

## PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

*The accurate journal of significant imponderables  
and locally compact pandemics*

is largely written, edited in places, not proofread at all, but entirely printed and published by John Bangsund, PO Box 80, West Brunswick, Victoria 3055, Australia, for members of ANZAPA, FAPA and GRAPPA. GRAPPA (since you ask) is a loose association of people who receive Philosophical Gas but are not members of ANZAPA or FAPA. I don't know what GRAPPA stands for, apart from motherhood, the Prairie Home Companion and other good and decent things.

This issue of Philosophical Gas is thought to be number 68. The first stencil, in fact this very one I am typing at this moment, was inserted in the IBM 50 on a bright cold day in August 1985.

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## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON CONTEMPORARY PRESTRESSED CONCRETE VERSE

The object of the game of Tattslotto is to get your money back. This may be achieved in two basic ways. The first, or positive, way is to win enough to cover your losses, then stop. The second, or negative, way is never to play the game at all. Only the second way is guaranteed 100 per cent effective, but it is considered unsporting, indeed unAustralian, if not downright undemocratic, in the deepest sense of that truly awesome term. Just as I have never (well, hardly ever) met a man I didn't like, so (apart from a few foreigners and Presbyterians) I have never met a man who doesn't play Tattslotto. But for the purpose of these observations on contemporary prestressed concrete verse I must pretend that there is such a person.

The object of the game I have stated. The nature of the game is this: you are required to guess, predict, divine or in some other way correctly calculate the six numbers between 1 and 45 that will appear on your TV screen on any given Wednesday or Saturday night. On Wednesday you pay fifty cents for your six numbers, on Saturday night just twenty-five cents, plus commission. Because you have read science fiction and a whole lot of other related literature, you know that your chance of getting those six numbers right is one in 8,145,060, but since it is normal to buy ten entries you take comfort from the fact that your chance of winning the big prize, or at least a share in it, is actually one in only 814,506 — or putting it another way, ten in 8,145,060. There are only 8,145,050 ways you can be completely wrong. Most weeks you get at least one or two numbers right, and you hang in there, waiting for the rest.

A long time ago I decided that winning Tattslotto, despite the fact that people do it every week, was too lofty an ambition for me. I would be quite happy with a consolation prize now and then. Tattslotto caters for this modest ambition by providing three lesser prizes each draw. If you get five numbers right you win maybe \$2000, maybe \$5000; if you get four right, somewhere between \$25 and \$40 on average; three plus one of the two 'supplementary' numbers kindly provided by the promoters, around \$10 or \$15. Your chance of getting five numbers right is one in 1,221,759. Your chance of getting four numbers right is one in 148,995. I decided to concentrate on getting four right and leave the rest to what is described in the technical literature as luck.

Fairly early in my career as a lotto gambler I realized that the 'systems entries' kindly provided by the Tattslotto people offered a much more efficient method of throwing away your money than the standard six-number entry. Instead of buying every combination of seven numbers, for example, you could just buy a 'system 7'. A system 7 entry gives you seven chances of getting the six numbers right, twenty-one chances of getting five numbers right and thirty-five chances of getting four numbers right. A system 8 entry gives you even more chances, and when you get up to a system 15 (the highest Tattslotto allows) you have a staggering 5005 chances in 8,145,060 of getting six right, and so many chances of getting four numbers right that your mind almost boggles. Unfortunately, a system 15 costs around \$1350, which is roughly what you are hoping to win, so for most of us the system 15 is what they call an unviable proposition in the technical literature.

My studies in the literature — going back, I am not ashamed to admit, to PreCambrian times — eventually gave me a new understanding of the mystic powers of the numbers 3, 7, 13 and 21. And 9, but 9 is not as highly regarded as the others, except in its capacity as 3 times 3, so I will tend to ignore 9 in these observations. Somewhat reluctantly, I will also put to one side the number 3, despite its glorious tradition, because it has little practical application to Tattslotto, and possibly even less to contemporary prestressed concrete verse.

Having discussed the methodology of systems entries on many occasions with my learned friend Gillespie, I am not confident that even those most deeply read in science fiction and related literature among us quite understand the concept, so I shall spell it out.

Let us say that we like the numbers 1 to 7. There is no number between 1 and 7 we would willingly do without, because (by damn) we have confidence in those numbers. Fair enough. We painstakingly work out that the only way to cover our seven favourite numbers, in groups of six, is this:

1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	7
1	2	3	4	6	7
1	2	3	5	6	7
1	2	4	5	6	7
1	3	4	5	6	7
2	3	4	5	6	7

In such a way, I imagine, computers were invented.

Then someone worked out that those seven groups of six could be much more efficiently organized to serve the same purpose by just putting them on one line:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

If six of your favourite numbers come up, there they are. If five come up, you've got them twice. If four come up, they're there three times.

Recall, please, that what I set out to achieve was just four numbers. If possible, five — but four would do. The first thing I did was to work on pairs of numbers: if I could get two right that would reduce the element of what we call luck. As it happens, getting two numbers right is dead easy: there are only 990 pairs in 45 numbers. Unfortunately, 990 entries in Tattslotto cost \$272.25, and that seemed a high price to pay for the satisfaction of knowing in advance that I would have two numbers right in every draw. Seven of the eight numbers drawn are useful, and there are 21 pairs in seven numbers, but even 21 correct combinations in each draw seemed somehow unsatisfactory, so I got working on something else.

It seemed somehow useful to work out the most efficient way of finding pairs. Eventually I worked out this brilliant (but not very useful) way of getting all the pairs in seven numbers:

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1 2 3
1 4 5
1 6 7
2 4 6
2 5 7
3 5 6
3 4 7

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I have to admit that I am still not sure whether I was more stunned by the beauty of this configuration or my pride in working it out. But more was to come!

I was aiming at pairs in 21 (because at that time Tattsлото had 40 numbers on Saturday nights and 39 on Wednesday— the 45 came in last month, and just about wrecked this article), and could not work out any economical way of doing it, when one day, or more probably one night, I stumbled over the Rule of 13. Intellectually, this was the greatest day of my life. I had written, all by myself, the ultimate prestressed concrete poem, and this is how it went:

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1 2 3 4
1 5 6 7
1 8 9 10
1 11 12 13
2 5 8 11
2 6 9 12
2 7 10 13
3 5 10 12
3 6 8 13
3 7 9 11
4 5 9 13
4 6 10 11
4 7 8 12

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I... Look, let me make my position clear on this. When I'm scribbling words, whether with pen on paper or IBM on stencil, I neither set out to be the Shakespeare of our time nor go anywhere near achieving it. But just once I wrote a perfect poem, and you have just read it. It isn't as perfect as Einstein's ' $E = MC^2$ ', but I reckon it's pretty damn close, if only because it requires no footnotes. Certainly, though I say so myself, I have written some good things in my time, but nothing to match this.

Over the years I have read a lot of poetry, and a fair bit about poetry, but I have not yet read a numerical poem. I decided that what I had written fell into the genre of prestressed concrete verse, and named this form of it (since it cried out for a name) the Eupompian Stanza. If you have read Aldous Huxley with due attention, you will know why I called it that: 'Eupompus Gave Splendour to Art by Numbers.' A grand story, vastly more interesting than that sci-fi nonsense you're probably rotting your brain with when you're not reading Philosophical Gas, and I recommend it to your urgent attention. (At or about the same time you should read Oscar Wilde's 'Portrait of Mr W.H.' I think that's the title. My complete Wilde disappeared in the Great Purge of '84. Never mind.)

As if that were not enough, I then discovered the *Grand Eupompian Stanza*! The basic Eupompian Stanza gives you every pair in thirteen numbers. By combining every line in the Eupompian Stanza with every

other line — 78 lines of seven numbers — you get every combination of five numbers in thirteen. Sadly, this was not a discovery I could use. A standard system 13 in Tattslotto costs around \$430. My Grand Eupompian system, using 78 system 7s, would cost \$152.10, a tremendous saving, certainly, but way beyond my means.

Quite apart from that, what I was aiming at was a 21-number equivalent of the Eupompian Stanza, as I mentioned earlier, and that still eludes me. The 21-number stanza I have called the Anselmian Stanza.

I will explain the Anselmian Stanza, or at least point in its direction, in a moment. But before that I must say that I have virtually given up playing Tattslotto, and that for some time I have been attempting to put the mystic Eupompian numbers into words. I have so far written, or rather, constructed, two poems on the Eupompian principle. The first, which I published in this journal last year, is the best. My friend Les Murray (distinguished poet and first recumbent of the Couch of Graphonympholeptics at the University of Ard-Knox — we offered him the chair but he preferred something more comfortable) went so far as to say that my thirteen-line poem was theologically sound, and on that ground (ignoring his comment that poetically it was piss-weak), I'll reprint it right here and now.

#### THIRTEEN FOREWORDS TO THE GOSPEL OF SAINT JOHN

In the beginning, Word.  
Word was with God  
And dwelt God beginning —  
Became with, beginning among,  
In, was, and among.  
Beginning us was flesh.  
And Word became flesh  
And with us: the  
Word dwelt among us —  
Became, was, dwelt, the  
God among the flesh,  
Dwelt in with flesh —  
In us became God.

'But you haven't followed the 1234/1567/18910 pattern,' Damien Broderick said, when he read this poem. True, I said, when I got over the shock of Damien taking my work seriously, But all I was trying to do was win Tattslotto. Yeah, said Damien, Right. Damien has theories of his own about Tattslotto.

The Eupompian Stanza — it's only fair to say that about this point the argument gets a bit heavy, so feel free to skip a page or two, or get back to Frank Dune or whoever you were reading when I interrupted you — exists. The Anselmian Stanza does not exist. The existence of Eupompus is matter for doubt. Of Anselm's existence there is no doubt whatever. You begin (I trust) to appreciate the aptness of the names, their mystic inevitability.

But it doesn't end there. The great and good Anselm (1033–1109), sometime Archbishop of Canterbury and all-round thinking person's thinking person, gives us proof not only of the existence of Eupompus but also of the Anselmian Stanza. What Anselm set out to do, actually, was to prove the existence of God, and this he did, brilliantly, in his

*Proslogion*, or *Alloquium de Dei Existentia*, of 1078, employing (indeed, as far as I know, inventing) what we now call the Ontological Argument. 'God', said St Anselm, 'is that than which nothing greater may be imagined. That which exists is greater than anything we imagine. Therefore God exists.'

The poetry in that, I need hardly say, just blows my mind.

The other night, walking up Little Collins Street with Art Widner and Terry Hughes, I stopped while Art (who knows more about my world than I do) found the *Crux Australis* for me, up in the blackness to the west of Nauru House. I don't like to think about the stars, I said to Art and Terry; they make me wonder all over again about infinity, and what's beyond beyond, and how everything started, and who pulled up the first Kleenex. My wife, I said, doesn't seem troubled by these problems — but then, she's an Anglican. (Terry took that as funny as I'd meant it to be. Art, that wise old man, said nothing.)

Anselm's Argument has been disputed by Gaulino of Marmoutier, Aquinas, Kant, Damien Broderick and others, but it'll do me.

And if you can prove the existence of God, why not the existence of Eupompus and the Anselmian Stanza? After God, they should be a snip.

The Anselmian Stanza starts like this:

1 2 3 4 5  
1 6 7 8 9  
1 10 11 12 13  
1 14 15 16 17  
1 18 19 20 21

It goes no further. The basic Eupompian Stanza has a demonstrable centre, which allows it to rotate and interweave and generally serve a useful purpose in its application to Tattslotto, prestressed concrete verse and life in general. The Anselmian Stanza has only a mystical centre: it's there, but it cannot be demonstrated, certainly not on stencil.

The *Grand Anselmian Stanza*, likewise, may only be imagined, not demonstrated. If it could be demonstrated it would provide 210 lines of nine numbers, and on average would win Tattslotto at least once a year. Also it would cost nearly \$9000 on Saturday night, and \$18,000 on Wednesday. So even if it could be demonstrated, the *Grand Anselmian Stanza* might just as well be in medieval Latin for all the good it would ever do me.

For the time being I think I'm stuck with the Eupompian Stanza. In its application to Tattslotto, as I have explained, its usefulness is restricted, but it does have direct and exciting application to prestressed concrete verse.

The next step up from the basic 13-line Eupompian Stanza is the 31-line Eupompian Stanza. In its numerical form it is every bit as beautiful as that 13-liner I set out for you two pages back. Translating it into words is another matter entirely. The 'Thirteen Forewords to the Gospel of Saint John' came fairly easily. The 'Thirty-one Hexagonies of James Joyce', which you will find on the next page ('Our Hexag', as I fondly thought of it during its months of construction), contains no discernible theology, sound or otherwise, and about as much poetry as the average Japanese compact-disc-player's operator's manual.

What I've done in this piece of prestressed concrete verse is show that it can be done. All it lacks is a centre.

GNOMENCLUTTER

OR

THIRTY-ONE HEXAGONIES  
OF JAMES JOYCE

Thelma Mina Fretta Opsy Celia Jess  
Hilda Mina Ada Anna Wanda Lou  
Ita Mina Katty Livia Delia Poll  
Ruth Thelma Ada Livia Zulma Vela  
Thelma Trix Katty Gilda Plurabelle Lou  
Yva Queeniee Ita Ruth Lou Jess  
  
Opsy Hilda Saucy Livia Yva Trix  
Nippa Katty Opsy Ruth Anna Bett  
Ena Gilda Saucy Mina Una Ruth  
  
Hilda Delia Fretta Phoebe Plurabelle Ruth  
Ena Thelma Wanda Delia Yva Bett  
Xenia Poll Celia Ruth Wanda Trix  
Ada Celia Una Phoebe Yva Katty  
Gilda Yva Vela Anna Fretta Poll  
Opsy Wanda Ita Una Vela Plurabelle  
Nippa Hilda Thelma Queeniee Una Poll  
Ita Hilda Zulma Gilda Celia Bett  
Ena Fretta Nippa Ita Ada Trix  
Saucy Fretta Zulma Queeniee Wanda Katty  
  
Opsy Delia Xenia Queeniee Ada Gilda  
Fretta Una Xenia Bett Livia Lou  
  
Jess Nippa Phoebe Livia Wanda Gilda  
Ada Jess Saucy Poll Bett Plurabelle  
Mina Queeniee Vela Bett Phoebe Trix  
Ena Hilda Xenia Vela Katty Jess  
Saucy Phoebe Ita Ada Thelma Xenia  
  
Jess Anna Zulma Delia Una Trix  
Opsy Phoebe Zulma Ena Lou Poll  
Yva Mina Zulma Xenia Nippa Plurabelle  
Celia Delia Saucy Nippa Vela Lou  
Ena Celia Queeniee Anna Livia Plurabelle

26.11.84

But perhaps there are times when having an edge is as important as having a centre.

Perhaps there is poetry in that.

Jorgen Jorgenson — I quote from failing memory, my copy of his *Shred of Autobiography* having apparently disappeared, perhaps a victim of the Great Purge (but I hope just mislaid) — mentions hearing a Quaker at Whitby preach upon the eccentric text 'Every herring shall hang by its own tail, and every tub stand on its own bottom.'

And perhaps there is poetry in that, too.