

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I was not at all surprised to learn that the Government of the United States of America is expecting more al-Qaeda attacks on its soil and that this international terrorist organisation has found safe havens in order to train its killers. What would have surprised me, greatly, would have been if al-Qaeda had ceased its international determination to kill and maim, indiscriminately. I know that I have said this before in previous letters, but it is worthy of reiteration: Man, still, cannot find a solution to the problems of understanding his fellow man and living together in peace and harmony. And, again, I argue that more money should be spent on the study of philosophy in order to advance man's knowledge to a much higher plane. One of the important questions which face many scientists and philosophers of today is that of reconciling the scientific imperative of trying to describe the maxim with regard to observations of fidelity in the natural world, on the one hand, with the ethical imperative of social responsibility – and latter, being a domain which extends beyond the borders of pure scientific pursuits. One wonders whether or not one should challenge the conventional, accepted wisdom that intellectual development of modern man reflects, in part at least, a particular phylogenetic hierarchy. Which leads us, of course, to the question of the probability of retraining (or recoding) man's brain, without destroying it or impairing its innate abilities, so that man may live together with his fellow man in peace and harmony. Is it possible for a man to break the shackles of his hierarchical genetic ancestry, assuming that one may debunk the concept that ontology recapitulates philology? In the case of life forms, 'lower' than those of man, experiments have been made whereby instincts/drives have been modified, dramatically, mostly by nature rather than by any design on the part of the modified life forms, themselves.

In California, Professor Jack Costlow, in his observations of octopi, determined that cephalopod molluscs do react to reward, recognition and titillation, and, by so doing, completely by accident, their responsive genetic engineering has been modified to their benefit. The observations of this learned professor have far-reaching implications if extrapolated further. Professor Jack Costlow observed, inter alia, that harmony exists between certain carnivorous marine molluscs and aquatic birds of the family of laridae. It is noted that no 2 species of life on the earth can be further apart than the small octopus and a high-flying seagull. Yet, in California, these 2 life forms live happily, today, one cooperating with the other in the search for life-giving sustenance. The interdependence of these 2 life forms is, now, an accepted fact. These 2 life forms live in completely separate environments, but, yet, they live in almost perfect harmony with each other. It could be held that the molluscs are the unwitting messengers of the seagulls, and the seagulls, in turn, are the 'butlers', bringing food to the molluscs upon receipt of the molluscs' messages, relayed from beneath the sea as a reward. No doubt, the above findings of Professor Jack Costlow were a chance discovery in the same way that the modified behavioral traits of the seagulls and cephalopod molluscs were by accident. But the accident was one that benefitted, and sustained and improved, both life forms and, that being the case, it was in the interests of both life forms to maintain the status quo. One cannot believe that the innate ability of the brains of molluscs and the innate ability of the brains of the laridae are superior to the innate ability of the brains of homo sapiens, yet, the molluscs and the seagulls seem, at least in California, to have formed a

bond which mutually benefits both and guarantees the perpetuity to both. Brain-cell activity, it appears very clearly, may be altered through, inter alia, nurture, diet and/or stimuli of one sort or another. Man's ability to reason is brought about by genetic engineering which, over the years, has rewarded him with an adaptive brain, that is a brain that has the ability to be coded into it, certain repetitive motor acts, such as hitting a tennis ball, dancing the tango with grace, etc.

There is a distinction between a person's brain and a person's mind, you know, and I ponder which of the 2 is more important: The greater usage of that mass, known as the brain; and/or, the ability of the brain to store, assimilate, interpolate and extrapolate received information – the mind, if you will. Man, today, is little changed from man of 5,000 years ago, but one could hardly call him civilised (to bring out of barbarism; bring into conformity with the standards of behaviour and the tastes of a highly developed society; enlighten; refine and educate) – inculcating moral and intellectual advancement, allowing him to live in harmony with his fellows. I am reminded, at this point, of the concept of coarse coding in cognitive neuroscience and how the brain appears to be governed by constraint satisfaction, with the overlapping of input and output mappings, being not precise, thus allowing for neuron computations to take extreme advantage of this vital function, causing generalizations to be conceptualized. It follows that the imprecision, brought about by the constraint satisfaction and coarse coding, leads to precise values, being achieved.

All of the above is food for thought, I fully realise this, but it may well be life-giving 'food' because, the way that I see the world, one day, somebody is going to push the wrong button. The way forward is not guns and bombs, but erudition and philosophical determinations, allowing all men to sit down together in order to find solutions to the world's problems so that the inability of man to live together in peace and harmony will be eradicated, once and for all.

Think about it.

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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