



## Regional Rep Rap

by Dave Stubbs



The last weekend in June, I, along with fellow Board member, Brigit O'Connell, attended the Mensa Canada Annual Gathering (Rencontre Annuelle Mensa Canada) and National Board meeting in Quebec City, hosted by Mensa Quebec. Without a doubt, this was one of the best AGs I have ever attended. Not only because it was held in Quebec City, an historic location unique in North America, but the local organizing committee did a superb job arranging speakers and activities (in both official languages), meals, and social venues for all those attending. Besides the two Board members from B.C., other local Mensans (and significant others) attending the AG included Stephen Lester-Smith and partner Donna Hill, Steve Gapp, Marlene Brown, Bonnie & Norm Chapman, Rex Fearn, and Bill Sillanpaa (all from the Vancouver/Fraser Valley group), Birthe Achtner-Wilson, LocSec for Mountain Mensa, and Sam Waltz from Fort St. John. In addition to attending the gathering, Donna also gave a audio/visual presentation on AIDS and Native Women, based on her extensive research and experience in this area of study.

At the end of June, Mensa Canada membership stood at 1,766, an increase of 89 from two months earlier. Of the 89 additional members, only nine were from this region, up from 315 in April to 324 in June.



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# Editor's Letter

by Lisa Le Blanc



Welcome to Summer, with folk fests, beach parties, engagements, and weddings. Congrats to the happy couples, and couples to be! My own sweet son, Jesse, became engaged this summer to a wonderful girl, and, my brother, Marc, not to be outdone by his nephew, will marry his wonderful fiancée in August. Ahhhh, summer.

So, I'm preparing my new digs for the arrival of the clan. His daughter will be coming. My sister and her girls will be driving down from the Yukon in a few days. My Aunt and cousin fly in from the east and we'll all head out to a country church in Langley for the big event. Such fun!

This issue is chock full of reports on the AG in Quebec City. Sounds like we missed a party - we frenchmen sure know how to live it up. A selection of letters to the editor offer tasty tidbits of opinion about our recent hot topics. Is it possible to be religious and not believe in God? You decide. Enjoy Don's commentary on respect, everyone's birthright. If you are so moved, feel free to throw your two bits into the fray. Write in with your comments, confusions or quibbles.

Please forward any and all submissions to [editor@lumens.ca](mailto:editor@lumens.ca) or write to *Lumens* with any brainstorm, suggestions or ideas.

*Looking forward to hearing from you,  
Lisa*



## Here's another fine mess you've gotten me into...

Thanks to Peter Walker



From a strictly mathematical viewpoint: What Equals 100%? What does it mean to give MORE than 100%? Ever wonder about those people who say they are giving more than 100%? We have all been in situations where someone wants you to GIVE OVER 100%. How about ACHIEVING 101%? Here's a little mathematical formula that might help answer these questions.

If: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y  
Z is represented as: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17  
18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26.

If: H-A-R-D-W-O- R- K  
 $8+1+18+4+23+ 15+18+11 = 98\%$

And: K-N-O-W-L-E- D-G-E  
 $11+14+15+23+ 12+5+4+7+ 5 = 96\%$

But: A-T-T-I-T-U- D-E  
 $1+20+20+9+20+ 21+4+5 = 100\%$

THEN, look how far the love of God will take you:  
L-O-V-E-O-F- G-O-D  
 $12+15+22+5+15+ 6+7+15+4 = 101\%$

Therefore, one can conclude with mathematical certainty that while Hard Work and Knowledge will get you close, Attitude will get you there but the Love of God will put you over the top!

Have a nice day & God bless!!

## Dear Editor,

I've just read Brian's piece on bicycle lanes in Vancouver, and I have to respond. Why do we cater to the 1.7%? Because it's the right thing to do. Everybody moans about traffic congestion and air pollution and global warming and obesity and the lack of "community feel" in our cities, especially in the suburbs. 1.7% of people do something about it by cycling to work. 6.3% do something about it by walking to work (including my wife and I, even though we own three licensed and insured motor vehicles between us). I'll bet less than 0.01% of people use wheelchairs, but we all agree that ramps and bathrooms and sidewalks should be made to accommodate them. Same for cyclists. A few more bike lanes and safe parking stalls and showers in office buildings, and it'll eventually be a lot more than 1.7% of us who park their cars and get some exercise on the way to work. Just ask someone who lives in Holland, or Portland, Oregon. Happy trails!

Max Durando, Victoria

Dear Editor,

I did a quick read of Don Graham's essay (vol 11, issue 3), and if I understand it correctly, his argument is that God doesn't exist because it is plausible that order arises spontaneously, and besides, he feels better being an atheist.

Somehow, I am not convinced. Aside from the observation that there are circumstances other than the presence of order which testify to the existence of someone we can properly call God, so that the Order argument is not really needed, there is the hitch that God is a simpler explanation of order than the other.

I note that physicists and cosmologists now discuss the notion of "our holographic universe" as being the best explanation, in some cases the only explanation, for a variety of phenomena. The idea that the universe is simply an expression of thought ought to lead us, of course, to acknowledge that intelligence must precede thought and therefore the universe.

Gordon Feil

Dear Editor,

In response to Don Graham, who in turn was responding to Lisa Le Blanc's brief summary of the recent think-tank discussion, I'd like to offer some thoughts. Don's reply hits upon a central point that was discussed, and needs to be understood before any scientific exploration of God can begin... and that is this inextricable binding together of God, organized religion and spirituality... three things that have as much in common as firearms, tobacco and alcohol. It's not God's fault that Man decided to group them together, to mix them up, to play them off against each other, to stake humanity on this Holy Trifecta. The majority of people who think they have an understanding of what God must be will probably tell you that the God that Don doesn't believe in is the same God they don't believe in either.

Is it possible to believe in God without being religious? Is it possible to be spiritual without believing in God? Is it possible to be religious but not believe in God?

The first pitfall one falls into in trying to discuss any of this has to do with people's ideas of what God is, or what

God purports to be. The usual evolution, discussion and conclusion of those sorts of discussions are things like:

"I was told that God looks out after all of us but people die needlessly and in accidents, so therefore God doesn't exist."

"If God loves us all, why is there so much suffering in the world? He doesn't exist."

"Religion is to blame for most wars and ethnic purges that have taken place over history, proving God doesn't exist because no peace-loving God would allow that."

"I prayed to God the Canucks would make the playoffs but they didn't, so obviously he doesn't exist." And so on.

If anyone wishes to discuss those sorts of things at that level, feel free -- that is an infantile religious discussion and has nothing to do with the God we're trying to talk about. The God we're trying to talk about arose from the discussions around Intelligent Design and how it, too, has been completely hijacked by the religious movement and others with their own agendas, who have molded those two words into their own narrow thinking and how it's now literally impossible to pry away the science, if any, that there may be to it.

If you ask a 10-year old what a water molecule is, you might get an explanation about two little balls attached to one bigger ball. A 20-year old who took chemistry through high school should be able to talk about what makes up the hydrogen and oxygen atoms, the electrons and protons and maybe the forces that hold it together, and why at an angle of 104 degrees. A 30-year old

That's a good idea, Ollie,  
tell me that again...



## Dear Editor (cont.)

quantum chemistry graduate student will have volumes more to offer and will describe things with words most of us don't understand. If you put any 2 of those 3 in a room, would you expect any sort of intelligent discussion about water?

The majority of people seem to discuss God at the level of a 10-year old, and of course, that's no big surprise because their knowledge comes from a childhood of unsatisfactory explanations, news coverage of religious fanatics blowing themselves up (and others) in the name of God, misbehaving priests. The Simpsons, comedic routines and so on. That's all bigger nonsense than defining water as 2 yellow balls, one red ball and a couple of wooden sticks to hold it all together because God has nothing to do with any of that. So, let's take a big step back.

The universe was created some 15 to 20 billion years ago, the earth formed 4.5 billion years ago, first signs of life showed up 3 billion years ago, dinosaurs died out 65 million years ago and so on. That's the evidence presented to all of us, so that's what we'll go with. We will not even touch upon the religious argument that the earth was created 5,000 years ago and all the fossils and old rocks were put there by God to test us and so on... because, again, that is a purely faith-based understanding and while anyone is free to believe what they want, there can never be a scientific approach that will support that, especially given the preponderance of evidence to the contrary. All religious arguments of that sort fall apart quickly, because we can reduce them to "the earth was created 10 seconds ago, with all the knowledge in your head and physical objects exactly as you'd expect." That's possible, difficult to prove one way or the other and completely unscientific.

The crux of the God argument we discussed goes way back to the origins

Is it possible to  
believe in God  
without being  
religious?

of the universe, up to 20 billion years ago.

It is correct that order emerges from chaos in a variety of ways. Self-organization, order from chaos, all the foundations of chaos theory and its progeny, complexity theory, deal with the fascinating subjects of self-organizing systems where the emergent behavior of a collective turns out to be greater than the sum of the parts. Think ant colony, where the emergent structures and societies are not implied by the basics you see within a single ant. It's all around us, and it leads to interesting speculation, which is basically that this universe is wired for life, wired for the emergence of complex systems. However, the nature of the universe is completely backwards from that. Entropy. As time rolls forward, things fall apart. Energy dissipates. If we wait long enough, like 10,500 years, there won't be a single atom of anything left.

Yet, within this framework, you have self-organizing systems capable of effectively evolving life out of nothing. Complexity, not just from simplicity, but pure randomness. Start with primordial soup, zap it with lightning, wait a long time and, voila, complex life. If we are to believe the No-God-Of-Any-Sort-Whatsoever argument, that's what we're left with, and that's where a lot of intelligent people, having put a lot of thought into it, come up with more questions than answers. Mr. Charles Darwin himself, in "On the Origin of Species" wonders out loud about the origins of life. There's no doubt life has been evolving for billions of years, but

where did it start? You could argue the original single-celled creature was created by God, but again, unscientific and unprovable. But keep rewinding, to what led to the creation of a universe where such a thing could randomly happen. That's where things get interesting, and that's where it's worth putting some thought.

Where did this incredible infrastructure come from?

Is there a "Creator of the Universe"? If there is, how would we go about trying to figure that out?

At the end of the day, the God argument that emerges is that for there to be a self-organizing component to a bigger, self-unorganizing infrastructure, maybe there's some sort of bigger-picture thought that went into it.

It's likely too much to ask, but it'd be nice if this self-organizing-friendly universe would give us a hint. But what would that look like? One could argue to just look around, that should be proof enough. But again, that's not going to satisfy most people. What we want is clear, testable, irrefutable proof. Where do we look? What do we hope to find? If the universe were intelligently designed – and I'm certainly not talking about a large, white-bearded fellow shooting lightning from His fingertips – could we ever hope to figure that out?

As a side note, two interesting possibilities emerge from this. One is that, given how pre-disposed the universe is to serve up life, it should be teeming with it. On earth, no matter where you look, some sort of living creature has adapted its existence to its harsh environment, be it under enormous pressure many miles under the sea, or within some acidic soup in some isolated volcanic crater or somewhere with no water or no air or no light. Some micro (or sometimes macro) scopic creature is sure to be found. There's no reason to think that shouldn't be the case all over the place, where complex life has emerged to fit the environment within

## Dear Editor (cont.)

which it finds itself. Or, two, is that even though it seems like there should be life of some sort all over the place, maybe earth is it... which gives a whole lot of weight to the “We are Special” religious argument. I like this conclusion, either God exists or the universe is full of life. Or, of course, both.

In summary, one thing we all agreed on is how difficult it would be to prove the existence of God to a true non-believer. If, after reading all this, you're still saying “show me proof”, I won't disagree with you. But I would ask that you provide what that proof should look like. No matter what evidence is provided,

it's generally shot down with alternate explanations. That's fine, there's always another explanation. But I would love to hear from a real atheist what it would take to prove to them the existence of a Greater Original Design, something that irrefutably would convince them. If we could craft experiments (thought experiments to begin) that we all can agree on, then we're one step closer to getting an answer to satisfy everyone.

Horatio Kemeny

*Well, that certainly kicked up alot of dust. How about it, readers? Anyone care to comment?*

editor



## 2008 Annual Gathering (AG) in Québec

Le Steve Gapp

Fleurdelyse fluttering in a cool breeze welcomed folks from BC to SC to Finland... to the AG. Grâce à Serge, Hugette, fellow AG organizers and other friendly local Mensans, we all shared a warm gathering.

Mensa Québec (MQ) planned three years for the AG (I studied French for six months). The AG spoke volumes of MQ's haut talent as hosts (me, I spoke mainly English). Oui, from Friday's welcoming buffet and “bone soir” to Sunday's brunch and “au revoir,” we were very well cared for.

On Friday evening, our traveled tummies sated, new acquaintances made and old ones renewed, MQ guided 16 of us to the summer-long audio and video show celebrating Québec's 400-year anniversary. For deux heures we shared in anticipation with 2,000 Québécois images projected across a small basin onto a grain silo spanning perhaps 450 meters across. To share a bit

of the experience, see <http://www.francisvachon.com/stock/photo/keywords/400e-de-quebec/>.

Saturday morning, well rested, I attended two French-language sessions. “The sex of angels or the charming difference” taught me that the brain of 1 in 5 men is wired like a typical woman's brain whereas the brain of (only) 1 in 10 women is wired like a typical man's brain. CAT scanners lacking, I nevertheless sauntered out of the session reaffirmed of my sexuality by my left ring finger measuring longer than my left index finger. Unsettling as it may be for Mensans, it's not all in the brain: fingers do count.

The second session, “Chemistry of odours: from skunk to Chanel,” ran concurrent with “Aids and the Native woman,” presented in English by BC's Donna Hill.

In the afternoon, techies were treated to “Canada's contribution to the International Space Station

Program.” Recommended reading for post-cold war space exploration was “Dragonfly.”

Surprisingly, for me, Middle Eastern culture was on display after the Saturday banquet. University-aged demoiselles performed a dozen self-choreographed barefoot and barebellied dances. Some pundits within earshot agreed that a smile carried on the lip is as alluring as a dip of the hip.

For some, les émotions ran high at Sunday's business session over la question of what, if any, handouts should be made available for attendees given that MC2 (already) reports BoD matters.

So here now I sit, content in my spacious hotel room on Blvd. Hochalaga, a 20-minute bus ride to downtown, my destination for tomorrow. Nobody here has displayed the slightest annoyance at my use of English. ...a nice place indeed. Glad I visited.

# What's in America? Skyscrapers.

# What's in Europe? Europeans.

by Don Graham

Believe it or not, these are both direct quotes from supposedly educated people, the first in Britain, the second in Canada, to explain why they had no interest in visiting the place in question. To make it worse, the second was by someone who was about to embark on a career in teaching. I shudder to think what kind of education his students eventually received.

I once made a remark of a philosophical nature to that same person, and his response was to say, "You've taken too many philosophy courses," then walk away. In fact I have never taken a philosophy course in my life, but I have done a great deal of reading in the field. On another occasion, his response to something I had said was to tell me I had no right to an opinion if I had never taken a course in it.

The other of these two once said to me that the best way to find out the truth about something was to ask the opinions of a number of intelligent people. I was flabbergasted to hear this from someone who had just completed a degree in science, of all things, from a prestigious university. What happened to the scientific method, which involves *testing* to find the truth about things, so we don't have to rely on opinions, even from intelligent people?

When I was in graduate school, I lived for a time in a rooming house with a variety of people, mostly students, with an assortment of others. One of the others was a high-school dropout with a working-class background whose job was to sit in a telephone exchange (in the days when they

*Don't merely ACCEPT  
responsibility.  
TAKE it.*

worked with electromechanical relays), and act as tech support for people whose phones weren't working. Usually this meant a stuck relay, which he unstuck by poking it with his finger. Most of the time, nothing happened, so he spent his shifts reading classics of English literature from Beowulf to the present day. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge and deep understanding of the plays of Shakespeare, and used this to tutor a final-year English literature major at the university. Also living in the house were three brothers, all students at the university, who had nothing but contempt for this man. "Lower-class Englishman; very low intelligence; no morals." By no morals, they meant that women stayed overnight. The irony of the intelligence remark was that they were all as thick as posts with stodgily conventional views on everything that you couldn't have dislodged with dynamite, and he was smarter than all three of them combined.

I have been fortunate in my life to have had a large number of close friends, some with and some without formal education, whose brilliant and creative minds make any conversation with them an adventure. One went from freshly-minted Ph.D. to full professor in six years, an all-time record for his university. Another is a world-class roboticist with the most

astounding intellect I have ever encountered. Yet another I first met as a young boy, now a young man, with a stratospheric IQ, whose mother engaged my services as a tutor, since his teachers didn't know what to do with him. "Just keep him engaged" were her instructions to me. He kept me just as engaged as I kept him, and I played a minor role in a TV special about him and a couple of other gifted kids. One is a former Catholic priest, now in his 80s, who has clearly-articulated ideas about any topic at all I raise with him. Although we frequently disagree, we always do so in a relaxed, good-natured way with lots of laughter, and we often manage to synthesize our viewpoints in such a way that we both end up understanding things neither of us did before.

Last and best, my adult daughter and I have remarkably similar dispositions and attitudes towards life, and any time we get together, the conversation always flows freely over an unlimited range of topics from banal to profound. Never in her entire life have we had a serious disagreement or raised our voices to one another. I attribute my close relationship with her to having treated her with respect from the time she was conceived. We both have the attitude that respect is everyone's birthright, and the only people who have to earn it are those who want it back after losing it.

In my entire life I can think of only three or four people I have ever treated with gratuitous disrespect, the most recent being about 25 years ago. Let's double that for situations I may have conveniently forgotten. There is no excuse for any of them, but I was fortunate to run into the last one a year or two later, giving me the opportunity to offer my apologies, which

# What's in America?

(cont)

by Don Graham

undid at least part of the damage.

The number of people who have lost my respect is about the same. Two of them later earned it back in the form of abject written apologies. Of the others, one was a world-famous writer who plagiarized an article I wrote, one a total stranger who physically assaulted me, one a former student who wrote a libellous letter about me to the president of the college where I was teaching, and the last was someone I had consistently treated with respect who used abusive language to make totally unfounded and grossly offensive accusations against me, then evaded responsibility while compounding the offence with insults. In my view the mark of an adult is that you don't merely *accept* responsibility for the consequences of your actions – you *take* it. My own worst character flaw is an inability to forgive people who refuse to make amends

after giving needless offence, though in practice I usually treat them with more respect than I feel.

Respect isn't what you *do*. Respect is an *attitude*. If you have the right attitude, the right actions will follow.

*Respect  
is everyone's  
birthright.*



## AG in Quebec City

Birthe Wilson Ahtner, LocSec Mountain Mensa

This June/July I was fortunate enough to take part in the AG in Quebec City. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Not only did I meet quite a few people from BC who I hadn't met before, but I also met up with the Past President, Phyrne Parker, and was able to go sightseeing with her and a few other women from Toronto. It would be wonderful if people from the West were able to see how beautiful Quebec City is and how friendly the people are. It

was such a pleasant experience.

As I'm originally from Denmark I've always missed a historical background living here in the West, so it was a treat for me to see all the old buildings, the fortifications, the Plains of Abraham, several museums and in this way get more of a feeling of Canada's history.

I took part in two excursions, one to Vieux Quebec and the other to the Botanical Gardens which are on the grounds of Laval University. This did mean that I did not listen in on some of

the planned talks, which was a shame. However, I did manage to get to a talk about Canada's role in the development of the space station and found it very interesting.

Next year the AG will be in Ottawa, and I believe that after that there will be a joint one in the U.S. I'll not be attending either one, but perhaps if one comes up in the Maritimes in the not too distant future, it might be possible for me to go.

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