The Bat of Minerva

Shea brings philosophy to television

by Peter Shea

Last year, my weekly philosophy show, The Bat of Minerva, received an operating grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission. The Scholars' Forum served as fiscal agent for that grant, and asked for some reflections on the history of the show and the ideas behind it.

When I first visited the offices of Metro Cable Network in Minneapolis four years ago, I had no intention of producing a regular regional cable show. I had done some educational and training video in philosophy years ago, and had just finished a two-year stint producing and directing a children's philosophy show for the cable station in Saint Paul. That show, called "Philosophy Jams at Dayton's Bluff," was part of an effort to introduce philosophy into an inner city school. I produced about an hour of usable tape a week featuring small groups of kids engaging in philosophic discussion. The idea of the show was that kids would get excited about being on television and that excitement would carry over to their classroom work in philosophy. So, I had had some experience with video production, in a very small way.

On an impulse, I asked about rates and discovered that the late-night, cheap rate started at midnight, and that I could have the half hour from 12:30 to 1 A.M. Thursday nights for only $500 a year. This seemed to me an incredible bargain. Metro Cable Network reaches half the homes in the seven county metro area, or about 900,000 households. Half of the televisions in the metro area are on at midnight. And, across the cable spectrum, there isn't much going on after midnight. Further, the agreements that established the cable franchises placed Metro Cable Network at 6 on the television dial, so that anyone channel surfing through the major networks will encounter its programming. I had visions of bringing philosophy, or maybe philosophy for children, to a really substantial audience. I called Kristen Eide-Tollefsen, who owns The Book House in Dinkytown, and asked if the store could pay the first year's bill. She instantly agreed, and I had a show.

Borrowing a studio and a hideous fake palm tree from a local school, the initial working group (Julie Daniels, Diana Dean, and I) taped our first shows as free-form conversations about philosophy and video and service and motherhood and as many big things in life as we could touch in half an hour. Sometimes we had professional camera help; sometimes we used kids and relatives. (At one memorable taping session, the camera somehow got fixated on Julie's legs for an endless time—probably increasing our audience share substantially.) Later on, as problems developed with the studio arrangements, the show moved to my living room; we taped in front of a blue bedsheets, under two 500-watt construction lamps. Sometimes the sheet fell down midway through; sometimes the dog had a walk-on part. I was able to borrow and buy some good equipment of a previous generation: an old camera with switch problems, a couple of heavy 34-inch tape decks, a tripod, and a mike. Our quality was bearable: the faces stayed in focus and the sound was clear.

My major problem was finding camera people, since I couldn't pay anything, and I had to schedule programs in my spare time. I tried various solutions: drafting my kids, calling on faithful volunteers, paying folks from church to run the camera. Eventually, I decided that the show could only survive if I could do it without help; arrangements even for free help were taking up too much time. So I stole an idea from Twin Cities Public Television's Portrait

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Editorial Notes....

It would not be possible to launch a new year of *The Forum* without a reflection on the events of September 11. In fact, this editorial is the third reflection I have written for this publication and I am intrigued by how much my thinking on the horrific events and their aftermath keeps changing. These are unsettling times, in which we are constantly readjusting to changing circumstances.

My first editorial stressed the need to get back to business; to right the economic machine; to go on with our lives as though nothing had happened, which is often the reaction of people to an unexpected death. We want to complete the plans we already have in place.

My second editorial began to capture some of the irrevocable ways in which our lives have changed. I liken that second week to a funeral in which we began to recognize and mourn the great loss we had suffered. The use of rituals (prayer services, God Bless America) helped us recognize and deal with our loss. But I found that I and many others had a private sense of depression.

In the third week, I began to reflect on how little things had changed. Even Sister Wendy (the art nun), in discussing an Edward Hopper painting at the Art Institute of Chicago, made a reference to Pearl Harbor that sounded hopelessly out-dated. It is that kind of casual, off-handed reference that will remind us again and again of how totally our reference points have altered.

As I sit down to rewrite this editorial for the fourth time, I am sobered by the fact that we are bombing in Afghanistan, but at home I find myself intrigued at how we have adapted and are continuing to do so. People, or Americans at least, are amazingly resilient—finding ways to deal with the changes that have been forced upon us, while keeping sight of the things that make life worthwhile: friends, family, and conversation.

I am also intrigued that each version of this editorial has come to the same conclusion: that we as scholars must stick with the things that we do. If we are historians, we should be writing history, perhaps especially our own history, so that people will know how we phrased and faced the many new questions that now confront us. If we are artists, we should be creating or studying art, because beauty does transcend time and violence. If we are philosophers, we should be talking about the issues that we face and perhaps leaving a record of our conversations so that people will know how we changed our thinking at the beginning of the 21st century.

Perhaps we should keep diaries, as did our revolutionary forebears. They knew they were living in significant times, with an uncertain outcome, and wanted to leave a record of how they thought and felt. These diaries constitute some of the most important records of the American Revolution. I believe that any writing we leave will have the same significance.

I look forward to this year as editor of *The Forum*. I hope you will allow this publication to print some of the reflection that we will all be doing for many years to come.

Lucy M. Brusic

The *Forum* is a gently refereed journal. The editorial board welcomes submissions from all members of the MIFS, although it reserves the right to edit articles either for content or for length. Views expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the editorial board.

The next *Forum* will appear in late-January; the deadline is January 15, 2002.
Making Sense—Moving Forward

by David Juncker

The editor suggested an article covering the September 11, 2001, events and the annual October gathering of scientists for the Nobel Conferences in St. Peter, Minnesota. It seemed a tall order...

11 September 2001

New York's World Trade Center and the United States Pentagon were firebombed using innocent passengers in four separate, hijacked planes. It was the largest initial act of war to occur on American soil and one of the largest worldwide. Hundreds of civilians in the planes and thousands in buildings and on the ground died. Advances in the sciences of real-time, visual, and sound communication added to the horror of the events. Photographers, TV cameras and personal cell phone calls from almost all possible locations brought terror out of the closet, to a world-wide audience.

The first responses were defensive: the successful diverting of one of the planes to reduce wider death and destruction, and the mobilization of firefighters and police to save individuals from the dying buildings. Our heroes (individual and service) were the New York firefighters and police forces, which directed evacuations and aided the injured. When the dust and smoke subsided, we all felt the desire, as several religious and political leaders would put it... "to bomb the perpetrators back into the Stone Age."

Broad, rapid sleuthing provided evidence suggesting that the perpetrators were a small set of loosely joined, highly trained graduates of an exiled, wealthy, religious terrorist's training camps. This perpetrator and his assistants had a recent history of several successful operations including the destruction of at least one commercial plane, a US military barracks in Beirut, embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the US destroyer Cole in a Yemen harbor. Admittedly, the events were "over-there" and casualties were relatively few. They didn't command our attention or focus.

Little noted was an additional fact: these same adversaries had received their covert operations training from US Forces during the height of the Cold War. We had then provided them with millions in funds and equipment to enable them to covertly terrorize Russian forces fighting in Afghanistan.

The interconnectedness of commerce, recreation, religious bodies, and currencies, worldwide has begun to blur the definition of national borders and national interests.

It soon became evident that the world had changed since the time of more "regular wars." President Bush made his statement that he couldn't see using $1,000,000 bombs to destroy small collections of empty tents. Additionally, the country in which the terrorists were hiding was already devastated from prior wars; there were no 'good' targets. And, it would be necessary to differentiate between friends and foe, between civilians and perpetrators.

We were experiencing a new kind of "war."

Over the past decades, significant changes affecting the technology and strategy for war have been recognized by many worldwide. One change that I recall occurred in 1986, following the USSR's Chernobyl accident. Within two days, the USSR was pleading before the United Nation's Vienna-based, International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) board for the same two to three weeks to 'get their house in order' that had been used by the US following the Three Mile Island accident. IAEA Board Representatives collectively, said "No!" Information and working plans would be necessary within 24 hours, due to the potential international effects of any substantial radioactive disbursement.

Almost as an aside, it was noted that Europe had an extensive patchwork of nuclear electric power plants, which, if an bombing occurred, would spread their radioactive cores throughout the region.

Another change has resulted from the devastating effectiveness of modern munitions and weapons. Not able to be contained within small boundaries, weapons had become increasingly dangerous to both sides. Now "precise" weapons with well defined damage boundaries are the weapons of choice.

Finally, during the 1990s, worldwide accessibility and economic development created international companies and organizations, with headquarters in multiple countries and installations spread across the globe. The interconnectedness of commerce, recreation, religious bodies, and currencies, worldwide has begun to blur the definition of national borders and national interests.

A New Order

Collectively these changes may have dragged us, kicking and screaming, into a new era in which classical wars are no longer possible. We may be facing the need for police and police actions rather than war. We may need to convert our classical war

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machinery into multiple local, national, and international police forces. Any society needs police, as there will always be a few aberrant individuals and organizations which focus only on themselves, to the detriment of those around them.

Our Own House

To be sure, we have religious and non-sectarian fanatics on our home front. One religious leader recently made a point of focussing on President Bush’s use of the word war, saying that it meant civilian deaths were okay. He also took the time to say the Bible condoned killing under certain circumstances as when Peter cut off the ear of a soldier in the garden of Gethsemane. Somehow he missed Jesus’ response. This same person and several other leaders have stated that God allowed the United States to be attacked because of Vietnam War dissenters and a growing US acceptance of lesbians and gays. It isn’t too far to the nearest fanatic.

Our neighbor, a retired Japanese woman married to an American World War II pilot, hosts one of our local coffee shops. She confided in me that she felt great sorrow for the loss of innocent life on September 11, but also had many mixed feelings. She then went on to explain that she had lost many family members and friends in the bombings of civilian Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There followed a silent moment that I won’t soon forget. We can’t even imagine that ground zero.

It seems that world history is replete with questionable uses of both the highest and lowest technologies of any given period. Advances seem invariably tied to misuses and over-uses. Even in a civilly policed society, new discoveries will present the opportunity for new uses, both good and bad.

Scientists & Scientific Discoveries

OK, what about these scientists and all their new discoveries? On the first day of the Nobel conference, it was apparent that the scientists were questioning and redefining themselves as well. Scientific discovery was once again under close scrutiny, this time by leading adherents.

Notable points included:

- "There is fear...of the side effects of the medicines we take, of genetically modified foods or irradiated foods, of what is in the air."
- The acceptance of uncertainty in research... "that (in science) there is no absolute truth"... This, of course, hasn’t kept scores of physicists and mathematicians from continuously trying to find a single “Unification Theory” for the universe.
- My favorite—the gun laws as revisited by molecular scientists: Nobelist Roald Hoffmann asked whether there could be "bad molecules" or merely "bad people" manipulating molecules. He noted that as societies may need to ban certain types of guns, they may also need to ban, or otherwise restrict, certain molecules—perhaps the ones used to manufacture the PCP drug, Angel Dust.
- It was acknowledged that scientific work can’t be entirely "ethical-neutral." Scientists’ work has the potential of wide effects and needs to continue to adhere to societal rules and ethical concerns. Several scientists reminded their fellow members that scientific inquiries most often arrive at a discovery different from the one envisioned by the researcher at the start. A professor from England used the Columbus example: Columbus was trying to find the shortest route to India, when he “discovered” land (my quotation marks, as I found the example interesting. I’m quite sure the indigenous tribes felt their lands were already well discovered).

- Conclusion #1—that the consequences of discovery are rarely clear-cut—led to Conclusion #2—"It is up to society to decide how to use it (a new discovery), and we hope they will do that wisely.” A statement that, I’d wager, will continue to be worth a little worry on all our parts!

What is becoming evident is that we are also entering an age of increased review, or police work, concerning societal and ethical controls for selected discoveries. Good examples of the need would include the banning of lead additives in gasoline (which poisoned thousands of children near highways)—even though it was great for smoother running automotive engines. And the more recent tire manufacturing fiascoes.

From Here??

I’m reminded of that ancient Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times.”

Dave Juncker is a Minnesota scholar.
My interview style has always been largely informed improvisation. I have known most of my guests for years, and have some idea of their work and thought and how they live. I don’t prepare questions or script the interview beyond a few big strokes. Instead, I try to listen for the words or images or ideas that have the most energy for the guest, in initial statements. I can then just press those buttons. It is very helpful not to have to get somewhere; we can spend the whole hour on one small point, if that point deserves time. One of my favorite interviews was with a bacteriologist for the state. I had invited him in to talk about the analogies between the spread of disease and the spread of other bad things, like crime—a trendy topic. But early on, he mentioned in passing that outstate medical labs do lots of their testing with kits that compress the processes normally carried out in huge, expensive equipment, into one-use packages—sort of like self-heating TV dinners. Thinking about the distance between mom’s Thanksgiving and the Swanson’s version, I asked about the limitations of these testing kits and the controls on their use. The discussion that followed was very rich, and it opened up an important area for further investigation, given the consequences of medical tests in people’s lives. This is a conversation I never could have had following a script, or doing an overview of “bacteriology today.”

Over the last four years, the Bat of Minerva has expanded to an hour and has moved through several time slots to reach its current home, midnight to one, the midnight between Saturday and Sunday. The cost has increased to about $3000 a year; thanks to generous sponsors and ongoing support from the Minnesota Humanities Commission, I have so far been able to make the membership payments without much problem. I still use relatively primitive equipment: room lights and a little high-8 camera with a good remote mike; I hope to upgrade to digital equipment and some basic editing software within the next year.

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environmental issues. Their show, Altere Vista ("Another View") is more politically engaged than mine, and it makes more extensive use of other people's video productions. Given that they do solid work in some areas I would otherwise feel obliged to cover—issues of justice and humanity in United States foreign policy, prison reform, environmental issues—I feel somewhat freer to do more eclectic and exploratory work in my own productions, knowing that they are there.

The block idea continues to move slowly ahead. It seems likely that the United Nations Association will take a slot sometime soon. I continue to encourage a folk music group, some biblical scholars, a spirituality center, a human rights organization, a local college, and a bookstore to take the plunge and become producers. They're all hard sells.

As I reflect on my reasons for undertaking this project, I see many different arguments and motivations at work. One idea that's important to me is a particular brand of consequentialism, the general view that one should act so as to bring about the best consequences one can in the world. My consequentialism is tempered by the strong conviction that we often can't predict consequences very well and that lots of what we are most proud of does no good, or else would get done anyway, without our efforts. It seems to me there's a premium on trying to do actions that wouldn't otherwise get done, that are pretty much harmless if they go wrong, and that have the potential to add value to the world. And what The Bat has to offer: a climate of speech in which people get to talk themselves out, in which points are taken seriously and slowly enough to be understood, in which the ideas and experience behind people's action get expressed—that seems to me a plausibly good chemical to contribute to the atmosphere of this society.

Also, I have always been fixated on the early days of the western philosophical tradition, on Socrates' demand that people examine their lives, and his example in doing his own examination by finding out who else was around him, and what their views provoked in him. I have wondered consistently throughout my time doing philosophy what it means to understand one's own life. The most helpful "document" for me so far has been the movie Groundhog Day, the story of a grumpy, disconnected, flippant guy who gets to relive the same day many times, until he knows the stories of all the people he runs into on the street.

**But I am not greatly worried about not producing much; next to Wittgenstein and Shakespeare, nobody produces much...**

how their struggles and victories and miseries and aspirations comment on his own life. When I saw this movie, it seemed to me biblical in its weight. Here was an obvious truth about life that hadn't occurred to me: to understand oneself is to understand the full range of relationships in which one is enmeshed, even the most casual. As a teacher, I look out over the mail and see administrators and donors and parents and community people and juniors and freshmen and seniors and alumni, and I think: if I really got it, how all these people are connected to this college and to what I am doing, I would understand what I am supposed to be doing here. And every little bit I get helps a little bit to deepen my sense of my own responsibility.

The Bat embodies this kind of project. It is an effort to hold on to the people in terms of whom I think about things and to get a fix on what they mean for me. It amazes me, from time to time, when an interview shows me that I have been reading someone wrong for years, just for the lack of a few basic biographical facts.

I find that The Bat episodes I am working on at any particular time strongly shape my thinking. I recast problems in terms of the experience, the concepts, the commitment of the last few people I have been talking to, and let those concerns lead my projects into new territory. This may seem to some a crazy way to work: to invite into one's thinking and research this much randomness and distraction. There is a danger there; it surely slows me down. But I am not greatly worried about not producing much: next to Wittgenstein and Shakespeare, nobody produces much, and the most prolific among us currently are folk like Tom Clancy, who might be better off producing less. My main worry is one I saw neatly stated on a kitchen wall: "Don't mistake the edge of your rut for the horizon." It is easy for people with good generators to keep thinking the same thought over and over endlessly in new words, believing themselves all the while to be blindingly innovative and original. I am more and more convinced that one can best carry through a long train of thought if one has regular interruptions, regular friendly random factors breaking things up.

Another strand of thought also feeds my interest in cable production: I hang around liberals a lot, and I get annoyed with their talk about the deficiencies of "the media." I have a very strong affection for television. The contribution to the humanity and good sense in our common culture by shows like Northern Exposure, Ally McBeal and The West Wing is astonishing. The best of television keeps getting better and better.

Furthermore, for the first time in history, just in the last few years, the line "Freedom of the press belongs to the person who owns one" has become something besides a cynical sneer. Good cameras and flexible public access channels have put the cable medium within the reach of almost any group with a message or a point of view. Those who don't like the "corporate" media environment can produce a
Boundaries of Knowledge: Schedule set for Scholars’ Forums

by Harvey Sarles

This year, we will hold a number of Scholar’s Forums on the general topic: “Boundaries of Knowledge.” These forums will take place throughout the year at the First Unitarian Society in Minneapolis, and at the Roseville Public Library. They are open to all interested participants.

We are living in an “interesting” moment in history when the changes we experience are enormous, the technologies life-shaping. Actualities and impending progress hold out the promise of the longest life, a global utopia, cures and delights of the most subtle...and extreme.

They also obscure, blur, and threaten many of the most basic of human concerns. Much of what we thought to be the ways of the world, the boundaries, categories, and memberships seem nowhere as clear as we had thought or might desire.

A year of Scholars’ Forums will discuss some of these issues and concerns in the context of its series: “Boundaries of Knowledge.” The format for these forums is two hours of discussion with a thinker who has given much time and thought to a particular subject; usually moderated by a thinker-scholar who will attempt to direct the discussion toward some sense of coherence; and an open interchange in congenial settings.

The opening discussion “Science and Religion” took place October 14, 2001, at the First Unitarian Society in Minneapolis. Professor Andreas Rosenberg of the Department of Lab-Medicine and Pathology at the University of Minnesota led the discussion. Harvey Sarles, who is Professor of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, at the University of Minnesota moderated.

Times and Settings

The First Unitarian Society, 900 Mount Curve, in Minneapolis, and the Roseville Public Library, at County Road C and Hamline, are the locations of the forums. The forums will take place on Sunday afternoons from 2:00-4:00, usually on the second and fourth Sundays of each month from October to May. These discussions are free and open to the public.

Sponsors include the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum, the First Unitarian Society, the Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota, and the Department of Philosophy and Graduate Liberal Studies at Hamline University. Additional sponsors include ELI (Elder Learning Institute) and MACAE (the Minnesota Association of Continuing and Adult Education). Principal moderator of the Minneapolis series is Harvey Sarles, Professor in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota.

Tentative Schedule for 2001-02

October 14: Science and Religion (First Unitarian Society)
October 28: TBA (Roseville)
November 11: Nation-State vs. Terrorism (First Unitarian Society)
November 25: Science and the Humanities (First Unitarian Society)
December 2: Law and Religion (Roseville)
January 27: Humans and Non-Humans (First Unitarian Society)
February 24: Medicine vs. Alternatives (First Unitarian Society)
April 14: TBA (Roseville)
April 28: Science and Mysticism (First Unitarian Society)
May 19: Life and Death (First Unitarian Society)

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visually plausible alternative. And, if they band together, they can make alternative channels, networks, line-ups, in just the way that the counterculture produced alternative food distribution networks in the 1970s. Ordinary, non-rich people are powerless, I will grant, in many ways, but (in the Twin Cities at least), they are not muzzled or gagged.

In the end maybe, the charm of the doing The Bat comes down to this: I get to see myself emerge from my own television set. I grew up when televisions were rare and a big deal. There’s no thrill like owning a piece of the action. •

Peter Shea teaches philosophy at area colleges and does projects in public philosophy, especially philosophy with children, as time permits.
Member News and Notes

Board Business

On January 1st, 2001, a new MISF Board of Directors took charge under the leadership of our new president, Shirley Whiting. One of Shirley’s major interests as president is collaborating with organizations with missions similar to MISF’s. Collaboration, spearheaded by member Tom Abeles, was the key to one of our first undertakings, a series of very successful “Philocafé.” With the success of these programs we are planning another series this fall to be called “Scholars Forums” in conjunction with a new board created just to handle the philocafé format.

The Board has taken on a long range planning process under the direction of Board member Alice Schroeder. We’ve been trying to articulate a vision of what we want MISF to look like in the next several years, identify our strengths and weaknesses, and describe the obstacles to reaching those goals.

After an unsuccessful search for a volunteer editor for our journal, The Forum, the Board finally decided to pay someone to do it, enlisting member Lucy Brusic for the job. (She will be paid for the desktop publishing aspect of this editorship.) While not publishing a journal for most of the year has prevented us from adequately communicating with our members, it has been good for our bottom line. The journal usually consumes about one half of our budget. As a result we have been able to recover from the deficit we ran last year. This is not, however, the preferred way to do it.

One of our major immediate problems involves our website. Presently we are using the facilities of TCFreemnet, but they are having financial and other difficulties and it appears they will be unable to continue in this role. It also appears likely that we will have to hire a webmaster in order to keep our website functional and up-to-date.

MISF has been offering services as a fiscal agent to individual grant recipients for several years, charging a modest management fee in the process. This summer the first fruits of this arrangement were realized when $500 was transferred from the fiscal agency account into our general operating funds.

Several Board members have expressed a desire for more social activities. As a result a potluck was held in late September and more events will hopefully be planned in the future.

Curt Hillstrom

Annual Meeting: November 4

Harvey Sarles (see Member Notes below) will be the featured speaker for the Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum. The meeting will take place Sunday November 4, 2001, at the Old Spaghetti Factory, 293 Park Avenue, in Minneapolis. The meeting will begin at 4 P.M. with a half-hour business meeting; new board members will be elected.

Members should watch for a special mailing about this meeting very soon. The mailing is important because RSVPs (which are suggested though not mandatory) will ensure that the Spaghetti Factory prepares enough food.

Alice Schroeder

Member News

Patricia Ross received a grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission for research entitled “The development of Psychiatric Nosology in Minnesota’s State Hospitals: 1855-1910,” a study of the diagnostic language used in describing mental illness. This grant will be administered by the Fiscal Agency committee of the MISF.

Frank Wright, retired editor of the Star Tribune and an honorary member of the MISF, spoke at the mid-May Learning in Retirement Network (LIRN) meeting. LIRN organizations and members from across the state attended to hear discussion on trends and opportunities in learning programs for older adults.

Joyce Fullard recently took a trip to China with a seniors group and was able to stop to visit friends while she was there.

Harvey Sarles, a new member, has recently published a book titled Nietzsche’s Prophecy: The Crisis in Meaning (Humanity Press: 2001). He says, “My book explores the current crisis in meaning through a set of aphorisms written both in the form and spirit of Nietzsche’s prophecy. Nihilism has emerged, meaning has been lost in our individual and collective lives in these turbulent times. I ask questions such as: How to probe and understand the nature of the loss of meaning, a complex and vexing phenomenon? What then; what next?” Sarles has been moderating the Scholars’ Forums. We will review his book in a forthcoming issue of the The Forum.
With all the events since September 11, I feel I should be writing something both moving and profound. Yet I have nothing profound to say. We all see the images. We all share the fears. We know we face the danger of engaging in a struggle where one misstep could lead to the end of civilization. This knowledge is all the more frightening when we consider that the enemy we face may not care whether civilization is destroyed, may even relish the opportunity to “serve God” by destroying it. Let us hope we have elected leaders who are capable of managing a situation of such delicacy, complexity, and ferocity.

I’m accustomed to looking at events in psychological and symbolic ways. Perhaps it’s my background as a teacher. If you teach long enough you come to realize that the differences in people are superficial compared to the similarities. We all have the same needs for food, shelter, acceptance, and a way to work out our spiritual life. We all take the religion and culture we grew up with for granted, until we’re forced to examine them. Then we’re likely to hear the small, still voice within, the voice that says “what if?”

What if my way is but one of many ways? What if I have an obligation to learn about others, to better understand them and in understanding them, to better understand myself? What if each of us is but a part of a larger entity that we call God? What if God is not “out there” somewhere, but here inside each of us? What if the same is true of evil?

In our lifetimes most of us will never encounter the dramatic forms of terrorism we witnessed in New York City. Yet in our daily lives, we are increasingly aware of insidious kinds of terrorism that contaminate our familial and communal life.

What, for example, is domestic vio-

ence but a form of terrorism on a smaller scale? Yet some women, and many children, live in atmospheres of violence for much of their lives. Drug use and suicide rates among our young people bear witness to the dysfunction that exists in parts of our society.

Perhaps terrorism is simply another name for extreme behavior without regard for the rights of others. If that is so, then perhaps we can each fight terrorism in our own way, by championing the rights of victims of violence, by teaching respect for self and others in our schools, and by fostering a return to that old fashioned concept of ‘love thy neighbor,’ examples of which were there aplenty in the rescue teams in New York City.

We certainly must fight terrorism by increasing our vigilance. But widening the kind and scope of that vigilance is important also. The Internet and globalization have shrunk the planet and we are much closer to our neighbors than ever before. We export our culture all over the world, so people know about us, yet we’re often ignorant of other cultures, learning about them only when we are in conflict with them.

The learning curve will be high for all of us in the times ahead. Our debates about reforming our educational system will take on new meaning as we’re forced to educate our children about the world they are to inherit. We must teach them to be vigilant without being timid. Above all, we must teach them to recognize the kind of behavior that breeds bullies, and that includes our own.

We’ve often heard the comment in the last two weeks, “The world has changed since September 11; it’ll never be the same.” I’m wondering if we have changed since September 11, and if we’ll ever be the same.

Shirley G. Whiting, President MISF
Mark your calendar: dates for scholars

Tuesdays:
Coffee with a Scholar
The "Coffee with a Scholar" series sponsored by MISF and ELI (The Elder Learning Institute) is currently taking place at Barnes and Noble in the Galleria, Edina, on Tuesday mornings, from 10:00-11:30. Presenters so far have been Bob Erickson, professor of Education, University of St. Thomas; Tom Abeles, long-time MISF member, futurist, and consultant; and Paul Nagel, former administrator and professor of history, now full time writer, and author of seven books. The series continues for five more weeks. For information call: 612-624-7847.

October 16—Harvey Sarles, U of M professor and writer. Nietzsche's Prophecy: the Crisis in Meaning

October 23—Alan Kahn, adjunct professor, U of M. Keeping Our Human Dimensions- the Importance of Community

October 30 — Bob Tapp, writer and researcher. Fundamentalism

November 6 — Juanita Garcia Godoy, Professor of Spanish, Macalester College. Day of the Dead

November 13—Phil Regal, U of M Professor.
Bioecology

Sundays:
Scholars' Forum series

A new Scholars' Forum series will be co-sponsored by the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum, the First Unitarian Society, Hamline University, and the University of Minnesota. The first in the new 2001-2002 series took place October 14 at the First Unitarian Society, 900 Mt. Curve Ave., Minneapolis. The series is free and open to the public. A full schedule for this series, which will continue throughout the year, appears on page 7 of this issue of The Forum.

November 4, Annual Meeting

The meeting will take place at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Minneapolis. For more information, see page 8 of this issue of the The Forum.

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