now virtually unknown in the Anglophone literature except for his eponymous syndrome. Unaware of de Clérambault's tragic suicide in 1934 and that his collected papers were published *posthumously* in 1942, Goldstein (1986) concluded that "a new (*sic*) psychiatric syndrome [had] been .. discovered .. in a work of literary fiction before (or perhaps concurrently with) its official 'discovery' by psychiatry" and, in an "effort to assign scientific credits and priorities fairly", suggested that erotomania be renamed "Simenon's syndrome"! Surely proof that truth can be at least as strange as fiction ...

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Words of wisdom

DEAR SIRS
The first instalment of Larry Culliford's series (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, December 1990, **14**, 734) makes interesting reading. I look forward to the rest of what promises to be a very worthwhile contribution. I also commend the *Psychiatric Bulletin* for encouraging an interest in philosophy.

Dr Culliford concludes this first instalment with, "Here is the chicken: wisdom. Here is the egg: a free and discerning mind. Which shall we choose to put first?", and refers this as a *paradox*.

A paradox is a situation that arises when, on the basis of valid deductions from generally accepted premises, a conclusion is reached which appears absurd or self-contradictory, or conflicts with other generally accepted beliefs.

There are basically two types of paradoxes: the *logical* (for example, Cantor's paradox, Burali-Forti's paradox, Russell's paradox), and the *semantic* (for example Zeno's famous Paradoxes and the Liar Paradox – the statement "I am lying" is true if it is false and false if it is true). The Clock Paradox in

Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity is in a class of its own, for it is a *prediction* of the theory itself, much as the theory predicts the existence of black holes.

Temple (1981) is of the view that paradoxes "may well be due to faulty ideas concerning thought and language and not to faulty logic or mathematics"; while Russell (1908), himself the discoverer of an important paradox, dismisses them as the results of a vicious circle of thinking.

Paradoxes are supposed to force us to re-examine our ideas. However, all they actually achieve is our frustration and perplexity. None has been of any use, or been demonstrated, with the single exception of the Clock Paradox, which states that, when observed from a stationary frame of reference, clocks run more slowly in a frame of reference moving at speeds close to the speed of light.

Returning to Dr Culliford's short piece, it is not clear what he means when he speaks of putting one or the other first – wisdom superior to, exists prior to, or is more desirable than, a free and discerning mind, or vice versa? Based on the discussion above, you can see that what he has there is definitely *not* a paradox. It is simply a question, at best an unfathomable enigma.

If Dr Culliford is contemplating using paradoxes in his series may I be allowed space to share this note with him: paradoxes are *not* the best way of learning or teaching. They take up too much mental energy for which there is very little reward. Try *parables* instead. Parables once heard are never forgotten and their meaning continues to unfold to us for the rest of our lives. An excellent example is the parable with which he introduces the short essay referred to in this response.

If you heard Aesop's fables or Christ's parables as a child I bet you could remember them in full detail today, even if you had never heard them repeated since then, and the wisdom they contain grows as your own consciousness unfolds.

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Odious correspondence

DEAR SIRS
There is more than a whiff of sanctimonious self-righteousness in the letters of Seager, Drummond and Young (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, November 1990, **14**, 679).