

## **Should one break with essay writing conventions within a discipline?**

*Author's name (parents' draft).* Terence Rajivan Edward (now Doctor)

*Dialogue on names (fictional):* "Now why do you want a name?" So that my works can be identified - that is one reason. "You need a number really."

*Author's name (my first draft).* 0161\_\_Rajivan

*Abstract.* This paper contains a long piece concerning the dialogue above, a pre-introduction before the introduction, which may well be of interest. The paper considers departures from the norms of accepted essay/paper writing within one's discipline. Are they a good idea or a bad idea? I engage in a dialogue with a Hulk Hogan-like figure on some experiments of mine – specifically writing on a topic set randomly and also trying to write on your own preferred topic – and I also examine how Dame Professor Marilyn Strathern writes, which is different from our philosophy conventions, it casually seems to me, but provides a way of putting all the stuff I want to say in without losing coherence. A character, Angela Merk&, also figures. (I set out to write a paper like Helen Beebee, but this seems a total failure!) An appendix contains some ritual chat.

*Draft version:* version 5 (2nd September 2025, version 1 18th August 2025)

*Although I am in seed, deed, and need a mouse*

*Nevertheless, I find the courage to leave the house*

### **0. Before the introduction (first to use zero for this?)**

This is the second paper in a row in which I have, after the title, done this: (i) introduced my name as specified by my parents and legal documents, referring to it parenthetically as parents' draft; (ii) presented a brief dialogue ("You call that brief? YAWN!"); and (iii) then my own draft of my name in response to the dialogue.

Here is the dialogue, more fully:

SOCX: Now why do you want a name?

ME: So that my works can be identified - that is one reason.

SOCX: You need a number really.

Names have some value, isn't it? They are useful for referring to distinct people. You don't give two siblings the same name, because how are you going to call one over and not the other? ("I have tried it, siblings with the same name; it is not as bad as it seems"???) I have this name which seems uncommon, Terence Rajivan Edward. Two English names and an Asian name in between. (It is used all over Asia now!!!?) It seems useful for finding my works on the Internet and locating them generally. I am interested in those uses of a name. *Question*. But what if someone else just thinks, "I am much wealthier than you and I am tired of your works having prominence. I am just going to get someone to write better works and with your name too. That is how much I want to put you in the metaphorical closet!"? Possible or not possible? *Response*. "Of course, it is possible, you idiot. A lot of things are possible." *Better question (I assume)*. Okay, is it plausible, in that it has some significant probability? *Response 1*: "It is plausible that a wealthy racist thinks like this. Your family have come to the UK or some of them have and the vast majority in the UK are white people (still true; change might take a while, you know, um); you have brown skin (with some lighter patches nowadays and also in periods of your boyhood); and you are writing in English and people read your work. Why not pay a talented white person to adopt your name and eclipse you?" *Response 2*: the sort of character I would associate with such a person is uncommon I think - people are nice, right? - but some people might well conclude that the best approach for them and their friends is to act as if they were such a person? "We keep failing at this level and we are going to have to try that, which we would rather not do," they think. Or "That is the best option for us, given our temperaments."

So numbers, one has to take incorporating numbers within a name seriously. It is going to be harder for them to eclipse you if you have a number as part of your name. Thus I came up with this name: 0161\_\_Rajivan. It is catchy as well, isn't it? 0161 is the Manchester dialling code, which I heard is due to be removed from existence soon. ("IS IT?") My legal name remains the same. I hope someone will not introduce this requirement: your addition of numbers does not count unless you make a legal change. But that requirement would not be surprising at all.

People have surely - "presumably" may be better here; what exactly does she contemplate? - considered the problem of how to get a name which avoids getting

eclipsed for centuries. These are some guesses at proposals, not in chronological order and not mutually exclusive. (a) "Reach Adam Smith level! Then it is not a problem!" Adam Smith is a famous philosopher economist from the Enlightenment, if you don't know. By the way, some names are such that discoveries just falsely accrue to them. When you see how Jonathan Quong refers to G.A. Cohen instead of Jan Narveson for a certain objection to Rawls's difference principle, you think of the Pythagoras cult, or I do. (b) Add a middle name. A forename and a family name is not enough. (c) Add more than a middle name. Add five names.... Shall I just add Kanagasurium, mother's maiden surname? "Hey, this name may not go down well in this country or parts of it." Well, if we are heading in this direction, add NRothwell too. (d) "Have a unique combination of names, but each name is just from the common stock names." My parents when naming me probably tried this and so did many others. (e) "Don't use the most common combination you can think of, such as John Smith. Let's call our child..." Not you Joel; I don't know what happened there. (f) Dame Professor Marilyn Strathern's approach? "Establish yourself at an elite institution. They will preserve your work." (I wonder: many of the pioneers of the solutions above think, "SO VULGAR"?) (g) Just put a number in the name...

But it is a break with convention, isn't it, putting numbers in your name? I imagine that someone, let us call them Angela Merk&, says, "It is merely a convention. If you want to prevent your works from being eclipsed, then break the convention. Put a number in your name." (Another character says, "Why are you so individually oriented? Look at all these people whom you have taken something from?" Sanity protection: discount perspective. Okay, I saw a Christmas decoration in a car and wrote on *A Christmas Garland*. "We think these little objects affected you as well." Not this one; not this one; not this one...) Angela Merk& repeats, "It is merely a convention. If you want to prevent your works being eclipsed, then break the convention. Put a number in your name. Don't get stuck with my life, whatever you do!" Here is my initial response (before remembering all the philosophy I have done!!! Do conventions even exist? Baby level for now.). A person such as myself inherits a certain tradition, which we can here think of as composed of conventions, such as naming conventions. It is against naming conventions to put a number in your name, it seems to me. In the flesh, I have never

encountered a parent who does this, and never heard of this even amongst celebrities. They seem keen on turning place names into people names (Paris Jackson, Brooklyn Beckham, Apple Martin? After the Big Apple, New York?). Among/amongst parents I have met in the flesh, they choose a child's name from a stock set of names and none of these names has a number in it and if, when naming my sister, I had proposed, "Just put a number in the name," my mother and father would have said to me, "That's crazy," and not listened to me.

I have worries, Angela Merk&. I am worried that there is only so far one can break from convention. If there are 10000 relevant conventions, there need to be 7000 I still abide by or I will seem too mad to people now. And maybe too mad to people from the future. Look at who gets the prominent place in a literature course. They are often a bunch of similar people of quite a high level who were part of a trend, the squad my friend Omar calls them, e.g. these are the Romantics who celebrated nature and opposed industrialization: William Blake (I have got my own ostrich poem though – "DESTROYED!"), Keats, Shelley, Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth and his sister, and the opium eater probably too, Thomas de Quincey. Where is "I am not keen on this romantic movement because I am keen on industrialization and I think the sky looks better with our pollution, as these stuck-up poets call it. I will write some poems to the polluted sky"? And also where is a poet paid by a businessman to combat the Romantics? A person rather similar to myself perhaps, or at least one of them is anyway, maybe both! (I don't believe they are alive, by the way, psychiatrists, the forgotten poets that is. CIJ<sub>aw</sub> INSPIRED NOVEL CONCEPT: These two undead and me in a threesome. "If even he engages in this ridiculous humour, it's the custom surely"???)

Is it a good idea to aim for recognition regarding the idea of putting a number in one's name? Probably it will not help, being more confident, chest out, saying, "This is my great idea." An anticipated reply: "Gosh, the person who first put a number in their name is this bad. They are worse than a Timothy Williamson?"

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are conventions of essay writing, at least within a discipline. For example, in the introduction specify your answer to the question and the order of discussion. Sometimes I don't do that. Is it a big problem? Some of my papers are quite small... In school my English literature teacher just crossed out my order of discussion. "Don't tell us what you are going to do. Just do it!" she would write. (If written or said to students of a certain social class, it would cause quite a few of these students to present the order of discussion, I think. That is probably how they react to such input!) But I don't often write in English literature (or so I assume – by the way, I owe lots to whoever invented parentheses?). Maybe with each discipline I write in, I should follow the conventions of that discipline. But I write in economics too and what do I know of their conventions? Little. Also what about work between disciplines?

I want to address the question of whether one should break with (one or more) essay writing conventions in a discipline or not. I shall be taking into account the perspective of a HULK HOGAN, as I (foolishly?) imagine his perspective. In the next part, I shall present some of my actual experience of breaking with conventions. In the third part, I shall present how I imagine Hogan will react. In the fourth part, I shall argue against his way of reacting. My conclusion is that it is okay to break with conventions.

(I watched World Wrestling Federation in the 1980s and there were these simple memorable characters, many dead early – which I was reminded of when thinking of essayists who die young – and I suspect you encounter characters like these all over the Anglosaxon world. Thanks for the information - you are more progressive than you seem, Republican WWF. I am not sure that there is much point putting them in a novel even. Does one need its fabled capacity for capturing more complex characters? Rick Flair: that is political philosophy. And the Ultimate Warrior: I am doing that now! But Andre the Giant: is that a provincial character? Behold, a massive pedophile?! When does one use this word "pedophile," by the way, or its slangy shortened form: "pedo"? "My social class are taught to publicly assume nonpedo unless given conclusive evidence." "This social class use it strategically. This boy's rule is: if you have the faintest impression of pedophile, shout, 'pedo.' Meanwhile, this boy's rule is: shout, 'pedo,' if it is likely to achieve any end of yours, e.g. getting a concerned adult to back away while you torture a wood pigeon." Have you seen this call-you-a-pedo level, by the

way? "It does not come out in the strict order of a video game"??? "LEVEL 8: SEND OUT..." By the way, if you are a child, I would not wait for the last piece of evidence before saying, "Pedo," in case it is you who is the victim. See Edward 2025 Instagram)

## **2. CONVENTION-BREAKING EXPERIENCE**

There are conventions of essay writing in the philosophy discipline area. As an undergraduate in the University of Manchester, you are expected to:

- answer the question set, not some other question.
- briefly state your answer to the question and the order of discussion in the introduction (it is not a detective story).
- argue for a position (you cannot just have a string of intuitively attractive theses, though this might be a contribution to philosophy).
- consider an objection to your position, assuming there is one, which there usually is.

These conventions are more or less preserved at more advanced levels and conventions like these exist in social anthropology and in political theory. But I sometimes violate some of these conventions. For very brief papers, I do not state my answer in the introduction or the order of discussion. I am quite good though. Not as good as you, maybe, but I'm okay at least!

In 2023 probably, I broke with conventions more significantly. I wrote a brief essay each day for a long period of time, sometimes more than one. I wrote on whatever I felt like really, within the scope of certain academic disciplines. Some of them were half-baked by many people's standards. Now I made this game in 2021 which involves some randomization (not publicly available); and I used it to choose a random topic in 2023. There were five topics: (a) Rawls/analytic political philosophy; (b) Milan Kundera; (c) social/cultural anthropology; (d) topic I cannot remember, maybe analytic philosophy which is not political philosophy (not questions of legitimacy and social justice, and subquestions); (e) other. I remember the topic set kept coming up as Kundera, which was strange, and I think I said this. But when writing random essays, as I called them, I decided to add this HYBRID CHALLENGE: appear to do the topic set

but also write on something else that you want to write on. I produced some strange objects that would not be valued by our system of convention.

The essay I remember best is one I deleted myself. Well, myself is a tricky one here. Writing so much, I had a mental health problem in September 2023. I behaved like a drunk person in the street, pretending to be Simone de Beauvoir and ignoring various conventions and running away from the police. It was around September 6th that I was admitted to hospital. I was in Manchester Royal Infirmary briefly and moved to North Manchester General Hospital, where I must have stayed for about 2 months in total, though after 3 weeks I escaped and was forcibly brought back after a week. (I will tell you about it some other time! "OH NO!") They told me that I had been writing nonsense in my papers: the consultant psychiatrist, someone he asked for expert advice, and even the nurse, the French nurse, but she was a good nurse mostly. They put me on injections for a year. And during this time, I deleted papers, including this one I most remember. It was superficially a Rawls essay but I wrote about the television sitcom Friends, very popular in our own day. It may have influenced how even a cultured person such as myself speaks – I would not look into this issue, if I were you. My former flatmate had said that both Joey and Phoebe are stupid. They are two characters on the show. There are six main characters (or just one perhaps; can there actually be six? Reduce to the Cosby show paradigm?! "OH F\*\*\* OFF!") and they live in fancy New York apartments. I disagreed with my former flatmate, back in 2002-3. Joey is stupid but Phoebe is zany or something: she appears not great on commonsense but she has far-out ideas of some value. (Is she just parodying someone such as myself, as she intuitively perceives them? I haven't watched much Friends, just the first two series when I was a teenager... The writers flip-flapped me?!) Now older, in my 2023 essay I argued that there could be some truth in my former flatmate's perspective: a simple economic model, with two categories CLEVER and STUPID, might if applied lead to all of these New York apartment dwellers being classed as stupid. (What does the cream of Cambridge University think of them? "We have a special term.") But I probably need to do more research, and it is not my interest at present. (Also, from a God's eye perspective, they are all stupid?! There is also: they have to go into the stupid category because they are fictional and you have to be real to be genuinely clever. Or: a

character could possibly be fictional and go into the clever category, but not these two dimensional characters.) Anyway, I deleted the essay because given what the psychiatrist and others said, I felt uncomfortable for some time with anything that deviated much from convention.

By the way, at the time, I had this exotic novel idea. I don't know which came first, novel idea or hybrid essay challenge. A person is forced into prostitution and customers pay for this, that, and the other, but she tries to realize her own desires. I didn't bother writing it, but I do have a strange half novel. It is based on my friend Omar basically, insofar as a wicked but good person such as myself has friends. (Gentleman tosser, gentleman tosser, lady tosser... Etc. "This is how our social class are taught to interact with your social class. We seem polite but we smuggle an insult discreetly, a tapping of the finger that means...")

### **3. FAUX HOGAN'S RESPONSE AND DEFENCES**

I imagine Hogan (at some stage or between known stages - I have not studied the matter) would say this: "What is the point of your experiment? Instead of having a topic randomly selected, learn a specialist area properly. Progress in philosophy might have once been made by individual geniuses, such as John Locke. But philosophy today is generally a team project, in which lots of people are involved and each area has a number of specialists and thereby more knowledge is produced. Learn John Rawls properly and stick to that maybe, instead of the next day switching to evil Mikey and the day after cultural anthropology, or whatever your random system dictates."

DEFENCE 1. Maybe there is some strange value which arises from doing the task, a value which is difficult to anticipate in advance. For example, one comes up with a fiction idea, a novel length fiction even. "What novel idea?" It is an exotic novel, maybe French or Spanish or something beyond those countries. It features a person who is forced into prostitution, but with each customer she aims to get the customer to instead do what she is after.

DEFENCE 2: "Hogan perhaps has a long bedding-in period. This makes him favour the system of conventions already in place." To which he can say: "I have given an argument and you must respond to that argument, not point to a strategic value for

me in accepting the conclusion.” Not sure what to say about this. I’ll just leave this debate. But I have this worry: once you cut certain people out of a certain social environment, such as this character, there is no adequate justice system or it is economically irrational for there to be such a thing (there is insufficient incentive in a broad sense, beyond monetary pay). We just don’t have anyone who can enter new systems of conventions, new games metaphorically speaking, quickly, in a way that remedies the problem. All the fast-adapters are not suited to the role of being just. I don’t think they will become suitable. But maybe in some other society, which has been engaged in projects of justice for longer, there are people who can do this: I should have had a child perhaps. “We have a just-by-character-fast-adapter. You don’t. Your just man is slower to adapt to new systems of convention.”

DEFENCE 3: it is unclear that it is of value sticking to the well-established system of conventions if one has certain long-term aims. In literature, the poet and essayist and fiction writer Laura Riding seems much closer to the tastes that dominate the English provincial university. If a typical provincial saw modernism, they would just say, “Do it in a loud, accessible, blocky way for the common reader here. To speak Chinese: yang not ying. At the moment modernism is just a clique amongst some overly well-read fairies.” And that is what Riding supplies. Here is some material from *Anarchism is not Enough*:

The important (but infrequently drawn) distinction between what is gentlemanly and what is dull in poetry. Many people read poetry because it makes them feel upper-class, and most poetry is written by people who feel upper-class; at least by people who take pleasure in describing themselves as upper-class; for instance, by men who make themselves feel upper-class by holding gentlemanly feelings toward women and by women who make themselves feel upper-class by acknowledging these feelings... Practical poetry is written by people who do not feel upper-class... (1928: 25)

This seems ideal for the provinces. It is somewhat Oasis even. But where is it now? Various books by Riding are published by Carcanet Press based in Manchester, which is not nothing. But this book is not in the main or central library, to my knowledge, unless I accidentally left a copy of mine there. Virginia Woolf, probably the target of this passage, dominates here – many have heard of her; she is much more widely read.

And the economics of literature does not allow for much else. University College London make Woolf central; Cambridge University do ("We had people at Girton who asked for a room of their own, but Woolf must take centre stage"; I read words to this effect in the from-the-store section of the university library); Oxford University do; how are you not going to?!

MY WORRY is that the provincial university fellow, who stands up for local traditions or preferences (as he perceived them) in the face of someone such as myself, is not really able to guarantee long-term rewards for those who meet his or her requirements. If certain figures stay in the curriculum, it is because higher-ranked places keep them in. I have been half-imitating Helen Beebee and writing what I believe to be papers of long-term value. What is the point? It should be treated as an amusing hobby and the moment it ceases to be, it should be abandoned probably!

#### **4. Marilyn Strathern's writing**

I have noticed something strange that Marilyn Strathern does, or this is a simplified portrait. The end of every paragraph in an essay links to the next paragraph. But there may be no clear connection between paragraph 1 and 3, say. 1 and 2 connect; 2 and 3 connect; but there has been a significant change of theme between 1 and 3. I doubt she invented this; it came from the depths of Girton or Trinity Cambridge, I suspect - "No she invented that too"; OH NO! - but it is an interesting approach. It goes against our analytic philosophy conventions, it seems. One has a narrow section theme and one sticks to the theme. But maybe it is incorporatable. It allows one to maintain flow while having less overall coherence: less big picture coherence, one might say. This is probably useful for me. I have various points I sometimes wish to make and it is a way of keeping them together in a format close enough to paradigmatic present-day convention: the dreamed of Helen Beebee essay (e.g. 2011).

I can't be bothered giving proper evidence (see Strathern 1992). "No. Give evidence: show some stamina." I can't be bothered giving evidence. "No. Give evidence: show some stamina." I can't be bothered giving evidence. "No. Give evidence: show some stamina." I can't be bothered giving evidence. "No. Give evidence: show some stamina." I can't be bothered giving evidence. "No. Give evidence: show some stamina." I can't be bothered giving evidence. "No. Give

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### **Appendix: some history anthropology chat**

The addition of numbers to names so as to ensure unique identification is a case of a naming-ritual arising from means-ends reasoning, or it would be if it occurred? It fits better with Sir James Frazer over Robertson-Smith, the latter saying that the ritual starts up and people justify it afterwards and in different ways (see Edward 2022, for Robertson Smith information). Or it seems to anyway.

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purpose, so that people cannot gauge our level in logic, nor can they get rid of all of us"?)

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Forgive me sticklers for referencing! And forgive myself maybe. OH NO!

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