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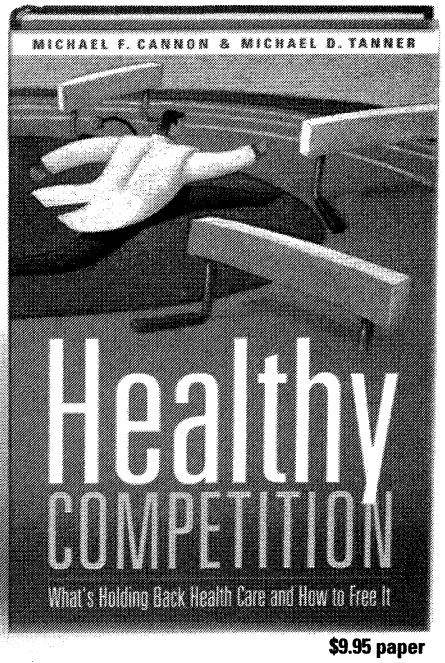

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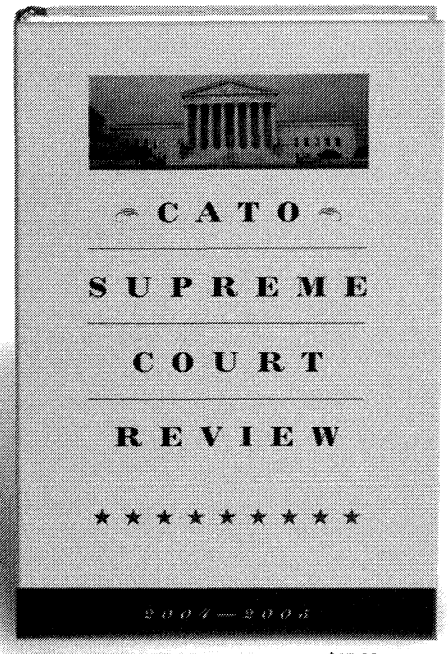

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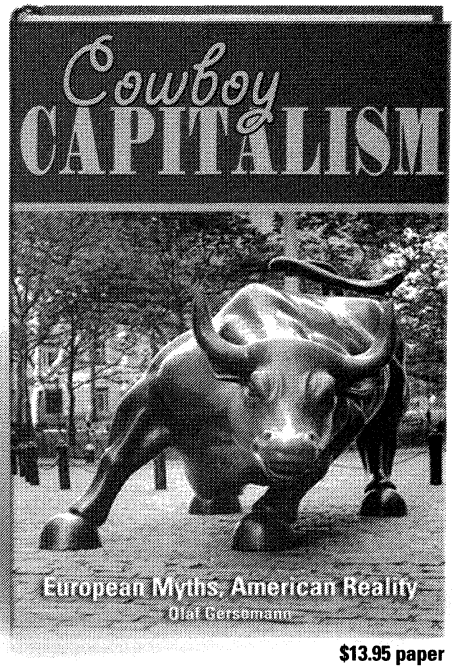

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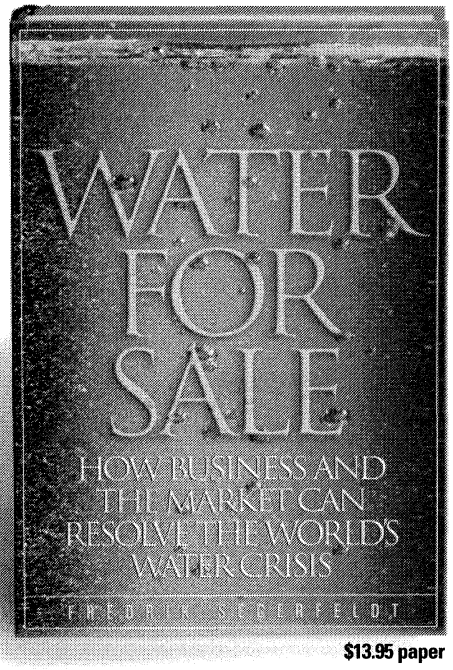

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Letters

Wealth of Ignorance

My introduction to "The Peasant Principle" (by Stephen Cox, September) came in 1976 — date ring a bell? — when I was playing table tennis at a California junior college.

A bright-eyed student with a clipboard, introducing himself as a history student, asked if I would mind taking a survey. "What famous event are we celebrating the 200th anniversary of this year?" "Easy," quoth I, "the publication of 'The Wealth of Nations.'" My subtle attempt at humor — and providing a diversion from what I assumed must have been a monotonous string of answers — failed. "WRONG!" he exclaimed, almost triumphantly. "Yes, yes, I know. It's the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence." "WRONG!" he almost shouted. "Well what then?" I enquired. "The American Revolution." I should have thought that a history student might have been able to connect the dots.

Adrian Day
Annapolis, Md.

Orwell Lives

Despite his good intentions, Alan W. Bock (Reflections, September) errs in writing that Yasir Esam Hamdi, an American citizen, was released "after about three years" imprisonment as an "enemy combatant." At press conferences, in typical Orwellian fashion, Bush Administration spokesmen sometimes describe it in such terms, implying Hamdi left the country of his own free will, or as the result of a consensual agreement. But it wasn't voluntary even to the extent that a plea agreement by a criminal defendant is.

Shortly after a lower court ruling in Hamdi's favor, according to the Washington Times, Hamdi signed a document agreeing to be sent to Saudi Arabia, alienate his American citizenship at the U.S. embassy in Riyadh, and remain in Saudi Arabia for at least five years. After the initial five years, Hamdi agrees not to return to the U.S. for an additional five years, and must notify the U.S. embassy in Riyadh before international travel during the subsequent 15 years. The article also quoted State Department spokesman Richard Boucher as confirming Hamdi had been transferred from the Charleston naval brig (where he was being held) to Saudi Arabia.

Josh Dunn
Burke, Va.

Not the Babysitter

Robert Kelley ("No ID, No Cookie," letters, September) writes, "Rycke Brown is clearly guilty of a crime" in giving a pot cookie to a 15-year-old. What crime is that? In what way did I violate the rights of that young woman when I gave her a cookie that she asked for nicely even after I told her it had pot in it?

Or is Mr. Kelley saying that I violated the rights of her parents? First, I did not know her parents or their view on pot cookies. Even if I did, they have no rights in this matter. They have authority — over their child, and only over their child. If their child, running loose at the age of 15, does not respect their authority enough to obey them, why should I? Actually, on this occasion, she was with her adult sister, who also exhibited little respect for these parents' authority.

I have tried to avoid giving pot cookies to minors because it might make their parents angry, and I'm not out there to make people angry at me. But that does not mean that they have the right to expect every adult to obey their unknown wishes. In this particular case, the young woman apparently set

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out to make her parents angry with me instead of her, since she was going to fail their urine test anyway.

The state has even less authority in this matter than her parents. Use, abuse, or misuse of any substance by anyone at any age is inherently a matter of religion, as are all other vice laws. As such, all vice laws violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. When the state usurps a function of a church, an organized religion, it establishes religion and becomes, in effect, a state church. (What other functions of churches has the state usurped in the last century and a half?)

Regarding alcohol, the 21st Amendment gives the states the power to regulate or prohibit alcohol — and nothing else. So the states have no legal authority to forbid distributing anything but alcohol to minors, and a proper interpretation of the First Amendment would not allow them to do so. There is no amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving the feds the power to regulate medicine at all. How is it that the states felt it necessary to pass amendments to ban and then regulate alcohol, and yet illegalized most drugs and the practice of medicine without any such authority?

So I should've asked for an ID, he says. Why? Because that's what the state requires of store clerks selling alcohol and cigarettes — semi-legal products sold in legal stores. Sorry! This is a fully illegal product not sold in stores, and I wasn't even selling it. Even if I was, nobody in the black market asks for IDs, laws against selling to minors to the contrary. If you want pot sellers or givers to ask for IDs, you'll have to make it semi-legal first, and sell it in legal stores.

Maybe then it would be harder for minors to get it than for adults. Right now, it is easier, as is the case for all banned drugs. Teenagers talk to each other and to young adults a lot. Information about who has what for how much flows freely. They are less cautious and they can afford to be, since penalties for minor-in-possession (MIP) are minor. Older adults talk less freely, have fewer connections, and tend to avoid dealing with kids. They have to be more cautious, since penalties for dealing, especially with minors, are major.

Not that MIP laws and carding keep any kids from getting drunk if they want to. What they do is ensure that minors will generally drink without older adults around to model good drinking behavior. In Europe, where children drink with their parents and are allowed to drink in taverns, they have much less drunkenness and alcoholism than in the United States.

A store clerk who doesn't ask a minor for ID can be fined $600. I'm facing 20 years for giving a young woman a pot cookie. Regardless of your views on minors and pot, the disconnect here is insane.

All in all, I'd say minor and major prohibition laws are just as perverse and unconstitutional as concealed weapons laws. And they sprang up in the same period! But that's a whole 'nother subject.

Rycke Brown
Grants Pass, Ore.

Cox Misses the Point

Stephen Cox surely misses the point in his criticism of the assistant pastor who defined God as a metaphor. ("Word Watch," September) Wittingly or not, this hapless clergyman stumbled upon the precise definition of the term God. It is a conceptual abstraction indeed, a metaphor of ultimate human authority. I am not surprised that this man of the cloth declined to elaborate on what he meant. After all, he'd have to admit that God is imaginary.

Timothy J. Taylor
Mt. Pleasant, Mich.

Look It Up!

I enjoyed Stephen Cox's article "The Peasant Principle." My mother bought a World Book Encyclopedia for us in about 1961, and whenever we asked questions she would always say "Look it up!" I am grateful to her for fostering a love of reading and of learning.

I imagine Mr. Cox was talking about Rives, Tennessee, but there is also a Rives, Missouri. The word "rive" is french for "bank" as in river bank, and that may be the origin of the town's name. "Rives" would be the plural, pronounced "reeve," but it wouldn't be surprising if the local pronunciation rhymes with "drives." The french would more properly say Les Rives. La Rive Gauche is of course the famous Left Bank of the Seine River in Paris.

Mayor Willy Star Marshall
Big Water, Utah

Pork and Circuses

"Pastime on the Potomac," (Andrew Ferguson, September) concerning major league baseball returning to Washington, D.C., was a home run.

Taxpayers should "just say no" to using public funds for any new major sports stadiums. In ancient Rome, government attempted to curry favor with the masses by offering free bread and circuses. Today, we have sports pork.

How sad that taxpayers across the nation are continually asked to pay for new stadiums. Public dollars on the city, state, and federal level are being used as corporate welfare to subsidize private-sector businesses. The only real beneficiaries of these expenditures are team owners and their multimillion dollar players.

It is impossible to judge the amount of new economic activity that these so-called public benefits will generate. Between selling the stadium name, season sky-boxes, and reserve seating; cable, television, and radio revenue; concession, refreshment, and souvenir sales; rental income for other sports, rock concerts, and other commercial events, it is hard to believe that owners can't finance new stadiums by themselves.

Cities have better things to do with our taxes. As Raymond Keating wrote in a Cato Institute report, "Public subsidies pad the bottom lines of team owners and boost player salaries while offering no real economic benefit to the cities involved." Professional sports is

Letters to the Editor

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not an essential service and shouldn't qualify for government subsidy. Let team owners float their own bonds or issue stock to finance new stadiums! Please don't pick the pockets of taxpayers!

Larry Penner
Great Neck, N.Y.

The Greatest Generation, Indeed!

In his essay "Pirates on the Potomac" in Reflections (August), Anonymous refers to people his mother's age living off Medicaid in nursing homes who "were either spendthrifts all of their working lives and thus had no savings upon retirement, or had considerable savings that they surreptitiously gave to their families . . . to qualify for Medicaid."

Congress dramatically tightened the Medicaid rules in 1993 after a General Accounting Office report that year described how common the latter abuse was. Among the changes are that the "look-back" period for asset transfers was extended in certain cases to five years from three; states generally must seize the house once both spouses are deceased or in a nursing home; and more assets, including those that are nonprobatable, must be turned over. There have even been attempts to make illegal the giving of information on how to continue to shelter assets from Medicaid.

This means that far fewer seniors fall into the second group than before; more and more fall into the first group, the spendthrifts. That's where one of my elderly relatives comes in. He is in his nineties, in a nursing home, and on Medicaid. He worked as a low-paid dairy farm hired hand, and bounced from one job to another as he got bored or angry at each employer. What resources his family had were consumed in these constant moves. He wasn't stupid, but I believe he could have made much better life choices.

Only in late life, after his wife received an inheritance and he had retired on Social Security, were they able to buy a house and own it free and clear. He then proceeded to spend most of the rest of the inheritance on collecting junk equipment. Once he and his wife became sick and ended up in long-term care, their few remaining assets were spent down, and both went on Medicaid.

Recently I crunched the numbers and discovered that the two received from Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid not only more than they paid into those systems, not only more than they paid in overall taxes, but more than their entire lifetime earnings, including any plausible interest saving them could have earned. It doesn't take very many years of nursing home care at $60,000 a year to wipe out years of work earning $2,000–$3,000 a year in the 1940s–1960s. And he is far from the only one in this boat. The irony is that his adult children are fighting to keep the state from taking his house, even though by law it must.

Everyone carped and bitched about welfare mothers with bastard children until welfare as we knew it was reformed with a sledgehammer in 1996. The real bastards all along have been the greedy geezers who all too often have become net leeches and who will tell you that they have "earned" these benefits. The sledgehammers are due to swing their way. And they will.

Edwin Krampitz, Jr.
Drewryville, Va.

The Metrics of Happiness

While I enjoyed reading Mark Skousen's attempt to determine the optimal size of government ("The Necessary Evil," September), there is something missing. He links socioeconomic well-being to quality of life, freedom, prosperity, and even opulence, but — incredibly — he never mentions happiness. I'm curious how he would respond to utilitarians, who claim that the ultimate end of human endeavor is happiness and that all other values are merely means to that end. Those libertarians might question his analysis, or at least request a clarification. If he acknowledges that he is a utilitarian as defined, does he hold that no modification to the optimal size of government is required? Does he think that freedom and prosperity taken together constitute happiness, or invariably yield it? If he rejects utilitarianism, does he maintain that something other than happiness is the ultimate end of human action? I'd like him at least to show how the elements that comprise socioeconomic well-being are weighted, and to indicate the effect, if any, this clarification has on his view of the optimal size of government.

Jan Wilbanks
Marietta, Ohio

Reflections

Crawford Cindy — Camped outside of Crawford, Texas, is a woman who is rapidly becoming the modern-day Jane Fonda. Her son died — needlessly, in her opinion — in the Iraq War, and she seeks publicity by demanding another audience with Bush II.

One wonders if the victims of other government officials would garner as much media attention by camping outside a summer home. Would the mothers of daughters abused by President Clinton be allowed to camp outside Chappaqua? Personally, I'd like to see Mr. and Mrs. Kopechne camping outside the Kennedy Compound in Martha's Vineyard.

— Tim Slagle

At NASA, no one can hear you scream — Two and a half years ago, when NASA officials held a news conference to discuss the destruction of the space shuttle by the debris they had failed to prevent from flying off their Rube Goldberg conception of a spaceship, I was struck by the amount of time they occupied (the great majority of a very long event) in sharing their feelings about themselves and vowing their undiminished commitment to a project that a) had just failed, with sickening loss of life, and b) they had no conception of how to put right.

This summer, I was struck by NASA's heroic self-consistency. Years of work and 1.5 billion dollars of "investment" had produced a vehicle that was imperiled by the same defect that destroyed the last one: stuff falling off of it at launch. Fortunately, this year's model wasn't damaged enough to result in another disaster; but, as a vocal minority of the commission appointed to investigate the shuttle disaster has wondered, "What the hell is going on here?" Yet the response of NASA officials was pretty much the same as it was in 2003. Uh, we got a problem here . . . Don't know how to fix it . . . But *one* thing is certain: our whole *team* is totally *committed* to this project, and that's a God damned inspiring thing.

Equally committed to the project were the majority of news media, who followed their normal practice of asking no serious questions of the scientific establishment.

— Stephen Cox

High on zoning — Rapidly rising housing prices are leading many economists to ask: is the U.S. facing a property market bubble similar to the bubble that brought Japan to its knees after 1991? The answer to this question is clearly yes, as anyone familiar with San Jose's market can see. Silicon Valley has lost 17% of its jobs in the last three years and office vacancies have increased from 3% to 30%. Yet San Jose housing prices rose by 17% last year, an increase that can only be due to speculative purchasing.

What few people are asking is: what is government's role in this bubble? While some economists at Harvard and Wharton Business School have known the answer for years, the first prominent writer to publish the truth is none other than left-liberal economist Paul Krugman. In his Aug. 8, 2005, New York Times column, Krugman notes that housing prices aren't increasing everywhere by the same amount. Instead, most of the increases are in what he calls the "Zoned Zone" — places like New York, Miami, and San Diego. Places with relatively little land-use regulation, such as Houston and Atlanta, have seen only modest price increases.

In the name of "livability," urban planners have driven up housing prices in many major cities to unsupportable levels, and now we run a huge risk that those prices will descend by 15 to 35 percent over the next few years. No one can seriously say that land-use regulation has made San Diego or Portland more livable than Atlanta or Phoenix. But it has increased the probability of high bankruptcy rates and a devastating downturn for the housing industry, which has been one of the main drivers of our economy for the last decade. — Randal O'Toole

Satanic versus — The Middle East is the cradle of the three great monotheistic religions — in chronological order, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — and that's not all that's wrong with it. For thousands of years, it's also been a cradle of ethnic and religious resentment and strife. Little seems to grow in the flinty soil of that austere desert landscape except absolutes and anathemas and vendettas, many of them, after a millennium or two, still in their first youth. Skepticism, toleration, and doubt, precarious enough everywhere, are particularly scarce there. After Sept. 11, 2001, the United States, following decades of Middle Eastern meddling, could have said either of two things: 1) "We had better

extricate ourselves as quickly as possible from this unholy mess, ending our dependence on their oil and their dependence on us, because the chaos and theocratic mayhem native to the region are spilling over into our own country now, and if we try anything more than a quick surgical intervention to punish and disperse the fanatics in Afghanistan who were responsible for the atrocities, we risk becoming Middle Eastern-caliber absolutists ourselves who throw around phrases like 'axis of evil' and 'an end to evil' and 'sacred cause.'" 2) "It's becoming so dangerous over there that we're just going to have to wade into two or three countries and stay there until these 2,000-year-old problems are solved once and for all. It should take about three years." The Bush administration, of course, chose to say the latter. It's committed to pursuing its mirage in the desert indefinitely. But so are the leading Democratic miragists, such as Hillary Clinton, who, like John Kerry, or Joe Biden, or Richard Holbrooke, or the allegedly moderate Republican John McCain, differentiates herself from Bush and Cheney chiefly by demanding more troops and more war and more taxes to pay for them. Only the American public, a solid majority of which now thinks the Iraq war was a mistake and has made us less safe from terrorism, along with a few maverick Democrats and Republicans and impotent third parties, begs to differ.

The one thing monotheism can't easily do without is a devil to explain how so many bad things get into a universe.

The history of religion suggests that the one thing monotheism can't easily do without is a devil. It needs a Satan, a Lucifer, a spirit of inexhaustible evil to explain how so many bad things get into a universe run by its absolutely powerful and absolutely good single, solitary God. Monotheism creates its own Satans; it's in the devil-manufacturing-and-distribution business. With the steady supply of bad news from Iraq as food for thought, we will have to decide if the vision, Bush's and Clinton's, of a monolithic world run by an absolutely powerful and absolutely good America is going to solve everybody's problems or just generate more devils, some of them bearing a striking resemblance to ourselves.

— Eric Kenning

Embryonic dilemma — A society can't be free unless its citizens are responsible. Policies surrounding the drug Accutane raise questions about how much liberty should be allowed when individual responsibility may be lacking.

Accutane is a strong medicine used in severe cases of acne. For people with the condition, it can be a miracle drug. But it has side effects, including birth defects in children born to women who take Accutane while pregnant.

Since the potential for birth defects is widely recognized, and since Accutane can be prescribed only by physicians, one might assume that doctors and patients would act with extreme care so that females using Accutane would not become pregnant. But are they acting responsibly?

The Food and Drug Administration doesn't think so. It has just tightened the rules again. This time, before a woman can use Accutane, both she and her physician must register through an electronic database, and the doctor must confirm that she has taken two pregnancy tests and is using two forms of birth control. A previous "restricted distribution" system of this kind was voluntary.

According to the New York Times (Aug. 13), women using Accutane have had more than 2,000 pregnancies since the drug went on the market in 1982. Most ended in abortion or miscarriage, but according to the Associated Press some

News You May Have Missed

Ape Eyed for Court Slot

NEW YORK — In a surprise move, PETA president Ingrid Newkirk broke with other left-leaning organizations and said that she would support President Bush's choice of John Roberts to fill the vacancy on the Supreme Court, "but only if he makes a complete monkey out of himself at the Senate confirmation hearings." Newkirk has long demanded that at least one court seat be set aside for "other primates." If Roberts is confirmed because of any recognizably human traits, she said, she would throw her support to a Barbary ape for the next vacancy, noting that the one she smuggled into the country after a recent trip to Gibraltar has "rock-solid" credentials and is also "kind of cute with very soft hands and a lot of stamina." She added that Barbary apes do not have tails, like the other current members of the court and like most senators, which should smooth the confirmation process.

But other animal-rights groups have angrily broken with PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) over the issue, including AETP (Animals for the Edible Treatment of People), PEETA (Pizza Eaters for Ethical Touchiness about Anchovies), and FUBGAF (Fat Ugly Bald Guys Against Fur). These activists are accusing PETA of "blatant primatism" for wanting to limit the court to humans and their simian cousins. They have insisted that the Supreme Court make room for two members of every animal species on earth, after it is suitably expanded, refitted, and launched out to sea, with each court session lasting 40 days and 40 nights, a strategy that has for the first time put the animal activists in step with scripture-quoting religious fundamentalists who believe that a court heavily stacked with primitive life forms like single-celled organisms, brachiopods, and the Rev. Pat Robertson will probably vote against allowing the theory of evolution to be taught in public schools.

Meanwhile, a proposal by PETI (People for the Ethical Training of Insects) which would allow the court to seat educated fleas, even if their education has not included law school, suffered a setback when ALF (Animal Liberation Front) militants raided several leading flea circuses and went away scratching themselves furiously, suggesting that virtually all the fleas had been successfully liberated. — Eric Kenning

160 babies were born with defects caused by the drug. The Times does not include the number of defects, and neither outlet explains what the defects are.

Indeed, one has to probe a bit to find out the severity of the potential birth defects. The Organization of Teratology Information Services says that when women took Accutane during the first trimester of pregnancy, 25 to 35 percent of their infants have a "pattern of birth defects." These can include "craniofacial defects, heart defects, and central nervous system defects," and "occasionally" thymus gland defects and limb abnormalities. Accutane also raises the risk of miscarriage.

The question for liberty-minded people is whether further prevention of miscarriages, abortions, and birth defects is worth the latest loss of liberty. This raises further questions.

For example, are the number of pregnancies and defects substantial? According to the Times, in 2002 physicians prescribed Accutane about 170,000 times a month, with half the prescriptions going to women. One hundred sixty children born with birth defects over more than 20 years seems small in comparison. Is the FDA pursuing an impossible ideal of human behavior?

But the Times also suggests that the drug is being used excessively — and thus irresponsibly. Only about 6,000 people at any one time have extreme acne, the newspaper says, a far cry from the 170,000 prescriptions per month. And most people with this condition, it says, are male.

But are these numbers, especially the number of pregnancies, accurate? Pregnancies may be underreported, especially if they end in abortions. The 160 cases of birth defects correlating with Accutane use would seem to be more reliable — but then why didn't the Times include this number?

Given the enormous desire that many (surely, most) women have for healthy babies, any pregnancy under these conditions seems excessive and irresponsible. But one piece of anecdotal information found on the Web suggests how these pregnancies might arise. One woman taking Accutane didn't follow the requirement to use two forms of birth control because she intended to have an abortion if she became pregnant. Also, perhaps the fact that our health and welfare system pays for medical care causes women to ignore the potential effects. (And requiring two forms of birth control? This seems patronizing, particularly since it cannot be enforced.)

All in all, I am troubled by both sides of this story — the move by the FDA toward more regulation, but even more the failure of women to protect future children. I long ago gave up the mantra that "if it [a regulation] saves one child's life, it must be worth it." But what standard should we hold in a society of free and responsible people? I don't know.

— Jane S. Shaw

Saint, shill, both, neither? — Depending on who you listen to, Cindy Sheehan is either a grief-stricken mother with an absolute moral authority to voice her opinion about the War on Iraq, or a grief-stricken mother who is being shamelessly exploited by liberals to advance their agenda. She is both.

No thinking person can honestly believe that having a son die in Iraq qualifies Sheehan (or any of the other parents who've lost children in Iraq) to set our foreign policy. If she were qualified (which she clearly is not), she would have been equally capable before her son's death. To believe otherwise is tantamount to believing that an actor's fame and riches make him an expert on economics. Yet left-liberals continually imply that her grief gives her special insight.

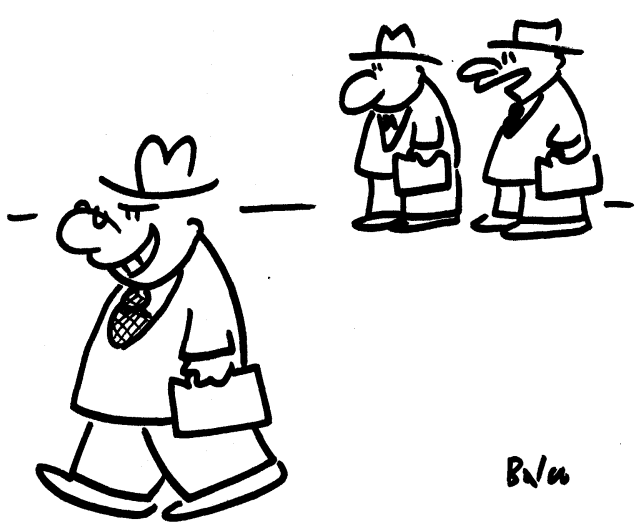
Sheehan's claims shed no light on any aspect of the mess in Iraq. Her assertion that the invasion of Iraq was part of a "Neo-Con agenda to benefit Israel" isn't worth a response, and her supporters' tired mantra "Bush lied, people died" is true, but devoid of content. (The fact that Bush lied about — or at least spun — the reasons to invade Iraq was self-evident from the start, and "people died" would be more accurately phrased as "different people would have died under a different course of action or inaction.") Still, Iraq was never a significant threat to the United States, and we didn't need to depose Hussein. The world as a whole may well be better off, in the long run, now that we *have* deposed him, but we certainly didn't *need* to.

All of that is irrelevant to whether Sheehan has the right to voice her opinion on Iraq. She does. The First Amendment doesn't give her that right — it merely protects it. Freedom of speech is the bedrock of liberty. If it is wrong to speak when you are convinced thousands of lives are at stake, when is it right? Does she have a right to be heard? Of course not. But she can, and should, be heard exactly to the extent that she can convince people to voluntarily listen. There's no *a priori* test of appropriate speech, nor can there be in a free society.

— Mark Rand

Make war, not sense — "The emperor shuddered, for he knew that they were right, but he thought, 'The procession must go on!' He carried himself even more proudly, and the chamberlains walked along behind carrying the train that wasn't there."

Though President Bush has been on a recent tour claiming that all is going well in Iraq, with total victory coming, it is getting harder for Americans to believe him. New polls show the President's approval ratings have sunk to around 38%. We are coming, I think, to the part in "The Emperor's New Clothes" where everyone starts to proclaim that the king is wearing nothing but his birthday suit.



"He's taken corruption to new heights — he *auctions* his vote."

A year or so ago, it was widely believed that it was only the unpatriotic, the America-haters, and the French who wouldn't climb aboard the President's caravan to Baghdad, but there were a few intrepid souls who amid the clamor and the uproar were trying to speak the truth.

At a speech at the University of Pittsburgh Law School during the 2004 presidential campaign, financier George Soros spoke of his lifelong fight against both fascism and communism, emphasizing that the common flaw shared by the two systems was their absolutist certainty that they were right, and their suppression of free thought and critical debate.

As one who had grown up in Nazi Germany, and who had worked to undermine the Soviet Union's suppression of dissent, Soros said alarm bells began to ring when he saw Bush administration attempts to suppress dissent and critical thought after Sept. 11. "Over time it's going to be important for nations to know they will be held accountable for inactivity," Bush declared in a joint news conference with French President Jacques Chirac on Nov. 5, 2001. "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror."

Speaking truth to power has never been easy, but the Bush administration, which claimed the Sept. 11 attacks as its own and enfolded them into its political agenda, made dis-

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

All last month I received phone calls congratulating me on this column's only known, or supposed, victory over the powers of verbal darkness. "Hey!" the little man inside my cell phone kept saying. "Congratulations! You've got the New Yorker on your side!" It was only a cartoon, but . . . Here's the story.

About a decade ago, I went to dinner with my friend Muriel Hall at a neighborhood restaurant near her home in rural Connecticut. When the waiter came around to collect our used dishes, I asked Muriel whether she'd heard what waiters in California always say on such occasions: "You finished workin' on that?"

"No!" Muriel said, recoiling in horror. "That's what they say?"

I assured her that it was true, and she would soon be hearing it herself. The next time I saw her, she sadly reported that I'd been right. "You finished workin' on that?", one of the most disgusting expressions ever applied to food, had infested the country from sea to shining sea.

This column has conducted a gallant campaign to exterminate it, but until now, I'm sorry to say, the campaign has been conspicuously unsupported. I suppose that most people who are interested in good usage and polite locutions don't spend as much time as I do in restaurants. They know how to cook for themselves. But help has finally arrived.

The July 25 issue of the New Yorker carries a cartoon that shows a waiter asking his hapless customer, "Are you still working on that?" The customer replies, "No. In fact, I'm completely *exhausted*." She adds, "Maybe if you wrap it up, I can finish working on it at home."

The cartoon isn't hysterically funny. It would have been better if she had said, "Yes. *Somebody's* got to work around here." Or, "That's right; this food needs a lot of work." Or, "Yes, and when I get through 'working,' it will sure be great to get something to eat." Or even, "No. But I guess you're still working on your vocabulary." Anyway, at least we see that resistance is forming, which is more than can be said about resistance to any other embarrassing linguistic tendency in America.

Verbal embarrassments can be divided into three groups: A) expressions that mean the wrong thing; B) expressions that don't mean anything; C) expressions that are just plain painful to read. All three types flourish as heartily among the educated as they do among the uneducated — often, indeed, more heartily. Weeds grow best on cultivated soil.

A brochure prepared by the National Gallery of Art for its recent show of the 17th-century painter Jan de Bray — an elite interest, if ever there was one — mentions the plague in which De Bray's parents and four of his siblings died. It continues: "Jan suffered further losses. Raised a Catholic, he was married three times, each time to a woman of that faith." This is a Type A embarrassment. So careful are the persons responsible (four authors and an editor are listed, for a 16-page booklet) to make sure you know that their friend "Jan" married within his faith, and also suffered the deaths of several wives, that they end up saying that to marry a Catholic is to suffer a loss. Somebody had to work pretty hard to produce an effect like that.

And here is Edmund Wilson, the god of the literary intellectuals, c. 1930–1960, laboring mightily to commit a Type C error. It's in one of his best books, a study of Civil War literature appropriately entitled Patriotic Gore. ("Avenge," commands the Confederate battle hymn, "the patriotic gore / That flecked the streets of Baltimore.") Writing about the domestic difficulties of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Wilson intones, "She was an invalid for months after the birth of the child; nor did the baby seem likely to live, and yet the little girl did survive." Well, how many kids did Stowe have, anyway? One senses that "the child" is also "the baby," and "the baby" is also "the little girl," but couldn't he have written a sentence that didn't require algebra to figure out? Couldn't he have written something like, "She was an invalid for months after the birth of the child, who survived only with difficulty"? No, that would have been too easy. Watching Wilson lumber like an elephant through the jungle of his words (Patriotic Gore contains 816 pages counted in Arabic numbers, and another 32 counted in

sent next to impossible. Generals and intelligence officials who disagreed with Bush strategy were ridiculed and fired, and military experts who objected to the invasion of Iraq, or the number of troops to be sent, were denigrated as "blow-dried generals," or as having mental problems.

Soros wrote in his 2004 book, "The Bubble of American Supremacy," "It is difficult to understand how President Bush could have embarked on the second Gulf War with so little forethought about, and preparation for, the aftermath. There had been plenty of warnings both for those responsible for the first Gulf War and from our European allies." Citing Brent Scowcroft's "Don't Attack Saddam" from the Wall Street Journal in August 2002, and James Baker's Financial Times article in February 2002, "The Right Way to Change A Regime," Soros contends that the caution of geopolitical realists yielded to arrogance.

"The main problem was that the senior administration officials have what I call faith-based intelligence," states Greg Thielmann, a former high-ranking official at the State Department. Intelligence "facts" were cherry-picked and made to fit around already-decided policy. "They knew what they wanted the intelligence to show. They were really blind and deaf to any kind of countervailing information the intelligence community would produce. I would assign some

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Roman), one sees how awful it can be when intellectuals keep trying to get it right.

Of course, not all intellectuals or academics err by overconscientiousness. Here is a Type A mistake by a college president, eulogizing his institution: "All tolled, SMC [Southwestern Michigan College] has awarded more than 11,000 associate degrees and certificates . . ." Ask not for whom the college tolled; it tolled for them. And here is one of those erudite fellows from National Review: "Everyone yaks about the culture, J.K. Rowling did something about it." I could complain about the comma splice. I could also complain about J.K. Rowling. But I won't. I just want to observe that a yak is a kind of bovine found in Tibet.

That's a mistake with a small word. Ordinarily the intelligentsia prefers to make its mistakes with big words. One of the current favorites is "infamous," which is used whenever "famous" seems too small. I learned from a recent public address that "Roosevelt's infamous Social Security program" isn't well understood today. At first I took heart: the intellectuals are finally noticing what a disaster the New Deal was! Then I realized that the speaker didn't realize that "infamous" had anything to do with "infamy."

But surely it isn't simple ignorance or carelessness that prompts the spokesmen for social causes to drag their remarks out until they get to something like, "I'm convinced that we need a larger conversation around the issue of racism in this country," or, "So, Larry, the purpose of our group is to organize both the men and the women of America around issues of education and child care." They could say that they feel impelled to *discuss* racism. And they could say what, precisely, they're organizing people *to do.* Instead, to use the old rural expression, which includes their favorite word, they'd rather go all *around* Robin Hood's barn, searching for the right smell of pomposity and impertinence. The inevitable result is a Type C mess.

Type B errors, the kind of expressions that have little or no literal meaning, are purportedly the forte of illiterates. Consider, for example, the much derided "irregardless." Yet many a genteel journalist, laboring not to offend, discusses the problems of "aging" men and women, or contemplates the statistics about "international" students currently living in the United States. The first scare-quoted word is supposed to mean "old," but it doesn't. It doesn't mean anything in particular. We're all "aging," aren't we? Rocks age, too. The second word means even less, if less be possible. It's meant to avoid the allegedly harsh tone of "foreign," but what exactly does it signify? Where are these "international" students from? A house perched on the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic? No, they are nationals of someplace, and they are foreigners here.

As a believer in human rights, I am especially dismayed by the high-toned meaninglessness of intellectual talk about "conflicts of rights," "the need to balance rights," the "predominance" of one "right" over "another," and so on. Listen, a right is an absolute, isn't it? If it's not, why talk about "rights"? If by affirming the right of religious freedom you mean no more than that people *should* have religious freedom, except when religious freedom conflicts with some other thing that you want, then you should talk about your own preference for religious freedom, not about other people's right to it. How could a right — if it really is a right — conflict with some other right?

Ask not for whom the college tolled; it tolled for them.

The problem for political philosophy is to identify rights in such a way that there is no conflict among them; the problem for writers about rights is to avoid meaningless expressions.

But, as politicians usually insist when confronted with some controversial statement, "No matter what I may think about what these people say, they clearly have a right to say it." Yup — and that also is a meaningless expression. No one who uses it is actually girding his loins, Voltaire-like, to defend to the death someone else's right to express opinions he loathes. He's just trying to avoid saying anything about the issue he's purportedly discussing.

That's not like you and me, eh? Maybe not. But I hate to think of how many times I've answered the cheery question, "How you doin' today?" with an equally cheery, "Fine! How 'bout you?", when my real view of the situation was, "Rotten — and please don't tell me that you're doing any better." I'm sure you've made the same meaningless answer. Still, I don't feel that we, unlike the politicians, are entirely to blame for our misuse of language. We're simply not permitted to make a meaningful response. Our listeners "couldn't deal with it."

But maybe the New Yorker will help us out with this one, too.

blame to the intelligence community and most of the blame to the senior administration officials."

At the time of the invasion, Thielmann says Iraq didn't pose an imminent threat to the U.S.: "I think it didn't even constitute an imminent threat to its neighbors at the time we went to war."

As the war in Iraq drags on and the outcome looks grim, George Soros' contention that "President Bush has played right into the terrorists' hands by invading Iraq" has begun to look prescient. His beliefs parallel the conclusions of longtime CIA analyst Michael Scheuer, former head of the CIA's bin Laden project, who claims that the U.S. invasion of Iraq has given bin Laden "the Christmas present he had long hoped for."

Scheuer, in his book "Imperial Hubris," worries that we're losing the war on terror because of thoughtless policy making. "Bin Laden has been precise in telling America the reasons he is waging war on us," he says. "None of the reasons have anything to do with our freedom, liberty and democracy, but have everything to do with U.S. policies and actions in the Muslim world."

Only when U.S. leaders begin to believe and preach that bin Laden and his allies are attacking us not for what we are or what we think, but for what we do, will we be on track to understanding why America is being targeted, argues Scheuer.

He explains that bin Laden has declared war on America because of its aggressive support of Israel, low oil prices, and especially, the presence of American troops on the Arabian peninsula.

A fundamental flaw in Bush's thinking, said Soros, was that designating terrorists as evil does not make all that we do right. Suicide bombers and other jihadists are more willing in larger numbers to fight us now than they were before Sept. 11. Every innocent Muslim death causes anger, he said, and "their rage and our fear feed each other."

Scheuer states that bin Laden is a long-term strategic thinker, who, having defeated one superpower, has plans to defeat another. His strategy included attacks on the World Trade Center which he hoped would provoke the U.S. into retaliating by invading Muslim lands and enraging a billion and a half Muslims, making it easier to defeat Western forces.

"Oil and Israel likely loomed large in the Bush administrations policy deliberations," wrote Soros, "but these were not the reasons publicly offered by President Bush and his advisers for the invasion of Iraq. Whatever the reason for invading Iraq, the American public has every reason to feel deceived."

Recently we have learned that even the Secretary of State was deceived. Appearing on CNN's "Dead Wrong — Inside an Intelligence Meltdown," Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, Colin Powell's longtime chief of staff, said the White House gave Powell an unsourced "Chinese menu" of information about WMD to present at his UN speech. Wilkerson says he now looks back on his involvement in Powell's presentation to the UN on Iraq's WMD as "the lowest point in my life."

Speaking truth to power has never been easy, but the Bush administration made dissent next to impossible.

Wilkerson and Powell spent four days and nights in a CIA conference room with then-Director George Tenet and other top officials trying to ensure the accuracy of the presentation.

"There was no way the Secretary of State was going to read off a script about serious matters of intelligence that could lead to war when the script was basically un-sourced," Wilkerson says.

"In fact, Secretary Powell was not told that one of the sources he was given as a source of this information had indeed been flagged by the Defense Intelligence Agency as a liar, a fabricator," says David Kay, who served as the CIA's chief weapons inspector in Iraq after the fall of Saddam. That source, an Iraqi defector who had never been debriefed by the CIA, was known within the intelligence community as "Curveball."

"George actually did call the Secretary, and said, 'I'm really sorry to have to tell you. We don't believe there were any mobile labs for making biological weapons,'" Wilkerson says in the documentary. "This was the third or fourth telephone call. And I think it's fair to say the Secretary and Mr. Tenet, at that point, ceased being close. I mean, you can be sincere and you can be honest and you can believe what you're telling the Secretary. But three or four times on substantive issues like that? It's difficult to maintain any warm feelings."

NBC News correspondent Jim Miklaszewski reported on August 19 that U.S. intelligence indicates that Islamic militants from several African nations — Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, and Somalia — travel through Syria into Iraq, where they get hands-on training in roadside and suicide bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings, as well as counter-surveillance and counter-intelligence against military targets, constantly changing their tactics to counter American defenses.

Back at the Pentagon, some officials now acknowledge that the two-and-a-half-year insurgent war in Iraq has turned the country into a full-blown terrorist training camp, according to NBC News terrorism analyst Roger Cressey: "Instead of going in to eliminate Iraq as a source of terrorism, Iraq now has a stronger terrorist presence than it did when Saddam Hussein was in power." — Sarah McCarthy

Spring forward, fall strike — Autumn is upon us, and as sure as the leaves will turn color, teachers will go on strike across the nation. Just as predictable as Back-to-School sales are the news stories affording striking teachers opportunities to remind all of us how dreadfully underpaid they are. In no other industry are strikes as common, or as effective. Perhaps the threat of forcing parents to spend an additional couple weeks with their children after a long hot summer is a useful bargaining chip.

I wonder why these strikes never happen at the end of the year. Perhaps a strike in June would push the school year too far into July, interrupting the teachers' generous vacation time. It is probably for this reason that school now starts in August — the strike is now factored into the school year.

I remember the Labor Days of my childhood as the most solemn of all the summer holidays: it was always like a wake for the passing of another summer. Sure, there were hot dogs and dashes through sprinklers, but the merriment was lacking. This isn't a problem today, as most children return to school up to two weeks before that holiday.

I asked a teacher why school starts so early, and she said it was to accommodate for snow days. I remember a snow day as a rare holiday that occurred only once every couple grades. Now, it is unusual when a year passes without at least a couple days that the schools are closed. It is quite possible that most teachers don't even realize that there has been a softening, that American children aren't expected to put on boots and trudge through the minor blizzards. Since a lot of teachers subscribe to the school of man-made global warming, they probably blame climate change for the increase in snow days over the past generation.

— Tim Slagle

Market yes, magic no — Free-market economists have a blind spot on the subject of energy. I noticed it during the time of the energy crisis, when Murray Rothbard said there could never be an energy shortage in a free market because supply would always equal demand. At some price, that was true, but what if the price were $50 a gallon? It is all very well to explain the magic of the market, but let's not go so far as to imply that geology doesn't count.

All this has come up again from Peter Huber and Mark Mills in their new book, "The Bottomless Well: The Twilight of Fuel, the Virtue of Waste, and Why We Will Never Run Out of Energy." The book makes a number of fine points. One point is the virtue of using up low-level, unconcentrated energy to create high-level energy like plutonium or jet fuel. That's their "virtue of waste." Another point is that the increasing efficiency of machines has not resulted in less energy use but in more machines. A related point is that we are getting more value out of each barrel of petroleum, so that as a percentage of our economy, oil is shrinking.

None of this, however, implies a "bottomless well." It is about our arrangements for using what's in the well. How deep the well is — that is, how much petroleum, gas, coal, uranium, and other sources of energy the earth has — is a hugely important question no matter what our social arrangements are. Economics implies a certain response to geology, but it cannot erase geology. I'm not sure that Huber, Mills, or even Rothbard ever flatly said it, but they implied that it didn't matter, and it does. — Bruce Ramsey

After the deluge — Inured as I am to natural disasters in poor countries, I almost ignored a New York Times story (Aug. 2) headlined "Torrential Rain Reveals Booming Mumbai's Frailties." But I happened to read it (wondering where Mumbai was). I learned that this was not just another tragic story; it signals a turning point.

A record 30 inches of rain fell within 24 hours in late July, causing floods that devastated the city, also known as Bombay. Four hundred six people were killed in Mumbai,

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and 962 throughout the state, as floods destroyed homes, infrastructure, and human beings. The destruction was particularly shocking because Mumbai is not an isolated outpost but a fast-growing, increasingly sophisticated city — "India's iconic city of strivers," according to the Times.

The government was slow to respond, and that undoubtedly pushed up the death toll, but the cause of the destruction was not hard to find. All that rain had nowhere to go. The city's antiquated storm sewer system could not send it downriver because the sewers were full of trash or buried by shanties, and one of the rivers had been narrowed by construction. One civic leader said, "It is bad weather that has caused part of the tragedy, but it is bad government policy that has compounded bad weather."

What struck me was that Mumbai illustrates the environmental Kuznets curve. This is the trend, discovered by economists, that shows environmental conditions changing as income changes. Initially, economic growth increases pollution (lots of smoke, contaminated water, etc.) but as income grows, pollution starts to decline.

We are seeing the turning point in Mumbai. When enough people are sufficiently prosperous, they become outraged at bad environmental conditions, and they take action. It may take a tragedy like this to galvanize them, and the steps they take may be voluntary or coercive (probably both), but there's no turning back. Rising incomes give citizens the desire and the wealth to correct the situation. Mumbai is on its way. — Jane S. Shaw

The other white meat — Nearly two years late, in July, Congress finally passed a law reauthorizing federal spending on transportation. This bill included more than 6,300 earmarks defining exactly how $24 billion would be distributed to every state and congressional district, allowing almost every member of Congress to brag about how well he had represented his constituents.

By comparison, the transportation bill passed in 1983 had fewer than a dozen earmarks. Before 1983, Congress left most of the details on where funds should be spent to transportation engineers who based their decisions on such criteria as safety, efficiency, and speed. Two things have changed since then.

First, the fall of the Soviet empire greatly diminished Congress' favorite form of pork — defense spending. So Congress turned to transportation as the next-best way of getting money to its top supporters. Second, the increasing demonization of the automobile has shifted transportation authority from engineers to urban planners who want to see roads as congested as possible in the hope that a few people will stop driving. The pork-driven politicians and anti-auto planners happily work together to spend federal gas taxes on million-dollar pedestrian paths and billion-dollar rail lines that few people will use.

Arizona Representative (and former Goldwater Institute Director) Jeff Flake was one of the few members of Congress to vote against the bill because he thinks federal transportation spending should be devolved to the states. While it might be difficult to get Congress to go that far by the time of the next reauthorization, enough people are unhappy enough with the current process that we may get some major reforms by 2009. At the very least, those reforms should base spending priorities on safety and efficiency rather than the congestion coalition's anti-automobile criteria. — Randal O'Toole

Hand over that hamburger, sir — Citing driver distraction, New Jersey lawmakers have proposed a ban on smoking while driving, thereby closing one of the few remaining sanctuaries for those who enjoy tobacco. Other former refuges like ballparks and the beach have already been cleansed by the anti-smoking Gestapo. Some municipalities have even attempted to ban smoking in private homes and apartments. Personally, I believe that a large mayonnaise-soaked hamburger is more distracting to a driver than a cigarette, and probably causes more accidents. It always seemed to me that the hamburger bun and spill-proof drink tops were designed purposefully to be used at the wheel of a car. I think that it would make more sense for safety advocates to go after hamburger peddlers rather than tobacconists. — Tim Slagle

It's a warm world after all — Something really big occurred in August: the evidence in favor of global warming became stronger. In fact, the last scientific bastion against the idea that the earth is warming showed signs of crumbling.

Since 1979, when measurements of global temperatures began to be taken by satellite, there has been a big difference between the trend they show and the trend identified by surface temperature measurements. Until now, no one has been able to explain why satellite (and weather balloon) thermometers show so little increase in temperature (about 0.09 degrees Celsius per decade), while surface measurements show a more significant rise of almost 0.20 degrees Celsius per decade.

Now, Science Express has published three articles (to appear in Science soon) that offer credible challenges to the

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South American Time Bomb

by Doug Casey

From coke barons to paramilitary groups to muggers who leave victims with no memory, Colombia has earned a reputation as one of the most dangerous places on earth.

In any country, the level of prosperity is determined by things like the level of personal freedom, respect for property rights, integrity of civil institutions, and cultural attitudes in general. Contrary to popular opinion, a country's geography and resources have almost nothing to do with how wealthy it is. If anything, they tend to be counterproductive, acting more as inducements to theft and lethargy than enterprise and hard work. Latin America started off on the wrong foot that way 500 years ago, when the conquistadors set the model for becoming wealthy by stealing and enslaving. Meanwhile, in the less endowed New England colonies, the model was more one of thrift and innovation. The differences still show themselves today.

Keeping that in mind, Colombia has done better than you might expect. Reported growth has averaged about 5%, compounded over the last 25 years. The country has long had a large and sophisticated stock market. Its government has never defaulted on or rescheduled its debt (last estimated at 50% of GDP, or about $140 billion). It's had a more pro-business policy (*apertura*, or "opening") since the early 1990s. Import duties have, for instance, dropped from an average of 40% to around 10%. Bogota looks, and is, modern and prosperous.

On the other hand, of all the Latin American countries, Colombia has most resembled a large ticking bomb for the longest time.

But you can always get a better feel for what's happening in a country by actually spending time there. So in May, I visited Colombia to make an on-the-ground assessment of the situation, paying particular attention to violence, drugs, and American involvement — the topics that American media usually focus on.

Violence

The most notorious violence is generated by leftist guerrilla armies: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the much smaller National Liberation Army (ELN). Guesstimates are that they have perhaps 25,000 members, combined, with which they pretty much control roughly half of the country. They (along with a number of other groups that have come and gone) have been fighting a civil war for decades, largely financed with drugs, kidnapping, and extra-legal taxation (protection and extortion). Of the perhaps 35,000 homicides in the country every year, the guerrillas are probably only involved in 10% or so. Your odds of encountering them are slim, unless you're out in the wrong part of the boondocks.

The second source is the right-wing paramilitaries. These formidable groups, slightly smaller than the guerrillas in number, were originally organized by wealthy business and agricultural interests to fight the guerrillas (since the army was chronically incompetent at protecting their property). At this point, some of them have a life of their own. You're unlikely to have a run-in with them, since neither they nor the army particularly target civilians unless they are perceived to have leftist tendencies. The police fit into this category as well, in that police here — as in many countries in Latin America — have a reputation for taking those they suspect of being . . . troublesome . . . for a "ride."

The third source of violence comes from common criminals. Regrettably, people who've lived in a war zone for several generations tend to develop bad habits, which are only exacerbated by extreme poverty. If something goes wrong for the average tourist, this is likely the source. When I first visited Bogota in 1980, the place just smelled like trouble — and I'm not much subject to flights of fear fancy. The city has clearly gotten more under control over the years, with its official homicide rate dropping from 80 per 100,000 ten years ago to 28 today. By way of comparison, that same number is 195 in Medellin, 95 in Rio, and 70 in Caracas. The downwaed trend is likely the result of heavily armed police, soldiers, and private security being absolutely thick underfoot in the capital; a surprising number of vehicles have been discreetly refitted with armor and bulletproof glass. That being the case, there is no question the place is violent: in Buenos Aires the homicide rate per 100,000 is only 5, and in Santiago, only 2 — a significant reason to prefer Argentina and Chile. (In case you're wondering, in New York City it's 7.)

The guerrilla war is cyclically swinging in favor of the army, mainly due to massively increased U.S. involvement. But, insofar as it's been going on in one form or another for 60 years now, I don't suppose it'll be going away soon. While I was there, attacks on police stations in the town of Toribio killed three cops and injured 23 others.

On that topic, I noted that the police station in one town we drove through had sandbags in front, blocking the windows and doors. I examined the fortifications, though, and found that they were stupidly placed — actually counterproductive. If I were a guerrilla, I would simply walk up to the barricade and throw my grenade (or, better, a satchel charge) over the sandbags against the door, and step away, knowing the bags would not only protect me from the blast, but focus it towards the station. Then, after the first blast, I'd toss in a second one. The sandbags were tactically idiotic, effectively putting the cops in a deathtrap.

This reminded me that there is no effective military defense against an informal, or guerrilla-style, enemy — *if* you want to maintain anything like a civil society. Military-style defenses — fortified camps, heavy weapons, organized troops everywhere — can be effective only if that's the kind of society you're willing to live in.

This is something I don't expect Americans to learn anytime soon.

While it's just common sense to be more alert for crime when you travel than you might be at home (you stand out as a foreigner, you are most likely richer than the locals and, most important, you don't know the local pitfalls), the fact is that most "security advisories" are based on hysteria, and a CYA approach to life. I heavily discount them. But, in the case of Colombia (and the big cities in Brazil and Venezuela), the danger is real and the violence can be unpredictable. There have been a number of bombings in nightspots in the Zona Rosa (the up-market district where my hotel was) in recent years. One in 2003 killed 33 and wounded 157. And yet, I walked around the city and ate out at sidewalk cafes, day and night, without feeling edgy.

Colombia has long been a world leader not only in emeralds, coffee, bananas, and cocaine, but kidnapping. In years past, up to 5,000 people have been reported held for ransom, although the numbers are now more in the 1,000 to 1,500 range. Kidnappings are most often of the "express" variety, where the victim is only held for as long as it takes to get together a reasonably small (a few thousand dollars) amount of money. This method makes sense, in that there's little incentive or time for the victim's family to recruit competent professionals to handle the situation. Less risk is involved for all parties.

Whither violence in Colombia? The figures show it's been dropping for some time. This is partly the product of the "get tough" attitude of the current president, who has vastly increased the size of the police and military. Just a few years ago, it was considered out of the question to drive a car at night, or sometimes even during the day, on the roads around Bucamaranga. Things seem to have changed, but my guess is that it's just been suppressed, not eliminated.

Drugs

At a dinner, I had a chance to talk with the provincial minister of economic affairs, a man of about 35. I (of course) abbreviated the good roads and good weather chatter as much as possible, redirecting the conversation to the "drug problem." I certainly wasn't looking for an argument, just information. I never, ever, argue. It serves no useful purpose. Instead, when I disagree, I politely ask questions and see where they might lead.

But, in the course of this conversation, I was not expecting what I got. He told me about the importance of the drug trade and the size of the U.S. military presence. So I said: "Don't you think it would be better to just legalize drugs?" The very sensible young man said, with a rather quizzical look on his face: "Why . . . yes, of course . . ." It was not a question he was used to fielding, although he was pleased to

actually be able to discuss it. Did he think it would happen? No, it was politically impossible; just too much opposition. The current president, a close ally of George Bush, would never hear of it.

Hysteria and propaganda aside, the fact is that most recreational drugs pose less of a health problem than alcohol, nicotine, or simple lack of exercise. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes (of whom I'm a great fan) was an aficionado of opium products. Sigmund Freud enjoyed cocaine. Churchill is supposed to have drunk a quart of whiskey daily. Dr. William Halstead, father of modern surgery and co-founder of Johns Hopkins University, was a regular user throughout his long and illustrious career, which included inventing local anesthesia after injecting cocaine into his skin. Insofar as recreational drugs present a problem, it arises partly from "overuse," which is not only arbitrary, but can be true of absolutely anything. The problem comes, however, mainly from the fact that they're illegal. Alcohol, of course, provides the classic example. It wasn't much of a problem in the U.S. before the enactment of Prohibition in 1920, and it hasn't been one since its repeal in 1933. Making a product illegal artificially and unnecessarily turns both users and suppliers into criminals. Because illegality makes any product vastly more expensive than it would be in a free market, some users resort to crime to finance their habits. Because of the risks and artificially reduced supply, the profits to the suppliers are necessarily huge, not the simple businessman's returns to be had from legal products. It's completely insane, and totally counterproductive.

Colombia has long been a world leader not only in emeralds, coffee, bananas, and cocaine, but kidnapping.

There's one drug in particular that you should be aware of in the present context of Colombia: Scopolamine, known informally as *burundanga*.

Burundanga is an extremely powerful anti-cholinergic, which completely blocks the formation of memories. The drug has been used in Colombia since before the Spanish conquest and has a pretty sordid history. It's derived from what is popularly known as the *borrachero* ("gets you drunk") tree, which grows wild and is a member of the same biological family as belladonna, nightshade, and Jimson weed. The pollen from its white and yellow flowers alone is said to induce strange dreams. Its seeds are deadly if eaten, and scopolamine isn't hard to extract from them. The main source of the stuff is Ecuador, where it's grown to provide the active ingredient in many motion sickness and anti-Parkinson's medicines.

At least at the present, its criminal applications are still almost exclusively confined to Colombia, where muggers use it to render victims helpless. I have no personal experience with it, but a friend of mine believes it was used on him in Serbia by some Gypsies; he says that, in addition to the immediate effects, it had unpleasant lingering effects that lasted for months afterwards.

What happens is that someone may blow it in your face as you walk down the street. Or, after taking the antidote, puff it at you in cigarette smoke. Or drop it in your food. Or your drink. Scopolamine causes severely attenuated consciousness and willpower that can last several days. Apparently there are up to 2,000 emergency room admissions a month in Colombia due to scopolamine poisoning. Most aren't even reported, unless the circumstances are especially bizarre.

My guess is that, once this drug makes a general escape from the Colombian underworld to international criminal circles, you're going to see fear and paranoia — especially where strangers are concerned — rise to unprecedented levels. I don't think it's a question of if, just a question of when. And it's likely to happen first in the U.S. because of America's intimate involvement with bad things that happen in Colombia.

U.S. Involvement

Colombia, totally unbeknownst to *Boobus Americanus*, is the third-largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, after Israel (for whom the annual $4 billion handout is a major economic prop), and Egypt (whose $2.2 billion might be considered indirect aid to Israel, in that it keeps the Egyptian government in power and friendly). Colombia has received $3 billion in U.S. taxpayer funds in the last couple of years, dispensed through the U.S. Embassy, which is the world's largest — at least until the new one in Iraq is completed. I didn't visit it, but am told that it's very much the form I discussed in my commentary on Syria (modernistic bunker-prison revival style), housing 2,000 employees, with at least three subterranean levels.

There is no effective military defense against an informal, or guerrilla-style, enemy — if you want to maintain anything like a civil society.

The U.S. is increasingly directly involved in the violence here, rather than funding it from afar. The Defense Department has just received authorization to double the number of U.S. military advisors in Colombia to 800; the permitted number of U.S. civilian contract agents, which is to say the same guys who are so prominent in Iraq and Afghanistan, has recently risen from 400 to 600. That's a lot of soldiers. The locals aren't thrilled to see armed gringos running around the countryside, or dozens of U.S. helicopters spraying potent herbicides over thousands of square miles of jungle in a futile attempt to kill coca plants — along with everything else. Pretty stupid, in a country containing an estimated 15% of the world's plant and animal species. This war could definitely get hotter.

The Venezuelans don't like it for lots of reasons, not least that it's causing the guerrillas to establish bases across the border for refuge.

Venezuela is ruled by Hugo Chavez. Chavez's act doesn't play well with the U.S. government for several reasons. He's friendly with Castro, which is understandable, as Fidel is

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Back to the Reservation

by Andrew Ferguson

The NCAA's asinine decree is not about sports, or even about Native Americans. It's about forcing people to think like they do.

"The presidents and chancellors who serve on the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletics Association] Executive Committee have adopted a new policy to prohibit NCAA colleges and universities from displaying hostile and abusive racial/ethnic/national origin mascots, nicknames or imagery at any of the 88 NCAA Championships." Thus began a press release that touched off a flurry of metaphors: the NCAA is on the warpath; scalping member schools; refusing the peace pipe — on and on.

The policy is hypocritical and egregiously stupid. The NCAA is presenting itself as the champion of the Native American cause, even though many Native American tribes are happy to have their names invoked, both for the sake of being remembered, and for the money that comes from marketing. Native American objections to Indian mascots come mainly from tribes outside these revenue streams, led by a vocal activist vanguard.

With these activists providing an ethical justification, the NCAA's officials are free to view themselves as enlightened despots, whose just and holy quest is to spread civilization to the savages. If the savages want no part in such an obviously superior way of life, why, they'll get routed in battle and marched off into exile, down trails leading only to obscurity. Who are these savages, these barbaric unbelievers? The fans, of course — the beer-swilling, tailgating, racist morons who fill the stands. With one hand the NCAA seizes the natives' resources (ticket money, advertising, merchandising); with the other, it shoves a conqueror's ideology down their throats — oddly enough, exactly how a Marxist would describe the behavior of a typical, exploitative colonial power.

After the announcement, fans of the affected schools circled the wagons to prepare their defense. They sought out a few sympathizers: for instance, Florida governor Jeb Bush spoke in support of the Florida State Seminoles. But on the whole, commentators opposing the egregious stupidity depicted the NCAA's statement as a surprise attack, as "political correctness run amok." They missed the point. This isn't an ambush: it's a minor skirmish, a small battle on one front of a major cultural campaign. The NCAA's mission statement says as much when it includes in its Core Purpose a desire to "integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education."

Those words should chill the marrow of anyone who's paid any attention to higher education in the past few decades. For those who haven't, a quick summary: the late '60s saw small, dedicated groups of students forcing open the doors of administrative policy, seizing control of institutions in support of "free speech." This was good, in that it effectively ended the discretionary powers administrators justified as *in loco parentis*, but bad in that it convinced many small groups of students that they could bring about any social change they desired through determination alone. The problem with this approach is that boredom and failure weeds out the moderates: since it is the extremists who are most determined to change society, it is the extremists who remain when all others have moved on. Usually the interest

group itself dies out around this time (witness PETA's descent into frothing madness), but here the protesters still controlled the institutions they'd taken over.

Thus when the moderates who toasted "free speech" fell away, the extremists who interpreted that to mean "freedom of opportunity to speak" redoubled their efforts. The semantic shift they effected — favoring equality over liberty — has led, ironically if predictably, to all manner of ills and indignities: racial quotas, sexual harassment witch hunts, Donna Shalala, et al.

Commentators opposing the egregious stupidity depicted the NCAA's statement as a surprise attack, as "political correctness run amok." They missed the point.

"Higher education," as modern-day mission statements would have it, is not about education, and certainly not about learning: it's about changing cultural consciousness by any means necessary. It is about instructing the members of a society in what to think, and punishing them if they do not think that way. The higher-ed extremists are trying to establish utopias that are not only free of racism (or sexism, or homophobia), but free from the possibility of thinking a racist thought. This appears to be a secular twist on a classical argument for God's existence: if the thought of racism is present, that must mean racism itself is present. Any thought that can be construed as racist must be racist, regardless of intent or context; and any person who has one of these purportedly racist thoughts is contributing to a "hostile environment" that prevents others from feeling free to speak.

Take a look back at the NCAA press statement. Note the phrase "hostile and abusive" — this is their way of applying the "hostile environment" standard to member schools, in accord with their efforts to integrate collegiate athletics into higher education. Charles Kupchella, the president of the University of North Dakota (the Fighting Sioux), wrote a tart letter to the NCAA demanding an explanation and promising an appeal. Kupchella seized upon the "hostile and abusive" phrase, and ran through a litany of things UND has done for Native American students. His response is admirable, and worth reading in full (it's available at http://www.und.edu/president/html/statements/NCAAletter.html) but he made a mistake in waiting too long to respond. He should have sent the letter last November, when the NCAA was conducting preliminary hearings.

Then, according to the NCAA's statement, "33 schools were asked to submit self-evaluations to the NCAA National Office to determine the extent, if any, of the use of Native American imagery or references on their campuses." Cultural diversity, gender equity, and nondiscrimination were listed as specific criteria on which the schools would be judged.

Fourteen schools saw that the fix was in, and caved. Some changed their names, like Stonehill College switching from the Chieftains to the Skyhawks. Some changed their imagery, like Merrimack College switching from a Warrior dressed like an Indian to a Warrior dressed like a Roman. The Aztecs of San Diego State and the Rainbow Warriors of Hawaii made their mascots more "authentic" (though you'd think an authentic Aztec would be more stereotypically savage and bloodthirsty than a white guy in facepaint at a football game) and have thus far been allowed to keep them — though protests persist at both campuses.

Eighteen schools are trying to keep their mascots. These can be divided into two categories: those with a chance and those without. Those without a chance are the schools with generic Native American mascots, like the Braves of Alcorn State, the Indians of Arkansas State, or the Redmen of Carthage College. Many schools who had these mascots already ditched them in favor of silly alternatives, like St. John's (N.Y.) becoming the Red Storm instead of the Redmen. The NCAA loves this sort of change, because it lets them point and say, "They did it, now you will too." The teacher's pet schools that make these types of changes are "model institutions," following "best practices," and it is their example that dooms Indians and Braves nationwide.

The schools that have a chance are the ones with specific tribal mascots: the Utes of Utah, the Chippewas of Central Michigan, the aforementioned Seminoles and Fighting Sioux. Most of these schools have explicit permission from tribal authorities to use the names, and they work with the tribes to manage their imagery very carefully. The NCAA has said that the testimony of tribal leaders will be crucial in the appeals process, so some of these schools may be allowed to keep their names — for now. But even if they win that battle, they'll lose ground in the war: the "model institutions" will see to that. Already, the Universities of Iowa and Wisconsin refuse to schedule games with schools who have "hostile and abusive" mascots (except Illinois, who they are required to play under conference rules). Other schools will be pressured into adopting this "best practice," and in time even wealthy schools like Florida State may be forced into dropping their mascots just so they can get a game.

"Higher education," as modern-day mission statements would have it, is not about education, and certainly not about learning: it's about changing cultural consciousness.

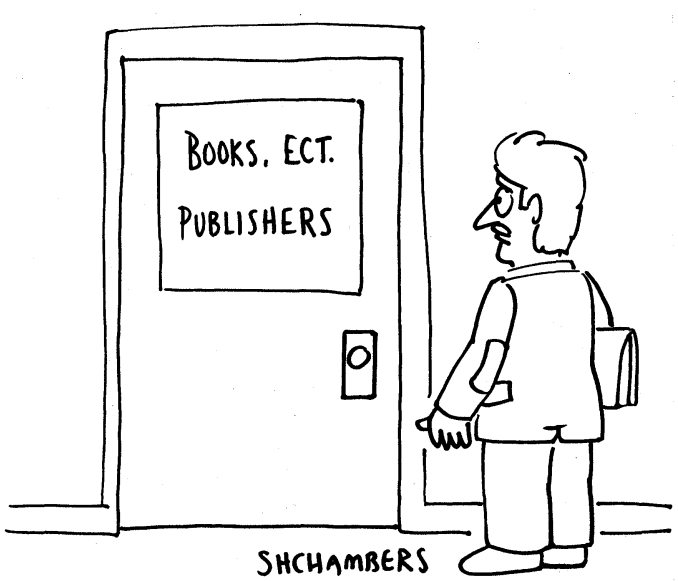
That's 32 schools accounted for. The 33rd, the Braves of North Carolina-Pembroke, must be considered on their own, because they're going to keep their mascot with full NCAA approval. Pembroke adopted the Braves nickname back in the '40s, when the student body was 100% Native American (compared to 20% today). Apparently, this sets them apart from the other schools, which "[have] not demonstrated that their use of a Native American mascot . . . was the result of Native Americans attending or being associated with that institution." This last statement, from the NCAA's press

release on Pembroke, is ridiculous. As Kupchella points out in his letter, North Dakota has 25 separate programs to support Native American students; they've produced 20% of all Native American doctors in the country today, they've trained nurses, psychologists, and pilots. Any of the other schools can point to their Native American associations and attendees — but that doesn't matter. Pembroke is keeping their mascot because they demonstrated that they are a school by Native Americans, for Native Americans; in the NCAA's view, they cannot be contributing to a hostile environment because they *are* the environment, and they cannot be hostile to themselves.

The NCAA is trying to control the rules of discourse by eradicating any thought that may be perceived as hostile.

This is what the NCAA president Miles Brand meant when he suggested that the decision aims at "initiating a discussion on a national basis about how American Indians have been characterized." For the academic utopians, a hostile environment eliminates the possibility of discussion. In order to initiate a discussion, one must clear the way for discussion to take place; i.e., get rid of whatever is considered hostile. So paint over the courts, toss blankets over the statues, whitewash the campus, and then maybe we can talk about whether you can keep all the stuff you just got rid of. Kupchella asks, "Do you really expect us to host a tournament in which [Native American] names and images are covered in some way that would imply that we are ashamed of them?" The utopian responds, "As long as those names and images are present, you should be ashamed."

This seeming stalemate is actually a victory for the NCAA: in the interest of initiating a discussion, they have stifled any possibility of one. So far only Pembroke has avoided being preemptively labeled a "hostile environment," and in 2007, barring any other successful appeal, Pembroke will be the only place in the country where any aspect of Native American culture can be celebrated in an NCAA-sanctioned athletic event. A tidy solution: restrict all that Indian stuff to a little plot of land no one cares about, where it can't get out and be hostile or abusive to anyone. The word *reservation* comes to mind.



I could be wrong. College boosters have a lot of pull, and they started tugging on strings as soon as they recovered from the initial shock. By the time this issue reaches the newsstand, the NCAA may already have given in to some of the richer schools. But winning through power politics would be the worst possible result for the colleges: it wouldn't change anyone's mind, and it wouldn't challenge the "hostile environment" test. People would go on thinking that the NCAA just went a little nuts.

But the NCAA is not acting alone or out of character. The entire educational establishment, higher or not, is in on this crusade. There are activist groups that exist solely to pressure elementary schools into giving up their Native American mascots. NCAA president Brand called the Native American controversy a "teachable moment." What sounds more teachable: having a mascot like the Choctaw or Cherokee that provides a ready-made lesson plan about an area's Native American heritage, or settling for a generic mascot like the Tigers or the Hawks?

To people like Brand, a "teachable moment" is not a time for disseminating information, or leading people to a point where they can make tentative conclusions based on what they have learned. No, a teachable moment is one in which there is a chance to transform human consciousness, to bring humanity a step closer to the "best practices" ideal. (Other teachable moments include the enactment of campus speech codes, mandatory sensitivity training sessions, and the destruction of colleagues' lives and careers for unfortunate slips of the tongue.)

Teachable moments, hostile environments, model institutions: this is the vocabulary of today's National Collegiate Athletic Association. For them, this policy isn't about sports, and only tangentially about Native Americans. What it's about is controlling the rules of discourse: initiating discussion by first eradicating any thought that may be perceived as hostile; or better yet, turning the discussion into a lecture, with the superior teacher condescending to the willful, unruly, yet "teachable" students.

The NCAA wants to see itself as a virtuous conqueror, bringing civilization to the uncivilized. This viewpoint has gone unchallenged for too long. It is more like an unwelcome invader, interfering where it is neither wanted nor needed, while ignoring the genuinely beneficial duties that should be its only concern.

Sherlock Holmes often noted the importance of rejecting the impossible and focusing on whatever remained, however improbable. The NCAA should heed his advice and concentrate on improbable tasks, like limiting corruption in big-money college sports, rather than impossible ones like changing human consciousness by fiat. ❑

Sunday Morning

I Protest

by Rycke Brown

One may be the loneliest number, but it makes for the most effective protest.

It's 10:45 Sunday morning, and as usual, I head downtown to the city center — 6th and G Street. As usual, my favorite parking spot, on G closest to the corner, is open. As usual, my heart is beating a little fast, and I sit a few seconds, willing it to slow. But getting on with it is the best cure, and I slip out of the truck and start putting my signs together, sliding the forked willow poles between the sandwiched poster boards and jamming two signs between the cab and bed of the truck, high enough to read the messages over the cab. I get out the two folding chairs that I started bringing when the city took away their bench, and set them up a little closer to the corner than the bench used to be. I get out my CD player and a small folding table for my bumper stickers (a recent addition), and set them up next to the chairs. Last, I grab my basket of goodies, my leaflet box, my water, and my sign. I set my basket and box up next to the curb, box leaning on the basket, showing off the bumper stickers on the back and holding leaflets at ready. I pull one out far enough for easy grabbing and put on a CD, all the while keeping the sign facing toward moving traffic. The music starts and I start dancing, holding my sign steady while my body moves to the beat, watching the drivers for signs of reaction. It's showtime.

Welcome to the Sunday midday Protest Party. It's a one-woman party most of the time, and I like it that way. I used to yearn for others to join me on the street, and some do, for a half-hour or an hour, sometimes the whole two hours, sometimes for several weeks in a row. I welcome them when they come, and I like it when they go, because I've figured out that I work best alone.

A street protest has two main purposes: informing the public about a cause, and demonstrating support or disapproval. Obviously, before you can get the masses out, you have to reach 'em and teach 'em. And you have to reduce the fear level: when people lose their fear of talking about a subject, they find that they are not alone in their beliefs, that they might even be a majority. That's when change happens in a democracy. (Don't tell me it's a republic. Franklin said that we had a republic, if we could keep it, and we didn't. But we can regain it.)

Mass protest isn't necessary for radical change, and may even be counter-productive. The masses only get out on the street when they are really pissed off, and it is not pretty. The American people have plenty of reasons to be pissed off and they know it, but they're comfortable. Which is why we won't be seeing a draft anytime soon.

This leaves either lone protests or small to middling-size protests, to reach and teach. Face it; small-to-middle-sized protests are pathetic. They certainly don't demonstrate mass support. But when it comes to reaching, teaching, and reducing the fear, a lone protester with leaflets excels.

The first advantage of the lone protester lies in abandoning the group. Groups have to decide everything by consensus in long, boring meetings, and then depend on each other to follow through. The lone protester sets his own protest time and place for his own convenience, writes his own leaflets, makes his own signs, and doesn't depend on anyone

else. A weekly group protest cannot be sustained for years; some people get tired of it, and as the ranks thin, so does everyone else. A lone protester can keep it up until the problem is solved, because she feels no lessening of support; all her support is external, from the public. At a group protest, the protesters are talking to each other, not the public. The lone protester is talking to the public and learning from the public.

One person with a sign and leaflets is unthreatening to all but the most timid. Most people will not go out of their way to avoid passing one person closely enough to accept or decline a leaflet. The same cannot be said for a group with signs: the larger the group, the more likely passing pedestrians will avoid it. I start to see the effect when more than four people join me, a rare happening.

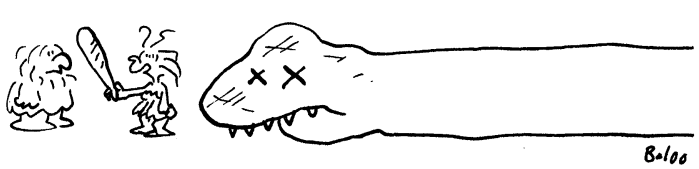
Groups have to decide everything by consensus in long, boring meetings, and then depend on each other to follow through.

People not only have an easier time passing or approaching a lone protester, they also are more likely to stop and talk. Fellow protesters can be a distraction and sometimes interrupt and interject their own opinions, usually trying to soft-peddle my radical opinions. (Soft-peddling doesn't work very well, in my experience. People respond much better to a consistent, radical position that is well stated.)

Fellow protesters can also be a distraction from the basic business of handing out leaflets, as people tend to talk to each other and miss out on opportunities. It takes great discipline, when I have helpers, not to let them distract me from the job. My discipline is not always that great.

A lone protester is not only non-threatening, she also appears uniquely vulnerable, out there all by herself, week after week. The fact that I am out there — week after week for over two years, without being attacked, hassled, or investigated for anything I say — brings down the fear of discussing what I say. My arrest four months ago (for what I did, not said) brought it back up a notch, but since I'm still out there every week, the fear is once again abating.

I have wondered if a protester has to get arrested to get any publicity. Now I know. A radical protest doesn't get any publicity unless someone gets arrested. Still, it was good that I spent two years building a following first. And while the arrest was helpful, it was not necessary. The people were getting educated, one leaflet at a time, without the help of the local paper.



"I've changed my mind, dear — I *don't* want a career of my own."

Now they're waiting to see if I get crucified. It's a sideshow, but I'll take publicity where I can find it. It's the only way to recoup the damage done to the fear-to-curiosity ratio.

I might have thought that this town is extraordinarily friendly to protesters, except that for the first few weeks of my protest, most passers-by disapproved. The problem was that my message was not clear. One side of my sign said "STOP THE WAR ON US!" — leading people to believe I was protesting the Iraq war. The other side said:

JUST SAY NO!
TO THE HOLY WAR ON DRUGS

leading people to think I was against drugs, because the second line was too small. I was catching it from both the rednecks and the hippies! First lesson: the message must be clear.

So I changed my sign to: "NO MORE DRUG WAR!" and "LEGALIZE FREEDOM OF MEDICINE." (This one has a pot leaf, which leads people to believe that the protest is mainly about pot. I intended it to be about all drugs, prescription as well, and the practice of medicine.) The rate of disapproval abruptly dropped to almost nothing, while the approval shot way up.

My first leaflet was titled, "Stop the Holy War on US!" and was mainly about the drug war. It was well-received among the persecuted, but was not reaching the straights. They didn't believe the drug war affected them, even though they were paying for it with their taxes.

Then I had to go to a doctor to get a prescription for a cheap antibiotic for a bladder infection. I was complaining to the doctor about having to pay $130 to see him to find out what I already knew and get permission to take what I knew I needed. He said, "Go to Mexico. You don't need a prescription for anything there."

I have wondered if a protester has to get arrested to get any publicity. Now I know.

That was my hook! Everybody is affected by the prescription drug system, which is just a licensing system for illegal drugs. Licensing of doctors, prescription power, and drug prohibition are all part of the same unconstitutional medical regulation system and must be attacked together.

I wrote a new leaflet — "Legalize Freedom of Medicine." People read it, and they understood. People who are willing to read are mostly reachable, and it is reaching them, even second-hand.

This is a cause whose time has come. And this is a way to spread the news, a fun and effective way. It's my Sunday devotion and performance art. The devotion comes into play when it's cold, rainy, or sweltering hot. That persistence and devotion to a cause has induced a lot of people to take a leaflet.

If you're an aspiring Libertarian politician (I'm not, but I know a few) there are worse ways to get name recognition. What has being careful gotten you? ❑

Fruitless Controversies

by Stephen Cox

Argument: A logical presentation of facts and data that utterly convinces the person who presents it.

My father had many good qualities, but one of them was not a tolerance for argument. He didn't mind expressions of opinion. Sometimes he expressed an opinion of his own. But at the first sign of *argument*, no matter how reasoned, restrained, and amicable the argument might be, he began to exhibit strong signs of anxiety. Soon anxiety became alarm, and he said, in an agitated voice, "Well, how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" That was the signal for controversy to cease.

I don't know which medieval thinkers, if any, used to debate the choreography of the seraphim, but from my father's perspective they were just doing what all arguers do — endangering domestic peace with contentions that can't possibly bear fruit.

I believe it was partly because of my father's opposition to argument that I grew up with a strong bias in its favor. I remember astonishing a friend, who had dared to proffer some kind of opinion about something, by telling him, "There are six reasons why you're wrong," then reciting the reasons, one by one, with appropriate subheads, corollaries, and illustrations. After that, my friend didn't speak to me for quite a while.

Being a libertarian added a lot to my argumentative spirit. I had two college friends who were radically opposed to each other in style of conversation. I'll call them Smite and Umble. Umble was quiet, introspective, disinclined to argument. Smite was aggressive and pugnacious, never tempted to let any matter drop. I was in the room, one day, when Umble called the personnel office of a local business to find out whether he'd gotten a job he'd been applying for. He was told, politely but firmly, that another person had been hired. "Well," he said, wistfully replacing the receiver, "I didn't get the job. Of course, if I were Smite, the conversation would just be getting started."

Libertarians are like that. We can't resist a chance to argue. We're no better at resisting it than the guy who reaches down to grab the dollar bill he sees lying on the pavement, not noticing that it's attached by wires to the bucketful of water teetering on the nearest window ledge. The only difference is that a libertarian wouldn't mind getting drenched. That would merely provide a happy occasion for arguing about whose property the water had now become.

Be that as it may, after spending five or six intellectual epochs as an aggressively argumentative libertarian, I began to wonder whether all the controversial steam was actually driving any pistons. I already sensed that my attitude was changing when I attended a libertarian conclave in Ann Arbor. I was sitting with Bill Bradford, the publisher of this journal, when a resolution was introduced and debated. It was intended to summarize the political philosophy of the assembled throng, and it contained about a million articles. One of them, devoted (as I recall) to denouncing Keynesian economic policies, observed that "you can't fight reality." The phrase incited passionate dispute. Speakers rose from every section of the auditorium, 50% of them asserting that the phrase was correct, because the true principles of eco-

nomics ("reality") will always doom the state's attempts to circumvent ("fight") them, the other 50% maintaining that because any struggle against reality is itself a part of reality, the phrase about fighting reality was meaningless. All of them were armed with big sheaves of notes, which they kept beating against the microphone, like warriors pounding their spears against their shields. Thus armed, they were prepared to fight about "reality" till the cows came home. Bill and I weren't so well equipped. We started giggling, and when more serious people turned around in their seats and glared at us, we fled the room.

But if you don't want to argue about "reality," what do you want to argue about?

Perhaps you could argue about who really "discovered" America. There is always a big market for arguments in that field. Maybe it was the Indians, although that sort of undermines their status as *native* Americans, doesn't it? Also, it wasn't exactly "America" that they "discovered." They thought it was only a big island off the coast of Siberia — or they would have thought that, if they'd had any concept of "Siberia," which they didn't. The same problem arises when you talk about Norsemen discovering Nova Scotia and Columbus discovering San Salvador. They didn't know what they'd "discovered," either. So maybe Columbus just "encountered" America, as the political puritans want to put it. Maybe he was just playing around with stuff that other people had already discovered, or walked on, or whatever. But where will this logic lead me? People have fallen in love for a thousand generations, but does that mean I have to say that I was 19 years old when I first *encountered* romance?

We can argue about all that, although the more you look at it, the less consequential it seems to be. Or perhaps we can take up "selfishness," a subject that libertarians have been masticating during the past six or seven decades, ever since Ayn Rand first suggested that selfishness is a virtue. She didn't mean it's a good idea to shove other people's faces in the dirt. She meant that you should respect your own individuality, your own capacity for reason, your own ability to make up your mind about what's good for you. She thought that "selfishness" might even prompt you to give your life for a cause that expressed your "highest values." In this regard, she wasn't very far from some versions of Christianity. Be that as it may, not everyone was convinced.

The philosophical attack on Rand proceeded in this way: Suppose that someone constantly defers to other people, conforms to the crowd in every conceivable way. He may seem "unselfish," but isn't he doing what he chooses to do, *wants* to do under the circumstances? Isn't he serving his own values? Isn't he fundamentally just as "selfish" as Howard Roark? So it's meaningless for Rand to exhort people to be "selfish"; we are all inevitably selfish, all the time.

After spending five or six intellectual epochs as an aggressively argumentative libertarian, I began to wonder whether all the controversial steam was actually driving any pistons.

Claim and counterclaim; and at this point, I submit, the controversy should have stopped, because this is the place where anyone with any imagination can see all the arguments that are likely to take shape on either side. Like the problems of "reality" and "discovery," the problem of "selfishness" is completely transparent. If you use "self" to mean something like "one's highest self," there's nothing paradoxical or redundant in Rand's praise of "selfishness." Not everyone lives up to his or her highest self. But if you define "self" in a less restrictive way, then she's simply wasting her breath; everyone has a self and acts in accordance with its choices. And that's the end of the philosophic story.

Curiously, though, the fact that you can see right to the bottom of a controversy doesn't mean that everyone will say, "Oh, I get it now," and move on to some other topic of conversation. The still, transparent waters just invite more people to jump into the pool. They see the argument — half of it, anyway — so clearly that they feel impelled to make the dive. They can't resist. They know the truth, and they must tell others about it.

The Deserts of Dispute are dotted with pools like this. The biggest one at present is the controversy about whether Islam is "a religion of peace" or "a religion of war." Here is a subject that everyone can discuss. True, few people in the West have read the Koran or possess any facts about Islamic history, and few people in the East are capable of anything like an objective, critical relationship to such matters. But don't worry about that. Anyone is free to assert, in the most uncompromising manner, either that Islam is a tolerant and pacific faith or that Islam is an intolerant and belligerent one. And everyone will be right. It's a religion of peace if you define it in such and such a way, a religion of war if you define it in such and such another way. This controversy can continue indefinitely, so long as no one feels a need for specific evidence about how to define such a large thing as a world religion.

"Well, if you refuse to answer the question on the ground that it may tend to incriminate you, could you at least give us a *hint*?"

Yet although it's natural to assume that controversy diminishes when evidence is found, the opposite is often the case. Many fruitless controversies thrive on evidence. They are hardy perennials, always ready to be revived by any "new fact" announced in the spring book lists; but they are fruitless nonetheless.

Some of them are deformed by over-pruning, at least on one side. I'm thinking, for instance, of the arguments about whether Oswald killed Kennedy and whether Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare. The people who foment these controversies try to promote a luxuriant growth of evidence on the "no" branches by hacking off all the established facts on the "yes" branches. In a way, this works. If you ignore the fact that the "innocent" Lee Harvey Oswald attempted to assassinate a right-wing general and succeeded in assassinating a Dallas cop, you can talk forever about such things as the properties of bullets, the arrangement of motorcades, the alleged fakery of the Zapruder film, and everything else that distracts attention from Lee Harvey Oswald. And if you ignore the fact that none of the alternative "Shakespeares" had anything like the talent necessary to write his plays, then any new evidence of their celebrity and of his obscurity in 16th-century England can be made to seem very telling indeed. But you're still a long way from a fruitful argument.

Unpruned facts are often just as disappointing. Virtually all arguments about the military history of the American Civil War are crippled by an unlimited supply of facts. These arguments generally start with a commonly accepted opinion. It appears, for example, that General A *foolishly* ordered an attack on General B's well defended center, thereby losing the battle of C, and therefore, possibly, the war itself. Then somebody discovers Document D, which reveals that General A had received a summary of secret intelligence from Major E, who assured him that General B had weakened his center by redeploying most of his troops to the right, in a belated attempt to turn General A's left flank. The intelligence was false, but how was General A to know that when he ordered his *bold* assault on the center? He now looks less like an idiot and more like a tragically mistaken hero.

When it finally dawned on me that virtually all "argument" is simply self-expression, I felt that I had begun a new phase of my existence.

But wait! Still more evidence turns up. A long-neglected letter shows that Major E, whose record was, or should have been, well known to General A, had been criticized on two prior occasions for purveying faulty intelligence. Now General A is in the doghouse again. Only a fool would have relied on the word of the mendacious Major E, and General A was that *fool*. Then fresh news comes hastening from the front. It's the newly discovered diary of Corporal F, 2nd Indiana Infantry, which discloses that Major E was *not* the *sole* source of the misleading intelligence. The other source was . . . Shall I go on? For all we know, the discovery of relevant facts will continue forever. This is what produces everyone's eerie sense that the Civil War is still being fought.

Many non-military controversies cannot be settled either, because there are too many plausible though inconclusive ways of settling them. Samuel Johnson was thinking of this kind of controversy when he mentioned a poem whose "true meaning is so uncertain and remote that it is never sought because it cannot be known when it is found." Even in literary landscapes as well trodden as the Divine Comedy one can find a lot of metaphors that can be explained in any number of ways. Critics sometimes say that these symbols are "rich" with meaning — and that's just the problem.

Anyone is free to assert, in the most uncompromising manner, either that Islam is a tolerant and pacific faith or that Islam is an intolerant and belligerent one. And everyone will be right.

Yet (popular opinion to the contrary) fruitless controversy of this sort is much less common in literature than it is in other fields. A good author knows many ways of making sure that readers come to the right conclusions about his work. If you wonder how to tell the good people from the bad people in King Lear, you haven't been paying much attention to the play; Shakespeare provided plenty of signs to help us interpret the motives of his characters. But in daily life, not to mention the study of history, the signs of motivation are not so artistically arranged. At least they don't seem that way. From the available evidence, I can make a plausible case that Richard Nixon failed to burn the incriminating tapes (A) out of arrogance, (B) out of fear that burning them would make things worse for him politically, (C) out of a misguided notion that the tapes were the ultimate proof that he was innocent and well-intentioned, (D) out of a sincere respect for the tapes as historical records, (E) out of all four motives. One of these interpretations must be correct — but how do we know which one?

And the mysteries of our own motivations are often far more mysterious than Nixon's. Sex is always the best example. I am very skeptical about the idea that homosexual attraction, for instance, can be explained by any theory about genetics. But assume that someone finally does prove that it's something about DNA that makes Adam like Steve better than he likes Eve. Big deal. Does that explain why Adam isn't equally attracted to David and Jonathan? Or why Jonathan becomes attractive to him only when he's wearing tennis shoes? Or why he never even noticed David before he got that ultra-short haircut? And those are only the warm-up questions. I haven't mentioned any of the fruitless arguments that we can entertain about why people are attracted to the intellectual and emotional qualities of their would-be mates, or why those sterling qualities often appear so much less sterling immediately after the sex act is completed. You may think you know. Why, then, are you still performing experiments?

But to return. Some controversies are fruitless because they have already been settled to the satisfaction of any mind that is competent to consider them. There is no point in arguing about the validity of the labor theory of value (it's false), the authenticity of the Vinland Map (it's a fake), or the usefulness of the Aristotelian laws of thought (you can't think without them). And some controversies are fruitless because there is no way for competent minds to settle them. Consider, for example:

Virtually all arguments about the military history of the American Civil War are crippled by an unlimited supply of facts.

• The Lizzie Borden Case. Who done it? Yes, it's possible to think of ways in which Lizzie might have axed her father to death, then taken the same approach to her stepmother, without getting a speck of blood on her own clothes. And it's possible to think of ways in which another person might have done it, then escaped into a closely built neighborhood, glaring with sunlight, thick with prying eyes, and failed to attract even the slightest suspicion. Given the nature of the evidence, however, it's just as easy to believe that the parents committed suicide.

• The mystery of the *Mary Celeste*, the ship that, on December 4, 1872, was discovered sailing across the North Atlantic without anyone on board. Pirates? Mutiny? Bad weather? A sudden panic caused by some hint that the ship was about to capsize? There isn't enough evidence to establish any of the plausible solutions, although there is enough evidence to keep people writing books. Every new version of the story tells us more things we do not know. It has now been learned that we don't even know why the boat was named the *Mary Celeste*.

• The mystery of the Ark of the Covenant. What happened to it? Was it in the temple at Jerusalem when the Babylonians looted it? If it was, did they take it with them? And what happened then? I'm prepared to testify that I don't have it — although the ark was pretty small, and I do have a way of losing things that I want to save.

• The disappearance of Judge Crater. No one knows what became of him. We do know that if, one night, you walk out on a New York street and vanish, "Judge Crater" is a perfect name for you. It is also poetically appropriate that Judge Crater should have vanished after buying *one* ticket for a comedy called "Dancing Partners." What Partner did he have in mind?

• The treasure of Oak Island. Is there something buried on the low little island off the coast of Nova Scotia? The evidence demonstrates that this must be true. No, no, the evidence demonstrates that this can't be true.

• The meaning of Revelation 13:18. According to the principles of numerology, "666" may mean "Nero." It may also mean "Harry Potter."

• The secession problem. Did the South have a legal right to leave the union? Alexander H. Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy, published two volumes of arguments showing that it did. "Can any proposition within the domain of reason be clearer?" he asked. Yes, I suppose there can be, considering the library of arguments assembled on the other side. The truth seems to be that the Founding Fathers couldn't agree on a constitution, and get it ratified, if it either excluded or included the right of secession. Now where does that leave the "legal" arguments?

• The true meaning of the "full faith and credit" clause. If gay people get married in Massachusetts, is Utah constitutionally bound to consider them married? The answer is Yes, if you want to think so; and No, if you don't. When the Supreme Court "decides" this issue, the answers will remain exactly the same.

• The Manchurian press conference. Do politicians really believe the things they say? No, that would be impossible. But how could they lie all the time, and still maintain their self-respect? So it's impossible that they *don't* believe their own propaganda. Yet as Pontius Pilate said, "What *is* self-respect?" Pilate appears to have been a successful politician.

Naturally, we *can* argue about any of these topics, just as we *can* argue about whether our memories are reports of a genuine past or whether (to cite Bertrand Russell's bright idea) the universe was created only a second ago, with all our memories in it. We *can* engage in any number of fruitless arguments. And the realization that we can always keep on arguing has itself produced some of the world's most fruitless and debilitating arguments, such as the argument for deconstruction, which holds that we can never reach a "foundation" of determinate and reliable meanings because any meaning we posit can always be the source of further arguments.

You've probably detected the fallacy in this determinate (not to say dogmatic) denial of the possibility of determinate meanings. Still, serious people, especially serious young people, are often unsettled by the idea that there is no end of argument, no literally unquestionable "proof" of the basic realities of our lives. This concept fills the deconstructionists with a gleeful sense of their power to disrupt and destroy. It fills ingenuous young seekers with the dreadful sense that nothing means anything.

According to the principles of numerology, "666" may mean "Nero." It may also mean "Harry Potter."

Their anxiety involves an interesting paradox. On the one hand, they assume that argument is the final test of truth; on the other hand, they assume that the very possibility of argument is a sign that truth cannot be found. Both assumptions give argument a lot more credit than it deserves. Even Hume, the greatest of philosophical skeptics, and one of the greatest of all arguers, lamented the fact that "there is no virtue or moral duty but what may, with facility, be refined

away, if we indulge a false philosophy in sifting and scrutinizing it, by every captious rule of logic, in every light or position in which it may be placed." When we do that, argument becomes the enemy of human life.

What Hume is saying is that argument is not the same as reasoning, or having common sense, and that everyone has enough common sense and reason to arrive at sound conclusions about such fundamental matters as duty and virtue. No visits to the sophists are required. As Hume notes in other places, over-conscientious arguers may be paralyzed by doubts about the final "warrants" of reality, but they still have perfect confidence in the way things work in daily life. They are perfectly convinced that axe heads won't float and that murder is wrong — until they ask themselves how they would prove these things beyond the shadow of any doubt. Then they despair about the ultimate "foundations." It's easy to see that they are not engaged so much in an argument about philosophy as in an inconclusive and perpetual argument between the practical and the metaphysical sides of their own temperament.

The argument, though concluded in your favor, will be as fruitless as any other, because your opponent won't pay any attention.

Such are the fruitless controversies to which the intelligent and the scrupulous succumb. More common, down here on earth, are arguments that go nowhere, not because there are too many or too few facts, or because someone doesn't trust the usefulness of facts, but because the arguers didn't bother to look for facts to begin with.

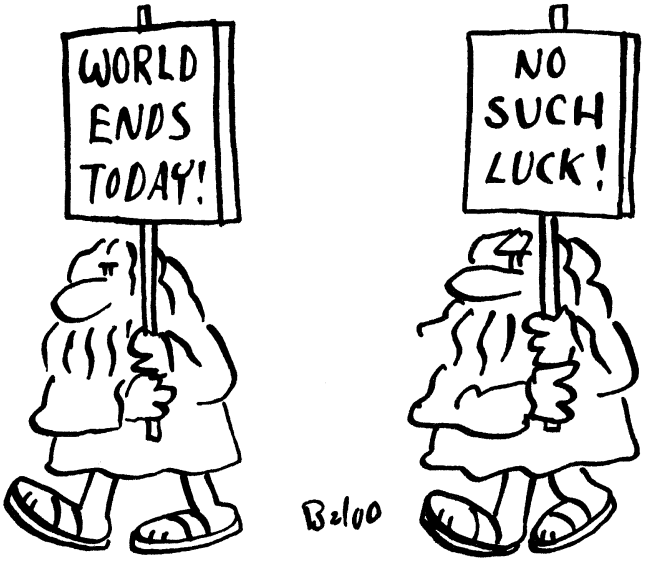
A couple of months ago I was lucky enough to have my radio on when a delightfully absurd moment occurred in a talk show hosted by Walter Williams. Williams, who is an African-American, was maintaining that the Constitution is not a "living document," to be given new meanings by successive generations of judges. The courts, he said, should interpret the Constitution as it was written by the founders. A (white) person called in to object. What did Williams think, he demanded, about the fact that slavery had been abolished by court decisions that reinterpreted the constitution so as to agree with the judges' own opinions? "Why, what court decisions do you mean?" Williams asked. "Oh," the caller said, "the *Dred Scott* decision." Williams had to tell him that the *Dred Scott* decision was famous for upholding slavery.

If you think that the caller's argument was unusually ridiculous, just press the next person with whom you argue for the specific facts on which he bases his claims. It is very probable that you will win that argument. There weren't any specific facts. But the argument, though concluded in your favor, will be as fruitless as any other, because your opponent won't pay any attention. He'll just go on to some other baseless set of claims, not minding his failure to convert you the first time around.

You might think that people who cared enough to try to get you to accept their views would also care enough to dig out the facts. But if arguments existed principally to change people's minds, nine out of ten arguments would never happen. I have a friend who constantly emails me articles ridiculing my ideas about religion and politics, prefacing the forwarded material with snide comments of his own. He sometimes sends me three or four of these messages a day. I used to reply, advising him that if he wanted to change my mind, this wasn't the best way to do it. He apologized, then immediately went back to doing what he'd done before. Gradually I realized that conversion is not his purpose. He knows perfectly well that I won't change. He also knows that I like him very much and am very unlikely to get angry with him, no matter what messages he forwards to me. So, whenever he has the opportunity to express his feelings, he happily presses the "send" button, and off goes another insulting post. It does no harm to me, and it seems to do a lot for his sense of intellectual superiority.

I am aware that some arguments are disinterested attempts to find the truth and communicate it. This spring, naturalists announced that the ivory-billed woodpecker, long considered extinct, had been discovered living and working somewhere in the sloughs of Arkansas. A few months later, a group of scientists wrote a paper disputing the claim: not enough evidence, they said. Then, in response to their arguments, more evidence was released. The critics considered it and withdrew their paper. Now, that was a fruitful controversy.

It is perfectly possible to debate in this way — calmly, clearly, without indulging in any of the evasions and logical fallacies that we normally use to score points in the great sport of arguing. The subject need not be ivory-billed woodpeckers. We can argue rationally with Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas, or the next-door neighbor. We can even debate honestly and fairly with ourselves. During a normal day, normal persons may change their minds a hundred times, as they find new information or reflect on past mistakes. Very few will keep driving down Main Street after they discover that they can save 20 minutes by taking the bypass.



But when controversy touches any issue that bears in any way on a person's identity — and there are so many of those issues — the dispute quickly reduces itself to one simple question: Shall I change myself or affirm myself? That's easy: affirm myself, of course! The vast majority of arguments are purely matters of self-affirmation. We argue, not to convince anyone else, but to show who we are. In the words of Artie Ziff, a bit-player on "The Simpsons," "I would stop, but I love my voice."

I encountered a nicer but more feckless way of putting this a few years ago, at a conference where I sat on a panel (an odd image, when you think of it) that was supposed to give career advice to libertarian college students. A question arose about whether you should announce that you are a libertarian when you submit your application materials for grad school. "No!" I said. "Why tell them things like that? If anybody cares, he'll care enough to veto your admission." The students' reaction was precisely the opposite. Some believed that they were "morally bound" to report their views. Others said they thought that education throve on controversy, so why conceal one's controversial ideas?

Confronted with the choice of feeling better about her life or worse about her viewpoint, she goes with the viewpoint every time.

What has gone wrong here? I wondered. Why should these people insist on starting a controversy, right off the bat, with a bunch of academics they don't even know? How many professors at Harvard or Yale are going to be converted to libertarianism by anything a student says? And if the purpose is not to convert them, why bring the whole thing up? Why, why? The answer, of course, is simply that the students were proud of their beliefs and wanted to express them, no matter what. And, needless to say, my arguments, which simply expressed my own concern with the practical aspects of professional life (i.e., getting a degree and making money), made no impression whatever on the idealistic young men and women.

I had no reason to be upset. They were expressing their opinion; I was expressing mine. If I had seriously attempted to convert them, it would still have been mainly an effort of self-expression. That's what most attempts at conversion are.

It's hard to think of anything that seems more aimed at conversion than the behavior of street evangelists, Mormon missionaries, and the guys with shaved heads who accost you in train stations. Many people resent any such public attempt to change their ideas. They consider it an unprovoked invasion of their space. It makes them angry; it makes them want to call the cops. But conversion is only the evangelists' ostensible purpose. If they really wanted to convert you, they wouldn't be yelling at you on a street corner or sidling up to you in the ticket line to ask if you were worried about "world conditions." They would know that this approach is exceedingly unlikely to bear fruit. But they don't care. Their true purpose is to dramatize themselves, to advertise their self-regard as religious persons. Jesus was talking about them when he condemned the Pharisees, who "for a show make long prayers" (Luke 20:47). But as with any other show, you're free to pass the Pharisees by without comment or retaliation. They're really not thinking about you anyway.

"How easily," says La Rochefoucauld, "we believe whatever we would like to." If evangelizing in an obnoxious way has become part of your identity as a Christian, a devotee of Krishna, a conservative Republican, an environmentalist, or (but no, that would be impossible) a libertarian, you are pretty likely to keep on doing it and believing that it works, whether it works or not. And if you spent your time predicting that the world would end in 1996, today you are likely to be preaching that the world will end in 2006, and thinking that somehow you were right both times.

Good news isn't good for people who aren't prepared to receive it. One of my best friends preaches the gospel of economic gloom, believing that the cost of everything is always going up, that it's harder to live now than it ever was before, et cetera. I've spent a lot of foolish hours handing her statistics about the rise in our standard of living, the accumulation of wealth by the middle class, the dwindling proportion of income that Americans spend on basics and the growing proportion that they spend on luxuries. Nothing makes any impression. Every cycle of statistics ends with her pointing to a phone bill or a receipt for ground round and saying in an agonized voice, "How can you think that we're doing so well when you look at prices like that?!" Confronted with the choice of feeling better about her life or worse about her viewpoint, she goes with the viewpoint every time.

When it finally dawned on me that virtually all "argument" is simply self-expression, I felt that I had begun a new phase of my existence. I admit that I continued to feel the instinctive response of *Homo sapiens* to people with opposing ideas: the hot flash of outrage against invasion of my intellectual terrain, the determination to show my opponents just how stupid they were, the chagrin accompanying the recognition that they might know something I didn't, the joy of transcending all such acknowledgments of reality with repeated assertions of my own ideas. But I no longer felt the burden of pretending that my real intention was to enlighten and convince. It wasn't. And I saw that it wasn't for other people, either.

Mainstream movements don't require a lot of arguments to support them. If they did, there wouldn't be an admirer of the New Deal left in America.

This zenlike realization did not tempt me to reject controversy, in the way my father did, as a distressing waste of time. Argument remained a spectacle worth viewing, sometimes worth joining, and at all times worth learning from. I saw that even the generation of "philosophers" (Norman O. Brown, Herbert Marcuse, and so forth) who tried to liberate

themselves from the law of contradiction were doing just what they claimed to be doing — providing an education for the rest of us. They just weren't providing the kind of education that they thought they were. Actually, they were showing what happens when people mistake words for ideas, arguments for insights. They were showing how not to think. Considered in this way, the dead branch budded; their fruitless chatter became fruitful for me. "If others had not been foolish," William Blake reflected, "we should be so."

And ironically, some self-expressive arguments really can change people's minds, if the self-expression is interesting in itself. If you saw a street preacher devoutly singing a fine old hymn, as street preachers used to do, you would think better about his message than you would if he were screeching pseudo-biblical slogans. America, the world's most Christian nation, has a long tradition of admiring atheists and freethinkers, people who, like Mark Twain, Robert Ingersoll, Harold Frederic, Sinclair Lewis, and H. L. Mencken, were remarkable for their exuberant wit and humor, freely exercised at the expense of Christianity. Their readers may not have been converted — and it's not clear, in the case of some of those authors, what the readers would have been converted to — but they did learn to see things from a different viewpoint.

Marx was such a bad arguer that generations of commentators have found lifetime occupations trying to force his thoughts into some kind of sensible relationship to the world outside.

It's possible that no one ever really changes, that "change" simply means becoming more like yourself. In any event, if people alter their opinions, it's not so much because they're attracted by good arguments as because they're attracted by good arguers, people who show them what they could be if they only had more wit, or fervor, or learning, or even logic than they now possess. When they take the hint and try to develop those qualities in themselves, their opinions may change accordingly.

This is the way in which minority movements in thought are sustained from generation to generation. Mainstream movements don't require a lot of arguments to support them. If they did, there wouldn't be an admirer of the New Deal left in America. But the unsanctioned, non-endowed minority needs to express itself vividly if it wants to remain alive. The radical libertarian movement was kept alive by a few people — Mencken, Rand, Albert Jay Nock, Isabel Paterson, Ludwig von Mises, Murray Rothbard, others — whose determinedly individual styles of argument attracted other individuals and encouraged them to check their logic and their facts, and act up to the conclusions that followed. Should libertarianism ever become the nation's authorized philosophy, people like that will still be needed, to keep the mainstream flowing.

The key word is "individual." You can argue from the assumed authority of some privileged class or majority tendency and, perhaps, succeed in inspiriting the people who already agree with you. I hear almost daily from friends and colleagues who read the New York Times and believe that there's something great and new in every issue. So what? When they folded the paper, they had exactly the same views that they had when they unfolded it, views indistinguishable from those of everyone else in their demographic group. If you want to change people's ideas, you need to dislodge them from their demographic and allow them to see themselves as individuals. But if your arguments don't project your own individuality, and do it in an interesting way, there's nothing for them to latch onto.

After President Reagan made his "evil empire" speech, Henry Steele Commager, a leading huckster in the history trade, said it was "the worst presidential speech in American history, and I've read them all." This was an extraordinarily feeble attack. For one thing, Commager's words were patently false. No sensible person could believe that even a senior professor of history had read all those speeches, or that Reagan's speech was indisputably the worst among thousands. But making all possible allowance for the hyperbole that Commager probably thought would individuate his statement, one notices a bigger problem: Who is this Professor Commager, anyhow? He talks like an authority, but his remarks don't make him look like anyone who deserves it. What if he did read those speeches? Didn't he have anything else to do? One pictures him hanging out in the faculty club, sucking a pipe and making superior remarks about Benjamin Harrison's second State of the Union address — a sniffy old spokesman for the brahmin caste. The "I" did nothing for his argument.

Mencken, by contrast, didn't need to use any "I" when he defined democracy as the idea that "the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard." He relied on the iconoclastic force of the statement itself, its intrinsic proof that its author was an individual, beholden to no caste or class or accepted ism. He left it to his readers to accept or reject what he said, knowing that his boldly careless expression of his ideas had the best chance of attracting them, and pleasing himself.

Some arguers do become notable because they operate within a movement and are so strongly identified with it that the movement and the person seem inconceivable apart from

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"I'd be willing to pay more taxes, if the government would use them to build more bars."

Where Everybody Knows Your Name

by Tamara Wilhite

The creation of nationwide databases threatens to make every day feel like a trip to the DMV.

I wasn't surprised to get a financial seminar invitation in the mail. Then I opened it — and saw my 2-year-old daughter's name on it. Needless to say, I called Fidelity the moment I found their phone number.

"I need to have the name Renee Wilhite taken off your mailing list."

"Can I ask why?"

"We just received an invitation to the seminar you have at the Mansion at Turtle Creek" — one of the most upscale restaurants in Dallas. As an engineer who prefers jeans over suits, I would have felt out of place there. A child in diapers most certainly could not have been the intended invitee — "We need to be taken off the list."

"We sent out invitations to new investors who have put significant amounts of money into new accounts."

That explained it. We'd recently opened a 529 plan and put in significant funds, including gifts from relatives.

"We're not interested. Please take her name off the account."

"Are you not Renee Wilhite?"

"I'm her mother."

"Only the account holder can request to be taken off the list."

"She's a minor."

"Adolescents could learn quite a bit about the market. As her mother, you could come as well if you paid an entrance fee . . ."

"I'm sure other investors will be quite thrilled if I bring my 2-year-old to your investment seminar with her very own invitation. Will it help the mood if she runs around covered in pasta sauce? You're serving quite a menu selection. I'll let her dump the plate on her head and run around with the sauce in her hair. Will that impress your other clients? Especially when I show that your client invitation list is so selective that it did actually includes my child."

"She's 2 years old?"

"Yes."

"I'll remove her name from the invitation list."

"I want her name removed from all of your mailing lists."

"You could benefit from . . ."

"And a financial services mailing list is shared with how many people? What happens when she gets credit card applications in the mail in her own name? What happens if someone fills out a credit card application in her name and mails it back? There's enough identity theft to worry us, and we're not checking our toddler's credit report. If the information is abused, we will sue you!"

"Please verify the information we are about to remove from our database."

We have yet to receive a credit card offer for our toddler, but we did receive health advice newsletters from our HMO until we put a stop to it. We receive letters for the ex-wife of the man we bought our home from four years ago. The ex-wife never lived here, but he did for several years. Hence, data-mining tied her name to his, and thus to our address. A business that used our address seven years ago continues to

receive letters from the IRS as well as occasional business service offers. The IRS, fortunately, has never tried to actually collect from us. The collection agencies for the former owner's ex-spouse have.

All of this occurs because a relational database algorithm says this address is associated with this person. The computer says they live here, so it must be right. In such a loose system of association, shared databases of outdated information collide with citizens who are not told when data about them is incorrect. Those who are targeted unfairly cannot get the information corrected.

Identity theft is only the tip of the iceberg. If privacy is not respected and our information is not our own to share as we choose, these incidents will only become more frequent and more severe. When third parties control our information — without our consent, control, or knowledge — they will do so in an increasingly sloppy manner and mere slaps on the wrist will not hold them in check.

The government's push to put more information in a public repository will only make the matter worse. When my HMO made an error in my records and I had a mild reaction to a drug, I recovered, then forced them to correct the typographical error that had put the wrong blood type into my records. My records were corrected that day, and I received a hard copy of the updates within a week. What if a government database had made this error? I know from experience I would have been up a creek without a paddle.

I'd gotten married and adopted my husband's family name. I filled out the forms to have my Social Security card updated and took care of my driver's license on the same day. Then Murphy's Law struck. The driver's license photos taken that day were overexposed, so I had to come back. My Social Security card arrived, but with a misspelling of my new last name. Then government bureaucracy kicked in. My old driver's license could not be accepted as proof of identity to get the Social Security card fixed. The driver's license bureau would not accept the misspelled Social Security card as proof of who I was to get the photo taken. It took showing up with my birth certificate, marriage license, Sam's Club card, and work ID badge with my new properly spelled name on it to convince the dueling bureaucracies to fix their mistakes. The process took two months.

Both agencies have processes and forms to update "client" information, such as name changes for Social Security and name and address changes for driver's licenses. If this is what it took to sort out government data entry snafus in systems accustomed to updates, how much harder will it be for a new central bureaucracy?

Mistakes of this sort don't always have such a "happy" resolution: several years ago, a friend was pulled over for a speeding violation. The cop ran a check against his name and saw a long list of warrants. Name, age, tattoo on right arm — all matched. Our friend was shocked when he was dragged before a judge. At least the judge had the sense to read a handwritten description of the wanted man, since "race" was omitted from the profile. Our friend was white; the wanted man was black. Whoops! Minor mistake, sir, please go on your way. Just don't get upset that we took time away from your visitation with your son and ruined your weekend, and try not to think about how long you could have been in jail if an actual human hadn't bothered to check a minor detail.

I'm sure other investors will be quite thrilled if I bring my 2-year-old to your investment seminar with her very own invitation. Will it help the mood if she runs around covered in pasta sauce?

This is why we should not have a central government database, whether for medical information (the proposed portable medical IDs would be based off government databases), or for collecting existing data (under proposed revisions of the Patriot Act), and why companies like Choicepoint that do lose data should be open to massive lawsuits from every person affected. Our bureaucracies are bad enough without making a big new one locked in a far-off building, closed to human interaction or correction, and even less accountable to the citizens it claims to serve. ❑

Reflections, *from page 14*

accuracy of the satellite temperature measurements. (Undoubtedly, charging forward with three simultaneous assaults is a tactic of psychological warfare by a far-from-objective magazine.)

Responding to these articles in an August 11 column on TechCentralStation, Roy Spencer, the University of Alabama at Huntsville researcher whose team takes the measurements, acknowledged that the criticisms have merit. (Spencer says that the most convincing criticism of the satellite measurements was not actually in the articles, but was discovered by one set of authors, who shared it with Spencer's group privately.)

Basically, satellites drift, and over time measurements are taken later in the day, leading to a cooling trend. Spencer's team had corrected for this, but not fully. Now that Spencer and his team have recalculated the figures, their estimate of warming comes to 0.12 C per decade — closer to the surface estimates of .19 C per decade, the current estimates of the critics).

That's not a big change, but it led Spencer to acknowledge that now "it is indeed possible to analyze different temperature datasets in such a way that they agree with global warming theory." That has never happened before, and his concession strengthens the hand of those who think global warming will be a disaster.

Not everyone is ready to surrender. Physicist (and policy

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George Washington's Farewell Address

After declining a third term as President, Washington delivered this speech on Sept. 7, 1796, to warn his country of the pitfalls to avoid.

Friends and Citizens: . . . .

The impressions with which I first undertook the arduous trust [of the presidency] were explained on the proper occasion. In the discharge of this trust, I will only say that I have, with good intentions, contributed towards the organization and administration of the government the best exertions of which a very fallible judgment was capable. . . .

[M]y feelings do not permit me to suspend the deep acknowledgment of that debt of gratitude which I owe to my beloved country for the many honors it has conferred upon me; . . . and for the opportunities I have thence enjoyed of manifesting my inviolable attachment, by services faithful and persevering, though in usefulness unequal to my zeal. . . . [L]et it always be remembered . . . that under circumstances in which the passions . . . were liable to mislead, amidst appearances sometimes dubious, vicissitudes of fortune often discouraging, in situations in which not unfrequently want of success has countenanced the spirit of criticism, the constancy of your support was the essential prop of the efforts, and a guarantee of the plans by which they were effected. Profoundly penetrated with this idea, I shall carry it with me to my grave, as a strong incitement to unceasing vows that . . . the free Constitution, which is the work of your hands, may be sacredly maintained; that its administration in every department may be stamped with wisdom and virtue; that, in fine, the happiness of the people of these States, under the auspices of liberty, may be made complete by so careful a preservation and so prudent a use of this blessing as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection, and adoption of every nation which is yet a stranger to it.

Here, perhaps, I ought to stop. But a solicitude for your welfare, which cannot end but with my life, and the apprehension of danger, natural to that solicitude, urge me, on an occasion like the present, to offer to your solemn contemplation, and to recommend to your frequent review, some sentiments which are the result of much reflection, of no inconsiderable observation, and

which appear to me all-important to the permanency of your felicity as a people. These will be offered to you with the more freedom, as you can only see in them the disinterested warnings of a parting friend, who can possibly have no personal motive to bias his counsel. . . .

The unity of government . . . is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquility at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very liberty which you so highly prize. . . . [I]t is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness; that you should cherish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.

. . . Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. With slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles. . . . [T]he independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint counsels, and joint efforts of common dangers, sufferings, and successes. . . .

These considerations speak a persuasive language to every reflecting and virtuous mind, and exhibit the continuance of the Union as a primary object of patriotic desire. Is there a doubt whether a common government can embrace so large a sphere? Let experience solve it. To listen to mere speculation in such a case were criminal. . . .

In contemplating the causes which may disturb our Union, it occurs as matter of serious concern that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by geographical discriminations, Northern and Southern, Atlantic and Western; whence designing men may endeavor to excite a belief that there is a real difference of local interests and views. One of the expedients of party to acquire influence within particular districts is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts. . . . This government, the offspring of our own choice, . . . has a just claim to your confidence and your support. Respect for its authority, compliance with its laws, acquiescence in its measures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true liberty. The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government. But the Constitution which at any time exists, till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people, is sacredly obligatory upon all. The very idea of the power and the right of the people to establish government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government.

All . . . combinations and associations, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities, are destructive of this fundamental principle, and of fatal tendency. They serve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put, in the place of the delegated will of the nation the will of a party, often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community; and, according to the alternate triumphs of different parties, to make the public administration the mirror of the ill-concerted and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plans digested by common counsels and modified by mutual interests.

However combinations or associations of the above description may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion.

The Constitution which at any time exists, till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people, is sacredly obligatory upon all.

Towards the preservation of your government, and the permanency of your present happy state, it is requisite . . . that you resist with care the spirit of innovation upon its principles. . . . One method of assault may be to effect, in the forms of the Constitution, alterations which will impair the energy of the system, and thus to undermine what cannot be directly overthrown. . . . Liberty itself will find in such a government, with powers properly distributed and adjusted, its surest guardian. It is, indeed, little else than a name, where the government is too feeble to withstand the enterprises of faction, to confine each member of the society within the limits prescribed by the laws, and to maintain all in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of the rights of person and property.

I have already intimated to you the danger of parties in the State, with particular reference to the founding of them on geographical discriminations. Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally.

"Make up your mind — do you want justice or social justice?"

This spirit, unfortunately, is inseparable from our nature, having its root in the strongest passions of the human mind. It exists under different shapes in all governments, more or less stifled, controlled, or repressed; but, in those of the popular form, it is seen in its greatest rankness, and is truly their worst enemy.

The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism. But

Let me warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party.

this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries which result gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty.

Without looking forward to an extremity of this kind (which nevertheless ought not to be entirely out of sight), the common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise people to discourage and restrain it.

It serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foments occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions. Thus the policy and the will of one country are subjected to the policy and will of another.

There is an opinion that parties in free countries are useful checks upon the administration of the government and serve to keep alive the spirit of liberty. This within certain limits is probably true; and in governments of a monarchical cast, patriotism may look with indulgence, if not with favor, upon the spirit of party. But in those of the popular character, in governments purely elective, it is a spirit not to be encouraged. From their natural tendency, it is certain there will always be enough of that spirit for every salutary purpose. And there being constant danger of excess, the effort ought to be by force of public opinion, to mitigate and assuage it. A fire not to be quenched, it demands a uniform vigilance to prevent its bursting into a flame, lest, instead of warming, it should consume.

It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free country should inspire caution in those entrusted with its administration, to confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism. A just estimate of that love of power, and proneness to abuse it, which predominates in the human heart, is sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of this position. The necessity of reciprocal checks in the exercise of political power, by dividing and distributing it into different depositaries, and constituting each the guardian of the public weal against invasions by the others, has been evinced by experiments ancient and modern; some of them in our country and under our own eyes. To preserve them must be as necessary as to institute them. If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed. The precedent must always greatly overbalance in permanent evil any partial or transient benefit, which the use can at any time yield. . . .

Promote then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.

. . . The execution of these maxims belongs to your representatives, but it is necessary that public opinion should cooperate. To facilitate to them the performance of their duty, it is essential that you should practically bear in mind that towards the payment of debts there must be revenue; that to have revenue there must be taxes; that no taxes can be devised which are not more or less inconvenient and unpleasant; that the intrinsic embarrassment, inseparable from the selection of the proper objects (which is always a choice of difficulties), ought to be a decisive motive for a candid con-

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible.

struction of the conduct of the government in making it, and for a spirit of acquiescence in the measures for obtaining revenue, which the public exigencies may at any time dictate. . . .

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop. Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.

Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one people under an efficient government, the period is not far off when we may defy material injury from external annoyance; when we

may take such an attitude as will cause the neutrality we may at any time resolve upon to be scrupulously respected; when belligerent nations, under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the giving us provocation; when we may choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.

Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalship, interest, humor or caprice?

It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world; so far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it; for let me not be understood as capable of patronizing infidelity to existing engagements. I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs, that honesty is always the best policy. I repeat it, therefore, let those engagements be observed in their genuine sense. But, in my opinion, it is unnecessary and would be unwise to extend them. . . .

In offering to you, my countrymen, these counsels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the strong and lasting impression I could wish; that they will control the usual current of the passions, or prevent our nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the destiny of nations. But, if I may even flatter myself that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good; that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the mischiefs of foreign intrigue, to guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism; this hope will be a full recompense for the solicitude for your welfare, by which they have been dictated.

How far in the discharge of my official duties I have been guided by the principles which have been delineated, the public records and other evidences of my conduct must witness to you and to the world. To myself, the assurance of my own conscience is, that I have at least believed myself to be guided by them. . . .

Though, in reviewing the incidents of my administration, I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my country will never cease to view them with indulgence; and that, after forty-five years of my life dedicated to its service with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the mansions of rest.

Relying on its kindness in this as in other things, and actuated by that fervent love towards it, which is so natural to a man who views in it the native soil of himself and his progenitors for several generations, I anticipate with pleasing expectation that retreat in which I promise myself to realize, without alloy, the sweet enjoyment of partaking, in the midst of my fellow-citizens, the benign influence of good laws under a free government, the ever-favorite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labors, and dangers.

G. Washington

Colombia, *from page 17*

both personally charismatic and something of an icon to many Latinos of a certain age. But really, who cares? Cuba is bankrupt, and Castro is a dinosaur. Chavez criticizes U.S. foreign policy. (Well, it's not like there's any aspect of it that makes any sense.) He's building closer relations with China (also understandable, because while China is the world's second-largest consumer of oil, it isn't in a position to bully the Venezuelans). He's harassing foreign oil companies (which is just stupid and counterproductive to his own interests). And he's buying 100,000 rifles from the Russians. Why this last issue has become a big news item mystifies me. The dollar figure hasn't been mentioned anywhere, but it's probably around $20 million, which is pocket change. Do the Americans think Venezuela is going to invade, now that the soldiers have some new small arms? Rifles wear out, does the U.S. government think the Venezuelans would be better armed with bows and arrows to push back trespassers from Colombia? It never ceases to amaze me how easily hysteria can be incited over absolutely nothing.

My own view on Chavez? A guy who got lucky, gained power, but is now in over his head because his ignorance and general incompetence are compounded by a number of personality aberrations and bent advisors. But, then again, that sounds like most world leaders, most prominently the one in the U.S.

The Colombian government also isn't enamored with Chavez, partially because it's obvious he considers his neighbor to be a U.S. puppet. This is not an unreasonable view, and it is frequently reinforced by incidents involving the large U.S. military presence. In just the past couple of months, those incidents have included the arrest of two U.S. soldiers who were apparently selling 32,000 rounds of ammo liberated from their base to the paramilitaries. Another five representatives of our best and brightest were just caught transporting 35 pounds of cocaine from Colombia to El Paso on a military plane. These incidents genuinely annoy the average Colombian, even while they provide a certain element of comic relief. In 2000, for instance, the wife of the U.S. Army officer heading anti-drug operations in Colombia was sentenced to five years in prison for trying to mail $700,000 worth of heroin to New York. Her husband, the officer, only got five months. Meanwhile, hundreds of Colombians accused of drug trafficking have been extradited to the United States for far more draconian prison sentences.

As I said, Colombia is doing better than you might expect, and danger to tourists is probably exaggerated. Still, violence can and does erupt unpredictably, and the U.S. insistence on waging the counterproductive War on Drugs gives the average Colombian ample reason to resent the United States. Caveat viator. ❑

Fruitless Controversies, *from page 29*

each other. Socialist ideas, which were very widespread in the 19th century, were bound to find an encyclopedic advocate at some time. It happened to be Karl Marx, who had a special talent for expressing the socialists' anger and hatred, while supplying a dogmatic and mystical authority for these emotions. Yet Marx was such a bad arguer that generations of commentators have found lifetime occupations trying to force his thoughts into some kind of sensible relationship to the world outside. And there have been Marxist "scholars" who never managed to read a whole chapter of "Das Kapital." Louis Althusser, esteemed the greatest Marxist of his time, speaks of "a few passages of Marx which I had studied closely."

But the appeal of most thinkers — I'm not counting cultural dignitaries whose only claim on one's attention is the possibility that their works will appear on the final exam — starts with the reader's interest and pleasure in their approach to argument, not in the outline of the arguments themselves. Johnson's philosophy survives in his aphorisms, Voltaire's in his satires, Jefferson's very largely in his personal correspondence. None is known for a great work of systematic thought. What gives life to their propositions, which are often the merest common sense, is the fact that nobody else could have expressed them in the way they did. As for systematic philosophers, Jefferson was right to credit Hume's "fascinating style" and Plato's "elegance" of "diction" for making people enthusiastic about their ideas (ideas that he considered pernicious). Their arguments, he thought, wouldn't have gotten very far if the reader's sense of beauty hadn't been enlisted on their side.

I'm not saying that if you can't express yourself like Plato or Hume, Mencken or Jefferson, you ought to give up arguing. I am saying that the best arguments, as well as the worst, are assertions of self. The better this is understood, and the more vigorously arguers rise to the challenge of honest self-expression, the more chance of fruitful controversy there will be. And if it's not fruitful, it may at least be entertaining.

Those are all the arguments about argument that I have for today. If you're not convinced, at least I've expressed myself. ❑

Reflections, *from page 31*

gadfly) Fred Singer thinks that the 0.12 C-per-decade estimate may be too high, and he's exploring some reasons why. But science reporter Ron Bailey's article on Reason Online was titled: "We're All Global Warmers Now." — Jane S. Shaw

Shamefully unremarkable — Here is a story of politics that I found in "Luke G. Williams, American Entrepreneur," the autobiography of a Spokane, Wash. businessman.

Williams, who died in 2004, was a founder of American Sign & Indicator, the company that popularized the digital time-and-temperature sign once common on banks. Williams was a conservative Republican. In 1962 he was eastern Washington chairman for Dick Christensen, the (failed) Republican challenger to Sen. Warren Magnuson, and was Washington state chairman for Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign in 1964.

After Lyndon Johnson's victory, Congress considered a highway beautification bill favored by his wife, Lady Bird. One part of the bill as proposed would have banned electronic signs of the kind made by American Sign & Indicator if visible from a highway. Williams believed it would put his company out of business. The Democrats had a majority and there was little doubt that the bill would pass. To save his company, which had 900 employees, Williams went to Washington, D.C., to get the bill changed.

The person in charge of the bill was Sen. Magnuson.

"I was pretty sure Magnuson would remember me," Williams recounts. "I had no choice but to go back to Washington, D.C., hat in hand, and lobby the man I had almost unseated."

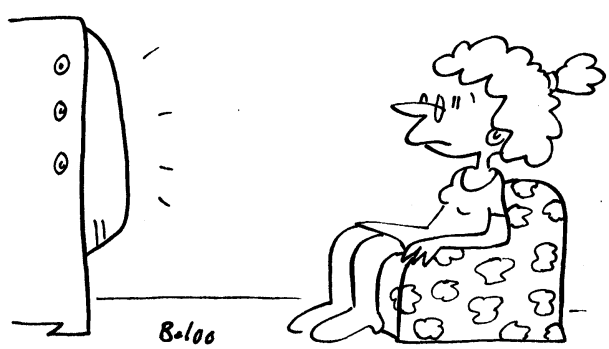
Williams was sweating. To his surprise, Magnuson "wanted to hear all about my problem." What did Williams need? To have time-and-temperature and public-information signs exempted. Magnuson had it done. There was no condition. But Williams writes, "I'm sure that he felt that if he did me a favor I would be less active in anti-Magnuson politics in the future — which I was."

Fifteen years later, during the 1970s, came another bill to outlaw electric signs, this time to save energy. The man to see in Washington, D.C., was the state's other Democratic senator, Henry Jackson. Williams saw him. As Magnuson had done, Jackson had time-and-temperature signs written out of the bill. This time there was a quid pro quo: that Williams stop his repeated efforts to bankroll challengers to Rep. Tom Foley, the Democrat who represented Spokane in the House — and who later became Speaker.

According to Williams' memoir, Jackson said: "Luke, I want one thing from you. Please get off Tom Foley's case."

"From that day forward," Williams writes, "I never contributed to another campaign against Tom Foley." (Foley would fall in the Republican sweep of 1994, and the district is solidly Republican now, held by Rep. Cathy McMorris.)

Williams puts these stories into his autobiography as if they had no moral import — on him, on the politicians concerned, or for the political system. He is recounting an interesting life, and these were interesting things, so he puts them in. — Bruce Ramsey



"The FDA issued a warning today not to eat things you find on the sidewalk."

Reviews

"Life at the Bottom: The Worldview that Makes the Underclass," by Theodore Dalrymple. Ivan R. Dee, 2001, 288 pages.
"Our Culture, What's Left of It," by Theodore Dalrymple. Ivan R. Dee, 2005, 320 pages.

Life at the Bottom

Bruce Ramsey

Once in a long while a writer comes along with a vision so powerful that it shakes you. Theodore Dalrymple is that kind of writer. He is a doctor, and with a medical clarity he examines the underclass — their habits, their manners, and the words they use to justify themselves. He writes: "It is the ideas my patients have that fascinate — and, to be honest, appall — me: for they are the source of their misery."

The idea Dalrymple has set himself against is that people are not responsible for what they do. That idea affects how citizens, police, judges, and wardens define certain acts, and how they will respond to them, and that, in turn, affects what the criminally inclined decide to do.

The denial of responsibility is, in turn, connected to the welfare state. In "The Frivolity of Evil," an essay in "Our Culture, What's Left of It," Dalrymple writes: "The state, guided by the apparently generous and humane philosophy that no child, whatever its origins, should suffer deprivation, gives assistance to any child, or rather the mother of any child, once it has come into being. . . . The biological father is now free to use whatever income he has as pocket money, for entertainment and little treats. He is therefore reduced to the status of a child, though a spoiled child with the physical capacities of a man: petulant, demanding, querulous, self-centered, and violent if he doesn't get his own way."

Dalrymple could be talking about parts of America, but he is British, and when he wrote most of the essays here, he practiced in a public hospital and a prison in Birmingham. For 14 years he advised a stream of ailing and complaining patients, most of them British-born and white. In his off-hours he advised his readers.

Dalrymple uses an older, moralized vocabulary — words like pauperism, squalor, wickedness, wretchedness, evil, and vice. Sometimes he employs Christian vocabulary, as when he describes man as a fallen creature with a propensity to evil, or when he says the decay of religious belief has left people without transcendent meaning in their lives. An odd choice of words, considering that Dalrymple is an atheist.

Many of these essays are based on conversations between doctor and patient: "Last week a young man finally imprisoned for repeated assaults on his girlfriend and his mother, among others, told me that prison was not doing him any good, that what he needed was anger management therapy. I remarked that his behavior in prison had been exemplary; he was always polite and did what he was told."

Some of his patients trump a harsh truth with a slogan, as in the case of a 17-year-old who'd gone on a binge when her boyfriend was sentenced to prison, and wound up in the hospital with alcohol poisoning. When Dalrymple tells her she will "have a succession of possessive, exploitative and violent boyfriends" unless she changes her life, she says "I can look after myself."

He doesn't think she will, and reminds her that men are stronger than women.

"That's a sexist thing to say," she says.

"But it's a plain, straightforward and inescapable fact."

"It's sexist."

Dalrymple's portrait of sexual life in the British underclass is one of "fleeting and kaleidoscopic" hookups. "They are the stars of their own soap operas," he writes. Relationships fly apart because, under the welfare state and the sexual revolution, "no obligations or pressures — financial,

social or ethical — keep people together."

In Britain 40% of children are born out of wedlock. Among Dalrymple's clientele, it is typical for the man to mistreat and abandon the mother, who is given welfare and an apartment. By age 20, some women have three children, each by a different man.

Too many libertarians decide the issue on principle and argue that the consequences of freedom will of course be better.

There are several messages in this social pathology. Dalrymple argues that about these crucial things the state cannot be neutral. He writes of "an unholy alliance" between the left "and libertarians on the right, who believe that consumer choice is the answer to all social questions, an idea eagerly adopted by the left in precisely those areas where it does not apply. Thus people have a right to bring forth children in any way they like, and the children, of course, have the right not to be deprived of anything, at least anything material. How men and women associate and have children is merely a matter of consumer choice, of no more moral consequence than the choice between dark and milk chocolate, and the state must not discriminate among different forms of association and child rearing . . . "

He has a point about the effects of libertarian policy in an irresponsible age. In late 19th century America and Victorian England, the law did not stop people from committing most acts of folly and vice, but most of the time people's beliefs, consciences. and common sense did. The hand of necessity was strong. People were responsible because they were trained to be, people around them expected them to be, and because they had to be.

With people like that, laissez faire can work.

This issue comes into particular focus with drugs. Dalrymple discusses the mess his patients have made of their lives by using drugs, and I know a bit of what he speaks. One of my high-school friends lost his business because he overused cocaine, one lost his house because his wife was addicted to crack, and one lost his life to an overdose of heroin. Not everyone who uses these substances comes to grief, but the risk is real, and each disaster has consequences for the people around the user. This matters. In any society, including an ideal one, you will have some people losing themselves in chemistry, but you had better not have too many.

Dalrymple takes this to a political conclusion in "Don't Legalize Drugs." "The consumption of drugs," he writes, ". . . impairs their ability to pursue more important human aims, such as raising a family and fulfilling civic obligations. Very often it impairs their ability to pursue gainful employment and promotes parasitism. Moreover, far from being expanders of consciousness, most drugs severely limit it. One of the most striking characteristics of drug-takers is their intense and tedious self-absorption; and their journeys into inner space are generally forays into inner vacuums. Drug-taking is a lazy man's way of pursuing happiness and wisdom."

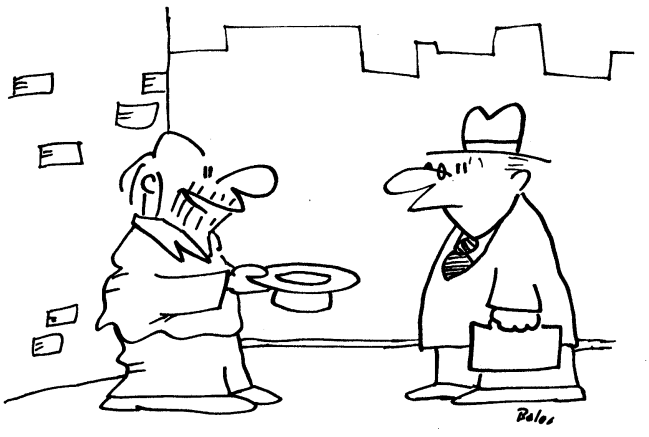
This could be an argument not to use these substances, or to limit one's exposure to them. I find it less convincing as an argument to keep them illegal.

Dalrymple argues that if these substances are legal, too many people will use them. He gives the example of workmen at a British project in Africa, where he was the company doctor. The men were given a liquor ration at a fraction of market value — booze so cheap that they couldn't afford to remain sober.

"Drunkenness among them far outstripped anything I had ever seen, before or since," he writes. "I discovered that, when alcohol is effectively free of charge, a fifth of British construction workers will regularly go to bed so drunk that they are incontinent of both urine and feces. I remember one man who very rarely got as far as his bed at night: he fell asleep in the lavatory, where he was usually found the next morning. Half the men shook in the mornings and resorted to the hair of the dog to steady their hands before they drove their bulldozers and other heavy machines (which they frequently wrecked, at enormous expense to the British taxpayers) . . . " The workers, he said, "gained a well-deserved local reputation for reprehensible, violent, anti-social behavior."

Dalrymple does not compare the social costs of freedom with the social costs of the war on drugs, but his piece is a reminder that there are social costs of a liberal policy.

Here are men on a foreign construction job who have been removed from the supervision of girlfriends, wives, parents, neighbors, and society. They will do things they would not do at home. Add to this the bizarre tolerance of the employer: what sensible boss would supply workers with below-market booze so that they would destroy company assets?



"I'd *like* to get a job, sir, but I hate the idea of my tax money going to support welfare bums."

This is not a convincing argument.

Dalrymple also argues that drug use is part of a criminal lifestyle whether the drug is prohibited or not. Methadone is legal in Britain. Methadone users do commit fewer crimes per person than heroin users, but are still inclined to commit crimes. If drugs were legalized, the price fell, and the number of users rose, crime might go up. In Liverpool, Dalrymple says, 2,000 addicts are on state methadone (and countless others use the black market), and the city "is the world capital for drug-motivated burglary." He says Amsterdam, which is ground zero for drug liberalization, "is among the most violent and squalid cities in Europe."

Dalrymple does not compare the social costs of freedom with the social costs of the War on Drugs, but his piece is a reminder that there are social costs of a liberal policy. Too many libertarians decide the issue on principle and argue that the consequences of freedom will of course be better. Maybe they will be better, but maybe it depends on the drug. Heroin is different from crack, which is different from methamphetamine. Maybe it depends on other things — social constraints other than the law, for instance.

Liberty includes the freedom to make bad choices. A supporter of liberty will have to tolerate a certain amount of bad choices around him — but he should have reason to believe there will not be too many of them. Some combination of influences, whether religion, morality, self-interest, or the law of supply and demand, will have to keep vice and folly under management. The totality has to work with folk whose appetites and inclinations differ from those of the people who design utopias.

Most of Dalrymple's writing describes welfare-state Britain. One of the most piercing views of that place is through the eyes of foreign doctors on

They come to realize that a system of welfare that makes no moral judgments in allocating economic rewards promotes anti-social egotism.

one-year contracts. These physicians are familiar with real, material poverty. At first the foreign docs admire the National Health Service. Everyone is treated, and by the foreigners' standards, the care is good. But few of the patients are grateful for the free service. Dalrymple cites the case of a man emerging from a drug-induced blackout. The man's first words are, "Get me a fucking roll-up!" (a hand-rolled cigarette). Pretty soon he is bellowing, "Get me the fuck out of here!"

"My doctors from Bombay, Madras or Manila observe this kind of conduct open-mouthed," Dalrymple writes.

"By the end of three months my doctors have, without exception, reversed their original opinion that the welfare state, as exemplified by England, represents the acme of civilization," he writes. "They come to realize that a system of welfare that makes no moral judgments in allocating economic rewards promotes anti-social egotism. The spiritual impoverishment of the population seems to them worse than anything they have ever known in their own countries."

"Spiritual impoverishment" may need some examples. A very concrete one is how the underclass eats: "In all my visits to the white households in the area, of which I've made hundreds, never — not once — have I seen any evidence of cooking. The nearest to this activity that I have witnessed is the reheating of prepared or packaged food, usually in a microwave. And by the same token, I have never seen any evidence of meals taken in common as a social activity. . . . They eat alone, even if other members of the household are present, and never at the table; they slump on the sofa in front of the television. Everyone in the household eats according to his own whim and timetable. Even in so elementary a matter as eating, therefore, there is no self-discipline but rather an imperative obedience to impulse."

Some take drugs that suppress their appetites. Dalrymple writes of a man five foot ten weighing just over 100 pounds, with sunken cheeks and paper-bag skin.

"You don't eat," Dalrymple tells him.

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"Not much," he says. "I don't feel like it."

"And when you do eat, what do you eat?"

"Crisps and chocolate." (Crisps are potato chips.)

People that careless with their digestions are not likely to cultivate their intellects — not that free public school ever expected it of them. Dalrymple notes "I cannot recall meeting a 16-year-old white from the public housing estates that are near my hospital who could multiply nine by seven (I do not exaggerate). Even three by seven often defeats them. One boy of seventeen told me, 'We didn't get that far.'"

The underclass mind dwells deeply on neither the past nor the future, neither cause nor effect. Its worldview is summed up in the bumper sticker "Shit Happens." One of Dalrymple's most perceptive essays is, "The Knife Went In," in which he relates that criminals portray their predations entirely in the passive voice.

The college-educated version of "Shit Happens" is that crime is caused by psychological illness. Criminals are sick. That idea drifts down to the criminals, Dalrymple says, and they have embraced it — at least in their interviews with government doctors — because it relieves them of responsibility. Obviously, if their crimes continue to happen, the doctor has not cured their illness. A crucial thing for doctors to do, Dalrymple argues, is to heave out the idea they have this sort of power. They don't. The patient has it.

"When a man tells me, in his antisocial behavior, that he is easily led," Dalrymple writes, "I ask him whether he was ever easily led to study mathematics or the subjunctives of French verbs." The patients laugh, but Dalrymple has made his point.

It is relatively easy these days to recognize nonsense from senators, congressmen and the president of the United States. A whole industry works, albeit imperfectly, to see through their spin. But in these ostensibly nonjudgmental times, in which one may blame institutions but never "the victim," it is an even rarer achievement to see through the nonsense of starving addicts, battered spouses, serial burglars and thugs. Dalrymple is a writer who accepts no excuses. ❑

"The Plot," by Will Eisner. W.W. Norton, 2005, 148 pages.

The Hoax of the 20th Century

Andrew Ferguson

Henry Ford wrote in the May 22, 1920 edition of The Dearborn Independent: "The Jew was never popular as a race. . . . Even in modern times, in civilized countries, in conditions which render persecution absolutely impossible, this unpopularity exists." But even as Ford wrote his series of essays on "The International Jew," the curious document he relied on as his primary source, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," was providing fuel for a pogrom that would scorch the earth.

There is hardly a conspiracy theory that does not at some point veer into anti-Semitism, and hardly an anti-Semite that does not at some point reference the Protocols. The forgery first appeared in 1904, purporting to be a transcript of a secret congress of international Jewry (first identified with the Zionist Congress convened in 1897, until someone pointed out that those proceedings were public and attended by many Gentiles). Actually, it was a nearly verbatim copy of a dialogue written decades before by French satirist Maurice Joly, in which Machiavelli (representing the tyrant Napoleon III) and Montesquieu discuss political philosophy in hell. All the forger did was replace Machiavelli with the Jews. The Russian secret police, who commissioned the forgery, hoped it would encourage the fickle Tsar to expel all Jews from Russia.

The pamphlet failed in this goal, but like a stubborn air pocket beneath wallpaper, it popped up again soon thereafter. The Russian Revolution offered the spectacle of many Jews — Trotsky first among them — helping Lenin overthrow the established government in Russia. Never mind that many socialist Jews, like Rosa Luxemburg, spoke out firmly against Lenin's means of achieving proletarian rule; never mind that many of these "Jews" were Cossacks or Eastern Europeans given a change of religion for propagandistic purposes (like the murderous Hungarian Bela Kun becoming "Cohen"); what mattered was that Jews were having their way with Russia, and if they were not stopped elsewhere they would have their way with the whole world.

Readers in Europe, seeing in the Protocols an easy explanation for the stupidities their countries engaged in, turned the book into a bestseller, even prompting serial publication in the London Times. But it was also the Times that debunked the Protocols, providing conclusive proof that the book was a forgery. Finally, the bubble had been smoothed away — until a certain young German corporal with political ambitions pumped it up again. Adolf Hitler made the Protocols compulsory reading in Nazi schools, and one of the centerpieces in his gallery of hate. By then the fraud had taken in much of the rest of the world, from Jerusalem (where the Grand Mufti became a gleeful admirer of Hitler's work), to Japan (where busi-

nessmen regarded it as a model to be emulated), to Dearborn, Michigan (where Henry Ford wrote his articles for the Independent). Every time the Protocols were presented as factual, they were again debunked, only to appear once more somewhere else. They've proven most resilient in the Arab world, with Nasser, Sadat, and Qaddafi all publicly recommending the book, and the militant group Hamas stating in their charter that "The Zionist plan is limitless. . . . [It] is embodied in the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion,' and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying."

When pressed, the college protesters demonstrate that what they hate most about Jews is that they're so damned Jewish.

In "The Plot," comics legend Will Eisner tells two stories: the first about the improbable tenacity of the Protocols, sketched above; the second about himself, an old Jew laboriously researching a hateful topic. In both, it is sheer frustration that dominates: how could something so clearly and demonstrably false be so often accepted as truth?

On the way to a college library, Eisner comes across a group of students waving placards to protest "Israeli apartheid" and handing out brochures with propaganda lifted from the Protocols. Dismayed, he tries to share with them the fruits of his research. But to them, it doesn't matter whether the Protocols are a hoax or not. Their agitprop must be true; after all, that's the way Jews are.

"The way Jews are"; the "Jewish outlook"; the "qualities inherent in the Jewish nature": though they attempt to tie their hatred to some contemporary issue, in the end anti-Semites must rely on tautology to explain what makes Jews so abhorrent. It is never envy alone that motivates them; anti-Semitism is a Protean thing. "[F]or the living, the Jew is a dead man; for the natives, an alien and a vagrant; for property holders, a beggar; for the poor, an exploiter and a millionaire; for the patriot, a man without a country; for all classes, a hated rival."* When pressed, the college protesters, like so many generations before them, demonstrate that what they hate most about Jews is that they're so damned Jewish.

Thus it seems as if the Jewish Question can only be answered by the disappearance of the Jews — the choice of whether this will be accomplished by assimilation or by extermination is left up to them. Eisner closes on a similarly bleak note, with a page showing his comic book self's hopes that the publication of "The Plot" will help debunk the Protocols once and for all, followed by a page that depicts a synagogue on fire, framed by newspaper clippings about present-day anti-Semitic vandalism and violence.

Eisner died shortly before the book was published; he will not see whether, or for how long, his book succeeds in debunking the hoax. Though "The Plot" is cynical, it may set some people straight: many of those same Israel-protesting college kids are also comics fans, and they might be inspired to pick up a master's final work. But no matter how many it persuades, it will not finish off the Protocols for good — and neither will it bring an end to the hatred of the Jews. ❑

* Leon Pinsker, "Autoemancipation," quoted in Paul Johnson, "The History of the Jews," p. 394.

"The Folly of Empire: What George W. Bush Can Learn From Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson," by John B. Judis. Scribner, 2004, 212 pages.

The Once and Future Empire

Martin Morse Wooster

It's now been over two years since America demonstrated its imperial ambitions with its invasion of Iraq. The grounds for the invasion were of course specious, concocted to undergird the new doctrine of "preemptive war." This doctrine was coated in foreign policy bafflegab, but when the rhetoric was stripped away, the new rules were strikingly simple: America is stronger than any one else; therefore, we can do whatever we want. God bless the USA!

During the war, I kept hoping that America would let its imperial ambitions go whole hog. I wanted to see a glorious victory parade, with villainous Iraqi generals marched down Pennsylvania Avenue and stoned by a cheering mob. Sean Hannity and Michael Savage would moderate the festivities.

That didn't happen. Not only was there no victory parade (unlike the Gulf War), but President Bush's subordinates dutifully appeared on talk shows and op-ed pages spouting the line that America is not an empire, that we don't do the "conquest thing," and that our only interest is enabling Iraq to become a democracy.

The doctrine of preemption was beaten into dust in the battles for Fallujah and Najaf. There are a few unrepentant imperialists out there,

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such as Harvard business historian Niall Ferguson and Council on Foreign Relations fellow Max Boot, who publicly daydream of the good old days when half-remembered British imperial viceroys practiced "gunboat diplomacy" using actual gunboats.

Now the neoconservative think tanks are once again ringing the tocsin and sounding dire warnings that terror can only be vanquished through an American occupation of Teheran or Damascus. But when (and if) there is another war, some long-standing questions ought to be answered. What should America's role in the world be? Should the U.S. act unilaterally, or is it necessary to use force only when American divisions are under the control of the United Nations?

Judis reminds us that imperialism and world government are not the only options for American foreign policy.

These are deep questions which have been debated for over a century. So it's clear that people interested in America's place in the world ought to study episodes in American history similar to the Iraq War and see what lessons can be learned from the past.

In "The Folly of Empire," John B. Judis, a visiting fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a senior editor at The New Republic, does a fine job resurrecting long-neglected debates over how and when America should go to war. In an earlier book, "Grand Illusion" (1992), Judis told the story of U.S. foreign policy through a series of biographical profiles about such important leaders as Sen. William Fulbright and former vice president Henry Wallace. In this book, he also presents the past century of American foreign policy, with about half of the book devoted to Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, the next quarter describing American foreign policy between 1920–2000, and the remaining two chapters critiquing President Bush's foreign policy.

From the title, one might assume that Judis is opposed to U.S. interventionism. That is not the case. Judis is a social democrat, and an heir to the "progressive" ideals that inspired Wilson (and, for that matter, the founders of The New Republic). This leads Judis to oppose American unilateralism and support the notion of the U.S. acting in concert with other nations or international organizations.

Judis' views are best illustrated by his opinion of Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policy. In an article published in 1899, Roosevelt wrote that the world was divided into civilized countries and barbarous ones, and since civilized countries rarely fought each other, the best way to ensure world peace was for civilized countries to conquer the barbarous ones. "Every expansion makes for peace," Roosevelt declared. "This has been the case in every instance of expansion in the present century, whether the expanding power were France or England, Russia or America."

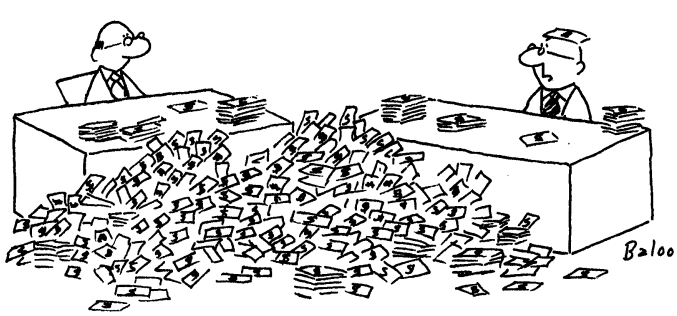
The ideas Theodore Roosevelt had in this period, Judis argues, are the ones that such neoconservatives as New York Times columnist David Brooks and Weekly Standard editor William Kristol admire. "It was invariably the Roosevelt of the late 1890s and his first term as president that neoconservatives would cite" in their arguments that the U.S. should go to war in Iraq, Judis writes.

But Judis notes that later in his career, Roosevelt partially changed his mind. In 1910, Roosevelt received the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating a peace treaty between Russia and Japan after these two nations fought each other in 1905. Roosevelt then backed the use of an international tribunal to settle disputes between other countries as a way of preventing war. In his Nobel address, Roosevelt declared "it would be a masterstroke if those great powers honestly bent on peace would form a League of Peace, not only to keep the peace among themselves, but to prevent, by force if necessary, its being broken by others."

Roosevelt, Judis writes, "was clearly moving away from the framework of 1898 toward a kind of vision that would be later embraced by Woodrow Wilson." Wilson is Judis' hero because he opposed U.S. imperialism and embraced international organization as a means to solve world problems. Wilson, notes Judis, was not entirely statist. "Wilson got much of his radicalism and his view of imperialism," he writes, from John Bright, one of the foremost 19th-century advocates of free trade. Wilson, during his administration, substantially lowered America's formidable trade barriers; Wilson, in Judis' view, "would see ending protectionism as integral to ending imperialism and an unstable balance of power."

In my view, Wilson was clearly not a Wilsonian in 1912. He probably did not become a Wilsonian until after 1916.

Judis also contrasts Roosevelt and Wilson's use of power by analyzing two American conflicts: the Spanish-American War of 1898, which led to the guerrilla war in the Philippines from 1899–1902, and the U.S. invasion of Mexico in 1914. Judis is wise to scrutinize the Spanish-American War, because it's the war that most resembles the Iraq War, both in its causes and its consequences. Spain, in Judis' view, was not a threat to the United States; like the Iraq War, the Spanish-



"You realize what this means, don't you, McAllister — we're going to have to pay windfall profits tax."

American War was clearly a "war of choice."

Another parallel with Iraq is that the Filipinos did not see themselves as "liberated" by American occupation; Filipino guerrilla leader Emilio Aguinaldo shifted from fighting the Spanish to fighting Americans. Roosevelt's response was to send generals skilled in slaughtering Indians to the Philippines. "I want no prisoners," General Jacob Smith, who fought at Wounded Knee, told his troops. "I wish to kill and burn, the more you kill and burn the better it will please me." His troops obeyed his orders, ravaging the Philippine Islands and herding tens of thousands of Filipinos into concentration camps. By 1902, these savage methods ensured that the Philippines were largely pacified, although sporadic fighting continued for about five years.

Judis contrasts Roosevelt's imperialism with Wilson's emphasis on creating international organizations. According to Judis, Wilson was an early advocate of using force to solve problems. In 1914, an American expeditionary force landed in Veracruz, Mexico, as part of an effort to depose Mexican dictator Victoriano Huerta. Wilson expected cheering crowds, but the Mexicans jeered the Marines who landed, and 19 soldiers died.

The doctrine of preemption was beaten into dust in the battles for Fallujah and Najaf.

Secretary of War Lindley Garrison urged Wilson to order American troops to occupy Mexico City and create a government friendly to the U.S. Wilson declined: "We shall have no right at any time to intervene in Mexico to determine the way in which Mexicans are to settle their own affairs." Wilson wrote Garrison, "There are in my judgment no conceivable circumstances which would make it right for us to direct by force or threat of force the internal processes of what is profound revolution."

Wilson, Judis argues, learned from the Mexican episode "that the United States had a mission to show the way to liberty, but he realized after the invasion of Veracruz that the United States could not do this simply by imposing liberty and democracy on a recalcitrant country like Mexico." Judis believes that Wilson supported U.S. entry into World War I as a way to ensure a stable democratic order that would make sure that global war would never again happen.

Historians continue to argue about when Woodrow Wilson became a "Wilsonian" advocate of establishing strong international organizations to ensure a peaceful world. In my view, Wilson was clearly not a Wilsonian in 1912, when the presidential election had little to do with foreign policy. He probably did not become a Wilsonian until after 1916, when he won a razor-thin victory over Republican Charles Evans Hughes, after campaigning as the president who "kept us out of war." Only when America entered World War I in April 1917 did Wilson reveal his commitment to a League of Nations.

But what should America's role in the League of Nations be? Many Republican senators wanted the United States to be part of the League, as long as the treaty included clauses stating that laws created by the League did not overrule American law. Judis dismisses these Republicans as putting "pure partisan concerns above the

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national interest," but I believe the objections of such senators as Massachusetts' Henry Cabot Lodge were reasonable. Lodge's reservations about the limits of international law are comparable to the reasons why the U.S. has refused to join the International Criminal Court. Had Wilson accommodated Lodge's reservations, America would have joined the League of Nations. He didn't, and the Senate repeatedly refused to allow the U.S. to join the League.

What can we learn from this period of American history? Does America have any options aside from acting alone in overseas adventures, or being a junior partner to an increasingly dominant United Nations?

Judis is right that the 21st century rationale for U.S. imperialism has led to disaster. The Iraq War reminds us that war is like major surgery; it always has unintended, often tragic, consequences. In the future, think-tank mandarins who scheme to rearrange the world should realize that invading American armies are more likely to be greeted with bullets than with flowers.

As Judis notes, during a presidential debate in 2000, candidate George W. Bush provided a forceful argument against what has since become his own foreign policy. "I'm not so sure that the role of the United States is to go around the world and say, 'this is the way it's got to be. We can help.' . . . I think one way to be viewed as the ugly American is for us to go around the world saying, 'We do it this way, so should you.'"

It's equally clear that American subservience to the United Nations is as ineffective as unilateral action. The UN has accomplished surprisingly little in its six decades of existence, and it's hard to see how a stronger UN, with American divisions under the control of foreign commanders, would make the world a safer place.

Certainly the U.S. should act to defend itself, whether patrolling the mountains of Afghanistan or breaking up terror cells around the world. But these actions need not involve tying up American divisions for years (or possibly decades).

The United States is the best country in the world. America should make its case for moral supremacy not by brute force but by free trade; by showing that success comes from the hard work of dynamic entrepreneurs, not from patronage granted by a permanent ruling class. In my view, Woodrow Wilson was right about the importance of trade, but his efforts to tie the United States to ineffectual international organizations are a misguided legacy that future generations should avoid. ❑

"The Skeptic's Dictionary: A Collection of Strange Beliefs, Amusing Deceptions, & Dangerous Delusions," by Robert Todd Carroll. John Wiley, 2003, 446 pages.

The Incomplete Skeptic

Gary Jason

Robert Todd Carroll's enjoyable new book is a concise dictionary of pseudo-sciences and other nonsensical belief systems, and the people who promulgate them. Carroll, who is chairman of the Philosophy Department at Sacramento City College, is well-versed in critical thinking and logic, having published a critical thinking text ("Becoming a Critical Thinker: A Guide for the New Millennium").

In this book, Carroll takes on trendy tabloid pseudo-sciences and cults. We meet relatively recent absurdities, such as hollow Earth theory, alien abduction, creation science, Falun Gong, the Indigo Children, SRA (Satanic ritual abuse), biorhythms, holistic medicine, transcendental meditation, Uri Geller, and reverse speech. And he includes many favorite oldies, such as palmistry, Nostradamus, the Loch Ness monster, astrology, numerology, Gurdjieff, haunted houses, Bigfoot, the Illuminati, reincarnation, Noah's Ark, fairies, vampires, zombies, phrenology, the shroud of Turin, mesmerism, and parapsychology — not to mention Roswell (we all know what happened there!). Well represented too are various pop therapies such as EST, dianetics, New Age psychotherapies, NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), and orgone energy, which never acquired scientific respectability, along with some that have gotten some mainstream support, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (used to classify personalities), the Rorschach inkblot test, RMT (repressed memory therapy), and TFT (thought field therapy). There are nearly 400 entries, a veritable grab bag of the inane, the insane, the asinine and the delusional.

If all Carroll did was debunk the usual suspects, his book would not be better than similar books, such as James Randi's primer "An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural." But Carroll covers some more recent and interesting specimens of intellectual dreck. He includes the nasty phenomenon of Holocaust denial, for instance. He also discusses the much-hyped use of subliminal messaging and mind control (brainwashing), both of which have been proven ineffective, despite popular fears to the contrary.

Even more valuable are his pithy essays on logic and scientific method, which identify the nature of pseudo-science as well as logical fallacies (such as begging the question) that underlie it. For example, he succinctly discusses the Forer effect (also called the Barnum effect), which is the use of such vague language (in psychological surveys, or predictions by astrologers) that it describes everyone. His discussion of entrenchment, or what he calls "the sunk-cost fallacy," is a delight — we keep flying the Concorde not because it makes a profit, but because we don't want to admit our initial investment was wasted. He discusses confirmation bias (the tendency to seek only evidence which will support one's theory), ad hoc hypotheses, positive-outcome bias (the tendency to publish positive outcomes rather than negative outcomes), the post hoc fallacy, control group experiments, memory (false and veridical), the placebo effect, pseudo-history, pseudo-science, and Occam's razor. All these make the book a good reference book for a critical thinking class.

My admiration for his book is lessened by omissions that in my view are all too characteristic of contemporary academic skeptics. There are dozens of books lampooning the usual suspects such as astrology and parapsychology, but these books (including Carroll's) never mention, say, Marx or communism. Now, don't get me wrong — astrology and parapsychology are nonsense, of course. But so is Marxism. I've been in philosophy departments where astrology is ridiculed ("Oh, the stupidity of the plebs is so hard to endure!"), but where Marx is held in high esteem ("A soaring genius!"). Yet while the devotees of astrology haven't killed anyone, devotees of Marxism were responsible for as many as 100 million deaths in the 20th century. Again, while Carroll's book has entries on such obscure figures as Edward Bach (a British physician who devised a therapy using flowers) and Frederic Lenz (a Zen entrepreneur who calls himself "Rama"), you don't see an entry on Margaret Mead, whose pseudo-scientific anthropological research (based upon a hoax by her key source) helped persuade people that all gender differences are culturally constructed. Nor is there any entry in Carroll's book on Alfred Kinsey, the hyper-sexed poster boy for bias in sampling. Again, one searches in vain for any mention of "Black Athena" (or its author Martin Bernal), which propounded the theory that the Greeks (the ultimate in dead white males) stole philosophy, math, art, and science from Africa. Again, I surely commend Carroll for discussing the oft-forgotten Lysenko affair, in which a rank pseudo-scientist was able to exploit political ideology to destroy genuine biological science in the Soviet Union, but what about the current attempt by feminists to stamp out research on gender differences in cognitive psychology?

Also mocked are delusions with some mainstream support, like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Rorschach inkblot test, and repressed memory therapy.

My suspicion is that skeptical academics are more apt to debunk the belief systems of the hoi polloi than deal with the absurdities so prevalent in contemporary academia for a number of reasons. First, although the average man is usually modest about his intellectual abilities, academics are usually less modest, if not positively hubristic.

Second, the degree of vapidity of belief is often greater with academics. As Orwell observed, there are some ideas so stupid that only intellectuals can believe them. Suppose someone tells me he believes in reincarnation. While I think this belief is silly, I confess that nothing in my experience directly refutes it, so my mind simply rolls along. But to hear someone — with a Ph.D., no less — argue that paying everyone equally will maximize production, or that there are no innate differences between men and women, or that criminals don't choose to commit heinous crimes, but commit them because of ignorance, so profoundly offends my daily experience that my mind boggles.

There's no entry on Margaret Mead, whose pseudo-scientific research persuaded people that all gender differences are culturally constructed.

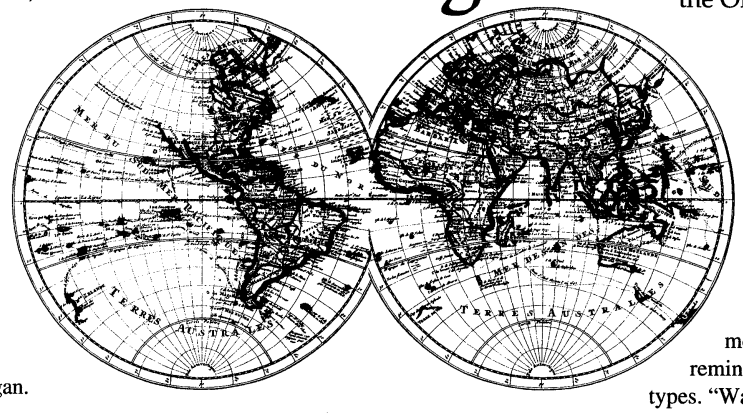
Third, there is simple pusillanimity. Tell believers in astrology that they are fools, and nothing happens. But if a university professor tells feminists or diversity scholars that their arguments are specious, they will demonstrate outside his office or torment feckless administrators until he is sacked.

Finally, there is sympathy. As Solzhenitsyn observed long ago, if you're a left-liberal, you have to have a sneaking sympathy for socialists, so in turn for communists. If you believe social justice requires confiscating most of what a productive person earns, why not all? The vast majority of academics are politically and socially liberal, as well as secular, and this colors even their skepticism.

Carroll's book is delightful, but not revolutionary. ❑

"Actually, his hidden agenda is all too obvious."

Terra Incognita



London

The wheels of justice grind exceeding slow, but exceeding fine in the United Kingdom, from a dispatch in the *Daily Mirror*:

> A 15-year-old juvenile delinquent charged with violating the terms of his anti-social behavior order was released when magistrates discovered that because of a misprint, the youth had been ordered not to be in public without alcohol, and that he was also duty bound to act in a threatening manner likely to cause harassment, alarm, and distress to others.

Fukuoka, Japan

How Japanese children prepare for adult life, from the *Japan Times*:

> Kidsbeer, a nonalcoholic brew aimed at children, is catching on with young drinkers and is posting monthly shipments of 75,000 bottles, according to maker Tomomasu. "Even kids cannot stand life unless they have a drink," reads the product's advertising slogan.

The European Union

Adulthood isn't what it used to be, from a dispatch in London's *Sun*:

> The EU has deemed it a health hazard for barmaids to show too much cleavage, saying they run a risk of skin cancer if they expose themselves to the sun when they go outside to collect glasses.
>
> In response, drinkers in Munich are threatening to boycott the famous Oktoberfest beer festival. Munich mayor Christian Ude said, "A waitress is no longer allowed to wander round a beer garden with a plunging neckline. I wouldn't want to enter a beer garden under those conditions."

London

Water conservation in the United Kingdom, from a report in the *Guardian*:

> Legal threats from the Thames Water utility company forced Mark McGowan to turn off his exhibit called "The Running Tap." McGowan had turned on the kitchen faucet in a south London gallery, and planned to leave it running for an entire year, in an effort to protest wasted water in London.

Oslo, Norway

Advance in penal science, reported by *Ringerikes Blad*:

> A Norwegian prison has stopped giving yoga sessions to inmates after finding that some of the prisoners became more aggressive and agitated. Prison warden Sigbjoern Hagen said that deep breathing exercises could make the inmates more dangerous by unblocking their psychological barriers.

Los Angeles

Advance in cartographic prudery, from the *Los Angeles Times*:

> Comments from a handful of passers-by led to a last-minute alteration of a map of Los Angeles County being shown at the California State Fair.
>
> Los Angeles County officials ordered a small section near Malibu cut off a map prepared for display at an exhibit celebrating California's counties. A few passers-by said the area resembled male genitalia.

Miami

Progress in racial sensitivity in the Old South, from the *Miami Herald*:

> Miami city leaders are apologizing for a news release that invited summer campers to a "Ghetto Style Talent Show" and "Watermelon Eating Contest." The release said that children participating in the summer camp who "know the meaning of ghetto style" would have a chance to "prove just how ghetto they are."
>
> Critics said that the watermelon eating contest is a painful reminder of racially insensitive stereotypes. "Watermelon, back in the days, was a good food for African-Americans, according to the Bible, but at the same time, it had an attachment with slavery and bondage ties," the Rev. Carl Johnson said.

Seattle

Novel legal theory, from the bowels of Ecotopia, noted in the *Seattle Times*:

> James C. Garrett, who has a felony conviction for assaulting former Seattle mayor Paul Schell with a bullhorn, wants to run for mayor himself.
>
> To support his candidacy, he argued in an administrative hearing that the Washington state law which bars him, as a convicted felon, from running for public office should not apply because the U.S. government's authority is invalid, and because he suffers from "post-traumatic slavery syndrome."

San Bernadino, Calif.

Advance in the struggle against metaphorical starvation in elementary schools, from the stalwart *San Bernadino Sun*:

> Sociology professor Mary Texeira commended the Board of Education for agreeing to incorporate Ebonics into school programs for black students. "For many of these students Ebonics is their language, and it should be considered a foreign language. These students should be taught like other students who speak a foreign language."
>
> Texeira also compared the low performance of black students to starvation: "How can you be angry when you feed a family of starving children?"

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(Readers are invited to forward news clippings or other items for publication in Terra Incognita, or email to terraincognita@libertyunbound.com.)

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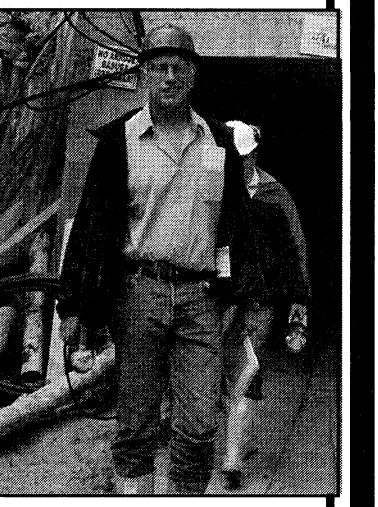

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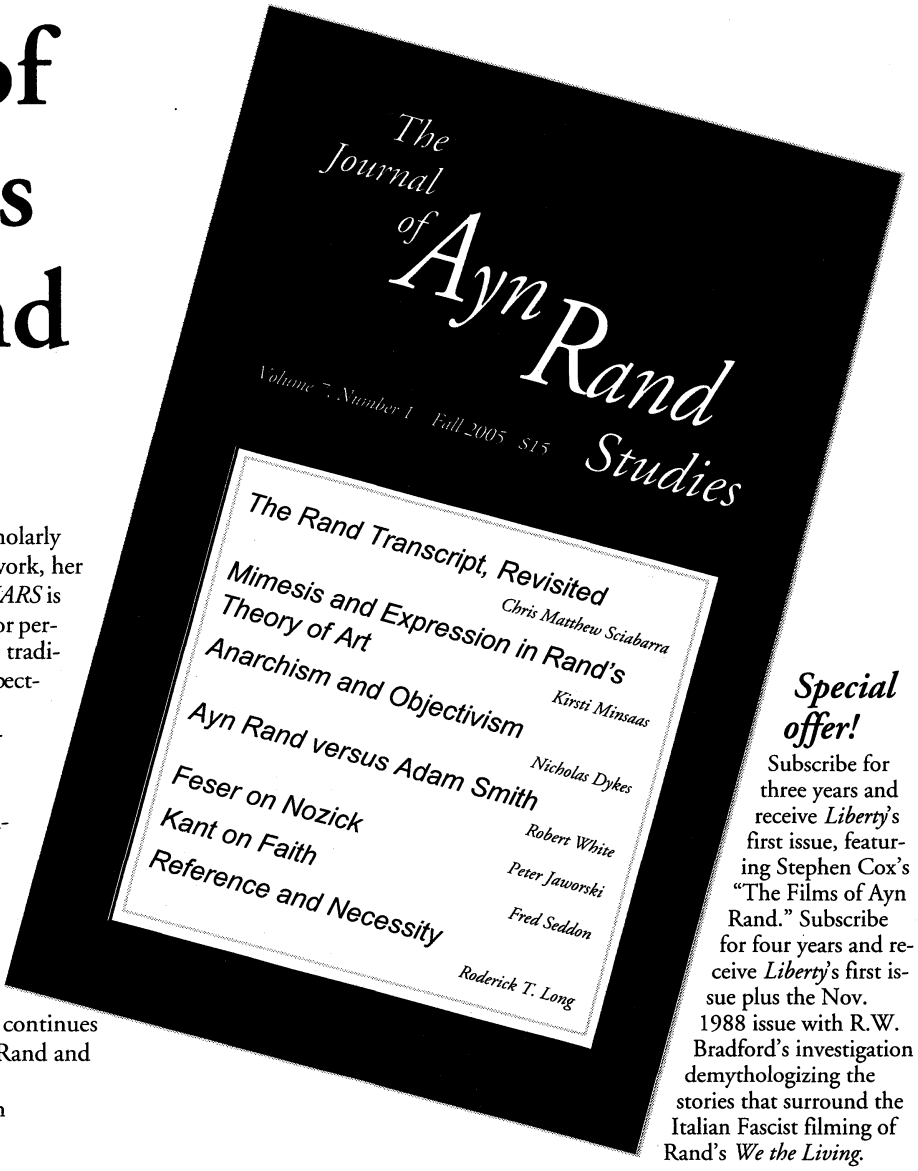

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