Dr. Edward Lewis Goldberg retired from his practice of internal medicine in January 2000. Throughout his career in medicine, he has always had a love of American history, and it finally came together for him in his recent book, *Presidential Health Matters*. The book explores the medical history of the U.S. through the lives of 46 presidents. Dr. Goldberg brings the perspective of a practicing primary-care internist to this account. He asks how and why medical events took place as they did.

From the Siege of Boston in 1775 until Covid 19 in 2020, the history of the United States and the history of medicine have been intertwined. Presidents have made medical history, and conversely have been gravely impacted by medical history.

Several presidents have received unconventional or questionable medical care. Dr Goldberg will utilize his perspective as a primary care physician to analyze physician behavior… And many questions remain.
The Scholars Notebook is issued monthly during the academic year, except December, by the San Diego Independent Scholars. Editor: Arlene Gilbert

SDIS strives to promote opportunities for active learning and scholarship, for its members and for the San Diego community.

Public service activities of SDIS include free public lectures and cooperative educational projects with other organizations. SDIS members enjoy a variety of regular discussion groups, presently via Zoom.

SDIS, established in 1982, was instrumental in the founding of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars, an organization that unites eight similar organizations and has international membership.

For more information see https://sdscholars.org or contact sdisask@gmail.com

SCHOLAR’S NOTEBOOK
October 2023—Contents

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At our last meeting, the Biosciences group considered how inflammation and other immune responses might influence psychological and neurological disorders. We focused on microglial, the only immune cells that are resident in the central nervous system (the brain plus spinal cord).

Among the immune functions that microglia play in the brain are: (1) continual surveying of the neural tissue for dead cells, infection, debris and other signs of damage or infection; (2) engulfment and digestion of debris or dead cells; and (3) triggering the start of various types of immune responses.

Interestingly, microglia (but not comparable immune cells that inhabit other parts of the body) have evolved additional capabilities that are specific to the central nervous system. For example, microglia are crucial to a process called "synaptic pruning," through which the connections (synapses) between nerve cells are continuously monitored for their degree of activity and unused synapses are eliminated. Thus, microglia improve the efficiency of the brain by favoring those neural connections that are frequently needed, but eliminating those that are less useful.

Interestingly, the removal of unnecessary synapses involves the same "engulf and digest" functions that microglia, as well as related immune cells in other parts of the body, use to remove cellular debris. This similarity has helped neuroscientists to rapidly unravel the process of synaptic pruning because the mechanisms through which immune cells ingest and destroy cell debris have been studied for many decades and are well understood.

Synaptic pruning is crucial to several neural functions, including both learning and neural development. Three critical windows of brain development are characterized by especially active synaptic pruning, namely times: (a) before birth, (b) in the first few years after birth, and (c) during adolescence.

A current research question is whether infection or inflammation, which stimulate the immune responses of microglia, might "highjack" their activity so that they are less available to perform synaptic pruning. If so, the result might be defective neural development. For problems occurring before birth, one might expect either too many synapses or too few. Autism is often characterized by more synapses than normal and shows some correlation with severe or chronic maternal infection during pregnancy. Schizophrenia is typically marked by fewer synapses than normal and may potentially be related to excessive synaptic pruning during adolescence.

Because of conflicts and travel, Biosciences will not meet in October. The next meeting will be on November 16, when we will continue to consider mind-body interactions, especially bodily reactions involving infection, immunity, or stress.

Dorothy Parker
Now that the 2024 election is approximately one year away, the SDIS Inside Politics Study Group is becoming even more relevant to the lives of our members. Former President Donald Trump is currently leading the polls for the Republican nomination for President by a virtual landslide against a field of about 7 or 8 candidates, at the same time that he faces four separate state and federal indictments which include over 90 criminal charges. The more indictments that are filed against Trump, the higher his poll ratings climb.

No former Presidents have ever faced criminal charges in the past. Thus far there have been two GOP Presidential debates, but Trump has not appeared in either of them, and neither debate has resulted in a breakaway candidate to challenge Trump for the nomination.

On the Democratic side, only two candidates have announced their candidacy to challenge President Biden for the 2024 nomination, but both are minor challengers and thus far no Democratic debates have been announced. Biden’s poll numbers are underwater and he has faced much criticism for being the oldest candidate to ever run for President, but thus far no prominent Democrat has dared to challenge Biden.

A new third party called the No Label Party has announced its intention to run a candidate for President in 2024 if Trump and Biden are the candidates for the Republican and Democratic Parties. The polls show that the majority of voters in the U.S. do not want either Trump or Biden to be running for President next year.

Our monthly SDIS Inside Politics Study Group discusses all of these fascinating issues on the second Saturday of every month, on Zoom, at 10:00 a.m., and we welcome any SDIS members to join the class. We also discuss a myriad of other political issues every month. For example, at our next class on Saturday October 14, our Agenda topics also will include climate change, the UAW strike, immigration, homelessness, and the current state of race relations in the U.S.

Al Korobkin
WORKS IN PROGRESS

3 p.m.— Thursday — November 16 — in person; location TBD

At the last meeting of Works in Progress, Tom Vazakas led the group in a guided conversation that introduced his novel method of mindfulness training and practice. This approach (called Efficient Delivery of Mindfulness) offers concise, rapid training in an approach that can be applied unobtrusively during the flow of a busy life — anytime, anywhere, and without any outward sign when others are present. It is specifically designed for people who, for some reason, cannot engage in meditation-based mindfulness training at that time.

Because of travel-related conflicts, will not meet in October. The next session will be at 3:00 on November 16, when Dr. Jaime Pineda will tell us about his new book, Controlling Mental Chaos: Harnessing the Power of the Creative Mind, which was published this year by Rowman and Littlefield.

Dorothy Parker

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READING EXPERIENCE

10 a.m. — Third Monday —October 16 --- via Zoom

This group ended its concentration on The Short Story in September, and October’s meeting will feature the beginning of a new focus, Photography, with analysis and discussion of Susan Sontag’s reflections on the subject, On Photography. That meeting, on the usual third Monday, will occur via Zoom on October 16 at 10 a.m.

“The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world ’picturesque.’”

— Susan Sontag, On Photography

September’s session was about three stories by Scott Fitzgerald, The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, The Diamond As Big As the Ritz, and Babylon Revisited. The first two, fantasies, were written in the early years of Fitzgerald’s career, and the third in his more mature period, based on his own experiences. August’s meeting centered on stories by Shirley Jackson, all three rather grim, and July’s discussion concerned works by J.D. Salinger.

We welcome SDIS members who’d like to join us, whether as “drop-ins” to sample our pursuits, or permanently. If this describes you, please contact me for further information.

Gerry Horwitz

To collect photographs is to collect the world.

Susan Sontag
The Physical Sciences Group has now completed the Peskin and Schroeder quantum field theory text through chapter 7. The plan is now to switch back to the Griffiths text starting, coincidentally, at chapter 8, which deals with the electrodynamics and chromodynamics of quarks.

Before doing that we will be conducting a review of the material covered in Peskin and Schroeder. The first review session actually took place at our Wednesday, September 27, Physical Sciences Group zoom meeting, where we reviewed the Lagrange formulation of fields, field quantization, symmetries, group theoretic approaches and the Feynman propagator for Klein Gordon Fields. We expect the review to continue over the next few biweekly meetings. The next zoom meeting will take place on Wednesday, October 11, 2 p.m.

Alvin Halpern

COLLOQUY CAFE

Members of this group now meet in person, in the apartment of one generous member inside La Jolla’s senior living community, “Vi”. Our discussions take place on each month’s third Wednesday afternoon at 1:00; the coming session will occur on October 18. Our subject will be “mood”.

September’s meeting focused on “certainty”; the enthusiastic analysis convinced most participants that, like the well-known saying, “Nothing is certain except death and taxes.” They discussed the supposed “certainty” of love, of political conviction, of sexual identity, of religion, and of other aspects of life, and began to realize that “certainty” is like ice cream; it can melt.

SDIS members who are not familiar with Colloquy Cafe and would like to experience it can learn more if they contact me.

Gerry Horwitz
On Wednesday, October 4th at 10 am, the SDIS Film Group will present online the 1948 film \textit{One Touch of Venus}. Group members will receive the Zoom link, but everyone in SDIS is welcome to join us by emailing Barbara Heckler for the link. Most people today associate Kurt Weill with his music composed during the Weimar Republic for playwright Bertoldt Brecht, whose works together included \textit{The Three-Penny Opera}, \textit{Happy End}, and \textit{Mahagonny}, among many others, and for expressionist dramatist Georg Kaiser.

Yet after Weill fled Europe in 1935 for New York, he began a new career and composing style for Broadway. The musicals he worked on included \textit{Street Scene}—and the writers he worked with included Alan Jay Lerner \textit{Love Life}, and most improbably, America’s dean of light and humorous poetry, Ogden Nash, who wrote the texts for the songs of \textit{One Touch of Venus} (1943), a comedic fantasy (with book by S.J. Perelman). It was about a statue exhibited in a Manhattan department store that, by the goddess’s intervention, is turned into a young woman with whom the store's window dresser falls in love.

When the play was made into a film four years later, at cut-rate Universal Studios, it was about a statue exhibited in a Manhattan department store that, by the goddess’s intervention, is turned into a young woman with whom the store's window dresser falls in love. Mary Martin was replaced by Ava Gardner as the title character and Kenny Baker, her admirer, was played by Robert Walker. and all but three of Weill’s wonderful show tunes were cut—the major hit from the stage production \textit{Speak Low}, being a notable survivor (although the producers included the Knickerbocker Holiday standard, \textit{September Song}. New songs were added by the producer’s wife, and all were mouthed by the stars with the voices of real singers.

\textit{Variety} noted, “Ava Gardner steps into the top ranks as the goddess, Venus. Hers is a sock impression, bountifully physical and alluring, delivered with a delightfully sly instinct for comedy,” observing that “Walker delivers a gifted comedy performance. Eve Arden, the store owner’s glib secretary, gives another of her punchy deliveries.” The \textit{Times}, however, complained, “Whatever charm ‘One Touch of Venus’ may have had on the stage is conspicuously absent from the version… prepared for the screen. Not one nimble-toed dancer appears in this pseudo-fantasy… presented at the Capitol yesterday. No more than three of the original sixteen Kurt Weill songs are used, and these are tossed off incidentally, with new lyrics… by Ann Ronell. A second-rate brand of slapstick has replaced the musical’s gossamer style. And the beauty and grace of Mary Martin are missed in Ava Gardner's lankier form.”

\textbf{Barbara Heckler and Ken Krauss}
Some meetings and events listed are via Zoom

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