

MATTERS OF OPINION #15

WHAT TO DO ABOUT DEGLER

To begin with, I chuck away all the things I had previously planned to say here. Ziff-Davis's action makes the situation serious. Robinson remarks that if they wanted to, they could probably get other publishing houses to proscribe us also. Some may need little urging, just the precedent. And much as we like to turn our backs on the pros, we can't get along without a steady influx of new fans.

Robinson thinks it would be a good idea for all fanzines prominently to display a statement that they are not connected with the Cosmic Circle. I take it for granted that those who were talking about expelling Degler from the fan organizations he has joined, are going ahead.

My own plan at present is to mimeograph a circular detailing fandom's repudiation of Degler, designed to be sent to persons who have likely received Cosmic Circle publications. Fanzine editors who may wish to distribute it with their publications will be given a supply upon request. If I get it finished in time, I'll put one in this Mailing.

The rest of the material in this issue of Mopsy is to be considered as having been written before the Degler crisis came to a head.

OPINION ON SLAN CENTER

The idea of Slan Center (aside from economic advantages) is to strengthen fan characteristics by concentration. This seems to me too much like intellectual inbreeding when our stock has not become sufficiently varied (and as author of that colossal work in fan Kultur, the Fancyclopedia, I'm not likely to underestimate its breadth). Intellectual inbreeding is likely to strengthen undesirable characteristics as well as the desirable ones.

Let's remember a few unpleasant things about fans: One has died insane; two others are probably mentally unbalanced; numerous ones have been deferred from military service for psychological unsuitability. Two or three sex criminals have turned up in fandom.* There have been numerous divorces among fans, or in their families. These and other things, occurring in a pretty small class of people, suggests that that class is much more likely than an average cross-section of the population to develop psychological trouble.

Certainly if we are To Increase Fan Prestige, we should encourage fans to learn how to live in the outside world. To some extent, social experience with fellow-fans may give Joe Introvert confidence with other people, but to dwell with them day in and day out would soon get him to living almost entirely in the world of fandom, and quite unable to interest anyone or be interested by anyone outside our little republic of letters. That is a direct contradiction of one of the ideals most tenaciously held by modern man, the ideal of the well-rounded-out individual. There is, moreover, the danger that fandom may be swept from under you, leaving you little boy lost in a world you haven't learned to handle yourself in.

Far better, I think, is the idea of a Foundation for fandom. The Foundation is an extension of the clubroom idea, as Slan Center is an extension of the Science Fiction Houses. In the case of the clubroom, fans meet as fans, whenever they're in the mood for some fan activity, and they have the equipment there all convenient for them. Fan activity certainly can be built up by such an institution. In the latter case, you're with other fans day in and day out, nitetime too, at breakfast, on washday, in sickness, and at times when you may get very tired of them (it's enlightening to ask how many of the dwellers in the Ivory Tower are still interested fans). The day-to-day activities

*This does not include the Los Angeles case, in which I was misinformed.

of human beings have little to do with the interests we hold in common. There's a big chance for frictions to develop (Altho I will add that there is no evidence of serious dissensions in any of the science-fiction houses we've had so far). There is also the possibility that scandal mite develop and give fandom a black eye - you can imagine what moron-caterers like the American Weekly could make of a stink in Slan Center. In the clubroom-Foundation idea, on the other hand, the possibility of an intolerable situation arising is very small.

I think Slan Center conflicts with the Foundation ideal in some ways: Angelina such as Chauvenot suggested, book collections to be given to one or the other, and simply the chief interest of fandom. Widner suggests that the two mite be combined. There are objections to this, one being the possibility of jealousy developing toward the overprivileged people in the fan capital, as bad feeling existed toward New York for some time when that was the center of everything.

I haven't considered here the financial problems which others discuss, nor the question of getting sufficient permanent population from our rather small circle, nor the problem of non-fan wives and children who mite object. These are all very considerable. However, if they are overcome, and Slan Center set up, I'll follow the experiment with great interest and best wishes, regardless of what I've just said.

FANS, TAKE OVER

Now in the quiet of wartime, we have a chance to do some post-war planning for the time when activity will probably take a great upsurge. Perhaps, by discussing things thoroly, we can arrive at agreement on some things where heretofore we've muddled along, and take control of our activities instead of drifting.

Language is as usual a good instance, and that's what I intend to talk about now. Yerke, in his report on the Cosmic Circle, brings up something that many other fans have spoken of also at various times, but done nothing about: The word "fan".

First, tho, let's consider the field of fantasy fiction. Since 1935 at least, the literature that interests us has been called fantasy, and has been trivided into science-fiction, weird fiction, and pure fantasy. The term "fantasy" for this field is unsatisfactory, because it usually calls to mind, in the uninitiate, fanciful tales, Oz books, and anything but the rigorously possible tales of science-fiction. Even hardened stfans often say "fantasy" when they mean "pure fantasy" -- vide the classifications in Yearbook; and maybe you can see back there where I used correction fluid, having unconsciously written "fantasy" when I meant "pure fantasy". The term and classification "weird fiction" is unsatisfactory, because in general usage "weird" refers to the emotional effect of a story rather than its type of plausibility. We have defined weird fiction as that which is based on beliefs now discredited by science, but once widely held. I'm not familiar enuf with weird Tales to know whether they include "scarey" stories that have no impossibility about them, but I know WT prints some tales that should be classed pure fantasy, not being based on any pre-existing set of beliefs. And for that matter, why are not stories based on classical mythology of the lighter sort, called weird? Simply because they aren't weird in the dictionary sense. Our class "weird fiction" seems to me to be a branch of pure fantasy rather than a separate division of its own. The word "science-fiction" is good where it applies, I think, but because of this artificial division of the field into three parts, it has been applied to stories which simply take place in the future, with little or no extrapolation on present-day science. Conclusion: We need a new word or phrase to designate the field of fantasy fiction, and we should abandon our efforts to trisect the field, while recognizing special easily distinguished divisions of the field, such as pure fantasy, science-fiction, sociological fantasy, etc. I think the word "stf" (or "stef", as it should be spelled to remove doubts about its pronunciation) would be satisfactory for us, and

would imply the prebminent place that the science-fictional division has for most of us. Whether we could get the word generally adopted by the pros and critics in general is more doubtful, but is secondary. There are other possibilities where the meaning is more apparent: jawbreakers like scientifantasy and fantascience. They may have auxiliary value, anyway.

Now for that curse of fandom, "fan". We all know, in an academic way, that it is derived from the word "fanatic", but 99% of our encounters with the word are in its reference to science-fiction fandom, so the connotations we feel it has are not bad. But this isn't true of the general population, or even of the pros to some extent. When they hear "fan", they think of baseball or movie fans, or (horrors!) of Sally Rand. There isn't an ounce of dignity to the word in its general connotations. To speak of the honor of a fan is grotesque, to the outer world.

"Fan" may describe the people that write in to Palmer, but we are not the fanatic followers of science-fiction that the word indicates; a few of us have completely stopped reading such stories, and the remainder hold their nose at a lot of the output. Yet science-fiction is so far the only definite thing that distinguishes us from some other people, it is the channel thru which practically all people in fandom have come into it, and I think we'll always remain interested in the literature in a varying degree.

There are several possible alternative words. If we decide to pick another, it may be as self-explanatory as "science-fiction fans"; more likely, since fandom itself is something that you can't explain to an outsider in five minutes, we'll pick a word that describes us to ourselves well enuf, but whose signification isn't immediately apparent to total outsiders. Nevertheless, we need a phrase to describe our hobby to people. "Devotees of science-fiction" and "amateur journalism" are possibilities. As to substitutes for "fan", I'll leave out "Cosmen" and "Slans", and others that I'm very willing to hear no more of, and consider some of the candidates that look more likely:

Walt Liebscher has plugged "flan", a blend of "fan" and "slan". This would have the advantage of leaving our language little changed--we could still speak of flanzines and so on. A disadvantage is that the "fl" combination (see p 15 current Sustaining Program) sounds like the kind of thing we're trying to get away from. Who could take a flan seriously?

"Science-fictionist" and "scientifictionist": Both of these are rather long, awkward words, and the latter already has the meaning of a follower of fantasy, particularly one who is not a fan of fandom. They are words whose meaning is pretty clear, tho; a possibility for use in speaking to non-fans. Anyway, I'd rather be known as a science-fictionist than a science-fiction fan.

"Steffist" or "stefnist". I think this is my own personal favorite, but I'll abide by the decision of the generality. The advantages here are: The initial "st" has a good sound (see SusPro again); the word is short, and sounds like it should be an English word, tho it conveys no definite meaning to the unfamiliar; and the "ist" ending shows that we are followers of something or other, and lends itself to standard declension: stefnistic, stefnism, etc. The -fn- combination may not sound good to you; personally I like it better than -ff-.

A word that hasn't been given much attention is "fantast". Weaknesses are the spondaic pronunciation, which killed "scientifiction" when "science-fiction" was invented, and the abovementioned objection to "fantasy" for the whole field. The meaning of the word is reasonably clear, it is short, and it is dignified enuf. It doesn't decline very well; I'd have trouble using "fantastdom", and "fantastic" has another meaning entirely.

Anyway, let's have lots of discussion, and new ideas on this subject.

THE PERSISTENT PROBLEMS OF A GENERAL FAN ORGANIZATION

The greatest thing that has laid in the dust one alphabetical organization after another is the lack of justification for its existence. Fans seem to have an unthinking instinct that says, "Organize? Sure!", but when the organization is formed, there is little that it should and can do, and often what there is cannot be participated in by the general membership.

I think that the ideas drawn up by the NFFF Plancom are sufficiently large and numerous, and appropriate, that a general fan organization need never again decline to become no more than its official organ. The problem of securing general participation is more difficult. The FAPA has the perfect answer, but it's not very applicable to a gfo. Perhaps if we can get in the habit of thinking of a certain organization and fandom as being coextensive, doing any kind of fan activity may be considered as membership participation, especially if the organization has promulgated rules to guide these activities, and set up bureaus such as cooperative purchasing of supplies, to facilitate them.

Problem 2 is: who shall be members? We all agree that there is no sense in having a membership list like the SFL's. But if no one is a member unless he pays dues, there is little chance of such a situation. Aside from the dues requirement, it is not easy to see why so many attempted general fan organizations have felt it desirable to set up membership requirements; I suspect that they have been acting without thinking, because it seemed the proper thing to do. There is, of course, the question of voting. We think that only active fans should be allowed to vote; but how many inactive fans are going to come thru with dollar dues for a rather slim official organ, and exercise the right to vote when they aren't energetic enuf to be considered "active"?

McI Brown, I think it was, put forward an excellent suggestion: Suppose we just say that everybody is a fan who'll send us a card every three months telling us what activity he's done in that period. If six months go by without our hearing from him, he's no longer a member.

But now arises another problem: How much power shall be given to the officers? How can we guard against well-meant, but harmful, use of that power? In the FAPA the problem is rather simple: We have a small group of highly active fans to watch and criticize, and if an officer gets out of line too far, they can pass around a petition countermanning his actions and/or kicking him out. This isn't practicable, however, in a large organization which contains many fans who seem unable to sign their names to a paper and mail it back.

The solution seems to be an in-between body, a cabinet, council, board, or whatever you want to call it. They should be sufficient in number to insure against individual idiosyncrasies leading to abuse of power, and few enuf that a majority can consult and act quickly. And they should have nearly absolute power over the organization.

There is the problem of cumbersome procedural rules written in to the constitution, but the answer to that is obvious: cut it out. Leave as much as possible to the discretion of the officers and the council; if you have the relations between these two groups properly worked out, they can safely be trusted to decide what committees and auxiliary officials they need, if any, and work out their own machinery.

Another danger, which has been over-emphasized, is that of a dictator or oligarchy gaining control. If the abuse is too great, the organization may dissolve and they'll have nothing to dictate to. Lesser abuses can be corrected at the annual elections as long as there is freedom of information. A somewhat more serious thing would be oppression by the majority. If we can get enuf power for the organization to enable it to coerce compliance with desirable directive that it issues, there is the possibility that such power

may be abused. However, this has never been possible in the past. I guess we can worry about it after we have solved the more urgent problem of finding such means of enforcement.

This leads naturally to the last point: The problem of rugged individualists who are undeniably fans but refuse to join the organization or obey its rules. We can make the organization offer such benefits that fans will be strongly impelled to join, but I doubt that we can do anything about those who prefer more nearly complete freedom to the practical advantages and opportunities for co-operation that the organization offers. They are a more serious matter in the formative stage of the organization (beyond which none so far has really gone), for individuals or small groups may do many of the things which we think are the business of an organization, and do them nearly as well. The job of the organization then is to show that it can do a better job.

WOLLHEIM'S POCKETBOOK

Everybody else has expressed his opinion, so I'll unload mine:

The cover drawing is very good, but suffers somewhat from the reduction in size. A simpler design might have more clearly put the idea across. The Introduction is terrible. I can't see any value in it either from the standpoint of the fan or of the casual reader. Phil Stong at least had something to say; this one, so far as I can make it out, just says that fantasy of some kind or other is very old, and repeats that silly slogan, "What on Earth!" The selection of stories is excellent. For once we have an anthology of stf as the stfan sees it, rather one that makes you mad all over at the editor. There are several stories here I've heard about and haven't had the opportunity of reading. Incidentally, I think it was smart to choose a Wells story like In the Abyss rather than one that everybody has already read. The great weakness of the contents, I'd say, is the lack of illustrations. They are very important in science-fiction because of the new things you're called on to visualize; Crooked House must have been impossible to understand without the tesseract depicted.

ON EDITING

I don't think I've ever submitted a ms to Le Zombie, other than that Bristoletter, because I don't do much writing for others' fanzines, and ain't a humorist anyway. But I desire to take belated issue with some of the implications of Tucker's article in Jinx.

Tastes differ. Maybe Cuthbert, after working over a humorous piece thoroly, has left something in there that Tucker considers clangorous. Tucker cuts it, and the readers write in saying the piece was flat and insipid. Cuthbert gets the blame, tho his judgment may have been better than Tucker's, who got the final say. If an editor made changes in something I sent in after I'd worked pretty hard on it (and it has happened to me, as in the old Science Fiction News), I'd consider it a presumption on his part.

Not that I deny that having someone else work over your composition will usually improve it. I'd probably have that done if I were selling the piece. But the only pay I get for something published in somebody else's fanzine is the satisfaction of seeing my story or article published, and the praise, if any, from the readers. What does the praise mean if half the credit goes to the editor? Moreover, when I'm reading something written by another fan, I want to know who's written it, whom to praise or blame. Some of my objection mite be removed if Tucker would add, "Substantially edited by the editor" (where only slite editing is needed, I'd rather he'd leave it as it is), but such joint authorship isn't very satisfactory: I remember how uncertain I was as to who was responsible for what in that Gilbert-Sehnert collaboration in Astounding, this detracting from my enjoyment of the story.

At the least, the author's consent should be obtained for editorial alterations.

ANOTHER MECHANIST WAKENS

Harry Stubbs, in his last article, criticizes scientific ideas of telepathy pretty thoroughly; better than had ever been done before, with the possible exception of --by Jove! I've just looked it up, and the story is by Stubbs: Impediment. Hats off to Harry, then, and let's get on with the discussion.

The fatal flaw he seems to find with the mechanistic idea of thought, that he has been using, is that it doesn't explain telepathy as Dr Rhine has worked it out. Dr Rhine is very troublesome, it's true, so it may be some comfort to hear the psych prof at GWU, a very open-minded woman, say that interest in Rhine's experiments has fallen off lately, because of the serious doubt that they prove anything. Apparently the situation with the experts is such that the layman is under no compulsion to accept telepathy or to reject it.

Another flaw in mechanism, which he calls fatal, is that it cannot explain the ego. Later on he says that under mechanism, it would seem impossible for the brain to understand completely its own functioning. But does it? Aren't there countless "fringes" to your main stream of thought at all times, any one of which you may concentrate on, but necessarily lose hold of the others? The more common objection along this line is that our experience of consciousness is so utterly different from the mechanistic picture of electrochemical discharges between neurones. My answer to this is simply that it's in the point of view (once the protester has come to a realization of how complex the actual process is, that the behaviorist describes in simplified terms): One view is objective, the other subjective, but they're views of the same thing, and the objective mechanistic view sees the whole thing. Just as -- just as a Morse code transcription of a hilly emotional passage in a story would have everything there that's in the original, tho the string of dots and dashes doesn't look very exciting.

That renegade mechanist, Bob Heinlein, says "It is simply nonsense to speak of the conception of a symphony as being an electrochemical reaction among the brain cells." It seems to me that he has here been overawed by the general look of the situation, and cast aside, without rationally criticizing it, the behavioristic explanation. It is possible that expert examination of the neurones and what we know about their action, would show this to be incapable of explaining complex thought processes. If such an examination has been made, however, it is strange that it has never been cited. Whether this is true or not, the insolubility of the mind-body problem, and other evidence, gives us every reason to believe that the action of the brain is entirely in accordance with physical laws, whether or not there yet remain some principles undiscovered.

HOW MANY DIMENSIONS HAS TIME?

The professor was telling us the conclusions that a certain Hellenic or school of Hellenes had reached about the nature of reality. With regard to time, he made the statement that it is "... one-dimensional, ..." I challenged it, but didn't wish to prolong the discussion and take up class time. Later I tried to get across the idea of two-dimensional time to him, but with no background of scientific concepts, he was astonishingly obtuse. We fans of course know what is meant by the second dimension of time: Subjunctiveness.

In the dark days before Poe, Verne, and Wells, it was natural to consider time as being one-dimensional. The question of whether the future was preordained depended on belief or non-belief in God and/or free will. This free will, in which the philosophy professor believes, was one possibility that I referred to in an explanation I wrote up for him. We fans, however, can forget about that factor, knowing its illusoriness.

There are still one or two ideas which, if true, open the way to an unpredetermined future, and two-dimensional time. If time travel is possible (i e, physical action extending from

the present into the past, or foreknowledge of the fated future), then there must be the possibility of branches of time. In Daniels' pioneering teleonautical tale, new branches came into existence only as a result of the operation of the time machine, which seems to me to be giving a lot of power to a little machine. It is highly probable that time-travel is impossible, but if it is possible, then time must be at least potentially two-dimensional; all the tales based on one-dimensional time, from *The Time Machine* to *By His Bootstraps*, have only shown how inescapable the grandfather-argument type of objection is.

The other, and more likely, possibility is indeterminism. My first acquaintance with this was Schachner's *Orb of Probability*; since then it's often been referred to, even in a story in *Unknown* which spoke of being able to exert special influences in the area of indeterminacy. Swisher is of the opinion that the indeterminacy here is only ⁱⁿ the incompleteness of our observation, that actually the course of events is strictly determined by imperfectly ascertained mechanical influences and laws. Maybe so; an article I read a while back in a philosophical journal indicated that the question is still open. If the future is not determined by the present, then many different futures are possible, however small the scope of indeterminacy may be, for even very slight differences, in things so small yet vital as our brain cells, will grow into greater differences later on. (You may remember that in *Branches of Time*, the time-traveler stopped himself from killing the mother of mammals, tossed the gun into the swamp, and returned to his original world-line; but it couldn't have been the same world he left, with that revolver thrown into a primeval swamp in its time-line.) This pure chance would operate also on inanimate objects, such as a delicately balanced boulder or in deciding the exact time at which a charge of lightning will strike. Now it may be that the outcome is decided by pure chance, and once decided, that's that, and the other possible futures cease to exist. It seems just as likely that there would be no such decision, and that other hypothetical worlds exist just as truly as our own does. This is the idea, apparently, that underlay *Sidewise in Time*.

The third pioneer work in two-dimensional time, *The Worlds of If*, need not concern us here. The implication there was that the worlds of if had a standing inferior to our own actual world; that they had ceased to exist.

Let's look at a few more things that might be true of our hypothetical two-dimensional time. Note that the possible outcomes of a given situation are infinite in number, having infinitesimal differences between them; they constitute a dense series, as defined by a philosopher in the current *Quoteworthy Quotes*. This gives us something that would be diagrammed as a fan-shaped plane. But are the possibilities always fanning out? A story by Jack Williamson a couple of years ago suggested that two different time-lines might converge and produce an identical present. This certainly looks to be possible, in this system. It would seem to be much less frequent in occurrence (frequency in a dense series being defined, I suppose, by the possible angle of divergence vs convergence), considering what infinitely small details could constitute a difference, but this may be a defect in our point of view. At any rate, once given this two-way divergence and convergence for a time-line in the time-plane, the question arises: Could a world-line run across the plane, perpendicular to our world's time-line? Could a history exist in which the continuous unrolling of events is actually a chart of the different possible futures for our time-line? It strains the imagination. Remember in *The Gostak* and the *Doshes* that the principal character in going from his world to the *Gostak-Doshes* world was rotated so that the time dimension (he considering time as a fourth dimension of space) took the place of one of the familiar spatial dimensions, and what had been that dimension became time. It might be all in the way of looking at it.

A post-script to this section: There is a dense series of possible futures radiating from any one factor

in our world. Since there are an infinite number of different factors, each one of which produces a pencil of future lines, our analogy of the plane is insufficient to contain them. What would be needed is an infinity (I've been using "infinity" to mean an inexhaustible quantity, something that I think is called an open series; if I'm misusing the word, I apologize) of infinities. Mathematicians, I am at your mercy!

One of my fellow-students who asked me to explain what I meant by two-dimensional time presently got the idea. Then he asked me if time might have more than two dimensions. I said it might, but if it did, I didn't know what they were.

In the last few years the immutability of natural laws has at times been questioned. TWS, of all magazines, broke the question wide open for me with "Zones of Space". In this tale, you may remember, the laws under which we operate were suddenly changed. Seeking to get a foothold on the new dispensation, the hero found that π was no longer 3.141592653589 plus, but was nearly 6, so that wheels built under the old regime were twisted all out of shape now. The absurdity of this, I think, makes it pretty certain that a given universe isn't going to suddenly shift into a new set of physical laws.

But there is still the interesting possibility that other universes do exist, with different natural laws. The Incredible Enchanter of L Sprague de Camp explored some of these--remember how his pistol wouldn't work in the world of Ragnarök? An orderly system of them was suggested in The Case of the Friendly Corpse, each one identified by a series of Greek letters, and King Arthur's knights galloped from one of the upper ones to one of the lower ones, to rescue the hero. There are all sorts of ways in which dense series of such universal systems might be defined: Perhaps there would be a slight shift in all the laws of physics (since they're supposed to be interrelated) if π were followed from its present value to 6. I wouldn't ask anybody but a science-fiction fan to try to imagine them. More unscientifically, a series could be defined according to the level of morality in the different universes, as was done in the Friendly Corpse story. If some natural laws fluctuated in different directions, say if the acceleration of gravity became greater as π went from 4 to 5, and less as it went from 5 to 6, we'd have several different infinities of legal systems as judged by physics.

The Augustans were fond of saying that this is the best of all possible worlds. I am fond of asking persons who take that position why God can't make a better world possible. Perhaps in the third dimension of time a better world could be found. The search would be much easier if the whole set of laws didn't shift at the same time, but different ones fluctuated as above suggested, so that all imaginable worlds could be found somewhere in the stack.

I realized that locality doesn't seem very closely bound up with time, and I may be called down for calling it the third dimension. But subjunctionivity is much more different from duration than length is from breadth, at least, the way we look at things. If subjunctionivity be admitted as a possible second dimension of time, however, I want to enter claim for locality as the third.

As to the fourth dimension: Just as a line prolonged far enough will return upon itself, so a possibility diverging far enough in one direction might produce a world identical with a divergence on the other side. The analogy of time and space is remarkably solid throughout.

IL DOLOROSO AND L'ALLEGRO

This is the title of an article I drafted for inclusion here. Since then I've read Kuttner's "Ghost", which shows that the moods I intended to describe are known and charted, and all I need to do is say that my tendency is to the manic-depressive rather than schizophrenia. By the way, Widner, this might be an interesting thing to test for: To which mental type do fans generally incline? JACK F SPEER 1 DEC 43