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Committee for Surrealist Investigation of Claims of the Normal

Robert Anton Wilson

Wilson describes himself as a “guerilla ontologist,” signifying his intent to ATTACK language and knowledge the way terrorists ATTACK their targets: to jump out from the shadows for an unprovoked ATTACK, then slink back and hide behind a hearty belly-laugh.
— Robert Sheaffer, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, Summer 1990

Dublin, 1986.

I had given a talk to the Irish Science-Fiction Society and the question period began.

“Do you believe in UFOs?” somebody asked.

“Yes, of course,” I answered.

The questioner, who looked quite young, then burst into a long speech, “proving” at least to his own satisfaction that all UFOs “really are” sun-dogs or heat inversions. When he finally ran down I simply replied,

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“Well, we both agree that UFOs exist. Our only difference is that you think you know what they are and I’m still puzzled.”

An elderly gentleman with blonde-white hair and a florid complexion cried out in great enthusiasm, “By God, sir, you’re right. I myself am still puzzled about everything!”

And thus I met Timothy F.X. Finnegan, Dean of the Royal Sir Myles na gCopaleen Astro-Anomalistic Society, Dalkey, sometime lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin, and founder of the **Committee for Surrealist Investigation of Claims of the Normal**.

In fact, Prof. Finnegan signed me up as a member of CSICON that very night, in the Plough and Stars pub over our ninth or tenth pint of Ireland’s most glorious product, linn dubh, known as Guinness to the ungodly.

Now I hear that Prof. Finnegan has died, or at least they took the liberty of burying him, and I feel that the world has lost a great man.

The Committee for Surrealist Investigation of Claims of the Normal (CSICON), however, lives on and deserves more attention than it has received hitherto. Prof. Finnegan always asserted that the idea for CSICON derived from a remark passed by an old Dalkey character named Sean Murphy, in the Goat and Compasses pub shortly before closing time on 23 July 1973.

Actually, it started with two old codgers named O’Brian and Nolan discussing the weather. “Terrible rain and wind for this time of year,” O’Brian ventured.

“Ah, faith,” Nolan replied, “I do not believe it is this time of year at all, at all.”

At this, Murphy spoke up. “Ah, Jaysus,” he said, “I’ve never seen a boogerin’ normal day.” He paused to set down his pint, then added thoughtfully, “And I never met a fookin’ average man neither”

(About Sean Murphy nothing else appears in the record except a remark gleaned by Prof. LaPutra from one Nora Dolan, a housewife of the vicinity: “Sure, that Murphy lad never did any hard work except for getting up off the floor and navigating himself back onto

the bar-stool, after he fell off, and he only did that twice a night.”)

But Murphy’s simple words lit a fire in the subtle and intricate brain of Timothy F.X. Finnegan, who had just finished his own fourteenth pint (de Selby says his fifteenth pint). The next day the aging Finnegan wrote the first two-page outline of the new science he called patapsychology, a term coined in salute to Alfred Jarry’s invention of pataphysics.

Finnegan’s paper began with the electrifying sentence, “The average Canadian has one testicle, just like Adolph Hitler — or, more precisely, the average Canadian has 0.96 testicles, an even sadder plight than Hitler’s, if the average Anything actually existed.” He then went on to demonstrate that the normal or average human lives in substandard housing in Asia, has 1.04 vaginas, cannot read or write, suffers from malnutrition and never heard of Silken Thomas Fitzgerald or Brian Boru. “The normal,” he concluded “consists of a null set which nobody and nothing really fits.”

Thus began the science of Patapsychology, Prof. Finnegan’s most enduring, and endearing, contribution to the world — aside from the computer-enhanced photos of the Face on Mars with which he endeavored to prove that the Face depicted Moishe Horwitz, his lifelong mentor and idol. This, of course, remains highly controversial, especially among disciples of Richard Hoagland, who believe the Face looks more like the Sphinx, those who insist it looks like Elvis to them, and the dullards who only see it as a bunch of rocks.

Nobody should confuse Patapsychology with parapsychology, although this precise misunderstanding evidently inspired the long and venomous diatribes against Finnegan by Prof. Sheissenhosen of Heidelberg. (We need not credit the allegations of Herr Doktor Hamburger that Sheissenhosen also dispatched the three separate letter-bombs sent to Finnegan in 1982, ‘83 and ‘87. Even in the most heated academic debate some limits of decorum should remain, one would hope.)

Sheissenhosen evidently believed that “parapsychology” represented an unprovoked attack on his language and thought, and that

Finnegan often leaped from shadows; he even suspected the Dalkey sage of slinking and of hiding behind a belly laugh, although the latter seems physiologically impossible. (I tried it once and found it made me more visible, not less.) In fact, Sheissenhosen never did correct his original error of misreading patapsycholgy as parapsychology. You will find more about the Sheissenhosen-Finnegan-LaPutta-Hamburger controversy in deSelby's *Finnegan: Enigma of the Occident*, Tourneur's *Finnegan: Homme ou Dieu?* and/or Sheissenhosen's own *Finneganismus und Dummheit* (6 volumes).

Patapsychology begins from Murphy's Law, as Finnegan called the First Axiom, adopted from Sean Murphy. This says, and I quote, "The normal does not exist. The average does not exist. We know only a very large but probably finite phalanx of discrete space-time events encountered and endured." In less technical language, the Board of the College of Patapsychology offers one million Irish pounds [around \$700,000 American] to any "normalist" who can exhibit "a normal sunset, an average Beethoven sonata, an ordinary Playmate of the Month, or any thing or event in space-time that qualifies as normal, average or ordinary."

In a world where no two fingerprints appear identical, and no two brains appear identical, and an electron does not even seem identical to itself from one nanosecond to another, patapsychology seems on safe ground here.

No normalist has yet produced even a totally normal dog, an average cat, or even an ordinary chickadee. Attempts to find an average Bird of Paradise, an ordinary haiku or even a normal cardiologist have floundered pathetically. The normal, the average, the ordinary, even the typical, exist only in statistics, i.e. the human mathematical mindscape. They never appear in external space-time, which consists only and always of nonnormal events in non-normal series.

Thus, unless you're an illiterate and malnourished Asian with exactly 1.04 vaginas and 0.96 testicles, living in substandard housing, you do not qualify as normal but as abnormal, subnormal, super-

spaceships — or as pookahs or pizza-trucks or probability waves. Of course, I also see things that I feel fairly safe in identifying as hedgehogs or stars or pizza trucks, but the world contains more and more events that I cannot identify fully and dogmatically with any norm or generalization. I live in a spectrum of probabilities, uncertainties and wonderments.

Perhaps I got this way by studying Finnegan's work. Or maybe I just drank too much linn dubh during my years in Ireland.

O rare, Tim Finnegan!

normal, paranormal or some variety of nonnormal.

The canny will detect here the usual Celtic impulse to make hash out of everything that seems obvious and incontrovertable to Saxons, grocers and other Fundamentalist Materialists. Patapsychology follows in the great tradition of Swift, who once proved with a horoscope that an astrologer named Partridge had died, even though Partridge continued to deny this in print; Bishop Berkeley, who proved that the universe doesn't exist but God has a persistent delusion that it does; William Rowan Hamilton, who invented the noncommutative algebra in which p times q does not equal q times p ; Wilde, who asked if the academic commentators on Hamlet had really gone mad or only pretended to have gone mad; John S. Bell, who proved mathematically that if any universe corresponds to the equations of quantum mathematics that universe must have nonlocal correlations similar to Jungian synchronicities; etc.

In the patapsychological model, the normal having vanished, most generalizations, especially about nonmathematical groups, disappear along with it. The monorchoid Mr. Hitler, for instance, could not generalize about "the Jews" within the patapsychological model, because first he would have to find a normal or average Jew, which appears as intracible to demonstration as exhibiting the Ideal Platonic Jew (or the Ideal Platonic Chicken Farm complete with Ideal Platonic Chickenshit.)

As Korzybski the semanticist said, all we can ever find in space-time consists of Jew₁, Jew₂, Jew₃ etc. to Jew_n. (For the nonmathematical, that means a list comprising Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Ruth, Jesus, Woody Allen, Richard Bandler, Felix Mendelsohn, Sigmund Freud, Paulette Goddard, Betty Grable, Noam Chomsky, Bernard Baruch, Paul Newman, the Virgin Mary, Albert Einstein, Lillian Hellman, Baron Rothschild, Ayn Rand, Max Epstein, Emma Goldman, Saul Bellow, etc. etc. etc. to the final enumeration of all Jews alive or dead.) Each of these, on inspection, will have different fingerprints, different brains, different neuro-immunological systems, different eyes, ears, noses etc. different life histories, different con-

ditioning and learning etc. and different personalities, hobbies, passions etc... and none will serve as a norm or Ideal Form for all the others.

To say it otherwise, world Jewish population stood at about 10 million when Hitler formed his generalizations. He could not possibly have known more than at maximum about 500 of them well enough to generalize about them; considering his early prejudices, he probably knew a lot less than that. But taking 500 as a high estimate, we find he generalized about 10 million individual persons on the basis of knowledge limited to around 1/20,000 or 0.00005% of them.

It seems, then, that Naziism could not have existed, if Hitler knew the difference between norms or averages (internal estimates, subject to error due to incomplete research or personal prejudice) and the phalanx of discrete nonnormal events and things (including persons) that we find in the sensory space-time continuum outside.

Similarly, the male human population currently stands at 3 billion 3 million 129 thousand, more or less (3,004,129,976, the last time I checked the World Game Website a while ago). Of these 3 billion+ discrete individuals, Robin Morgan, Andrea Dworkin and other Radical Feminists probably have not known more than about 500 to generalize from. This means that Rad Fem dogma consists of propositions about 3 billion critters based on examination of less than 0.00000001 per cent of them. This amounts to a much more reckless use of generalization than Hitler's thoughts on Judaism. You can no more find the male norm from Gandhi, Gen George Custer, Buddha, Bill Clinton, Louis Pasteur, Kung fu tzu, Bruno, Father Damien, Ted Bundy etc. than you can find the Jewish norm from Emma Goldman, Harpo Marx, Felix Mendelsohn, Spinoza, Barbra Streisand, Nathaniel Branden, Emma Lazarus, Jerry Seinfeld etc.

Now you know how the word "feminazi" got into the language. The two ideologies have a strong isomorphism. They both confuse

the theoretical norm with a vast array of different individuals — and they both have no idea how to create even a tolerably scientific norm (which will still differ in many respects from the actual series of individuals the norm allegedly covers).

CSICON applies the same Deconstructive logic all across the board.

For instance, to return to our starting point, whatever your idea of the "normal" UFO — whether you consider it a spaceship, a secret US government weapon, a hoax, or a hallucination etc. — such a general idea will render you incapable of forming a truly objective view of the next UFO that comes along. The only way to cancel such pre-judgement lies in patapsychology (and in general semantics). You must remember the difference between the individual and unpredictable event that gets called a UFO and your past generalizations about "the UFO" or the "normal" UFO."

Otherwise you will only note how this UFO fits your Ideal UFO and will unconsciously ignore how it differs therefrom. This mechanical reflex will please your ego, if you like to feel you know more than most people, but it will prove hazardous to your ability to observe and think carefully.

People who think they know all about Jews or males or UFOs never see a real Jew or male or UFO. They see the generalized norm that exists only in their own brains. We never know "all" — we only know what I call *sombunall*, some-but-not-all. This applies also to dogs (the patapsychologist will not say "I love them," "I hate them," "I fear them" etc.), and to plumbers, bosses, right-wingers, left-wingers, cats, lizards, sitcoms, houses, nails, Senators, waterfalls and all other miscellaneous sets or groups.

Personally, I see two or three UFOs every week. This does not astonish me, or convince me of the spaceship theory, because I also see about 2 or 3 UNFOs every week — ***Unidentified Non-Flying Objects***. These remain unidentified (by me) because they go by too fast or look so weird that I never know whether to classify them as hedgehogs, hobgoblins or helicopters — or as stars or satellites or