**The Teenager’s Dilemma**

**Brian Peacock, February 2015, like the rest of you aged almost 77!**

*“There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle.
"That's some catch, that catch-22," he observed.
"It's the best there is," Doc Daneeka agreed.”*

The Prisoner’s Dilemma, which is similar to Catch 22, is a classical game theory situation in which two prisoners have to decide whether or not to admit guilt or innocence while not knowing what the other prisoner will do. In game theory there are optimal solutions to this problem if the (expected) payoff for each combined outcome is predictable.

The teenager’s dilemma has two forms: “should you ask and risk refusal or not ask and risk regret?” “Should you kiss and tell or not tell, or should you not kiss and tell or not tell”, because nobody will believe you either way or everybody will criticize you for saying, or not saying. That’s Catch 22,

In the case of the teenager’s dilemma life goes on and, to continue with the clichés, “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.’ “You learn from your mistakes,” but “there’s no fool like an old fool”. In practice it doesn’t matter as “life is like a box of chocolates,” the trick is to enjoy the chocolates. Also history shows that it is the (real or self-proclaimed) winners that write the history books. Finally we should note that “Ludum non victoriam amare.” The teenage dilemma is epitomized by the school dance. Should you or shouldn’t you? Dare you or daren’t you? Before we get to our school dance it may be more entertaining to reflect on some great movies on the theme of the teenager’s dilemma.

Most of you may remember the 1970s stage and screen musical, “Grease” about romance at Rydell High. I shall play Danny! (in the earlier version of this diatribe I named names and assigned roles, but in the interest of protecting the guilty, I removed these references. If you would like to hear more please send $100 and a postage paid return envelope.) Now some of you may object to this gratuitous casting, some may unkindly suggest a Napoleonic complex, some may point to the many differences between the 1950s and 1970s, but the pen is mightier than the sword. The lyrics of “Summer Nights” pose the teenager’s dilemma – “tell me more, tell me more”. John Travolta’s macho posturing was priceless acting - ”Greased Lightning” and ”Cool Rider”. Then there was “Look at me I’m Sandra Dee”, “Hopelessly devoted to you” and “Tears on my pillow.” These lyrics tell the story of the games that surround the teenager’s dilemma.

The Princess Bride (<http://megashare.sc/watch-the-princess-bride-online-TXpNeE1RPT0>) was another romantic movie about the beautiful Buttercup and a farm boy. Now I wasn’t sure in which role I should cast myself; my first thought was Westley the farm boy, but he really was a bit of a romantic wimp subservient to that arrogant young lady. “Farm boy... fetch me that pitcher.” “Farm boy fill these with water – please”. “Farm boy, polish my horse's saddle. I want to see my face shining in it by morning.” “You can die too for all I care!” “As you wish”. The dread pirate Roberts would show an alternative side of Westley. I did consider the role of Fezzic as “Giant” was my nickname in elementary school and he really was a nice man. I also thought of playing Inigo Montoya, he had that memorable line in the sword fight scene: “Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.” And Vizzini in the poisoned goblet scene: “Hah, you took the poison, they were both poisoned.” Another Catch 22. Perhaps I should settle for Grandpa:

[*Grandpa*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000393/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)*: When I was your age, television was called books. And this is a special book. It was the book my father used to read to me when I was sick, and I used to read it to your father. And today I'm gonna read it to you.*

[*The Grandson*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000625/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)*: Has it got any sports in it?*

[*Grandpa*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000393/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)*: Are you kidding? Fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases, escapes, true love, miracles...*

[*The Grandson*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000625/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)*: Doesn't sound too bad. I'll try to stay awake.*

[*Grandpa*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000393/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)*: Oh, well, thank you very much, very nice of you. Your vote of confidence is overwhelming.*

In the 1950s none of us drove ourselves to school, a prerequisite in Grease, although from time to time we found friends who had access to wheels. In fact I recall the odd trip in a car to a dance hall in Hornsea on Saturday nights. For country boys like me the choice was between bus or bike, and curfews ruled, even when we got to stay the night at our in-town aunt’s place. Hornsea was quite a trip on a bike, but sometimes we made it on our bikes to a church hall dance, down Beverley Road I think. We did have the village institute in Sproatley where on Friday nights we watched movies from the front row while our older cousins made out on the back row. And once a year there was a dance for the big kids organized by the Women’s Institute. Now that is an organization. Every year delegates from all over the country assemble in The Royal Albert Hall to sign “Jerusalem:” <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/jul/09/womens-institute-anniversary-debut-album>

Unlike Rydell High, we didn’t have a beach in East Hull, but we did have Friday night swimming at the East Hull baths, ably managed by the fiery haired and tempered Mr. Albert Royle. He played left fullback for the staff team and was prone to taking both ball and legs in one scything swing. Now Mr. Royle had swimming talent – he could swim a full length with only 4 strokes. And he was a stickler for discipline, just as he was for layout of our algebra proofs, QED! Boys on one side and girls on the other and ne’er the twain shall meet, until afterwards, but back then curfews ruled and the trolley buses whisked us quickly in different directions and distances on our way home.

The third opportunity we had for fraternization was a walk in the Park after Sunday school. There were all denominations up and down Holderness Road – Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and Congregational. I don’t recall a Church of England, but those of you who visit Sproatley could go to the 1200 AD St Swithins. Our East Park Baptist Sunday school group also met on Friday or Saturday nights at the Astoria and if you were lucky and within the curfew you could get sit in the back row and to take someone home, and face the teenager’s dilemma.

The big opportunity was the school dance for sixth formers. Now very few of us knew much about dancing so Little Jim paraded the boys and girls into the gym. He ordered two lines, girls on one side and boys on the other and frowned on those who juggled for position. We were then instructed to march forward raise your left (right) hand and place the other hand on your partner’s small of the back (or shoulder). Precise placement was mandatory and the six inch apart rule was monitored strictly. We started with “The Yellow Rose of Texas” – slow, slow, quick, quick slow while rotating counter clockwise. I recall that I had a pen friend in Waco, Texas at that time; she filled one letter with the lyrics of “Mr Sandman” and talked about the school dance. We then graduated to the fox trot and finally to the Waltz. 1,2,3, 1,2,3, 1,2,3, 1,2,3…….and “Unchained Melody.” In this case the six inch rule was reduced to three and hand placement rules were (marginally) less stringent. In 1956 I was introduced to Bill Haley and “Rock around the Clock”; now that was a great leap forward, perhaps too much of a shock for our high school administration. I remember seeing that movie in Cardington where, in October 1956, we went to register for National Service; we were thrown out of the theater for dancing in the aisles. Happy days!

The teenager’s dilemma roared into our lives at the high school dance. After all what is dancing but the preamble to the dilemma? It’s all about thrust and parry; sometimes the parry was preemptive. There was fairly strict protocol starting during the run up to the dance. The studs sent discreet messages to their targets; I shall leave it to your infallible memories to identify who was which. Preliminary moves were made early at the dance, a sort of trial teenager’s dilemma, searching for reciprocity. Sometimes these early moves were conclusive after which there was minimal contact until later in the evening. It was traditional to finish the evening with a slow waltz – “Save the last waltz for me.” The lights were dimmed and the dilemma evolved. Should I or shouldn’t I? If you raced across the room or engineered a strategic place for attack then you got “first refusal” to your request for the last dance and first refusal to your request to escort the target home. The protocol was usually, but not always, first come first served, which introduces another mathematical method – queuing theory. If you were not first in the queue you had the option of jumping to another queue, balking or reneging. Yet another operations research technique applies – the allocation or matching problem, in which most people get their first choice and the system is optimized by an overall minimal regret, with a few having to opt for third choice. The actual teenager’s dilemma occurred on or before the beginning of the last waltz, but on occasion, where a request was made in good faith, a refusal based on a prior commitment was offered, creating considerable embarrassment. From a distance and with the passage of time these maneuverings were hysterical, because of the uncertainty involved and the timidity of the players.

**The dilemma really is not a single discrete event. It continues on the way home after the dance and repeats itself in various forms for the rest of our lives. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Wer angibt, hat mehr vom Leben. Pride comes before the fall.**

Gaudeamus igitur

Iuvenes dum sumus.

Post iucundam iuventutem

Post molestam senectutem

Nos habebit humus.

Etc. etc.

Alma Mater floreat,

Quae nos educavit;

Caros et commilitones,

Dissitas in regiones

Sparsos, congregavit