

SEE SHERRY SPEAK
BY SHERRY MORIN

Something from nothing

See Meg, see Ron. See Meg and Ron do lessons. See Meg and Ron add two-plus-two. "Oh, no," says Ron. Ron doesn't know the answer. Neither does Meg. See the T.V. in the background. See Bullwinkle and Rocky on T.V. Bullwinkle says, "Rocky, watch me pull a rabbit out of a hat." See Ron say, "Maybe he has something, there." See Ron write "five" on the page.

Human creativity has always been seen as a very mysterious process. In ancient times, it was even considered mystical. Ancient Greek poets were revered as Hearers of The Gods; The Gods were supposed to speak through them. They were like Ancient Greece's version of the modern t.v.-evangelist, except that they had the respect of most of society. Their words were, literally, "taken as gospel" by everyone; everyone, it seemed, except the philosopher Plato and his renegade circle of close pals.

Plato couldn't believe that there was any "divine inspiration" behind creativity, or that it was a passive process. In Plato's

view, bright ideas don't come from the Gods. They come from a place called the World of Forms. This is a dimension which remains "invisible" to us, a world apart from the physical environment. Through our senses, we can perceive the physical environment, but not the World of Forms. The latter is like a big storage closet piled with a bunch of "ideas"/"essences", or forms. These Forms are like the original, flawless "blueprints" for everything that has ever existed (or will exist) in the physical world.

If it is invisible, how do we "see" the World of Forms? Perception of the Forms does not come to us through our regular five senses. Instead, knowledge of the Forms comes from a quest for knowledge, and philosophical discussions with others. Once you start to actively look for truth, the Forms become clear to us.

According to Plato, we are under the misconception that painters, sculptors, and inventors are "creating" stuff - but, surprise! They're not. The creator doesn't

"come up with" the ideas for his/her "stuff"; the ideas are not his/her invention. They have been sitting around, gathering dust in that closet of Forms, since the beginning of time. Anyone who creates is just plagiarizing, producing bad copies of abstract objects or ideas that have been sitting in that Form-closet. Even God, as Plato wrote in *Timaeus*, did not create the Forms. God was as much a copy-cat as everyone else. He sculpted everything in the Physical World using things that he saw in the World of Forms as his models.

All the inventor can be credited for, then (even if he is a diety), is having the courage, knowledge, moderation and wisdom which are necessary to "see" the forms. Certain people are supposedly more predisposed to "see" the Forms than others. They are the lucky ones. Some people, though, are condemned to a really boring existence where they blindly accept the "copies" of the truth, sit back, relax, and don't go looking for the World of Forms. They appear not to have

much imagination.

Isaac Asimov, a very creative person, also had some things to say about creativity. According to Asimov, people spend their whole lives either actively or passively gathering "bits" of knowledge. These "bits", which reach us as isolated facts or as "clumps" of related facts, get shaken around in our brains until some of the facts, by chance, get "stuck together" and form even larger clumps. In other words, facts are infused into our minds as free-floating things and they get assembled in our minds (purely by chance) into what we call "bright ideas", or revelations. Asimov calls this process free association. He says that a broad education, intuitive ness, intelligence, courage and luck are the five criteria that an individual needs in order to be "creative", or good at free association. Incidentally, Asimov's *Fact and Fancy* commented, "I would like to see methods devised for spotting the intelligent and intuitive (particularly the latter) early in life and treating them with special care." This quotation wraps up what Plato has said many times. Anyone who has read any Asimov will find this connection really amusing, as Asimov is (in)famous for his good-natured scoffing (and sometimes downright rudeness) toward philosophers - especially the ancient ones, and even more especially, toward Plato.

Jung, a psychologist, labelled creativity

as a conscious attempt to get in touch with one's unconscious. Dreams and fantasies let us see the Unconscious, but this is just a passive effort; it is not creativity. Creativity requires that we "actively listen to our minds". The Jung writings contradict what Asimov says - that the process is a purely passive one, governed largely by chance. Jung contends that a creative breakthrough requires a very strong, willful focus of our concentration on a particular problem (ideas do not spontaneously "pop into our heads" - rather, we have to invite the answers into our heads). When we have "break throughs", or seize unconscious knowledge into the conscious mind, we can simulate the breakthroughs to form new, "original" notions" (now Jung is starting to sound a bit more like Asimov).

Jung's writings on creativity are also like Asimov's, in their brash, "out-there" sexism. Jung formulated his overview of creativity in the form of a dichotomy. He called the "passive" processes of creativity "feminine" and the "active", constructive aspects (the conscious focusing of mind-energy) "masculine". This is a virtual throw-back to Confucianism; give me a break. Too bad Jung wasn't creative enough to explain creativity in a way that hadn't been done 2000 years before.

That's it for this week, kiddies. See me speak again in two weeks.

FOREST BREEZE Plantations in NB
BY JILLIAN WELDON

Every spring and summer here in New Brunswick many seedlings (one year old trees), over 15 million, are brought out of the greenhouses and transplanted into cutover areas. A cutover area is a patch of land that has been cleared of all standing timber, leaving nothing but stumps and slash. Planting trees after a clearcut ensures a future wood supply faster than a cutover left to regenerate naturally.

The genetic make-up of the seedlings consist of a mom, whom we call "plus mom", of a known provenance. Dad is collected from the same relative provenance as mom and are joined to create "plus trees". Now the seedlings of these super parents are brought into the world in a temperature, humidity and nutrient controlled environment. Several times a day they experience a nice sprinkle of water and two or three times a week they look forward to an indulgence of favoured nutrients.

Our seedling (seedling A) is predicted to grow straight, tall and very quickly; a great achiever. It's being monitored by the great hand that feeds it and takes care of it. The future of this seedling is already been determined, cutover 47 on route 2; an area of land his ancestors have never previously occupied. This seedling is expected to return great volume as quickly as it can.

Now outside of this coloured world is a

seedling which has newly sprouted from a newly cut area. This seedling's ancestors have occupied this local area for many generations and have adapted to local environment factors such as elevation and temperature fluctuations. The mother and father of this seedling have passed on to their offspring a bundle of adaptive characteristics to ensure its capability to compete in its environment.

Spring has arrived and the planter is assigned to his cutover with a bundle of seedlings which he is to plant evenly over the area. One by one he firmly transplants brothers and sisters in relatively straight rows. He is creating what is known as a monoculture. As he plants he notices a seedling which has already begun to flush and grow. Accidentally he steps on the tree crushing it. The tree planter feels bad so he replaces the tree with seedling A, the so-called "plus seedling" thinking he has done his good deed for the day.

This planter feels he has done our world some good by planting his bundle of new improved seedlings, but has he really? I feel that creating monocultures on areas which would not ordinarily support such plus trees will eventually create problems in our forests. Monocultures increase the chance of massive invasions of insects and diseases.

I also feel these plus trees will not be able

to contribute sufficient genetic variation to the natural gene pool. I believe more effort and understanding should be funneled toward the use of natural regeneration.

METANOIA
BY JOHN VALK

Restorer of streets

In a few days the people of Canada will be called upon to make some crucial decisions. We have the opportunity to elect to public office those whom we feel best able to lead this country. Some, no doubt, will not be happy with the choices. Ideal candidates with ideal policies and platforms may not be that prevalent. Yet, you and I will, if we wish to exercise our democratic right, and freedom, need to decide on one particular person and/or party.

There are major issues in this campaign. Credibility is certainly one of them. Due to recent, and not so recent, acts of patronage, abuse of office and conflict of interest, some feel that the politician with integrity, who is both honest and hard working, is rare. More feel that all too often people in positions of power have, seemingly without qualm or shame, provided handsomely for themselves, and their friends, at the public trough. Is public office, we may ask, for service, or self-service?

Public indebtedness is another major concern. Exorbitant government spending of the past threatens much needed programs of the present. Interest payments on the debt now jeopardizes education, unemployment insurance, welfare and the future viability of our children.

How much of the government debt we understand, or can comprehend, is not clear. What is clear is that only some of our debt is foreign owned. Seventy-five percent of Canadian debt is held by Canadians themselves. That is a good thing. We then control most of our own debt.

It also means, however, that Canadian debt holders profit, if we can use that word, from the debt. Pension funds and Savings Bonds are just two kinds of investments in government debt, and

interest is earned on them, however large or small. Investments of these sorts are not bad in themselves. But it is clear that repayment of capital investment takes priority over investment in people. That only makes good business sense, it is argued. But the result is that the holders of capital are less effected by public debt than those with no capital.

One thing that has not changed much is our continued focus on economic growth. We place our faith, and salvation, in a continually expanding economy and an ever increasing Gross National Product. Our society, including our educational institutions, perpetuate the belief that prosperity means economic prosperity.

Economic prosperity, through an increasing GNP, has been promised for decades. That kind of prosperity has, no doubt, increased, if not burgeoned, for some. But that cannot be said for an increasing number of others: the unemployed, impoverished, elderly, single mothers, students. In fact, it appears that the younger generation will be wrestling with survival rather than prosperity. Why do we continue to place our faith in the false god of economic prosperity?

Perhaps we should consider an "economy of enough". In the midst of plenty, what constitutes "enough"? Do we ever say that we now have enough? Can some of us direct our abundance to those who have none?

An economy of enough refocuses our attention. If forces us to consider those with minimal material, social, educational and medical opportunities. That kind of refocusing would also be significant in reducing our moral and spiritual poverty.

Surprising it is then that little attention is given to native rights in this election. The Charlottetown Accord was

a golden opportunity for non-native Canadians to take a significant step in entrenching native self-government. We didn't though. Now, seemingly, more important issues take centre stage? We ought not to be shocked then if suicide rates among native youth continue to remain the highest in the world.

In the 8th Century BCE, the prophet Isaiah called the Hebrew people to observe a fast. They were to speak to God regarding their sins and transgressions. But God rejected their fast. In their political maneuverings they had "sought their own pleasure and oppressed all their own workers" (Isaiah 58:3).

God was not much interested in pious words or promises that ring hollow. God was interested in actions that "loosed the bonds of wickedness, and undid the thongs of the yoke." More specifically, God wanted every yoke not just to be loosed, but to be broken altogether. To do that entailed sharing bread with the hungry, providing for the homeless and covering the naked. When Israel as a nation did that, God said it would become strong. The nation would be called "the repairers of the breach, the restorers of streets to dwell in" (vs. 12).

Will those whom we consider for elected office be candidates that seek self-service, and chase after the false god of economic prosperity (for the few)? Or, will they be those who give real leadership in repairing the breach: the infractions and violations of law, justice and morality? Will they become known as those who have made our streets places to live in: safe, secure and people oriented?

Which candidate, or federal party, would best help us in this area? And, will God be pleased with what takes place in the next parliament?

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