

DANGEROUS RATIONALIZING

If you prefer your 1940s-style retro radio dramas to be quaint and charmingly uncomplicated, then read no farther. 'Donovan's Brain' and most other old radio plays can be taken as just light, nostalgic entertainment to briefly distract oneself from an often perplexing and frustrating world. But for those who can't resist trying to wring some meaning out of an arguably meaningless existence, let us contemplate...

There are many different tacks one can take when trying to find some relevance from 'Donovan's Brain' to apply to our modern lives.

One could seek to find symbolic meaning in the brain and its destruction of Dr. Cory and his family. The list of possible symbols is endless: the woes of addiction; the corruptive quality of capitalism; growing dependence upon computers/technology; and so on...

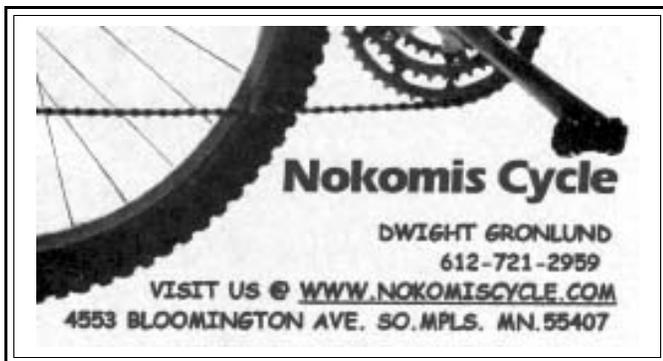
One theme the scriptwriters obviously had in mind was the "religion vs. science" schism, with Schratt representing the sentiments of religion imploring Cory to show some reason and compassion and to stop "profaning life". One can imagine similar pleas to doctors today from religious-minded individuals in regard to abortion, euthanasia and other concerns.

Others might bemoan that the amoral "scientists" are creating monsters that will turn around and destroy their makers and all of us with them. Many carry such fears in regard to stem cell research, genetic modification of foods, and technologies that contribute to greenhouse warming.

Jeff Nordin, in a reflective article published for Walking Boxes' premier presentation of 'Donovan's Brain' (autumn '04) focused his contemplations on considering who the real villain was, Donovan or Dr. Cory? Since we listeners are guided through the story by Cory, we tend to sympathize with him and feel that Donovan is the evil one, but quite disturbing is Dr. Cory's ability to rationalize taking Donovan's life ("He would die anyway.")

It is known all-too-well by most, that humans can rationalize anything. Some of the most extreme examples come from the time that this radio drama was aired in the '40s. The cruel and inhumane experiments by Nazi and Japanese scientists upon their captives during WWII are nearly impossible for us to believe and too horrible to be recounted here. How can any man's brain rationalize such sinister behavior against a fellow human being?

But one need not be a scientist to be confronted by human efforts to rationalize behavior; within the brain of every man is the ability and temptation to rationalize some act or behavior one knows to be wrong or harmful to oneself or others. What is it within the brain that allows us to do this? Most intriguing perhaps is the brain's apparent willingness to create rationalizations that could allow its very own host to be harmed or even destroyed. Those who smoke cigarettes, take harmful narcotics, or eat an unhealthy diet must constantly rationalize their behavior as they give in to temptation ("Just one"; "I'll cut back tomorrow"; "Some people smoke and still live to a ripe old age.") One must be vigilant of one's own brain or risk meeting the fate of Dr. Cory.

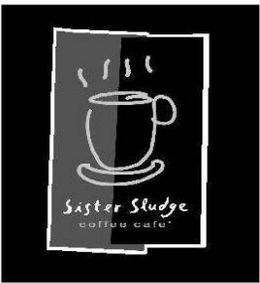


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