to immortality, that business about 'dust unto dust' contained more truth than was apparent, or than one was willing to consider. The spirit, the us, or the me, or the I, might not be anything at all, not even the apparently insubstantial ether. That immortality existed through the Transformation Of Decay. All that imaginary stuff of us, all cleaned up, our bones picked clean, sitting smugly at his right hand, while all those sinners, flesh and all, felt the heat of the Inferno. Ignorance Is Not Bliss.

"Then one backtracks in his thinking, examines his basic premises. All the reasons for being one thing or another have no particular relevance to what happens to the dust. There is no ennobled dust. One might turn the pages, noting all the has-beens, the ones who were awarded gold medals, Nobel prizes, that were reduced to dust. Or the more ignominious cataloguing of the great numbers, the swollen numbers of those slaughtered, as one might slaughter sheep, in genocidal romps, or bizarre land grabbing wars, or scourges of religiosity, or in ideological fits. There they were, as far as the eye could see, more numerous than all the grazing sheep one might see from his car window, enshrined as an indistinctive, inconsequential, irrelevant number, like six million.

"Even without the advent of violence in the affairs of men, this great Malthusian multiplicity of the six **b**illion must pass in the next hundred or less orbits. To be replaced, or not replaced. To what end?

On The Road To Civilization

“Suppose it suddenly occurred to man that his life was no more than a holding action, that Gold Medals for agility, speed, grace and strength, or Nobels for great revelations concerning Quarks, Black Holes, Banes, or the Cure For Cancer, or the Cure For Life On This Earth, a counterfeit printing press for each and everyone one of us, a ticket to fame and fortune; and a completely succored vanity; all had no relevance to anything, had no consequence, as he knows to be true in his heart of hearts. That if he tries to convince himself of the untruth of it all, he becomes ill, disturbed with anxiety; aware of his colossal Ignorance.

“Suppose, in his fanatical ignorance, anxiety, and terror, he goes off the deep end; what does it matter? Will we read in the history books that one more went crazy? How he became a hunted man; hunted down unto death; premature immortality. Something to be avoided?

“Sane or Insane thoughts?”

“Mr. D., unnerving to me to hear your words unfold.

“Perhaps insane thoughts of a sane man.”

“Lyd, often Mr. D. speaks this way. He knows he cannot provide a clear path to the truth, so he hacks away at the underbush of confusion.

“Our conversations often disguisedly devolve into a kind of table talk. As we might be dining, he will out of nowhere request, ‘Please Pass The Truth’, as though he was asking for the most ordinary, commonplace thing found upon the dining table.

“Nonchalantly, he seems to patiently await my response, betraying no hint of humor; his demeanor only somewhat expectant. He might like to be surprised. I have on such occasions pretended to scan the table seeking that which he requests, then pretend to note its absence, whereupon I will rise from the table feigning a trip to a cupboard to seek what he has requested, only to wonder how he will react. If he follows me with his eyes, I am prepared to look in every cupboard; and to declare that I cannot find what he seeks. If he leaves me liberty to do as I please with his request, not following me with his eyes, I will busy myself in a mock search until I can come up behind him to put my arms around him. I have been known to find in the cupboard a container labeled, TRUTH, which I have placed there for such occasions. But usually I need to be ready for a heady discussion, or a humorous banter concerning things that we cannot have, must forever be denied.”

“I would find that kind of banter annoying, Cate.”

“I don’t but rarely mind it, because it is what I expect of him. There are times when his jests are inopportune, like when we are having an argument concerning matters close to one’s heart, when instead of a straight answer, he becomes tangential.”

“Catherine, you are giving away the game.”

“I am confident you will invent others, but I doubt I will tire of the same game, as long as I am amongst the players.”

On The Road To Civilization

“I wonder about your grip on reality, Cate.”

“Lydia, you shouldn’t worry about that. Mr. D. is the one that is uneasy about where the truth will lead him. He knows he cannot know certain things. We both share in this realization. We do not wish to put something in place of what we cannot know, that is, a posit that is mostly or merely a wild guess. We cannot reason our way there; that is, we do reason our way there, until we come upon a wall of darkness. The wall is permeable; ready to swallow us whole; we disappear into something, but soon need to return to something more secure, although no more relevant, that which we can see in the daylight; what we imagine we can know. All metaphors of course; an aphorism: Seeing is deceiving.”

“Gee, if I might be allowed an opinion, I find this discussion most stimulating, although it may appear to be going nowhere.”

“Sure Theresa, fire away.”

“I like the way it began with quiescent life. One observes the ‘sheep condition’. Then superimposes the ‘human condition’, not so quiescent; more disturbed, perhaps marked by upheavals, and plagues of indiscriminate destruction.

“We see the one, and know of the other.

“If we are free to imagine what life is intended to be, we think of survival as the first prerequisite. Individual survival, an instinctive thing bred into every life. Then group survival, or, a species continuum.

“In one sense we have nothing to say about what we are obliged to do in order to survive. In another, we are forced to account others who are as compelled as are we.

“Those sheep make it all seem uncomplicated. Out of the goodness of his heart the Almighty (man in this case) might provide shelter from the elements for his flock. He might even remove the fence that the sheep might find their own shelter.

“But that sounds too reasonable, like there might be a connection between the creator and his creation, something which we, the created, cannot observe, or verify, in the least.

“We then think of what might be accomplished if we could take advantage of our awareness of many possibilities for life, beyond raw survival. One might characterize the implementation of possibilities as ‘civilization’. Or more simply, ‘order from out chaos’.

“As we observe the sheep, we do not observe chaos. But as we become aware of our own kind in its full accounting we imagine chaos. Or we might imagine a deficiency, not readily apparent.

“However, we seem to possess certain qualities, or attributes, that ‘go begging’. That is, we are equipped with ‘reason’, but seem unable to consistently utilize this attribute. “Reason’ does not always produce a predictable result. It is flawed in some way.

On The Road To Civilization

“ ‘Reason’ devolves into justification. The individual freely offers ‘justifications’ to support his method of survival. Can we fault that individual?

“Yes!, and we do, in the name of something greater than the individual. As we must, to avoid chaos, perhaps to assure for ‘our’ own survival.

“We cannot ‘trust’ to ‘Do unto others as you would be done by.’ This too seems flawed, because these are only words; and because there are those who do not care. To observe and follow the basic tenet, we, its creator, must descend to earth in order to implement and enforce it. “Do unto others....’ must be enforced.

“But that is amongst men. We might also extend the tenet to include all of life. Further, as part of this extended tenet, we must realize that it may be a one-sided happening; however, that should not deter us. Our magnanimity must rise up in us.

“Not to stray too far from your focus, I would return to the search for the truth.

“Amongst ourselves, we have previously tacitly agreed there can exist no absolutes. Even things we take for granted will at least change, and in our way of knowing will require adjustments.

“Our universe has evolved from something we barely understand, if we understand it all. Because we are who we are, we create what we imagine are plausible scenarios of how we got here, why we are here, and where we are going. In any scenario we must account the variables, the flux of things, which may predict that life in our universe can exist for only a finite time, along with the zillions of other finite things that comprise our lives.

“That may or may not be a relevant truth. It may exist as one kind of relative truth, but how does it affect us here in our whiff or puff of existence? What surrounds us, the environment in which we live, our experience informs us will not materially, or significantly change, during our lifetime, or a foreseeable series of lifetimes. Our life may be affected by cataclysmic events in the ‘human condition’, perhaps to a far greater extent than any ‘natural’ occurrence. Can we do anything about either, can we plan for either?

“If we all are intended to be aware of our genesis as a condition that should be continued beyond our lifetime, as it was before we arrived (so we are told and so we assume), then what should we be doing to assure for that future in which we will not live? Can we escape dealing with the issue?”

“All truly and wonderfully stated Tess. Our concerns are engulfed in your words. The author is having a good run.

On The Road To Civilization

“To change direction here, Mr. D., how is your author friend doing these days? Any good word on the publishing front?”

“I think he’s about to go off the deep end, Lydia.

“Even should the possibility arise that he might find acceptance, he is not too happy about the challenge to copyright that has arisen with this Gobble stuff. Because copyright law is not absolute in its protections, these smart-asses have gone ahead with their copying of copyrighted material under a ‘fair use’ clause. As well as making deals with Publishers. Meanwhile the ‘authors’ are left hanging, and may soon find themselves without any means of protection against wholesale plagiarism under the guise of fair use, or they may be limited to only a percentage of earnings as a result of some judgment that allows only a certain amount of compensation for use, whether fair or not. Google gets to make something out of nothing; we have become the nothing that enriches Google.

“He was mumbling something about Ted Kazinsky and Timothy McVeigh having the right idea.”

“I wouldn’t advise that.”

“It is possible that some courageous judge will nix the whole idea. If Gobble wants to build some kind of ‘universal library’ out of the kindness of its heart, let it be with the consent of those affected. As much as a parent or friend would will his stocks, or land holdings, or property to his progeny or friends, a parent ought be allowed to do the same with his intellectual property. No fucking corporation, with its slick lawyers should prevail against this basic right. ‘Fair use’ is easily construed to unfair abuse. The little guy, the person slaving away in the garret, cannot bring suit against the corporation that is benefiting from his or her labors. Screw Gobble, and all the other parasites in their high-sounding, grasping benevolence.”

“Mr. D., The Law is an imperfect institution. The ‘spirit of the law’ is one thing, but the ‘loophole’ was invented to circumvent the ‘spirit’. The ‘spirit of the law’ would argue that Joe or Jane Blow retain all the rights to their creations, even though they share these with the general public. Because they have shared does not mean they have given them away to anyone of the general public, even should their creations become some kind of standard of performance, or common reference. ‘Fair use’ in this instance must conform to a principle that protects the basic right, observing the ‘spirit of the law’. ‘Fair use’ by Gobble could not be anything but a ‘circumvention’ of the principle.

“When Corporations attempt to contravene the ‘spirit of the law’, they should be slapped down very hard. They need to realize that there are no public benefactors with special privileges. All must play by the same rules.

On The Road To Civilization

“Nowadays, the Gobble effort may help us, within this nation, define more precisely what are the specific protections or rights of the individual with regard to his creations. The Chinese juggernaut is proving a challenge in every area of protection of intellectual property as well as copyrights and patents. They are copying everything, ‘knock-offs’, and marketing it back to us, with little recognition of ‘rights’. Instead of the globalization of economics, and fair trade practices, it’s the gobbleization of markets; and ‘whateverthemarketwillbear’.”

“Obviously we need to put a stop to it. Can we? Most of what we would obtain in this manner we could do without. I’ll go a step further by declaring we could do without any of it. To parody Mr. Rumsfeld, ‘We don’t need what we don’t need!’ A great deal of what is being copied is inferior to the original. What might have been an attractive something or other in its origins is becoming shit by inference. What we didn’t need in the first place has become a sickening reminder of our bad habits and gullibility. Tempted! Shoddy goods is our reward for our niggling participation in the consumer ethic. Our landfills grow as we dispose of our disposable income on disposable materiality. China is mounting our landfills. That is a polite expression for ‘fucking us over.’”

“Very harsh words, Mr. D.”

“I think not. Something was already suffering the taint of Planned Obsolescence in order to assure perpetuation, for the lack of a better word, somewhat like your ‘whateverthemarketwillbear’, of ‘materioeconomicconsumption’.

“A disposable planet?”

“Harsh words? I think not Lydia.

“There is something very shortsighted in all of this Gobblezation. In the early days of the Industrial Revolution, even though design might have been considered flawed, compared to our latter day sophisticated engineering, goods were meant to be durable. There were no plastics, there was a lot of heavy metal, and castings. Babbit bearings instead of ball bearings. With intervention of lighter metals and ball bearings goods might still be made durable if the bearings were manufactured to the highest standards, and the machining was of the highest precision.

“The USA and Germany, perhaps England, had achieved a high degree of manufacturing sophistication. It was costly, but one felt assured that durable goods were truly durable. But even then, it was with the caveat that friction and heat, and corrosion within the environment, were anathema to longevity in the material world. Running metal surfaces had to be properly and consistently lubricated to reduce the friction and heat. Metals put under great strain, levers, booms, supports that flexed, were all subject to crystallization. We tried to offset these weaknesses by better engineering and better lubricants, better corrosion resistance, and more sophisticated metallurgy.

On The Road To Civilization

“Yes, in the background, was the notion of ‘mass production’. Some of this was brought on by the desire of making fortunes, or because of the exigencies of war. None of it was intended to serve mankind, to enhance the quality of life in Bedlam.



“Along that road, coupled with the fortune making, the gain or profit motive, ‘more’s the better’, expediency, standards were shaved, and a new concept arose, perpetual income derived from a social complex, the social complex, or religion, of consumption. The society became part of the machine for eternal profit. Planned Obsolescence was introduced. New materials, bound to fail, were introduced. Shoddy manufacture was concealed in the glitz of advertising, the advertising meant to whet the appetite for consumption. Not guaranteed for life, but only for ninety days; read the *fine print*. One considered it a good thing if a product was guaranteed for a year. A very few things were guaranteed beyond that; read the *fine print*. Almost cynical. Playing with people for profit.

“China has come on line, India wants on line, the USA has made a shift to foreign labor to produce whatever kind of goods more cheaply, in order to increase the profit; Yes! Even Chinese labor. Still, all cynically executed.

“One day I spilled some beer on my laptop. Immediately I turned it upside down, shook it every which way, positioned it upside down in the heat to dry for several hours. It seemed to work for a few days, then it wouldn’t boot, but occasionally. Then, not at all. I dismantled it, to see if I could find where the liquid might have gone, where it was creating a problem. In dismantling it I found twelve different countries involved in its manufacture. There wasn’t any hope of repair, with a host of miniaturized components stamped and etched into plastic boards. I do

On The Road To Civilization

not recall any part of it manufactured in the USA. Only the promotional bullshit!”

“Mr. D., laptop!?? What happened to the old fashioned quill and ink well?”

“You mock me; but, in a way,



I deserve such treatment. If I wasn't such a frustrated grandiosity, I might not even have recourse to that more primitive venue. Instead I might gather unto me mail, helmet, sword and lance, mount my feeble-legged equine friend, to gallop forward, swinging at every conceivable Bedlamite, charge every windmill, to humiliate all, with their justly earned disgrace, as evil conspirators, bringing ruin to our beautiful planet, with their blatant visceral onslaughts.”

“I'd love to witness that, Mr. D.”

“What, the blatant visceral onslaught?”