Ecology & Evolution

Can we learn to think globally?

by David Wiggins

"The relative indifference to the environment springs, I believe, from deep within human nature. The human brain evidently evolved to commit itself emotionally only to a small piece of geography, a limited band of kinsmen, and two or three generations into the future. To look neither far ahead nor far afield is elemental in a Darwinian sense. We are innately inclined to ignore any distant possibility not yet requiring examination. It is, people say, just good common sense. Why do they think in this shortsighted way? The reason is simple: it is hardwired as part of our Paleolithic heritage. For hundreds of millennia, those who worked for short-term gain within a small circle of relatives and friends lived longer and left more offspring—even when their collective striving caused their chiefdoms and empires to crumble around them. The long view that might have saved their distant descendants required a vision and extended altruism instinctively difficult to marshal." Edward Wilson

Can a global mind evolve?

This vision of the not-family, not-kin as other, and of the future as irrelevant and therefore okay to ignore, threatens us in the ecological realm and threatens new disasters greater than history has yet produced. Can we think ourselves out of this, or will we think ourselves into this?

In the Gaia hypothesis of the earth as a self-regulating organism, it is common to think of humans as not much more special than the many other organisms of the earth's living common system. But with our technology and global organization, humans are unique in the impact that we can have upon the whole. We hope we can evolve the sort of wisdom and understanding that will allow us to act intelligently in our relations to the planet; we think of ourselves as simply going through growing pains to our new role as intelligent manager of the planetary biology. I am not so sure that biology compels us to be intelligent in these relationships to the world. Indeed, we might, as Wilson says, be genetically inclined to do the opposite.

In fact, when we look over the remains of war or even the local suburb, it is questionable whether we are intelligent managers of our own turf. If we don't seem to be very good at understanding the basics of our own local ecosystems, what prayer do we have of developing an understanding of the complexity of the world at the scale at which we are changing it?

Media and economic dominance obviously drive the global systems. The dominant cultures make the rules for what gets produced and circulated around the world. If so much of what the human race decides to do in the world is going to be determined here in America, and the way that humans can think about these things as a body politic is so limited by our very biology, how can we establish the kind of informational feedback loops that any biological system needs to be healthy? For all of our intelligence-gathering apparatus and international reporting technology pulling in information from the political storms of the world, we still lack the ability to look at most of this information and have even less ability to define a national understanding and consensus around an action.

If the potential to act intelligently is crippled by the public inability to attend to anything too complex in the political arena, how is it going to be possible to act intelligently through

Wiggins continues on page 6

Inside this issue

- Hospitals & Evolution p. 3
- Book review p. 4
- Board introductions p. 9
- President's column p. 10
- Member news and notes p. 11
- Dates for scholars p. 12
Editorial Notes...

Recently, I picked up a book called *The Alamo: A Cultural History* by Frank Thompson. It is not a scholarly work; it focuses mainly on movie interpretations of the Battle of the Alamo. I read it because I am interested in the 1830s and had no intention of discussing it in this journal until I realized that what has happened to the story of the Alamo in American cinematography illustrates some of the ideas that are being talked about in depth in this edition of the *Forum*.

To review: the Battle of the Alamo took place March 6, 1836. General Santa Anna, the president and dictator of Mexico, captured a rundown fort defended by a force of about 150 Texian men. Santa Anna’s forces are generally assumed to have been about 1500 strong. Every man who was defending the Alamo died either in its defense or was killed afterward; Santa Anna was practicing take-no-prisoners warfare. Davy Crockett fought at the Alamo; he was probably killed after he had surrendered to Santa Anna.

The wholesale slaughter of the defenders so enraged Sam Houston that he coined the expression “Remember the Alamo” at the Battle of San Jacinto, some six weeks later, where Houston attacked and captured Santa Anna and took the republic of Texas from Mexico.

The points at which this rather well-known story connect with this edition of the *Forum* journal are three: 1) The rise of other voices, particularly Tejanos (Mexicans living in Texas), has called into question several aspects of the way the story has been told in movies. This instance is a perfect example of the way multiple perspectives (see the review of Sarles’s book on Nietzsche) have changed our ways of looking at the world. In spite of the overwhelming number of Anglo stars in Alamo movies, there were also Tejanos who fought and died in the battle. Further, it is grossly chauvinistic to imply (as has often been the case) that nothing less than an overwhelming force of Mexicans could have defeated the ‘brave’ Americans. We need to be more respectful of Mexican historical pride and more realistic about our own capabilities.

2) The numerous movies that have been made about the Alamo (*The Immortal Alamo*, 1911; * Martyrs of the Alamo*, 1915; * Heroes of the Alamo*, 1937, etc.) have so shaped our perception of the battle that it is almost impossible to see the truth. The symbol has become a reality with a life of its own; even when the truth is demonstrated to be something else, we still prefer the legend. The rampant distortion of American history in movies certainly justifies the cynicism that David Wiggins expresses about American media saturation in his lead article.

3) A third point to be made about the Alamo is that Jim Bowie was specifically told not to defend the spot in the first place. He was sent to the Alamo with instructions to blow the place to smithereens so that it could not be captured by Santa Anna. For some reason Bowie decided to stay and fight and the rest, as they say, is ‘history.’ What lesson is to be drawn here? Perhaps it is that wishful thinking will not change reality. Which is to say that we should pay attention to the readable signs of what is going on around us—the message of the articles by both David Juncker and David Wiggins.

Cultural history is a mirror in which we can see ourselves. The image may not be flattering; in fact it rarely is. But a real image will give us a better basis for dealing with today than do unexamined legends. We should not forget the Alamo, but we need to learn more than the battle cry!

Lucy Brusic
Hospitals and Evolution

by David Juncker

We may be at a point in time when we need to evaluate and make changes in the definition and relationship of hospitals (and their medical services) to patients. Evidence of this need has been accumulating for many years. A new urgency was triggered, in my mind, by the realization that three of the last six deaths in my limited family-and-close-friends data base, occurred after extensive stays in ICU, battling massive system failures unrelated to the reasons for being admitted to the hospital.

Case I. Pathogen mutagenesis: Aided by chemical dumping

BEGINNING in the early sixties, medical journals and the news media began reporting ‘rare’ incidences of increased resistance to the treatment of isolated infectious diseases. In one reported finding, sewers and drainage ditches in the vicinity of a British hospital were found to contain highly resistant mutated pathogens that were no longer susceptible to the drugs in use at that time. The noted most likely cause was the large, on-going dumping of physicians’ unused drug samples, sent to hospitals by the leading drug companies of the day.

Case II. Additional aids: Conditions and concentrations

KATHMANDU sits high in the strikingly beautiful Himalaya Mountains and for years has remained a somewhat dangerous place to visit. It was thought that the danger was due to the general lack of sanitary conditions and the local custom of making pilgrimages to the city when one was near death. The resulting concentration of sickness and disease, in an atmosphere greatly lacking in sanitation, led to the proliferation of illness and disease and most likely the development of a region in which new resistant pathogens might more easily evolve. The pathogens seemed to affect visitors more often than the citizens of the city. Citizens, it was thought, had developed an inherent set of acquired immunities.

Case III. Increases in distribution, worldwide

The medical community has learned, from the annual North American flu attacks, that close proximity, in any corner of the world, of animals and humans creates sanitation and sewage problems that foster the development of new flu strains. The circle is completed when new flu strains come into direct contact with increasing numbers of North American citizens travelling worldwide, thus providing an increased probability for widespread dispersion.

Recap—

These and similar cases have led to present day practices of restraint, in the number of over-the-counter drugs available to the public and also in the once prevalent physician’s practice of ‘over-prescribing’ or ‘blanket-prescribing’ drugs. They have also led to the development of families of related drugs to afford variation in the treatment of specific illnesses.

What intrigues me is that we’ve looked long and hard at drugs and drug delivery systems without applying the same general rules to the delivery site, i.e. the hospital. Before going further, it is important to note that hospitals have continuously sought to minimize the transfer of disease, making great advances in exactly that area. I am reminded, however, of an old farmer’s rule—if one wishes to grow and harvest all the seed that one has sown, the cost of reaping the last ten percent of the crop becomes exponential. Medically, we might add: The complete elimination of an infectious disease can prove exponentially difficult. Especially so, if it requires the elimination of the occupant of a viable evolutionary niche.

Rules-of-thumb

As an aid, the following list of generalized rules-of-thumb, pertaining to pathogen mutation and distribution, is presented:

Mutagenesis is accelerated
—when an organism, or its cells, detect the onslaught of a lethal attack, be it a stressful change in environment or a directed chemical attack;

—when symbiotic organisms and suitable growth conditions are in close proximity;

—when mutagenesis products are presented with a nearby distribution system, available for use.

Proliferation of communicable illnesses and disease is enhanced under conditions of
—concentrations of patients with identical or similar illnesses or diseases;

—concentrations of patients with a broad range of illnesses and disease;

—concentrations of patients with depressed immune systems;

—concentrations of patients with

Juncker continues on page 4
Juncker continued from page 3

can open sores or surgically transacted skin;

—concentrations of staff members in proximity with each other, simultaneously serving the various concentrations of aforementioned patients.

It is time to apply some of the rules about stopping pathogen distribution to the site of patient care. It would seem that existing hospitals that place most, or all, of the above risk factors in proximity to each other and in order to stressed patients with both conditioned-weakened immune systems and surgically transacted skin (the largest, and certainly one of the most important, organs in the body), cannot possibly remain the best prescription for successful patient treatment and recovery.

Existing trends and solutions

Doctors have learned to keep patient contact to a minimum to protect their own health (among other reasons) and have left most hands-on exposures to nurses and more recently, to LPNs. In general, hospitals work hard to limit pathogen exposure for doctors, RNs, LPNs, and patients, but due to the very definition of ‘patient’ and the current definition of ‘hospital,’ it is the patient who remains most at risk.

In recent years medical practitioners have noted the emergence of much shorter hospital stays for many treatments and a proliferation of ‘day surgeries’ performed in doctors’ offices or clinics. Both developments, originally tied rather closely to reducing costs, have led to improved health in patients. The improvements are most often identified as the result of the patients’ reduced time spent horizontally in bed. Undoubtedly there is truth in this assertion; yet I am convinced that there is more to these improvements, as the delivery sites are much less apt to be a problem based on the general rules above.

Is there a need to move toward more fully investigating and changing health delivery systems? I believe we’re past due. Fifty percent (50%) of my (acknowledged as limited) sample set, and the randomly chosen, recent and tragic deaths of several Minnesotans, who entered area hospitals for simple knee surgeries, would seem to be a strong indication of the need. With similar cases all over the country, a new term “generalized system failure,” the failure of groups of organs, has entered the hospital ICU lexicon.

Possible futures

When you note the current need for multiple ICU specialists in most large hospitals, whose job, in large part, is to battle invading, highly drug-resistant, and very-difficult-to-locate infections that are threatening the lives of today’s patients...you know the time for improvements is NOW!

I don’t know where minimizing these risks will take us, but it seems possible that mobile units may proliferate, and that specialty centers may be miniaturized and distributed more evenly around our states. Possibly mobile surgical suites may be in our future.

DFJ

---

Book Review

**Nietzsche’s Prophecy: the crisis in meaning** by Harvey Sarles


Harvey Sarles tells us that the principle concern of his book, *Nietzsche's Prophecy*, is “to report on what many of us experience as aspects of the current crisis in meaning: a syndrome engulfing our being.” After exploring this crisis in meaning, Sarles aims to “begin a course of conceptual therapeutics whose dynamics may help form a pursuit of meaning and wisdom: a sense of towardness, of wholeness, wellness, a critical strength to re-create ourselves as meaningful.”(16-17)

Except for the title of the book, a quote by Nietzsche on the jacket cover, one aphorism on Nietzsche and rather few short references to Nietzsche (the index lists 9), one wonders where Nietzsche is to be found here. If anyone thought this book would offer some substantial insights into Nietzschean philosophy based on its title, they will feel distinctly misled. The prophesying in this book consists primarily of Sarles’s ideas about the proper direction of what he calls our futurity.

Witty style

The style in which Sarles’s book is written is a witty, although not entirely successful, attempt to imitate Nietzsche’s aphoristic style. Nietzsche is one of the world’s master aphoristic writers, a very hard act to follow. In an aphorism entitled Style-eyed, Sarles criticizes postmodern literary critical and writerly obsession with style. “The form takes on a life of its own. Sometimes it seems greater than substance, or substance is background, sometimes it seems that all is form, that there is not much of what we might call the thing itself. The rhetoric of rhetoric?”(34) Although his book claims to be an effort to go beyond such conundrums, is it entirely successful? Is it possible that Sarles’s style overpowers the content of his book to some extent?

If we take a look at the aphorism *Nietzsche’s Prophecy*, we see that Sarles focuses on two ideas from

continued on the next page
Book review: Nietzsche's Prophecy, continued from page 4

Nietzsche's thought: first, Nietzsche's prediction that once the belief in God and an essentially moral order become untenable, nihilism is bound to appear, because if there was only one tenable meaning for being, and that depended on belief in a transcendent God, its fall throws meaning into ruins. Sarles writes that, according to Nietzsche, people will look rather desperately for another transcendent framework of meaning.

Second, Sarles refers to Nietzsche's idea of the noble or overman, one who is able to give himself a self-determination by granting meaning to his own life rather than depending on a transcendent formula. These two points taken together allow Sarles to set the stage for his defense of an individually and socially self-determined rational humanism as the way back to meaning and out of nihilism.

**Modern conundrums**

The first five chapters of Nietzsche's Prophecy cover a panoply of post-modern conundrums in meaning: Relativism in culture, philosophy, religion; Whose perspective to validate? Is there truth? Loss of self-identity—do we know who we are anymore? Reason has become subjective and no longer offers meaning: "Part of the problematic between reason and meaning [is] the sense in which the very idea of reason has changed and weakened from its mathematical-logical external and objective focus to the subjectivity of each person..."(52)

Knowledge has become impossible, philosophically and within the context of informational overload. Biogenetics and the world market economy have thrown us into a crisis of meaning which will challenge our very sense of bodily existence and further ecological disaster. Sarles asks if we are in a period that equals the cultural upheaval of the industrial revolution? He blames, among other things, self-indulgent commercialism (having is being) and the rise of technology, writing that we have ourselves become machines.

As Sarles gallops through one aphorism after another, as he enumerates the ills that plague our post-modern culture and that have produced our crisis in meaning, the pace borders on the manic. It is not that he is unjustified—however, perhaps a more considered discussion of fewer topics would have been more effective. The structure of his book seems to set up the kind of logical fallacy in philosophy called the false dilemma, in which only two options are offered, one clearly false or undesirable and the other clearly true and desirable. The first part of Sarles's book clearly enumerates the qualities of the undesirable pole from his perspective.

**Rational humanism**

Let's look at the pole of Sarles's argument offered as the desirable movement for the future of meaning. In chapter 6, the final chapter of his book, Sarles suggests as his therapeutic for our loss of meaning: meaning based on rational humanism. For Sarles, following upon Nietzsche, to look to transcendent answers to meaning is a form of immaturity (shades of Freud's The Future of an Illusion). And we are not to look toward Utopias: "Within the humanist tradition, there must therefore be some sense of positive and progressive development which finds a transcendence within life; rather than falling/rising into the idealities of utopic thought." Sarles makes the distinction between a crisis of meaning, which is "a lament for the loss of belief" (Nietzsche's idea of nihilism) and the crisis in meaning, which is "the lament for the loss of belief in our living being and responsibility to futurity" (Nietzsche's noble man).

To buoy up rational humanism, his antidote to nihilism, Sarles refers to Peter Wilson's Domestication of the Human Species, which "returns us to our human experience as the locus of meaning. It grants us agency over our own being, suggesting that the idea of extrinsic agency is derived from our stories about being: we created the concept of heaven, rather than heaven creating the concept/reality of earth, thence ourselves."(182) F. M. Alexander's The Resurrection of the Body, Sarles says, "bids us examine our bodily being in such ways that we can (re)discover some of our habits, thence change them in useful and/or productive ways."(183) For Sarles, following the ethological critique of G. H. Mead (Mind, Self, and Society) and the pragmatism of Dewey, reminds us that "the ordinariness of the human condition is social."(57)

It is in this way that Sarles suggests we can overcome our current crisis in meaning—by knowing that we create our world, that we live in natural bodies, and that we are primarily social animals. "It is we who create meaning for one another. It is the lack of willingness to teach, to cure, to pay the costs of human relations which empties our meaning."(175) Who are to be the purveyors of this renaissance of rational humanism, according to Sarles? "Teachers need to emerge to authorize meaning, to authorize the possibility of students authorizing, searching within themselves to pursue meaning."(111)

In the aphorism "Authority and Agency" Sarles writes, "As parents (mothers/others) breathe being into their infants, so we authorize the world.... As we trust other authors, others' agency, so we must learn to trust ourselves. Those who think, teach, write carefully and thoughtfully, are the authors of the world: parents, thinkers, those with whom we contract to live, reproduce, hand on our constructions of being and reality. It is we who are its authors." "It is we who can once again—as in other meaningful eras—find ways to create meaning, and to live the world mean-

Sarles continues on page 6
ing fully...to authorize one and another...and ourselves."(172)

One of the most interesting statements in Sarles’s book appears as the first sentence in chapter 5, “The Meaning of Being Human”: “whoever controls the definition of human nature controls the future.” Sarles’s ‘good’ definition as we have seen, a definition that will deliver us back to meaning, is only possible based upon the definition of human nature as rational, secular, embodied, and social.

Back to the idea that Sarles’s book is structured as a false dilemma. One of the reasons why this is seen as a logical fallacy in philosophy is that there are almost always more than just two poles in an argument, more than two options from which to choose.

The elements that Sarles describes in the first part of his book as the ground out of which our current crisis in meaning has and is growing, are our new meanings. Yes, genetic engineering is mind-boggling in its possibility of changing meaning and destabilizing old meanings, meanings very close to home, our bodies, the other creatures we live with, the food we eat. Yes, the global economy is restructuring some of the foundations of our ideas and realities of politics, corporations, nations, morality, but these elements are not going to disappear in the near future. There are many people in the world who do not see these developments as bringing about a crisis in meaning, rather the opposite.

**Multiple perspectives**

We could go on enumerating the different perspectives from which our post-modern world can be interpreted. This multiplicity of perspectives was one of Nietzsche’s most formidable ideas; yet it is one of Nietzsche’s ideas that Sarles does not wish to credit. It was, however, this Nietzschean idea that Allan Bloom in his *Closing of the American Mind* blamed for many of the ills that Sarles also catalogues.

Ultimately, we have to ask, what does meaning mean? Can there be a common, objective, timeless meaning? Or even a common, objective, time-bound meaning? Does meaning point to goals; does it point to values? Aren’t meaning and values always changing as humans and the conditions of their world change? Sarles has offered one suggestion of where a renaissance in meaning should come from and what it is, and has rejected many others. It is true, he says we will need to rebalance our meanings on a daily basis, but it is clear that he believes in some meanings and authorities that will hold us in good stead in any culture and most any time. Is it realistic to think that with his definition of human nature as a rational humanism, control of future meanings will be possible? Couldn’t some argue that it has been various versions of rational humanism itself that have led us to the future which is now?

Claudia Crawford

Claudia Crawford is based in Minneapolis. She has taught humanities and comparative literature at the University of Minnesota and Macalester College. She is currently teaching philosophy at North Hennepin Community College. Dr. Crawford has published two books and many articles on the philosophy of Nietzsche.

---

**Evolution and Ecology**

Wiggins continued from page 1

peaceful public processes to address the larger, even more complex, biological problems which seem to loom? If there is no capacity for the public debate to expand beyond very simple ideas, can the world’s complex systems ever be intelligently managed by people?

It is a human trait to overestimate how much we can control our fate. Maybe Stuart Kauffman is correct in suggesting that the system as a system—world biology, world culture, world media, internet and all—is super- (in the sense of overarching) critical. If so, then maybe the feedback loops we would like to see working in the arena of education and public policy are irrelevant. Just as the terrorists were able to act “asymmetrically,” any and many small acts can shift a supercritical complex system on to a fundamentally different axis. The image of the World Trade Center collapse is perhaps a good metaphor for the implications of catastrophic system change played out in a system of the current size and complexity. While there is apparent resilience in the systems we are playing with, it would be foolish to assume that we are not playing the odds with our living, thinking world.

**Chaos or human nature**

SEPTEMBER 11 was a scene of chaos on the screen, but was it chaos in the complex systems sense? I have come to think that we are ourselves so embedded in various complex systems, from our internal dynamics to the migration of memes (the connections of symbols to actions) that we are always involved with chaos. Chaos is part of the nature of nature. But what we are making within nature is new. More interaction means that the system is more complex and because of this complexity the system can behave more unpredictably.

The sight of the National Guard troops trying to figure out what they should be looking for at the airport really underlined the futility of trying
to anticipate all enemies and guard against all vulnerabilities. The probability remains high that our turbulent world will deliver another major disaster. When it does, we will see it televised and the announcers will use the word "shocked."

An outline of various possibilities was suggested by the author John C. Gordon on Business in America in a segment called "After 9-11 anything is possible." (MPR Marketplace 1/28/02)

What are the lessons?

- Expect all possible scenarios.
- Complexity means vulnerability.
- Borders meant less than we thought in the real world and much more than we knew in our inner world and identity.
- The next danger is not necessarily predictable or preventable.

Gordon's guesses were that the short list of pending disasters might include:

- The flooding of New Orleans, Venice, and other low-lying areas.
- More meat-vector disease or other paybacks for years of antibiotic abuse.
- Food shortages resulting from the impact of our changing climate upon agricultural systems already stretched to the limit.
- Catastrophic collapse of the ocean ecosystem.
- Even stranger mass psychosis in places that have had decades of social stress like Africa and the Middle East.
- Shortage of drinking water.

I don't think we need to wait for these bigger disasters to happen. The mind-boggling scale of the 9-11 disaster was orders of magnitude smaller than the concurrent disasters already playing out around the world. The AIDS crises in Africa and elsewhere, starvation in North Korea, and—the list could fill the page. Are not these all symptoms of the turbulence of the planet as a complex system?

**Evolution and information**

If we are to evolve in the realm of our thinking beyond our genetic determinism, then the feedback loops of our memetic connections must stitch together the social, political, and cultural arenas. We do not however get to disconnect from the biological world, either in the internal relationship of biology to our thinking, or the external impacts of our economy within the ecosystem. Our great challenge is that we are not evolved to think about the

---

**We...could use a better lens than that of our current media...**

larger world in ways that are a good fit with either the nature of our brains or the nature of our cultures. Both our genes and our memes conspire against global and ecological thinking.

The economic impact of 9-11 is an even clearer example of how these ideas in the mind translate into a change in the real world. If it is accurate to consider the ecosystem and the economic system as a single system, such a combined system would have encompass a continuum from DNA to MTV to the NYSE and the NYPD. Such economic concepts as consumer confidence have an internal mental state that corresponds in some way to the neural machinery enabling the brain, the person, to generate and relate to somatic markers at both the internal and social level. Discovering these associations requires sustained attention. Furthermore, the emotion that enables such focus makes learning very time related. Just as the world is becoming very integrated at every level and exchanging more and more information about itself, the related acceleration of life has reduced the time that is available to think long about anything and correspondingly the amount of information that can be understood.

We could use a better mirror and we could use a better lens than that of our current media, but mostly we could use a more direct connection to the real world than that provided by the crude outlines of television. Information is exchanged between our interacting world cultures in the real world with far more complexity than we are aware. Our microbial exchanges and our economic exchanges are also a type of information exchange within the unified system.

**Need to look outside ourselves**

But we need to look further than inside ourselves to understand each other. We can seek to live in peace and love, but this does not mean that we should just look for what we have in common. One thing we may have to understand is that there are very different ways of being and thinking in the world. Normal biology has demonstrated already that the range of humanity it can produce is very great, both individually and culturally. The range of what we can consider normal is going to be challenged as much as the definition of who we believe ourselves to be. We are in a new time and will need new answers to the turbulent times we should expect to follow.

Biological understandings of our nature can supplement the substantial contribution of other fields and wisdom. I find it somewhat comforting to think that we may not be dealing so much with good and evil as with our common nature. But even with a mental construct of self and other bound by common nature, we are still connected to the real world. And the real world is coming to us more on planes that land than on those that crash into buildings. And no matter what we think about this idea, the fact of it will change our world.

"In New York, the Chinese who fled Cuba have created Cuban-Chinese cuisine.

Wiggins concludes on page 8
For reasons I do not know, except perhaps that the image appeals to me...I find myself suspecting that we will ever invent new cultural solar flares at the frontiers of bits of old colliding cultures. I find myself thinking about small and large avalanches of change propagating within and between the civilizations we have built in the past. I deeply fear the social havoc of dying ways of being in the world. People go to war for less. But one does find the idea of Cubi-Chinese cuisine and whatever might emerge from Islam and hard rock at least interesting. Maybe we need more of a sense of humor. Maybe we will know we are on our way when we can tell one another ethnic jokes because the mutual respect is so deep and the tolerance is so clear that laughter helps heal the remaining tension."

3Kauffman, p. 301.

David Wiggins is the manager of the Mississippi River Historical Park of the National Park Service. He is a past president of MISF.

Who's who on the board

Lucy Brusic is the editor of the Forum journal. She has been editing newsletters and journals since she was 12 years old; she is also the author of three books and the editor of three more. Brusic has a master’s degree in French from Oberlin College; she managed an apple orchard in Connecticut for several years; she has been a handweaver for more than 30 years.

Marilyn Chiat received her Ph.D. in Art History from UM. Since 1992 she has been adjunct faculty in the UM Department of Classical and Near Eastern Studies and has taught classes on Jewish art and architecture, Mediterranean culture, religious architecture, and material culture. She co-chaired a conference on "Saving and Praising the Past: The History and Preservation of Minnesota’s Religious Architecture," that resulted in her co-founding in 1990 the Center for the Documentation and Preservation of Places of Worship, that was affiliated with the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Inc. Her book, America’s Religious Architecture: Sacred Places for every Community, was published in 1997.

Lionel Davis is 78 years old, which means that he reached adulthood during Roosevelt administration. Thus he has a distinct perspective on the course of events during the last 60 years. He hopes to be able to pursue this interest on the Board of MISF.

His MA was in Music History. Davis’s publications include a recounting of the composer Antonin Dvorak’s visit to Iowa and the Twin Cities, and of musical compositions inspired by Dvorak’s sojourn in the American Midwest. Davis’s paper "1893—a year of Myth-making" was read at an MISF meeting. Davis teaches piano and recorder at the St. Paul Jewish Community Center and at his home studio. He is the coordinator of study groups for MISF.

James Erickson is currently the Education Curator of the Ramsey County Historical Society. His long-standing interests in philosophy, intellectual history, and education have taken him in many directions. He has worked as an anthropologist for the Science Museum of Minnesota, as the director of a private school, and as a writing instructor. He has also worked in the film business and in the technical field with lasers. In addition to serving on the Board, Erickson is the treasurer of MISF.

Dave Juncker, a 15+ year member of MISF, is a human system physiologist and bio-physicist. He’s had the opportunity to help in the design and testing of the AVCO, MA intra-aortic Board continues on page 9
balloon pump, the UM Physiology Department’s ionic flow studies in beating cardiac tissue; and the development of stimulus and diagnostic leads at Medtronic Corp. More recently he has investigated human factors in complex railroad accidents. He lectures on general human physiology, cardiovascular subjects, advances in understanding human memory and learning processes, and the ways in which the body’s sensory systems can be fooled. He is co-leader of an annual gourmet canoe trip into the BWCA and Quetico. He enjoys biking, in-line skating, canoe-camping, foreign travel, and fencing whenever possible. David is the chair of the Fiscal Agency committee of MISF.

Brian J. Mulhern has broad-ranging interests in American history, specifically in immigration and ethnicity; literary theory, and the study of foreign (European) languages. He is currently a cataloger at the State Law Library, Saint Paul. He holds two master’s degrees, in American Studies (UM, 1982) and in Library and Information Studies (U Wisconsin, Madison, 1987) and has a background in archival theory and procedures, both locally and in Wisconsin. The election of 1900 in Minneapolis has been a particular research interest in recent years. Brian is the secretary of the MISF board.

Alice Schroeder currently works in development/fundraising for the Bakken Museum, and is studying for a Financial Planning Certificate in order to make a career change. She holds a J. D. and B.E.S. from the UM. Her intellectual interest is to identify changes that need to be made in the current assumptions of economics, politics, science, and religion in order to develop a utopian vision of the future. Alice has been a member of MISF since 1998, and currently serves as Vice President. She lives in Ramsey, writes poetry and personal essays, and enjoys the outdoors with her dog, Rosie.

Dale Schwie is currently writing a biography of the photographer, Herbert W. Gleason (1855-1937). Schwie’s interest in Gleason grew out of his career as a photographer and his avocational interest in the life and writings of Henry David Thoreau. Many of Gleason’s photographs were used to illustrate Thoreau’s writings. Schwie has presented illustrated lectures on Gleason at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and in Concord, Massachusetts, for the annual gathering of the Thoreau Society. His article, “Herbert W. Gleason: A Photographer’s Journey to Thoreau’s World” was recently published in The Concord Saunterer, an annual publication of the Thoreau Society.

Schwie graduated from St. Cloud State University with a B.A. in Sociology and Philosophy. The merging of his career in photography and his interest in Thoreau resulted in his present career as an independent scholar. He has been a member of the Thoreau Society for over 20 years and is currently working on plans for a Thoreau Society “excursion” to Minnesota to commemorate Thoreau’s 1861 visit to Minnesota. Schwie is the program coordinator for MISF.

Shirley Whiting is a writer/teacher/consultant who combines the techniques of creative writing with the insights of depth psychology for those who want to explore personal creativity with a spiritual dimension. She has published poetry in Sing Heavenly Muse!, North Country Amvil, Dacotah Territory, Studio One and Lake Street Review. She is interested in early childhood development, learning styles, philosophy, especially the philosophy of education, history, psychology, and creativity. Whiting is the current president of MISF.

New MISF member Thomas Reiersgord has recently published a book, The Kensington Runestone, Its Place in History. The author’s contention is that the runestone is an authentic relic of contact between European explorers and Dakota Indians in 1362. He asserts that the stone was carried from Mille Lacs area to Kensington by the Dakota, who buried it at the latter site. The 219-page book is available from the author who lives at 4500 W. 44th Street, Minneapolis 55424.

Dale Schwie will be presenting an illustrated lecture on landscape photographer Herbert Gleason (1855-1837) to the members of the Skylight Club in Minneapolis, April 17, 2002. Schwie will also be lecturing on Gleason in October, 2002, for the Concord Free Library, in Concord, Massachusetts, at the opening of an exhibit of Gleason’s work.

Longtime MISF member Dennis Shapiro was elected to the Minneapolis School Board in the November election.

Shirley Whiting is forming a class called “Writing the soul’s biography,” which will explore the relationship between writing, personal experience, and typology. For further information call Shirley Whiting at 952-938-7446.

Study Groups

Long time members of MISF may have belonged to a study group. Only the Philosophy study group still meets, on Monday nights at Curran’s restaurant. Since September 11, we have talked of starting a study group devoted to American history. Other possible study group subjects are Music and Art or the works of Shakespeare. If you are interested in these or other groups call Lionel Davis at 612-825-4362.

Lionel Davis
President’s Column

“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

We’re launched on what promises to be an interesting year. On the national scene we have the mid-term elections, overshadowed by the Enron scandal, plus the ever-present War on Terror. On the state scene we have the shock of fiscal crisis, when we thought our coffers were overflowing. In many ways, both situations demonstrate the confusing and many-layered realities we’re ingesting as the problems in our world increase in range and derangement. Sorting it out is enough to give a scholar a headache.

Yet sorting is what scholars do: fact from non-fact; fiction from differing fictions; worldview from worldview; ideology from competing ideology; one religion from another, ad infinitum. And, as if to up the ante on sorting, we find ourselves dealing with countries where religion and politics are virtually the same thing, and where women are treated as non-beings. (How does a democracy sort that out?)

More and more, of late, I’ve come to think that Pope (Alexander, not Pius) had it right when he said: “Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; the proper study of mankind is man.”

Which brings us back to scholarly pursuits, and to the question I feel, as president, I should ask. How can we build an effective MISF, one that attracts new members, while maintaining ties with members of long standing? How can we, a small group, contribute to the continuing study of (hu)mankind, as evinced by the interests of our members and the needs of the world?

These are questions many non-profits are asking, especially when memberships decline, or fail to increase. As a member of several groups, I know it is a common concern. And in MISF it may be even more so, as the interests of our members are so diverse and only scholarship is the linking thread.

But, ever the optimist, I see in the very problem, the key to its solution. We build by linking with others: offering what we do well: providing fiscal agency, intellectual support and discussion, and an enhanced sense of self-identity in a culture often saturated with sensational pursuits and unfounded opinions.

Encourage and collaborate
At a time of increased need for education at every level but with constricted resources, MISF can continue to encourage individual scholarship and to collaborate with other organizations devoted to Lifelong Learning.

I’m thinking, in particular, of Minnesota non-profits with missions similar to MISF’s where joint venturing could be fruitful and where potential independent scholars could learn about MISF. Non-profits such as: MACAE, the Minnesota Association for Continuing Adult Education; MJA, the Minnesota Jung Association; APT, the Association for Psychological Type; and Mensa, the high IQ club, come to mind.

These organizations undoubtedly include people whose interests transcend the group. And in a society that is getting older, each of the organizations harbors potential scholars who, in maturity, may welcome the chance to explore interests they couldn’t pursue when they were younger.

Having made the case, I hope, for collaboration, I invite each of you to consider how you can participate actively in MISF as we go forth into 2002. What can you contribute and what would you like to receive in return? What groups are you part of that you can inform about MISF? I’d welcome your email, telephone or written responses. We have the opportunity to imagine an organization that encompasses the entire state of Minnesota, where outstate folks and city folks alike can develop their interests and know that they needn’t be part of any institution to participate in the universal desire to explore both the world within and the world without.

I will close by including a synopsis of an MISF Mission statement discussion that took place in January of 1991 when David Wiggins was President of MISF. “…I propose the following as a mission statement for MISF: ‘to encourage, develop, support, and sustain independent scholars in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest without regard to academic standing or formal educational attainments.’

It further states: “Then we need to offer services to our membership which effectively implement this mission, such as regular programs, a polished newsletter, networking, knowledge of opportunities to share scholarly work with an appropriate critique of member’s work by knowledgeable peers, grants for independent scholars, our own journal, our own library, an office with computers and staff to help produce written work, and some sort of general psychological support.

“I do not think that these considerations are mere esoteric exercises. I believe, with regard to intellectual pursuit, we are the future. Provided we can get our act together, we can be, at the least, a powerful alternative to the established academy.”

The scribe paraphrasing the synopsis was Curt Hillstrom, our current membership chair and recent treasurer.

As President, I can only say, “Amen.”

Shirley Whiting

Shirley Whiting can be reached at shirleyw@mn.uswest.net or 952-938-7446.
MISF News

Annual Meeting

TWENTY-SIX people attended the annual meeting on November 4, 2001, at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Minneapolis. After hearing reports from committee chairs and the president, nominations for new board members were made from the floor. Lucy Brusic, Lionel Davis, Jim Erickson, and Brian Mulhern were elected by unanimous vote. Retiring board member Curt Hillstrom was recognized and thanked for his five-year stint on the Board, including service as treasurer, secretary, membership chair, and data base manager. After dinner Harvey Sarles captivated the group with a talk on Nietzsche including readings from his new book, Nietzsche's Prophecy: The Crisis in Meaning.

Board Notes

In December, President Shirley Whiting invited retiring, current, and new board members to her house for a changing-of-the-guard social meeting. Dave Juncker hosted the first meeting of the new Board of Directors in January and officers were elected. Shirley Whiting remains president and Alice Schroeder became vice-president. Jim Erickson is our new treasurer; and Brian Mulhern, our new secretary. Lionel Davis is chairing the study group committee; Lucy Brusic remains our Forum editor; Dale Schwie is chairing the program committee (with help from Ginny Hanson); and Dave Juncker continues to head the fiscal agency committee. Though retired from the Board, Curt Hillstrom will remain in charge of membership, with assistance from J.C. Hancock, who will serve as membership promoter and liaison to other organizations. Rich Anderson has volunteered to be our web master, and gave a very professional presentation on how we can move forward to upgrade our website.

President Shirley Whiting announced that we have received a $2,000 grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission. This grant will help support the publication of The Forum, and underwrite our programs, as well as other projects.

A Long Range Planning Committee is being formed to clarify MISF’s vision and to support further funding efforts. All MISF members are invited and encouraged to attend board meetings and to participate as committee members. Contact President Shirley Whiting at 952 938-7446 for dates, times, and location.

Alice Schroeder

Web Notes

LIKE many other projects MISF takes on, our website, www.misf.net, is a work in progress. Neal Gosman, our original webmaster, did a yeoman’s job in defining and setting up our site, but, unfortunately, he became too busy with other projects and felt the need to resign from the job. MISF, moving at the speed of a small, volunteer-driven nonprofit, took some time to find a replacement for Neal. However, Rich Anderson has now agreed to step in and begin updating, extending, and enhancing our website. He is currently looking for suggestions from members on content and other ways of making us look good on the internet. So if you are interested in what is going on in MISF, or are waiting for an e-mail reply, help should be on the way. We are all hoping that soon, perhaps by the time you read this, our website will be bristling with new and up-to-date information and useful features. You can send any comments or suggestions that you may have to Rich at rich@traderumors.com or to curthillstrom@hotmail.com, or you can contact any of our board members. A sample web page is available at misf.d2g.com.

Curt Hillstrom