



PHICTION

SPRING 2015 ISSUE

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Note from the Editor,

First let me thank you for choosing to take the time to enjoy this year's edition of the literary journal *Phiction*. After a short hiatus, we are pleased to present the 2015 issue and are grateful to have the opportunity to share the works of these talented students. Our theme for this issue is one of general experience and philosophical investigation and we are proud to present this collection of poems and short stories that tell of the multiple experiences and thoughts of our contributors. This issue will take you through multiple points of view and varied philosophical approaches to this thing we call life.

I'd also like to personally thank my staff for all of the hard work and dedication they put into making this issue a success and ensuring the quality of the experience the reader will receive. Without them, many of the painstaking hours reading and rereading would have been much more grueling and most likely less productive. I'd also like to thank the Texas State University Philosophy Department for giving us the opportunity to pick this project back up, and the personal support and help provided to us by our chair, Dr. Craig Hanks. A special thanks to Camrie Pippet for her continuous help and inspiration. We hope that you enjoy this collection and the journey that it will take you down with every read.

Thanks Always,

Travis Wellington Stockton
Editor and Chief

“Sometimes a rich heart wears a poor coat.”
Scottish Proverb

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Cut Hands
Sarah Elmiarri

All of these cuts
keep appearing
around my hands,
my fingers.
I wonder if it's from
the weather,
if it's from
having to do
too many dishes.
I wonder if the
cuts are there
because you aren't.
As I sat in a
coffee shop,
listening to all of the
people speaking,
I listened to these
two women exchange stories.
Going back and forth
switching between
Arabic and English.
I wondered if they
have cuts on their hands
from doing too many
dishes or the weather.
Maybe the cuts have
formed from their previous
lovers leaving.
I heard the barista
speak to a man
about how she used
to be a nurse,
yet, how now,
being a barista has been
her favorite job.
Maybe she's had to deal
with too many cut hands.

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Too many women
going to her with
cut, bleeding, splintered
hands and fingers.

Maybe she knew it
wasn't from doing
too many dishes or
the weather.

She must have
started becoming heart-broken
from all the tales
that unraveled
from each hand.

She must have
learned at some point
it was all from
their lovers.

It makes me question
whether a man's hands
are rougher and tougher,
or a woman's.

Maybe it's just the
case from behind
where the heartbreak
derived.

Hairs on a Pillow
I laid in your bed
counting the hairs
on your pillow.

I wondered how many
were yours
and how many
were another's.

My body started to tense;
I imagined if any
of the others
were tense.

Once you started
kissing me,
my body floated

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into the clouds;
along with where
all the others
had probably been.
Once my body
drifted down,
I pictured myself
lying there;
then pictured the one
who will lie there
with you
next.

The Boat of Thales

Elaine M. Lazaro

Between cold teas and a sheet of paper, sometime in November or December, I asked him if
with the paper he could make me a bird.
But he said no and I said my grandmother can make. Oh well, but I too can't.
So with the green paper, he made a boat for me instead.
And like an eight year old girl, with it, I amused myself. I was imagining that sea we shared
last summer, as he, on the other side of the table recalled how he and his childhood friends
used to have fun with paper boats.
Carefully placing them over what they thought resembled a river.
Thales believed that everything comes and returns to water, I said.
He cannot make a paper bird, but he can make a paper boat because he never desired to fly,
He is a boat or a green canoe. He is a river and like a river, he incessantly flows.
So I wanted to ask him if I could hold his water in a jar, but I remained mum.
Then he asked me if he ever told me that story of Thales when he found out how to measure the distance, using the isosceles triangle, of a ship from a shore.
I said no. And with his green paper boat he told me the story.
When he tells me story like that, I fall for him more.
Sometimes when he is too quiet, though I want to ask him whether I can use the isosceles
triangle to measure his boat's distance from my shore.

The Point

Thomas Dylan Daniel

There is a man who sits on a mountain in the country of Laicep who knows why the world is about to end. He understands why things seem to be accelerating at a thunderous pace, always moving faster than the day, year or decade previous. The veiled push for primitivism on a large scale has always been motivated by a kind of desperation, a manic urgency that denies the importance of this life, this people. The feeling reduces men to psychopaths bent upon the murder of brothers, he reflects. He sits, eyes closed, meditating upon the end of the world as snow falls around him.

His eyes are open in a different place, away from his physical body. In this place, he is the mountain. In this place, his soul is as immutable and unmovable as a continent, as large and daunting as a mountain. There are stars in the sky, and there is earth underfoot - a vast, dead plain of matter that is as invisible as the floor of a deep ocean or the very core of the earth in our physical world.

It is a world that has been built up, over the generations and mutations and evolutions of life forms; beginning, as always, with the simplest. Even as single celled organisms relate to the complexities of mammalian creatures in the physical world, their souls relate to the souls of men in the spiritual one where the man now looks around. Everything shines with a different color of light; and light comes only from life. Even as souls flicker out and collapse, they are covered over by seas of the living.

The man studied physics, once.

A main sequence star has a definite life cycle. It burns hydrogen first, fusing it into heavier elements. Eventually, the elements have been fused to a point of no return - there aren't enough light ones left for fuel - and the star dies; first expanding, then contracting so as to spew matter out to form other things. That doesn't seem to be how it is here, in this world of dark mass and brilliant light. The stars in the sky represent other places where this phenomenon takes place in the spiritual world, he thinks as he patiently observes the world around him. There is no real motion in a physical sense, no body to move. Only possibility, composed of monads large and small, monads that grow without eating, never consume one another, and wink into existence from nothingness. As he looks around with human eyes, he sees a certain formlessness to the world surrounding him. Lumpy, yet expansive. It is fortunate he sits in a high place, for he is unable to move about.

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Oddly enough, he thinks, the man begins to recognize people he knows in the soup of lights nearest him. A man he studied with sits twinkling amongst a thousand larger and smaller souls, but is certainly recognizable. A wave, a thought, a feeling of recognition passes through him and he tries to stand.

Back on top of the mountain, his physical eyes open. He stands, freezing, covered in freshly fallen snow, and walks a short way to a building where his brothers live. Inside, he finds soup, a fire, and friendly faces; but he does not smile. He does not sit by the fire to chase away his chill, and he does not drink warm soup to fill his stomach. He sits away from his fellows, facing a wall, saying nothing.

In the spiritual world, there is no sound as the mountain collapses upon itself. There is no moment of darkness; for even as his soul winks out others have already appeared to cover it over. Soon, the mountain he represented is taller than before, covered thick with the brightly shining lights of the living.

His brothers approach him, and finding him dead, begin to prepare his body for the funeral pyre. Far, far away an old spirit-star grows dark, but it does not explode. It simply... continues, without its light. And elsewhere, in the night, a new light begins to shine. Slowly, at first, each light the same color as each other as they wink into existence. Soon, as they all get farther away, there are other colors and the source grows brighter, stronger.

From the proper vantage point, anyone who spoke English could read the vivid, flashing, cosmic scale neon sign. Every life form in the universe served the purpose of illuminating this sign, a scrolling banner that looked as if it were composed of LEDs that repeated the same message, over and over.

This is what it said:

So, **THIS** is the point of everything?

Cancerous
Marcus Casasa

At first I did not quiver
When I received the news,
Being such a dainty muse.
Though I looked much younger
I wasn't quite a sprite,
But I did feel a hunger
With a future not so bright.
So treatment came and was a must
Appointments I had to fill,
The cancer spread throughout my crust
I did not feel a shiver
I had truly fallen ill.
This mutagen was the newest yet
The doctors knew not how,
My neighbors told me not to fret
But it wouldn't be long now.
It metastasized and spread aloof
Inside and then back out,
Airborne now and showing proof
That I had no other route.
I am dying now, and so I beg
Why should I now perish?
Why am I home to such selfish dreg?
Whom I they do not cherish?
So many cells I do now home
Who need me to survive,
Perhaps...I should now roam
My life they will derive.
So now my body is not mine
Perhaps it was to borrow,
Maybe I could love them today
As they will love themselves tomorrow.

In Praise of Dukkha!
Christopher H. Ketcham

Siddhartha was weak, exhausted from fasting and meditating. His Ribs humped his skin and his eyes were sunken and gray. There must be a better way he thought. He sat under the Bodhi tree and began to think of this better way...

And this is the story we have all heard of the coming into enlightenment of the Buddha. Of course he remembered all his past lives and saw there had been other Buddhas before him. But there was an eternally recurring theme with all of these past lives and Buddhas. Mara. Mara the tempter. Mara of death. And Siddhartha was not spared a visitation from Mara. Some say he came in the guise of Siddhartha's wife or other comely women. But Siddhartha had left his wife to discover the cause of suffering (dukkha) so he would not have been swayed by such a visage. Instead there is another story that reverberates through the high passes of the great mountains of northern India. It has swept down in rushing eddies and flooded the plains of understanding. And it is this story that the wind whispers that the guise that Mara took was Siddhartha himself, well fed, a bit chunky even, smiling and seemingly enjoying life and all the pleasures it offered.

Balderdash! I hear you, friend. For like the spring breeze this is a cold tale that was never written down. It is but a diaphanous whisper. But if you listen carefully you can hear the wind hiss Siddhartha. And it is a hiss as if from the mouth of a demon but yet sweet as a tempter's entreaty—"oh, so wonderful is my way, Siddhartha. So wondrous and you have forsaken me, me, your self, your self who is sitting before you. I am what you could be and what you once were. But now you are a shell of yourself and for what? This ill you have done to yourself is self-inflicted, injurious, and not in your nature. You have forsaken all that is good, but for what? For what, Siddhartha?"

And the sickly Siddhartha saw this visage and sighed back in a way that sounded like a death rattle. Of course, as we all know the story, he would not make his death bed for many years to come. But Siddhartha's sigh mingled with that of Mara-Siddhartha and he saw that his sigh had become inseparable with Mara's own. But he did not see Mara in his doppelganger, his corpulent twin who sat before him. He saw only that his breath and the breath of this other were but the same. And at

first this concerned him. “Which one of us is me,” he thought. But then with a weak chuckle, “neither,” he said to the gentle breeze that gently rocked the Bodhi tree leaves above him.

This was the truth, he thought, that neither one: the corpulent one, or the near-corpse was him. There was no him; there was only Siddhartha of the flesh and mind and these were not separate but the same thing. “That I am continuity but not continuity with identity,” he said to himself. “So either of these visages of Siddhartha is possible and so are many others. But it is the continuity of Siddhartha that makes it possible for me to choose a path that I believe in.”

And, of course, then and there he began to construct the path he would follow—the eightfold path. The End...

Well not exactly. You see there is still the problem with the rather round Buddha. Did he disappear? No. Siddhartha, when he became the Buddha, began to consume this other visage—but not distinctly other, this identity without continuity. Rather than try to defeat Mara directly or through verbal sparring with the tempter, which is what the chroniclers of the Buddha have fed you over the centuries—rather than send Mara away—he consumed this separate identity, incorporating the lies into his own flesh. In other words he imprisoned Mara but not in a way that you might think because we all know that Mara cannot be imprisoned in his state as a demi-god. Rather the Buddha consumed his identity which Mara in his attempt to lure Buddha away from his quest to cure dukkha had separated from himself. Recognizing the impossibility of this separate self in the guise of another Siddhartha, the Buddha simply incorporated the impossibility of this separate self into him where it has become imprisoned and died with the Buddha and has never been reborn again.

Some say that Mara still roams the Asian steppes without identity, without his self, an anachronism looking for something he cannot find, incomplete as any changeling might be, searching for a becoming he can never have. I believe he is still there because dukkha has remained uncured in the world. You will know when you encounter this Mara because he will show himself as you in a guise that might be tempting: handsome or beautiful; athletic or smart or both. But you will know this is an impossibility and if you are smart you will scoop him up into your pocket and ferry this separate identity into your own enlightenment and enter into paranibbana

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with it and end its suffering. Alas, that will only cure a bit of dukkha, won't it because the visage was not Mara, only another of his separate selves. Mara is still singing the praises of dukkha to anyone who will listen.

Ruined Clay
Sarah Elmiarri

These two tree trunks
Help hold me to the ground.
Roots leading up them,
those veiny roots.
Cellulite striking at a young age.
These trunks rub together
While I walk,
Spark a fire,
When I run.
These tree trunks are
my thighs.
Pale; hidden from the sun.
Large, like the body they carry.
Fatty, like a camel's hump.
These thighs are
my thighs.
Carved and sculpted
Like ruined clay. They guide me
To my destination, and
Stand me when I wake.
These grand ol' tree trunks
Aren't like those of yours.
Grow: they will.
Hide: they can't.
These thighs are
my thighs.

A moment of Experience

Pritika Nehra

It was late February, the time of the year when the flowers have just begun to bloom and there was a little warmth in the air in the afternoons and early evenings. It had rained last night. She could hear the thundering of clouds while still asleep.

The idea of meeting with him and the anticipation of being in that moment cheered her. The day was bright and clear. She had to make a polite excuse to miss a talk. She took a train to the heart of the city where they had decided to meet. It was not so frequent that he came around. He arrived a little late this time. She was deeply serious and also slightly silly enough to pursue, to understand all that there is. This life and its curiosities connected them.

She always liked to give him flowers. She said that there was so much of happiness around them. He liked the early spring in the air. There was a rhythm in his walk. He even hummed a song about rainbows while walking on the street when he was still busy taking off his black cardigan. He always dressed plainly and had long hair.

Walking around the streets, the smell of coffee beans, the perfume flowing from her hair left open, his perfectly textured yogic body, the little hint of inviting touches while walking, the smiling, laughing, feasting, drinking, the simmering inside of desires which never appears on surface, the talks about the frivolous and the deep, the way he circled his arms around twice in a warm embrace messaging her back a little.

Going over and over again about the chain of thoughts, desires and feelings when she was with him, she could now see how she was so taken up by the flow of all these transitions going on, one after another in her mind and body. Had she got a moment to experience, just one moment with him away from this everlasting boarding on the train of her mind, emotions and feelings? Had she really met him or even met this observing self of her, only for one moment? Nur eine moment bitte!! She just sat in her room in front of a window and observing herself from a distance and all that had went by in those few hours of the meeting—her thoughts, emotions, the flux of her feelings that came and went by in a flow and still continuing. Life was such a big miracle and it was just a moment away from being experienced.

Ascension

Marcus Casasa

Prior existence comes not unfolding
A celestial being is withholding
Mute at the altar of divinity,
Why are no tears shed in infinity?
New knighted angels know only human plight
What conversion took place within?
As seraphs seek not the salvation of their mortal kin.
The saved perceive the illusion of life
The integrious remain unperturbed,
Few are willing to descend and absolve,
A reality free of heavenly light,
A celestial being is withholding.

Katharsis

By Elaine M. Lazaro

Flush—the corpus delicti of that you and I daily commit.
Isles of Naked Negroes submerging the sea,
In the porcelain earth by the shape of lily.
Aristotelian Katharsis:
A scolded school boy,
Puts tacks on the pedagogical chair.
Instructor jumps; boy laughs.
Or murderer’s constant hand washing
Imaginary blood drip-drip-dripping,
(A voice inside him: “I didn’t mean to! I didn’t mean to!”)
Or bashful girl, one day rants like cajoling spirits
Her afternoon play, they were open-mouthed
Is a play with her grandpa’s malfunctioning loins.
Freudian transference:
Sprawl on the couch,
Let eyes give birth to muddy waters
Or zipped mouth into monster words—then savior ones.
To the festering soul, unleash the rotten.
As in the basket of tomatoes,
One putrid, the rest will turn into inedible mess.

Hairs on a Pillow
Sara Elmiarri

I laid in your bed
counting the hairs
on your pillow.
I wondered how many
were yours
and how many
were another's.
My body started to tense;
I imagined if any
of the others
were tense.
Once you started
kissing me,
my body floated
into the clouds;
along with where
all the others
had probably been.
Once my body
drifted down,
I pictured myself
lying there;
then pictured the one
who will lie there
with you
next.

Punch Lines

Thomas Dylan Daniel

The rain fell upon the rooftops and dumpsters alike, beating upon cars, trees, alleys and restaurants. Down over the lawns of the wealthy and the yards of the poor it quietly cascaded, perfectly rhythmic, as if in a dream.

Michael Huffman was a graduate of Stanford University, class of '68. He had soared above other minds in his classes as he put together his Literature major but after school, he thought, something had gone horribly wrong. Now, more than twenty years later, Michael Huffman missed his wife and child.

“Dang kids,” Michael swore under his breath. His mustache was gray and partially offset by the three days’ growth of beard he failed to notice as he turned and stared into the mirror. The other man was surprisingly old and appeared to be very angry even when, as now, his face wore no particular expression; reminding Michael that he didn’t care much to look in the mirror anymore. He scooped the refuse out of the urinal with a gloved hand and deposited it in a trash can, peeling off the latex glove on his way to the sink. He washed his hands for a long time under hot water and quickly tied up the trash bag, throwing the paper towel and inside-out glove in first. He put it on top of a pile of others and pushed the gray plastic wheelbarrow outside to throw each bag, one by one, into the dumpster. Michael stood under the awning next to the wheelbarrow, slightly damp from his work yet not ready to go inside. His work complete, he leaned against a wall and peered into the now-driving rain. He closed his eyes, looking the part of his frustration, and his thoughts raced to torment him about being a middle-aged failure who was forced to clean up other people’s shit for a living. A moment later, a melody caught his ear and he opened his eyes, turning his head to hear it. Someone was singing in the rain outside the elementary school. The rain slowed, and Michael ventured out a distance from under the overhang to tell the kids to knock it off and go home, wherever they were.

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As he began to hear the words more clearly, Michael realized he couldn't see the singers anywhere. Though their melody was sad, the song they sang was taunting, a childish song that made his blood boil. Feeling vaguely unsettled, Michael slowly wandered around the whole building in the light rain, looking above it and into the windows. He turned his gaze outward, but never caught a glimpse of whoever it was producing the music he heard; music that never got louder or quieter no matter where he walked.

"It's raining, it's pour-ring," the unseen children sang, over and over nearby, moving to lead him in one direction or another. "The old man is snoring. He went to bed so we shot him in the head and he wouldn't get up in the morning." Michael felt a chill at the conscious realization that someone was trying to lead him away from the school. Realizing next that he was soaked, the only logical choice was to walk back into the school to change and go home. The voices stopped as soon as he turned around.

Michael shuddered and tried to put the voices out of his mind. He put on fresh clothes from his locker; the pants and shirt he had worn to school that morning. Moments later he signed his name on a paper sheet confirming that the school was clean and left, carrying the uniform in one hand and an umbrella in the other. As he exited the building, he thought he heard the voices again. He turned around, and they stopped. Cautiously, he made his way home through the downpour.

That night, Michael couldn't sleep. He was reeling at the possibility of his mind being fallible. Perhaps he was going schizophrenic. He was a janitor at a public school and the stress of feeling that he needed to improve his station was driving him insane.

The stink of his failure to advance was simply too much to bear. Thoughts of the day just passed and the stark contrast his current life bore to the dreams of his youth some twenty years ago were just too prevalent, rearing their ugly heads time after time in his overheating mind.

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In the end, he tossed and turned for two hours before he got up to sit on the porch. Observing the placid rain made him tired after a few minutes soon he was back in bed, tossing and turning as the winds picked up and the storm resumed its thunderous fury. Michael's thoughts accelerated as if they were racing as he grew uncomfortable first in one position and then in another. At last, a fitful state of rest was attained. Michael slept in motion, hands and feet beating against imaginary padded walls.

His eyes moved rapidly under their lids, attempting to penetrate the mystery he knew was a hoax. Children sang, and Michael followed. They sang and sang and soon he walked into a large steel cage, the door slamming shut behind him.

He wailed and cried and eventually drew the conclusion that he had been put into a mental institution to be treated for schizophrenia.

"I'm not schizophrenic," he moaned, asleep. In the dream, he sat down and leaned against the wall, daring to remember the dream in his failing understanding of the reality that he lived.

Angry, frustrated, Michael stood in front of the door, staring out the small window in the padding. He couldn't see what was on the other side. Straining, his eyes failed him and the blackness sucked him into its yawning depth through the three inch square hole.

Suddenly, lightning struck very near the house. Its thunder shattered the night, annihilating the dream and simultaneously spurring Michael into action by justifying his restlessness. Having forgotten the dream, Michael found a reason to persist in wakefulness. He quickly got out his legal pad and a pencil. He walked as quickly as possible to his recliner on the porch, knowing that the trance would be his and it was time to write the thoughts that harassed him.

It has been a long time since last I sat
down with the mere intention of setting my
thoughts to the page. Misery has cost me

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greatly, I fear. For it is a choice to be miserable in this life, so rich and full of encounters. We each choose what to give and what to take from our experiences every day. I try in vain to steal the attention of the horde of familiar strangers that surround me. I look to the future in hopes, once again, of finding solace in the days to come. The night impenetrable to a ray of hope is black indeed. Yet no one avails. No one wants to hear my mad ramblings this time and I turn my attention to the page in hopes of purging these demons from my soul. So many illusions to create and to perceive. So many witnesses avail themselves to call down a blatant wrongdoer - so many blind eyes they have for the suffering of one in their midst. I have worked to be at peace with the present by seeking to determine a path to the future, using the past as my guide. Such a course of action is taken in vain, however, and herein lies the source of my frustration. Identified but not dispersed, the ghastly horrors in the night remain unwavering. They watched my young days, my reveling and my self righteous struggle yet they did not present themselves until the party had died. I am a remarkable man. A remarkable farce has been my life. If, indeed, it is all a divine comedy, I fear my moments have been punchlines, making me the butt of the joke. But never fear! At last I find myself ready for bed. Thank you, blank page, for allowing me that which my soul mates cannot give - an audience to the interminable suffering that goes, unbeknownst to the world, on and on in my thoughts.

Feeling better, Michael finished reading his new creation and

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walked back inside to the refrigerator to pour a glass of water. He set a glass on the counter and then paused for a minute, staring into the open refrigerator and leaning on the door. It was hard work, writing down feelings you'd repressed for years. A former novelist, Michael had taken the job as a janitor in order to allow himself a little financial peace of mind as he worked toward his masterpiece. Then, one day, he'd just stopped.

He poured a glass of water from the gallon jug he kept in the fridge. Grief could be a terrible thing. Now his mind was clear and he planned to write even more, later. He walked into the bedroom, sipping the water and enjoying the contented feeling he got from setting his thoughts to rest. Michael was asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow and in the morning he awoke, feeling rested and refreshed as the sun beamed in through the window. The storm had ended and Michael set to his morning routine with a smile on his face.

He walked out the door a few minutes later, setting a battered briefcase down in the hallway to fish in his pocket for his keys. It contained a legal pad, two ballpoint pens, a copy of *Great Expectations*, and his lunch in addition to the umbrella. Michael slipped his keys into his pocket and picked up the briefcase before he walked into the sun, humming. Later, there was supposed to be more rain.

The Recording
Rodrigo Ferreira

Dr. Roberts often tells me that when the Recording was first found, nobody knew if its message was true. He always says, “Of course, nobody had ever built a human before, so there was simply no way of knowing”.

I think that the fact that the message was translated to as using the word “built” was part of what baffled people so much. New humans come into existence every day: a human sticks a part of his body into a part of the body of another human, and nine months later, the result is that a new human is “born”. Everyone seems to clearly understand this and to trust the efficacy of this process. But, Dr. Roberts says, “for some reason, people had trouble with finding out that there was actually a set of step-by-step instructions that explained how to carry out this exact same process, just outside of a human body”. The Recording itself provided nothing more than a series of numerical data to describe the different steps... however, once people came to understand its message and wanted to translate to English, it seems that some people translated it as the “creation” process, others translated as the “cloning” process, and yet others translated it as the “building” process.

I’m going to use the latter simply because that was the term that Dr. Roberts first used when he appeared on television and has since then insisted that everyone should use. I have seen many times the video of when Dr. Roberts first broke out the news about the recording to the world. I remember the news show host saying something like “... and coming up, after the break, a self-taught amateur scientist says he used a self-made radio reception device to track changes in radio wave frequency in outer space. What he discovered, he says... is a message for us all!”

I laugh every time that I see Dr. Roberts in this video: his shabby beard, gray-brown hair, and large glasses, all moving together in unison, as he narrated the story of what he had done and how this would change the world forever. Dr. Roberts says that if he would have looked back then the way he looks now, nobody would have paid any attention to him. He says that people were just so surprised to hear how some much logic and coherence was coming out from the mouth of what effectively looked like a giant fur ball.

Now, Dr. Roberts inexcusably shaves every day and keeps a clean, brown set of hair shoved to the side. With all the public appearances and political conferences he appears in, he claims that “his people” tell him that this is a must.

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That's also something highly strange about Dr. Robert - he seems to use the term "people" very vaguely. For him, there are, for example, those people that he calls "my people" when he is in the lab. He tells these people include Dr. Bruce and all the other men and women in white coats that run around him during the day, listening to his every word, jotting down his instructions on notebooks. Then there are other people he also calls "my people", but he uses that term mostly when he is speaking in public and he wishes to distinguish those people who support what he says from those people who do not. Actually, to the people who disagree with him he sometimes refers to simply as "those people". Or, if talking to any one of them directly, he will say "you people".

This doesn't seem to go well with them. "Those people" are frequently making remarks on television about how "evil" Dr. Roberts is. I really find it hard to understand how they could say such things, though. Dr. Roberts has displayed numerous times how good-hearted his intentions really are. One time, in particular, one of "those people" actually confronted Dr. Roberts and some of "his people" on a live debate on the television. Of course, I didn't see it at the time, but I have an audiotape of it here with me:

Priest: But, we are, ourselves, the children of God, Dr. Roberts. It says so right here.

Dr. Roberts: Oh man, that Bible looks pretty difficult to carry around.

Priest: God created the heaven and the earth, and then created man in His own image. It is our duty to praise him, and to live in accordance with His rules. Nowhere in the Scriptures does it say anything about man creating man, or even having the power to do so. How do you dare to pronounce yourself capable of accomplishing such feats?

Dr. Roberts: Let me correct you there, man. I do not pronounce myself of being capable of accomplishing anything as of yet. All that I am saying is that it is possible. The Recording provides all the necessary information in order for me to be able to do so. I've been receiving all the private funding required to carry out the project - now I just need the National Ethics Committee to let me begin.

Priest: And you think, Dr. Roberts, that inviting me to participate in this debate with you is going to help you? I speak for all the children of God, out there in the world, who believe that what you intend to is blasphemous. You

will not only condemn yourself to hell for it, but it will also condemn those people who support you.

Dr. Roberts: Look, man, for all we know the message could have come from God Himself. I don't believe in God, but I sure as hell don't know where the message came from. And you know what? It doesn't matter. Here we have in front of us the most important message in the history of mankind, and we should act, by every means we have, to do something about it. I can build a human. I promise you, and everyone else in the world.

Priest: But you are wrong. God has already sent us the most important message in the history of mankind. It was the coming of Jesus Christ - our Lord, our Savior. He taught us to love God, and to sacrifice ourselves for Him, in the same way that He sacrificed himself for us. It is only through the love of God that He will greet us into Heaven.

Dr. Roberts: Well, then, you should consider this as an opportunity! Let me build a human, and then you can tell him all about heaven and hell. If you are right, you will convince him, and you will have one more follower to take into heaven with you.

Priest: No, Dr. Roberts. That would not happen. Any thing that you build in a laboratory does not get to go to heaven."

Dr. Roberts: But why not?

Priest: Well, of course, because it would not have a soul. Only God is able grant us that, Dr. Roberts. Not you.

Dr. Roberts: Wow, souls... now that's an interesting concept, man, especially as I've never seen one.

Priest: You wouldn't see one, Doctor, because they are immaterial in nature. You cannot perceive them through your senses.

Dr. Roberts: Ok, but God can see them, right? Based upon them, he will decide whether we get to heaven or not, this is the way it works, isn't it?

Priest: That is correct.

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Dr. Roberts: Well, then, let me ask you – just to make sure I understand this correctly. If I sit here and think about going to kill somebody, and then go and actually do so, I guess my soul wouldn't be making it to heaven, right?

Priest: That, again, is correct. You would not be going to heaven for that.

Dr. Roberts: Okay, but now, what if, in an attempt to get away with it, I ask Dr. Bruce right here, to perform a little bit of brain-washing trickery? Say, I wanted God to punish you, instead of me, for planning and committing murder, so I ask Dr. Bruce to take all of our thoughts –including our beliefs, memories, and intentions - from our brains, and then to swap them around with each other's.

Priest: But that is impossible!

Dr. Roberts: No, no... this is something that we actually can do. Really, the things that we have learned from the Recording are impressive. We now have the knowledge to fully understand how all of our thoughts are mapped through a biochemical neural network.

Priest: Excuse me, but those technical terms mean nothing to...

Dr. Roberts: Just go along with it for a minute, man... What would happen if you wake up with the desire to commit murder, while I – who originally wanted to commit the murder – woke up with only the desire to praise the Lord. If you were then to carry out the murder, would God punish you, instead of me, for this sin?

Priest: No, Dr. Roberts, that would not work.

Dr. Roberts: But why not? It would be you, along with your soul, that would be committing murder!

Priest: Well, yes. Me and my soul would be carrying out the murder, as you say, but we would only be doing so because it would be contaminated with your thoughts. I personally wouldn't be guilty of any wrongdoing.

Dr. Roberts: Aha! So then God would still punish me - but he would do so based upon my thoughts rather on actually what my soul is doing.

Priest: Yes, okay, but...

Dr. Roberts: This god of yours, if he is just, in the way that you describe him to be, wouldn't permit your soul to be damned for Dr. Bruce's brain-washing trickery. He would have to be able to differentiate your souls for from your thoughts, and then punish me for them.

Priest: Certainly, God is just. So He would punishes us based upon our thoughts rather than our souls, agreed. But what is your point with this, Dr. Roberts?

Dr. Roberts: My point is that thoughts are something that the human that I build in the lab will have. In his brain, he will be able to form memories, beliefs, and intentions - just as much as you and me. So then, your God, if he exists, will have a basis upon which to judge him. You say he might not have a soul, but what the heck is that for anyway, if we just agreed that God makes the call based upon our thoughts?! After all, it seems, this human would have a shot at hanging out with you in Heaven.

Priest: I'm sorry Dr. Roberts, I will not tolerate listening to this blasphemy any further.

Dr. Roberts: Heck, you might even invite him to go chase around young boys with you!

Dr. Roberts says that the priest splashed him with holy water after he said that. He laughs about it every time he tells me about it, but he also says that he shouldn't have done it. "Doesn't go well with receiving government permissions", he says.

There is also another tape that I particularly enjoy. It is one in which Dr. Roberts is being interviewed by the National Ethics Committee. Dr. Roberts says that the Chairman in this one was "a real prick".

Chairman: Dr. Roberts, you are cited here as your final audience in front of this Committee seeking our approval for you to carry out your project. And, I see you have colleague, Dr. Bruce, here with you as well. Both of you understand that if we reject your appeal this time, there will be no further audiences, correct?

Dr. Bruce: Yes, sir.

Dr. Roberts: We got it, man.

Chairman: Very well, we will proceed then. Dr. Roberts, as in the former audience – excuse me, as in the former two audiences we have had - we have communicated to you that your project presents unknown social, moral and political harm, with immeasurable consequences on the citizens of our nation. In particular, we have cited the risks associated with the commodification of human organs, potential genetic mutations in future generations, and loss of heterogeneity in culture. We will repeat each one in detail if you would like to hear them again.

Dr. Roberts: No, man, I get it. You're afraid that if we build this human, then other people will start building humans in order to sell body parts, spread disease, or make copies of themselves. I understand. However, you must understand that these are things that we already do – I'm just trying to help fix them.

Chairman: Dr. Roberts we have heard you state...

Dr. Roberts: Look man, I know that there are people out there that drug people at clubs, steal their organs, and then sell them in the black market, leaving them to die in a dirty, cheap motel in the middle of nowhere. This is terrible. But our project will actually help put an end to that. Under the current conditions, someone with a rare blood type in need of a new kidney, may go for years on the waiting list, and might not even ever make it. If we are able to build this human we will be able to reproduce the specific organ that we need, without building the rest of the human. People will no longer have to wait for someone to die to receive a new kidney. We could make one instantly.

In regard to the genetic mutations, all of us already carry some kind of genetic mutation unknowingly that might harm our children. If you don't believe me, ask the parent of a child with Tay-Sachs disease. Imagine having to face that impossible situation: you can't know your child is sick until around six months into pregnancy, and after that there is almost no chance that your child will live past age 5. Through this project, we will be able to learn a whole lot more about the human genome and of ways to prevent these situations. What if we could screen parents even before they conceive the child? We could warn them about possible conditions, or, if too late, might even have the resources in order to fix it.

Phiction, 2015

And, as for the loss of heterogeneity of culture, why even worry about this? People are already so consumed by social standards of “beauty” that everyone is striving to look the same anyway.

Everybody wants to be thin, everybody wants to be tall, and everybody wants to be white. Do you know, however, how small the percentage of the world population is that has the genetic traits to look like this?! Maybe if people started looking beyond appearances they might express some individuality through the form of non-physical characteristics. People could develop new arts and hobbies - culture and creativity in our society could thrive. Through this project, we could pretty much insert any genetic trait into the genome of any person - this will mean that it will no longer hold value to have any specific traits because anyone could have them. Heck, I even got a call from someone calling himself a genetic artist the other day!

Chairman: Thank you, Dr. Roberts. We have already heard all your colorful arguments before. Do you have anything new to add? These are the same arguments that you have presented at all of our hearings, and the answer has remained negative.

Dr. Roberts: Actually, I do have something extra that I would like to say?

Chairman: What is that, Doctor?

Dr. Roberts: Just come on, man!

Then, there is another audiotape that is marked, “Secret”. I really don’t know why Dr. Roberts would want me to keep this tape a secret from him, but I do as he asks. I guess it may have something to do with the fact that the audio on it is so terrible. You can hear a lot of static, and all the voices seem muffled. Plus, it isn’t labeled on the cover who Dr. Roberts is speaking to!

Unknown speaker: Dr. Roberts. Sorry to keep you waiting, I was just in a meeting with the President.

Dr. Roberts: No problem, Senator. I am glad you decided to review my case. I just don’t understand why you wouldn’t let me bring my colleague Dr. Bruce with me. He has been at my side at everyone of our meetings.”

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Unknown speaker: Well, Dr. Roberts, certain information will be discussed throughout this meeting that is highly confidential. Note even your associates could hear about it at these stages of the discussion. Please take a seat.

(Static)

We know how much public support you have gained ever since this whole thing started, and how much private funding you have been receiving.

Dr. Roberts: That is right, Senator. Unfortunately, your buddies at the National Ethics Committee here have rejected all my requests to actually begin with building this human. We now have all the data analyzed and ready to go.

Unknown speaker: We are aware of that as well, Dr. Roberts. And that is why I have summoned you here. See, the President, some other high ranking officials, and I, believe that we could put your project at great use for our country.

(Static)

But, first, I must ask: assuming that you succeed, would you be willing to keep this information from the public?

Dr. Roberts: Of course not, man. The whole point of this is to show the world! I want to be able to prove to everyone that the religious and ethical limitations we have imposed upon ourselves do nothing but stand in the way of progress. This is meant to bring about a revolution, man. No more archaic beliefs and subordination. It is time for humans to take charge of their own destiny, and start building themselves from the ground up.

Unknown speaker: I see.

(Static)

Very well, then. Our meeting is over, Dr. Roberts. Thank you very much for your time.

Dr. Roberts: Wait. Just like that?

Unknown speaker: Thank you very much for your time, Dr. Roberts. Security will now escort you outside.”

(Static)

Phiction, 2015

There are many other tapes and papers that Dr. Robert keeps around for me to listen to. I find them to be greatly educational, and very helpful for me to continue learning about the language and the culture of this place. There are just so many tapes that sometimes I never know which one to pick up next.

I think maybe this time I will hear -

Wait, I think I just heard someone outside banging on the door. How strange! Dr. Roberts never knocks before coming in. I always just hear him open the doors straight away with his keys.

“Dr. Roberts! It’s me, Dr. Bruce - are you home?!... Are you home, Dr. Roberts?! There’s been an emergency at the lab”.

Dr. Roberts warned me about this ever happening, and told me to make sure that I hide in the basement. Do I have enough time to run to the basement? Dr. Roberts said that I should never, ever let anyone find me.

But it sounds like they are now inside the house.

“Dr. Roberts! I’m sorry I had to sneak in through the window... Dr. Roberts?! Are you home?!”

Oh no, no time to reach to the stairs.

“Dr. Roberts, where are you?”

This is the first time I meet Dr. Bruce, yet I feel as if I have known him my entire life. In a strange sort of way, that may be right. “Who the hell are you?! Where is Dr. Roberts?”

Dr. Roberts also prepared me for this eventuality. He taught me how to say very politely in English, “Very nice to finally meet you, Dr. Bruce. I am the future of mankind.”