

Another evidence of the counter-phobic nature of this manner of language use comes from the observation that when the farmer says he's "anxious to get started to church" he doesn't *appear* to be at all anxious. Contrarily, he is likely at the moment to seem very calm. I will assume though that if he couldn't enjoy the language-defended freedom from anxiety, he would really be anxious.

So, apparently I have gone full cycle. The "anxious" world is, perhaps, anxious after all.

THE ZEN KOAN AND THE LAPIDUS PRINCIPLE

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I HAVE NEVER really dug, or even walked, the Beat, and all I know about Zen Buddhism is what I read in *ETC.* or the stories of J. D. Salinger. Nevertheless, I am prepared to shed a little light on one of Zen's more baffling aspects, the Koan. This is a profound but pointless question, meditation on which is intended to free the acolyte from the shackles of Reason. Sheldon Klein, in "Zen Buddhism and General Semantics" (*ETC.*, XIV [1957], 88-97), gives examples of Koans, such as: "Does a dog have the nature of the Buddha?" (Answer: "Arf!") Or, "If you call this a stick you affirm; if you call it not a stick you negate. Beyond affirmation and negation what would you call it?" (Answer: disciple breaks the stick.) Further, Mr. Klein cites "Western Koans" suggested by P. W. Bridgman (*The Logic of Modern Physics* [New York, 1927], p. 30): "May space or time be discontinuous?" "Is a universe possible in which the laws are different?" "What is the temperature of an atom?" etc. (Preventive: the operational method.)

No one has as yet indicated, however, that both types of

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Koans, like other ploys of intelligent inquiry, may be subsumed under the celebrated Lapidus Principle. There are other canons of inquiry, such as The Eternal Cussedness of Inanimate Objects, or *Verfluchtheitprinzip*, which applies chiefly to experimental work; and Murphy's Law: "If anything can go wrong, it will,"¹ applicable more to public performances of all sorts, including, I suppose, missile warning and retaliation systems. But these other principles are less fundamental than Lapidus's, since they are in turn dependent on a particular pessimistic view of the universe, a sense of malign fate waiting. The Lapidus Principle is more in the spirit of Einstein's dictum ("*Raffiniert ist der Herr Gott; boshaft aber ist Er nicht*"),² but it has less of the character of a synthetic *a priori*; rather it is an axiom of scientific ethics which prescribes the inquirer's, not the universe's, behavior.

SEMANTICISTS HAVE, of course, dealt with these issues,³ yet I have never seen in any learned journal the classic statement of the Principle in Lapidus's terms. To remedy this omission, I reproduce the dialectical argument as I heard it years ago from the lips of Dr. Lou Holtz, who is not only the co-discoverer of the Principle but the creator of Lapidus. (If I am premature in the use of "Dr."—if no university has yet granted him an honorary degree for his contribution to epistemology—this is just one more sad shortcoming of American education.) I can't quite tell it the way he did, but don't stop me.

Well, it seems that Sam Lapidus (*La-peed-us*) was taking a train trip with his friend—Garfunkel, the name was, I believe, not yet transmogrified by the rising generation to Garfield—and they found themselves in the unaccustomed splendor of a railroad dining car. Coping valiantly with the high-flown language of the menu and the prices to match, they proceeded

¹ There are available, in regard to Murphy, no biographical data whatever.

² "God is subtle, but he is not malicious."

³ See for example *The Language of Wisdom and Folly*, ed. I. J. Lee (New York: Harper, 1949), pp. 109-127.

cautiously through two-thirds of the meal, to the point where the waiter placed before each of them, without explanation, a bowl of warm water with a few rose-petals floating on its surface and a slice of lemon at its side. The two travelers exchanged guarded looks, and then Garfunkel whispered, "What could be? It couldn't be soup, we already *hed* soup. It couldn't be *desseyt*, we didn't *order* yet *desseyt*." With sudden resolution, "I'll esk the waiter."

"Please," moaned Lapidus, closing his eyes in pain. "Dunt make a scene. Dunt *humeelyate* me."

"So why shouldn't seemply I esk the waiter?"

"Please. Just sit still. Eat it quietly. Ect like a men of the world."

But Garfunkel was made of coarser fiber. "Feh. Men of the world! Hey, waiter!" And while his companion cringed he outlined his dilemma.

The waiter, seeing at once that the quandary was genuine, answered with gentle urbanity. "Well, *suh*" (this is dialect unashamed), "it may have happened in the co'se of yo' meal that you may have soiled yo' fingers slightly. So, you squeeze a little lemon juice on them, dabble them in the wotah, and wipe them off on yo' napkin, that's all."

After the waiter left, the two men sat in silence for a while. Finally Lapidus spoke: "Nu, so you esk a foolish question, you're entitled to a foolish enser!"