

Nice Distinctions 33

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Still here. I see it's been three years since I did a new zine, but the impulse arises again.

To remind you, I am Arthur D. Hlavaty, retired copy editor and not-quite-retired fanwriter; my beloved spouse, Bernadette Bosky, teaches and advises ambitious high school students; my beloved cohusband, Kevin Maroney, maintains the computers for a Wall St. business. For the last few months they, like so many other people, have been working from home. The Grand Old Plague has affected their jobs, but none of us appear to have caught it.

Null-A

In answer to a popular Internet question, my pronouns of choice are *he*, *him*, *his*. I fit fairly comfortably in the gender binary, and I'm mostly a big cissy who is happy with the gender I've been assigned, glad that it goes with my genitals, and proud to display my secondary sexual characteristics, as I've been doing for 55 years.

But that is only to the nearest integer. We're all, if not genderqueer, at least somewhat noncompliant. (The defect that first got me accused of being unworthy of my genitalia was liking pretty colors.)

Just as libertarians are pro-choice about everything, General Semanticists are nonbinary about everything. Neither works all the time, but both are good places to start. The gender binary seems to be one of the major areas where two-valued logic is inadequate to deal with the complexity of the situation,

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Between issues we got two excellent books on the kind of sf that made me love sf: Farah Mendlesohn's *The Pleasant Profession of Robert A. Heinlein* and Eric Nevala-Lee's *Astounding*.

Heinlein was such a complex and multiply productive author that he has phalanxes and cadres of followers attracted to different aspects of his work.

I was in the Dirty Fucking Hippie cadre. I am that cliché figure that read *Stranger in a Strange Land* in 1966 and had my mind blown. It wasn't just the polyamory, either. It was "Thou Art God," the Martian blasphemy that's also Eastern wisdom; it was "Man, as a social animal, can no more escape government than the individual can escape bondage to his bowels"; it was the way Valentine Michael Smith learned about humanity by seeing a monkey hit a smaller monkey, who in turn hit a still smaller one. And more more more.

I didn't fall in love with all of his oeuvre; when I read *Starship Troopers* and *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, which seemed in some ways to contradict the original, I enjoyed them but they did not move me as *Stranger* had done. We were left with the question of how the same person could have written all three; many good writers have wrestled with it, but the problem remained.

Farah Mendlesohn has finally given Heinlein the reading he deserves, delving into everything in the books (even what is supposed to lead to a polite society) and made it all cohere into a consistent vision. She has finally answered my one greatest objection to *Stranger* (the strong

sexual dimorphism) by wading through *I Will Fear No Evil* and *To Sail beyond the Sunset* to show how much his views on sexual differences (as on so many other issues) evolved.

There can be no absolute conclusion to the Matter of Heinlein (I would still like to know more about what he got from Korzybski and Ouspensky), but this book is essential.

Heinlein was also part of the *Astounding* cohort, who followed John W. Campbell's dictum that sf need not be tedious science-class lectures à la Gernsback or explosions à la Doc Smith but actual popular fiction (the benchmark was *The Saturday Evening Post*) about the nifty sf stuff.

Astounding offered the vision of humanity getting out of the gravity well and into space, getting out of each other's way. For some, it meant imperial conquest, but the vision I liked was Isaac Asimov's approach: outsmarting the Universe. (Heinlein did a bit of both.) We would figure out the technology to send vehicles to the far ends of space, but we would also apply our minds (augmented by computer technology) to social problems. Machines of loving grace would take care of the garbage and the politics.

The sf I grew up with was not so much *Astounding* as the reaction to it, the social sf that appeared when I was at the Age of Wonder (12). Social sf satirized the vision with backtalking robots and ads that buzzed around your head but fundamentally conceded it.

Campbell is in such bad odor now (deservedly) that we tend to forget his real accomplishments. He did improve the writing significantly, and his organizing the efforts of Asimov, Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, A.E. van Vogt, et al. to produce a successful magazine was a heroic effort of cat herding, as Alexei & Cory Panshin demonstrated in *The World beyond the Hill*.

Alec Nevala-Lee told the story in a book called *Astounding*, a mandala of

Asimov, Heinlein, Campbell, and L. Ron Hubbard. The Asimov and Heinlein parts mostly boil down to the tales told in William Patterson's Heinlein bio and the account of Asimov's life by an equally admiring chronicler (himself), but they do so skillfully and add enhancement.

The rest of the book was new to me: Campbell had a sharp but limited mind with at least a normal amount of skepticism that was all but randomly divided. (It is not an uncommon trait; I once participated in a phone company focus group with a man who was shrewdly sensitive to all the tricks TPC was trying on him, but told me that Nostradamus had predicted the entire 20th century including Hitler *by name*.) Campbell justly prided himself on the received truths he questioned, but the common or garden ideas of racism and sexism in his time were not among those.

He longed for a modern science of mental health, and Hubbard offered him one. Dianetics was in the beta testing stage. It postulated that our problems come from bad memories, so Hubbard repeatedly hypnotized Campbell, ripping out old memories and installing new ones. At the end of the procedure Campbell didn't know what he remembered. (We can't tell if the *Who Goes There?* story of his mother and aunt impersonating each other occurred in consensus reality.) That kind of experimentation may not be good for the subject. The Hieronymus Machine, the Dean Drive, and the endorsement of Governor Wallace all followed.

Send them a message

More than 1,000 young people are facing charges in Denmark after allegedly sharing two sexually explicit videos and a photograph involving underage subjects on Facebook Messenger. The cops said, "We want to give out a warning to young people: think about what you're doing." I like one comment the news received:

I agree. This is actually the most useful message you could ever send young people. The world is unfair, the government is wrong, and old people hate you.

It turns out that buying Girl Scout cookies does not directly promote promiscuous sex and abortion. Oh well, they still taste good.

They say war teaches us where other countries are, but we don't always learn. There is a strong correlation between "America should go to war with \$COUNTRY" and not knowing what continent \$COUNTRY is on.

Christianists petitioned Netflix to cancel *Good Omens*, which already had concluded and was on Amazon Prime.

Actress Vanessa Marquez was shot to death by police during a wellness check. I guess she wasn't well enough.

Texas passed a bill to allow Christians to refuse to associate with undesirables (harlots and tax farmers and such) because it's what Jesus would have wanted.

That is not dead...

According to *The Register*, Cambridge Anal. (which *The Register* abbreviates the same way I do) is not shutting down but renaming itself Emerdata. *Je l'emmerde*.

I have a funny name, and not just the unpronounceable last name. In New York in the 1940s and 1950s there was a set of names—Anglo-Saxon names Jews gave their sons—that were considered intrinsically laughable. The real thigh-slappers were *Melvin*, *Irving*, and *Seymour*, but *Arthur* was always good for a few chuckles.

Outside the New York area and after 1960 or so, the names were just names, and so I got over it, but I was left with the

feeling that laughing at someone's name was not particularly adaptive or intelligent behavior.

We are now hearing stories of middle-aged white women who panic at the sight of dark-skinned people in stores or on the street and scream or even call the cops.

That is also not particularly adaptive or intelligent behavior, and I'm glad that the proliferation of cell phone cameras means that many of them get caught. (Calling the cops under those circumstances is rightly considered a crime.)

But somewhere in the danker depths of the collective unconscious it was decided that these women are or should be named Karen, and thus we have another example of the PETA tradition of being stupid and hateful in a good cause.

Right to refrain

One reason we have a rape culture is that we have a pushiness culture. "The sale begins when the customer says no." Example: alcohol. We know from a recent Penn State case that frat boys enjoy getting someone horribly drunk even if they don't want to screw him when he passes out.

And many of the Web pages I see immediately hit the user with something they want to sign you up for, often with the exclusive choice:

[]Yes [] not now

Iron Law

Many years ago I noticed and named the Iron Law of Euphemism: When we make up a euphemism for something, after a while we remember that we still don't like the entity in question, so the euphemism needs a euphemism of its own. The only way the process ends is when the denoted group takes over and demands a name they themselves choose, usually several euphemisms back (Black, gay). I suggested that someday a child will say, "Mommy! Bobby called me a Bad Word! He said I'm *special!*"

I recently joined a Facebook group for people with ADHD because after seventy years I conceded that I belong there. The group also includes parents of people with ADHD, one of whom announced that she had been offended. Her son was diagnosed with the condition, and his school set up an IEP for him, and all was going well until the administrator carelessly remarked that her son was in Special Ed. “My child is NOT in Special Ed! He just learns differently and has a program for that!”

Flog spelled backwards

I never liked golf. It’s not a major problem for me, at worst taking up space on the sports page for some reason, but I am vaguely annoyed that it is out there. As a participant sport, it is, as Mark Twain said, a good walk spoiled (unless one can afford to ride around in a silly little cart). As a spectator sport, it is for those, and only those, who cannot keep up with the frenzied, madcap pace of baseball.

Now golf has served justice. A man named Valentino Dixon, serving 40-to-life for murder, was fascinated by golf courses, though he had never played the game, and he did beautiful complex, pencil-colored drawings of them. These were brought to the attention of *Golf Digest*, which published them. The magazine also investigated his conviction, which turned out to be particularly shoddy. (Speaking of color, guess which one Mr. Dixon is.) As a result the conviction was overturned, and Valentino Dixon was set free.

Politicians eat it

Cynthia Nixon ran in the New York State gubernatorial primary and unsurprisingly lost to a strong incumbent. It says here one factor was a “horrifying” bagel order: She ordered lox on a cinnamon raisin bagel. What horrifies me is the possibility that the candidate I’m going to vote for might lose because of bagel incorrectness.

Of course it seems most likely that this sort of thing amuses pundits but has never once decided an election. There seems to be one of them every year. Kerry got caught putting incorrect cheese on his cheesesteak, so Bush lied and said he hadn’t done the same, but that’s not why he won. I would vote for a candidate with good ideas even if she put mayo on a cheesesteak.

The whole thing is symbolic. (Symbolic of junk, as Mel Brooks would say.) I, the politician, love you people so much that I will choke down whatever alleged food you eat. As long as one vote apiece goes to people who think “That’s just your education talking” is a reasonable argument (and I see no better alternative), we have to be able to get down on all fours and look at things from the voter’s point of view.

Reminder: I am not a reactionary; I am a condescending liberal elitist. Just because people have stupid political ideas doesn’t mean they should face financial ruin if they dare to get sick.

People are now noticing when the police shoot a Black person for unconvincing reasons. One part of the usual defense when this happens is that the victim was “no angel.” After Botham Jean was fatally shot by a policewoman who lived in the same building and mistakenly believed she was in her own apartment, the police triumphantly announced that the apartment in question contained an unlawful substance. Then I understood.

Having marijuana in one’s home has frequently caused the police to break in and shoot people. That risk is by far the greatest danger the drug presents. And the police officer was lucky to be the shooter rather than the shootee because living in a place that can be mistaken for one with drugs is also dangerous.

The enemy of my enemy

I am too old to hate the Red Sox. That is, I discovered baseball in 1949, when I was

almost 7, and I became a Yankee fan because my father was one. The Jesuits are right: What you believe at that age is the way the world is, or at least should be, so the Yankees are supposed to win the World Series every year.

Back then, the Dodgers were the Enemy. We traditionally beat them in the World Series, with an occasional break for beating the Phils or the Giants in the interests of variety. The Red Sox were just another team that we beat during the regular season: Teddy Ballgame and the Eight Dwarfs.

But then Walter O'Malley became the third worst person in the 20th century (revisionists say it was really Robert Moses), and the Dodgers moved to the ass end of the country, which meant they were too far away for a real rivalry. For that and other reasons (attention span), I drifted away from baseball, replacing it with football, which I still follow, despite all the issues. Then came Steinbrenner, and old Yankee fans, like old Communists, compare notes on which particular abomination drove them away, but insofar as I still noticed baseball, I was pro-Yankee.

The new rivalry was the brave little Red Sox versus the big bad Establishment Yankees, and as John Cheever said, "It can be worth your life in literary circles to be a Yankee fan." Eventually the inevitable came: Red Sox fans lost their *raison d'être* when the team finally won a World Series, but many still persevere.

In 2018 the Sox and the Dodgers played for the Big One. I was cheered by the thought that one of them had to lose.

The Republican victory in the Senate reminded us that the unelected, elitist, activist Court that gave us school desegregation, legal birth control & abortion; an end to laws against consensual sodomy; different-race and same-sex marriage and lots of good decisions on smut & police excess can no longer be counted on, and we will have to

find other ways to reach our remaining goals.

Slaves of Zuck

Facebook's other name is "A Web page is slowing down your browser," but I must admit that in some ways what I hate about Facebook is not Facebook's fault.

I am a Like slut. This is not a big secret. I know it; Zuck knows it; the advertisers know it; Homeland Security knows it; the Russians know it; everyone who has access to my Facebook activity knows it. I frequently hit Like, as well as other choices from Facebook's desperately limited emotional palette.

But sometimes hitting Like kicks me off my main page and puts me in the specific post that I clicked on, and when I try to return I am reminded that the Back button is one of Facebook's little jokes. Sometimes I find my way back; sometimes I don't.

I know. It's a video game, requiring hand-eye coordination and the patience to wait for the subtle signs that Like means Like. If I wanted to play a video game, I would play one with more interesting graphics.

But it's not just Facebook. It's inherent in the GUI. GUIs are gooey, and have turned computers into the sort of thing I want to have computers to deal with.

Every time Facebook plugs my first name into a boilerplate announcement about how much they love us, I want to channel Don Rickles: "Who made you an equal?"

Facebook has sent me half a dozen invitations to join groups dedicated to The Sweet, one of the many musical acts that have sprung up in the 45 years or so since I stopped listening to new music. I Googled them & discovered that they are "Glam rock," which is one of the main reasons I stopped listening to new music 45 years ago. I refuse to be lulled into a false sense of security by the obvious lack of intelligence of Facebook's AI.

Facebook also keeps sending me many ads for caviar, for which I am not in the market for two reasons, either of which would suffice: Expensive. Fish eggs.

Now it wants to know if I remember a particular ad that appeared here. Didn't answer because there's no checkbox for "I never remember any of your ads." Blatant effort to get me to do unpaid uninteresting work to make myself a better product.

There was a semi-recent scandal in elite college admission, in which parents faked not academic competence but the variety of interests required by the new demand for "well-roundedness." (Consider a perfectly spherical student with equal interests in all directions.) They always pretended the athletes were students. Now they're pretending the students are athletes.

Back when the forces of purity & decency were attacking pictures of nekkid women, we used to say, "If you think the human body is obscene, complain to the Manufacturer." Pete Buttigieg says the same about his love life; he's right too.

I've been a First Amendment Nut as long as I can remember. Back in the day when the battles were over sexual verbiage and descriptions, that meant defending the likes of Henry Miller & D.H. Lawrence on principle and because those who wanted to suppress them were worse.

Now it's Julian Assange, a shit disturber who gets his kicks spilling secrets, whether it's American war crimes or the names of closeted gay people in countries where outing could mean death. Again, the principle and the opponents. In traditional diplomatic parlance, he's a son of a bitch but he's our son of a bitch.

A fundamentalist radio preacher has announced that pro-choice people will be aborted by demons in Hell over and over again forever. He has not specified the mechanism by which this goal could be achieved. Further evidence for Robert Anton Wilson's remark that fundamentalists believe that the entire Universe was designed and built by something so mean and petty you wouldn't trust it to put together an outhouse.

I am torn between thinking that anti-GMO is orthorexia by the kind of people who fear dihydrogen monoxide in their food and realizing that American business is capable of creating a frankenfood too scary for Paolo Bacigalupi to write about.

Just win, Baby

The manager and general manager of the Houston Astros have been punished for using instant replay to steal other teams' signs. The technology was new, but the crime was an old one. It is now widely believed that Bobby Thomson hit the home run heard 'round the world because Leo Durocher had an agent in the center field seats with a telescope relaying the catcher's sign to him.

That's the kind of guy Leo was: Win at any cost and treat the concept of unwritten rules as a contradiction in terms. (There was then no official rule against spying from the bleachers.) Four years earlier his team also won the National League pennant (but he was not allowed to be there, suspended for having a sex life offensive to the Roman Catholic Church). That time the unwritten law he ignored forbade having a player who was the wrong color.

His spiritual heir was the Raiders' Al Davis, who bugged the visiting team's locker room and was in the forefront of hiring Blacks and women, both to gain an edge. He would have signed Kaepernick.

Someone posted a five-year-old story about a Christianist child-indoctrination facility that took the next step by kicking out everyone who has queer relatives. I assume by now they have no one left.

Prince Harry believes that Murdoch and the rest of the British yellow press killed his mother and would be quite happy to kill his wife if it would increase sales. He is not entirely mistaken.

More and more sites are demanding that you remove your ad blocker to read them, which is not unlike saying, "I won't talk to you unless you let me stand right in front of you without a mask."

A few years ago a news story revealed that some captains of industry were doing Adderall while others favored microdoses of LSD. 50 years back, some of us filthy hippies suggested that the future might be decided by a battle between the speed freaks and the acidheads. The Very Serious People laughed at us.

Much of the anti-lockdown and anti-mask propaganda is coming from Russian bots. It's biological warfare by proxy.

Irresistible/immovable question: What if there's a slaveholder monument in the way of something the capitalists want to make money from?

We are born with ideas and skills that were useful on the savannah, and we mostly augment them with what seemed to work when we were five years old.

Collateral damage

There is a point in pregnancy after which doctors can predict with better-than-chance accuracy what sex the child will decide to be. This is one of the things the Nacirema take too seriously, sometimes with disastrous results. There have now been two significant forest fires started by

Gender Reveals and at least one fatality from indoor pyrotechnics.

Not forgotten

Harlan Ellison: In 1964 I read an Inner Space tale called "All the Sounds of Fear," which all by itself inspired me to hunt down the battered paperbacks of its author in the used book stores (you remember used book stores) and then read his new books as they appeared. I enjoyed much of his work and am sad about how unpleasant it must have been to be him.

Earl Kemp was a smutmonger and a science-fiction fan. (What's not to like?) He navigated the morass of laws against Bad Words that my cohort grew up with and wound up spending time in jail for his part in publishing an illustrated version of the President's Commission Report on the subject just as victory was in sight. He published the famous symposium on *Who Killed Science Fiction?* back in the day, and in more recent years did a delightful zine of smut & fandom memories that I was pleased and proud to contribute to. He died at his computer.

Vonda N. McIntyre may be best known for trying to make the novelization an art form, filling out and explaining *Star Treks II-IV*. (Among other things, she gave Mr. Sulu a first name, which became canon.) She then novelized a nonexistent TV show (*Starfarers*) and wrote two Nebula-winning novels: *Dreamsnake* and *The Moon and the Sun*. It is reported that she finished one last novel before cellular life on its own terms got her, and she left her copyrights to Clarion West.

Bill Withers wrote & recorded "Lean on Me," a great song about Mutual Aid.

Lester Grinspoon talked sense about drugs. Nevertheless, he lived to be 92.

Justin Raimondo quite seriously described himself as the #1 gay supporter of Pat Buchanan (he admitted there was not a lot of competition), but that was not the whole story.

I have abandoned the hope of having a society without a few elements controlled by a legitimized armed gang, but I still have a lot of sympathy for libertarianism, not just sex&weed&dirty books but two other good ideas:

1) distrusting the cops. Radley Balko proudly upholds that one, now more liberals are noticing, and that may be the one element of vestigial libertarianism in Rand Paul's makeup.

2) staying out of Asian wars. Going back to Woodrow Wilson and continuing today there is the allegedly liberal doctrine that democracy is so wonderful that we must impose it everywhere no matter how many people we have to kill. Justin Raimondo and antiwar.org stood up to that idea.

Paul Krassner was the first great corrupting influence in my life. *The Realist* introduced me to Robert Anton Wilson and Albert Ellis, among others, and he himself commented incisively on the follies of our times. In the 70s he went through paranoia and came out the other side. I always sent him my zines, and one of the high points of my writing life was being quoted in *The Realist*.

Don Shula got the greatest praise I ever heard one coach give another. Bum Phillips said, "He can take hisn, beat you with yourn, then take yourn, and beat you with hisn."

Clive James was a polymath who wrote poetry, fiction, criticism, and memoir and seemed to know just about everything about the high and popular arts. His massive *Cultural Amnesia* is one of the essential books of our time.

Goodbye, Baby

He was born Giovanni Domenico Scafone Jr., but in those days Italians in showbiz, like Jews, had to have real Amurrican names (Frank Sinatra was one of the few to resist), so he became **Jack Scott**. In 1958 he recorded a rocker called "Leroy," which I loved. It didn't become a hit, but the deejays flipped it over and made the lugubrious "My True Love" a bestseller. That was the pattern: I liked the up-tempo ones; the ballads sold. He was a star for five years or so and then was forgotten, and now he's dead.

Sam Wyche was an innovative coach who took the Cincinnati Bengals to the Super Bowl. When the local fans were so displeased by an officiating decision that they were throwing things on the field and the officials threatened to forfeit the game, Wyche took the referee's mike and said, "Calm down. This is Cincinnati. You don't live in Cleveland." It worked.

On to a less pleasant topic: Donald Trump.

The great mathematician G.H. Hardy said it is never worth a first-class person's time to express a majority opinion, but I am not sure this is one or at least common enough to beat the fixed game known as the electoral college, so:

**VOTE AGAINST TRUMP
VOTE AGAINST ALL HIS ENABLERS,**
which is to say, anyone running as a Republican. Under the present system the only way to vote against the Republicans is to vote for the Democrats, so you gotta do that.

Excelsior,

Arthur