

OK kids, you're done for now. Thread closed. Those who wish to comment further can do so in another forum. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/30/05

Daniel, Read my post regarding the Fair Use provision. Andrew hasn't done anything wrong, in the legal sense, except that he was obviously confused about the nature of Contrary's content. For some reason, he mistook it for a publication of high academic standards. However, since it is merely a content-oriented magazine, that criticism is obviously misguided. Get over it. Move on. Patrick, I never said Gibson's paper wasn't cool. In fact, I did affirm its literary merit. What caused me to "vomit" earlier was that I thought the essay was being peddled as something of genuine philosophical interest. However, that presumption is obviously false. Thanks to Jeff the record on that point has finally been set -- albiet after 40 posts had already been wasted on this thread. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

Mark Smeltzer

on 9/30/05

Wow, what an interesting debate. Before Andrew Bailey throws in the towel, I would like to throw in my two cents. I think I can greatly simplify things. I read the Gibson piece, and not only did I understand it, but I thought it was pretty cool. Maybe Andrew and Mark just aren't very smart. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Patrick Sheehan](#)

on 9/30/05

For anyone interested in the text little Goebbels felt needed deleting below is a copy. My question was if this constitutes a request for using the text from a memorial service in this forum. Undoubtedly Andrew will soon delete this post of mine, but that is of no concern as copies have been kept should they ever need to be used, say in a hearing of the academic board at his university, or with a meeting of his "references" listed on the CV, or even perhaps by the legal department at blogger. Jeff McMahon should not have to ask that these insulting comments be taken down. They should never have been posted to begin with. Jeff McMahon is a professional who adheres to certain standards prior to publishing. He probably learned that in kindergarten. A note on deleting my comments from your philosophical debate: "Where one begins by burning books, one will end up burning people." Heinrich Heine 1797-1856-----

-----Andrew at 11:35 PM said... What's worse is on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Daniel Lotspeich](#)

on 9/30/05

Jeff, Andrew's citation of Gibson's paper is perfectly acceptable under the Fair Use provision of the copyright act since the context is that of criticism. He doesn't owe you anything. And his offer to you to remove it at your request is going above and beyond the legal requirements. <http://www.benedict.com/Info/Law/FairUse.aspx> on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Mark Smeltzer](#)

on 9/30/05

Yes, those struck me as evasions of responsibility rather than requests for permission. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/30/05

<p>Daniel,"Also, your failure to fully investigate the status of the copyright on the material prior to issuing your statement is your problem. Do your homework next time."Have you never heard of a hypothetical assertion? I never made any claims about the nature of the copyright -- I simply said that I didn't have evidence to believe it was valid. Jeff later provided that evidence by saying that Gibson submitted the piece before he died. Case closed. on Nonsense Alert (original)</p>	<p>Mark Smeltzer</p>	<p>on 9/30/05</p>
<p>I'll cite at least two relevant posts. "5. If you wish me to remove the quotation, please email me privately to discuss.""PS: Again, if you wish me to remove the quotation (or parts of it), you need only say the word in private email." I have recieved no such words in private email, but the offer to remove the quotation remains an open one.Let's wrap this up, this time for real. Last call to post for all interested parties! on Nonsense Alert (original)</p>	<p>Andrew</p>	<p>on 9/30/05</p>
<p>Except that it isn't true. I haven't received a request for permission to reprint the Gibson piece. on Nonsense Alert (original)</p>	<p>Jeff McMahon</p>	<p>on 9/30/05</p>
<p>Good for you. That is the sort of humble act that will make you a better academic and a better philosopher. I wish you well in your pursuit of knowledge. on Nonsense Alert (original)</p>	<p>Daniel Lotspeich</p>	<p>on 9/30/05</p>
<p>No, it isn't too complicated, which is why I did contact the copyright owner. He has yet to let me know what he wants done with the Gibson quotation. I know of nothing else I can do but wait for a reply. on Nonsense Alert (original)</p>	<p>Andrew</p>	<p>on 9/30/05</p>

Returning to questions of philosophy. How do you know something. Is there a way to test your assumptions in reality? Can you perhaps make an inquiry or is it better to trust an assumption? As a physician formally trained in biochemistry, I frequently needed to perform inquiries to gain knowledge of something. Often this meant using complicated scientific instrumentations such as nuclear magnetic resonance spectrography to gain knowledge of the structure of a new molecule that I has synthesized for use in designing new pharmaceuticals. It was a difficult way to gain knowledge. A simple way to gain knowledge, rather than assuming it, is present here: I have deferred to the wishes of the apparent copyright owner, who, so far as I know, does not wish that the quotation to be removed. -Andrew Bailey
In this instance a simple way to gain knowledge would be to ask said copyright owner for permission to use his work. Or is that too complicated? -Lotspeich. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Daniel Lotspeich](#)

on 9/30/05

Perhaps you should have read more carefully before unleashing a grave accusation (when it comes to netiquette), viz., falsely attributing words to another by means of moderator permissions. Let's wrap this up, folks. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/30/05

Oh...I thought my words were being edited, not just completely censored and deleted away. My mistake. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Daniel Lotspeich](#)

on 9/30/05

The content of *no* posts have been edited. Not a single one. Hell, I don't even have *control* over the content of posts, since they're hosted and handled by Blogger and not any blogging software on my own server! Suggesting otherwise, as you have done, Daniel, is a petty and false insult--and this is apparent to those who know anything about Blogger. Two posts have been deleted in this thread--my first comment which was, I think, inappropriate, and your quotation of it. If I intended to be sneaky, I would not plainly announce this (which I already did); this much is obvious. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/30/05

And please. Do not edit the content of my posts. I see that unfortunately my request on that comes too late. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Daniel Lotspeich](#)

on 9/30/05

That Andrew is changing the wording of his prior posts speaks volumes towards his integrity (or lack thereof). on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Daniel Lotspeich](#)

on 9/30/05

Mark. Just because you assert that only two options exist, does not make it so. I have proposed a third: that Andrew request permission to use copywritten material in this forum. This does not seem unreasonable given that he publishes here, alongside his resume. This still looks to me that his blog represents not just him as a dilettante philosopher, but as a would-be professional. His use of the material is clearly in an effort to further his own career. A "preoccupation" his motives may seem strange, similar to preoccupations with why Hitler invaded Poland, even though he said that would be the limit of expansion. Andrew has issues with personal boundaries. This is alarming given his intent to pursue a career in philosophy. Also, your failure to fully investigate the status of the copyright on the material prior to issuing your statement is your problem. Do your homework next time. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Daniel Lotspeich](#)

on 9/30/05

Andrew, although you have been sneakily revising your previous posts, an advantage the rest of us do not have, it remains evident that you began the thread of ad hominem commentary. Your very first act was to refer to people you don't know very well as "know nothings." And Mark and Andrew, as Daniel correctly points out, the onus is on Andrew to request permission. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/30/05

Jeff, If you read my previous post you should have already seen that I conceded the debate. Get off it. I did not, however, let you off scott free: you could have simply stated that you were running a magazine from the start and been done with the whole matter. My error, if you can call it that, was taking Andrew's categorization of your site as a journal to be factual. Furthermore, regarding the copyright tangent, if you read my post you should have noticed that I qualified every single one of those claims. You never said that Gibson submitted it, nor that he had any heirs (if he didn't have heirs, he would have had to elect a benefactor in his will). It is dialectically useless to criticize assertions I never made. That said, you guys have two options: 1) either ask Andrew to take down this thread due to the copyright concerns, or 2) move on. The debate is over. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

Mark Smeltzer

on 9/30/05

I have no doubt that Gibson's piece is copyrighted; this is precisely why I have deferred to the wishes of the apparent copyright owner, who, so far as I know, does not wish that the quotation to be removed. But this was (like other issues, I fear) already discussed early in this thread. Nor have I said anything about "poetry." On the Napoleonic insults (good phrase, by the way!). Save perhaps for my expression of sadness at the low quality of grad students Jeff works with and his poor philosophical training (I have since deleted this comment), I think I've done fairly well on this count. I have tried to avoid psychoanalysis, character assassination, accusations of totalitarian sympathies, or childish name-calling of those I do not know well. If the analysis of any piece of writing reduces to these elements, I have little desire to take part. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/30/05

My, oh my. The request that Andrew ask permission to use what has been published in a copyrighted format triggers snide remarks from Andrew and then Mark attempts to spark a debate on whether or not the copyright was valid! Who are you people? I do not know the ins and outs of how Chris and Jeff handled copyright issues. For all that I know, it was all on the up and up, Chris left a will, and ensured that proceeds of his writing be spent on his dog. It wouldn't surprise me if that were the case. But come on Andrew...you can at least ask the guy if you have his permission to copy material from his journal, published in tribute to his very recently dead friend. What would that request look like? Would you be proposing a critique of this piece to a review of its philosophical merits? Would that mean that you think it should have been published in a philosophical journal in the first place? If so, then you concede that it is not poetry (which apparently would lessen its value in on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#))

[Daniel Lotspeich](#)

on 9/30/05

Mark, Mr. Gibson transferred right of publication to us when he submitted his writing for publication. The rights that he retains in the work transfer to his heirs for 75 years. They don't become public domain. It seems like you could at least look this stuff up yourself. This whole discussion would have been unnecessary if the two of you had simply done the homework I've done for you. And yet this whole discussion might have been edifying but for a certain entrenchment in pride. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/30/05

Andrew, I can't speak for Daniel, but I'm trying to get some good sense past your thick defenses for your own good. There are lots of arrogant young philosophy students, who tend not to go very far. Philosophy needs humble young philosophy students who do not place themselves above the matters of study. Also, we all know you don't return the favor because you're incapable of returning the favor. Mark, the information that escaped you until now was present in Andrew's original post ("Contrary Magazine"), as well as my first post, as well as our url, www.contrarymagazine.com. But it's important to note that the word "journal" does not refer exclusively to academic journals. It also refers to popular journals like the one published on Wall Street, the Yoga Journal, the Comics Journal, the City Journal, etc. It seems that you may have assumed that "journal" only refers to academic journals. I think it points to the harmfulness of Andrew's misrepresentation of our article that it deceived on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/30/05

Tangent: On the subject of the copyright, I doubt the validity of such since Gibson's work was published after he died. Unless he submitted the work, knowing that doing so involves the transfer of the rights to the work to Jeff's magazine, then no such transfer of rights has taken place. If Gibson did not submit the work, he is still the copyright owner, and since he is dead, that would make the public domain unless he transferred ownership to a benefactor in his will. You can't simply post something on the web with a "Copyright 2005" stamp and make it so. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

Mark Smeltzer

on 9/30/05

Jeff,"Contrary Magazine is not an academic journal."(I posted something to this effect yesterday, but apparently it didn't work because I can't find my post now.)Anyway, I think this is the crucial point. I did not visit the link to checkout your site until yesterday, but once I did, I immediately discovered that your site is an online magazine and NOT an online journal.If your intention were to be running a journal, I think Andrew's criticisms would be well founded, but since you are not, I think they are off base.Shame on you Jeff (and the other Contrary readers who have read this thread). If you had half as much sense as you do spirit, you would have recognized the staw man nature of Andrew's criticism right away and you would have been able to resolve this controversy in a single post without dragging everyone into a lengthy and frivolous debate. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

Mark Smeltzer

on 9/30/05

I'll repeat myself (one more time?) for both Jeff and Daniel: attempting to psychoanalyze and vitiate my own motives (as you both seem preoccupied with doing) is not a productive endeavor; I will not return the favor. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/30/05

To respond to Andrew's comment about peer review: It's curious how your standards are not only flexible enough to be misapplied, but also flexible enough to exempt yourself. There are many different kinds of journals. If there is a world of difference between a blog and journal, then there is a world of difference between types of journals as well. Peer review is a process used for vetting scholarly submissions to academic journals. Contrary Magazine is not an academic journal. We publish creative works for a popular audience. In our case, Gibson's work was reviewed by a number of editors, who not only have more expertise in writing than you do, but obviously have more expertise in philosophy than you do. They did not share your reaction to the piece, nor did any reader in its intended audience express such a reaction. Neither is peer review a perfect process. I suspect it was a failure of peer review that transformed Andrew Bailey, promising student, into Andrew Bailey, pillar of on [Nonsense Alert](#) (original)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/30/05

Allusions to Bart Simpson and The Big Lebowski are funny. This is not. Anyone can look at Contrary Magazine's publication of Gibson's writing and realize that it was published there as a memorial. You have taken it from that context without permission and are using it here to further your own agenda. I find that distasteful. What you are perpetrating is not the same as criticising published works by Locke, or Hume, or even Larry Flynn commenting on first ammendment speech. What you are doing is not an insult to Chris Gibson (your arguments don't even hold water), but it is an insult to Jeff McMahon. I would like to see you ask permission of Jeff McMahon here, now, publicly, at this admittedly late hour, for your use of his copyrighted material in this forum. That would clearly require that you accept that it was inappropriate for you to have used the work in the first place, which you may be unwilling to admit. But it is the better part of valor. -Lotspeich. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Daniel Lotspeich](#)

on 9/30/05

"Wrathius"Your reply to my comments fatigue. Not because of the strength of the "points" you aspire to make, but rather to their trivial nature. Taking your first point: it does not appear to me that "questions of permission and fair use can be set aside." You never asked permission, nor have you even at this late hour. To assume that this means the editor readily grants permission again demonstrates a lack of courtesy. However, courtesy is clearly not a strong point of yours. If it were, this question of permission and fair use would never have risen in the first place. From my limited experience in personal correspondance with the editor of Contrary Magazine, I suspect that his permission would have been readily granted from the start. In his words (used here without his permission), "Chris would appreciate a good fight." But you never bothered to ask for that permission. Here, like Walter Sobchak, even if you're right, you're still an asshole.I never suggested that your on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Daniel Lotspeich](#)

on 9/29/05

See my number 4; better yet, I'll repeat it here:There is a world of difference between a blog and a journal (in any discipline). Personal preference governs the first; peer review, the latter--or so we would hope! on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/29/05

You might consider applying that description of prudence to yourself, Andrew, since your published comments on this blog clearly do not derive from any relevant specialty or expertise. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/29/05

No one, so far as I can tell, has advocated censorship in this thread, though a plea for editorial modesty and restraint was issued. A journal that doesn't publish outside of its field of specialty (or, more broadly, the area of competence of its editorial board) isn't a forshadow of some totalitarian regime; it could just be good old fashioned prudence! on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/29/05

No I don't concede those points, Mark (three posts ago). I didn't address them because they're goofy. Every piece of writing should be placed in a distinct category and then labelled as such? That's worse than Mr. Bailey's argument for censorship based on his personal confusion. The two of you would have been valued members of the youth corps of a certain nightmarish 20th century regime. I'm not sure you know what poetic means. Furthermore, the piece was substantially labeled as a memorial, and Mr. Bailey simply stripped that context away in his unauthorized reproduction. So what good is labeling? Likewise you've tried to place Mr. Bailey and I in different categories of perspective so we can both be right. While cheerful, that doesn't work either. Mr. Bailey is wrong from both perspectives, as evidenced by his wholesale and decidedly unphilosophic flight from the argument. Nor do I accept Mr. Bailey's more recent mischaracterization of what I take the piece to be. I think it has a on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/29/05

1. Given that the editor has at least twice declined the invitation, questions of permission and fair use can be set aside. 2. A critical discussion of the merits of a piece of writing is not an insult to the author, even if he is dead. To repeat the common claim that Hume is only *superficially* clear, for example, is no insult to the man, nor should it be taken as such by his ancestors. Suggesting otherwise places a gag on thoughtful discourse, something I, at least, am not willing to do. Arguments and words are not persons nor are they subject to the same rules of respect, decor, etc.; anyone who thinks they are is simply misguided and likely to live life, constantly "offended." 3. My claim wasn't merely that Gibson's work would not survive in the world of philosophy; it's that it was bad philosophy to begin with, a point to which authorship is irrelevant. The gloss Jeff gave to the piece is evidence I rely on for this claim--the editor of the journal himself takes the essay to on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/29/05

"Wrathius," From what I see here, you have extracted a short piece of writing from a creative journal, and then issued a rather banal and superficial critique, making the odd claim that it would not have met publication criteria for a philosophical journal. Interesting and provocative that one might ever have thought that it would. To my eye it never was intended to be published in a philosophical journal (passive voice). That was not the author's intent (active voice). Had it been, he most certainly would not have submitted the piece for publication to the editor of a creative journal. He would have submitted it to publication in a philosophical journal. Lacking in formal education he may have been, but I can assure you that he was capable of distinguishing the one from the other. Mark asserts that, "Gibson's piece is BAD, on the philosophical grading scale," "that it does not cater to the needs of the reader." I will assert the contrary, that it is BRILLIANT, precisely on [Nonsense Alert](#) (original)

Daniel Forrest

on 9/29/05

I concede both of those points! I re-read your prior post and I believe I misinterpreted this line while skimming it, "He wrote it when he couldn't sleep; that's all it means." Regarding the validity of our interpretations, my point was simply that his paper is BAD on a philosophical grading scale simply due to the fact that it requires an extraordinary amount of effort on the part of the reader to discern its meaning. I never claimed that it lacked meaning. Since you haven't taken the opportunity to answer my central claim: that his paper is poetic in nature, despite having written replies to my two posts, which both explicitly repeat this central claim, I take it that you concede this point. My second claim was that the piece, being poetic, should have been labeled as such, and that this would have prevented the current controversy. This point has also gone unanswered, so I take it you concede it as well. Now, the thing is, I think I agree with your original claim: you are producing a on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

Mark Smeltzer

on 9/28/05

You boys have really been behaving like amateurs. If you're going to point out contradictions in something I said, you're going to have to accurately report what I said. 1) I never told you that you should not respond so negatively because Gibson wrote this piece in the wee hours of the night. You made that up. 2) I did not say this piece was "orthodox for Gibson." I said, "The work may appear unorthodox to a philosopher, but strikes me as surprisingly orthodox coming from Chris," which is a reference to his radically unorthodox life and his lack of formal training in philosophy and in writing. Also, Mark, if my interpretation of Gibson is suspect because I haven't read more of his work, then so, of course, is yours. You're a poor tag-team partner for Andrew. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/28/05

"Is it your suggestion that because not-knowledge is not closed under entailment that the same can be said for N?" No. The counter-example (s) offered earlier stand on their own merits. The discussion of the relevant of "not" closure principles was just speculative musings, not brazen claims. I have not formally asserted a specific connexion between this debate and epistemic closure principles; rather, simply that I think one exists. on [Can Rejecting PAP Get the Compatibilist Anywhere? \(Part II\)](#)

Mark Smeltzer

on 9/28/05

So, are you conceding that the piece was published purely for biographical purposes? Also, I am confused about some things. Earlier you said two things: 1) that we shouldn't respond so negatively because Gibson wrote this piece in the wee hours of the night, and 2) that this piece was "orthodox for Gibson". However, in your most recent post you have said that 1) the piece was written while Gibson was fully lucid, and 2) that you've never read any of Gibson's other pieces. Both of these recent claims stand in stark opposition to your prior claims -- how can we read Gibson with increased sensitivity merely for his being a night owl (viz., the type of person who would be lucid at wee hours of the morning)? How can you claim that this piece was orthodox for Gibson if it's the only piece you've read? Furthermore, if this is the only piece of Gibson's you've read, then your whole interpretation of his piece is suspect. You don't have enough grammatical context to reliably translate his poetic on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

Mark Smeltzer

on 9/28/05

Mark, It is entirely possible that a different headline might have avoided Andrew's criticism, or not, but I think the real issue here is the substance of that criticism. Andrew has argued that material should not be printed that confuses him or that he fails to comprehend. This seems unfair to readers who can comprehend it and readers who simply would like to have an opportunity to read it. In other words, it may have a different audience. Andrew places himself untenably in the position of arbiter of bad writing and arbiter of philosophy-period for all audiences. He may be a fine student, but he's obviously not yet that fine. Andrew suggests an objective or absolute criteria for bad writing, but when pressed can only produce 1) his own subjective state of confusion and 2) a reference to Strunk & White's "Elements of Style." Now, Andrew has promoted an article on the Philosopher's Carnival that he authored himself. I only had to read the first two sentences to find two sentences that on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/27/05

Is it your suggestion that because not-knowledge is not closed under entailment that the same can be said for N? This strikes me as a weak analogy, if only because logical necessity provides an analogy in the opposite direction (necessity is closed under entailment, as per the distribution axiom of K). Some modal principles are closed under entailment, some are not; why believe that the failure of some impugnes this particular principle (Beta*)? on [Can Rejecting PAP Get the Compatibilist Anywhere? \(Part II\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/26/05

Was the paper published purely as a memorial piece? Because that's what I'm hearing from Jeff. If so, perhaps it would have been wiser and more charitable to Gibson's memory to publish something of his that had received his full and lucid attention. If it were graded as a philosophical essay, it would not score well. However, I readily concede that any of the creative writing teachers I've ever had would have scored it very highly -- they tend to appreciate ambiguous grammatical quagmires that pass by the name of poetry. Had the piece been labeled as "philosophically inspired poetry", I think it would have passed under the radar of those critics such as Mr. Bailey. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

Mark Smeltzer

on 9/26/05

Hey Andrew. It's cool to hear from you again. I've been throwing around different options, but maybe something in the vein of english, philosophy, and or business administration. on [Philosophers' Carnival](#)

[Matt](#)

on 9/23/05

Wow. If I were a psychoanalyst I'd call that projection. Charitable reading? Indeed. It would be excellent for you to figure out what that is. Academic integrity? If you're hinting at impugning mine, let's hear it. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/22/05

I can only hope that some semblance of care, wisdom, academic integrity, charitable reading, and maybe even rigor will come to you one day, Jeff. Perhaps then you will apologize to this conscientious Biola student. =)Until then, as Humpty-Dumpty would say, "That is all. Goodbye." on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/22/05

Yes, I thought you'd go for the quick escape. Just a few points, shouted! as you flee:Saying "bad writing is bad writing" is saying nothing rather than something, a superb example of nonsense. I think it proves that you must, by your own standards, dissolve your blog.I read your little paragraph that you keep insisting I read, read it a few times now, but it also seems to say nothing.Strunk & White's "Elements of Style" was written by a certain reader (Strunk, a writing teacher) for a certain set of writers (students including White). It consists of very good advice for those writers considering that audience. That advice is often very good advice when applied to other writers writing for other audiences, but not necessarily for all writers and all audiences. It is not objective criteria. Must we ALWAYS begin a paragraph with a topic sentence? Might there NEVER be occasion to divert from that practice? Strunk tells us that it's often a good idea to use active voice, but not always. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/22/05

As I already indicated, I'm through with this discussion; your views are apparently such that I can do nothing but give them a Lewisian stare and move on. That you twice refuse to give a careful reading to what I have *already* written and continue to harp on irrelevant accidents only convinces me of the wisdom of this tactic. I can direct you, however, to a resource that you are no doubt already aware of: Strunk and White's "The Elements of Style." I take the advice in that booklet to sum up rather well some objective principles of good writing. Those who disregard these principles do so at a risk--not merely of raising the ire of Strunk, White, and analytic philosophers, but of saying nothing rather than something. If this is not a vice, I don't know what is. Peace, -Andrew
[on Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/21/05

Come now, Andrew, I thought you'd have this done by now. Your moment is at hand. "Bad writing is bad writing" looks strikingly like a bald tautology but I'm certain a thinker of such robust self-importance would never behave so irrigorously. We might be at the moment where we prove my point on comparative rigor by having you look in the mirror, but no, I dare not hope. Certainly you must have answers for these six questions, some luminous elaboration, thou arbiter not only of what is philosophy, but also of what is bad writing, and of what should and should not be published for all audiences everywhere. We must hear six answers from you before we adopt your directive to ban all writing that you fail to comprehend. Please, your audience awaits (and I don't mean just me). on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/21/05

Yikes! An incredulous stare!
Now that I've answered your
impetuous demands to your
all-too-predictable
dissatisfaction, might you
kindly answer a small number
of questions for me? One for
each paragraph I glossed for
you and one for the road, if
you don't mind. On your first
point: "bad writing is bad
writing." Please elaborate: 1.
What is bad writing? At one
point you mention a vague
standard of "philosophic
interest in an original way,"
but I thought your precise
objection is that Gibson writes
in an original way, confusing
you, in your own words, and
with no ready reference where
you can look up terminology.
At another point you mention
writing that is "verbose,
unclear, unoriginal, and
uninsightful." 2. Are those
absolute values, and if so,
where can I find the recorded
standards of verbosity, clarity,
originality, and insight so that
I can compare them to
Gibson? (Don't worry, I
promise not to use them on
you). Also, 3. where is the
scale of philosophic interest
recorded? On the on [Nonsense
Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/21/05

The gloss you have provided (should it be accurate) is insightful, in that it only confirms what I have previously claimed. I will not argue for this observation, but I think it is apparent enough for any third party to verify. On your own reading of Gibson, he has (so far as I can tell) said nothing of philosophical interest or in an original way, but these are precisely the factors that justify publication. As for the relevance of biographical details, I suggest this: please read what I wrote again. I specifically asked for you to read (just one little paragraph, please oh please oh please!) with care, and this evidently did not happen. My claim was that these biographical details that you harp upon are irrelevant to one mode of evaluation--but not to others. You seemed to miss both the qualification and the caveat, so I'll repeat them both. On the first point: bad writing is bad writing, whether penned by a privileged-son-of-a-Congressman, a lunatic, a Ph.D, an untrained resident of

[Andrew](#)

on 9/21/05

on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

My answer to number 2 indicates I'm no longer interested in vindicating the Gibson piece? I really don't think it's my burden to prove anything to you, especially when my comment on rigor is a comparison. Do you want me to show you student work that's sloppy compared to Gibson's? I believe I already have. You want me to provide a summary, a gloss, or a commentary, but I think if you're a student of philosophy you ought to be able to do that yourself. The material is fairly straightforward, certainly no more difficult than Davidson or Kripke can be, and you seem to say you are able to parse them. The difference is that Chris Gibson is an amateur who hasn't been trained in their tradition or their orthodoxies. There should be no expectation that he rivals them. As a student of philosophy, you should also know that explications are always wrong and always inadequate. And as I admit in my introduction, I'm certainly not able to see everything Chris intended, since there has only ever been on

[Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/20/05

It's clear that you're no longer interested in vindicating the Gibson piece (your answer, especially to #2, is indicative of this). Saying something is rigorous doesn't make it so! Read this next bit carefully: Gibson places himself as a writer something like (though perhaps entirely uninfluenced by) Brett Bourbon and Co.. His writing alone, in both style and content, is strong evidence of this. That alone justifies commentary, I think. That he was a dearly loved man who lived a hard life and died tragically is immaterial to this particular point (though not to all, of course). Finally, attempting to psychoanalyze and vitiate my own motives is not a productive endeavor; I will not return the favor. Peace, -Andrew PS: Again, if you wish me to remove the quotation (or parts of it), you need only say the word in private email. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/19/05

1. You say you are "aware of no additional context," after what i just told you. I'll let that reply stand on its merits.2. For proof, see number 1. Compared to your rigor, Gibson's is enviable.... (My goodness, Andrew, you yourself put Chris Gibson in the company of Stanley Fish and Brett Bourbon! You even placed him in a tradition and opposed it to analytic philosophy! It's clear you misinterpreted the context of the piece when you visited the site, mistook the writings of this self-educated, quasi-homeless gentleman as academic work of the ilk of Fish and Bourbon, and now you're too proud to apologize. Which just looks ugly. You're maligning the dearly departed at a funeral.)3. It does not claim to be a work of professional philosophy. Academics have not yet cornered the use of the terms "philosophy" nor "philosopher." (You could learn that by not so quickly dismissing Continental philosophy.) The title is self-deprecating. He wrote it when he couldn't sleep; that's all it means. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/18/05

Jeff, Thanks for commenting; I'm glad to see you took the post seriously enough to reply. I'll address the relevant points in order. 1. I am aware of no additional context needed to read the Chris Gibson piece. That is why I quoted the paper in its entirety (I also read all of the attached links carefully before posting). And yet, I am still met with nothing but confusion when reading what he has left us. Gibson may use an elaborate technical vocabulary which those not initiated in his thought are not able to interpret (Kant is like this). Or, perhaps he is merely a bad writer, who aims to obfuscate rather than to enlighten. Your comment suggests that you think the former is the case; should this be true, I would be happy to discover it. If Gibson uses technical vocabulary defined elsewhere, perhaps you could direct me to such definitions? 2. Your claim that Gibson writes with rigor strikes me as nothing but hand-waving. Let me put the point this way: show me how this rigor is displayed. on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Andrew](#)

on 9/18/05

Hello Wrathii, Thank you for your comments on Chris Gibson's "Wages of Insomnia." What you've missed is the context supplied by the links accompanying the piece in Contrary. Chris Gibson was a high school dropout who lived much of his life without a home, and who unfortunately met his death this summer. He was enormously popular and, it turns out, important in the town where he lived, San Luis Obispo, California. There, he was often talking about philosophy, most often about Wittgenstein. What you've copied and posted here *out of context* is the effort of a man who had none of the training that seems to have benefitted you, acting out of sheer love for the material and doing his very best to reflect it, the way amateur writers who love Hemingway like to produce short crisp sentences. Would you fault them for not being Hemingway? When you consider the actual comparison I made -- that this came from a man who had very little schooling and did most of his studying in the broken down on [Nonsense Alert \(original\)](#)

[Jeff McMahon](#)

on 9/18/05