

Noesis

The Journal of the Mega Society

Issue #184 July 2007

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About the Mega Society

The Mega Society was founded by Dr. Ronald K. Hoeflin in 1982. The 606 Society (6 in 10^6), founded by Christopher Harding, was incorporated into the new society and those with IQ scores on the Langdon Adult Intelligence Test (LAIT) of 173 or more were also invited to join. (The LAIT qualifying score was subsequently raised to 175; official scoring of the LAIT terminated at the end of 1993, after the test was compromised). A number of different tests were accepted by 606 and during the first few years of Mega's existence. Later, the LAIT and Dr. Hoeflin's Mega Test became the sole official entrance tests, by vote of the membership. Later, Dr. Hoeflin's Titan Test was added. (The Mega was also compromised, so scores after 1994 are currently not accepted; the Mega and Titan cutoff is now 43—but either the LAIT cutoff or the cutoff on Dr. Hoeflin's tests will need to be changed, as they are not equivalent.)

Mega publishes this irregularly-timed journal. The society also has a (low-traffic) members-only e-mail list. Mega members, please contact the Editor to be added to the list.

For more background on Mega, please refer to Darryl Miyaguchi's "A Short (and Bloody) History of the High-IQ Societies,"

<http://www.eskimo.com/~miyaguch/history.html>

and the official Mega Society page,

<http://www.megasociety.org/>

Noesis, the journal of the Mega Society, #184, July 2007.

Noesis is the journal of the Mega Society, an organization whose members are selected by means of high-range intelligence tests. Jeff Ward, 13155 Wimberly Square #284, San Diego, CA 92128, is Administrator of the Mega Society. Inquiries regarding membership should be directed to him at the address above or:

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Editorial

Kevin Langdon

Although the Mega Society is not currently listed in Wikipedia, the society still exists and continues to publish this journal. Other demands on the Editor's time, unexpected complications in a study I'd expected to include in this issue, and a shortage of material have resulted in the lateness of this issue. I apologize for the delay.

This issue features Ian Goddard's thoughts on art and the red rains of Kerala and a new column, "Ask May-Tzu," by an author whose writings are familiar to—and treasured by—readers of *Noesis*. We also have three letters to the Editor. This is especially welcome, as *Noesis* is intended to be a vehicle for the *exchange* of ideas.

A question has come up regarding whether we should accept second attempts on the Titan Test for admission to Mega. And, although no other currently-scored tests are available, there are people out there with qualifying LAIT and Mega Test scores, from before the tests were compromised. One difficulty is that people may have retaken the tests, received score reports, and submitted them for admission to Mega without making it clear that they've taken them before; it's hard to imagine how we'd enforce a ban on second attempts. Opinions on this subject are solicited.

There's a very real need for the high-range-psychometrics community to come together and try to arrive at a better consensus about high-end testing. To that end, I've proposed the publication of the *Journal of Right Tail Psychometrics*. This project has been a dream for several years and it's now time to launch it. To this end, I'd like to ask the members of the various societies to help me find publishable material in the societies' e-mail lists. Original articles on high-range testing and extreme giftedness are also encouraged. I'd like to get the first issue out this fall. The deadline for submissions is September 15.

The deadline for *Noesis* #185 is also September 15.

More *Noesis* submissions are needed. Please think about writing something or send something from your files for publication.

And please submit your questions for "Ask May-Tzu."

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Back Cover: The Editor's cat, Bashir, brother of Jadzia (back cover of *Noesis* #183).

Recent & Random Thoughts

Ian Williams Goddard

Before I set off meandering about somewhat aimlessly across the landscape of random thoughts let me take this opportunity to thank Kevin Langdon for important feedback on strong dualism that improved the presentation of other models and the conclusion in my last *Noesis* article. [1] Thanks Kevin for your ever-wise thoughts!

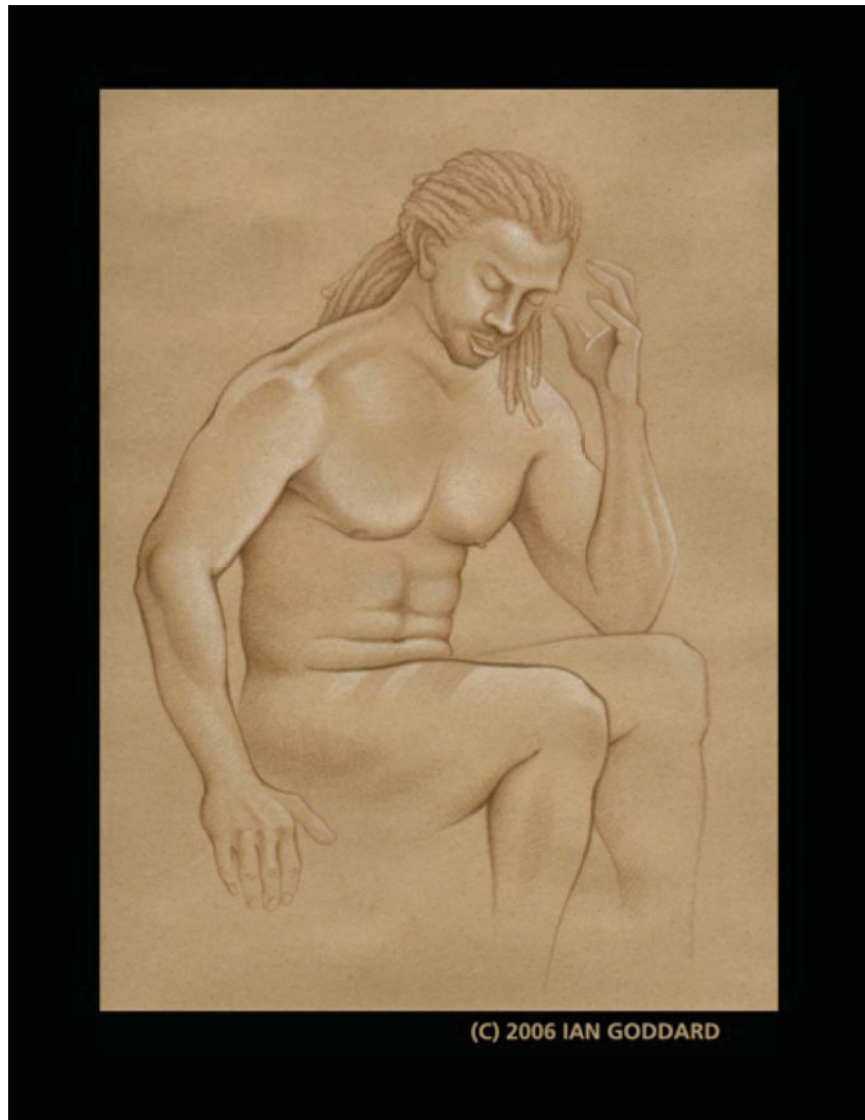
Let me also point folks to a report on the mysterious red rains of Kerala published by the University of Wisconsin's *The Why Files*. [2] Its author, David Tenenbaum, is one of the few reporters who did his homework before jumping on the sensational claims of an extraterrestrial origin of the rains reported by major media sources. His report cites some of the arguments for a terrestrial origin of the rains that I raised in *Noesis* 180. [3] But before we head off to India let me share a few thoughts I've had on art.

My Conflict with Line

The artistic medium I most enjoy is drawing. Drawing seems like the most fundamental form of artistic expression. There is in drawing a naked vitality and freshness that you don't find in other media. Few other media are as dependent on the use of line. Yet while it's essential to drawing, I've always had a conflict with line. I love the well-drawn line, a sinuous curve that conveys the form of an object not only by continuity but by width variation. As a master illustrator taught me, the curve outlining a drawn object should become thinner where it denotes a *convex* surface and thicker where it denotes a *concave* surface. Such width variation produces the impression that the convex portion of a delineated object is protruding outward, simulating just what the form is doing.

That extra dimension of linear expression is part of the rich 'language of line' that's fundamental to drawing. Captivated by the language of line my drawings usually end up with strong linear statements. My conflict has been knowing if my linear statements are too loud, possibly overpowering other important aspects of a drawing. Many artists use strong lines in drawing, while others emphasize shading over line. What's the right balance?

The following two colored-pencil drawings of one model provide an example of heavy and lighter use of line. The first drawing gives an example of heavy use of line.



In the drawing above, my linear statements are loud and clear. Such linear volume has been my natural style. [4] However, currently I'm taking a course with one of the great masters of our day, Robert Liberace. [5] His style and teaching points away from strong line and emphasizes shading as primary to the expression of form. After just three of his classes to date, what I've learned has already influenced my drawing. Observe for example a drawing I just made (below) of the same model I previously drew above:



Notice the lighter use of line in the second drawing and how it allows the depicted form to better express sculptural volume even as much of the drawing is in a muted tone. View the two drawings back and forth to see that difference between heavy and light line. The first one looks more like a cartoon while the second looks a little more like an actual object that's *out there* in space. The second drawing shows the influence of Liberace on both my line and on my depiction of shadow. But I'm not happy with some aspects of the

second drawing, such as the sketchy and somewhat stylized look of the upper arm due, it seems, to a too-heavy line above the upper arm. Alas, there's that line conflict working its way back into the picture! I may work a little more on that drawing.

The following two quick sketches also show the influence of Liberace on my evolving drawing style, especially on my depiction of shadow.



Notice how the shadows convey the sculptural volume of the forms depicted above. These quick sketches demonstrate some principles of shadow structure I learned from Liberace, which I leave for the curious observer to deduce from the given.

As the previous two drawings suggest, a problem with lines is that they can flatten out a depicted form. The ability of variable line width to convey surface structure is not sufficient to entirely cancel the flattening effect of heavy line. The reason seems to be that a strong dark outline defines a level of darkness that most shaded areas inside the delineated form cannot compete with. In that case the line is over and above the form, stronger than the form, suppressing its sculptural volume and thereby flattening it out. So my conflict with line is trying to find the right balance between depicting *boundary* with line and *sculptural volume* with shading.

Linear Depiction As Abstraction

Some of my earliest childhood memories involve occasions when I was examining things in my environment to see if they actually had outlines around them like the things I drew with crayons and saw depicted in books by artists. I concluded that things were not so delineated in real life. The nonexistence of lines around real objects raises a curious point: a line drawing of an object is an *abstract* representation of that object. In contrast, drawn shading depicts what actually *is* out there and thus shading constitutes *concrete* representation. Unlike drawn shadows, drawn lines are typically abstractions.

Yet we usually think of accurate line illustration as the very essence of concrete representation. But actually, only a photo-realistic representation of the object would be the essence of concrete representation, and photos don't show the lines we see in drawings. A linear drawing of an object is an abstraction of that object, and the nature of this process of abstraction seems to be that of a symbolic convention that denotes the category of form, or more broadly of difference. A line in art is essentially a statement that says what's on one side of the line is *different* than what's on the other side.

Perception As Parsing

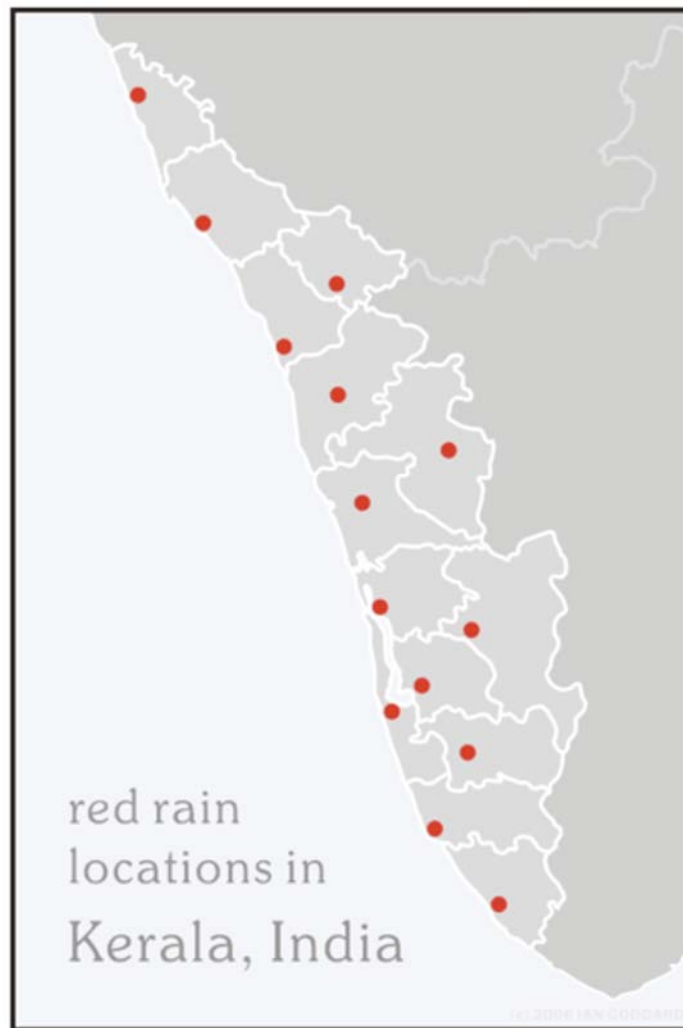
Study of the visual attributes of objects in an effort to better depict their likeness provides much grist for the mills of perceptual analysis. For example, learning new things about observed phenomena affects subsequent phenomenal perceptions. As an instance, learning about shadow structure and seeing it applied by a master (Liberace) has changed the way I see shadows. Now, when observing things during the day I notice the structure of shadows and how they convey form. Before being pointed to common shadow-structure patterns, data carrying that information had certainly fallen on my eyes and run through my perceptual field, but I never *noticed* it specifically.

Because I had never noticed the shadow-structure data in my sensory data stream, that structure never appeared to exist. To *notice* data is to *parse* data where the incoming stream of sensory data is seen as an expressed language governed by rules of grammar that are also known as 'the laws of physics'. Only by learning to parse shadow-structure data from sensory data and to incorporate it into a meaningful knowledge schema did it come into *perceptual existence* for me. So if I don't parse x , I don't perceive x . To perceive x is fundamentally to *notice* x , and to notice x is to *parse* x from sensory data. So it seems we might be able to say: to perceive is to parse.

And now on to Kerala

Readers may recall my previous article (*Noesis* 180) exploring causal hypotheses for unusual red-colored rains that fell in Kerala, India during the summer monsoon of 2001. [3] One of the causal models explored involved oceanic algae, perhaps red-tide algae, being carried up into the clouds by waterspouts over the ocean. Waterspouts are tornadic cyclones that occur over water and are known to draw up vast amounts of water, including its occupants, such as fish, frogs, or eels. The drawn-up travelers are lofted up into the clouds and often deposited on land close to shore. [3]

Given those facts it's most curious to note that there was a report of a fish fall in Kerala last July, the *same* month red rains fell most often in 2001. [6] This report suggests that waterspouts *do* in fact occur off the Keralan coast, where there has also been a problem with red-tide algae. [3] Also consider the map showing places where red rains fell, their distribution suggests that proximity to the ocean was a 'risk factor' for red rain. Red rains were not reports outside Kerala during the 2001 monsoon, and the most intense red rains fell in towns right next to the Arabian sea.



In my report I discounted the waterspout model due entirely to the findings that the rains were colored primarily by the spores of a red algae of the *Trentepohila* genus, which it seems goes not grow in the ocean. Sampath *et al.* concluded that the spores were from algae growing prolifically on local trees and surfaces. While my inclination has been and still is to accept those findings, the waterspout model has a lot of *prima facie* appeal. [3]

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- [1] <http://megasociety.org/noesis/182.pdf>
 - [2] http://whyfiles.org/shorties/207red_rain/
 - [3] <http://megasociety.org/noesis/180.pdf>
 - [4] <http://iangoddard.net/art.htm>
 - [5] <http://robertliberace.com>
 - [6] Gopakumar, R. (2006). "It rained live fish in Kerala town." *Deccan Herald*, July 23. <http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/Jul232006/index2038362006722.asp>

Letters to the Editor

Frank Nemec

Re: “An Interstellar Propulsion System” article in *Noesis* 183:

Just enough to stimulate a hunger for more details . . .

I presume magnetism is the intended method of imparting kinetic energy as well as maintaining and adjusting the orbit. Do you envision the spacecraft having significant ferromagnetic mass? Or a large superconducting magnet?

The craft must survive the intense magnetic field. I like the idea of having the energy source near the sun’s supply rather than on the spacecraft or carried from earth. The craft would be moving quite quickly already due to the gravitational attraction of the sun. Do you have any idea how much energy this satellite ring could add?

I think the spacecraft can’t afford the mass of the magnets; they’d be in the ring of booster stations in close solar orbit. I do see it as being composed primarily of ferromagnetic material. There’s no limit to the number of times the spacecraft can circle before it’s released, so it’s more a question of how much energy the apparatus can handle.

–Kevin Langdon

After receiving the above, I wrote to Frank and asked: “Would it be all right if I print your comments on my article and my response as a letter to the Editor and response in the next issue of Noesis?” And Frank replied:

Absolutely. It'll increase my motivation to read the issues. . . . It sounds like you envision something like a cyclotron, using well-timed magnetic pulses to add kinetic energy to the craft with each orbit around the sun. I would think it would take an incredible amount of energy to get the craft into that close circular orbit on its first approach. I admit I'm handicapped by seeing only a small portion of your idea.

On each pass, the majority of the energy would go into cooling and keeping the spacecraft in orbit, not flying off into space, but some would go into imparting additional velocity. The investment of energy required to get the stations and the spacecraft into place would be one of the main considerations that would need to be addressed in an engineering study of this project.

—KL

Daniel Heyer

Dear Sir,

I do not know *Noesis*' policies regarding editorial comment, but I am writing in response to Chris Cole's recent article on the nature of morality. Since I have no formal exposure hermeneutics or philosophy, I apologize in advance for the manner in which I have expressed my thoughts and hope that they are clear nonetheless.

In his article Chris speculates that morality is an evolutionary adaptation, either biological or cultural, that promotes the survival of the species. A consequence of this adaptive moral compass is a discomfiting sense of normative/positive dichotomy, the conflict between Should and Is. Chris then explores psychological and technological means for delivering us from our moral discomfort, with significant emphasis on the technological.

At the beginning, I must admit my own skepticism about the soteriological effectiveness of Chris' technological solution, biological immortality. My own feelings aside, however, Chris' analysis contains a several tacit assumptions that warrant further exploration.

First Chris notes that any question of absolute right and wrong is simply unanswerable (and is probably best left that way). By definition, a god is necessarily an enigma to its creations and its rules of right and wrong are not necessarily codable in a way that is communicable to its creations. The formal arguments follow Gödel. Abandoning absolutes, we can still observe the consequences of morality, however. Actions that lead to cooperation and allow for social organization contribute to the survival of a social entity. As members of a surviving social entity, we can anticipate these cooperative phenomena and it makes sense to interpret morality in this way.

Chris notes indirect consequences of morality, an individual sense of discomfort and unhappiness arising from moral tension., fear of mortality, etc. It is at this point, that Chris subtly allows unstated positive and normative beliefs of his own to enter his analysis: that discomfort creates unhappiness and that unhappiness should be relieved.

Discomfort is demonstrably unrelated to happiness. My young son has a close classroom friend. They are inseparable and genuinely enjoy each other's company. Occasionally, however, his friend will unexpectedly and publicly humiliate him. My son was devastated by this unkind behavior until I explained that his friend has a psychological disorder and his doctors are experimenting with his medications. His friend is not acting from malice and is truly his friend. My son still experiences discomfort at his periodic humiliation, but these events no longer have emotional power over him. The difference lies in his understanding and perception, not in his circumstances.

Discomfort, whether physical or psychological, is an unavoidable fact of our existence and does not necessarily lead to unhappiness. It is only when we attach artificial significance to our discomfort that unhappiness arises. For that matter, one can't even clearly delineate discomfort. Is the pain of physical exercise uncomfortable? Is the warm haze of one-too-many glasses of wine comfortable? The notion of discomfort is blurred with the notion of happiness and whether I 'like' something. The only thing I can say for certain is that I experience sensations and that, depending upon my understanding and perception, these sensations lead to happiness or otherwise.

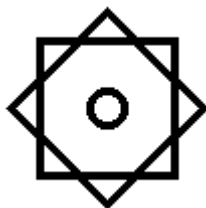
From this understanding we can see that unhappiness can only reliably be removed by modifying our understanding and perception of the world. (Given the universality of our desire to avoid suffering, I accept this motivation as axiomatic.) On this basis the Zen solution is superior, more direct in its effectiveness than the technological approach. Immortality cannot be relied upon to make people happier. Rather we should practice enduring our sensations with equanimity. We should explore our beliefs about mortality, about existence and nonexistence. In our investigation we will find that many of our implicit beliefs are logically unsupportable, and by rejecting these beliefs we allow space for a more sophisticated and harmonious understanding/experience of our existence.

Warmest Regards,
Daniel Heyer
danielheyer@sbcglobal.net

Chris Cole

Following up on Jeff Ward's article on the Nasca lines in Peru, I came across the book *Nasca: Eighth Wonder of the World*, by Anthony Aveni, in which he proposes that the lines are walking paths. The lines are formed by scraping away the surface soil, which seems like a common way to create a path (the other being to build up the surface, but this requires material that may not be available). The most convincing piece of evidence is that the lines in the figures form one continuous path and some of the figures have approach and return paths (see the lower left foot of the spider in Jeff's pictures or the bill of the hummingbird).

Chris Cole



Moment

The bird's song hears the listening ear.
The wind-blown flame sees the watching eye.
Looking back from the mirror world I see myself,
Remembering now.

—May-Tzu

Ask May-Tzu

In response to popular demand, the enlightened master May-Tzu has graciously consented to answer questions submitted by readers of Noesis.

Q: May-Tzu, what can you tell us about the “old country”?

May-Tzu: The Laputans found composing plays to be far too practical and randomness, itself, excessively ordered. Yet they accomplished the most complex tasks by seemingly random actions, which depended upon a perfect utilization of the butterfly effect. Before the concept of order or the measurement of time, it was not uncommon for Laputans to inhabit mirages, in order to better appreciate the more substantial world of illusion and shadow. Some dwelled invisibly in ancient cities which had long since vanished from the Earth.

Among the Laputans it was not considered true that a house built of metaphors was not as strong as a house built of straw. It had been said since time immemorial that a house built of metaphors was stronger than a house built of bricks and mortar. It’s not known if they meant this metaphorically or literally.

But it has been noted that the Laputans left no relics or artifacts of their past glory and were said to have had no shadows. This absence of evidence for the existence of the Laputans is, in fact, the most enduring monument to the greatness of their achievements.

The Laputan space program attempted to determine the location of their ancestral planet, Earth. There was no consensus among even the most pragmatic on how to determine which direction was “down,” in order to reach the Earth. But, as an expression of unity, their plan was to launch exploratory spacecraft at more or less random times from the island of Laputa in all possible directions. At some later time the astronauts planned to regroup somewhere and then construct a complete model of the cosmos on a larger scale than the cosmos itself, in order to gain precision.

Among the Laputans endurance breathing was considered a lifetime sport and one that they were truly motivated to play, usually on highly competitive endurance breathing teams, but sometimes in solitude among the clouds. The games were, of course, televised 24 – 7. But often the uninitiated had difficulty differentiating sportsmen from spectators. The games continued until everyone within range of camera deceased either of old age or from the intense excitement of the sports competition itself.

Viruses and bacteria were honored as homeless beings seeking food and shelter and as great spiritual teachers. Laputans abhorred any use of force by the government or by Nature, herself, and spent their days from time immemorial attempting to abolish the forces of gravitation and electromagnetism, seeking to substitute a susurrations of tautologies.

Among the Laputans it is not uncommon to absentmindedly lose something one is holding in one's hand, but the reason is different. When lost in thought, Laputans will generally still remember that the lost object is in their own hand, but be unable to recall the location of their hand or physical body, itself, in relation to them.

In the past it was not uncommon to come upon large caravans of the most grounded and practical Laputans, who were on quests to find their own body again. Traditionally many Laputans have spent their entire lives fruitlessly attempting to re-locate their bodies, often not seen since childhood, only in order to have access to something quite ordinary that they were holding in their hand.

But now post-modern Laputans use Google Earth for this. Sitting at their computers for unending days without rest, Laputans will scan high-resolution images of the Earth's surface in search for their own body. Sometimes passersby may hear a Laputan shout joyfully, "Eureka! There I am sitting at a computer!"

