



# Noesis

The Journal of the Mega Society  
Issue #205, August 2019

## Contents

About the Mega Society		2
Editorial	Kevin Langdon	3
The Uncanny Dreamscapes of the Weird	Ken Shea	4
To Grandmother's House We Go	May-Tzu	8
Round-the-Corner Rummy	Kevin Langdon	11
Interview with Rick Rosner (Part Ten)	Rick Rosner & Scott Douglas Jacobsen	13
Answers to Puzzles		
Obscure Words and Facts Analogies, II	Jeff Ward	22
Another Set of OW&F Analogies	Werner Couwenbergh	22
A Third Set of Analogies	Ken Shea	24
The Existential Threat	Kevin Langdon	25
What Will Our Children Say?	Chuck Sher	26
Letters to the Editor	Ken Shea, David Seaborg, Kevin Kihn	26

## About the Mega Society

The Mega Society was founded by Dr. Ronald K. Hoeflin in 1982. The 606 Society (6 in  $10^6$ ), founded by Christopher Harding, was incorporated into the new society and those with IQ scores on the Langdon Adult Intelligence Test (LAIT) of 173 or more were also invited to join. (The LAIT qualifying score was subsequently raised to 175; official scoring of the LAIT terminated at the end of 1993, after the test was compromised). A number of different tests were accepted by 606 and during the first few years of Mega's existence. Later, the LAIT and Dr. Hoeflin's Mega Test became the sole official entrance tests, by vote of the membership. Later, Dr. Hoeflin's Titan Test was added. (The Mega was also compromised, so scores after 1994 are currently not accepted; the Mega and Titan cutoff is now 43—but either the LAIT cutoff or the cutoff on Dr. Hoeflin's tests will need to be changed, as they are not equivalent.) Mega publishes this irregularly-timed journal. The society also has a (low-traffic) members-only e-mail list. Mega members, please contact the Editor to be added to the list. For more background on Mega, please refer to Darryl Miyaguchi's "A Short (and Bloody) History of the High-IQ Societies"—

<http://archive.today/K32e>

—the Editor's High-IQ Societies page—

<http://www.polymath-systems.com/intel/hiqsocs/index.html>

—and the official Mega Society page,

<http://www.megasociety.org/>

*Noesis* is the journal of the Mega Society, an organization whose members are selected by means of high-range intelligence tests. Jeff Ward, 13155 Wimberly Square #284, San Diego, CA 92128, is Administrator of the Mega Society. Inquiries regarding membership should be directed to him at the address above or:

[ward-jeff@san.rr.com](mailto:ward-jeff@san.rr.com)

Opinions expressed in these pages are those of individuals, not of *Noesis* or the Mega Society.

Copyright © 2019 by the Mega Society. Copyright for each individual contribution is retained by the author unless otherwise indicated.

# Editorial

**Kevin Langdon**

I must apologize for the long delay in publication of this issue. This is due to an unusually busy few months in my life.

Society business: Jeff Ward, our long-time Administrator, has resigned for medical reasons. I'd like to express the society's gratitude for his long service. We now need at least one volunteer to take on this job, which is essentially the same as the position of Membership Officer in other high-IQ societies.

First up in this issue is an essay by Ken Shea, "Uncanny Dreamscapes of the Weird," a short history of the genre of "weird fiction."

Next is "To Grandmother's House We Go," by May-Tzu (Richard May), a report on his continuing research into his biological roots.

Then we have "Round-the-Corner Rummy," a section from a forthcoming book of games by the Editor.

Next is Part Ten of the long interview with Rick Rosner by Scott Douglas Jacobsen, from the *In-Sight* journal site—

<http://in-sightjournal.com/>

—where the interview originally appeared.

In this section of the interview, Rick addresses questions having to do with ethics in our world of accelerating technical change and the implications of developments in artificial intelligence.

And then we have the answers to three sets of analogies, by Jeff Ward, Werner Couwenberg, and Ken Shea.

A reader wrote that she wished my essay in #203, "Human Population Doubling Time," had been longer. Her wish has been granted now, in my essay, "The Existential Threat," on the serious impact of human activity on the earth and life on our planet.

And finally, we have two items touching on similar subject matter to my essay: an essay by Chuck Sher, "What Will Our Children Say," and a new Letters to the Editor column, something that I intend to continue, with the help of *Noesis* readers.

And, as usual, please submit material for our next issue, tentatively planned for October 2019.

**Cover:** "Tripod Snow Star W," by Nathaniel Hellerstein

**Illustration on page 4:** "Whose Race?" by Vincent J. Zukowski



## The Uncanny Dreamscapes of the Weird

**Ken Shea**

Weird fiction supposedly originated in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The term weird fiction canonically refers to works of supernatural fiction with occasional flavorings of horror and fantasy to suit the taste and disposition of the writer and ad hoc requirements of the tale in question. Ontologically, weird fiction is considered to be a hyponym (subordinate) of speculative fiction, which itself is a fairly comprehensive umbrella genre that subsumes the following genres, critically including: supernatural, horror, fantasy, magic realism, dystopian, and science fiction. Weird fiction is a co-hyponym with the aforesaid genres and, obviously, a hypernym (superordinate) in its own right. These seemingly generous boundaries still prove cramped for housing weird fiction since writers can subscribe to some, all, or none of these genre conventions and still generate weird tales. If works of weird fiction inescapably arose from interaction with these genres, then such a situation would be impossible. The supernatural and weird fiction, moreover, have become somewhat yoked together since certain

psychological fiction or impressionistic works can be open-endedly explicated supernaturally or psychologically. (cf. Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia," H.P. Lovecraft's "The Music of Erich Zann," Thomas Ligotti's "Vastarien")

Taking stock of the situation, over the years there have been popular writers like Ray Bradbury and Stephen King who have sojourned in the weird, relatively unheralded writers like H.P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith who have penned weird tales primarily employing the motifs of supernatural fiction, and a clutch of Japanese weird writers like Ryunosuke Akutagawa and Sakutarō Hagiwara who probably weren't terribly concerned with weird fiction as such or slipped taxonomizing over tea. This is all to say that, though weird fiction is today treated as a branch of speculative fiction, the origins of the supernatural weird tale stretch at least as far back as the Book of Enoch (circa 300 BCE) and probably further back to ancient oral traditions and folktale and shamanic invocation of spirits. *A Kayak Full of Ghosts: Eskimo Tales* suggests the weird tale has been around a long time and the underlying concerns are acultural; the commonality across time and place appears to be the weird tale's presentation of an insoluble enigma and the inclusion of mysterious, possibly uncontrollable, cosmic forces. H.P. Lovecraft found a "suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos" to be a sine qua non for the weird tale. (cf. Michael Shea's "The Autopsy," Jerome Bixby's "It's a Good Life," Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation*)

In this day and age, the weird tale seems to more heavily assimilate elements, or simply borrow a certain ethos, from transgressive fiction to remain vital. By channeling the spirit of transgressive fiction into weird fiction, a writer can impugn the standing of a slew of interlocking sociocultural, moral, narrative, phenomenological, and epistemological conventions. The experimental writer Brian Evenson is masterful in this regard, and what distinguishes Brian Evenson from strictly transgressive writers like Hubert Selby Jr. and Chuck Palahniuk is the willingness to gamely venture into the unexplained and potentially unknowable as often as not. The real experimentation goes on in Brian Evenson's short stories, but the thinking which permeates the short stories, novellas, and novels seems to be that any story which fails to challenge the reader's preconceptions is limited by those same preconceptions. Brian Evenson frequently uses alien character names, neologisms, unexpected syntax, recontextualized information à la Donald Barthelme, and archaic words to "defamiliarize English" and disturb the reader's orientation in the midst of ethically and/or metaphysically challenging situations. If the reader's preconceptions can be thrown into doubt one way or another, then suddenly the reader's imagination can engage with a refreshingly expanded field of possibilities.

Getting from here to there might further require rendering the weird tale more abstract and less linear to engage the mind at a deeper level. In this vein, works of weird fiction are said to stimulate and be stimulated by the same internal space as Surrealist art and dreams – namely, the unconscious mind. The

dreamer naturally experiences a perturbation of temporal causality, eased moral guidelines for thought and oneiric behavior, and more porous influences on agency and identity. But how best to bring this same pliancy to readers of weird fiction? Surrealist art offers a serviceable road map. Weird tales can present scenarios that are so deranged as to usher in a surreal, uncanny effect to the reader's consciousness. Georg Heym's "The Dissection," a macabre prose poem, is sui generis and - it almost goes without saying - a treat best savored at night. Thomas Ligotti's "The Cocoons" and "The Glamour," Clive Barker's "In the Hills, the Cities," Thomas Bernhard's monomaniacal *The Lime Works and Correction*, and J.G. Ballard's controversial novel *Crash* equally spring to mind as being jarringly beyond the sensible reader's preferred ambit and kaleidoscopic in psychodynamic implications.

Sigmund Freud, who wrote "The Uncanny" in 1919 as the Surrealist movement was taking shape, concatenated the German word *unheimlich* (uncanny) with the following: the unconscious reminder of repressed id impulses, repetition compulsion, *doppelgangers*, uncertainty, disfigurement, and discovering something familiar and agreeable (*heimlich*) in a reconstructed taboo context. The German word *heimlich* is translated into English as hidden or secret. Sigmund Freud draws many extrapolations based on the etymology of the German word *heimlich*, "which belongs to two sets of ideas," namely, that which is familiar and agreeable and, secondly, that which is "concealed and kept out of sight." Subsequently, according to one view, "everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."

Much as dreams are the unconscious mind's way of dramatizing forbidden wishes and working out personal psychopathology in hopes of achieving psychic wholeness, J.G. Ballard sought to exaggerate and personify individual and collective psychopathology in *Crash* while time still remained for an overdue course correction. *Crash* suggests that advertising, mass media, politics, preening celebrities, sensationalized gore, brutalizing sexuality, and technology run riot constitute an externalized fever dream from which one best wake up. J.G. Ballard came to believe that, "Freud's classic distinction between the latent and manifest content of the dream, between the apparent and the real, now needs to be applied to the external world of so-called reality," and that a significant inversion had taken place in postmodern society whereby truth was to be approached through exploring the workings of the mind and eschewing mass-produced solutions and similar hokum wherever it may be found. J.G. Ballard throughout his career continued dissecting the ways in which technology promises one thing and delivers something else entirely (cf. Ballard's short stories "The Voices of Time" and "The Intensive Care Unit") and intuitively never lost sight of the fact that the word obsession derives from the Latin root *obsidere*, which means to besiege. In reimagining the maritime misadventures of *Robinson Crusoe* with *Concrete Island*, J.G. Ballard is characteristically relentless in portraying disillusionment with urbanity and a "whole system of comfortable expectations," which somehow never materialize.

Weird fiction need not be sententious, violent, topical, or sexually charged, however. In fact, Edgar Allan Poe considered himself a soldier on the front line against what he termed the “heresy of the didactic,” or the novelist’s obstinate tendency to impart a moral lesson on the reader; Poe, an iconoclast to the last, even rejected the novel in favor of the short story as the ideal vehicle for conveying a “single effect” to the reader’s consciousness. Inhabiting the short story form and largely remaining aloof from secular concerns, weird tales from Edgar Allan Poe and Thomas Ligotti seem to breathe in a timeless dimension, where they luxuriate in a dark beauty and gather strength from symbolism and subtler psychological subversions. The surreal, uncanny effect evoked by such tales may paradoxically be stronger as mood, metaphor, and atmosphere are permitted to gradually erode the reader’s defenses and surreptitiously remove, brick by brick, the partition between the conscious and unconscious. The dreaming world’s sense of fatalism, warped logic, and bizarre ritual can also be imported into the weird tale for heightened dislocation. (cf. George R.R. Martin’s “Sandkings,” Thomas Ligotti’s “The Last Feast of Harlequin,” William Sansom’s “The Long Sheet”)

Considered holistically, the precarious thing about weird fiction is that the reader’s imagination and unconscious mind play an outsize role in galvanizing these psychological effects into existence. Tragically, only a minority of readers are prepared to expend much mental energy deeply engaging with febrile fantasists like Franz Kafka or Bruno Schulz, as the demands on the reader’s imagination are simply too great and the scenarios too absurd to be entertained for extended periods of time. A detachment from everyday events, on the one hand, and a lively imagination, on the other, seem to be prerequisites to countenance the weird tale in the first place. As this dispositional combination is vanishingly rare, weird fiction remains a series of tributaries only occasionally finding broader expression. Sensible readers would understandably prefer their world not be further deformed or mythologized in the fashion of Surrealism and dreams, and that’s perhaps as it should be. After all, the weird tale, at its most effective, catapults the reader past the weird and uncanny into the sublime, where the issues normally considered absolute prove perfectly conditional and more fleeting than dreams.

“Only the impossible has any real charm; the possible has been vulgarized by happening too often.” —Clark Ashton Smith

“In a totally sane society, madness is the only freedom.” —J.G. Ballard

# To Grandmother's House We Go

May-Tzu

Academics consider the Pashtun to be an East Iranian people. Ironically for hundreds of years there have been claims with interesting evidence to support them that the Afghan Pashtun, a faction of today's Taliban, are at least in part one of the ten lost tribes of Israel from more than 2700 years ago. Please see, for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/17/israel-lost-tribes-pashtun> After more than two decades of genealogical research I recently learned that I have 3.8% "Asia (South) Pashtun-related" ancestry, according to the genealogical DNA-testing company LivingDNA. "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!" or descent from the Pashtun.

I deduce by process of elimination that one of my maternal grandmother's eight great grandparents may have been "South Asian." The specific identity of any of Grandmother's antecedents, of an orphan born in 1882, are largely unknown to me. This ancestral DNA probably comes from an unknown great great great grandparent, about  $1/(2^5) \approx 3\%$  of my genetic inheritance, probably on my mother's mother's side. Many of Mother's relatives had unusually broad noses. The few surviving photographs of Grandmother reveal that she had what were to me slightly exotic facial features, including a broad nose. See, for example: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/28384322@N05/29215996923/in/photostream/lightbox/> A Google-image search for Pashtun faces shows that the Pashtun do tend to have broad aboriginal noses.

Regardless of how many genetic markers on your chromosomes are tested by a company, if certain pieces of your DNA aren't in one of their reference populations, their origin won't be identified. E.g., if one of your recent ancestors were an extraterrestrial and if there is none of that particular species of extraterrestrial's DNA in any of the company's reference populations, your alien-hybrid nature will not be indicated in the test results. LivingDNA has 80 reference populations at present. Most other genealogical-DNA testing companies supposedly have about 40.

I think that the description "Pashtun-related" does not precisely equate to Pashtun ancestry per se. Living DNA also uses both the terms "Irish-related ancestry" and "Irish ancestry." The former includes much of Scotland geographically. The latter does not. So the term "X-related" appears to include a wider geographic area than the term it refers to. The reference populations this company has for Asia (South) are Balochistan; Burusho; Indian subcontinent; Kalash; Pashtun; Sindh; and Southern Central Asia.



There are very many ethnicities within the Indian subcontinent. Many ethnically mixed marriages, some polygamous, occurred between Europeans, especially the British, and the people of India in the 18th and 19th centuries. At some point in the past the Chinese also intermarried with the people of India. This contrasts markedly with the traditional tribal endogamy of the people of Afghanistan, including the Pashtun.

One of the “South Asia Pashtun-related” possible ancestral areas indicated on a LivingDNA map is the southern border of Pakistan along the northwest border of India. The ancestry maps indicate up to 10 generations back. But, of course, Pakistan did not exist as a country before 1947. Therefore, this area was a part of India in the 19th. century. The people of northwest India are more genetically admixed with Europeans than those of other areas of India.

It’s far more probable historically that a European male would have married a South Asian female in the early 19th century, than vice versa. It’s also more likely that she would have been a female from what was then northern India, than an Afghan female of the Pashtun tribe. I conclude that my South Asian ancestor was probably a woman from northern India who married a Brit in the early 19th century. Maybe.

Academics consider the Pashtun to be an East Iranian people. Ironically for hundreds of years there have been claims with interesting evidence to support them that the Afghan Pashtun, a faction of today’s Taliban, are at least in part one of the ten lost tribes of Israel from more than 2700 years ago. Please see, for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/17/israel-lost-tribes-pashtun> After more than two decades of genealogical research I recently learned that I have 3.8% “Asia (South) Pashtun-related” ancestry, according to the genealogical DNA-testing company LivingDNA. “Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!” or descent from the Pashtun.

I deduce by process of elimination that one of my maternal grandmother’s eight great grandparents may have been “South Asian.” The specific identity of any of Grandmother’s antecedents, an orphan born in 1882, are largely unknown to me. This ancestral DNA probably comes from an unknown great great great grandparent, about  $1/(2^5) \approx 3\%$  of my genetic inheritance, probably on my mother’s mother’s side. Many of Mother’s relatives had unusually broad noses. The few surviving photographs of Grandmother reveal that she had what were to me slightly exotic facial features, including a broad nose. See, for example: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/28384322@N05/29215996923/in/photostream/lightbox/> A Google-image search for Pashtun faces shows that the Pashtun do tend to have broad aboriginal noses.

Regardless of how many genetic markers on your chromosomes are tested

by a company, if certain pieces of your DNA aren't in one of their reference populations, their origin won't be identified. E.g., if one of your recent ancestors were an extraterrestrial and if there is none of that particular species of extraterrestrial's DNA in any of the company's reference populations, your alien-hybrid nature will not be indicated in the test results. LivingDNA has 80 reference populations at present. Most other genealogical-DNA testing companies supposedly have about 40.

I think that the description "Pashtun-related" does not precisely equate to Pashtun ancestry per se. Living DNA also uses both the terms "Irish-related ancestry" and "Irish ancestry." The former includes much of Scotland geographically. The latter does not. So the term "X-related" appears to include a wider geographic area than the term it refers to. The reference populations this company has for Asia (South) are Balochistan; Burusho; Indian subcontinent; Kalash; Pashtun; Sindh; and Southern Central Asia.

There are very many ethnicities within the Indian subcontinent. Many ethnically mixed marriages, some polygamous, occurred between Europeans, especially the British, and the people of India in the 18th and 19th centuries. At some point in the past the Chinese also intermarried with the people of India. This contrasts markedly with the traditional tribal endogamy of the people of Afghanistan, including the Pashtun.

One of the "South Asia Pashtun-related" possible ancestral areas indicated on a LivingDNA map is the southern border of Pakistan along the northwest border of the India. The ancestry maps indicate up to 10 generations back. But, of course, Pakistan did not exist as a country before 1947. Therefore, this area was a part of India in the 19th. century. The people of northwest India are more genetically admixed with Europeans than those of other areas of India.

It's far more probable historically that a European male would have married a South Asian female in the early 19th century, than vice versa. It's also more likely that she would have been a female from what was then northern India, than an Afghan female of the Pashtun tribe. I conclude that my South Asian ancestor was probably a woman from northern India who married a Brit in the early 19th century. Maybe . . .

# Round-the-Corner Rummy

**Kevin Langdon**

**Number of players:** 2 to 5

**Level of difficulty:** 3

**Objectivity:** 3

**Average playing time:** 45 minutes (short game); 75 minutes (long game)

**Equipment required:** A deck of 52 playing cards (the jokers are removed)

One player is selected to deal first. The deal passes to the left.

The dealer shuffles the cards and deals them one at a time around the table, starting with the player to his left, until each player has seven cards. The remaining cards are placed in the middle of the table to form the stock. One card is turned up from the stock to begin the discard pile.

The player on the dealer's left plays first; thereafter play passes to the left.

On his turn, a player either draws the top card from the stock or picks up the top three cards from the discard pile by playing a card from his hand which connects with the top card of the pile (see Connecting Cards below). If there are fewer than three cards in the pile, he picks up all there are. The top card must be played to the table with the connecting card, and the other two cards are taken up into the player's hand.

A player may play cards from his hand to the table, joining them to either end of a meld already on the table or creating a new meld or melds of at least two properly connected cards each, after drawing a card from the stock or before or after taking cards from the discard pile. The top three cards from the discard pile may also be picked up by playing the top card onto either end of a meld already on the table.

Cards from the discard pile may be picked up by a player only once per turn.

A player completes his turn by discarding one card from his hand to the top of the discard pile, which is fanned out so that all cards are visible. If a player has only one card left in his hand, he may end his turn by passing instead of discarding.

## **Connecting Cards**

Two cards are connected if they are either of the same rank or of the same suit and adjacent ranks (The Ace is adjacent to both the Deuce and the King).

## Melds

Melds are constructed by stringing cards together in such a way that each pair of adjacent cards are connected, subject to the restriction that three cards of the same rank may not appear without other cards intervening. Melds may build up or down in any order and an Ace may be connected to a Deuce on one side and a King on the other.

Thus, ♥K, ♥Q, ♦Q, ♦J, ♣J, ♣Q and ♠3, ♠2, ♠A, ♠K, ♦K are valid melds, while ♣8, ♣9, ♦9, ♠9, ♠10 and ♥4, ♥5, ♦6, ♣6 are not.

Once played to the table, a meld may not be rearranged, though cards may be added to either end. Two separate melds may not be joined into one. No player may play to another's meld.

## Exhausting the Stock

If a player wishes to draw a card from the stock and there are none left, he picks up the discard pile, shuffles it, and draws the top card. If the discard pile has also been exhausted (the preceding player having ended his turn by passing), the player takes a normal turn except that he loses the opportunity to draw or pick up the discard pile.

## Going Out

When a player plays his last card to a meld or to the discard pile, he “goes out” and play stops for the round.

## Scoring

When a player goes out, each player scores one point for each card in a meld of five or more cards and minus one point for each card in a meld of less than five cards. Cards left in a player's hand are not scored. There is no bonus for going out.

Play continues until one player reaches an agreed-upon number of points. If more than one player exceeds the required total in the same round, the player with the highest total wins. If two or more players tie for highest, another round is played.

Thirty points makes a good short game; fifty a somewhat longer one.

# Interview with Rick Rosner by Scott Douglas Jacobsen (Part Ten)

## ABSTRACT

Part ten of eleven, comprehensive interview with Rick G. Rosner. ex-editor for Mega Society (1991-97), and writer. He discusses the following subject-matter: individual-based/subjective, universe-based/objective, and collective-based ethics, *Social Contract Theory* of Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*, 1651), John Locke (*Second Treatise of Government*, 1689), Jean Jacques-Rousseau (*The Social Contract*, 1762), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (*General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, 1851), John Rawls (*Theory of Justice*, 1971), David Gauthiers (*Morals By Agreement*, 1986), and Philip Pettit (*Republicanism*, 1997), with discussion on social ethics in essence “boiling down” to the *Golden Rule*; ethics in journalism with respect to acquisition, collation, and reportage, definition of a “real” journalist, Dr. Steven J. Pinker on the improved conditions for humans, and informational ethics in relation to sociocultural trends; motivation of intellectuals for the good, troubles in academia with description of differing cultural/ethical systems transformed into prescription of cultural/ethical relativism – no scale to ethics or cultures, and things for intellectuals to do in the immediate future for the good; Academia’s two dominant ideological strains of “bland multiculturalism” and “ethical relativism,” and reference back to thinking about the future; mobilization of intellectuals for the good in the long-term; possible prevention of this good; and thoughts on ethics of focus on one person with reflection on the personal desire for fame.

Keywords: collective, ethics, fame, good, informational cosmology, informational ethics, intellectuals, journalism, Mega Society, mind-space, objective, Rick G. Rosner, subjective, writer.

89. Ethics at the individual-based/subjective ( $C_n^E$ ) scale relates to the universe-based/objective scale ( $C^E$ ). Everything might appear abstract. Not so, informational ethics would clarify social ethics too.

Social ethics equates to collective-based ethics. A superset of  $C_n^E$ . A group of individuals with different, similar, or the same ethics within each possible superset. All of this would provide new clarification of the terminology in ethics.

Universe-based ethics means objective; collective-based ethics means universal; individual-based means subjective. More vogue ethics relate to social context and universal ethics such as *Social Contract Theory* of Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*, 1651), John Locke (*Second Treatise of Government*, 1689), Jean Jacques-Rousseau (*The Social Contract*, 1762), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (*General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, 1851), John Rawls (*Theory of Justice*, 1971), David Gauthiers (*Morals By Agreement*, 1986), and Philip Pettit (*Republicanism*, 1997).

**Collectives and individuals can exist out of sync with the greatest possible criterion for ethics ( $C^E$ ) in informational ethics. They might have greater or lesser correspondence in actions and choices with  $C^E$ , and, therefore, more moral or immoral behavior. Degree of moral and immoral dependent upon correspondence with  $C^E$ .**

**Informational ethics clarifies the variant and invariant aspects of ethics. A comprehensive and coherent consideration of ethics. Social ethics pertains to the many-valued middle between individual-based/subjective and universe based/objective ethics.**

**A more prosaic consideration of this issue with one question: what equates to the right action in the immediate social context?**

I suppose that informational ethics in a social context boils down to something like the golden rule – treat others how you’d want to be treated. Often, a tacit or explicitly stated argument for the inconsiderate treatment of others is that the others don’t have fully developed consciousness – they’re dumb or animal-like. However, if consciousness is a technical-not-mystical thing that’s commonly found in systems with wide-angle information-sharing, then you can assume that you can find consciousness in many of the places you’d suspect you could find it – in other people, for instance, and in animals with decent-sized brains.

In an even smaller nutshell – don’t break stuff. That is, don’t unnecessarily destroy things that may be valued by other conscious beings.

But there’s a huge caveat to all of this. Under informational cosmology, consciousness is a not-too-hard-to-achieve technical phenomenon which arises frequently in the universe. In terms of time and space as we experience it, it’s a rare thing – it shows up on this planet, and suppose, in the closest other instance, it emerged 32 light years (and 700 million years ago) on some other planet – but in terms of sheer numbers, it probably shows up a bunch. Figure our universe creates  $10^{20}$  habitable planets per every 20 billion years, and conscious life arises on one half of one percent of such planets. This would mean that conscious life arises somewhere in the universe an average of nearly once a second.

Conscious life could be, in terms of the sheer number of times it arises, fantastically common. Does that make it less magical? Not necessarily, in that consciousness may be linked to the existence of everything. Not that rocks and trees and Gaia are individually conscious, but that matter is information that’s part of the mind/information-space of the (conscious) universe itself. At the same time, our individual consciousnesses are rough-grained and piddly compared to a universe-sized consciousness. And when an individual consciousness ends, the good and bad things experienced within that consciousness may be completely erased. When a factory-farmed pig leads a thoroughly miserable life and then is killed, there’s no vessel in which the pig’s misery lives on. So does the pig’s misery ultimately matter? Do the good and bad we experience ultimately matter? We just don’t know yet.

We can imagine a set of all possible moments in a mind/information space (with informational cosmology suggesting that such moments are the only context in which things can exist). There are strong probabilistic linkages among such moments, experienced as individual consciousnesses' world-lines. Among animals and primitive naturally arising civilizations, death means the end of a world-line. But in more advanced civilizations, there can be technical resurrection and virtual creation – moments of consciousness and world-lines can be artificially created. So death may not exactly be Game Over. (Though it still may be Game Over. What are the odds that some civilization will resurrect virtual pigs in cyberspace?) Given the possibility of artificial resurrection, we can't rule out the possibility that what's experienced in a world-line has some significance beyond that world-line. There's the obvious significance of the good you do in the world lasting beyond your death. And there's the yet-to-be-explored probabilistic math of how mind-space moments relate to each other beyond the natural moment-to-moment linking along world-lines. Looking into this will be complicated and never-ending. In the meantime, try not to be a dick.

**90. Ethics appears more in the fore of the public conversation – for the better. I do not know the precise state of journalism, but I do have many suspicions. Suspicions with respect to acquisition, collation, and reportage from popular news venues. Most venues seem trivial, content with shameless hyperbole and political bias, celebrity gossip, inaccuracies or, worse yet, ignorant and callous; ignorance and a hard edge become the harvesting ground for cynical charlatans, liars, mountebanks, swindlers, and sophists. A phenomenon hastened by continuous motion into a service economy. How else for their jobs to persist? They malignantly grow on ignorance, unconcern for others, and non-production – a modicum of wellbeing from solace at times, but not much else.**

**Possible amusement in consideration of the reality, but more distress because of the deleterious effect on popular discourse. I quote Malcolm X: “The media is the most powerful entity on earth . . . they control the minds of the masses.” We should respect media more. Media should conduct themselves with more wisdom. Not an easy task. It becomes a ubiquitous pattern of inaccurate representation. Not aimed at reportage with high correspondence to *objective truth* (which exists – sorry to burst bubbles), but in apparent intent to create an image of how things can *seem* true.**

**A real journalist seems demonized, wrongly – but expectedly, into obscurity. What do I mean by “real”? “Real” lives next door to “true.” A journalist collects, collates, and summarily reports. Within this framework, a “real journalist” collects, collates, and summarily reports the truth. One might add – for explicit clarity – “. . . without obfuscation, lies, leniencies, allegiances, and onward in the list of foul behaviour in the name of public (or more appropriately self-) service.” I write in such frank tones because of the immense responsibilities and duties concomitant with roles in the media – at all levels, especially for journalists.**

**According to Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, Dr. Steven J. Pinker, we live in the most peaceful times of humankind, which he**

described at length in *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (2011). Other troubles exist and persist (more later).

**Without common diversionary tactics or redirecting attention from particular groups, even excuses for infliction of suffering upon other human beings, terrorist activity from fundamentalist national and religious groups, killing without trial in violation of international human rights, and law, by some countries, organizations, and individuals, and variegated forms of subjection, general thralldom, or objectification of women depending on the history, nation, culture, context, people, and motivations, ethics emerges in each of these particulars and their innumerable interactions – acknowledging far more numerous other instances without explicit statement, how does an information-based perspective in ethics relate to sociocultural trends?**

In addition to the long-term trend of science moving humanity away from the center of the universe, there's a long-term social trend of admitting that an increasingly large sphere of people deserve civil rights, with an implied acknowledgment that different groups – women, minorities, LGBT people – think and feel on a par with members of the most empowered class. Informational cosmology will reinforce that process. It will lead to the mathematization of consciousness and, by 2050 or so, we'll be able to estimate the size of thinking systems. (We'll have a number of pairs of numbers which will reflect the size of an information-space.)

Having a numerical idea of the size of thinking systems and mathematical models of such systems will inform ethical questions. Is it wrong to make a chicken, with its mind-space of size X, suffer? What about a cow? A whale? A robot companion? Is it cruel to deprive someone of his AI brain booster, reducing the size of his mind-space by two-thirds? Should a copy of a deceased person's mind-space, downloaded with 92% accuracy while he was still alive, have legal rights? Should it continue to receive a pension? Should it be able to vote? Should it be able to own things? Should video games be allowed to incorporate AIs which think and feel? How much privacy should be given to individuals' mind-spaces? Who should be allowed to have cyber-immortality? Should reengineering of criminals' mental landscapes to remove criminal tendencies replace punishment?

All these and many more questions about AIs and boosted brains are familiar to anyone who's interested in science fiction. Informational cosmology will help clarify what thinking and consciousness are and will encourage and facilitate the creation of artificial and add-on thinking systems.

Our world will have more and more embedded computing devices – people (who watch TED talks) are calling it “the internet of things,” “ubiquitous computing,” “the world waking up.” Many of these devices will be of sufficient complexity that they can be said to think, which will raise a zillion new questions of ethics and etiquette. And we won't have time to adequately answer these questions before new stuff comes along. We'll be playing catch-up, at least until someone develops MannersMaster, an AI specialist system brain add-on. “MannersMaster has manners, so you don't have to! Order now, and we'll include MannersMaster Junior, absolutely free!”



I imagine a science-fiction story in which every animal above a certain level of complexity has had its intelligence boosted.

*[Editor's note: There is such a science fiction story, though the intelligence boost is natural rather than human-created, Brain Wave, by my late friend Poul Anderson.]*

Their lives become a mix of their old ways of being and new behaviors prompted by their expanded cognition. When one animal kills another, the killer is obligated to absorb and incorporate the life experience – the mental record – of the animal it's killing. (This is also how vampires should work. Nanobots, injected via the vampire's bite, map the victim's brain. The victim lives on, along with a chorus of other victims, in the vampire's brain.) I don't imagine this will really happen – it's just fun to think about. However, eventually we'll have dogs and cats that live for 40 years and have the intelligence of kindergarteners (and little articulated paws for posting their selfies on Instagram for Pets).

**91. You spoke in another venue for motivating intellectuals into a force for good. Difficulties exist in mobilization of intellectuals for the good. Formal, mainstream intellectuals, i.e., a majority of Academia, seem to have two dominant ideological strains: bland multiculturalism and moral relativism. A broad conceptualization would depict these two in generalized, merged terms: difference in cultural/ethical systems transformed into prescription of cultural/ethical relativism – no scale to ethics or cultures. Ethics becomes a human construction; in contradistinction to this ubiquitous academic position, informational ethics necessitates otherwise – described earlier.**

**Together, these have crippled effective ethical calculations and implementations in and from the Academy in many instances. Organizations external to Academia could form, organize, strategize, and implement various plans of action to counteract these rather negative developments. Trouble with this, the majority of funding, support, and advertisement goes towards mainstream academics.**

**If we wish to create a force of good from intellectuals, in and out of the ivory tower, we might need to erase or modify these ideological programs based on their failure to intake large quantities of ethically relevant information and compute this into effective action to solve problems inside and outside the university system. I do not state this with the intention to demean any particular person or group.**

**Either through tacit approval or passive negligence, all – interviewer included – have failed to combat the morally crippling effects of these two ideological strains in conjunction. Intellectuals have more foundational work to complete in this light. What can intellectuals begin to do in the immediate as a force for good?**

I'll say again that people need to think about the changes the future will bring. The future will be increasingly focused on thinking, computing, and sharing information. It could be helpful to start thinking about the risks and benefits of this kind of future before it arrives.

Here's how we might think about and prepare for the future:

If you're in the arts, make stories set in the near-future. Picturing the near-future is hard, because it doesn't exist yet, and it has a lot of moving parts. But people will love you for taking on the future. Look at *Star Trek* – it's been around for 48 years, has spawned a bunch of series and movies, and is universally known and widely beloved, and it does a half-assed job at best of presenting the future.

Acquire scientific and technical literacy. The future's not gonna get *less* filled with high-tech geegaws. Everybody should understand this stuff, so we can distinguish reasonable approximations of the truth from nonsense and don't get fooled by bad actors – sleazy corporations, sneaky government programs – hiding behind lies. C'mon – if you can understand the math of fantasy football, you can track trends in tech.

Sharpen and systematize our predictions of the future. We do a lot of predicting of election and sports results. We don't do much predicting of the future in general. We use Moore's Law to determine how small and cheap and powerful our devices will become. Futurists like Ray Kurzweil have their timelines full of predictions. But we don't have a good overall consensus landscape of how the future might unfold. A consensus landscape would of course be wrong about a bunch of things, maybe most things, but at least it would give us practice at thinking about and getting ahead of possible issues. We're doing a crap job of addressing global warming. Idiots and shysters are still arguing that doing anything about it is playing into some liberal, big-government scam, and those arguments seem as if they'll continue for years to come, even as increasingly obvious effects become apparent. What will happen if that kind of paralysis-by-bullshit is allowed to play out with a faster-moving problem?

Call out cynical stupidity and anti-scientific bias in the media. News channels are full of false balance or false equivalence, with a sensible argument on one side and idiots spouting bullshit on the other, presented as equal in merit. We should be less afraid to call stupidity stupid.

If we don't do the work of visualizing the future, it will be built for us in ways that will be less to our liking.

## **92. What about the long-term? How can those with particular gifts and talents contribute to society?**

John Maynard Keynes said, "In the long run we are all dead." The era of people with exceptional natural talents may be, in the not so long run, over. In some important ways, we're living at the beginning of the end of the world. It's premature to call this the end of human civilization and the beginning of post-human civilization, but it's not *that* premature. The science fiction future is coming. It won't be much about Mars colonies and gyrocopters. The future will be the rise of computation, with everyone being nodes in a network of stuff that thinks.

Natural talents won't translate directly into the world of pervasive computing. The new talented might be people who figure out the most effective ways to team up or merge with technology. The most effective talents change from era to era. My friend Lance Richlin, who's skilled in Old-Masters-style painting and who painted the portrait of me which begins each part of this interview, scrambles to make a living. Four hundred years ago, his painting skill would have made him wildly successful and highly renowned.

[*Editor's note: This painting appeared with the first few parts of the interview in Noesis but is not repeated in each issue.*]

Andy Warhol was a talented illustrator, but he found great success in putting aside illustration to concentrate on the role of celebrity in pop culture. Jeff Koons is an artist-technologist, developing novel high-tech methods to create works of kitsch which acquire grace and grandeur through their sheer size and precision.

In the long run, contributions to society will come from people who find and create creative niches in the computational world. Old niches will remain for traditional artists, writers, performers, but many more new niches will open up as the world becomes more saturated with cheap computing.

There will be room and need for both creators and artistic interpreters of computation-intensive technology. So, once again, my advice is to stay current on technology. And don't be afraid to do stupid stuff – powerful technology brings with it powerful frivolity, which often turns out to have seriously transformative effects – Twitter and other social media as tools against political repression, for instance.

**93. Insofar as ethics concerns individuals' focus on one person, this collective drain of attentional, emotional, and sometimes intellectual resources might work for good or bad, which relates to an astonishing and relatively pervasive celebrity culture devoid of a single scintilla of responsibility – even with a lack of basic knowledge about risks associated with the potential for creation of an idol without grounds. You comment on this celebrity culture within some of the discussion for prior parts of the interview.**

**Most people do not deserve such status because most do not earn it. Further, most fail to heed risks and steward responsibilities implicated within increased attention, admiration, and general expenditure of collective time and resources on them. Entrusted power means privilege; privilege implies responsibility; responsibility proportional to privilege, and therefore responsibility proportional to entrusted power.**

**In point of fact, you desire fame – have for decades. You spend lots of time in this pursuit. As noted, responsibilities and risks come with it. Based on the quotation of Eugene Wigner from me and your return with the quote of Albert Einstein, I return the ball to you with a minor note from *Ideas and Opinions* (1954) by Einstein in print:**

The cult of individuals is always, in my view, unjustified. To be sure, nature — well-endowed, thank God, and I am firmly convinced that most of them live quiet, unobtrusive lives. It strikes me as unfair, and even in bad taste, to select a few of them for boundless admiration, attributing superhuman powers of mind and character to them. This has been my fate, and the contrast between the popular estimate of my powers and achievements and the reality is simply grotesque.

—Einstein, 1954

**I observe near-universal tendencies in others and yourself. What do people want in life? Lots of things. You want to be understood, liked, and respected – in no particular order. Why the desire for fame – even glory? Does this not appear proud or hubristic?**

I agree with Einstein that the structure of fame rests on a rotten foundation, since every characteristic on which fame can be based is the result of luck, even traits that don't seem like special gifts, such as persistence or conscientiousness. But fame being based on luck doesn't imply a moral prohibition against trying to become famous. Many famous people who complain about fame probably secretly or not-so-secretly enjoy its benefits.

Starting when I was young, I wanted fame for at least three reasons – respect, understanding, and a girlfriend. I was nerdy at a time when nerdy wasn't at all cute. I sometimes felt picked-on. Whenever allowed, I stayed inside at recess and read. From constant reading and looking at *Mad* magazine and *National Lampoon* and accidentally being exposed to a book of Victorian pornographic writing (and having cute third- and fourth-grade teachers), I became aware of women's sexual desirability by age nine, which is way too young to do anything about it, especially when you're a geek.

So I wanted to be famous. I didn't want to be picked-on, and I wanted a girlfriend. I figured that my shot at recognition would be through figuring out the universe.

I've always been a little weird. Not so much eccentric-for-attention (though I do like attention) but rather, having my own ways of doing things which make sense to me but seem nuts to everyone else – taking 70 pills a day, going to the gym 5 times a day, having an OCDish preference for turning clockwise. Always figured if I were famous my quirks would be understood and perhaps accepted. Instead of “What's up with that weirdo?” it'd be “Hey, there's that guy who does that stuff.”

I've been pretty successful without being famous. Been married for nearly 24 years. Am a parent of a lovely daughter. Have been a TV writer for more than 25 years, contributing to 2,500 hours of network television and being nominated for six Writers Guild Awards and an Emmy. Am generally thought of by people who know me as not especially a prick or a douche.

I'm past the point of wanting celebrity in order to get a girlfriend. But I still want to be famous. Have had brushes with fame – was in an Errol Morris documentary, have been in three TV pilots which, like most pilots, didn't go anywhere, occasionally get to be in a

news article. None of these has caused me to reach a self-sustaining level of fame, where you get to stay famous by virtue of being famous.

But now, I kind of really want/need to be famous. I lost my longest-lasting, best TV-writing job a few months ago and am screwed when it comes to (easily) getting more TV work (even though I'm a proven writer). Met with an agent at a big agency. He said that he can't represent me unless I have a spec sitcom pilot. But if I take a couple months and write a spec pilot, all that would do, if the agent indeed would rep me, would be to get my stuff into a stack of 200 or so submissions, out of which 1 or 2 percent of the submitters might be hired. I want to stand out from the hundreds of other submitters, and to do that, it would be helpful to have fame. (If I did write a spec pilot, it'd be about a weird genius dad with a normal family who thinks he's half-an-idiot. Write what you know.)

Genius is very popular on TV right now – two flavors of Sherlock Holmes, *The Big Bang Theory*, the team of super-geniuses on *Scorpion*, the genius forensic techs and profilers on every murder show. CBS alone must have more than a dozen actors playing geniuses. So I want to yell, “Yo! Over here, CBS – a real person who's gotten dozens of highest-ever scores on IQ tests, who has a theory of the universe that might not suck, who knows all the issues and behaviors associated with being a weird-ass brainiac, and who's written more TV than all but 60 or 80 people in the city of Los Angeles.”

It's not unreasonable for me to want recognition. You may have noticed that reality TV has made dozens and dozens and dozens of horrible people famous. At least my story is interesting. I'm not some Botox addict getting in a slap-fight at a wine-tasting. (But give me a chance – I'll do that.) Marilyn vos Savant has had a nice 30-year career based on having the world's highest IQ. My scores are higher than hers.

And let's say my theory of the universe is at least partially correct. It could lead to big steps forward in our understanding of the world and our place in it. It could help us figure out how to make our brains work better. If some fame draws some attention to the theory, then good.

If you've slogged through all of the interview up to this point, you should be able to tell that I'm not a BSer. I've spent decades trying to figure out how the universe works (when I haven't been writing Kardashian jokes), and I've come up with some stuff that I think merits some attention. Yeah, there's some “Hey – looka me!” in my fame-seeking. But, after working on a theory for 33 ½ years and having had a bunch of ridiculous mis-adventures, it doesn't make me a douche to want people to check out my stuff.

# Answers to the Puzzles in *Noesis* #204

## Obscure Words and Facts Analogies, II

**Jeff Ward**

1. growing older : senescence :: growing younger : ?
2. man & horse : centaur :: man & goat : ?
3. man & horse : centaur :: lion, goat, & serpent : ?
4. deer : herd :: crows : ?
5. Hilton : Shangri-La :: McCutcheon : ?
6. Yap, Guam : Micronesia :: Madeira, Sao Tiago : ?
7. non-rectangular state flag : Ohio :: non-rectangular flag, member of the UN : ?
8. water surrounded by land : lake :: water surrounded by sea ice : ?
9. dog : canine :: squirrel : ?  
*also back for a second try, because no one got it last time:*
10. dog : canine :: dodo : ?

### ANSWERS

1. juvenescence
2. satyr
3. chimera
4. murder
5. Graustark
6. Macaronesia
7. Nepal
8. polynya
9. sciurine
10. didine

## Another Set of OW&F Analogies

**Werner Couwenbergh**  
wcouwenbergh@gmail.com

1. Parmentier : Julienne :: Carré : ?
2. Fungi : Lichen :: Animals : ?
3. Read : Reckoning :: Wrote : ?
4. Open : Closed :: Dragon : ?
5. Venice : Bruges :: Firenze : ?
6. Depth : Aphorism :: Wit : ?
7. Word : Etymology :: Disease : ?

8. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland : Hole :: Mission: Impossible III : ?
9. Bulb : Sky :: Coin : ?
10. Logic : Sophism :: Interpretation of nature : ?
11. White : Colostrum :: Black : ?
12. Chicken : Egg :: Phenomenology : ?
13. Feather : Scale :: Phenix : ?
14. Absolute : Torino :: Relative : ?
15. Political : Aristotle :: Metaphysical : ?
16. Knot : Alexander :: Child : ?
17. Wise : Esoteric :: Holy : ?
18. Spartan : Tartan :: Charlatan : ?
19. Trivial : Road :: Profane : ?
20. Moon : Earthshine :: Pangea : ?
21. Birds : Archaeopteryx :: Tetrapods : ?
22. Electron : Chandrasekhar :: Neutron : ?
23. Birth : Tokology :: Archery : ?

## ANSWERS

- 1) Batonnet
- 2) Coral
- 3) Creation
- 4) Damsel
- 5) Dresden
- 6) Epigram
- 7) Etiology
- 8) Foot
- 9) Fountain
- 10) Idols
- 11) Meconium
- 12) Ontology
- 13) Ouroboros
- 14) Palermo
- 15) Schopenhauer
- 16) Solomon
- 17) Soteric
- 18) Tarlatan
- 19) Temple
- 20) Thetys
- 21) Tiktaalik
- 22) Tolman-Oppenheimer-Volkoff
- 23) Toxology

# A Third Set of Analogies

**Ken Shea**

1. Jumbo Shrimp : Oxymoron :: No Small Feat : ?
2. Presentation : Exposition :: Reconciled Resolution : ?
3. Far : Ap- :: Near : ?
4. Money Supply : Monetarist :: Favorable Balance of Trade : ?
5. Idealized Image : Eidolon :: Supplemental Work : ?
6. Playbook : Repertoire :: Book of Spells : ?
7. Dilation : Contraction :: Time : ?
8. Tactfully Put : Euphemistic :: Wordy and True Regardless : ?
9. Eyes : Cries :: Hope : ?
10. Exchange of Favors : Quid Pro Quo :: Essential Piece : ?
11. Railroad : Compound :: Smog : ?
12. Sensory Mashup : Synesthesia :: Divine Food : ?
13. Set : Vespertinal :: Rise : ?
14. Government Seizure : Eminent Domain :: Magician's Swipe : ?
15. Legato : Staccato :: Bound : ?
16. Eye : Horse :: Hurricane : ?
17. Male : Female :: Avuncular : ?
18. Quantifies Risk : Actuary :: Engraves Stones : ?
19. Official Journal : Gazette :: Night Journal : ?
20. Hearsay : Anecdotal :: Holy Mediators : ?

## ANSWERS

- 1) Litotes
- 2) Recapitulation
- 3) Peri-
- 4) Mercantilist
- 5) Parergon
- 6) Grimoire
- 7) Space/Length
- 8) Tautologic/Pleonastic
- 9) Scope
- 10) Sine Qua Non
- 11) Portmanteau/Blend
- 12) Ambrosia
- 13) Matutinal
- 14) Legerdemain
- 15) Detached
- 16) Latitudes
- 17) Materteral
- 18) Lapidary
- 19) Noctuary
- 20) Sacerdotal



# The Existential Threat

**Kevin Langdon**

The greatest existential threat to humanity is humanity.

The human population of this planet already exceeds the sustainable carrying capacity of the earth by a factor of at least 3 and is expected to increase by another 25% by the middle of this century. In my lifetime the population of the earth has more than tripled (I'm 76).

The impact of humanity on our planet has two aspects:

1. The load per person; this can be reduced by environmentally-responsible action on the part of governments, businesses, and consumers;
2. The number of persons; no matter how we clean up industrial processes there's still a load on the planetary ecosystem and the physical environment it depends on, and it is compounded with increased population—but this basic fact is being ignored by governments, industry, the scientific community, and the media. This is a disgrace.

In addition, there is a major decline in diversity. This can be expected to slow evolution, reduce the ability of life to adapt to changing conditions, and limit opportunities to make use of many species in medicine, chemistry, and agriculture. And important natural balances are being upset by the nature and scale of human activity on the earth.

China only permitted one child for most families in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century but now enforces a much stricter population policy. And other countries aren't addressing the problem at all. It's true that increased wealth tends to lead to lower birth rates, but in much of the world there is widespread poverty, poor resources to prevent unintended conception, and explosive population growth which outstrips all efforts to better economic conditions.

Human activity seriously threatens to create an environment no longer friendly to human life. It has already led to the greatest mass extinction in many millions of years. Human Pollution, depletion of nonrenewable resources, and significant human-caused changes in both local and global climate threaten life on earth, of which we are a part. None of this is being taken seriously enough.

I predict a catastrophic breakdown (or breakdowns) before the end of this century. Large populations will be unable to stay afloat in the face of climate disruption, toxic pollution, agricultural failure on a major scale, increasing scarcity of natural resources and rising prices, a great increase in interpersonal and intertribal conflict., and the increasing availability of weapons of mass destruction. Only when tens or hundreds of millions have died will there be a serious movement toward a sane population policy. Or maybe it will take billions. . . .

And it is a distinct possibility that action will come too late to save most or all of the earth's human population.

# What Will Our Children Say?

**Chuck Sher**

The last year or two has seen an unprecedented number of natural disasters in the USA: major hurricanes and floods back to back, tornadoes ripping through the south, the most destructive wildfires in California's history, record-breaking, subzero cold in the east and Midwest, some of the hottest years on record, etc. And overseas the rest of the world has suffered from ever-increasing drought, desertification, melting glaciers, typhoons, flooding, etc.

*All these phenomena are not unrelated.* They are all part of a larger pattern of climate change. According to the vast majority of climate scientists, these are the beginning effects of climate change that will, without question, get much worse in the foreseeable future. For the next 12 years, according to the latest report from the US government, we have the chance to prevent the worst case scenarios from coming to pass. After that, it will be out of our hands. (Look up David Wallace-Wells on youTube for state-of-the-art information.)

It is easy to go into denial about the catastrophic nature of what humankind faces. But we need to ask ourselves one serious question: What will our children and grandchildren say about us 30 or 50 years from now? Will they curse us for willfully ignoring the clear signs of impending destruction of a livable planet for them? This question requires our active attention.

## Letters to the Editor

**Ken Shea 3/7/18**

The figures vary but methane is around 30 times worse as a heat-trapping greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Fluorinated gases (hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexafluoride, and nitrogen trifluoride) are also very detrimental to the environment. The truly bad ones (high GWP, global warming potential, gases) stick around longer, do more damage, and aren't sequestered like carbon dioxide. Some of the fluorinated gases are literally 20,000 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping heat and swirl around for thousands of years in the atmosphere. Fortunately, though, the rogues' gallery of high GWP gases aren't being pumped into the atmosphere as quickly as carbon dioxide.

<https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases>

### **Ken Shea 11/17/18**

I found myself morosely nodding along to your piece in the last *Noesis* ("World Human Population Doubling Time") on overpopulation, escalating geopolitical tensions, and inevitable wars over dwindling natural resources.

This neoliberal crusade of privatization and unfettered despoliation of the planet plows ahead...

"Nothing short of compulsory limitations on births will halt the march of the human lemmings over the population cliff, but there's no political will to do it."  
(Kevin L.)

A plague in this interconnected world or tragic miscalculation among nuclear-armed nations would certainly thin the herd, but I think you mean "benevolently" or "innocuously" halt the march.

"I foresee big trouble for humanity before the end of this century." (Kevin L.)

I agree with your last sentence - brace for impact.

P.P.S., I might submit a piece in an upcoming *Noesis* on the ethics of having/ forgoing children a la David Benatar's "Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming Into Existence". I had considered doing so earlier but thought the topic too grim.

Perhaps the topic is still too grim for general consumption...

### **David Seaborg 12/21/18**

Thanks, Kevin--concise and well done. i now conclude mandatory restrictions won't happen and won't work, so we need economic incentives, including bettering the lot of the poor and a good tax system rewarding less kids. Mandatory can work in places like China, not Western nations, we must be real. Problem is, better the poor and they have less kids, but then each child has a greater environmental impact. Not sure how to solve that one. Will think on that.

### **Ken Shea 2/26/19**

1) Neoliberalism aligns more closely with the Right in the United States (see below). Disregard the fact that Adam Smith was skeptical of the businessman.

From <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoliberalism> :

Neoliberalism or neo-liberalism is the 20th-century resurgence of 19th-century ideas associated with laissez-faire economic liberalism and free market

capitalism. Those ideas include economic liberalization policies such as privatization, austerity, deregulation, free trade and reductions in government spending in order to increase the role of the private sector in the economy and society. These market-based ideas and the policies they inspired constitute a paradigm shift away from the post-war Keynesian consensus which lasted from 1945 to 1980.

2) On the eugenics issue, the thing to do is probably positive eugenics since negative eugenics caused such controversy in the last century - Hitler was inspired by the negative eugenics programs in the United States, which sterilized the feeble-minded, insane, and criminals, who were all said to be society-corroding "defectives." Sterilizations and marriage prohibitions for the feeble-minded (IQ < 70) were apparently de rigueur in certain parts of the United States during the so-called Progressive Era. All told, these sterilization programs didn't have too widespread an impact:

"In the end, over 65,000 individuals were sterilized in 33 states under state compulsory sterilization programs in the United States, in all likelihood without the perspectives of ethnic minorities."

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compulsory\\_sterilization#United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compulsory_sterilization#United_States)

The fact that today women in Niger and Somalia have on average 7 and 6 children, respectively, is problematic. I guess explicit anti-dysgenics is considered off the table at this point. You can do certain things with policy to practically bring about the same effect, however, without ever stating the effect you're striving for explicitly.

In my original email, though, I perhaps should have added that David Benatar analyzes things from more of a pain/pleasure perspective and whether choosing to have a child is really in that future child's best interests. David Benatar is a moral philosopher who doesn't seem to be overburdened with eugenics considerations. You can read more about it here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antinatalism#David\\_Benatar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antinatalism#David_Benatar)

**Kevin Kihn 7/4/19**

I took a gander at your website and enjoyed your article on climate change. You seem to cover all the relevant facts in a lucid manner; I appreciated the way you didn't try to stampede the reader toward some foregone conclusion or panic me over how many parts per million there are of CO2 in the atmosphere and We're All Gonna Die, yet didn't gloss over the fact that we have some serious problems.

Also, the article you posted about the decline of industrial civilization struck me as pretty much on the mark.