



## Reg Rep Rap

by Dave Stubbs



Here we are in December, and, once again, we find ourselves in the midst of that great annual event, the 'Commercialization of Christmas'. Everywhere, we are inundated with a myriad of messages, either welcoming us to the 'holiday season' (since when did 'holiday' become a season?), or wishing us 'season's greetings' (which season would that be, Winter or Holiday?) and 'happy holidays' (what holidays? Two days for those of us employed by someone else, none for the rest of us).

Throughout it all, we are bombarded with words and images intended to convince us that this is a time to spend time with (and money on) friends and family (much of it done with money we don't have, on things that the recipients would not buy themselves).

Above all, we are told that we must be happy, and that not to do so is to somehow miss what Christmas is all about. Typically, Christmas is portrayed as a joyous occasion spent exchanging gifts and enjoying a super-sized meal with friends or members of the extended family (almost always white), images intended to have us imagine what Christmas might have been like, or recall what it actually was like, for us when we were children.

Unfortunately, we all grow older, and, for the vast majority of us, Christmas today is not like it was when we were kids. Today, often we find ourselves living on our own or far removed from family and friends, and Christmas for many has become a time of sadness and loneliness rather than joy. The Christmas we experience does not measure up to what society is telling us Christmas should be for us, and we feel that we are somehow 'missing out' on what presumably everyone else is enjoying.

The truth, of course, is that everyone's Christmas experience is different, and few of us enjoy the experiences portrayed by the marketing machine. To survive December and all the Christmas hype associated with it, we each have to ignore, as best we can, all of the advertising, decide what 'Christmas' experience is right for us, and be comfortable with that decision. There is no 'right' way to 'do' Christmas; it is what we chose to make it. Merry Christmas. ☺

## Leo's Lot

by Leo Jung



*Begining in March, Speakers Night will change to the first Wednesday of each month. Thanks for the suggestion!!*

### January 27, 2010: Dr. Jamie Scott, MD PhD, Simon Fraser University.

Jamie is one of the top immunologists in the world, holds the Canada Research Chair in Molecular Immunity, and runs one of the six top HIV vaccine research labs in the world. She will discuss her work and answer questions on vaccines in general, for diseases such as cancer, HIV, and others.

### February, 2010: No Speaker in February

February meeting cancelled, due to limited access during the Olympics.

### March 3, 2010: John Meier, Book Collector

John is an expert who collects books awarded with the Canadian Governor General Award for Fiction & Poetry. He visits universities around the country, and brings his unique collection along with a variety of authors who have received the Governor General Award. ☺

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## Editor's Letter

by Lisa Le Blanc



*"The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle."*

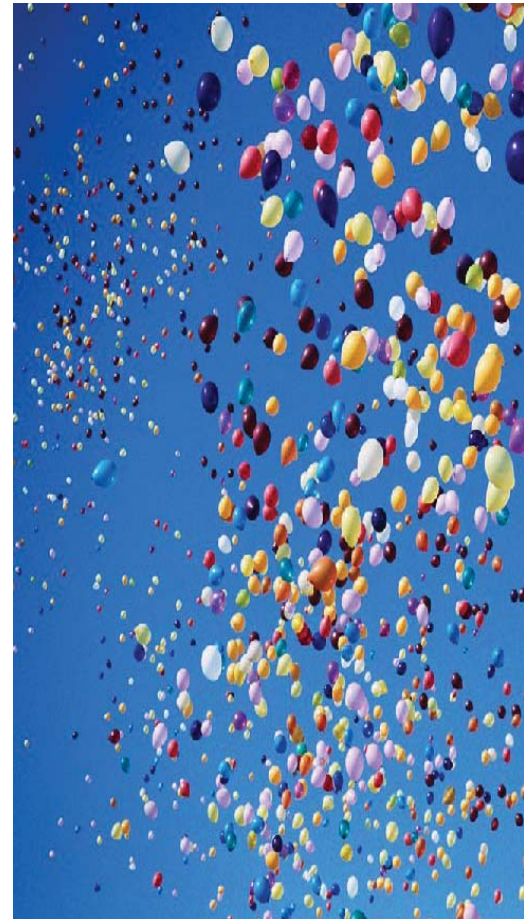
*David Hume, Philosopher (1711-1776)*

According to philosopher, David Hume, our 'self' is merely contrived out of a collection of our own perceptions. So if life is a living art, as such, it is subject to change without notice, due to opinion or perception or unseen forces. In this issue of *Lumens* Brian says, *Huh??* to uselessness while Don comments on the continuity of generations before. Allen's article, *Selfishness*, does stir up some thoughts. We'd be happy to hear yours.

I find myself pondering the upcoming AGM where we will consider the past year and plan for the future. We are not only at the end of 2009, but also at the end of a decade. Many call it the "Oh, Oh Decade." We witnessed one fall after another. Take time to reflect on our world and to consider the beginning of a new year. A fresh start. A time of new hopes and good intentions. Let's make the best of it. Dave's note will hit home with many. Let's hope that this new year is a safe and happy one for us all.

Time to dust off your fountain pen and get those thoughts sorted out and onto paper. We're looking for jokes, puzzles, quotes, quirks, rants, raves and any other random thoughts worth discussing. Please forward any submissions to: [editor@lumens.ca](mailto:editor@lumens.ca) or write to *Lumens* with any brainstorm or ideas.

*Looking forward to hearing from you,  
Lisa*



## Here's another fine mess you've gotten me into...




*Thanks to Gerri for sending this in:*

Grabbed from the Ottawa Mensa newsletter. Too good to pass up:

According to this webpage, male Mensans are more likely to have abundant and thick body hair:

<http://www.aolhealth.com/healthy-living/longevity/body-image?feeddeeplinkNum=0>

The blurb to the right of the image on slide #1 of the webpage explains it thus:

"A study published by psychiatrist Dr. Aikarakudy Alias concluded that men with extraordinarily high IQ's generally had thicker, more abundant body hair than their less intelligent counterparts. He also found that the smartest members of Mensa (a high-IQ society) tended to have thick hair on their backs, as well as their chests." 

## Letters to the Editor

### Hello

I have been a member of MENSA International for about 5 years but I am trying to get in touch with the MENSA chapter in Vancouver since I will be moving there next April. I am moving on my own and I don't know anyone in the city. Therefore, I am trying to contact different organizations to meet new people.

I met some Mensa members in Victoria about 3 years ago. They were all very nice, but I am glad to see there are many more group gatherings, events and activities in Vancouver organized by MENSA.

Please let me know if it is possible to join these group meetings if I am a member of MENSA International. To tell you a little bit about me, I am from Monterrey, Mexico, 30 years old, single and have just been granted permanent residency to your country.

I hope it is possible to meet. Vancouver is a lovely city but I must admit, I am very nervous about not knowing anyone there yet. Still, I am sure things will work out for the best :)

Happy Holidays!!  
Norma Yuridia Morales López  
MENSA International Member

### Dear Editor

I'm hoping to get in touch with anyone active in Mensa in Vancouver who:

1. Remembers Janissa and Craig Wagner from 20+ years ago (I saw Elizabeth's name in one of the older newsletters, but couldn't find an e-address for her, and Ted briefly replied to an e-mail as he was boarding a cruise ship, so I'm unlikely to hear from him soon),
2. Can give me information on how active your younger members are (our son may be relocating there soon, and our daughter is already at SFU).

Could you please forward this to anyone who may be able to help?

Thank you!  
Craig Wagner  
cwagner@his.com

## Notice of AGM

Saturday, March 13, 2010

*Please join us at the  
Annual General Meeting*

to be held at 4:30 pm on  
Saturday, March 13, 2010

Potluck dinner to follow.  
Please bring a dish of your  
choice.

Sheila Gair's home  
14372 Ridge Crescent  
Surrey, BC

## That's a good idea, Ollie, tell me that again...

A cowboy appeared before St. Peter at the Pearly Gates.

*Have you ever done anything of particular merit?* St. Peter asked.

*Well, I can think of one thing,* the cowboy offered.

*On a trip to the Black Hills out in South Dakota, I came upon a gang of bikers who were threatening a young woman.*

*I directed them to leave her alone, but they wouldn't listen.*

*So, I approached the largest and most heavily tattooed biker and smacked him in his face.*

*I kicked his bike over, ripped out his nose ring, and threw it on the ground.*

*Then I yelled, 'Now, back off!! Or I'll kick the stuff out of all of you!'*

St. Peter was impressed, *When did this happen?*

*Just a couple of minutes ago...*



# The Stone of Destiny

by Don Graham

My father, David Graham, was an ardent Scottish Nationalist who wrote and spoke extensively and passionately on the subject. He was a skilled and articulate writer and public speaker, and I have what I believe to be a complete archive of his published writings.

I have a vivid recollection of an incident that took place around 1950, when I was about 12 years old. We lived in Newport-on-Tay, in the north-east corner of Fife, an area known as the East Neuk. A couple of thousand years before, the area had a number of Roman settlements, and some of the local names are of Roman origin, including a picturesque bit of wilderness called Chesterhill, the “Chester” part of the name being derived from the Latin word “castra,” meaning a camp.

One day a hole about 30 cm across appeared in a patch of lawn in our front yard, and as the edges crumbled and fell into the hole, the opening became larger and larger, exposing a huge hollow the size of a small house, with water at the foot of it. Apparently this had been an old Roman well that someone centuries later had covered over with logs or thick planks so that houses could be built around it. Eventually the wood rotted, and exposed the well. It took something like 20 truckloads of dirt to fill the hole. Since we had all walked over that spot every day for years, it is a miracle that no-one had fallen into it.

654 years earlier, a large rock called the Stone of Destiny (also known as the Stone of Scone – pronounced “Scoon”), its origins lost in antiquity, and with heavily symbolic value to the Scots as the seat upon which its monarchs had traditionally been crowned, had been forcibly removed from Scotland by England’s King Edward the First, and placed into a wooden chair called St. Edward’s Chair in Westminster Abbey in London, upon which many English and British monarchs have since been crowned.

Around the same time as the hole appeared in our yard, four Scottish students broke into Westminster Abbey, liberated the Stone, and brought it back to Scotland.

Although no-one had actually said the Stone was in Scotland, it was the ob-



*Coronation Chair*

vious place to look. As a prominent Scottish Nationalist, my father was, of course, a prime suspect. One day there came the inevitable knock at the front door. My father answered, with me standing behind him, looking past to see and hear what was going on. It was a large, heavy-set middle-aged police sergeant with a tall thin young constable accompanying him. The sergeant harrumphed, put on his best official voice, and a conversation took place, somewhat as follows:

Sergeant: “Are you Mr. Graham?”

My father: “I am.”

Sergeant: “Do you know who stole the Stone of Destiny?”

My father: “I do.”

At this point, both the sergeant and the constable became instantly alert, and the sergeant’s notebook came out, with his pencil poised over it. The conversation continued.

Sergeant: “Well? Who was it?”

My father: “King Edward the First.”

Both the sergeant and the constable looked distinctly startled, then as if they

were about to explode as they suppressed their laughter. With the gravity of the moment disrupted, the questioning continued in a noticeably different tone, as the sergeant tried to maintain his composure.

Sergeant: “Hmph, well, do you know where it is now?”

My father: “Do you see that hole over there?”

Sergeant (craning his neck to look at it): “Ye-e-e-es.”

My father: “It’s at the bottom of the hole.”

The sergeant took a few cautious steps towards the hole, briefly looked into it from behind the safety barrier that had been placed around it, came back, looked quickly to the left and to the right, then leaned conspiratorially towards my father with the back of his hand shielding his mouth as if to thwart eavesdroppers, and said, straight-faced, “Bloody well keep it there!”, folded his notebook, gestured with his head to the constable, who hadn’t said a word during the entire exchange, to follow him, and left. That was the end of the police investigation into my father’s possible involvement.

I think he was secretly hoping that the police would send a crew to dig through the water, mud, and dirt, and waste a lot of manpower on looking for the Stone, which had in fact never been anywhere near the hole. He later told me that Ian Hamilton, one of the students who had retrieved the Stone from Westminster Abbey, had told him that several duplicates of the Stone had been made, and that the one eventually taken back to England after an anonymous phone call told authorities where to find it was not the original, so that the stone on which the current Queen was seated during her Coronation is a forgery. I have no way of knowing whether or not this is true, but it seems unlikely.

Since that time, the Stone has been repatriated to Scotland, with the understanding that it may be borrowed any time it is needed for a Coronation in England.

But I’ll never forget my personal connection with the event.

## Huh??



Many years ago, I think in New York, some joker came up with a wonderful machine. It consisted of a small black box with a switch on the side. When you pressed the switch up, the lid opened, a hand came out and pushed the switch down again, and returned to the box. The lid shut. You were now exactly where you started.

At the time I thought that this was a splendid piece of technology. I still do. I thought that I should never see something quite so entertainingly useless. Until now. Apparently we now have a power-producing windmill on Grouse Mountain.

This has occasioned a lady to write to the Vancouver Sun. She thinks the windmill is quite wonderful: it will show the world that Vancouver is saving the planet, blah, blah, blah. But, she has one serious reservation: we cannot see it after sunset. Neither can the world. She has a solution: use some of the power it produces to floodlight the damned thing.

My technically with-it friends tell me that a generator is merely an electric motor turned by external means. So, I suggest that we could use some excess power from the Burrard Dirty Power Plant to both floodlight the beast and turn its blades should the wind not be blowing that night. Good, solid idiocy.

We are urged to unplug our TV sets and computers while the powers (good word) that be string a grotty little row of lights across the Lions Gate Bridge, another around the rim of B.C. Place, and floodlight the underside of the Cambie Street Bridge. All on the public dollar.

Today's Sun, a paper so plugged into the Chicken Little Theory that it let David Suzuki play at being editor, has as its leading article the need to establish a museum for the city's discarded neon signs. This should be in some public place where they can be seen, admired, and lit, presumably by methane from the Green Party.

I am not sure about the editor of the Sun's letter page. On good days I think he is an elderly grouch, not unlike myself, who hopes to escape his treadmill by publishing the silliest letters he gets. On bad days I think she is just plain stoopid as Victor Borge used to say.

A while ago there was a letter from a woman who was saving the planet by turning off the tap while she cleaned her teeth. Why? Where does she think the water goes, other than to the ocean?

Vancouver is not short of water. It is short of water storage because successive governments have put their collective elbow up their common bottom and failed to build reservoirs. We do not even have to pump the stuff to most of the Lower

Mainland. Water falls from the sky here in far greater quantities than the citizenry could possibly use. In winter it even stores itself as snowpack.

Out here in the valley we spend a lot of money raising banks to keep the Fraser River in. I should have been more impressed if that lady had promised not to urinate during August. That would have shown commitment. ☹



## To Members of Vancouver Mensa

Our treasurer Martin Ramshaw has asked to be released from his position. According to our Bylaw 8.1 *"in the case of interim resignation of Executive Committee member the Loc-Sec shall be required to assume those responsibilities on an interim basis until an alternate individual can be assigned or elected"*

As Loc-Sec I have signing authority with the treasurer and so I had to act quickly. I asked Gerri Sombke, a former Geographical Rep., if she would please assume the position of treasurer and she has agreed. We will get the bank account transferred to a branch more accessible to us both.

Sincerely,  
Sheila Gair, Vancouver Loc Sec.

# Selfishness - A Pun

by Allen Peabody

Of all the ideas that philosophers have contemplated, perhaps the most confounding is the very notion of 'self'. Intuitively, the existence of the self is obvious: in the normal course of life, we unthinkingly ascribe it to ourselves and to others. But the philosophical distinction here concerns the 'identity' self (i.e. the internal self, or the mind), rather than the physical self, or corporeal manifestation. And in the discourse of epistemology and metaphysics, the notion of self is disputed. Many philosophers have weighed in on this debate, and several theories have been offered. I recently had occasion to ruminate on this, and I shall discuss two classic theories here.

Seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method* (1637), argued for an identity-self distinct from the physical. He rationalized that a 'substantial' self must exist (his *cogito, ergo sum* argument); in other words, that an essential self exists but in a non-physical form. (The term substance, in this context, does not denote physical matter, but rather an "essence," devoid of materiality.) This notion was a critical premise in Descartes' argument for the existence of the soul, an entity that supersedes the body and mortality, and his argument for the existence of God.

In contrast, David Hume argues in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) that

a non-physical self does not exist; that the notion of such is merely a fantasy, a reification constructed by humans to explain the phenomenon of sequentially perceiving and processing information. In other words, Hume believes the physical body in all its corporeal properties, and nothing more, fully comprises the human being.

Descartes undertook his examination of the self with a thought experiment. While not a skeptic by orientation, he derived his conclusion of a non-physical self by deconstructing his accumulated 'knowledge' with uncompromising scepticism. Understanding that it was impossible to individually evaluate every proposition he took to be knowledge, Descartes contrived a means test, whereby he evaluated the means by which various categories of knowledge are ascertained—the testimony of others, his own empirical observations, his faculties of reason—and evaluated the reliability of those means. For any means found to be capable of producing false knowledge, i.e., if it is shown that it is possible for said means to produce any incident of faulty knowledge, Descartes would then reject all knowledge dependent on that means: "It is the part of prudence not to place absolute confidence in that by which we have even once been deceived."

Descartes thus discarded all his *learned*

knowledge by assuming his secondary sources – the writings and teachings of scholars and theologians – were fallible. Then, turning to his firsthand *empirical* knowledge (knowledge derived from sensory experience), he proved senses could be fooled, and since their fallibility undermined his conception of the physical world, he rejected all empirically derived knowledge as unreliable. By extension, this finding of doubt in all physical phenomena rendered his own physicality dubitable. (Importantly, Descartes was not suggesting he actually doubted his physical existence. Rather, he was accepting that empiricism had the property of fallibility, therefore physical phenomena could not have the property of certainty.)

Left with only his *cognition*, Descartes acknowledged he is imperfect, and prone to errors of reason, of dreaming, and even subject, as any human being, to delusion. Moreover, he could be deceived by God: presumed rational ideas, he proposed, such as mathematical or geometrical facts, may be a falsities implanted in his cognition by God. (This argument does not require a deity; a nontheist could similarly argue that one can be deceived by an evil genius, or a social conspiracy). Therefore, Descartes rejects all knowledge derived by his faculties of reason.

Ultimately, this skeptical investigation leads to the only knowledge he can claim



# Selfishness - A Pun (continued from page 6)

by Allen Peabody

with certainty: “I think, hence I am.” In other words, in order to question the existence of oneself, he argues, one must in fact exist; this is indubitable.

And so Descartes has struck a property that applies to the self identity, but does not apply to the physical body: the existence of ‘self’ is indubitable, but physical phenomena are not; and if the identity self and the physical self do not have exactly the same properties, they must be distinct entities (Descartes’ Dualism). This completes Descartes’ argument for a non-physical self: if all physical manifestations can be doubted, but one’s existence is indubitable, then one’s self (i.e. identity) is not a physical manifestation. Essentially, Descartes is arguing that his cognitive self exists separately from, albeit intimately connected to, his physical body; a sort of homonucleic, or ‘man at the centre’ self. And this construct allows for the existence of an immortal soul.

Hume would agree up to the point that there is no such thing as a physical identity-self. But he would not accept Hume’s ‘substantial’ or non-physical self. In fact, Hume’s reasoning allows for no concept of ‘self’ at all. This is not as nuanced a notion as it sounds. He simply asserts that ‘what you see is what you get’; a person is essentially a changing, corporeal manifestation – one that thinks, emotes, and has a concept of ‘self’, but that self-identity is merely an inevitable construction of our psychological wiring. His conclusion follows from his strict empiricism. To Hume, knowledge can only be derived from ‘impressions’ (i.e. perceived by the senses): there “must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea,” he asserts. In other words, any conception of an *entity* must correspond to an enduring, tangible thing – otherwise, it’s just imaginary, and therefore not real. While a person may have an imagined conception of a ‘self’, the only empirical information he or she has is an unending stream of experiences, not one enduring impression. And Descartes’ idea of ‘self’, Hume would argue, fails this empirical test: “From what impression cou’d [Descartes’] idea be deriv’d?” Hume says this question is unanswerable, and therefore Descartes’



David Hume

idea of self is impossible.

Hume has thus deduced that one’s world consists merely of ongoing perceptions of transpiring events (a ‘stream of consciousness’). He offers, as an analogy, that in a theatrical production, the only ‘reality’ involved is the movements of the actors on the stage, “perceptions that ... pass, repass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations.” The ‘play’, or the story those actors’ behaviours portray, is merely a reification, an identity ascribed to those movements by the audience. When the show is over, the ‘play’ does not disappear – it simply was never a real thing to begin with. Similarly, Hume argues, one’s idea of Self is an identity ascribed to the stream of perceptions, or ‘impressions’, that one experiences.

Hume’s notion that a ‘self’ is merely an ascribed identity, rather than a real property, is a compelling contrast to Descartes’ dualism, but its counterintuitive nature leaves one unsatisfied.

Descartes’ dualism is also perplexing. His argument that the self is non-physical, and therefore has no spatial or temporal properties, renders it un-connectable to the physical world we seem to inhabit. He presents Self as an enduring thing, “nothing but thought [needing] no place to exist nor any other material thing.” But the idea that this self processes our perceptions, yet is

severed from our physical interface with the world, does not explain how physical sensations inform our cognition. He offers in a later work, *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), that the pineal gland in the brain is responsible for connecting the physical with the non-physical. But this is a baffling explanation, possibly rendered in response to pressure from his royal patrons rather than by intellectual inspiration. And no one since has provided a satisfactory explanation for this gap in Dualist thinking.

Moreover, the very validity of Descartes’ argument can be assailed. Descartes argues that the identity self (i.e., the mind) must be non-physical because all things physical can be doubted while the existence of the mind is *a priori* indubitable. But he overlooks an important nuance: “doubt” is connected to the subject, not the object, of doubt. In other words, all Descartes can really assert is that *he is capable* of doubting one thing, and *incapable* of doubting another. But this presence or lack of doubt in the subject does not confer a property on the object; it merely speaks to the cognitive capacity of the subject. When Descartes’ premises are considered in this sense, his conclusion does not follow logically from them. The revised argument, ‘I am able to doubt my physical manifestation, but I am unable to doubt that I think, therefore my ‘self’ (i.e. my mind) is not a physical manifestation’, is logically invalid. The best Descartes can validly conclude from these premises is that his own cognitive abilities differ when contemplating his body and contemplating his thoughts. (This idea is fully developed by Elliot Sober in *Core Questions in Philosophy*.)

It is not surprising both Descartes’ and Hume’s arguments are imperfect. It is typical of philosophical questions that disparate, well-developed theories are irreconcilable. Other philosophers have refined these conceptions, and some have proposed altogether different theories concerning the mind-body problem. I welcome yours!

allen.peabody@mensacanada.org  
(References and full citations for this article are available on request).

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