

it is. Due to a whole set of circumstances starting with the Big Bang, we have been forced to prepare several issues of the MT VOID in advance, with the result that I am (was?) writing this almost a month before you will be (are?) reading it. However, in honor of this occasion, Lincroft will look at elections in science fiction. Some possible works to discuss are Ben Bova's _ T _ h _ e _ M _ u _ l _ t _ i _ p _ l _ e _ M _ a _ n ,

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Clifford D. Simak's _ P _ r _ o _ j _ e _ c _ t _ P _ o _ p _ e , and Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery." Join the other Lincroftians in discussing these and anything else that comes up. (Something that should come up is probably what will be discussed next.) [-ecl]

2. Boy, I'll tell you. Things are really going down hill. It used to be that you saw grammar and spelling mistakes in common usage, but never in signs in shops and official places like that. That would have been considered a real admission of ignorance. Then you started seeing a surprising array of things like local stores with hand-lettered signs with errors, but still not in anything like TV advertising. Now you are seeing mistakes in national ads. A recent McDonald's ad running on TV says that you can get hamburgers for ".99 cents". (Well, they didn't spell out cents. They used a "c" with a slash.) I suspect what they meant was either "99 cents" or "\$.99". A hamburger for less than a penny is a pretty good deal and I am sure old Ronald McDonald doesn't give any good deals. I was tempted to actually go to a McDonalds and insist on the price in the ads, but I know it would just be a waste of time. Our society is starting to accept that .99 cents really means \$.99. This is not the same thing as everyone using "infer" to mean "imply." If everyone does that by mutual consent, that becomes what "infer" means. Some curmudgeons will grumble about it, but when they die, the word changes meanings unlamented. But if ".99 cents" is the same as "99 cents", then .99 = 99, and then 98.01 = 0 and that is a little scary. That is not something I want to say mutual consent can say. Not that most people will really care.

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High-Level Fruitcakes
Comments by Mark R. Leeper
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(Occasionally some of my comments are a little controversial and get me into trouble. If the following offends you, turn the channel.)

Ah, friends, the world is complex. The structure of human knowledge is complex. And one of the things this complex structure has bought us is that there are many, many ways to be a fruitcake. In fact, there is an entire spectrum of fruitcakedness. At the low end of the spectrum, you have the gentleman who stands on the street corner in an old raincoat with a boot on one foot and a shower cap on his head, making comments like "Apple three come bottle revenge. Yuh?" The low end of the fruitcake spectrum is in the visible range. Everybody can see this guy is a fruitcake.

But what I want to talk about is the high end of the spectrum. It may be less obvious that these people are fruitcakes. And here I am

walking on thin ice because you may find I am talking about people you recognize. (In fact, it may well be that we all really stand somewhere on the spectrum and that without some irrationality the human mind would be totally boggled by the size of the universe and by our own apparent unimportance.) What I want to talk about are people who are somewhat higher order fruitcakes. These are people who, on the surface, want to accept the rationality of science, use it as a foundation (many even understand it), and then jump off of it into a sort of eloquent fruitcakedness. I am talking here about the aficionados of such books as TaoandtheNewPhysics. What brings this up is that I just heard someone talking on the radio about a book linking the I Ching and the genetic code.

I think such a book is most likely a crass commercial effort to appeal to a "National Enquirer" sort of audience, sort of a high-priced equivalent of the story "Genetic Code Experts Say, "I Ching Was Right All Along!" that you might find in a grocery check-out line.

The acceptance of these books may on a deeper level be based on a well-intentioned attempt to reconcile rationalist and irrationalist views of the universe. And I am not saying that the Tao or the I Ching are intrinsically irrational, but applying them where they were never intended to apply is extremely suspect. Like it or not, here is what Fu Hsi and the framers of the I Ching knew about the genetic code: squat. Here is what they were saying about the genetic code: zilch. They were talking about principles of human decision-making. The I Ching is a way of choosing at random an approach to handling a human situation. It may be argued that this is really a good approach to life, choosing a different philosophy at random in different situations. That strategy could conceivably be a very good one. But any relation that has to the

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genetic code is unintentional, coincidental, and very apt to be misleading. To my mind the people who buy into this sort of thing so religiously are doing the intellectual equivalent of putting shower caps on their heads and a boot on one foot.

On a slight digression here, I recently heard an interview with Philip K. Dick in which he was asked about his interest in the I Ching. He started attacking the I Ching with all the fervor of a divorced man

tearing into his ex-wife. He said that the I Ching is a false friend-- that it tells you the things you want to hear; it leads you on. And then it betrays you. It cheats you. This was eloquent evidence for me that the fact that somebody is a popular science fiction writer is no evidence that their cookie has not crumbled nor that it might not have been short a few chocolate chips to start with.

Perhaps that was not such a digression. I think Dick embraced the I Ching, expected too much from it, found it did not measure up to his misguided expectations, and ended by rejecting it. I think the same sort of evolution applies to attitudes toward science and rationality in general.

Rationality and science promised to give us a sort of magic lamp that would allow us to do things like go to the stars, create new super-materials, do all sorts of magical things. For a while that sounded pretty good to everyone. A magic lamp gives the owner great power, but not if everyone has one. Because human nature is to use power callously and irresponsibly, and the fact that you have a genie to command does not necessarily mean that your neighbor will not tell his genie to step on you.

Some people have become disillusioned with scientific power and with it a rational view of the universe. They want to turn their backs on rationality and instead champion mysticism, perhaps because deep down they think that you cannot build atomic bombs with mystical ideas and pseudo-rationality. They seem safe. I do not know how much consideration they have given to the damage and the misery that has been caused by mystical fanatics in history. So like Dick rejected the I Ching with such fervor, some people reject rationality totally for mysticism. These people you usually can recognize.

But there is also a breed of people who at least superficially pay lip service to rationality and to science. They explain their mysticism in pseudo-scientific terms. They do not want to turn their backs on science, but they try to hybridize it with malarky and use it to justify the malarky. And these are the people it is sad to think about. Not that many people can understand a subject like the new physics or the genetic code. It is a shame that those who can still try to draw false analogies to other systems of thought.