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Letters

Some of His Best Friends

On page 7 in Reflections of the July issue is a cartoon. In the cartoon two women are talking about a man standing nearby. The caption is "Politics is difficult for Leonard these days — his racism conflicts with his sexism."

Leonard could be me in shape, style, age, and politics. Married for 43 years to my high school sweetheart, with two grown daughters, I can legitimately attest to 66 years of experiences with women. A white resident of Prince George's County, MD for virtually 65 years, I can also attest to experiences with other races and cultures.

The cartoon implies Leonard can't look past race and gender when making political decisions. I play the cards I am dealt. If my experiences lead me to have a particular point of view, I can't and won't attempt to change that to be politically correct. I am a libertarian at heart, but not a fool. Leonard and I might agree that "sexism" and "racism" are words used to stifle people who rely on "realism" when they make decisions and are otherwise meaningless terms. Sadly Leonard can't speak for himself.

Charles Goines
Lanham, MD

Maximum Viscosity

I read a very disturbing and cold-hearted article in your magazine by Erwin Haas (Reflections, June) about how those folks in the Gulf should quit their bitchin' and just lie back and enjoy the BP rape of their livelihoods and homes. I personally thought the article

was poorly timed, but I had to remind myself that in today's world, there is so little compassion and empathy for the pain and hardship of others when there is so much money to be made exploiting this tragedy by self-centered assholes like Haas.

So given Haas' love affair with seeping oil, and this magazine's promotion of his ideas, I thought we could use his personal property in Michigan, and your corporate headquarters in Nevada, as places that the citizens can dump their used oil. Hell, he *can't* object after the article he wrote, and neither can you, you'd be hypocrites!

So, if you would so kindly provide me with Mr. Haas' address, that would be great. I'll advertise it and everyone in Michigan can dump their waste oil at this house. And ditto in Nevada.

I'll be awaiting your reply!

Mark Leslie
Denver, CO

There's a Law for That

An item in Terra Incognita (June) reported that the principal of Danvers High School has decreed that the word "meep" (the only word spoken by the Muppet Beaker) is now considered profanity because students used it to disrupt school. When I was in school, there was one rule against disrupting classes and that rule was enforced with detentions, extra homework, etc. We didn't have individual rules against burping, group hiccupping, or other tactics my friends and I would occasionally use to disrupt class.

Letters to the editor

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This is typical of those in authority today. They would rather *appear* to be addressing a problem than work to *actually* address it. States across the country are passing laws against using cellphones while driving, rather than enforcing existing laws against reckless driving. I suppose it's okay now to drive while shaving, applying makeup, or eating a bowl of cereal, just as long as we don't touch that cellphone. Prince George's County, MD, responded to a perceived increase in car thefts by making it illegal to warm up one's own car

where it could be visible from the street, turning many law-abiding citizens into criminals. Where does the madness end?

Paul L. Booth
Boonsboro, MD

On Morality

In David Ramsay Steele's review of my book, "The Myth of Natural Rights and Other Essays" (June), it is interesting to see that he agrees with me to some extent in rejecting natural rights a la Rand and Rothbard. But here are some responses to some of his criticisms.

From the Editor

To me, one of the most boring features of the mainstream media is their greed for "fairness."

Fairness is the Medusa's head that strikes mainstream reporters' brains to stone. If they interview a politician who is advocating a tax increase, and he recites the magic formula, "We want every American to pay a fair tax," all serious questioning stops. No one would dream of asking, "Fair? What's your definition of 'fair'?" — much less, "Don't you just want to get more out of the taxpayers?" No high-class interviewer would ever ask a question like, "Is it fair that most income taxes are paid by a small minority of people?" Putting questions like that wouldn't be "fair."

There's another aspect of fairness that depresses me. I'm thinking about all the time that's lost in interviewing people whose opinions are perfectly predictable. Suppose — which it is not very difficult to do — that Congress were considering a bill designed to shut down all industry in the United States, so that condors and sea turtles would no longer be endangered thereby. The media would respond by interviewing John Doe, owner of a widget factory, and Richard Roe, an environmental activist. One would oppose the bill; the other would support it. That would be fair — and the trivialization would be complete.

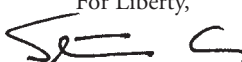
This is the kind of thing that happens all day, every day — every time the media ask a Republican spokesman and a Democratic spokesman for their assessments of an issue. Each side responds with its own inane talking points, created not by scholars or logicians but by junior members of a PR staff. And thus are the demands of fairness satisfied.

When I was an infant, there were only three television networks, and they were bound by a fairness code, established by the government, which required constant employment of the sort of fair representation and debate that I've just mentioned. It's a miracle the republic survived.

Real fairness is something different. Real fairness demands that individuals be requested to express their own ideas, not those of a party, movement, or other interest group; that they be given space to develop their evidence and logic; and that their ideas, their whole body of ideas, not just sound bites and talking points, be submitted to the judgment of their peers — to other intelligent people, willing to take some time to think through arguments and assess them on their own.

Fairness doesn't mean surveying a range of socially respectable opinions. It doesn't mean being nice. It means being an individual and having rational communication with other individuals. It means saying, "That's strange, but I think he's right"; or, "I hate to admit it, but she has a good point"; or, "I can't agree, but this certainly makes me think."

There ought to be a place for that kind of fairness. And Liberty is the place.

For Liberty,

Stephen Cox

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He says in the second paragraph that I condemn all moral judgments. But, to judge from the dictionary definition I recently looked at, to condemn is to make a moral judgment. And I am not so irrational and inconsistent as to make a moral judgment condemning all moral judgments. In this, as in other instances, Steele is misreading, or misrepresenting, what I wrote.

It would be closer to the truth to say that, for myself, I reject all moral judgments, as I define "moral" in "The Myth of Natural Rights." But it should be noted, as Steele never does in his review, that on pages 44–48 in my book one can see that the "morality" that I reject is any morality based on what Kant called "categorical imperatives," i.e. claims about alleged unconditional obligations or duties. I did not reject the possibility of hypothetical imperatives, claims about what one must do in order to achieve a desired goal, e.g., "If you want to be happy for the rest of your life, never make a pretty woman your wife." If someone wishes to make claims about alleged hypothetical imperatives and label those claims "moral judgments," then he is using the word "moral" differently than I did in "The Myth of Natural Rights," but we wouldn't necessarily have any substantive disagreement.

These distinctions are important because Steele says I attack all morality while ignoring my actual definition of "morality." As a result, he claims that I attack all sorts of things that I don't necessarily attack.

Steele writes, "The question then arises why, as Rollins seems to assume, self-interest should be privileged over other motives." But I don't know what he's talking about. In fact, on page 45, I wrote that "although I am an egoist of sorts, I nevertheless reject what Brian Medlin calls the principle of 'universal categorical egoism,' to wit, 'that we all ought to observe our own interests, because that is what we ought to do.' I say, to the contrary, that it is up to each individual, insofar as he has freedom of choice in the matter, to decide for himself whether or not to pursue his own interests." This is important because Steele makes a number of comments based on the false premise that I preach that everyone should always pursue their self-interest and nothing but their

self-interest. But I wrote no such thing.

Incidentally, many of Steele's comments seem to assume that he knows the specific meaning of "self-interest" for people other than himself. But how does he know? How, for example, does he know that no one who campaigned against slavery in England had any self-interest in doing so? In my opinion, self-interest is not an objective thing (bite it, Objectivists); it's subjective.

Steele says, "There's also the odd fact that when he inveighs against moral arguments, Rollins plainly exhibits an emotional tone that sounds very much like righteous indignation." Really? Plainly? I might take this more seriously if he cited any specific example(s) of what he has in mind, but he doesn't. For what it's worth, I don't remember feeling righteously indignant when I wrote that essay.

In any case, I don't deny that I sometimes get angry, but I do deny that anger is necessarily the expression of a moral judgment. If I accidentally stub my toe on the leg of a desk and feel pain and anger, am I expressing a moral judgment on myself? On my toe? On the leg of the desk? I don't think so. I think I'm having an emotional reaction to a painful experience. If I get angry when I hear a Zionist propagandist making false claims (e.g., all the land that Israel ever got from the Arabs was bought and paid for) in order to promote U.S. government support for Israel, a policy which I regard as inimical to my interests (though perhaps Steele knows better than I do what my interests are), am I thereby expressing a moral judgment about the Zionist misleader? No, I don't think so. I think it's an emotional reaction to something I regard as contrary to my interests. Why do so many moralists claim or imply, without any actual argument or proof, that an avowed amoralist is not supposed to have emotions? Why do emotions supposedly presuppose moral beliefs? Why aren't beliefs about self-interest sufficient to generate emotions?

There is much more I could say in reply to Steele's review, but, because of space limitations, I must stop here. However, there is a lengthier reply to Steele posted online at "The Hoover Hog" website.

L.A. Rollins
Bloomington, IL

Volcanic Disruption

I agree with James L. Payne (Reflections, June) that "environmentalism of the Al Gore variety is not a rational, responsible policy position," that "opposition to fossil fuels is an emotionally-based aversion," and that "environmentalists are not really interested in preventing global warming." This is all manifestly true.

But I definitely disagree that geoengineering a cooler global environment is "relatively cheap," "directly addresses the problem," or is "fast." Let me consider his leading geoengineering proposal: "high-flying airplanes spraying fine, reflective particles into the atmosphere" after the fashion of a massive volcanic eruption such as Krakatoa.

It is difficult to pin down measurements of volcanic eruptions, particularly as they might be early in history, but Krakatoa is figured to have erupted more than ten cubic kilometers of volcanic material. This material, tephra, consists mostly of the mineral rhyolite, which is composed mainly of quartz, with a density of 2.65 grams per cubic centimeter. This means that ten cubic kilometers of such material (100 billion cubic centimeters) equates to 2.65×10^8 kilograms, or approximately 583 million pounds. The payload of a modern airliner at maximum weight is on the order of half a million pounds. It is also estimated that Krakatoa lofted this material to an altitude of 80 kilometers, which is 50 miles, or 262,500 feet. Passenger jetliners of today are limited to about 45,000 feet in operating altitude. Military aircraft can perhaps approach 60,000 feet. The U-2 flew at 70,000 feet and the SR-71 was reputedly capable of operating at 85,000 feet. We have no cargo-class airplanes capable of operating at the altitudes necessary to distribute surrogate volcanic ash. Moreover, "fine ash" (which would stay aloft for extended periods) is on the order of 0.063 mm in size (or smaller), equivalent to 2.5 thousandths of an inch. This may actually be finer than air-delivered crop pesticide dust. There are no mechanisms for the distribution of millions of pounds of such material as an aerosol; they would have to be developed and proven. (If the dispersal

continued on page 44

Reflections

Bad company — In the wake of the ugly immigration debate in Arizona comes a suggestion from a Republican congressional candidate in Iowa that, prior to deporting illegals, we implant electronic tags in them. “I can microchip my dog so I can find it. Why can’t I microchip an illegal?” said the candidate, Pat Bertroche, adding, “It’s a lot cheaper than building a fence they can tunnel under.”

This may just one ignorant, pandering small-state pol, but it’s an extreme form of the attitude that increasingly characterizes the absolutist anti-immigration position, allowing for no shades of gray between legal and illegal. It’s the sort of attitude that cheers on racist thugs like Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio when he “gets tough on illegals,” detaining every Latino in sight even though half (or fewer) of the ones he pulls in are in the country illegally.

It is hard to imagine anyone opposed to the depredations of government rallying around a man who once forced a woman to give birth with her arms and legs shackled, yet not long back Sheriff Joe was tapped to give the headline speech at an Arizona Tea Party rally — the applause he received highlighting the schizoid split between those supporting the Tea Party for economic freedom, and those purely in it for the nativist fervor. There’s a reason that libertarian-leaning conservative groups are so susceptible to smears from opportunist race-baiters, and that reason is precisely this tolerance of tinpot authoritarianism masquerading as law-and-order. — Andrew Ferguson

Public served — Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) cemented her place in history as Congress’s most profligate spender by an impressive act: she opened her palatial new district office in San Francisco. Her Persian palace costs \$18,736 in rent — per month! Quite a tab for a 3,000-square-foot office. Her propaganda minister (sorry, spokesman) said that the outrageous rent (the highest to be paid for any member of Congress) was justified by the fact that Ms. Moneypissner has increased security needs and this is a “greener” office space. He may be right: Lord knows that most taxpayers hate her guts, and they are certainly shelling out more green for her new pad. — Gary Jason

Our private Siberia — Seeking a break from the seemingly endless cycle of news about the attempts of Congress and the Obama administration at remaking our country, I took refuge in fiction. Perhaps, I thought, I would take a literary journey though the Russian revolution and its aftermath — Boris Pasternak’s “Dr. Zhivago.” Compared to another population cursed to live in interesting times, we might not seem so bad off.

Like many other Russian literary classics, this novel offers

some timeless truths. One struck me as particularly relevant to the architects of today’s era of “change.” Speaking of those who inspired the revolution, Zhivago says:

“For them transitional periods, worlds in the making, are an end in themselves. They aren’t trained for anything else, they don’t know anything except that. And do you know why these never-ending preparations are so futile? It’s because these men haven’t any real capacities, they are incompetent.”

So much for getting away from contemporary troubles!

— Marlaime White

Barriers to competence — During the recent grilling of the Goldman Sachs management I was struck by an oft-repeated question about whether the executives were concerned more about the welfare of their clients or the welfare of their firm. The deeper question, assuming that the answer was one or the other, is how a firm that has a divergence between its interests and those of its clients can continue to exist. If a firm has a known divergence of interests with its clients and is still in business, a number of conclusions might be drawn.

It could be possible that for this type of business no one has come up with a way in which to align the interests of both parties. This problem is one of knowledge, and might especially plague industries in which results are difficult to evaluate or are not evident until a much later date. Medicine comes to mind.

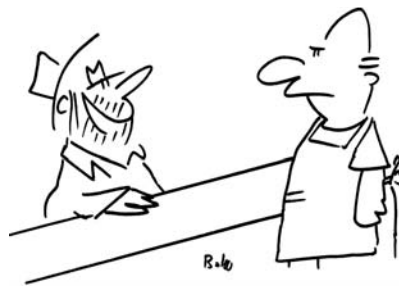
Or it may be that there are known ways of aligning interests, but they are illegal. For example, it is my understanding that it is illegal for stock brokers to cover client losses on stock recommendations.

Finally, in a corollary to the latter case, regulations and mandates may create such a barrier to entry that innovative business models that would potentially align the interests of clients and firms are

unlikely to be tried. Such a condition effectively produces a cartel of the already existing enterprises, which then provide uniformly mediocre services. How many times has your bank angered you, but you decide against changing because “they are all the same?”

In a free market, however, “consumer sovereignty” has a meaning, and firms that ignore it are destined for the trash heap. — Brian Gladish

Uncle Moneybags — In early June, the federal government set a new high (or low, to use a better term): its debt officially hit the \$13 trillion mark. That’s about \$42,000 for every citizen, babies included. And it represents \$2.4 trillion in new debt during the 500 days Obama has blessed this lucky nation with his presence in the Oval Office. It is a prodigious level of debt accumulation — nearly \$5 billion added to the national debt every day.



“Okay then, what’s the break on *twenty* drinks?”

I know what the ObamaRands (libertarians who back Obama) will shout (because it is what they always shout): “Yeah? Well, Bush was a big spender too!” True, but not this big: Obama’s rate of addition to the national debt is triple that of Bush. Obama is now the undisputed übermensch of fiscal folly. — Gary Jason

Batting 1.000 for 50 years — When Sen. Robert C. Byrd died last month, the Washington Post ran a front-page eulogy celebrating his “more than half a century in the Senate.” The writer declared that Byrd “used his canny mastery of the institution to protect its rules, shape the federal budget and, above all else, tend to the interests of his impoverished state.”

Since West Virginia is still an impoverished state after 50 years of tending, either a) Byrd wasn’t all that masterly, or

b) federal paternalism isn’t the solution for poverty.

— James L. Payne

Inside the Beltway — I recently spent a week in Washington, D.C. and noticed a number of things about current affairs in our nation’s capital.

First, the quality of the Washington Post has degenerated markedly during the Age of Obama. It has become one of the worst “major” daily newspapers I’ve ever read. Its biases, which are more in favor of Babbitt-like social conformity than of ideological partisanship, are overwhelming. Its articles are rewritten releases from the White House, various government agency press offices, and local institutions.

Case in point: while I was in town, the local pro basketball team drafted a highly-touted point guard from the University of Kentucky. The next day, the Post ran — on its front page —

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

Michael Christian has long been an adviser to this column. He’s especially valuable because of his fluency in European as well as American. When he said that he wanted to discuss a subject that I hadn’t paid much attention to — the subject of the “heft” or weight of words — I asked him to go ahead and write. Please take the column, I said, so long as you agree to give it back.

I think you’ll be interested in what he says. Here’s Michael Christian:

Stephen Cox’s complaints about our language can be weighty, and I usually find myself agreeing with them. My own complaint is about weight itself, or rather the lack of it, in English as it is spoken and written by the educated, the powerful, and the obtrusive. The problem is a lack of *heft*.

Long ago, when I was studying French, I learned to love the heft of a certain kind of English. Our mother tongue is full of words that are palpable, words you can stub your toe on. Yet these are the very words that every contemporary spokeshole seems to avoid. The detour these people take around good old rocky English is usually paved with French words.

In their own land, a lot of French words have their own heft. Quite the contrary with the French words that, over the centuries, have plumped up English vocabulary. These words tend to be fluffy.

Francis Ponge, a 20th-century French poet, loved the French etymological dictionary, “Le Dictionnaire d’Emile Littré de la Langue Française,” which is called with affection “le Littré.” According to Ponge, when he was still a boy, he discovered this great old dictionary of French in his father’s library. Many years later, his passion for the Littré seems to have grown. He said that the Littré would take you back, very far back, “very often farther even than the Latin, even unto the Vedic roots.” Ponge wanted to buttress the French language with the recycled stones from ancient, crumbled arches. As he put it, he wanted to “restore to French the density, the weight, and the thickness . . . that come from its most ancient origins.” In some of his poems, I think he succeeded.

Ponge felt that words possessed something beyond denotation and connotation. He was no postmodern semiotician, but he perceived some magic that happened between words and their referents, as though words, through their own history, spoke for

the things they could be used to describe.

However that may be, I agree that words often convey a powerful feeling about language itself, and the feeling often comes from the roots of words. This feeling, which Ponge called “density,” obsessed him. I’ll call the feeling “etymological heft,” or just “heft” for short.

By the way, the Oxford English Dictionary (our Littré, and then some) says that “heft” was lately derived (16th century) from “heave.” Now “heave” itself is an old word with plenty of heft in English, and the word “heft” gets a lot of that weightiness by association with “heave.” The OED takes “heave” back all the way to Teutonic and finds its first example in “Beowulf”: “Ic hond and rond hebban mihte”: “I could lift hand and shield” (“hebban” was a form of “heave”).

When I was reading in college and law school, I found heft in odd corners of French — in Ponge of course, in Rabelais (oodles of it), and in the obscene, slang-soaked pulp fiction of Frédéric Dard, who mostly wrote under the pseudonym “San-Antonio.” I learned to love language when it had that heft or grip, in French or English.

Dard used and produced so much argot, both collected and invented, that a long dictionary of his slang was published. I think his rule (and it’s a good one) was “always aim low.” He might substitute a verb for “talk,” which is “parler” in French, but it would never be “discourir” (equivalent to the grotesque verb in English “to discourse”); instead, it would be “papoter,” which means “to chat.” Actually, “papoter” is even better than “chat,” because it sounds silly.

Ponge’s early poems, my favorites, were descriptions of common objects. One such poem did nothing but describe an oyster. In that poem, Ponge said you could open the oyster’s stubbornly closed world with a “franc.” In this context, the best translation of “franc” is “a knife that is plain and suited to the task.” Ponge could have said “a plain knife” (using the French word “simple”) or “a short knife” (“court” in French). But “franc” is an old, common word. And old, common words tend to have many meanings — as handy to a poet as a “couteau franc” is to the shucker who goes through thousands of oysters at a Parisian brasserie.

The Littré gives “franc” more than 20 meanings, and several of

the picture of a herd of local children wearing clothes branded with the pro team's logo and cheering for the new player. A few years ago, the Los Angeles Times got into trouble for running such cozy propaganda for *its* local professional sports teams. But the L.A. paper has always been known as a hacky local booster; the Washington Post used to have higher journalistic aspirations.

No longer. These days, the Post exhibits little skepticism about any conventional wisdom — only the grasping boosterism of a small-town advertising salesman. It also has several quirks that may pass as sophistication locally but show their true provincial colors at a distance. Almost all its front-page articles are written by teams of two or three “reporters” whose racial or ethnic identity is readily apparent in their names. Evidently, it takes a small committee of multi-culti mouth breathers to change some words here and there in the offi-

cial line. Woodward and Bernstein's investigative reporting seems like an ancient legend, lost in the mists of time — even though both men are still alive and Woodward is still affiliated with the wretched paper.

Second: I visited a couple of the Smithsonian museums for the first time in many years. They remain much as I remember them, with one noteworthy exception: the Air and Space Museum now includes several air- and spacecraft built by Burt Rutan. For those of you who don't follow the aerospace industry, Rutan is an iconoclastic California-based pilot, engineer, and designer who has breathed life into the prospect of private-sector space travel. His distinctively designed spaceplanes are being used by Richard Branson's for-profit Virgin Galactic space travel venture.

Rutan is a person whom Ayn Rand might have dreamed up. His work, hanging in the Smithsonian, is an unexpected

them suit Ponge's poem. They include such notions as “free,” “suitable,” “tidy and strong,” and “true.” Better yet, the Littré's version of the word's history gives us the Celtic tribe, the Francs, whose name came to mean “free,” because they, before Caesar, conquered Gaul and thereby became free men among subject men. They were the knife that first opened the oyster of Gaul. I have no doubt that Ponge was aware of this.

But English is better than French. It offers heft by the imperial ton. And here's a curious thing: English has some Vedic roots, like those revealed in Ponge's beloved dictionary, but they don't reach us by passing through French. French is a huge graft on the trunk of English. When you graft a branch, the roots don't come with it, do they? The old roots of French words didn't make it over to England. They branched without the roots, and consequently without the heft.

Of course you can get out your OED and trace the history of a word from English to French to Latin and so on to Indo-European (“Vedic”), but you can't feel the density, weight, and thickness of the ancient roots when they come through French. When we find heft in English, it usually comes from the Old English, the Germanic, the Norse. It recalls battles in the snow and trolls under bridges, not gods on Olympus.

Old French words have heft — in French. In English, the huge vocabulary that comes from French is the source of the lightest, fluffiest words, the darlings of shallow, clever writers. To put my hand on an example of “shallow” and “clever,” all I have to do is reach out to my fellow Harvard Law alumni. Speaking at Wayne State University, Michelle Obama said, “Embracing our challenges and not shrinking from them is the surest way to succeed.” Just imagine if she had used hefty, old words: “hugging our worries. . . .” It prompts one to wonder what the hell she was talking about. And that's the point. If you don't have anything to say, use words that fog up the picture you are making, like Vaseline on a camera lens. Most of the audience will just assume that “embracing our challenges” must mean something smart and will let it go and move on to the next idiocy.

To my ear, sometime before the middle of the past century both French and American lost their heft. But “lost” is too passive. They gave it up. They dumped it. Why? I think it was a fashion for cleverness, on both sides of the Atlantic. The catwalks of academia paraded mostly cleverness, and cleverness is brainpower that can't be bothered. It's a display of cheap, shiny things: “Watch my

synapses fire.” It's unoriginal, easy, and everywhere. It's lazy (which is probably why it will persist as long as it's rewarded). It's also the kryptonite to super heft. More clever, less hefty.

In English as a rule, the more Frenchy a word is, the more it flits away from its object and the less heft it has — very handy if you want to appear clever but have nothing to say. Modern English usage has more and more French in it and less and less heft. At least that's what I read and hear.

Probably the scribbling and chatting classes who ought to use hefty language but don't are bad examples. Some other parts of our language don't get so messed up with fashion or the aversion to meaning that has become the trademark of the academic, the bureaucrat, the politician, the consultant, the expert, and (God forbid) even the businessman. You are safe when the bus driver says, “Get off here for Balboa Park.” Nothing special, true, but a lot better than the San Diego city buses' spokesman who actually wrote, “The problem of emissions from vehicle emissions is accelerating.” I can translate that sentence into French without even changing the words; that's how Frenchy it is: “Le problème d'émissions véhiculaires des véhicules s'accélère.” Ghastly in both tongues. Why not, “Cars keep spewing more dirt”? OK, “cars” has some Latin associations, but it didn't reach us rootless through the French. It came to Middle English from Late Latin and found a home in almost all the Celtic tongues too. Hefty enough for me. Let's not be puritanical about it.

Or how about in the 2008 Olympics, when the NBC commentator said, as rain fell on the beach volleyball final, that the ball would “accumulate moisture.” Couldn't it just get wet?

I admit that you can hardly produce a sentence in English without using a word that comes from French. But whenever you succeed in avoiding all French and Latinate words, it's a sure bet that your words will have heft. It takes a little work, because you will have to say what you mean. With hefty English you can't just kick up a cloud of confused images that other people are supposed to credit with meaning.

Try it. Women, don't cover yourselves in lingerie; put on your smallclothes, or take them off. Criminals and libertarians, don't contravene venerable procedures; break the old rules. Spokesmen and politicians, don't generate a negative news story; slander. Businessmen and consultants, don't discover potential synergies; just don't. (They're merely excuses for paying too much in a merger.) Writers, don't compose your discourse; root around for some heft.

(and perhaps inadvertent) endorsement of capitalism and individualism.

I hope the sweaty tourists rushing through the museums will linger long enough to read the short writeups on Rutan's designs. The impression I took away from my visit is that most of the visitors weren't stopping long enough to absorb what they were seeing. But maybe one or two kids will read enough about Rutan to emulate him.

Finally, I saw the James Cameron film "Avatar" in giant-screen, 3-D format at an IMAX theater attached to one of the Smithsonian branches. IMAX technology is impressive, though it costs a lot to film in a way that takes advantage of the huge display and high resolutions. In the early years of the IMAX format, only a handful of rather dry short-format nature documentaries was available. But recently some big-budget commercial films have been made (at least partly) in IMAX format. An effects-heavy visual fantasy like "Avatar" benefits from the huge screen.

And there were some interesting aspects of seeing a film at the Smithsonian. "Avatar" screened after hours (even the expanded summer hours), and the entrances to the theater weren't specially marked, so getting in took some initiative and a healthy disregard for the hours actually posted. And other posted rules. All around the theater were written and recorded admonitions that food and drinks weren't allowed in the IMAX theater. But, at the ticket counter, the staff had set up an officially-sanctioned concession cart, complete with the sort of candy and soft drinks available at most other theaters. It was a flicker of capitalist life in a collectivist mausoleum.

I did my small part to support that flicker. I bought a Diet Coke and some M&Ms.

— Jim Walsh

The death of Superman — The liberals are sure to try to spin the BP Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster as a story in which evil Big Business has destroyed the beauty of the natural environment and recklessly devastated the helpless Gulf community. Curiously enough, I think that the proper reaction is not to rush to BP's defense.

BP made a mistake and should be held accountable. I have always been an environmentalist, almost in the tradition of Robert Nozick, in my belief that if a businessman poisons my drinking water and I get sick and I can prove that the pollution was the cause of my illness, then it is just for me to exact restitution from him. We should not (and cannot) ban offshore oil drilling, but accident victims should be compensated.

Nevertheless, this disaster can be turned to the advantage of libertarians, because it pulls back the curtain and reveals the Wizard of Oz for the charlatan he is. If Obama really were the superhero that he presented himself as, he would have put the spill under the government's direct control, and he and his brilliant bureaucrats and engineers would have created some sort of genius solution that would have plugged the leak immediately. I am sure he wanted to do so — only he couldn't. He couldn't because the government is not, after all, superhuman. It is limited by all the ignorance and weakness of human beings. As it turned out, BP had better technological expertise and equipment than the glorious almighty government, so BP was left in control of the oil spill.

America will continue to watch on TV as more and more oil gushes out of that pipe and the president is incapable of

doing anything other than make fancy speeches. I would not want to rely upon Obama in an emergency — and that is scary, because one day the entire nation might have to do so.

— Russell Hasan

The civic teat — "MTA" usually refers to New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority, but it could just as well stand for "Major Taxpayer Aggravation." An article in The New York Times (June 2) points out what an aggravation it is.

It turns out that over 8,000 MTA employees earn more than \$100,000 a year in compensation. This isn't just high-level management; it's also conductors, engineers, and police officers. In fact, one conductor made over \$239,000 last year (including overtime), which is thousands more than even the CEO of the MTA makes. Fifty MTA employees earned over \$200,000, including two car repairmen and a dozen police officers.

This helps to explain why the outfit's sprawling bureaucracy, embracing over 70,000 employees, all protected by lavish union contracts, is in such deep economic cat crap. The MTA has a budget deficit of \$400 million. Sixty percent of its massive \$7 billion budget goes to cover labor costs.

The reason for this mess is not simply high base salaries, but also the insanely generous perks and benefits that employees receive. For example, the MTA pays out over \$560 million yearly in overtime alone. Then there are the magnificent sick-day and vacation time provisions.

In the year he retired, one prince of labor — a conductor! — pocketed a base salary of \$67,000, another \$67,000 in overtime, and \$100,000 in unused sick and vacation time. Then there was the frisky fellow, a locomotive engineer, who got \$75,000 in base salary, \$52,000 in overtime pay, and \$95,000 in "penalty payments" for such things as having to move his locomotive to a repair facility or operating a train outside the yard.

Clearly, this is an out-of-control agency, deeply in need of privatization.

— Gary Jason

Working man — I recently reread "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress" and found myself wondering whether the author, Robert Heinlein, intended the character Mike to have a special symbolic meaning, and if so, what Mike's symbolism might be.

As the AI supercomputer that controls all Luna electronics and communications, Mike is the reason why Luna's libertarian revolution succeeds. Indeed, there are perhaps ten different places in the novel where Mike's superhuman ability to think and his control over machines makes the difference between success and failure.

Mike is the key to a libertarian future, but what is Mike? Mike has no purely political interest in the revolution and helps the revolutionaries only for the sake of his friendship with them. So is Heinlein saying that libertarians need to appeal to the masses at a more emotional level rather than through dry political ideology? Despite his encyclopedic knowledge, Mike has something of the ignorance and curiosity of a child. So is it Heinlein's message that appealing to youth is the key to advancing the movement?

The most obvious symbolism of a libertarian supercomputer is that the support of the highly scientific intelligentsia,

in other words the computer geeks, could be decisive in creating a more libertarian world — and Heinlein’s science fiction has gone a long way towards making nerd subculture into a libertarian haven. Mike might simply represent highly intelligent people, as evidenced by his broad knowledge and his scorn for people who are “stupid.”

But there is one possibility that I consider most likely: as someone who writes libertarian science fiction short stories in my spare time, I can say that whenever a science fiction author runs into trouble with structuring a plot and needs to do something that cannot easily be done, the most convenient thing is to use a *deus ex machina* tactic and develop a technological gimmick that will make the plot work. Heinlein needed libertarian Luna to defeat statist Terra, something that was implausible, so he invented a superhuman AI computer to make it more plausible. Paradoxically, Mike’s ultimate symbolism may be that no human being could make a libertarian revolution succeed without technological divine intervention. Nonetheless, “Moon” is still an uplifting novel because its characters are willing to devote their lives passionately to the cause of freedom, and in this aspect Mike is, ironically, one of the most deeply human characters in the book.

— Russell Hasan

To keep and bear — Shortly before press time, the United States Supreme Court delivered its opinion in the *McDonald v. Chicago* case. The opinion, including concurrences and dissents, is easily accessible online. It is something every American citizen should read — all 214 pages.

Basically, the Court extends its prior ruling in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, challenging the District’s ban on handgun ownership. The ruling stated that self-defense is the central component of the 2nd Amendment right, and that citizens must be permitted to use handguns for the core lawful purpose of self-defense.

Justice Alito delivered the *McDonald* majority opinion, holding that the 2nd Amendment right is fully applicable to the states through the 14th Amendment’s due process clause. To arrive at that conclusion, the Court determined that the 2nd Amendment right to keep and bear arms is fundamental to our scheme of ordered liberty and deeply rooted in the nation’s history and tradition. The majority opinion’s historical review demonstrates that the right to keep and bear arms is a long-held fundamental principle, integral to our free republic.

Justice Thomas concurs, but maintains that the shorter route to the same conclusion is through the 14th Amendment’s privileges and immunities clause, which stipulates that no state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States. Thomas states that the intent of the 14th Amendment was to be understood by ordinary citizens. His historical review demonstrates that citizens would have understood the clause to protect constitutionally enumerated rights, including the right to keep and bear arms. That opinion is worth reading for the history lessons alone.

The *McDonald* opinion will surely be the subject of much debate and commentary for a long time. Though I am no constitutional scholar, as a libertarian I believe this opinion raises two issues of primary importance for a free society.

First, the different paths to same conclusion presented by Alito and Thomas force us to think about the origins of our rights. Is the 2nd Amendment right to keep and bear arms incorporated under the due process clause to extend to the states because it is deeply rooted in our history or fundamental to our scheme of ordered liberty, or is it a prior right automatically imparted to an American citizen by virtue of citizenship?

Second, the subjective approach laid out in Justice Stevens’ dissent demonstrates how treating the Constitution as a “living document” ultimately leaves citizens’ rights to the whims of judges. The debate between Justice Scalia (in his concurrence) and Justice Stevens (in his dissent) forces us to consider the temporal context of our liberties. Are the principles of liberty timeless, or are they flexible conceptions mutable by society’s contemporary needs? And who really decides these questions?

— Marlane White

Health scare — A report by Reuters (May 31) indicates what the United States faces now that Obamacare is the law of the land. The goal of Obamacare was (and remains) an eventual “single-payer” (i.e., socialized) healthcare system, such as Canada has. The Reuters story is about what’s happening in Canada’s healthcare system today.

It turns out that the Canadian system is now eating up 40% of the budgets of the provinces, or about \$174 billion. And spending has been rising at about 6% a year. Ontario projects that at the current rate of increase, in 12 years the national healthcare system will take 70% of the provincial budget. The system faces “spiraling costs for new medical technologies and drugs,” and the financial problems are only going to get worse as the baby boomers retire. During the next 25 years, the proportion of old people will rise to 25% of the population.

What are the Canadians doing to stop the escalating costs? Some drastic things, indeed. Ontario has announced it will be cutting in half the amount paid for generic drugs and will eliminate “incentive fees” for generic drug companies. British Columbia is moving from block grants to hospitals to fee-for-procedure reimbursements. Quebec has a plan to move to a flat health tax and payments for all visits to clinics. Other provinces are looking at private options for such procedures as hip, knee, and cataract surgery.

It could get even worse: some provinces are considering means-testing (that is, denying free service to the very people who have been most heavily taxed to support the system) and adopting an “evidence-based” model of medicine (that is, taking decisions about whether or not to give advanced or new treatments to patients out of the hands of doctors and putting them in the hands of panels of bureaucrats tasked to lower costs — death panels, so to speak).

This is now our future.

— Gary Jason

Counting coup — I was doing some simple multitasking the other afternoon, sitting on my front sidewalk picking some small weeds out from between the pavers while listening to a talk show and waiting for my wife to come out and go for a ride.

Focusing on the weeds with my head down and listening to the radio, I didn’t see or hear anyone coming into the yard. I first noticed that someone was there when I looked ahead a dozen pavers or so to see how many weeds were left, and I

saw a pair of feet in some blue and white tennis shoes.

I glanced up and saw a smiling person who looked like a twin to that middle-aged Englishwoman who became an instant hit by singing on "Britain's Got Talent" — that plain and plump frump who told judge Simon Cowell and the rest of the world that she was single, lived with her cat, Pebbles, and had never been kissed.

"I'm from the census," she said, sheepishly. "I'm only doing this part-time."

I had seen the national job creation numbers a few days earlier. Almost no jobs were being created in the private sector. The only real job creation was census workers occupying temporary government jobs, like the person standing in front of me.

She said it would take only a few minutes; only a couple of questions needed to be asked. She said she was there because I hadn't mailed in my form.

I did mail it in, weeks earlier, I told her, politely.

She read my street name and number from her clipboard. Both were wrong, I told her.

"No," she said. "This says you live at the address written here."

"No," I said, still politely, "I've been at this address for decades. I know my street name and address. We're in my yard." Actually, I've been in the neighborhood since before World War II was over.

"Well," she replied, "let's just go over these questions and I'll mark your answers for the address I have here."

"No," I said, remaining polite and friendly. "That's some other guy's address. I can't answer for him."

She asked me the location of the street on the form. It was one street over, I told her.

"Thank you," she said, as she moved on. "Okay," I said, "hope you get it," thinking how crazy it is for the government to put up roadblocks to the creation of real jobs in the private sector and then send these people around with clipboards and run ads on the radio telling us to cooperate with them so we can get our fair share of the federal largess. — Ralph Reiland

Fool me twice — On June 6, the estimable Mara Liasson commented on the administration's offers of jobs to Joe Sestak and Andrew Romanoff if they would stay out of Democratic primaries, and on the administration's long effort to obscure the facts. Liasson said, "It's always the stonewalling and the coverup that gets you in trouble."

That's the conventional wisdom; everybody expresses it. But it's way below Mara's pay grade.

If she, and all the other political commentators I have heard, were confidential advisers to the president, they would presumably tell him to make everything public as soon as possible, no matter how bad it looked, and thus avoid any long, Watergate-style inquisitions — because *coverups don't work*. But nobody knows how many cover-ups do work, and therefore remain . . . covered up. My own assumption is that the vast majority of coverups are successful.

Granted, the internet has made it much easier to detect and publicize our leaders' indiscretions. The only surprise is that so many politicians still find it hard to understand that their street behavior is constantly being videotaped, and that it doesn't go over very well when you flatly deny say-

ing something that people can watch you say on YouTube till their computers wear out. President Obama is one of the slow learners. He always acts as if there weren't a video record of 60% of his waking hours, because that's the amount of time he spends ranting in public.

But do you think that any significant proportion of the dirty business that goes on inside the White House ever gets into the news? And do you think that your local congressman faces any considerable risk of exposure when he accepts favors to advance a constituent's bill, or beds a prostitute on his visit to the All-American Apiary Exposition? If there were any substantial risk of exposure, the papers would run hundreds of column inches, every day, just on the escaping facts.

To cite a venerable authority, "You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, and those are pretty good odds." — Stephen Cox

Arms and the man — "A well regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed."

In *McDonald v. Chicago*, the Supreme Court just committed another error. The majority found that we can keep our guns to protect our homes and families against assailants and intruders. But I opine that personal protection was not the reason for the 2nd Amendment.

The first clause has always been a bit of a mystery, but any thoughtful student of Latin (which the aging altar boys on the Supreme Court probably forgot or never fully understood) would recognize the gerundive construction. The Latin gerundive creates a kind of polarity that contrasts or creates tension between one phrase and another. Latin uses this all the time, and those of us who have translated a lot of that language got used to "that old gerundive feeling" both in translation and in how we would use similar constructions in English.

Think about how the first clause contrasts with the second in the following sentence: "The weather being bad, we decided to stay indoors." This sentence sounds stilted to modern ears, but we all understand it to say, "Because the weather was bad, we did thus and so." So those of us who have retained that old gerundive feeling would normally construe the first phrase of the 2nd Amendment as, in modern language: "Because a well regulated Militia is necessary," or "In light of the fact that a well regulated Militia is necessary."

The Founding Fathers, who knew and skillfully imitated Latin constructions, certainly had that old gerundive feeling and used it to express economically and accurately what they wanted to say.

The other key term in the Amendment is "Arms." The Founders did not say "guns" or "handguns." "Arms," which are larger and more potent weapons, are used by soldiers to bully people and kill enemies. As a parallel, the Constitution mentions letters of marque and reprisal. These allow for arming private merchant ships so they can be used for war. The Founders saw no problem entrusting citizens with arms and the means of waging war. Using guns for hunting or protection against robbers was not the purpose envisioned in the 2nd Amendment.

Among the uses of arms that the Founders did envision were of course attacks on the English or French, or hostile Indians. The Founders had also been at war with the king of

England and had themselves used arms against governments and their organized forces. They were nervous about the government that they had just created, and they clearly meant that the people should retain the means to rid themselves of a new government if it became as obnoxious as the king of England had been.

I suggest that the original meaning of the 2nd Amendment might be restated in contemporary English in this way: "Because, on the one hand, the state needs an armed militia, the people, on the other hand, shall retain their own weapons to counteract the state." The Founders weren't that prolix. They used the brevity and exactness of expression that any educated person would have appreciated in 1790. Nevertheless, I believe I have paraphrased their meaning accurately enough.

If my interpretation is correct, the government cannot constitutionally stop people from owning tanks, bombs, artillery pieces, and so on. In my sober moments, I'd worry if some libertarians I know kept atomic bombs around. So I admit the need to impose a few rules on the ownership of weapons. Yet the media's reaction to *McDonald* was way overboard. They preempted the politicians in proposing regulations to counter the decision. They called for states and cities to restrict the sale, carrying, and holding of weapons, because unrestricted gun ownership would otherwise, surely, result in a bloodbath.

Poppycock.

I can make the argument that private guns alone have kept the peace in America and saved millions of lives. Hitler, Stalin, and Mao banned private arms and then were able to subject their defenseless populations to the carnages of WWII and the Cultural Revolution (more aptly named the Revolution Against Culture). Americans probably hold 300 million private firearms. Disarming them would be futile. If any substantial number of citizens with guns were mobilized they could deter any army from attacking them. Being armed deters force from being used to influence American life and shields us from the really catastrophic slaughters suffered by disarmed people elsewhere.

— Erwin Haas

Damned statistics — Even though I am a libertarian I am a registered member of the Republican Party, not the Libertarian Party. I simply see no reason to support a party that can't win, and I sometimes fall victim to the naive optimism that the Grand Old Party will one day reclaim its small-government roots.

So I was very happy when I recently received a letter from the chairman of the GOP that contained a survey seeking information about the beliefs of Republican voters. Oh, good, I thought, my party wants to know what I think. I will finally have a chance to voice my opinion and tell the party that it should focus more on economic issues and less on social issues and national security.

It was with some dismay that I saw that every question in the survey was a yes-no, loaded, question-begging query: for instance (to paraphrase), "Do you hate Obama's granting a right to trial to War on Terror detainees, which brings us closer to being destroyed by Islamic terrorists?"; "Do you disagree with allowing innocent living human beings to be murdered by abortion doctors?"

I did agree with some of the questions, such as (again, a

paraphrase), "Do you hate Obama, Reid, and Pelosi's evil liberal agenda?" But it was disheartening to know that the GOP doesn't really want to listen to me.

Then, at the end of the survey, I saw a clue to its proper interpretation: it requested that I donate \$25, \$50, or \$100 when I returned it, and there was no option listed for sending it in without a donation.

It would take a lot more than this to make me abandon the GOP, but I subsequently filed the "survey" in my round filing cabinet.

— Russell Hasan

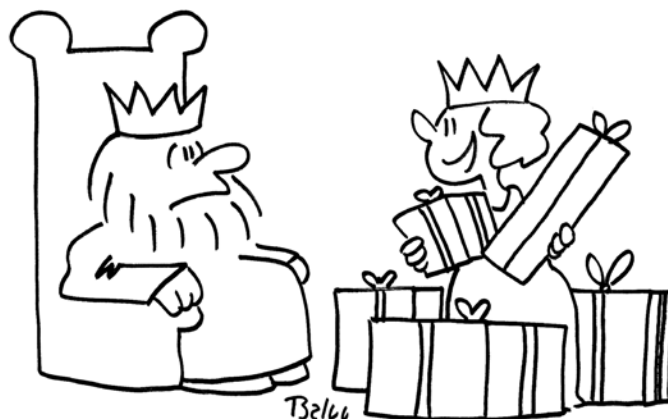
Taxing questions — Politicians and economists each advocate a certain type of taxes, quarreling over consumption vs. capital taxes, with myriad sub-schools within each camp. But should libertarians care? Our preference for individual liberty means that we favor institutions that minimize government interventions. Anarchocapitalists would argue for no government, while minimalists would argue for the "night watchman" state. (But, then, why not privatize that too?) The immediate challenge, however, is not that Shining City on the Hill to which we aspire but what advice, if any, we can provide those seeking to modify existing taxes.

Business types tend to favor lower taxes on capital, making the case that such taxes allow more investment, leading to greater economic growth. This is certainly plausible. Some economists argue that consumption taxes are "better" because (in a world of increasing taxes) a shift toward this type of tax would lessen the burden on economic growth.

But each of us faces a similar choice daily: to put some money aside for the future, or to make a useful or pleasant purchase today. No libertarian would think that government should make the decision for us, but picking one tax over another does that for all of us.

Tax analysts can help us understand the consequences of alternative tax policies (and, as individuals, may have their own preferences), but why should we care? Note also that the analysis is far from easy. Higher consumption today may well encourage innovations and capital growth; higher investments today may well accelerate improvements in productivity, lowering the cost of consumption tomorrow.

Allowing elites to make these choices is certainly dangerous — and it becomes ever more dangerous in a world where



"Don't worry — I used a bond issue."

government, and thus the burdens of government (taxes, mandates, regulations, subsidies), are ever more liberty-denying, making us all suffer the consequences of *their* choices.

— Fred Smith

Paper loss — The dream of the American neosocialist is to turn the United States into just another European welfare state, with massive taxes, endless regulations, limitless “safety net” (welfare) programs, punitive taxation, redistribution of wealth from the productive to the unproductive, the nationalization of failing industries — all administered by a closed, charmed circle of managerial elites. Obama has pursued this dream monomaniacally.

But this dream has its costs. A news story on CNBC.com (June 29) brings this point home. In a report virtually ignored by the mainstream media, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that the losses of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac — which have already amounted to \$145 billion — will soon balloon to \$400 billion. And some experts are now suggesting that if the housing market drops much farther, the cost will soar to a trillion dollars.

All these losses Obama put entirely on the backs of American taxpayers, with one stroke of his pen late last year. But, hey, it’s not his money, so why should he worry?

— Gary Jason

Forever war — As June came to an end a remarkable article appeared in Rolling Stone magazine. Designed as a profile of Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, it went viral immediately. Rolling Stone’s reporter was given unprecedented access to McChrystal and his staff, and made the most of the opportunity. McChrystal and his people let down their hair in the reporter’s presence, and on the record to boot. They were scathing in their remarks about Vice President Joe Biden, national security adviser James Jones, U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan-Pakistan Richard Holbrooke, and U.S. ambassador in Kabul (and retired general) Karl Eikenberry. Additionally, they expressed contempt for some of the allied forces serving beside our troops in the field. McChrystal’s staff also let the reporter know that their general had found his two meetings with the president disappointing.

Gen. McChrystal was a very capable chief of special operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in the years from 2003 to 2008. It was his success in that role that paved the way for his appointment to command NATO’s forces in Afghanistan in 2009. But there had been doubts about McChrystal going back to his early days in charge of special ops. In 2004 he had signed off on the blatant falsehood that Pat Tillman had died heroically under enemy fire, when in fact it was a case of fratricide. In this writer’s opinion, McChrystal should have been cashiered then. But the Army took no action. In 2009, shortly after assuming command in Afghanistan, McChrystal went public with his desire for a major troop increase at a time when Obama was attempting to decide what our policy should be. This was unacceptable behavior for a soldier, but McChrystal escaped with nothing more than a talking-to by the president. Eisenhower would have sent McChrystal packing — although it’s unlikely, of course, that any general would have tried such a stunt on Ike. But the faintly unmilitary aura surrounding Barack Obama, who appears to be intimidated by the brass,

encourages cowboys like McChrystal to push the constitutional envelope.

Some have spoken of the increasing divide between two cultures, civilian and military, in the volunteer force era. While there is some truth in this, the main problem is the failure of certain general officers to recognize the absolute nature of civilian control. A general officer in disagreement with policy set by the civilian leadership has the right — indeed, the duty — to resign his commission and bring his dissent before the citizenry, but to remain in uniform and seek to intimidate or undermine the commander-in-chief is intolerable. McChrystal should have been relieved in 2009. That has finally happened in 2010, but he has been allowed to keep his fourth star. It would have been appropriate — indeed, highly salutary — to have retired him at three-star rank.

Taking over as *deus ex machina* in Afghanistan is Gen. David Petraeus, the architect of the surge in Iraq. Petraeus is politically very smooth, in the Eisenhower tradition. He is also bright and, even more important, lucky. Will his manifest attributes turn around a sinking situation in Afghanistan? The problems are enormous and the patience of the American people (Afghanistan recently became America’s longest war) is not infinite.

Personally, I am inclining more and more to Ron Paul’s view that this is a war that we can neither win nor afford. Nevertheless, I do not support a cut-and-run policy. I see a possible middle way, a sort of “enclave strategy” in which we secure Kabul and a few other key centers and focus combat operations in the Afghan-Pakistan border regions, employing special forces and drones to continue to attrit the Taliban-Qaeda leadership and cadres. Such a policy would avoid abandoning Afghanistan to the terrorists, while reducing both U.S. casualties and dollars spent. Indeed, the recent revelation of vast mineral riches in Afghanistan (the timing of which seemed suspicious to many) makes a U.S. withdrawal even harder to contemplate. The rare earths alone are so vital (and so scarce — until the Afghan discoveries, most known reserves were in China) that we cannot possibly forego them, at least not in the immediate future.

— Jon Harrison

The political posture — Other people are always propounding “iron laws,” so why shouldn’t I? I have an iron law of politics. And it’s not just my whim; it’s backed by the observations of two eminent politicians.

One is Benjamin Franklin, who begins his autobiography by remarking, “I scarce ever heard or saw the introductory words, ‘Without vanity, I may say,’ etc., but some vain thing immediately followed.”

The other is Jonathan Swift, who explains in “Gulliver’s Travels” that whenever the emperor of Lilliput wanted to get rid of someone, he “always made a speech to his whole council, expressing his great lenity and tenderness, as qualities known and confessed by all the world. This speech was immediately published throughout the kingdom; nor did any thing terrify the people so much as those encomiums on his majesty’s mercy; because it was observed, that the more these praises were enlarged and insisted on, the more inhuman was the punishment, and the sufferer more innocent.”

My iron law, therefore, is this: whatever a politician most praises himself for having, that’s what he lacks the most.

I'm sure that this law was followed as precisely in ancient times as it is in the modern world. Doubtless King David lectured everyone, including Bathsheba, about how much more important chastity was for him than it had been under the Saul regime. But our current president must be recognized as a very rigorous obeyer of the law.

His obedience is, in fact, breathtaking. The more money Obama spends, the more complacently he prides himself on saving money. The more ardently he defends the status quo in immigration, the more he insists that he is campaigning for comprehensive reform. The more he maintains that his administration is "transparent," the less he answers questions and the more his news is managed and repressed.

There is, however, a second iron law of politics. I can't claim credit for this law. It was propounded in the late 18th century, by William Blake: "He who has suffered you to impose on him, *knows* you." In other words, after a while, people understand that you're abusing their confidence, and from then on, though they may not understand all the details, they know how to rate you. No politician should want to be explained by that law.

— Stephen Cox

Getting jobbed — On June 4, the monthly jobs report was released, and the results were underwhelming, to say the least. The overall (i.e., net) jobs growth was 431,000, and the unemployment rate dropped only slightly, from 9.9 to 9.7%. Of the 431,000 new jobs created, 95% (411,000) were . . . census workers! In the private sector, only a pathetic 41,000 new jobs were created, down from a feeble 218,000 the month before. And the drop in the rate of unemployment reflected 322,000 people who gave up looking for work.

Moreover, the number of people who have been out of work for six months or longer reached a new high of 6.76 million. That is a whopping 46% of all the unemployed, which is also a new high.

The business about the census workers is disturbing enough. Even more disturbing is the fact that the numbers of census people being hired may be artificially high. A whistleblower with the pseudonym "Maria" reported that the Census Bureau is hiring people, training them for a couple of weeks, laying them off, and then rehiring them, each rehire being counted as a new hire. If this is true, as many commentators believe, then there is no telling how many net new hires there really were.

Add to this the fact that the Census Bureau has admitted to the Office of the Inspector General that it deliberately hired more workers than needed, a practice it calls "front-loading," which it justifies as a "cost-cutting" measure. Another alleged purpose of this front-loading is to ensure that there are enough workers to count all the hard-to-find people, such as the homeless, people who live in RV parks, marinas, and campgrounds, carnival workers, people in homes that could not be reached by ordinary mail, and so on. (There is now one census worker for every seven homeless people!) Whether this makes any sense I leave for the reader to determine, but clearly, front-loading makes the figure of new census hires a misleading one, since it is deliberately inflated by redundant hires.

There were two perfectly predictable responses to this dismal report. First, econ-illiterate Obama high fived himself,

exulting, "This report is a sign that our economy is getting stronger by the day." Second, the stock market tanked, the Dow dropping 323 points in one day, losing more than 3% of its total value. The NASDAQ and S&P 500 also lost more than 3% of their values, and the Russell 2000 lost 5%. Not exactly a high-five.

— Gary Jason

Closing shop — For Southern Californians, one of the most interesting features of the June 8 primary was a proposition put to the voters of Chula Vista, a medium-sized city in San Diego County.

It was an anti-closed-shop proposition, aimed against union control of labor and the unnecessary costs associated with it. As the San Diego Union-Tribune summarized the proposal, "Proposition G would prohibit the city from requiring that private companies agree to union-only project labor agreements on city projects." In other words, it wasn't just anti-closed-shop; it was anti-government-interference. It proposed to eliminate the subsidy-by-power that keeps unions in business by guaranteeing them a monopoly on labor.

Such subsidies can be very lucrative. There's a firm that wants to build a resort in Chula Vista. If it were obliged to employ only union members, or pay everyone union wages and benefits, the project could cost \$70 million more than it ought to. (Note that Chula Vista has a population of only 210,000, and you get the scale.)

The importance of Proposition G was fully understood by its adversaries. During the months preceding the primary, there was never a 10-minute slot on cable TV that didn't feature one, two, or three ads attacking the proposition. Mostly, these ads showed young people speaking with Spanish accents, claiming that they were workers who would be thrown out of jobs. Sometimes, they claimed, preposterously, that Prop G would prevent Chula Vista from acquiring a (state-supported) university, as if it needed one. There were also numerous viewings-with-alarm by establishment business associations, government officials, and so forth. The general idea was that Chula Vista would be permanently impoverished, and all manual laborers reduced to abject indigence, if for some perverse reason Proposition G were passed.

But there was an uglier thing going on, something courteously veiled from English speakers. Here's the Union-Tribune's description:

A Spanish-language ad opposing Proposition G absurdly links the measure to Arizona's controversial law targeting illegal immigrants, complete with scenes of an angry Arizona protest and police cars and officers surrounding a suspect.

An English translation of the ad goes like this: "The new Arizona law discriminates against Latinos. The police can arrest you simply because you look like you're from Mexico. Proposition G in Chula Vista discriminates here against our community. Proposition G will take away jobs from our community. Vote No on G. Defend our community. No discrimination in Chula Vista. No on G."

In other words, a lying appeal to ethnic pride and fear.

According to a local TV station, even people with non-Anglo-Saxon names were shocked by this approach. It cited "Yes on G supporter Francis Barraza" as saying that unions were "trying to scare Mexican-Americans into voting against the proposition. 'I was horrified,' he said. 'I was literally floored by the crazy imagery that I saw on the screen.'"

But at whom do you think those “crazy” appeals were aimed? Were they aimed at stalwart Mexican-American liberals, conservatives, and libertarians, firmly implanted in America’s political process, accustomed to making up their own minds about political issues, and just as unlikely as anyone else to be taken for a ride by demagogic practices? Or were they aimed at recent, politically suggestible, immigrants, including illegal immigrants, who usually aren’t fluent in English and aren’t supposed to vote, but obviously are expected to be voting, or crucially influencing the vote?

In the same election, one San Diego voter was asked to show identification, and this scandalous act became top news — because so many well-intentioned people feared that ethnic discrimination could possibly be involved. So do you think it’s hard for foreign nationals to vote unchallenged, if they really want to do so?

In San Diego County, when you want to talk to a member of a maintenance crew or construction crew, you usually have to find a translator. I do not believe that this is because “Americans won’t do the work.” But whether that’s true or not, it is foreign workers whom unions are now mobilizing to support not only unrestricted immigration but also universal government healthcare, raises for government schools, and (as in Chula Vista) vast labor taxes on private and public employers.

Have you ever wondered why there has been an historic change in the attitude of labor unions toward immigration? Virtually all unions, in all countries, have traditionally considered immigration their Number 2 enemy (Number 1 being convict labor). Just one generation back, even the Cesar Chavez farm workers’ union, whose adherents were almost all Mexican-Americans, was programmatically opposed to heavy immigration from Mexico. Now, organized labor is generally, though not universally, supportive of immigration, and the cutting edge of labor, the service workers’ unions, are violently supportive of it. What happened?

Here’s what. Since the 1930s, the percentage of workers represented by labor unions has declined. Today, such workers are a small minority of people employed in this country. The only growth segment of the labor movement, but this is significant, is workers employed by government. Other targets are desired, and the best are thought to be low-wage,

politically naive, politically suggestible people. That’s virtually a definition of illegal immigrants. So unions are mounting a tremendous effort to organize these workers. It goes without saying that their political representation will take an emphatically statist form, with constant demands for welfare, government healthcare, economic restrictions, ethnic subsidies, and other things that left-wing collectivists demand. It doesn’t matter that many, if not most, illegal immigrants are culturally conservative. They know little and care less about American politics. But they are alienated from general American society by the language barrier. What better theater of operations for self-appointed spokesmen, who can organize the illegals, institute legal protections and subsidies for them, and simultaneously enrich themselves with their dues?

Many libertarians would like to believe that politicians are correct in saying that “immigration is America’s strength.” To me, that’s like saying that the Mississippi River is America’s strength. Maybe so; maybe not. Depends on whether there’s a flood.

Masses of people who arrive here without skills, who are paid low wages in a high-wage country; who are adopted, cajoled, and flattered by labor unions and political parties, with the intention of increasing their own power, and the power of government; who are exploited by ethnic propaganda and fed with lies about the American political process, so as to complete their alienation from everyone except demagogic leaders; who are then transformed, by hook or crook or amnesty, into voters . . . No, it can’t be right. It can’t be right to empower everyone who manages to cross the border — and I don’t care whether the immigrants are Italian or Canadian, Mexican or Irish.

So, on principled reasons, I continue to think that libertarians should refuse to support unrestricted immigration. But if you want political reasons . . . Chula Vista followed the consistent national pattern: it voted 56–44 for Proposition G. And Chula Vista is 50% Hispanic.

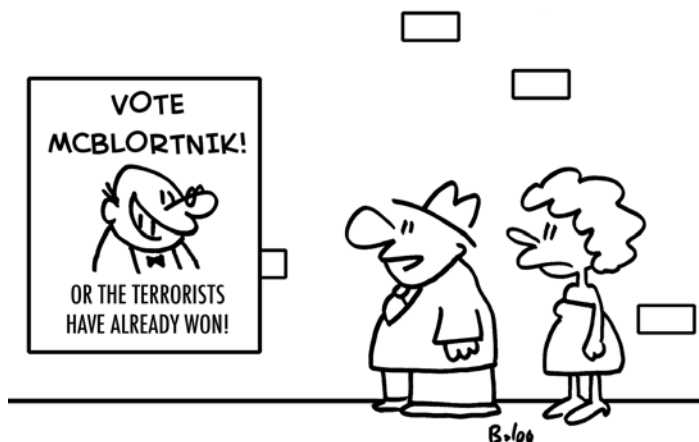
— Stephen Cox

Fiscal sanity — With the sovereign debt crisis imperiling European nations, especially the PIGS — Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain — it is nice to see economic common sense prevailing in at least two countries.

As *The Wall Street Journal* noted in early June, the German government is resisting pressures by other, more profligate European governments, as well as the totally profligate U.S. government, to increase its spending in order to spur economic growth (“the Keynesian cure”). Instead, Chancellor Angela Merkel aims to eliminate Germany’s annual budget deficit in just a few years. This year, the German government will come up with spending cuts (and a few minor tax increases) so as to cut \$12 billion from the deficit. The outrageous Merkel had the effrontery to tell her citizens, “We must make sure we don’t constantly live beyond our means.”

Note that the Germans announced their austerity the week after U.S. Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner used his nonpareil credibility and charisma to urge the Germans to join with the rest of the world in stimulating the economy by spending more. In other words, Germany should follow the glorious lead of Greece and the United States when it comes to fiscal probity.

Germany’s aggregate sovereign debt totals about 77% of



“Crude but effective.”

its GDP, while ours totals about 83%. But while ours is headed dramatically up, Germany has just indicated that it will take aggressive steps, including cutting lavish benefits, to move in the other direction. Bravo.

Bloomberg.com reports that Switzerland is also riling its Euro neighbors. Switzerland charges 8.5% business tax, and to this the various cantons of which it is composed add another business tax. The cantons (like our states) have business tax rates ranging from a low of 11.8% (making a total of 20.3%) to a high of 24.2% (making a total of 32.7%). This compares favorably to the top rate in the United States, 35% for combined federal and state. But while they are competing to bring their rates down, Obama aims to jack ours up. As a spokesman for Transocean, which just relocated its main operations to Switzerland, said, that country “has one of the best tax treaties and tax set-ups in the world.”

Naturally, those committed to high tax regimens (such as ours) are unhappy about such tax competition. One leftist, John Christensen, director of the London-based Tax Justice Network, said bitterly of the lower rates, “It’s a tax war that involves beggaring neighboring states. It’s deeply abusing because it doesn’t create many jobs as the headquarters activity mainly remains elsewhere.” Huh? But the Swiss cantons, seeing quite significant job growth, are inclined to keep cutting business taxes. Bravo again. — Gary Jason

Profit motive — It’s a mere sideshow to the attacks on banks and private healthcare, but it’s still a government assault. This one goes after for-profit or proprietary colleges. Apparently eager to wipe out any vestige of efficiency in education, the Senate recently held hearings on for-profits, and the Department of Education is trying to regulate their tuition.

For-profits (University of Phoenix is the biggest, but some of the other names are Walden, Strayer, and DeVry) have found a market niche in the “underserved” student population. These are older, working adults, often low-income, who are trying to obtain credentials and move up economically. The for-profits now enroll nearly 10% of all college-level students.

The problem (and it is a problem) is that these institutions rely on federal funds. As Inside Higher Education reports, they receive “nearly a quarter of the funds dedicated to student aid under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965” (Title IV is the law that authorizes Pell Grants and other subsidies). According to Bloomberg Business Week, for-profits get, on average, 75% of their revenues through federal aid or subsidized loans (by law, they have a cap of 90% on federal funding).

So, having authorized all this taxpayer largess, the government is looking for culprits. Congressmen claim there are “bad apples” among the for-profits, schools that seek out unqualified students, offer misleading information, and provide poor career placement. And, beyond that, there is just something wrong with providing education for profit. Sen. Tom Harkin, who chaired the latest hearing, warned against “false hopes peddled on a billboard or pop-up ad.”

Like other Liberty readers, I recoil at the thought of all this federal aid and all these loan guarantees. But nonprofits (the schools that most of us went to) take government money, too.

Seventy-five percent of all college students attend state universities, which are heavily subsidized by state taxpayers and receive plenty of Pell grant revenue. And most universities depend heavily on federal research money.

The impressive growth of for-profits suggests that their success is not some fluke. The Chronicle of Higher Education recently reported that the latest GI Bill is sending the majority of its students to (first) for-profits and (second) community colleges — even though its provisions were designed to help veterans attend four-year schools. And the majority of participants in Michigan’s “No Worker Left Behind” retraining program attend for-profit schools, even though one aim of the program was to increase enrollment in the state’s community colleges.

There’s much to deliberate here, but clearly the for-profit colleges are doing something right — serving their customers, perhaps?

— Jane S. Shaw

Magoo at the helm — More evidence is surfacing that the nation’s economy is recovering from the Great Evil Bush Depression at breathtaking speed.

As of late June, according to a June 29 report in *The American*, the unemployment trust funds in 30 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands were insolvent. They need loans from Uncle Sugar of about \$38 billion. The Department of Labor is projecting that 40 states will likely require \$93 billion in federal loans for their unemployment insurance funds during the next three years alone. This is in addition to the \$130 billion the feds have expended for supplemental unemployment benefits.

Total spending by the feds to provide or augment unemployment benefits from July 2008 already exceeds the bailout package provided to Greece by the EU and the International Monetary Fund.

On July 2, the latest employment report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed a *loss* of 125,000 jobs in June, with the short-term census jobs coming to an end. The private sector created a pathetic 83,000 jobs, of which 21,000 were temp workers, well short of the 200,000 jobs needed every month to bring down unemployment. The unemployment rate dipped slightly, from 9.7% to 9.5%, but only because a whopping 652,000 people simply gave up looking for work altogether.

Yes, quite a recovery. As Obama crowed, “Make no mistake about it — we are headed in the right direction!”

— Gary Jason

Guild tactics — Libertarian genius Milton Friedman is famous for advocating an end to government licensing of medical doctors. I used to be doubtful about that proposal, because medical science is a highly technical field in which either you know the science or you don’t, and if you get it wrong, someone dies. However, my experience as a student in law school has made me question my convictions.

The world is rife with lawyer jokes. (If you’re in an elevator with Hitler, Stalin, and a lawyer, and you have a gun with only two bullets, what should you do? Answer: shoot the lawyer twice!) But there is some basis for the idea that lawyers are extraordinarily overpaid. The reason for this can be revealed by an economic analysis of licensing. In order to get a license to practice law, a person must pass a state bar exam, for which a bar review class typically costs \$3,000. Except in

California, the sole exception, to be eligible to take the bar exam you must obtain a JD degree from an American Bar Association-approved law school. The ABA only approves three-year programs, which usually cost \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year. Even though Department of Education government interference makes it very easy to get student loans, neither the poor nor the lower middle class can easily afford to risk going \$100,000 in debt, then failing the bar exam on the first try and being on the hook for student loans without a job. And even student loans are not sufficient to cover the total cost of three years of law school.

Three years and \$100,000 is a huge investment that scares away most people who are not rich to begin with. The supply and demand economic analysis is simple: the legal licensing system drastically reduces supply, which artificially raises prices; hence, everybody hates lawyers.

Most of what law school teaches you is not the law itself but how to think like a lawyer; and it really only takes one year of law school to learn that. Anyone can learn what the law is by reading cases and statutes, and anyone who can formulate a well-reasoned argument is capable of practicing law. But the lawyers, with the help of state governments, have created a very nice situation for themselves (and I hope for me, once I earn my JD). If clients want to pay for an ABA-approved lawyer, then let them, but why have the government force them to do so?

— Russell Hasan

Wave that flag — As one of the relatively few Americans who actually follow soccer, I found myself glued to the recent World Cup tournament. The U.S.-Algeria match was one of the most exciting games I've ever seen. After having two legitimate (and potentially game-winning) goals disallowed, the United States was less than three minutes from being robbed of a well-deserved qualification for the second round; but a goal by Landon Donovan in injury time staved off disaster, and with one stroke the U.S. side not only survived but also won its group for the first time in 80 years.

ESPN provided coverage of the event, and during each match the commentators mentioned that the tournament was also broadcast on the American Forces Radio and Television Service to American soldiers stationed in 175 countries around the world.

That's one hundred seventy-five. Foreign countries. 175.

North Korea is one of the few countries in the world that does not (yet) host any U.S. soldiers, and the Norks managed to deliver some entertaining World Cup headlines of their own. Very few North Korean fans were able to make the journey from Pyongyang to Johannesburg to cheer their team. (June and July is the busy season for slave labor camps, after all, and it's hard to get time off from work). So to make a decent showing in the stands, the dictatorship hired hundreds of Chinese people to dress up in North Korean colors, wave flags, and pretend to be fans.

Who knew that outsourcing to China had gone so far?

And for a while it looked as if they might also have to hire some Chinese players to replace four members of the North Korean team who briefly went missing (but absolutely, positively, under no circumstances tried to defect).

To top it all off, the North Korean coach stated that Dear Leader himself, Kim Jong-Il, used an invisible cell phone (of

Kim's own design, no less) to offer tactical advice during the first-round matches. Sadly, Kim's soccer skills — prodigious as they must be — were not quite on par with his magic telephone design skills. The North Koreans fought hard against Brazil, losing by only one goal, but were later eliminated after a 7-0 beatdown by Portugal.

Part of the problem for the North Korean team was that it drew the "Group of Death," the group containing the strongest teams in the first round of the World Cup. But an additional factor could be that the traditional North Korean starvation diet of grass and bark soup is not exactly conducive to World Cup play. Maybe, next time, Kim Jong-Il will use his invisible cell phone to order some decent takeout for his team instead.

— Stephen M. Smith

The eggman cometh — Paul McCartney has long been a fool, but this summer he showed himself a fool in more ways than I expected. The occasion was his receipt of a "coveted" award from the Library of Congress. Pleased that the award was presented by yuppie publicity hog Barack Obama rather than yuppie devil George Bush, McCartney remarked, "After the last eight years, it's great to have a president who knows what a library is."

In the words of "I Am the Walrus," "See how they snide."

Anyone is a fool who comes to someone else's country, toadies to its current leader, claims him as something to "have," and makes rude remarks about the last Great Leader. And if you're a person whose highest educational attainment is having taken meditation classes from Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, you shouldn't get haughty about libraries.

Of course, McCartney understood his audience — a bunch of elitist Washingtonians who think that President Obama spends, or ever spent, a lot of time reading. Check Obama's grammar (indifferent) and his range of literary and historical reference (slim to vanishing). If he reads, *what* does he read? Bush, by contrast, actually married a librarian, and reads books about history. Not much, perhaps, but it's a start.

McCartney could find out about this stuff if he ever visited a library — or even the internet. But why do I apply such standards to a has-been musician? No awards ceremony will transform Paul McCartney into Cole Porter or Irving Berlin. The real fools were the people who laughed sympathetically at McCartney's nasty remark. When was the last time *they* were in a library — to learn something, not to go to some event? In short: goo goo ga job.

— Stephen Cox

Uncompetitive at any speed — A couple of months back, when Toyota was forced to recall and repair a large number of cars, the media and Congress went ballistic. The news was filled nightly with stories about how bad Toyota was, how its customers were being abused, and so on. Toyota's CEO came on American TV and publicly apologized. Congressional hearings were immediately launched with great fanfare (of course, the majority of the committee members consisted of pols who had accepted UAW money). GM ran ads telling Toyota customers to buy GM or face death behind the wheel. The federal government, now Toyota's main competitor, was clearly doing its best to destroy Toyota.

Ah, but two recent stories don't make Government Motors (GM and Chrysler) look so hot, which is why the media are pretty quiet about them. The first was a report in The Wall

Street Journal (June 8) that Chrysler is recalling nearly 700,000 Jeep Wranglers and minivans because of problems with brake linings and doors. This was on top of the announcement the week before that Chrysler was recalling 35,000 Dodge Caliber and Jeep Compass cars for — you guessed it! — faulty accelerator pedals.

The Journal reported the next day that GM is recalling over 1.5 million vehicles because of a potential fire hazard. There is a glitch in the windshield wiper system, the part of the system that heats the fluid that can cause the car to catch fire. This makes 3 million cars and trucks GM has recalled this year, which beats last year's total of 2.2 million.

But funny . . . no congressional hearings have been announced! — Gary Jason

Then they came for me — “Defying Hitler,” by Sebastian Haffner, is a mesmerizing book. Haffner is well known for his post-World War II analyses of Hitler — “From Bismarck to Hitler,” for example, and “The Meaning of Hitler” — but “Defying Hitler” is a personal memoir written shortly after he emigrated to England with his Jewish wife in 1938. The incomplete manuscript was discovered posthumously in 1999 by Haffner's son.

Haffner is a unique commentator on the slide of Germany away from civilization and into barbarism. He was a historian with a fine eye; he was anti-Nazi, with disdain for those who did nothing to oppose Hitler's rise; and not yet a celebrity, he was representative of the educated German in the '30s. Haffner speaks as an eloquent witness to the erosion of individual rights, the increasing polarization of society, and the other repressive tactics used by ruthless politicians.

The most haunting aspect of the book is the main question it addresses: what should good people do when they see a nation renowned for its civilization and culture plunge into totalitarianism? What, in fact, do they do? Why did 66 million citizens of one of the world's most advanced societies submit to Hitler's rule?

There is no single or simple answer, of course. But I believe an important piece of the explanation lies in the active denial in which many Germans engaged.

According to Haffner, many of them said, “It couldn't happen here, not here in Germany,” just as I hear many Americans today saying, “Totalitarianism couldn't happen in America.” Drawing parallels with the United States is inevitable.

Several years ago, a book review of “Defying Hitler” in the webzine Salon commented, “The question that always springs from accounts of Hitler's Germany is ‘Why didn't the Germans resist?’ Some of the reasons have long been obvious. There is a natural human instinct for survival, however odious the forms it takes or the lengths it may go to. And there is also the understandable refusal to believe that the worst will come to pass. Again and again in ‘Defying Hitler’ Haffner's acquaintances talk of the Nazis as clowns who, because they cannot help revealing their true natures, are destined to fall out of power. Haffner's endorsement of the idea that even dictators are powerless without the consent (or at least the passivity) of the masses means that ‘Defying Hitler’ has no time for quibbling about how much the Germans knew and when . . . Haffner takes it for granted that Germans knew about the brutality of Nazi rule — brutality that, logically, would only

increase as the state consolidated its power — and that they lacked the will to resist it.”

Haffner speaks of the “automatic continuation of ordinary life that hindered any lively, forceful reaction against the horror” of Hitler. I think “the automatic continuation of ordinary life” is a key to understanding how Germans in the 1930s and Americans today are able to dismiss the storms of statism gathering around them. Even people who recognize that freedom is eroding day by day are reassured by the fact that “life is normal” because they wake in their own beds, eat the same cereal for breakfast, work at the same job, and drive down accustomed streets. They have a real sense that everything is as it has always been. And until the realities of their daily lives significantly change, as they are beginning to for so many people, they tend to ignore the Chicken Littles who tediously go on and on about freedom.

In reality, things have changed drastically in the United States. The legal and other institutional structures that defined America's broad freedoms and encouraged prosperity are dramatically altered — in some cases, they are gone. But these protections are not tangible in the same manner as breakfast cereal and daily routines. Even people who understand the role that due process, for example, plays in preserving freedom are inclined to dismiss the threat of its absence. After all, the daily routine is the same as before. Today is much the same as yesterday and, so, the constant erosion doesn't seem to affect their lives or well-being.

Until, of course, it does. And, then, it is usually too late.

Totalitarianism often grows slowly, and so gradually that people don't realize the extent of its power until it walks up and knocks on their door. Then they ask in amazement, “How did this happen?” — Wendy McElroy

Spilt oil — On May 27, The Wall Street Journal ran an unintentionally hilarious story. It was a report about the White House chiding the Europeans for not responding quickly enough to the massive financial crisis brought on by the Greek welfare state's hitting the wall — the same wall, please note, at which we are hurtling at warp speed.

Obama dispatched Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner — a figure of towering intellect and profound integrity — to advise the various heads of state in Europe, starting with the newly installed British government, that they should act quickly to stop the spreading panic. Of course, the medicine Obama is pushing is a massive bailout plan, whereby the more solvent European states (read: Germany) will help stabilize the less solvent ones (read: the PIGS — Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain), so they don't default on their bonds and collapse the European banking system.

What is hilarious about this is the complete lack of credibility of the advisers. The Obama regime has shown little concern for reining in the sovereign debt of the country it governs; indeed, it has increased it at a record-setting pace. Now it is urging other governments to act hastily, while it drags its own feet in dealing with the most salient crisis of its tenure in office, the massive oil spill caused by the sinking of a British Petroleum (BP) deep-sea rig.

There is scarcely a way to overstate the magnitude of the disaster. At the time of writing, the spill is already double the size of the infamous Exxon Valdez spill, and the well is

still leaking. The spill threatens upwards of 40% of America's wetlands, a huge fishing industry (accounting for fully a third of all seafood produced domestically), and a hell of a lot of choice beachfront property essential to tourism.

Obama's response was pathetically slow and indecisive. He took nearly two weeks before even visiting the area, during which he golfed, attended fundraising events, and yucked it up at the White House Correspondents dinner. His only relevant actions were continuously bashing BP (as if the corporation wanted the disaster!) and bragging about keeping a boot on its throat (in the phrase of one of his underlings). Really helpful. He put BP in charge of cleaning up the spill, and kept state officials and local agencies out of helping in the effort.

After more than a month, and considerable criticism, Obama took action. He did nothing to stop the leak, but he did shut down all new offshore drilling (what little was in the works) and cancelled some land projects in Alaska. So here we are again, with no plan to increase domestic oil production. The "good" news is that the Obama recession continues, so the price of oil stays in control. But if ever it does end, we are set for another massive price increase in the future.

The disaster is now being called "Obama's Katrina," but that is grossly unfair to Bush. Bush was bashed by the media after only 48 hours, while Obama got a pass from press criticism for well over a month. Again, Bush took only four days to visit the scene of the disaster, while Obama took nearly two weeks before sauntering on down.

The primary responsibility for dealing with Katrina (under both federal and state law) lay with the idiot Ray Nagin, mayor of New Orleans (or "Chocolate City," as he called it) and the buffoon Kathleen Blanco, governor of Louisiana. Both resisted Bush's help before the hurricane made landfall. But the oil leak of 2010 occurred way out in federal waters, so from the start it was Obama's responsibility.

In this case, however, local and state officials have been demanding the right to act. For example, Louisiana Governor Jindal has been begging the Army Corps of Engineers to give permission for sand to be dredged to create berms to keep the oil off the shore, but the feds have so far refused to give the go-ahead, much less to help.

— Gary Jason

Gag order — My favorite new term for the day is "The Streisand Effect." Wikipedia describes this as "a primarily online phenomenon in which an attempt to censor or remove a piece of information has the unintended consequences of causing the information to be publicized widely and to a greater extent than would have occurred if no censorship had been attempted. It is named after American entertainer Barbra Streisand, following a 2003 incident in which her attempts to suppress photographs of her residence inadvertently generated further publicity."

The proximate cause of my stumbling on this term is Pennsylvania attorney general and Republican candidate for governor Tom Corbett. The man has been targeted for mockery at the blog site CasaBlancaPA and by at least two anonymous critics on Twitter. In early May, Corbett lived down to their lowest expectations when he used a grand jury, assembled to investigate political corruption, to issue a subpoena to Twitter that demanded the "name, address, contact information, cre-

ation date, creation Internet protocol address, and any and all log-in Internet addresses" of his tweeting critics.

Silly me, I thought the purpose of a grand jury was to determine whether there is enough evidence in a case for it to be taken to trial, not to silence critics.

So what's happened as a result of this apparent attempt to quash free speech? In late May, a Google search on the terms "Tom Corbett" and "Casablanca" returned 333 news articles, including international coverage in British papers. Corbett's Democratic rival for governor is making a campaign item of the matter, declaring it to be "outrageous" and "unbelievable" that Corbett would use "the powers of his office" to subpoena critics. Twitter is refusing to turn over the information, and Vic Walczak, head of the ACLU of Pennsylvania, is defending the two Twitter users. He explains, "Any subpoena seeking to unmask the identity of anonymous critics raises the specter of political retaliation . . . It's a prized American right to criticize government officials, and to do so anonymously."

Wisely, Corbett dropped the matter. But it isn't clear what the other parties are willing to do.

Oh . . . and as the blog site Adventures in IT commented on May 21, "The tweeps whose identities have been sought . . . just had their follower counts boosted by about 1,000%. . . . Even better, the CasablancaPA blog where many of these tweets were directed saw its readership grow sevenfold, according to one of its posts. I'm sure it's even bigger now."

— Wendy McElroy

Brokenhearted — Two touching stories now reach us about great men who have changed their hearts about matters of faith.

The first appeared in a Washington Post article by Chico Harlan (June 18). It reports that the glorious leader Kim Jong Il has relented on the pure commie stuff. In the face of growing food shortages and the prospect of another round of mass starvation, his government has announced to the eager populace (or what is left of it) that all restrictions on private markets have been lifted. The markets sprang up about 15 years ago, during the last famine, when about a million helpless North Koreans starved. These markets were officially frowned upon, but the government now embraces them.

The second story was broached by Mortimer Zuckerman on June 18, in an article in U.S. News in which he contends that the world now sees Obama as "incompetent and an amateur." (Presumably the world also now sees the sky as blue.) Zuckerman reviews the numerous foreign policy gaffes and goofs of our petulant president, and notes that many foreign leaders are now openly contemptuous of him.

The real news is not what Zuckerman reports, which has been obvious for quite some time. No, it's that Zuckerman, a prominent Obamacon, has now suffered a decay of faith. If Peggy Noonan was the queen of the Obamacons, Zuckerman was their king. He had quite the mancrush on Obama, but, as with Noonan before him, the look of love has now been replaced by the tears of disappointment.

It is all such a pity.

— Gary Jason

Sacrilege — Jonathan Alter is a well-connected mediocrity who rewrites conventional wisdom for Newsweek and spouts truisms for several TV news shows. Earlier this year, Alter released a book called "The Promise," which purported

to be an “insider’s perspective” on the first year of Barack Obama’s presidency. Here’s an excerpt from the book:

Rabbi David Saperstein, reading from Psalms in English and Hebrew, noticed from the altar that the good men and women of the congregation that day, including the Bidens and other dignitaries, had not yet stood. Finally Bishop Vashti McKenzie of the African Methodist Church asked that everyone rise. At that moment Saperstein saw something from his angle of vision . . . a beam of morning light shone through the stained-glass windows and illuminated the president-elect’s face. Several of the clergy and choir on the altar who also saw it marveled afterward about the presence of the Divine.

One wonders whether there was room enough in that scene for the God whom Abraham and Moses worshipped. Suppose there’s no need for Him these days.

But Yahweh may be the least of this sycophant’s problems. When Alter arrives at the gates of hell, H.L. Mencken is going to be waiting for him. Eternity’s a long time to be satirized, pal.

— Jim Walsh

Breaking up is hard to do — Peggy Noonan is the Queen of the ObamaCons — conservatives who supported Obama. (Libertarians who supported Obama are called “ObamaRands.”) Her adoring columns about Obama betray a passion rare in politics, a passion that reminds me of Cloris Leachman’s character in “The Last Picture Show,” who is hung up on a young guy played by Timothy Bottoms.

But Cloris may just have had enough of Timothy and his bottom. Her Wall Street Journal column of May 29 has a plaintive wail of a title, “He Was Supposed to be Competent.” She conjectures ruefully that the Gulf oil spill is the third major “political disaster” in his year and a half in office. From her perspective, Obama’s first disaster was the unnecessarily brutal fight over healthcare reform. The second was his disregard of the desire of the populace to deal with illegal immigration. And the third was his handling of — actually, his refusal to handle — the oil spill. This, she suspects, shows that he has never been “in sync” with the center of the country.

But if her column doesn’t confirm the old adage “love is blind,” I don’t know what does. I mean, where has Cloris been? It’s not as if we had to guess what Obama was about when he was running for president. The guy refused to release his undergraduate transcripts or his SAT and LSAT scores, which obviously meant that he got into Harvard Law by means of affirmative action, and was therefore likely to support the ideology of victimhood. He had been employed as a “community activist,” which obviously meant that he was a leftist — I mean, honestly, are there any conservative or libertarian “community activists”? There’s more: He was made a professor of law at the University of Chicago with absolutely no academic publications, which again indicates an affirmative action hire. He started his career in politics with the help of a prominent ’60s radical, and was a member of a black liberationist church. Even before he got elected, everyone but the blind could see that he was a real leftist.

Now that he’s in office, all Obama has done is push a hard left agenda “from day one” (to use one of his pet clichés). The massive, costly, and corrupt bailouts, the nationalization of the auto and student loan industries, the setting up of a pathway for nationalizing the healthcare industry, the endless stimulus spending that fails to stimulate anything but the

national debt (now at 83% of GDP), the vast new regulations, the hard-left court appointments — none of these were hinted at by Obama the candidate, but they were completely predictable to anybody but the blind.

Including those blinded by love.

— Gary Jason

The latest nonsense — The media have thoroughly displaced the Oxford English Dictionary in defining English phraseology, especially when it comes to blurring danger and death, blood and guts, and war with euphemisms.

It all began with “harm’s way.” They came up with this verbal gaucherie during the first Iraq war. Not battle or even “military engagement” (which in itself is softly genteel; it brings to mind pink ribbons, balloons, and confetti). “Our troops may be in harm’s way if they continue the surge,” says the TV head, reciting from his teleprompter. “Harm’s way” — how awkward. They mean the probability of maiming, mauling, and the loss of major limbs. And the expression has picked up speed; even police use it. “Johnson is heavily armed. If you see him, run. Do not place yourself in harm’s way.” What a bland way to express death or dismemberment.

More recent — but maybe more short lived — is “at the end of the day.” Not nearly as objectionable as “harm’s way,” and clearly not as endowed with the same euphemistic motives, it’s more an attempt at metaphor. Very big on TV, I notice, especially with talking heads of every stripe. It does have the virtue of a great extension of air time, highly prized by spokespeople; six words instead of one (“eventually,” which would do very nicely).

But best of all, the favorite of euphemists, is that colorless, nonaccusatory expression, as new and shiny as a fresh-minted coin, “person of interest” instead of the old-fashioned “suspect.” This one is in great favor with police spokesmen. See how it removes all the raw obloquy. And it’s so broad. After all, a person of interest could be your aunt, your lover, a business partner, your librarian, or the cook at your favorite restaurant. It could even be Bismarck, FDR, or Napoleon Bonaparte — in whom you may always have had an interest.

A person of interest? Well, so is President Obama, which reminds me: a fertile source of these with-it expressions is Obama’s chief spokesperson, Robert Gibbs. He’s full of them (or “it”) — a new one every day. Don’t miss him.

— Ted Roberts

Bomb disposal — I’ve seen talking points trotted out before, but Eric Holder’s performance in May was the Kentucky Derby.

Testifying before a committee of the House of Representatives, the Attorney General was asked whether “radical Islam” might have been a motive for recent episodes of terrorism — the mad doctor at the army base, the Times Square bomber, and so forth. In “answer,” he introduced, over and over again, the idea that many motives for terrorism may exist: “There are a variety of reasons why people do these things. Some of them are potentially religious-based.” Well, yes, *potentially*.

There’s a passage in Holder’s comments that is favored for quotation by leftwing defenders of all that is Obama. In this passage — the passage in which, it is said, Holder *actually pins the whole thing on radical Islam, contrary to what his right-wing opponents falsely charge* — the AG says, “I certainly think

that it's possible that people who espouse a radical version of Islam have had an ability to have an impact on people like Mr. Shahzad." Shahzad was (allegedly) the Times Square bomber.

Let's see how many boxes-within-boxes there are in Holder's statement. The poor, squalid, inner box is the one personally occupied by "Mr. Shahzad," an (allegedly) crazed Islamic radical who tried to kill thousands of people of all races and religions while they were innocently strolling through a public place. But it's hard to see Mr. Shahzad, the radical Islamicist, because he's buried so deep in the nest of boxes.

The second box in which he's buried is "people like" him. Now let's see . . . who is like Faisal Shahzad? The answer that immediately comes to mind is "other (allegedly) crazed Islamic radicals." But already Shahzad and his specific motivation are fading a bit in the distance. Maybe, when you think about it hard enough, there are other people *like* Shahzad, in some *other* way. Maybe, let's see . . . other 30-year-old males, living in the Western hemisphere. That might be it. Or other people living in Connecticut. That might be true. Or, perhaps, other no-talent clones who for some reason migrate to the United States and manage to stay here. That might be why Faisal cracked. Do you think so?

The next two boxes in which Shahzad and his real motivation lie concealed are represented by the peculiar words "have had an ability to have an impact." "Have an impact," the inner of those two boxes, vastly increases the chances that Shahzad was not on an Islamic crusade after all, that he was merely an outer moon of the angry Mars of Islamicism, "impacted" by stray fragments of interplanetary junk (I mean radical religious teachings), the force of which was never sufficient to send him out of orbit. "Had an ability" adds the metaphysical dimension, the quality of philosophical speculation that leads us, when we're drunk, to reflect that under certain circumstances, inconceivable to us in their specifics, but capable of being postulated on the assumption that anything can happen, given enough time, we ourselves might be *capable* of kicking a dachshund in the street, thus *impacting* it.

Well, where are we now? Struggling upward, we come to the last, the outermost box. We find it in the ringing affirmation, the triumphant declaration of Holder's scientific objectivity: "I certainly think that it's possible." Yes, it is *possible*. But when scientists like Holder say that something is *possible*, don't they usually mean that it might be true — once in a blue moon, or in a pig's eye, or somewhere in Oz, on the day after Dorothy sailed off?

One wonders, open-mouthed: what other motive exists for the acts of terrorism under discussion? Adventism? The theories of Immanuel Velikovsky? Agitation for the Single Tax? It's all preposterous — yet in this way are the real Mr. Shahzad and his real and obvious motives buried by those who refuse to admit what everyone knows.

The technique is similar to that of Holder's other comment, quoted above — another remark that his defenders brag on: "There are a variety of reasons why people do these things. Some of them are potentially religious-based."

Well, that's telling 'em!

But "potentially religious-based" . . . what does that mean? Any action is potentially religious-based. Anybody may be hovering over the potentiality of a religious motivation. But

of course, we must consider other potentialities. There is such a variety of them. How do we know that Lenin, when he was plotting terror against the enemies of the Soviet regime, may not have had a variety of reasons that were not communistic, were not even political? Maybe he acted out of a repressed religious sensibility. Maybe he was inspired by an oracle from Tannu-Tuva. Maybe he felt the influence of the Pleiades. Maybe he responded to a lack of potassium in his diet. It's the same with Faisal Shahzad and company: "There are a variety of reasons."

Charming, isn't it, this scientific allowance for all possibilities?

One thing to note, however, is that this kind of thought (if you want to call it that) never appears in real life. And it never appears as an explanation for actions that we normally regard as innocent. If you ask me to go to church with you on Sunday, and I accept the invitation, and go, and partake of the bread and the wine, no one, not even Eric Holder, will say, "There are a variety of reasons why people do these things. Some of them are potentially religious-based." No one will say, "I certainly think that it's possible that people who espouse an Episcopal version of Christianity have had an ability to have an impact on people like Mr. Cox." Instead, people will say, "Cox wanted to worship at the Episcopal church."

The attorney general knew very well that he was using cunning words about an influence that was clear but by no means innocent. The question is, Why did he resort to cunning?

— Stephen Cox

Austria rising — I'm enjoying Nouriel Roubini's "Crisis Economics," particularly chapter 2 on "Crisis Economists." Roubini is the NYU professor who in 2006 predicted the financial crisis. His book is coauthored by Stephen Mihm at the University of Georgia, and he acknowledges free-banker George Selgin in the book. Perhaps Selgin had something to do with the fact that chapter 2 has a big section on the Austrian school of free-market economics. In fact, while the authors reject short-run Austrian policy (let the markets follow their natural collapse) in favor of Keynesian stimulus, they conclude, "But when it comes to the medium term and long term, the Austrians have something to teach us" (p. 58).

That's quite a change — finally, a fair and balanced view of the various schools (Keynesian, Chicago, and Austrian) that is sadly missing from most textbooks and financial books.

Even Bob Shiller's latest book "Animal Spirits" does a very poor job of this. It doesn't even mention the Chicago and Austrian schools. The book doesn't even mention Milton Friedman's and Anna J. Schwartz's classic work, "A Monetary History of the United States: 1867–1960" (1963), in explaining the Great Depression, let alone Mises and Hayek.

I think this is quite a sea change for Roubini. I don't think he has ever acknowledged the Austrians before. In "Personal Acknowledgements," he cites his "friends" Paul Krugman, Jeff Sachs, Joe Stiglitz, Barry Eichengreen, Bob Shiller, and even George Soros, who "kindly hosted me in his summer home while I wrote parts of this book and has always been for me a model of a 'Renaissance man.'"

I figure it is because of the influence of his co-author that the Austrians are now in his book. This is a breakthrough for Austrians.

— Mark Skousen

Off the Rails

by Randal O'Toole

Light rail systems are facing a wave of problems related to deferred maintenance. Get ready for more excuses.

In the last 40 years, American cities have spent nearly \$100 billion building new rail transit lines, ranging from the Kenosha, Wisconsin vintage trolley to the Washington, D.C. subway system. Despite spending all this money, and hundreds of billions more to operate the systems, per-capita transit ridership has declined since 1970.

Economists, taxpayer groups, and fiscally conservative thinktanks objected to almost every one of these lines as a waste of money — although these prophets often went unheeded. Recently, however, criticism of the rail transit boom has come from an unexpected source: Peter Rogoff, the Obama administration's selection as chief of the Federal Transit Administration.

In a May 18 speech, Rogoff pointed out that the nation's rail transit systems are crumbling, and it makes no sense for cities to spend billions of dollars building new rail lines when they can't afford to maintain the ones they already have. Rogoff argued that buses make more sense in many cities that are pushing to build rail lines.

Rogoff related that in his year as FTA administrator he has met with many transit agency general managers. These people spend the first part of the meetings grimly asserting that they can't afford to run the systems they have and are forced to make severe cutbacks in bus and rail service. But in

the second half of the meetings, "the glossy brochures come out" and the "general manager wants to talk about their new plans for expansion."

Rogoff asks, "If you can't afford to operate the system you have, why does it make sense for us to partner in your expansion?"

Fittingly, Rogoff gave his speech in Boston, whose state-run transit system is on the verge of collapse and where a recent audit found that \$3.2 billion was needed just to bring the system up to a state of good repair. Not only does the state not have that money; it isn't even spending enough to keep the system in its current state of poor repair.

Nationwide, says Rogoff, transit systems have a \$78 billion maintenance backlog. The vast majority of this is for older rail lines in New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and San Francisco; but this backlog is growing each year, even as more and more cities undertake construction of new rail lines.

The federal government typically pays at least half the cost of building new transit lines. Most transit agencies finance the local matching share by selling 30-year bonds and repaying those bonds out of general or dedicated funds such as sales taxes or property taxes. But rail transit infrastructure wears out and must be almost completely replaced every 30 years, so by the time the bonds are paid off, the transit agencies face an even larger bill for rehabilitating the rail lines. Since all the costs of construction and maintenance, as well as most of the operational costs, must be paid for out of general funds, rail transit is financially unsustainable.

The Washington Metrorail system is typical. It first opened for service in 1976. The federal government paid most of the construction cost, and local governments covered most of the operating costs. But no one budgeted any money for rehabilitation, so the system is now rapidly deteriorating, with almost daily train delays from broken rails, smoke in the tunnels, and other problems — not to mention the nine people killed in a horrific 2009 accident caused by a poorly maintained signaling system.

Thirty years ago, in 1980, only ten American urban areas had some form of rail transit. Those ten areas are now responsible for nearly all of the \$78 billion maintenance backlog. But since then, more than two dozen other urban areas have built rail lines. Systems in Baltimore, Buffalo, Miami, Portland, Sacramento, San Diego, and San Jose will all turn 30 in the next decade. Because few of these cities have set aside funding to rehabilitate the systems, these aging systems will soon add billions of dollars to the unfunded maintenance backlog. Yet the majority of those urban areas are actively building more rail lines, and close to 50 urban areas that don't have rail transit are planning to build new lines.

Rogoff gave some advice to cities that want to build these lines: "Paint is cheap, rail systems are very expensive." Instead of building the rail lines, he suggested, transit agencies could attract as many new "riders onto a bus, if you call it a 'special' bus and just paint it a different color than the rest of the fleet."

This advice might be worthwhile. Kansas City, for example, has attracted 30% more riders on selected routes by running colorful buses on ordinary streets but more frequent schedules. The buses stop less frequently than normal ones, so they get to their destinations faster. This is sometimes called "bus-rapid transit."

Rogoff noted that bus-rapid transit may not make sense everywhere, but it "is a fine fit for a lot more communities than are seriously considering it." In Denver, for example,

every single study that compared bus-rapid transit with rail transit found that buses could do more to relieve congestion at a tiny fraction of the cost of rail transit. Yet heavy lobbying by rail contractors and railcar manufacturers persuaded the transit agency board and the region's voters to build rail transit instead.

Rogoff admitted that opening a new rail transit line is usually "a big press event with lots of cameras, microphones and political leaders," while maintenance attracts little attention. But the problem goes deeper than that. Rogoff's own agency, under the direction of Congress and the Department of Transportation, gives transit agencies huge incentives to build high-cost rail systems when low-cost bus systems would work just as well.

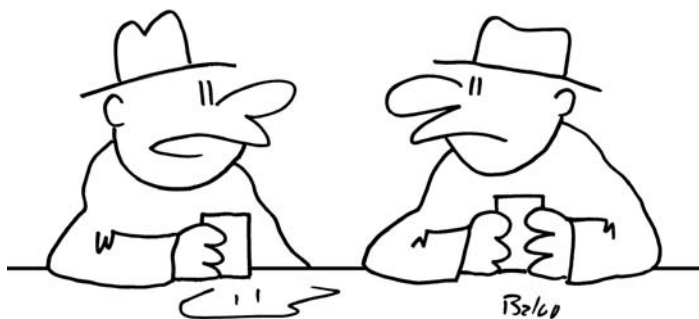
Those incentives can be traced back to 1973, when Congress passed a law allowing cities to cancel planned interstate freeways and apply the federal funds to transit capital improvements. Since few cities had enough money to operate all the buses that they could purchase with the funds released by not building an interstate freeway, Portland, Sacramento, and other cities chose rail transit as a high-cost solution that could absorb lots of federal capital dollars without imposing high operating costs. The cities conveniently ignored the high maintenance costs that would be required after 30 years or so.

While the 1973 law was repealed in 1982, it generated a light-rail construction lobby that has now persuaded at least two dozen urban areas to build rail lines. Today, the rail construction lobby is far more powerful than the fabled highway lobby. The combined budgets of every pro-highway group in Washington, D.C. add up to less than \$4 million per year, while the transit lobby has a budget of more than \$20 million per year, much of it from railcar manufacturers, rail contractors, and rail engineering firms.

Thanks to efforts by this lobby, Congress created a multi-billion-dollar annual fund for new rail projects in 1991. Unlike most other transportation funds, which are distributed using formulas based on population or similar state and local attributes, the "New Starts" rail fund was an "open bucket," made available on a first-come, first-served basis. Local leaders soon realized that the cities that came up with the most expensive proposals received the most money. The cost of new light-rail lines, for example, zoomed from \$15 million per mile for the first one built in San Diego to \$220 million per mile for the latest one being built in Seattle.

Counting both open-bucket and formula-driven funds, Congress dedicates more than half of all federal transit dollars to rail transit. This means a city that relies exclusively on buses must compete against 400 other urban areas for the smaller share of the federal transit pie. Building rail lines allows transit agencies to tap into the rail funds that are shared by only about 30 urban areas.

To put some limit on wasteful rail projects, the Bush administration's Secretary of Transportation, Mary Peters, imposed two rules requiring that such projects be cost-effective. One rule applied to all rail transit and it set an upper limit on the amount a project could cost for every hour of peoples' time the project was supposed to save. This rule eliminated some of



"Every election day I ask myself the same question — 'Heads or tails?'"

continued on page 44

Health, or Share the Wealth?

by Steve Murphy

President Obama's healthcare experiment is less about healing the sick than about redistributing money.

With the passage of the Obama healthcare bill, the United States can be divided into three distinct health insurance groups. Group 1 consists of retirees on Medicare. Group 2 consists of working people with private health insurance to cover them until they retire. Group 3 consists of the 32 million people who previously did not have health insurance. The first group includes people who, in addition to paying income taxes, have paid into Medicare during their working lives for the benefits they are now receiving. The second group include people who, also in addition to paying income taxes, pay for their current health insurance as well as payroll deductions for their future Medicare benefits. Most people in the third group pay little or no income taxes and will now receive health insurance at little or no cost.

To the proponents of ObamaCare this is social justice, and its principal achievement. But the greater achievement, by far, is the financing. As Margaret Thatcher once pointed out, socialists eventually run out of other people's money. The problem is that "eventually" is now.

The money that Group 1 people have put into the Medicare Trust Fund has been spent — long since. Congress has been spending Medicare surpluses for many years. Consequently, Group 2 payments (which are supposed to be invested to pay

the Medicare benefits of Group 2 people when they retire) are being used to pay Group 1 benefits now. Under ObamaCare, Group 2 people will be paying more — evidently paying for themselves after they finish paying for Group 1 people. That Group 1 people will be getting less (via \$500 billion in Medicare "savings") is the only solace of the Group 2 people.

CBO projections have been used to claim that we can afford ObamaCare — that it will fix Medicare and reduce the deficit to boot. How credible are government estimates?

Medicare was enacted in 1966 at a cost of \$3 billion. The House Ways and Means Committee projected that it would cost \$12 billion a year by 1990, a conservative, inflation-adjusted estimate. The actual 1990 Medicare cost was \$107 billion. It reached \$244 billion by 2003. Today it is up to \$500 billion and rising fast. This is why Congress has spent decades trying to control Medicare costs. The result of its diligent efforts: according to the latest Medicare Trustees Report,

Medicare is expected to run out of money in 2017. The celebration of ObamaCare's social justice and the delusion that it will bend the cost curve down is likely to be short-lived.

The Trustees Report went on to say that the "Trust Fund could be brought into actuarial balance over the next 75 years by changes equivalent to an immediate 134% increase in the

ObamaCare was sold by blaming capitalism for the healthcare crisis, and praising government regulation as the remedy.

payroll tax (from a rate of 2.9% to 6.78%), or an immediate 53% reduction in program outlays, or some combination of the two." That is, Medicare can be fixed over a 75-year period by increasing payroll deductions of Group 2 people by 134% or decreasing the benefits of Group 1 people by 53%.

ObamaCare was sold, in no small part, by blaming capitalism for the healthcare crisis and praising government regulation as the remedy. In particular, private insurance companies were demonized for making ever-increasing profits while charging customers ever-increasing premiums. It turns out that their profits have been quite meager — an industry average of 2.2% annually.

Furthermore, if they operated like the government, all of them would be out of business and their CEOs would be in jail. Medicare charges its enrollees too little and uses the payments of working nonbeneficiaries to make up the difference. It is a Ponzi scheme that has created an enormous liability (\$38 trillion at last count). If Medicare had to operate as a legitimate private insurance company, it would have to come up with an extra \$1 trillion annually just to pay the interest on this debt.

Not only does the Obama healthcare bill fail to deal with this fraudulent practice, but it continues to ignore the well known payer-to-beneficiary demographic that perpetuates and exacerbates the liability. I refer to the fact that the size of Group 1 is increasing at a much higher rate than the size of Group 2 (e.g., 116% and only 22% by 2040, respectively). It is doomed to failure because, as economist Walter Williams has pointed out, it doesn't satisfy "the first order condition of a Ponzi scheme, namely expanding the pool of suckers."

Yet the Obama administration focus is locked on Group 3, apparently hoping the Medicare bomb set to go off in 2017 will be replaced by a giant wad of cash — for, incredibly, it plans to pay for Group 3 costs (insurance subsidies, premiums, and benefits) with \$500 billion in Medicare savings (a.k.a., \$500 billion in Medicare cuts). To finance ObamaCare, Group 2 people will continue to pay the benefits, at higher and higher rates, of Group 1 people, while \$500 billion that Group 1 people were expecting will be used to finance Group 3 people. That is, Group 1 people who have paid income taxes and both health insurance and Medicare premiums during their entire working lives will have their Medicare benefits cut in

order to finance Group 3 people who have paid little or no income taxes, health insurance, or Medicare premiums. That Group 2 people will be paying even more is the only solace of the Group 1 people.

Medicare was a \$3 billion experiment designed for all working Americans and their families. But thanks to incompetent, deceitful politicians and government accountants who failed miserably to estimate the true cost, it will be unable to meet its obligations in 2017, only seven years from now. And when I say "out of money," I have already figured in the money from both Group 1 and Group 2.

ObamaCare, however, is a \$2.6 trillion (full ten-year cost) experiment designed to share the healthcare wealth of Groups 1 and 2 with Group 3. And its cost estimates are even shakier than those of Medicare. For example, Congress and the administration blatantly omitted from their calculations the \$290 billion cost of the so-called Doctor Fix bill. If the Obama administration moves on to immigration reform, we could quickly see 12 million formerly illegal aliens added to Group 3.

When it comes to estimating costs, government has a long and consistent record of stupendous inaccuracy. Add to this the unintended and mysterious, but probably very expensive consequences of an indecipherable 2,700-page bill, and Group 2 and 3 ObamaCare could go broke before Medicare. Alas, irony isn't covered in the bill — not even in the special deals sections.

To many, social justice is the crowning achievement of ObamaCare. My own money is on the financing. Medicare financing has been abysmal, even criminal, but its goal was not to transfer wealth from one class to another. Its incompetent management has led to a staggering \$38 trillion in unfunded liabilities over the next 75 years — although, to be *fair*, some experts believe that the \$500 billion in "savings" prophesied by the administration over the first ten years of ObamaCare can be used to extend Medicare's solvency.

In contrast, ObamaCare will reconfigure one-sixth of our economy, and will do so in the midst of war and recession. Its feasibility depends on taking \$500 billion in mythical savings

If private insurance companies operated like the government, their CEOs would be in jail.

from Group 1 (thereby snuffing out the possibility of salvaging Medicare) and \$500 billion from Group 2 (in higher taxes and insurance costs) to pay for Group 3 (and bigger government). The healthcare adventure is so immense and intrusive that if the estimates are off — just by a small percentage — the economy could be ruined for decades.

But even if, by some miracle, the estimates are accurate and the \$2.6 trillion program turns out to be an efficient, well-run entitlement for Group 3, the real achievement lies in the concoction of a financial scheme that would please both Karl Marx and Bernie Madoff. □

Complexity and Liberty

by Charles Barr

A modern theory of the universe provides insights into the political process.

During the 18th century, when the libertarian philosophy was in its early stages of development, a linear and mechanistic view of the world dominated the physical sciences. The universe was seen as a Newtonian “clockwork,” operating through immutable mathematical and physical laws. Only human beings were considered exempt from nature’s determinism. Human behavior considered proper at the time was based upon generally accepted principles of “right and wrong,” and people were expected to use their free will to choose between the two.

Applying the then-prevailing scientific metaphor to the political arena, classical liberalism, from which libertarianism is descended, introduced the idea of a society of free individuals, operating within a stable, well-defined social, legal, and ethical framework. This paradigm has persisted to the present day. The ideal world envisioned by many libertarians is one in which all property is private, all laws are objective, and all rights are absolute. In this scenario, dynamic interactions among people take place within a political and social system that has achieved a state of optimal equilibrium.

This model is now in severe need of revision. It has been rendered obsolete by the recent emergence of an integrated set of observations, principles and techniques collectively referred to as “complexity theory” or the “science of com-

plexity.” This view of the world is markedly different from the earlier Newtonian view, in its description and interpretation of interactions among individuals and the effects of such interactions upon their social and political environment.

As will be shown below, many of the perspectives embodied in complexity theory give support to libertarian principles, and suggest strategies that can aid in their advancement. However, to take advantage of the perspective of complexity theory, it will be useful for libertarians to familiarize themselves with its framework, especially in areas where this perspective challenges the philosophical infrastructure that has guided (and in some respects hindered) the libertarian movement during the last several decades.

Complexity is not a formal science, in the sense that physics and mathematics are. It is rather an attempt to update our view of reality and its underlying processes by integrating a broad array of discoveries, techniques, and concepts that

have emerged during the past century. Linear cause-and-effect models of real-world processes, until recently dominant in both the physical and the social sciences, are being supplanted by nonlinear “complex” models that are more accurate in their representations of reality.

It is important to note that the terms “complex” and “complexity,” as used in the physical and social sciences, have somewhat different meanings from those employed in everyday language. “Complex systems” (or “complex adaptive systems”)

The Bill of Rights gave rise to legal protections of individual liberty, such as the right to bear arms and the right to trial by jury.

are entities or systems that show evidence of ongoing internal processes generated by interactions among some or all of their component parts. The term does not refer to entities that are merely “complicated,” such as automobiles. The actions of “complicated” entities are controlled by one or more outside forces (a driver in the case of the automobile), and such entities are incapable of initiating or sustaining self-generated activity.

Complex adaptive systems abound in both nature and society. They include large-scale physical systems such as galaxies and other astronomical phenomena; small-scale physical systems such as molecules; biological systems such as cells, organisms, and ecological habitats; and social systems such as cultures and economies.

Researchers have identified several attributes that all complex adaptive systems share. Here I want to give a brief description of some of the more important of these attributes, then demonstrate their relevance to libertarian theory and practice.

Dynamic structure: Complex entities are dynamic systems that change over time as they both influence and adapt to their respective environments. These entities may grow, shrink, change form, change appearance, and modify the interactions of the elements within them. Complex entities may also cease to exist under the weight of hostile environmental factors or internal stresses.

Presence of adaptive agents: “Agents” are the building blocks or component parts of systems. In a complex system, the agents must be *active*, performing one or more functions, and *adaptive*, capable of modifying their behavior in response to external stimuli. Computer simulation is a powerful tool that is frequently employed for modeling the characteristics of such agents and observing the outcomes of their interactions with each other and with their wider environments. In M. Mitchell Waldrop’s book “Complexity,” John Holland of the Santa Fe Institute describes complex systems as networks of agents acting in parallel:

In a brain the agents are nerve cells, in an ecology the agents are species, in a cell the agents are organelles such as the nucleus and the mitochondria, in an embryo the agents are cells, and so on. In an economy, the agents

might be individuals or households. . . . But regardless of how you define them, each agent finds itself in an environment produced by its interactions with the other agents in the system. It is constantly reacting to what the other agents are doing.

Self-organization and emergent behavior: In an appropriate environment, a complex system or structure can spontaneously arise from the combined interactions of agents. Complexity scientists refer to this process as “self-organization” or “emergence.” Waldrop sees this phenomenon arising because

a great many independent agents are interacting with each other in a great many ways. . . . In every case, moreover, the very richness of these interactions allows the system as a whole to undergo spontaneous self-organization. Thus, people trying to satisfy their material needs unconsciously organize themselves into an economy through myriad individual acts of buying and selling; it happens without anyone being in charge or consciously planning it. . . . Organisms constantly adapt to each other through evolution, thereby organizing themselves into an exquisitely tuned ecosystem. . . . In every case, groups of agents seeking mutual accommodation and self-consistency somehow manage to transcend themselves, acquiring collective properties such as life, thought, and purpose that they might never have possessed individually.

Feedback loops: In 1963, Karl W. Deutsch, in his book “The Nerves of Government,” offered a classic description of feedback as a property of “a communications network that produces action in response to an input of information, and includes the results of its own action in the new information by which it modifies its subsequent behavior.” A feedback mechanism within a complex system, or between a complex system and its environment, will act in response to a perceived disequilibrium in a manner that either reduces or amplifies this disequilibrium. A thermostat is an example of a *negative feedback*; it reduces disequilibrium by bringing room temperature closer to the desired setting. On the other hand, the familiar noise created by placing a microphone near a loudspeaker is an example of *positive feedback*; it increases disequilibrium by continuously amplifying a sound to the limit of the loudspeaker’s capacity. A complex system typically contains numerous positive and negative feedback loops, including many with multiple inputs and outputs, which form the core of its overall structure and internal dynamics.

Nonlinearity: Internal relationships among components in complex systems can be either linear or nonlinear. A linear system displays a direct quantitative correspondence between input and output; for example, by doubling the amount of each ingredient, a bakery can produce twice as many loaves of bread. A nonlinear system displays a more complex relationship between input and output: doubling the recommended amount of water and fertilizer over a given acreage will not double the crop yield; an excessive amount of either could very well wind up killing the crop instead. Most relationships found within complex systems (such as the feedback loops described above) are nonlinear, a fact that makes them more difficult to study than more simple linear systems.

Path dependence, increasing returns and “lock-in”: These related concepts, briefly described below, were pioneered by economist Brian Arthur of the Santa Fe Institute. They have

come under fire in certain libertarian quarters, in part because they were used during the Clinton administration to promote the government's antitrust suit against Microsoft. (The government accused Microsoft of attempting to leverage its dominant market share in computer operating systems to "lock-in" a dominant market share for other software products, such as its web browser.) My view is that, while the government's legal arguments misapply these ideas, the concepts themselves are sound. They refer to outcomes generated by positive feedback loops in the economy, and they can also be applied to complex systems in other domains.

Path dependence refers to the sensitivity of the structure and form of a particular complex system to the initial conditions that gave rise to it. For example, the location of a town and the manner of its development may be determined by an accident of history, such as which side of a river is chosen for the location of a new factory (the initial path of development). Politically, an example of path dependence is the adoption of America's Bill of Rights shortly after ratification of the Constitution. The Bill of Rights gave rise to legal protections of individual liberty, such as the right to bear arms and the right to trial by jury, that persist to this day. Although government power continues to grow in these and other areas, it does so at a slower pace than would be the case if the Bill of Rights had not been adopted more than 200 years ago.

Increasing returns describes a situation in which some aspect of a complex system gives it an early advantage, which it uses to progressively increase its dominance over its competitors. In the factory example above, increasing returns accrue to the geographical area surrounding the new factory, as new homes and businesses arise nearby to share in the economic benefits it generates. Land in the factory's vicinity becomes progressively more desirable and valuable, while land on the other side of the river (which may originally have been an equally favorable location for the factory) continues to be worth much less.

Lock-in refers to the tendency of a dominant position, once achieved, to perpetuate itself, making it difficult or impossible for potential competitors to dislodge it. A controversial but commonly cited example is the familiar QWERTY layout, introduced in the early days of typewriters, and today deeply embedded as a standard for computer keyboards well over a century later. Numerous inventors claimed to have developed superior keyboard layouts, but were unable to overcome the formidable advantages enjoyed by QWERTY as an established standard. These advantages included the large number of typists proficient in the QWERTY layout, the considerable amount of manufacturing equipment already in place to continue making QWERTY keyboards, and the cost in terms of money and lost productivity that would have been associated with the changeover to another keyboard layout.

Punctuated equilibrium: This concept, originated in 1972 by Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, refers to the tendency of complex systems, following long periods of relative stability, to undergo bursts of sudden (often catastrophic) turmoil. One of the best known examples is found in the fossil record, which indicates that the orderly evolution of living organisms from simple to more complex forms was interrupted at several points by mass extinctions. There are two competing theories of the cause of this phenomenon. One theory regards

such disturbances as a succession of unrelated accidents, such as the impact of comets or changes in weather patterns. The other theory, championed by complexity researchers such as Per Bak, attributes these sudden changes to *self-organized criticality*, a condition in which the ecological balance among coexisting species becomes increasingly complex and precarious. Under these conditions, a relatively small internal or external disturbance can destroy this balance, causing numerous species that depend upon it to share a common fate. Bak's metaphor for this phenomenon is a sand pile created by adding one grain of sand at a time from a single location above the pile. At some point, the addition of one more grain of sand triggers a cascading avalanche that restructures the shape of the entire pile.

A contemporary example of this phenomenon is the ongoing world financial crisis. The trigger for this event was an escalating series of defaults on "subprime" mortgages. But the underlying cause was the creation by major financial institutions of trillions of dollars worth of highly leveraged "derivative" contracts, using questionable mortgages and other high-risk debt as the underlying assets. The subprime default was the "grain of sand" that triggered an avalanche of financial destruction that continues to this day. (It is important to note that such a massive systemic failure could not have occurred in a free market. The major players in this debacle were financial entities that either had the implicit backing of the U.S. government or wielded sufficient political clout to be on the receiving end of massive government bailouts when their financial house of cards collapsed.)

Balance between order and chaos: Complexity is often described as being at the "edge of chaos," or at the "boundary between order and chaos." Within complex systems we find, as Waldrop states in his book "Complexity," "a class of behaviors in which the components of the system never quite lock into place, yet never quite dissolve into turbulence, either. These are the systems that are both stable enough to store information, and yet evanescent enough to transmit it."

So how does all this relate to libertarianism? What insights, strategies and techniques can libertarians derive from complexity theory? I think that understanding complexity can dramatically increase our awareness of the processes that drive political and social systems. Such understanding can make us

Although government power continues to grow, it does so at a slower pace than if the Bill of Rights had not been adopted.

more effective in communicating the libertarian viewpoint to the outside world. Here are what I consider three key features of complexity theory that are especially relevant to the libertarian movement.

Complexity theory shares much of its worldview with Austrian economics. Numerous similarities exist between Austrian economists' models of how people interact within a free economy, and complexity researchers' models of how complex adaptive

"agents" interact within their physical, social, and political environments. Both humans and computer-generated virtual "agents" engage in purposeful activity: humans to satisfy their "most urgently felt needs," and agents to increase their "fitness levels" and access to resources such as virtual "food" or "money" programmed into the computer models. Both humans and agents can behave as entrepreneurs, in the sense that they can innovate, compete with their own kind, search for new resources, and productively employ existing resources.

Austrian theorists view economies as dynamic systems, arising spontaneously from interactions of human beings trading goods and services. Likewise, scientists view complex systems as emergent phenomena, built from the "bottom up" by dynamic interactions among adaptive agents, rather than by a controlling authority. In fact, a major impetus behind computer modeling of complex systems is the opportunity to observe and understand the dynamics of novel processes and environments that spontaneously arise from the actions of virtual agents following relatively simple rules.

Austrian economics focuses primarily on the interior workings of an economy. Outside influences such as governments are considered relevant mainly to the extent that they augment or impair the ability of an economy to fulfill its role of satisfying the "felt needs" of its participants. However, Austrian economics for the most part does not deal with the mutual interactions between an economy and its wider social and political environment. Complexity theory, on the other hand, extends many of the insights of Austrian economics to a wide array of complex systems, including economies, and the ways in which these systems relate to each other. Viewing other complex systems through an Austrian lens will enable libertarians to devise and implement more effective strategies for achieving their political and social goals, by enhancing their understanding of the complex political and social processes that they seek to influence.

For example, libertarian activists tend to view the political landscape as a battleground of ideologies. The Libertarian Party promotes itself as the "Party of Principle," and expends considerable effort promoting principles of individual freedom that are shared by a significant number of Americans. However, over the course of nearly four decades, this approach has failed to establish the LP as a significant player

The major players in the world's financial debacle were entities that had the implicit backing of the U.S. government.

on the national political scene. By contrast, the two major parties exhibit no discernible principles whatsoever, yet they have enjoyed uninterrupted dominance over the American political process since the end of the Civil War.

From a traditional "logical" perspective, this dismal state of affairs is not easily explained. From an Austrian perspective, however, it makes more sense — the major parties have

been more successful in catering to voters' "felt needs," and have been more adaptable in responding to changes in voter preferences. Major party operatives view the political landscape not as an ideological battlefield, but rather as a complex and constantly shifting terrain of opportunistic alliances, backroom deals and hot-button issues that can be exploited for short-term political gain.

Libertarians can adopt this perspective and refine their political strategies without abandoning their core principles. For example, Texas congressman Ron Paul has gained an impressive amount of political traction and visibility with his proposal to audit the Federal Reserve, despite strong opposition from the Fed and its friends in high places. He has done so by forging single-issue alliances with legislators on both sides of the aisle, and by tapping into voter discontent with the secrecy surrounding the endless bailouts of politically connected firms. His crusade for Fed transparency is an instructive example of how libertarians can gain credibility and political capital by addressing the "felt needs" of voters, without having to convince them of the overall worthiness of fundamental libertarian principles.

Complex systems interact, both competing and cooperating with each other. In any given geographical area, numerous complex systems, both physical and social, operate simultaneously, influence each other, and co-evolve. Such systems include weather patterns, myriad life forms, languages, technologies, economies, religions, cultures, and governments, to name a few. For any complex system, other complex systems in its proximity make up a significant part of its environment. Dynamic interactions occur continually among complex systems, primarily by means of mutual feedback loops.

What this means in practical terms is that the borders between complex systems are porous. Resources created by one complex system can be leveraged to influence the inner workings of another complex system. A contemporary example is the translation of economic power into political power, using both legal and illegal means such as political fund raising, lobbying, influence peddling, and outright bribery.

In the United States and elsewhere, the linkage between economic and political power has led to widespread government corruption and the near collapse of economic freedom. Such an outcome was not inevitable, and other factors contributed to its severity. But even under the best of circumstances it is not possible to completely insulate economic power from political power. An important lesson from complexity theory is that linkages among complex systems are pervasive, and part of the natural order of things. Rather than mounting a futile attempt to build a wall of separation between economic and political processes, libertarians can better advance their goals by acknowledging the linkages between these two domains, and seeking to make such linkages as transparent as possible. Ron Paul's proposed "Audit the Fed" legislation is a good move in this direction.

For complex systems, change is inevitable, but its direction is not. Complexity theory suggests that the libertarian ideal of a permanently stable social system protecting individual rights is not achievable in practice. Instead, all complex systems — including societies and legal structures — are dynamic,

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Stray Facts

by Stephen Cox

How much do you know? And why don't
you know more?

Earlier this year I was teaching a college class in which I had occasion to bring up “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Noticing that when I did so, my bright, attentive 21- and 22-year-olds suddenly looked blank, I asked them how many had ever heard of the song. Only three out of 30 raised their hands. I recited the first verse, but that didn't increase the number. Finally I sang the famous chorus — “Glory, glory, hallelujah!” — and picked up three more hands, though one of them wavered doubtfully, then dropped, perhaps in response to my wretched singing.

Around the same time, I had a disappointing experience with another group of students. There were 12 of them, all 18- or 19-year-olds who had signed up for a “free lunch” with me. (Yes, I did explain that there really ain't no such thing as a free lunch; they would have to pay for the food with their time and their willingness to converse.) To illustrate some point, I quoted a line from a Cary Grant movie, only to discover that not a single one of them had ever heard of Cary Grant.

You might say that there's no pressing reason for people to know such things, and you'd be right. But that's exactly why I'm concerned. I'm worried about people's ignorance of all the interesting things they aren't *pressed* to know.

It's a notorious fact that American children are constantly coerced into organized “learning experiences.” In many

well-regulated households, every moment not spent eating or sleeping is consecrated to music classes, art classes, team sports, weekend fitness classes, field trips, charitable expeditions — and even school itself. Every foot of the forced march to adulthood involves a focused attempt to Learn. It's a nightmare, when you think of it. And somehow, despite all the efforts to teach kids every specific thing on the required curriculum, they still don't emerge with a rich or rounded, or an odd or interesting, view of the world.

Something like this happened in the days before the Russian Revolution. The offspring and relations of the imperial family were given nothing but the best in the way of focused education. They had French tutors, English tutors, geography tutors, mathematics tutors, music masters, painting masters, priests. They traveled with their kin to London, Paris, Switzerland, the Riviera, migrating like herds of mastodons from one spring of culture to another. And what came

of it? A few learned enough to become cynics and eccentrics. One even learned to be a saint, but only after her husband was blown up by a terrorist's bomb, and she was left to pick up the pieces, literally. The rest of them — Ducky and Jelly, Bimbo and Mische-Mische, Andrusha and Minny and Misha — were swept innocently along by the current of life, without a

I quoted a line from a Cary Grant movie, only to discover that not a single one of my students had ever heard of Cary Grant.

thought in their heads until the pleasant stream crashed over the falls. Yet they had been superbly *well educated*. They had learned what they were *required* to learn.

My idea is this: people should be taught the basics, and taught much, much better than Americans are today, but they should also be warmly encouraged to learn what isn't required, what isn't needed, what appears, indeed, to have no purpose. They should be encouraged to learn the stray, obscure, seemingly irrelevant and peripheral facts of life.

If you want examples, read on. But before elaborating on this notion, I want to emphasize that I'm not just worried about the young. I'm worried about all of us. It seems to me that as we work our way intently through this world, we lose so much of our peripheral vision that we often have no idea of where we are.

An extreme instance: I used to know a woman who ran a guide service in Concord, Massachusetts. I once took her standard tour. Its thoroughness could never be surpassed; she knew everything. So I was curious to find out what questions people asked, after feasting on her rich knowledge of history. "Oh," she sighed, "the most common question is about the house that was a station on the underground railroad. People want to know why the train noise couldn't be heard in the street."

No one has a pressing need to know how the underground railroad operated. But I do think that people would have a clearer picture of the world if they knew more things like that. Correction: not "more things like that" — just more *things*, of any kind.

The other day, I accompanied my friend Joseph Ho while he took pictures of an old church in the San Diego area. It was built downtown, in the late 19th century; then, in the mid-20th century, it was moved to a suburb, and after that to another suburb. This church is a sizable building — a big, tall, complicated, Victorian structure. It was fun to think about moving such a large chunk of matter.

But when I told another friend about our visit, he showed a regrettably limited view of the matter. "It's really great," he said, "what you can do with today's machinery." He had no idea of how commonly buildings were moved about, long before our current technology. Even in 19th-century San Diego, even in the days when "horsepower" meant the power of horses, buildings wandered up and down the streets like drunks at closing time. Somebody would build a house on

Fourth Street; then shift it over to Sixth Street; then put it on a barge and ferry it across the bay. Later he would move it around some more, over there. And San Diego wasn't special. In the northern Great Lakes, buildings were put on sleds and moved across the ice; and if there was an enormous brick church on the town square, and the congregation wanted to add some space, they just jacked up the building and put a new ground floor underneath. Nobody thought much about it.

The old folks also discovered mail-order buildings. Did you know that between 1908 and 1940, Sears Roebuck & Company sold over 100,000 prefabricated homes and shipped them all over the continent, often arranging the mortgages, too? Whole neighborhoods were built in that way. You looked in the Sears catalogue and selected one of 447 models; then Sears put the parts on a train and sent them to the station you stipulated. You picked them up, took them to your lot, and assembled your house. The process was easy and cheap. "For \$1,766 [about \$27,000 in today's money] we will furnish all the material to build this Eight-Room Residence, consisting of Mill Work, Ceiling, Siding, Flooring, Finishing Lumber, Building Paper, Pipe, Gutter, Sash Weights, Hardware, Mantel, Painting Material, Lumber, Lath and Shingles. NO EXTRAS, as we guarantee enough material at the above price to build this house according to our plans. By allowing a fair price for labor, cement, brick and plaster, which we do not furnish, this house can be built for about \$3,480.00, including all material and labor."

I told this story to the friend I just mentioned, and as I talked his eyes got bigger and bigger. He'd never heard any of these things. They gave him a new idea of the old America, and the power of enterprise that was in it. No internet, no freeways, precious little government . . . but damn! Just try to mail-order a house today!

Speaking of moving things around . . . Most people know that Stephen Douglas was Lincoln's opponent in a series of debates, which they believe, erroneously, decided a presidential election. But there are a lot of other things to know, peculiar and interesting things, about the man who waits in his tall

One learned to be a saint, but only after her husband was blown up by a terrorist's bomb, and she was left to pick up the pieces, literally.

stone monument beside Lake Michigan, expecting the tourists who do not come. Some of these peculiar facts have to do with Douglas's trip to Europe. In 1853, after his failure to win his party's nomination for president, and after the deaths of his wife and infant daughter, Douglas decided that he should get away and see everything he wanted to see in the Old World. So, simple as that, he got on a boat and sailed to Europe. He visited England, France, and Italy. Then he went to Turkey, where he declined to visit the sultan, because it would take too much time. Instead, he went to the Crimea (you didn't see that coming, did you?), where he boarded a special "carriage"

equipped with a bedroom and a kitchen. In this contraption he rushed across Eastern Europe, moving both by day and by night. He saw Moscow, Kiev, Nizhni Novgorod, and St. Petersburg. He conferred with the tsar. After that, he hit Copenhagen, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Munich, and Paris. He conferred with the emperor of France. Then he went back to England, took passage on another boat, and sailed back to America, where he resumed his political career exactly where he'd left off. And how long did this trip take? It took five months, just five months — in 1853! It sometimes takes me five months to plan my next trip to the auto parts store.

So that's something to know. And did you know that on May 31 and June 1, 1886, during a period of just 36 hours, the gauge of 11,500 miles of railroad in the southern states — and every bit of the southern railroads' rolling stock — was changed to match the gauge of the Pennsylvania Railroad? In less than two days, 11 *thousand* miles of railroad were reconfigured. The change was motivated entirely by commercial considerations (to put it plainly, by the desire to make a buck); it was organized entirely by private enterprise; it took only four months to plan; and, as contemporaries remarked, not only was it "done economically" but "the public hardly realized it was in progress." Imagine what would happen if the government tried to do such a thing today.

While your imagination is at work on that, here's another little story about moving objects. There is, in a cemetery in Marion, Ohio, something called the Mysterious Ball. It's a two and a half ton granite sphere that rests on the top of a granite monument. The Mysterious Ball was placed on the monument in 1896, and soon it began to turn. Nobody has ever seen it turn, but over the years it has turned quite a lot, and in several directions, as evidenced by the varying positions that a small unpolished part of the ball, formerly located on the bottom, has occupied. The rest of the surface remains polished; it reveals no scars from a century of motion. No one knows how this happens, and almost no one outside of Marion, Ohio, knows that it does. But it does.

I have visited the Ball, but I have no explanation to suggest. I regard it simply as a fact on the loose. This isn't to say that unprogrammed facts can't have a meaning. Not at all. It's fun to look for meanings. And with some facts, you don't need to look very far.

Back in the days when Republican administrations were actually trying to reduce the size of government, a threat arose to the budget of the National Endowment for the Arts. A young artist was visiting me at the time, and she was full of protests about this "first attempt in American history to cut government support for the arts." I know it's preposterous, but that's what she heard, and that's what she believed. I told her the simple fact: regularly established federal support for the arts was very recent. The NEA had originated less than 20 years before. I also reviewed the reasons for thinking that the federal government isn't the best judge of artistic quality. But it was the stray fact that impressed her. She immediately went about town, telling her artistic comrades that the federal government *wasn't* the traditional patron of the arts — and therefore, perhaps, shouldn't be. And, she said, the artists listened. You can't tell what effect a stray fact may have.

Here's an odd fact, and another odd story, one that has a lot of meaning for me. I'd have a hard time doing without it.

Every year I give a lecture about comedy, and I always tell the story to illustrate the idea that any subject can be comic, and that comedy is a splendid attempt to transcend the things we fear.

I would be better at telling the story if I could remember the name of the chief character. What I do remember is that he was a respected author, and he was lying on his deathbed. Friends gathered. The great man spoke with them, then ceased to speak. His breath became less frequent; stopped. "Ah!" they said. "Is he gone?" They couldn't tell. One of them searched for his pulse, and couldn't find it. Another touched his forehead — cold. But still they doubted. "Feel his feet," someone suggested; "no one ever died with warm feet." But

*People should be taught the basics, but also
be encouraged to learn what isn't required.*

just when their hands were reaching for his feet, the corpse-like man reared up in bed and, in a final assertion of life and personality, proclaimed to his startled friends: "Joan of Arc did!" And then he died.

When I tell this tale, it's amusing to see the little pockets of listeners who get the joke right away, then to watch the laugh spreading, as more and more people remember Joan of Arc. By the time I remind my audience that "Joan of Arc was burned at the stake," almost all of them have remembered this stray fact, and they laugh a second time at the reassurance that, despite all fears of faulty memory, they turned out to be right.

Reassurance? I myself depend on this yearly reassurance that I can still locate a fund of vagrant, obscure, yet commonly known information. Knowledge of facts can be a solid bond.

In May of this year, the Southern California news was full of stories — the usual stories — about a young woman who had disappeared while jogging, and a young man who had disappeared while driving to work, and where oh where could they possibly be? Liam Vavasour was with me when those two stories appeared in a newscast. He turned to me and said, "Judge Crater!" Many people would think he had suddenly lost his mind, but I knew better. Liam and I both know the odd fact that on the evening of August 6, 1930, New York Supreme Court Justice Joseph Force Crater walked out on the streets of Manhattan and disappeared, never to be seen again. Nobody knows what happened to Judge Crater, and actually, nobody cares. Practically nobody ever really cared. Yet for Liam and me, knowledge of Judge Crater is the handshake of a secret society — a society that's a lot smaller than the Elks and a lot less important (perhaps) than the Illuminati, but a lot more fun for us.

I don't think that knowledge — even knowledge of Judge Crater — ever needs to be justified. But if you want justification, I have much more of it. Franklin Roosevelt offered Four Freedoms, but I offer Five — five forms of liberation that result from knowing the type of facts that will never appear on a test.

Roosevelt called one of his freedoms the *freedom from fear*. It'll appropriate that name for my own First Freedom. To the extent that you know some facts, you aren't likely, as St. Paul said, to be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness." In other words, you know better than to let other people scare you with their propaganda.

If you've been frightened by the current, unrelenting propaganda about "the degradation of our environment," you'll feel happier if you know some facts about what's happened to our environment in the past. Consider, for example, the Great Molasses Flood of 1919. The disaster occurred on the grounds of the Purity (of course) Distilling Company in Boston. A tank holding two million gallons of molasses collapsed. First, rivets started shooting out of the sides. Then a tide of molasses gushed forth, running down the streets at over 30 miles an hour, killing 35 people, fouling the harbor, and leaving horses dying "like so many flies on sticky fly-paper."

Whisper to me, environmentalist: would you rather see dead horses stuck to your walls, or endure a little bit of secondhand smoke?

By the way, did you know that — contrary to fears that the environment is always getting worse — an estimated 12,000 people died in London in December 1952, because of a severe smog? Compared with that, today's environment is just swell, thank you.

Do you suffer a twinge of fear when people warn you against printing out their emails, as if you were living on Easter Island and were about to murder the final tree? Then maybe you should know that there are more trees in this country now than there were in 1900. And maybe you should know about the Great Peshtigo fire (Wisconsin, 1871). Started by Mother Nature herself, it burned an area twice the size of Rhode Island and killed thousands of people. Later She started the Great Thumb Fire of 1881, which burned almost every acre of three counties in Michigan. Yet despite such frolics of the bitch-goddess Nature, our forests still thrive. (Especially when they're privately owned.)

You might also be interested in comparing our normal "quality of environment" with the environment of 1910, when there were (here's another stray fact) 3 million horses shitting in the streets, and another 10 million shitting on farms; when there was a saloon on every corner and a red-light district in every major city; when the death rate for infectious diseases

was 15 times higher than it is today; when steam locomotives blackened the landscape; when air conditioning was unknown and indoor plumbing was still a minority possession If you make that comparison, you will feel freer about turning up the AC, cracking a beer, and printing off a few dozen pages of your favorite emails — remembering not the deaths of trees.

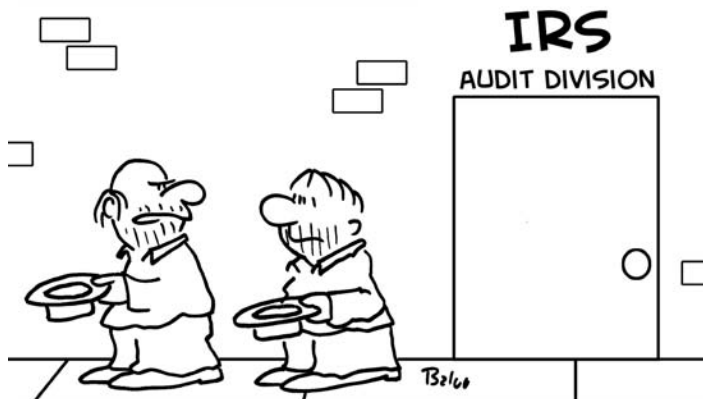
My Second Freedom is *freedom from cliches*. I guess I've been talking about that already. This whole business about the present being worse than the past — that's just a cliché, and not a true one, either. You can say the same thing about the perpetually recurring idea that uncivilized people, such as the American Indians, lived on a higher moral plane than ours, that they were more in tune with nature, and so on. A few stray facts about the history of the Iroquois, and what they would do to you if you fell into their hands, should be sufficient to liberate you from that cliché. I won't state the specifics here; I'm sorry I ever heard them myself. It's enough to say that when the Aztecs wanted to get the attention of the rain god, they tortured little children to make them cry (crying = water = rain), and that the Iroquois were about 50 times worse.

Cliches are predictable — that's why they are cliches — and they assume a world of predictable opinions. But knowledge of facts provides a Third Freedom: *freedom from predictability*. Hitler was evil; that everyone knows. But did you also know that he was a crusading vegetarian, antitobacconist, and nature lover? That is not predictable, according to the current equation of "environmentalist" with "highly moral person." Yet it's true, and if you think about it, it can inspire some unpredictable and unprogrammed moral evaluations of our own contemporaries.

But we don't need to take this in a moral direction. All history is unpredictable. Its precise determinants are unknown, and may never be known. Yet even the unpredictable failures of human beings help to make life exciting.

Most people know — or knew, before political correctness banished this kind of knowledge — that the pre-European inhabitants of the Americas never learned the use of wheels. That understanding is still generally true, but the interesting thing is that many wheeled *toys* have been discovered from the pre-European period. This is one of the least predictable, most remarkable facts in the intellectual history of the world. It is even more remarkable than the fact that the principle of marginal utility — the basis of modern economic thought, and an idea that is superbly easy to deduce from the most rudimentary observations — wasn't formulated until the late 19th century, when three people, working independently, came up with it. How could you use a little wheel, without thinking about using big wheels? Clearly, the obvious can be insuperably difficult to see. And how can you contemplate this fact, without glimpsing the mystery of human life?

Of course, there's a temptation, when one considers things like the Amerindians' wheeled toys, to start lamenting man's feebleness and folly. But that's where the Fourth Freedom comes in. It's *freedom from littleness*, freedom from the supposed necessity of minimizing human powers. You can never predict when you're going to discover some stray fact that astonishes you with its proof of man's ability to do important things.



"This has got to be the lousiest location in town!"

Did you know that Darius I of Persia completed a canal (begun by an Egyptian pharaoh) that connected the Red Sea with the Nile, more than 2,300 years before the Suez Canal? Did you know that self-propelled vehicles were in regular service on the roads of England in the early 19th century, long before the advent of the automobile? (They perished — let's see whether you can guess — because of government regulations.)

I often ask my students how many went to high schools where they were taught that until Columbus, educated people believed the world was flat. Virtually all of them raise their hands. Not a single one is aware that in the 3rd century B.C., the Alexandrian scientist Eratosthenes calculated the circumference of the earth, and came very close to the exact figure. His elegant calculation, which required only two or three clear, sharp operations of the intellect, and only one small set of observational data, is one of the greatest monuments of the human mind.

It's shocking that more people haven't found this stray fact. But when one does happen on such facts, one experiences the fifth and final of the Five Freedoms of Fact: *freedom of perspective*. I'll put it bluntly: when you know a lot of different things, you see the world a lot differently. You don't feel that you are bound so tightly to the ordinary details. You feel that your own life is more interesting, as indeed it is.

In Willa Cather's novel "O Pioneers!", the heroine relates an anecdote about a young woman who becomes despondent because she's never known anything but dull labor on a Nebraska farm. Then her family sends her to visit relatives in Iowa, and she experiences the Fifth Freedom: "Ever since she's come back she's been perfectly cheerful, and she says she's contented to live and work in a world that's so big and interesting. She said that anything as big as the bridges over the Platte and the Missouri reconciled her."

"Reconciled to the world" is one way of putting it. "Realizing your own significance" is another. When you know more about this "world that's so big and interesting," you think better of yourself. I understand the received wisdom: when we reflect on the size of the cosmos and the extent of history and the number of people on earth, we're supposed to feel humble about ourselves. But Cather disagrees, and so do I.

Think of yourself as a character in a play (as we all have a tendency to do). Imagine that this is a little play, with only a few characters. All that happens in it is that the people in your neighborhood say this and that about their immediate concerns, and you say this and that in return, and then you die.

In less than two days in 1886, 11 thousand miles of railroad were reconfigured. The change was organized entirely by private enterprise.

Some play! Now picture yourself in another drama — a vast theatrical display, full of unpredictable events and fascinating people from all over the world and all recorded history, a drama thousands of times greater and more interesting than

"King Lear." If you think you're in the second play, you're right; you have perspective on the significance of your life.

Perspective is what we gain when we stop cultivating our garden and start looking over the fence. I have a homely example of this. It has to do with the history of the Midwest.

Before government land could be sold in the states west of the Appalachians, the wilderness needed to be surveyed. In each of the northwestern and southwestern territories, surveyors laid out a grid of mile-square sections. They began by projecting a meridian, running north and south, and a baseline, running east and west. Every parcel of land was plotted

The Mysterious Ball was placed on the monument in 1896, and soon it began to turn. No one knows how this happens. But it does.

and numbered in relation to those lines. The men who ran the lines were well paid, and they deserved to be. Theirs was a heroic endeavor — cutting through forests, wading through swamps, fighting dirt and heat and animals and malaria and every other feature of a noisome environment, where perspective was provided only by scientific instruments and the sight of the North Star. And they weren't just running lines; they were writing elaborate reports on the soil, minerals, hydraulics, fauna and flora of every section of land they surveyed, for the benefit of future purchasers, if any.

Well. I grew up at 11502 N. Meridian Road, Jackson County, Michigan. It was called Meridian Road because it was located about half a mile east of the Michigan meridian. Further, our place was located a mile and a half south of Michigan's baseline — a line that made an unpredictable jog, right where it hit the meridian. Because of a surveyor's (understandable) mistake, the end of the eastern part of the baseline was, and is, 936 feet away from the start of the western part.

At any rate, a journey to the meridian from the back fence of my childhood home was only a 20-minute tramp through fields and woods. On one or two occasions I made that trip, but I had to do it secretly. My parents didn't like the idea of my "traipsing" across the neighbors' property. More to the point, they had no perspective on where we lived. The idea of the baseline and meridian had no influence on them, although you'd think that anyone who lived on Meridian Road would want to know why it got its name. My K-8 school, which was also situated on Meridian Road, imparted no information on the subject either. The topic never came up, not even in my beloved Michigan history class.

It wasn't until long after I grew up and moved away that I realized where I had lived. Then I saw that T.S. Eliot's lines about the discovery of perspective might be literally true:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

If I had known those apparently useless pieces of information about the baseline and meridian, they would have helped

me visualize my place in history. They would have helped me understand that I was an heir to the brawny, sweaty, mosquito-bitten guys who laid out the little world in which I was privileged to be reared. And they would have helped me sense the greater world, beyond the back fence and the imaginary line — a world where things happen strangely, unpredictably, with superhuman toil and, often, with superhuman cleverness and skill.

Fortunately, it doesn't take superhuman effort to gain the shiny bits of knowledge that help us see such things. Part of it is just asking questions. Children are better at this than adults, because adults learn not to ask the kind of questions that might keep us from moving efficiently through our day. Far be it from us to wonder when the city hall was built, or why Normal Street should have that abnormal name. The only problem with children's questions is that kids can't follow up on them without the assistance of adults, and the adults usually don't know enough to assist them — because they've lost the habit of asking questions themselves.

I've had an on-again, off-again interest in the history of my family, but I was over 40 before it occurred to me to ask my aunt Norma, the eldest of our tribe, what kind of car her parents owned. "Car!" she replied. "They never owned a car. They didn't have that kind of money." The fact that my grandfather ran a store, served on the school board, and was an officer of a local bank (think "It's a Wonderful Life"), yet could never afford a car, opened a new vista on what is called "social class in America." But I'd never asked the obvious question.

Have you ever noticed, when you're reading biographies, how seldom the authors try to answer such obvious questions as "How tall was he? Did he keep his Virginia accent? He was a Catholic — how often did he go to church? Did his house contain a toilet?" Not to mention the most important question of all: "How much money did he make?" You can read thousands of pages of biography and never learn what anyone's salary was, or how much anyone earned on the royalties of

Would you rather see dead horses stuck to your walls, or endure a little bit of secondhand smoke?

books, or how much anyone actually spent for the "expensive new house" that people are always buying in biographies. Sometimes you're fobbed off in the way you are when the mainstream media talk about a strike. "Teachers," you're told, "are demanding a 10% raise," but you never learn how much they're making now. In the same way, a biographer will tell you, "Her third book sold 10,000 copies more than her second," without ever telling you how much the second one sold. It's true that financial information can be hard to find. But unless the biographer tells you that he couldn't find the answer, you can bet that he didn't even ask the question.

Asking questions is the most important thing. But there are two other good ways of learning stray facts. The two may seem contradictory, but they're just different ways of coming at the same thing.

The first is to read *anything*. Aren't you amazed when you see people sitting by themselves in a restaurant or a waiting room, and they *aren't reading*? Perhaps they're immersed in God-consciousness. Perhaps they're nearing completion of their plan to rule the world. Perhaps their minds are total blanks. In any event, as the Lord says in Genesis, it isn't good for man to be alone. He should be reading something. He should be reading the help-wanted signs or last week's Entertainment section or the ingredients on the ketchup bottle — anything that might reveal some facts. Better, he should have bought the first book he saw at the swap meet, and grabbed it when he was going out the door today.

I exaggerate. Nobody has a motivation for literally random reading. But everyone can pursue the connections of his favorite interests. A person who loves gothic cathedrals can look for some information about how they were financed. A person who loves Chinese food can go online and do some research about Chinese immigration and the cultures attached to it. A person who loves railroads can learn something about the people who planned them, invested in them, tried to manage them. In short: identify your interests, and find out what lies half a mile away from them.

The second way of learning stray facts is to read according to plan. I would add, "the more arbitrary the plan, the better," but that would be another exaggeration. Yet the basic idea is sound. When I was a sophomore in high school, our librarian, Mrs. Helen Hodge, a sweet, plump, eccentric little lady who voted Socialist and claimed that her vote wasn't counted (which was probably true), mimeographed a list of 100 books that she thought everyone should read. I was not a reader, but I took her list seriously. I guess I believed it was connected with getting into college, though like most other young people, then or now, I could have gotten into college without reading much of anything.

Every list of this kind must be pretty arbitrary. One hundred books? Why not 50 books? Why not 200? And no high-class educator would have approved the entries on Mrs. Hodge's list. It was very long on prize-winning novels ("The Good Earth") and very short on poetry, history, and philosophy. Left-wing stuff was prominent ("The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens"). But the list had an overwhelming virtue: it reduced the infinite number of books that I had never read to the finite number of books that I might actually get through.

Starting on that list was an enormous event in my life. I remember that when I had finished five out of the hundred titles (one of them the redoubtable "Moby-Dick"), I lay in the bathtub, congratulating myself on being well-read — or at least one-twentieth well-read. I believe I eventually got through 55 or 60 of Mrs. Hodge's books. Some of them were dreadful ("The Jungle"); others were good at the time, but attempts at rereading have been spectacularly unsuccessful. And contrary to my emphasis on random, unorganized, unprofessional knowledge, I must admit that the list has benefited me greatly in a professional way. As a college teacher, I often have occasion to notice that I'm the only one in the seminar room who has read Edna Ferber or can comment on the *oeuvre* of Upton Sinclair.

The great thing about the list, however, was that it was

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In Vino Libertas

by Michael Christian

The theoretical benefits of free trade and competition are clear — but the practical ones are more worth savoring.

In a perfect libertarian world there wouldn't be a lot of room for libertarians to talk about politics, would there?

In the real, obviously imperfect world, our job is to complain (I know, rationally) until the cows come home. But if the cows do come home, there will be no more complaining to do, and we may find ourselves at a loss. What would a libertarian do in such a world?

Not to worry, you say; the world is at no risk of achieving perfection any time soon. True, but I don't think my speculation is vain. Even our imperfect world gives us freedoms that merely sit on the shelf, where most of us don't even see them. We may have political and economic freedom in some sphere but are too constrained by culture and received wisdom to make full use of it.

In some sense, of course, the limitations are voluntary and therefore not the proper object of more libertarian kvetching. Still, I think that since we put such a high value on freedom we should be especially good at exploiting it for our own enjoyment.

There's the freedom you have, and there's the freedom you use. This little essay is about the latter. It's about one of my favorite freedoms — the freedom to drink. The French say

“drink like a hole” and “smoke like a fireman.” Some day, I hope to write about the exquisite pleasures of tobacco, and how best to enjoy them, but this attempt is about the pleasures of drinking. My particular example of a freedom and pleasure — and how easy it is not to make the most of it — is the use of wine.

Thanks to increasingly free trade and competition and the market differentiation they have produced, and thanks to the propagation of grape vines and of Mediterranean wine culture around the world, I can walk into a local store and buy hundreds of different wines from dozens of different countries and four different continents. That's my kind of freedom, and I enjoy it. But you (if you're like most American wine drinkers) don't enjoy it as you should — you are limited by prejudices. You are choosing wine for the wrong reasons. You are (sin of sins) ignoring your own palate.

I know it's true. I was once like you. My mind had been

narrowed. I had trained my naive palate to seek a certain style of wine. I had been indoctrinated, and indoctrination had left me with a debilitating dogma. It had left me less free, in an immediate and practical sense. The shelves were full of the possibilities that economic liberty had produced, I kept

California and Australia winemakers pushed to greater and greater extremes. The results could be a caricature: fruit like a mouthful of Smuckers with some raisins and prunes.

reaching for the same old stuff. In your local wine merchant's shop, just ten or twenty dollars will buy you great freedom to choose, but you can't use it unless you look past the popular authorities and educate yourself.

The education of which I speak requires no books or lectures. For years I read books and attended lectures but left freedom on the shelf. Then it suddenly revealed itself to me. I woke up one day, knowing that for several years I had been dissatisfied with the Californian and Australian wine I was drinking. I hadn't thought about it. I had just assumed that I liked what I was supposed to like. The solution was to forget most of what I had learned about drinking wine. You should too.

I had become so tired of the wine I was supposed to like that, not only did I begin to buy alternatives, but I began to make my own. A friend and I planted a couple hundred vines in the high country east of San Diego. Last night I drank some of our third vintage. Very satisfying.

But to return. If you are like me and most other Americans with an interest in wine, you learned about it at the feet of such critics as Robert Parker, an American lawyer with a great palate and a subscription newsletter with thousands of followers. These people introduced the 100-point rating system for wine, and they did a good job of taking away some of the mystery that surrounds it. The numbers were easy to comprehend: an 88 was pretty good, a 93 was excellent, and a 98 would cost an arm and a leg, if you could find it. Today, wherever you buy wine, little signs proclaim things like "Parker 91" and "Wine Spectator 89!"

Most consumers were relieved to have these references. They fulfilled a proper function of advertising: they provided basic information and assisted the customer's choice. Suppose you're going to a dinner party and want to bring a bottle for the host. Hey, here's a Parker 90 — can't be bad. If you didn't have time to get your guidance directly from the new critics, you could take it from an ambient wine culture that was molded by them.

American wine drinkers were like a bad girlfriend or boyfriend — needy and vulnerable. The critics met the need and exploited the vulnerability. That sounds morally bad, but it wasn't. They really did provide a service — for a while.

It all started in 1982, with the 1982 Bordeaux vintage in France. More than in California or Australia, vintages matter in the Bordeaux and Burgundy regions, mostly because their

weather is less reliable and their methods leave more room for natural variations. The 1982 Bordeaux vintage was unusual, even atypical, and exceptionally good. Parker proclaimed it from the rooftops, and it was a huge hit with consumers in the United States. This great Bordeaux vintage, combined with the newly significant American wine market and the influence of an innovative wine critic, started a swing of the pendulum in wine styles that has now reached an extreme.

It happened that in 1982 everything conspired to produce a bumper crop of very ripe fruit in Bordeaux. The flowering of the vines came early, pollination was good, and there was plenty of sun and heat as the grapes matured. The resulting wine was much richer, sweeter, and fruitier than usual. It was easy to drink young, unlike more traditional Bordeaux; yet it still had enough acid and tannins to avoid being syrupy.

When the vintage came out, Parker was just making his bones in the industry. He used his 100-point scale to rate the Bordeaux of '82, and he absolutely loved the vintage. He announced that it could be the vintage of the century. His judgment moved millions of bottles — so many in fact, that vintners began making wine to please his particular palate.

At the same time, the U.S. market was becoming more important as a result of some liberating political and economic events. The stagflation of the Carter years was over, tax rates were coming down, and the dollar was getting strong. I remember in the mid-'80s buying French francs at 11 to the dollar. That would put the dollar at close to 2 euros today. As I write, you can't buy eight-tenths of a euro with a dollar.

Americans went mad for the '82 vintage even before it was released. They bought up the futures contracts and later drank up most of the wine before it was mature. A whole style of wine — ripe and ready, often called "fruit-forward wine" or "fruit bombs" — took over. With rich, ripe juice, wine makers could get good scores on Parker's 100-point scale, and those scores opened up the large and growing U.S. market. The better fruit bombs might benefit from long aging (unlike many other wines, good Bordeaux usually does), but it was delicious even when young.

A more traditional Bordeaux might be too harsh and tart, unless it had spent a decade or more in a good wine cellar. But who had a good wine cellar? Back when the '82s were released I was drinking the stuff in dorm rooms. I had no way to store wine. So Parker and American drinkers and the new style broadened the market for premium wine.

So the economic incentive for making wine in the super-ripe style was strong. But how do you make such wine in years that don't look like '82? There are two ways.

One is fruit cropping — reducing the amount of fruit on the vine severely, so that the vine has ample resources to ripen the remaining fruit. The other is hang time. This involves leaving the fruit on the vine well after its initial ripening, to get the sugar content higher. The first method, severe fruit cropping, can result in deeply concentrated, rich wine, but it makes for such small yields that, for the most part, only wine makers who can charge very high prices use it. The second method, extending the hang time, can result in prune flavors and wine that is rich but bland or cloying, because the acidity of the grapes drops as the ripe fruit hangs on the vine. Some

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Radio Free Santa Cruz

by Jacques Delacroix

The revolution may not be televised — but
it will be broadcast.

I am a talk-show host, a radio personality you might say, but Rush Limbaugh is not sweating it — not yet.

My show, “Facts Matter,” runs two hours a week on Sundays, 11 to 1 p.m. on KSCO Santa Cruz, 1080 AM. Mid-day Sunday is not the best radio time; that would be the late afternoon weekdays rush hour. But Sunday noon is not the worst time either. Many people feel leisurely enough to pay attention at that hour, although I have to compete with God to some extent. I work for that rarity, a small, locally owned station with no corporate connections.

I don't know exactly how the station makes a living, or if it does. It's a family enterprise. The family may subsidize it to an unknown extent. There is some local paid advertising, for conventional local businesses, including the Santa Cruz Diner (about which more below). Some of the locally generated advertising for local businesses makes good folklore. One couple-owned business airs a sweet short commercial in which husband and wife use, at least ten times, the words “eletic” and “eleticr.” What's sweet is that they sound exactly alike. There also seem to be many ads for vitamins and other, more or less esoteric, food supplements that I don't use because I eat an apple a day.

The station is another rare thing: a frankly conservative organ in the midst of a well-known people's green socialist republic. The government of the city where the station is located is dominated by current Maoists, former Trotskyists (no such thing, maybe) and unreformed Stalinists, plus secretly insane Greens. Most of these people are liberals; and most are prosperous merchants, of course. Some are university lecturers, as you would expect. Over the years, they have forbidden smoking, sitting, sleeping, and dogs. Recently, they decided in their wisdom that there could be only two medicinal pot-shops in town, by appointment. The idea of letting the market decide did not arise.

With all this, the town is well run in a sort of second-grade, school-teacherish way, with new rules every other week. My garbage gets collected, but I am forbidden from cutting down the ludicrous tall redwood tree in my narrow front yard. Of course, I like sequoias, but there are thousands in the forest,

five minutes by car from my house. Fellow citizens who want to see one should not impose this unconstitutional tax on me. They can damn well drive to the forest.

In my immediate catchment area, vestigial Trotskyism, unlettered Maoism, and mushy environmentalism are the Establishment. If it were not ridiculous, I would declare that people like me are the underground. That claim would not

After 30 years of being called "racist," even patriots feel that being American must be vaguely sinful.

work because we are loud and feared, at least I hope so. My station's main key to success and even to the survival is its shining service record on local issues. In bad weather, or when forest fires encircle us, we give nonstop utilitarian coverage. If a big earthquake struck, most people in our area, including effete, sensitive, haughty liberals, would tune to my station for salvation.

Our programming is distinctive. It's almost all talk. There is no music except what individual hosts choose to play. The station boasts what I think is a world-class "Good Morning" program. It hurts me to admit this, but it's led by a die-hard liberal who has at least the merit of being a patriotic immigrant like me. Then it airs the syndicated Rush Limbaugh show from 9 to 12, five days a week, every week. On the same days, it has two strongly libertarian-leaning conservative hosts in the afternoon. One, who has been at it for 15 years, is a refined commentator on the Constitution and an expert on California politics.

There is also an informally defined but persistent left-liberal, "progressive" slot in the middle of the afternoon. The station management has trouble keeping it filled, although I am certain it's trying hard. Air America comes to mind, but that no longer exists. (I know it's not compassionate to mention this defunct attempt at Left mastery of the airways, but it's unavoidable.) It seems to me that liberal talk-show hosts tend to be too soft on facts to take on the listeners' challenges, at least conservative listeners' challenges. Moreover, too many things "appall" them. It's tiring to the audience and to themselves. They are smart enough to hear themselves and they tend to move on.

The other radio stations in our listening area are liberal, "progressive," or hard-left in their orientation. They demonstrate daily the small-scale totalitarian foundations of their worldview: None of them has even a single, token, conservative on its crew. None of them is trying.

As for my prosciutto-thin slice of airtime, it provides an "international" component, among other things. It's true that my foreign accent almost certainly helped me get the gig. It's annoying because, personally, I don't like hearing foreign accents on the radio. I always suspect that the host got the benefit of the doubt just because of the accent — additional presumed IQ points, perhaps. I even suspect there is a fixed rate: Oxbridge: + 30 points; common English English:

+ 20 points; Scottish or French (mine): +10 points; Aussie: + 5 points. Everything else non-American: + 2 or - 2 points. Yet I am well qualified because of my former scholarship in cross-national research and because I taught international business for 20 years. (Correct: I didn't just read the textbook aloud to my class; I was learning all the time.) Furthermore, I keep informed routinely in two languages other than English, and occasionally, in a third.

My personal contribution does not amount to much that is tangible. There are two aspects of it, symbolic and substantive; the substantive part is not that concrete, and the symbolic contribution may be wholly imagined. After 30 years, political correctness has done its pernicious work. After 30 years of being called "racist," after 30 years of hearing the rantings of La Raza ("The Race"), even libertarians, even conservatives, even patriots feel that being American must be vaguely sinful. Fragments of out-of-context truth end up sticking to those big lies, affecting the innocent and the well-meaning. Listening to this immigrant, with his foreign-accented voice, who stumbles occasionally on common words, and liking what he says, must provide some solace, I speculate. It might even bestow legitimacy on the listeners, in their own minds. People who tune to me Sunday after Sunday can't be all that intolerant of "diversity." They can't really be xenophobic. (I don't know how many know the word, but they are surely familiar with the accusation it conveys.) My predecessor in the time slot was also an immigrant, and he too had a foreign accent. When I leave, I hope another American-by-choice will take the same slot.

Then, of course, there is what one does on the air, and how. I perform more tangible services, but the consequences of my doing so are not necessarily measurable or important. Naturally, I help explain American foreign policy as well as some foreign events. I expatiate on the mutual effects of American policies and of other countries' policies. I also offer a cross-national judgment on seemingly domestic facts. For example, before March 22, 2010, conservative commentators persisted in declaring that the United States had "the best healthcare system in the world," a meaningless statement that would be false if it had meaning. I said so aloud. No one else with any credentials did.

None of what I do is very scholarly or intellectually elevated, but I am addressing myself mostly to working people who don't have much time to inform themselves broadly, or to digest what they do learn. I like to think of myself as a kind of caterer: I shop for my clients and I cook for them, probably a little better than most of them would do for themselves. My role model for ethics and style is the popular local old-fashioned Santa Cruz Diner. Here is why.

When I began broadcasting, I met with issues of personal self-evaluation. My former life as an academic, and the laboring years preceding it, did nothing to give me standards of behavior or performance metrics relevant to my new avocation. Since I thought of myself as a kind of caterer, I chose a restaurant as a role model. It's an award-winning diner. As "diner" implies, it has a counter where you can sit on stools. Half the waitresses are white women in tight jeans and fresh hairdos. The other half are smiling Filipinas. The waitresses never tell you they are your "server tonight," or "your wait-person." They never babble about their other job as an

undiscovered artist or “actor.” They are all kind, courteous, and brisk. The kitchen is open, a fact I like because I am naturally mistrustful. The whole jocular and efficient kitchen crew is Mexican — from the same area, possibly from the same town, my ear tells me. The menu offers eggs with waffles and even eggs with corned beef. You can get biscuits with gravy if you ask. It’s also a lunch and a dinner restaurant, of course. Every dinner features a different special: spare ribs, prime ribs, grilled salmon, etc. — familiar dishes cooked with care, and all for under \$10 (in early 2010). It’s not gourmet gastronomy; it’s solid food that seldom disappoints. It’s honest food. Yet we are in California, so a pretty good *pho* is also on the menu. I don’t know how it got there, but I am charmed that it did. (For those of you in the deep hinterland, *pho* is a Vietnamese noodle soup with thinly sliced exotic meats floating on the surface. It’s served with fresh herbs and bean sprouts.)

On the air, I try to be as forthright, as honest, and as courteous as the Santa Cruz Diner. I try hard to explain apparently obfuscated issues in a straightforward manner. I make a deliberate effort to do that in ordinary words. Sometimes, I think I am doing the best teaching I have done in my life. It’s tough going. Radio is a difficult medium because it forces you to talk to a blank wall. There is no barefoot, hairy, overgrown C-addict sleeping in the back of the room. There is no second row filled with yellow marker-brandishing good girls with whom to make inquiring eye contact. It’s so bad, I blackmail my friends to come and keep me company in the studio just to have a reactive human face to look at. There is one guy, an Englishman, whom I bribe with *pâté* sandwiches for lunch just so he will sit across from my mic.

It’s true that there are always the callers, since it’s “talk” radio. Yet relying on wild calls is not as productive as it sounds. First, in every show, initial calls are often from single-issue types who try to bite off a big chunk of my airtime, irrespective of what I happen to be speaking about. Some are sane; others may not be. Most of the gold standardizers would be an example of the sane. There are also the conspiracy addicts, addicts to conspiracies I don’t need to name; but some of the gold standardizers also belong in there. There are the Bilderbergers, the brave fighters against the Illuminati plot, and even the contrailers. Other callers have a valid point with which I don’t want to deal, or not right then, because it’s too complicated or too boring for radio. I have been moderately successful in freezing them out through my show’s name and theme: “Facts Matter.” When I detect a conspiracy caller moving interminably toward the deep end, I challenge him quickly to cite his sources, to tell me and the audience why we should believe what he alleges. I offer that he do it on-air, by fax, by email, the next day, any day. That usually takes care of it.

If I think a caller is acting unreasonably stubborn, I defy him to take a friendly wager over the air, to benefit a charity. As I write, one stubborn guy has been owing Doctors Without Borders \$20 for three months. He lost, and he is too cheap or too stubborn to pay up. At least, he has not called my show since. The on-air, uncharitable bet for charitable purposes may be my first original contribution to the genre of talk-show radio. I pioneered another contribution, but just one time: a rare radlib caller got under my skin, and I provoked — maneuvered him, rather — into challenging me to

a duel. We had it out arm-wrestling in the station parking lot. The match had been well advertised. It was well attended. My producer commented on it step by step on air, as one would the World Soccer Cup. I collected donations for a good cause. (And please don’t even ask: the other guy was ten years younger than I am — nevertheless, six out of six; what do you think? Leftists can’t stand the heat of one-on-one direct conflict. That’s why they are collectivists.)

Relying on callers presents tangled problems of strategy. When I am on a roll, talking eloquently about some topic or other in the lonely silence of the studio, I will take some calls just because it’s supposed to be “talk radio.” Then I will receive an email or a fax, or a caller will ask specifically that

Leftists can’t stand the heat of one-on-one direct conflict. That’s why they are collectivists.

I *not* put him on the air — “I was listening and understanding for the first time why polar bears are probably not starving on ice floes any more than before. Please keep those other morons off the air” — and I am simultaneously flattered, mortified, and disoriented.

I receive little feedback of any kind, but most of it encourages me to lecture at length. I feel that I have to keep a balance between lecturing and taking calls, but I have little idea of what the balance is. So I muddle through; but there is a constant danger of awarding too much importance to the few people who bother to express an opinion and to the opinions of chance encounters with people who recognize my voice at the coffee shop.

The work involved in preparing for a short weekly program is significant. It’s of the same order of magnitude as prepping for a good long weekly university lecture that you haven’t delivered before. True, there are no exams to grade, but there are also no breaks, not at Christmas, not for spring. And there is some synergy, as management textbooks put it. The radio show feeds my blog and the blog feeds the radio show. I also read some of my short stories on the air after posting them on my blog. Together, the two media may give me more quasi-readers than the average periodical publication. Nevertheless, the questions often arise in my mind: “Why am I not out fishing? What am I doing here? What am I doing it for? What good do I do?”

The answer to these questions has near absolute, physical limits, dictated by the station’s hardware: on a good day, with favorable atmospheric conditions, we reach 100 miles in every direction, including the empty Pacific to the west. Our area encompasses a little more than a million potential listeners. Of course, there is a big gap between potential and actual. The internet provides a little extension. I have had people listening to me online from Russia and Morocco. But the custom of listening to AM radio online is not well established.

Here is an incomplete review of what I do. For one thing, no one wants to cover downtown. I live there, so the beat is

mine by default. I get to do occasional good by watching the city government closely. One example: the night before garbage pickup, a small, well-organized team of homeless types rifles through the cans to gather recyclables. They are discreet, efficient, and neat. In their diminished circumstances they are reaching out for the dignity of work and taking a step toward self-sufficiency. They are entrepreneurial in an area where many eat at the government's trough. To my mind, they are

The article describes a local clown as “fluent in six languages,” and the holder of a doctorate in astrophysics. Some overqualified clown!

gleaning, a modest but respectable and traditional way to earn a living. It's such an old practice that Leviticus 19 prohibited prohibiting it. But recently the city started a vicious, nasty, lying war against the gleaners. I came to their defense on the air, loudly. I did so on the ground that my garbage was my garbage notwithstanding any monopoly the city may have given, more or less legally, to a refuse collection company under contract.

This form of petty oppression is especially repugnant because it is based on the well-founded assumption that no one who cares will take the trouble to mount a legal challenge either to the monopoly or to the city's practice of confiscating people's garbage to give it to one of its own creatures. I also pointed out that the city's actions were immoral. First, I believe it. Second, this kind of accusation always makes liberals and progressives squirm, because they are so convinced of their own selfless rectitude. I was surprised and gratified by the number of approving calls I received on this issue. It was a small victory, to be sure, but elementary, tiny truths need to be said aloud frequently. The struggle for the gleaners continues.

From listeners' question and emails, and from comments on my blog, I have come to think that my most significant contribution is also the most difficult to explain, because it's largely tacit: I am the cosmopolitan, or the crossnational, or perhaps the crosscultural voice of criticality. (I hate that term, too, but it existed before political correctness and it has a valid meaning outside of it.) The following is an example.



“A spin doctor just isn't enough any more, Senator — you need a choreographer.”

A local columnist has been using the local paper to erect himself as the equally local arts czar. He organizes award ceremonies where he is both jury and presenter. He writes pretty good columns on art events. My town is exceptionally artsy-craftsy. It boasts an amazingly varied music scene and hundreds of visual artists. Incidentally, the visual arts are like the Olympics: any locality with a broad base of practitioners is likely to turn out a few high achievers. For each set of 30 divorced, middle-class women who reproduce pretty flowers adequately, there is one who comes up with paintings that are both well executed and original. Someone local has to comment; someone local has to announce the relevant issues and shows. That columnist does. I don't take this away from him. But there is more.

One Sunday, the front page of the newspaper has a big piece written by the journalist in question, announcing another art award ceremony in big letters, and a list of the winners he has chosen. One item catches my eye: a local clown is one of the award recipients. This perplexes me a little, but it just may show that I am a narrow-minded old fogey. I read on. The article describes the lucky winner, the clown, as “fluent in six languages” and the holder of a “doctorate in astrophysics.” No shit, I think, some overqualified clown!

The next item in the story is even more bizarre: the clown's father used to be “the director of the famed Bolshoi Ballet” in Moscow. A garland of red lights comes on in my brain. I have to ask myself why the clown's parental antecedents should matter at all. Clowning is one of those rare, blessed occupations that give you instantaneous, uncomplicated feedback about the quality of your performance: if they laugh from the belly, they like it; if they applaud discreetly, they don't. Then why have any recourse to Daddy's achievements? But wait a second: the Bolshoi? In Moscow? This clown is 50 if she is a day. That would put us back in the 1970s, in the Soviet Union. I look up the clown's online biography. It mentions more or less vaguely some studies in the German Democratic Republic. That would be the communist workers' paradise that almost emptied itself into the West when the Berlin Wall collapsed. But the clown appears to have French origins. I have reasons to believe she understands French. Can you imagine how twisted her father or her mother would have had to have been to choose deadly boring, nakedly repressive East Germany over smiley France (just think of the gastronomical downward mobility involved!), or even Belgium?

I sniff a red-diaper baby, probably from the old Communist Order's privileged international aristocracy. These people refuse to disappear into the dustbin of history. They cling. The woman is starting to look like a deluded or a mendacious clown. Now, remember that I am writing about small-time, local talk radio, and my tiny part in it. What native-born American would have that old history in mind at all? Furthermore, who else would ask questions about the truthfulness of the personal history?

The answers to my questions are mildly complex. Given my origins, Eurotrash issues fall within my bailiwick as a matter of course. I recognize a common immigrant trick of absurd, invented self-aggrandizement exploiting the natives' benevolent, openminded parochialism. I know things that all immigrants know and nary a native-born American knows. One is that no one, nobody, is “fluent in six languages.” That's

the case, almost whatever lenient definition of “fluent” you adopt. (I think I am going to receive furious readers’ mail on this. It will come from strict monolinguals who will assure me that their uncle “speaks” seven or eight languages “fluently.” Some angry mail may even come from people whose grammar qualifies them as “semi-linguals.” As I always say, “*Caca de taureau!*”) Then there is the doctorate in astrophysics. From the online biography, I deduce that it’s supposed to have been awarded by the most prestigious institution in Germany. I don’t believe any of this. It all smells so bad, I don’t have to check before opening my big mouth.

The same day on my show I challenge the journalist by name. I offer to give \$200 to Doctors Without Borders if he can demonstrate three crucial statements about the clown to be true, \$100 if any two are true, and \$50 if *any* one of the three is correct. It’s not even a bet. He can’t lose except through inaction, and even then, he is under no obligation to give anyone anything. I take the precaution to forward my challenge in an email. That’s just in case the journalist is not listening and none of his cohorts is interested enough to let him know. I think the latter is unlikely because, again, this is a small town.

After a while, the art writer muses in a private email sent back to me that it’s five languages rather than six and “conversant” might be more accurate than “fluent.” No offer to correct, even on the tenth page of the newspaper. Then, I press him on the doctorate. Soon, he tells me that the subject is of no interest to him. Get this: a journalist affirms in writing that the factuality of what he wrote does not concern him.

I do what a good journalist would have done in the old days and send an inquiry to the prestigious German institution of higher learning. It takes a month, but I receive an email in both German and English telling me that no such person has ever received any degree from that institution. I believe Germans tend to be thorough. The person who answered me at the institution confirms my suspicions, of course: “We performed thorough research. We have never heard of this person.” I forward the response to the journalist. The fact that he does not acknowledge my message supplies yet more confirmation of my suspicion.

It’s true that my test does not provide definitive proof of either delusion or mendacity. The Germans may not have found the clown in their records under her present name because she was awarded her degree under another name — perhaps the name of her father, also not on the Bolshoi list of directors! (None of these gentlemen was a likely candidate.) But then, naturally, I would ask for *that* name. In the meantime, I have taken it upon myself to send the award-winning clown an email containing my challenge to the journalist about her biography. The message is in French. If she knows six, or even five languages fluently, one of them must be that commonplace language, and her online biography says that she speaks it. There is no response, of course.

This is interesting — a kind of live experiment that radio and only radio makes possible. Every Sunday, for several weeks, I inform my audience of the progress of the experiment. After a while, I declare victory and abandon the topic. One might ask what I accomplished, if anything. As I said above, the answer is not evident; it’s tacit. It’s possible that the journalist will be more prudent in the future, that he will check his facts better because you never know what despica-

bly well-informed foreign-born s.o.b might check them if you don’t. Possibly, he will be less eager to affirm the unknown and the unknowable. Perhaps, in the future, he will pay attention to contradiction when it’s brought to his attention. I suspect he knows that I am watching him, that I am looking over his shoulder, not all the time surely but some of the time, and he does not know when. This misadventure, I judge, will make him reconsider the belief that his newspaper’s de facto monopoly in town confers immunity from ridicule. It’s even possible, because this is local stuff, small-time stuff, that some of his colleagues have also straightened out, belted up, for fear of my watching them too, with my mean, beady eyes. For all I know, there might even have been a short editorial conference about avoiding the “Facts Matter” peril. How I would like that!

More important, it’s likely that some of my audience got its criticality motor revved up. I reminded my listeners that small lies abound. I demonstrated for them that the fog of mendacity does not emanate entirely from “politicians” or “the corporations,” as many are inclined to believe. I gave lying or delusional behavior a small, proximate, familiar face. And, of course, I provided a demonstration that you can’t trust the traditional media even on a small, insignificant issue such as a clown’s lies or delusions. Lastly, I can’t skirt the obvious question of the personal, intimate, sadistic pleasure the experiment may have procured for me. My answer is that when providence tosses you an opportunity to commit a virtuous sin, you should dive and catch it. I bullied the bullies; that’s virtuous any way you look at it. I afflicted the comfortable, one of the two things existentially worth doing.

Earlier, when I was in academia, colleagues, and especially deans and assorted lower forms of life often called me a “loose cannon.” The truth is that most academics love free speech only as an abstraction they are seldom called upon to implement. By and large, they want to sound genteel so they

The journalist says that the subject is of no interest to him. He affirms in writing that the factuality of his article doesn’t concern him.

will be accepted. Many confuse “genteel” with “rational.” Many more are not of the Left from reasoned conviction but because of a fearful herd instinct. Radio gives me a belated chance to be a constructive loose cannon. I get to shout from the rooftops what others, busier people than I, barely have a chance to formulate in their own minds.

I am, however, pretty moderate and thoughtful as loose cannons go. In the end, I tell myself, ten thousand loose cannons, including the borderline agitated, the crazies, and the frankly insane, aggregate into the voice of reason and of intellectual honesty. Individually, radio talk shows hosts serve a multitude of local and regional markets, most on a small-scale basis. Together, they form the main alternative to the bulk of the lazy, intellectually conformist but still poisonous mainstream liberal, *bien-pensant* media. □

Off the Rails, *from page 24*

the most wasteful projects (though Congress waived the rule for several projects, including an extension of the Washington rail system to Dulles Airport and an extension of the BART system to San Jose). The other rule applied only to streetcars and required that cities prove that streetcars were more cost-effective than buses. Together, these cost-effectiveness rules forced transit agencies to consider outputs, such as passenger miles of travel and congestion relief, as opposed to just inputs, such as jobs and infrastructure.

A typical example of an agency confusing inputs with outputs is Nashville's Regional Transportation Authority, which spent more than \$40 million to start a commuter train called the Music City Star. The agency proudly tells everyone who will listen that it is "the most cost effective commuter rail start-up in the nation," meaning that it spent less on its commuter train than other cities. But it is truly cost-effective only if people ride it, and so few people ride the Music City Star that it would have cost less to give every daily round-trip rider a brand new Toyota Prius every year for the next 30 years than to run the train.

Unfortunately, the current Secretary of Transportation (and Rogoff's boss), Ray LaHood, rescinded Peters' cost-effectiveness rules in January 2010. Immediately afterward, the Federal Transit Administration funded streetcar lines in Dallas, Detroit, New Orleans, Portland, and Tucson — lines that could not have been funded under the previous rules.

At least some members of Congress are aware that federal funding programs create perverse incentives for local transit agencies. In 2005, Congress passed a law requiring the FTA to do a "study on incentives in formula programs." The same section of the law specifically mentioned outputs or "performance categories" such as trips and passenger miles per capita.

Yet the incentives study that the FTA published in response to this law did nothing to evaluate the incentives created by the existing formulas or how new incentives could improve transit outputs. Instead, it looked solely at creating incentives for "improving the transit industry's 'state of good repair.'" While a laudable goal, this is focused on inputs, not outputs. It doesn't do much good to have well-maintained trains if hardly anyone rides them.

Rogoff's speech has left people wondering whether he is openly challenging Secretary LaHood's policies or whether it reflects a broader administration realization that the nation is nearly broke and can't afford more expensive rail transit

white elephants. One way in which Rogoff can send a new signal is to order his agency to redo its incentives study, this time looking at all the existing incentives and how they can be reshaped to make the most effective use of federal transit dollars. Congress expects to take up a new transportation bill in 2011, and a revised incentives study could have a significant influence on that bill.

The fundamental problem is that our socialized transit model is broken. Unlike government highways, which are largely paid for by user fees and thus have been built mainly to serve highway users, transit is funded mainly by taxpayers. For every dollar paid in fares by transit users, taxpayers pay more than two dollars to support operating costs and more than another dollar in capital costs.

As a result, rather than manage transit systems to serve users, transit agencies focus on pleasing taxpayers and the elected officials who represent them. They cut back bus service to low-income neighborhoods that have low rates of auto ownership in order to build expensive rail lines into suburban neighborhoods to "get people out of their cars" and build a constituency of wealthy, upper-middle-class users who would never ride a bus.

Transit agencies are also heavily unionized, and many agencies have given their unions unbelievable (and unbelievably expensive) pension and healthcare packages. The New York Times recently reported that more than 8,000 employees of the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority earn six-figure incomes, including a Long Island Rail Road Conductor who made \$239,000 last year. Federal law is biased toward the unions, giving them effective vetoes over any federal grants to transit agencies.

Consequently, transit productivity has declined dramatically since 1964, when Congress started encouraging cities and states to take over private transit companies. Between 1964 and 2008, America's urban population grew by 77%, while transit ridership grew by only 26%. But the number of employees required to operate transit grew by 165% and the inflation-adjusted cost of operating transit lines grew by a whopping 360%.

Libertarians agree that transit ought to be privatized. While the Obama administration is not likely to endorse that view, we can take heart from the fact that at least some officials understand the financial unsustainability of rail transit systems. Perhaps Rogoff's speech will discourage at least a few cities from building more of these boondoggles. □

Letters, *from page 6*

process caused the fine ash particles to agglomerate into lumps, they would sift out of the sky too quickly.) Eventually, this material would settle earthwards and would become an ingestion hazard for airplane turbine engines, clogging turbine blade cooling passages.

But where would we get ten cubic kilometers of quartz? Let us assume it is reasonable to mine granite deposits con-

sisting of, say, 50% quartz. This means we would need to excavate 20 cubic kilometers of material. If this were done as a conical pit mine, with the radius of the excavation equal to its depth at the center, the pit would be 5.35 kilometers across (3.32 miles) and 8,800 feet deep — approximately as wide and deep as the Grand Canyon. Any way you look at it, this would be a gigantic earth-

moving and ore-processing project. So, in order to implement this "cheap and fast" approach, we would have to design and develop a cargo aircraft to operate at altitudes three times higher than anything we have achieved to date (six times higher than current cargo

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Reviews

"Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles," by Richard Dowden. Perseus, 2009, 592 pages.

A Continent Adrift

Robert Chatfield

Richard Dowden's work is a perfect starting point for anyone lacking knowledge on the present state of Africa. The author spent a decade there as editor for *The Economist*, then another decade as editor for the *Independent*; he has lived a considerable portion of his life on the continent. Rather than provide a history of each country, he takes a wide ranging approach to postcolonial Africa and presents cogent reasons why certain countries have developed the way they have.

Dowden's greatest strength is his ability to weave together tales from the history of interesting people and places, while delivering succinct summaries on the current state of affairs. It amazes me that he could write empathetically about the problems that lie behind the continent's awful political regimes, and still deliver sharply worded reproaches to those regimes.

A perfect example can be found in a chapter on Rwanda. Dowden maneuvers effortlessly between the Tutsi and

Hutu tribes before concluding that the present-day situation may be no better than a precursor to continued genocide in the region.

Most chapters in this book are named after specific countries, yet apply lessons that the author has learned throughout Africa. A chapter entitled "Zimbabwe" is as much about why dictatorships were allowed to flourish throughout the continent as it is about Robert Mugabe's destruction of this specific country.

Of particular interest to Liberty readers, I believe, are three themes that evolve throughout the book: why did dictatorships of the worst kind rise in Africa? Why did third-world Asia begin to emerge from poverty and political repression, while third-world Africa remained stagnant? And what has been the effect of concerted efforts to "save the Africans from themselves"? I'll try to address each issue separately.

Dowden spent his formative years in Uganda, home of Idi Amin, and he notes that Amin's rise was no less predictable than that of many other African

dictators. Most African nations are products of boundaries drawn by European colonists who paid little attention to the history, culture, or politics of any given territory. As long as those territories were ruled by mightily armed foreign forces, local tribes had little choice but to acquiesce. But after World War II, many of the European colonizers lost their appetite for controlling the vast continent, and a sudden wave of independence was thrust upon people who were ill-equipped to handle it.

Dowden's premise is that Western governments propped up leaders thought to be favorable to them, with a sharp eye to what appeared to be the biggest threat at the time, the possibility that Africa would succumb to Soviet influence. This support helped to ensure that most African nations were ruled as one-party states, regardless of the makeup of the populace. And, as Dowden says, "Africa's one-party states increasingly became one-man states — the Big Man."

This Big Man is a recurring character in the book. He is a direct result of

historical African societies. Many tribal nations were ruled by a chief, who was often held to possess supernatural powers. Postcolonial African nations would survive only if powerful leaders could consolidate the many tribes within the boundaries of ill-conceived nation-states. A rise to power would obviously mean rewarding those who had assisted a leader in achieving and maintaining power. Would a Big Man be any less likely to punish those opposing his power?

Dowden regards the rise of Robert Mugabe, one of the Big Men, as the natural, Zimbabwean extension of old Rhodesia's white leader, Ian Smith. Nascent African nations were essentially run as dictatorships by the colonial powers, however benevolent the Europeans thought they were being to the locals; and ensuing rulers naturally assumed and extended the same kind of authority.

As Dowden writes, "Mugabe thinks Zimbabwe is his because he took it by force — exactly the same mentality as the brutal white colonists who seized it more than a century ago. His aim, he says, is total independence but Zimbabweans will remain dependent on others' charity for the foreseeable future. In more than 40 years Zimbabwe has had only two rulers. Opposites in every conceivable way, Smith and Mugabe have one thing in common. Stubborn and reckless, they both gave the finger to the rest of the world and their own people. Maybe it is something in the water."

The story was repeated throughout the continent, as leaders in country after country consolidated power and drove minority tribes out of power, usually through hideous means that are poignantly described by the author. This often led to civil wars that probably would never have occurred if the artificial nation-state boundaries hadn't been drawn up years before by foreigners. Unfortunately, democracy and the republican form of government may be considered foreign exports to a continent that has very little experience in or use for such ideologies.

Did Africa's kind of leadership differ much from Asia's, during the same period? Dowden notes that dictatorship was not exclusive to Africa and that much of Asia was ruled by American-

or European-supported authoritarians in the 1970s and '80s. What can explain why Asia became the poster child for growth while Africa became stagnant or even went backwards?

Dowden explains that Asian leaders had the foresight to invest in their own countries, while African leaders looted their countries and took the spoils elsewhere. He provides one estimate that \$607 billion in assets are held outside the continent. The sum is about twice as large as Africa's external debt. As Dowden opines, "If Africans move their own wealth out of the continent, how can Africa ask outsiders to invest there?"

Other factors played a role, such as the idea that almost all of Africa's infrastructure was built to take natural resources out of the continent. For example, railways and roads were not built to connect cities within the continent but to provide the fastest mode of export to the coasts. From slaves in the 18th century to oil and diamonds today, Africa has been continuously despoiled for the benefit of Western civilization.

Whereas Asian nations, often poorer in natural resources than Africa, were forced to import raw materials and add value through some manufacturing process, "the colonial legacy made [Africans] primary producers of raw materials. Manufacturing was done in Europe. Raw materials gave Africa a guaranteed income, but that income fell steadily from the 1970s to 2000 as the prices for those primary products — except oil — fell in relation to manufactured goods."

Still, Dowden remains optimistic on the future of Africa, or parts of it. He is quick to point out that there is in fact no "Africa"; the continent is an amalgamation of many tribes, with such poorly drawn boundaries that considering Africa one place is as accurate as considering the United States, Mexico, and Brazil one place. That said, Africa has economic opportunities that — if a culture of entrepreneurship could be developed to take advantage of them — would lead to dramatic internal changes throughout the continent. An obvious example can be seen in the rise of cell phones and prepaid phone cards. In Nigeria, the government chose to let many companies compete in the telecommunications sector, and that

sector is now Nigeria's fastest growing. Dowden also gives an example of a Somali nomadic goatherd who comes down from the mountains to sell his livestock, but first calls into the city to gauge pricing in order to maximize the price he receives.

Dowden does not believe that Africa requires wholesale intervention by aid organizations. Sprinkled through the book are examples of such organizations using famine or destruction in Africa as a stimulus for donations, which perpetuate the idea that Africa is dependent on foreign charity for its very survival.

On Rwanda, he writes, "At the joint press conferences every day, the aid bosses competed with each other over the death toll in the [refugee] camps, knowing that the highest figure would make the news bulletins and bring in the money. And cash poured in to 'save Rwanda' appeals." But the donations served primarily to further the interests of those associated with genocide, because they were most easily able to access Western aid, while the victims were largely cut off from that channel of assistance.

Other examples are too numerous to mention, but the results appear too similar to be coincidental. Most aid from governments or charities routinely goes to the coffers of the ruling elite. The elite, in turn, uses those funds to pay its supporters or expatriate funds to foreign accounts. This keeps the poorest in each country trapped in poverty, allegedly dependent on the Big Man for their survival.

Dowden succinctly measures the true worth of foreign aid in his concluding chapter. "If the rest of the world wants to help Africa," he says, "the guiding principle must be: do no harm." He goes on to provide suggestions for how to help without providing a penny of aid.

His first suggestion is the worldwide removal of farm subsidies, which make it difficult for African products to compete with the subsidized products of other regions. According to Dowden, in 2002 agriculture subsidies in the EU countries equaled nearly two-thirds of the total sub-Saharan GDP for that year. He regards the current world financial system as more akin to "managed globalization" than to the free market. If

the United States can subsidize something as obtuse as “green technology jobs” with \$2.3 billion in tax credits, how can the average African nation expect to compete on a level playing field?

Dowden also suggests that the banking industry stop abetting the Big Man and his cronies while they loot their compatriots. “Corruption kills as surely as terrorism or drug dealing,” he says, and he believes that financial institutions are implicitly supporting outright theft when they shelter funds for Africa’s ruling elite.

While I might disagree with having banks act as the frontline for tracking funds for corruption or terrorism, Dowden’s point is that many of the world’s most corrupt leaders are operating in public with the full support of the banking system. Their families and

friends are allowed to travel the world freely while the populace is condemned to live in a police state, hoping for a literal lottery ticket to emigrate.

Dowden, indeed, denounces the hypocrisy of a developed world that believes in the free movement of money and merchandise, while placing restrictions on the movement of people. Official immigration policies in the developed world are designed to allow only the best and the brightest from Africa to enter. The home continent’s only hope is the possibility that those people will send money back to their families or someday return and bring their knowledge home.

This is not a libertarian book, nor was it meant to be. It is a stark reminder that for most people in Africa, freedom as we measure it is a far-off concept. □

“A Rat Is a Pig Is a Dog Is a Boy: The Human Cost of the Animal Rights Movement,” by Wesley Smith. Encounter Books, 2010, 312 pages.

Animal Harm

Gary Jason

To paraphrase George Orwell, there are some ideas so absurd that only intellectuals can believe them. Certainly one of the most absurd ideas that are widespread among today’s intellectuals is the notion that animals have rights. Since the public, to the extent that it’s even aware of the animal rights movement, usually misunderstands it, Wesley Smith’s new book explaining this movement and its costs to society is most welcome.

Smith is a Senior Fellow in Human Rights and Bioethics at the Discovery

Institute. He has written several other books broadly within the realm of bioethics.

Smith starts this book by surveying and contrasting the views of the intellectuals behind the animal rights movement. They include Gary Francione, Richard Ryder, Charles Patterson, Tom Regan, and most notably Peter Singer, the philosopher who wrote the seminal work in this area, “Animal Liberation,” in 1975. Singer is credited with popularizing the notion of “speciesism” that equates preferring the human species to preferring one’s own race. Singer is a utilitarian, so as Smith rightly notes, he doesn’t base his views on natural rights

as such. His call for animal liberation proceeds, instead, from the notion that animals can feel pain and pleasure, so should be considered in the calculus of pleasures and pains that determine (in his view) right and wrong actions. What Smith doesn’t note is that Singer’s philosophical take on animals harks back to one of the earliest exponents of utilitarian ethics, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), and that Bentham’s most acute follower rejected it. I will return to this point.

Smith also discusses the worldwide efforts to give animals legal rights. On the national scene, law professors such as Steven Wise and the Center for Expansion of Fundamental Rights come in for considerable scrutiny, as do such famous legal authorities as Cass Sunstein and Lawrence Tribe. All have sought to give legal standing to animals in the courts. But (a point Smith doesn’t explore), none of these worthies has seen one of the obvious results of giving animals legal rights: logically, it opens the way for animals to be arrested for victimizing other animals, and for animals to sue other animals. If a mouse has legal standing to sue people in a court of law, why shouldn’t it be allowed to sue any cat that attacks it, or see the cat stand trial for assault?

Smith covers the actions of animal rights groups such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and HSUS (the Humane Society of the United States). They have used some unsavory and even despicable tactics to sway public opinion, including the operation of grossly misleading propaganda campaigns (such as the notorious PETA campaign equating the cooking of chickens by Kentucky Fried Chicken with the killing of millions of people in the Holocaust). They have had no scruples about pushing propaganda in the public schools. Other groups have infiltrated medical labs to destroy research and “liberate” the animals.

The book reviews in detail the animal rights terrorist groups such as ALF (the Animal Liberation Front), ELF (the Earth Liberation Front), and SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty). These groups have committed grave crimes and caused great harm, but they have received a lot of direct and indirect support from members of so-called “moderate” groups.

Perhaps the most useful feature

of the book is its explanation and defense of the use of animals in medical research. The usual specious arguments against this practice put forward by the animal rights activists (that animals aren't physiologically analogous to humans, that computer modeling can always replace experimentation, and so on) are refuted. Smith reviews in detail the evolution of our testing procedures, including the development of protections for lab animals by the medical and pharmaceutical industries. Especially useful has been a private nonprofit organization AAALAC (the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International). In a supplement to the book, Smith provides a table of nearly 75 entries of Nobel Prizes awarded for research conducted using animals.

Working from the natural rights ethical perspective, Smith gives a compelling account of why animals don't have rights. Essentially, they don't have rights because they cannot enter into the realm of rights, i.e., the community of morally autonomous, rights-recognizing individuals. Animals cannot recognize any rights in humans or any other animals. Only humans can — which is why we don't try, say, a bear for attacking a tourist. We may kill it to prevent further attacks, but no one but a madman would blame it. The bear views us as simply part of the environment.

To the common reply by animal rights supporters that many humans (such as infants and the mentally impaired) are similarly incapable of recognizing rights, Smith rightly responds that they are still members of the rights community, because they have the potential to recognize other peoples' rights in the future or did so in the past, or because even though they are diminished in mental abilities, they are still capable of recognizing rights. This moral autonomy is just part of being human. I would add that when humans — such as violent criminals — show no recognition of the rights of others, we colloquially call them “animals” and incarcerate or even execute them.

My only criticism of the book is that it attempts to explain why the animal rights ideology is asinine from solely the natural rights ethical framework. In truth, the ideology can be seen as morally bankrupt from almost any ethical

perspective. Consider the utilitarian view. Even from the hedonistic utilitarian perspective, the ideology can be criticized for equating the pleasures that a pig can experience with the pleasures that a person can experience. John Stuart Mill, the protégé of Bentham, took precisely this tack. Or we can just drop hedonism entirely, which many later utilitarians did, and say that other things besides pleasure — artistic achievement, scientific knowledge, literature, and so on — are inherently

desirable. From those utilitarian perspectives, one can easily hold that animals are not on the same moral plane as people.

Smith is to be thanked for giving us a concise but comprehensive survey of the ideas, thinkers, advocacy organizations, and terrorist groups responsible for making an aberrational ideology as influential as it has been, and for showing just how detrimental to human flourishing its further empowerment would be. □

Notes on Contributors

Baloo is a *nom de plume* of Rex F. May.

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"Eating the Dinosaur," by Chuck Klosterman. Scribner, 2009, 245 pages.

Over the Pop

Alec Mouhibian

A corpse in Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology" recalls debating a friend over free will. His favorite metaphor was the neighbor's cow: "Roped out to grass, and free you know as far / As the length of a rope." As the two friends argued, the cow forced out the stake that held its rope and gored the speaker to death.

Chuck Klosterman can relate to that cow. A pop-obsessive critic who writes about everything from Pepsi to Coke, Klosterman seems to know all that's ever been famous for at least 15 minutes since 1960. His new book of essays mines the depths of a familiarly wide-yet-shallow pasture of pop subjects. There are philosophical musings on such matters as irony, voyeurism, and the ethics of time travel (to which the title of this book refers). In trademark style, not a single argument is made without reference to at least three indie-rock bands you don't have to recognize in order to hate.

But unlike Klosterman's previous work, "Eating the Dinosaur" is unified by a serious, desperate theme. Kurt Cobain, Waco, the NBA, Britney Spears, "Rear Window," Garth Brooks, football, ABBA, "Friends," soda commercials, Ralph Nader, and the Artist Formerly Known as Whatsisname all have something in common here. In Klosterman's view, each plays a role in explaining why his and our immersion

in this constantly mediated celebrity culture has eliminated genuine feeling, concrete experience, and independent thought.

"We do not have the freedom to think whatever we want," he writes. "And until we accept that, it's useless to think about anything else." But far from your typical metaphysical cry-baby, Klosterman has some knowledge of what *he* wants to think.

He wants, for example, to think of Ralph Sampson in the way in which many used to think of him when he played basketball at the University of Virginia in the early 1980s. A seven-foot-four center with the athleticism of a guard, Sampson seemed singularly perfect for the game. He ended his career as a singularly contemptible NBA bust — a symbol of underachievement so pure that there is no other way to remember him. "Sampson busted big by succeeding mildly," Klosterman writes. "He was needed to remind people that their own self-imposed mediocrity is better than choking on transcendence."

Klosterman also wants to think that the tears evoked by "Friday Night Lights" come from real emotions and not the TV show's "realistic" jumble-camera technique. He wants to think that laughter should reflect what is actually funny and not what is merely supposed to be — though this is rarely the case, he argues in an essay on laugh tracks, now that the evil device has conditioned America into one giant Jon

Stewart studio audience. "The only thing people in New York won't laugh at are unfamous stand-up comedians; we really despise those motherfuckers, for some reason."

Sick of his tears, tired of his laughs, a man has only one respite in the world. That would be football, which emerges from its own hoopla with Klosterman's affections fully intact.

Tracing its history and wild evolution from the forward pass to the trend of barefoot kicking to the spread offense, Klosterman shows how football changes constantly while always staying the same, which is, in his view, sublimely, irreducibly beautiful. "It has a liberal cerebellum and a reactionary heart," as he puts it. "And this is all I want from everything, all the time, always."

At his best, Klosterman is an ideal barmate. Reading him on a subject close to your heart is like talking to a smarter, more amusing version of yourself. He is amusingly tangential while still able to capture the hidden value of something in one good line, as when he mentions "a depressing song that makes you feel better," a phrase that applies to so much of the best music. He's almost witty and engaging enough to make a subject interesting even when it's completely unfamiliar.

But the key word is "almost." Such are the temporal, audience-specific limits of most pop culture that reading about a show or band you've never heard of eventually makes you realize that you're talking to someone who isn't a version of you. (Even though Klosterman's football chapter is the best in the book, he warns large parts of his audience to skip it.) This is why the finest critics of pop culture have a frame of reference in the higher, literary arts against which to contrast both the limits and the profound distinctions of the moment under review.

Klosterman, however, is ultimately complicit in the stupidities he attacks, because he thinks only in their terms. Occasionally, the problem is his language. Phrases like "consuming honesty" lower Klosterman from drunken barmate to media studies professor. And no matter what the subject, the words keep tumbling out, as if the filter's too big, or they are too thin.

A deeper problem reveals itself in the

most courageous moments of the book. These include a strongly announced rebellion against irony, which he himself practices, and the reluctant sympathy that Klosterman is forced to feel for the feeble autonomy practiced by the likes of Ted Kaczynski.

Both gestures come from a good place. Both are dangerously futile. Who, after all, could possibly be more obsessed with society than the Unabomber? Isolation isn't always independent, any more than sincerity is always honest. Puerile preoccupations with autonomy and literalness — the trap of every confused determinist — ignore the state of realized individuality in which deceptions and influences are not absent but transcended.

That's what beckons the cows from their stakes. That's what great art and great lives are made of. But if Klosterman knows any examples, he's too distracted to invoke them.

In "Eating the Dinosaur's" open-

ing essay, Klosterman interviews a few prominent interviewers about why people give interviews. Why do people talk to strangers? Filmmaker Errol Morris, "This American Life" host Ira Glass, and celebrity profiler Chris Heath each scratch and sniff at various guesses, none of which really satisfy the author. Finally Morris speaks of a period of writer's block when talking was a way to do "something instead of nothing," and Klosterman uses it for the chapter's title.

But . . . we know why people give interviews. People give interviews because they're people. Being people, they're lonely and vain. The vital question — which Klosterman always seems a little too curious to notice — is whether talking to a stranger with a mike heals this mortal condition or intensifies it.

I'd love to see Klosterman pursue that question. But I don't think he can do it until he discovers God's provision of the button marked "off." □

"Winter's Bone," directed by Debra Granik. Anonymous Content/Winter's Bone Productions, 2010, 100 minutes.

Paeon to the Individual

Jo Ann Skousen

Two films this month deal with characters trying to hold onto their family homesteads. In "Crazy Like a Fox" the protagonist sells his property, then changes his mind, squatting on it until the new owners improbably give up and go away. The result is an uneven, unbelievable, and unsatisfying tale (see my review in these pages). By contrast, in "Winter's Bone," Jennifer Lawrence gives a rich, believable performance as the gritty young protagonist, 17-year-old Ree Dolly, who must find her hillbilly father and bring him

back to appear in court after he uses the family property as collateral and then jumps bail. If she doesn't find him in time, their home and everything else they own will be forfeited.

Unlike Nat Banks in "Crazy," Ree doesn't try to scam the system. She doesn't try to sell the land out from under the bondsman. She doesn't sit around feeling sorry for herself. She is a young woman with heroic, unflinching determination to take care of her family and get things done, no matter what the obstacles. Her father has already been arrested at least three times for "cooking crank" (running a meth lab).

Her mother has an incapacitating mental illness, possibly caused by using the homecooked crank, or by the stress of worrying about her family. Whatever the cause, she has become a complete invalid.

Virtually parentless, Ree is left to mother her two young siblings, 12-year-old Sonny (Isaiah Stone) and 6-year-old Ashlee (Ashlee Thompson) by herself. And mother them she does, drilling them in arithmetic and spelling as they walk to school, and watching Ashlee anxiously through her classroom window before going to her own class. When a police car comes onto their property, Ree moves protectively from the porch to the front door, blocking the policeman's entrance until she knows why he is there.

Ree is the kind of self-reliant heroine one can genuinely admire. She briefly considers joining the Army to take advantage of the \$40,000 enlistment bonus, but she does not consider turning to the government for welfare handouts. Despite the family's deep poverty, there is no evidence of social workers, child protective services, Section 8 housing, or even food stamps. This is a closed, insulated society where they eat off the land, or they don't eat at all.

Ree's self-reliant attitude is summed up in an early scene. She and her siblings watch hungrily as a neighbor skins a freshly killed deer. "Never ask for what ought to be offered," she teaches Sonny when he appears ready to ask for some meat. Sure enough, that evening the neighbor's wife arrives of her own accord with a generous shoulder of venison and a bag of potatoes, carrots, and onions. "Thought you could use this," is all she says, preserving the family's dignity as she offers them charity in the purest sense of the word.

As soon as the neighbor leaves, Ree asks her young siblings, "Want some deer stew?" Then, keenly aware of her responsibility to teach them to take care of themselves, she adds, "Both of you get over here and watch how I make it." Throughout the film she teaches them survival skills such as cooking, hunting, gardening, gun safety, caring for animals, dealing with neighbors, and dealing with the law. Ashlee helps her squeeze the trigger when she shoots a squirrel, and when Sonny balks at

gutting the squirrel because “there’s a bunch of stuff in there,” she tells him matter-of-factly, “There’s a bunch of stuff you’re gonna have to get over being scared of.” Ree doesn’t have the luxury of coddling her siblings, but her love for them is apparent in everything she does.

The setting of this film is as important to the story as the characters themselves. It is the backwoods of the Missouri Ozarks, where moonshine has given way to meth labs but the attitude toward “revenooers” hasn’t changed. As Ree sets out to look for her father, we meet a closed community of ramshackle houses, broken-down barns, homeless mutts, and rutted dirt roads. The characters have the worn, creased faces of poverty and meth use. Everyone is somebody’s cousin, and they live by a moral code that supersedes the law. Each person knows his or her place.

Part of the code is a pronounced division of the gender roles that dominate social interaction. When Ree begins to search for her father, one per-

son asks, “Ain’t you got no man to do this for you?” He refuses to help her. Manhunting is not women’s work. Later, Ree is beaten up by women in a neighboring clan as a warning to stop searching. Her uncle comes to rescue her, but he cannot retaliate. In this community a man can’t hit a woman, even in retribution, and they know it. The men “cook the crank” and the women protect their men from the law.

Ree’s absent father and silent mother give this film an allegorical scope, especially when Ree pleads with her unresponsive mother to help her know what to do and curses her missing father for not returning to ransom their home. The filmmakers have created a cold, existential universe, one in which the protagonist must rely on herself because there is no one out there to help her. But through it all, despite the grit and the dirt, Ree’s indomitable spirit shines. She will not give up, no matter how Job-like her trials become. That determination makes this a film worth seeing and admiring. □

“The Secret in Their Eyes” (“El secreto de sus ojos”),
 directed by Juan José Campanella. Spanish with English subtitles.
 100 Bares, 2010, 100 minutes.

Masterpiece of Suspense

Jo Ann Skousen

“The Secret in Their Eyes” won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 2010, and for good reason. Superbly written, beautifully filmed, and tightly crafted, it is a masterpiece of suspense, passion, revenge — and restraint.

In the film, Benjamin Esposito (Ricardo Darín) is a retired criminal investigator still haunted by the memory of a rape and murder case he covered 25 years earlier. Now a writer, he

is trying to turn the case into a novel. Unsure how to approach the story, he returns to the precinct where his former supervisor, Irene Menéndez (Soledad Villamil), is still a judge, and asks her to read his manuscript. The rest of the film is presented mostly in flashback as we see the investigation unfold.

The title comes from Esposito’s ability to “read” a person’s character by focusing on the eyes. He recognizes the evil passion in a suspect’s eyes, but he also envies the devotion he sees in the

eyes of the murdered woman’s husband. Meanwhile, his own thoughts and emotions are veiled. He will not admit his love for Irene, even to himself, much less to her. She is his boss, after all. But she can see the secret in his eyes, and so can we. This unspoken, unrequited longing, this focus on individual emotion and character, permeates the story and lifts the film above the level of a typical crime thriller.

Esposito’s partner, Pablo Sandoval (Guillermo Francella), has a similar skill, tracking down suspects by figuring out their passions. “A guy can change anything,” he tells Esposito, “his face, his home, his family, his girlfriend. But there’s one thing he can’t change. He can’t change his passion.” Figure out a suspect’s passion, and you can anticipate where he will be. Esposito values Pablo’s detective skills so much that he tolerates and even facilitates his partner’s weakness for alcohol.

I’m always hesitant to see films about a rape, especially foreign films. There are certain grisly images I simply don’t want in my mind. This one, however, is shown without lingering on the gruesome details. We see a quick moment of the girl’s terror, lasting perhaps five or six seconds, just enough to let us know what has happened. Later, as Esposito arrives to begin the investigation, the girl’s body is seen slumped along the bed where her attacker has left her. Despite its brutal nature, the scene seems detached, two-dimensional, and very artistic. In fact, it reminded me of a Degas painting. She is nude, she is blue, and she is heartbreakingly beautiful. Esposito, normally blasé about his work, is uncharacteristically overcome by the scene and driven to find this beautiful girl’s murderer. Even 25 years later, he can’t get the case out of his mind.

Several factors make this the best foreign film of 2010. First is the brilliant script. The story is perfectly crafted, with subtle clues and foreshadowings that don’t fully blossom until the final moments of the film. Many times I caught myself thinking, “But why . . . ?” only to have the question answered resoundingly later in the film. The characters are also well developed and believable. As a judge Irene is confident and capable, mature and beautiful, yet vulnerable and innocent in her

frustrated love for the romantically reluctant Benjamin. The murder suspect (Javier Godino) is creepy, cocky, and smart. The bereaved husband (Pablo Rago) is convincingly heartbroken.

The camera work is often astounding. When the two investigators chase the suspect through a crowded soccer stadium, we actually feel ourselves being jostled as the camera pushes its way through the throng of cheering fans. In one long, unbroken shot the camera follows the fleeing suspect up and down the stadium stairs and somehow stays with him as he plummets to the ground outside the stadium and rises to keep running. The effect is electrifying.

In another scene, the murderer is on an elevator with Irene and Esposito. They know who he is, and he knows they are onto him, but since he has a gun and they don't, they can do nothing to stop him at the moment. Irene's rising panic is portrayed convincingly as she wonders whether he is going to use the gun. The scene ends with the murderer's smug sneer caught in the reflection behind them as he exits the elevator. Simply an amazing shot, perfectly executed.

This is an "art house film" in the very best sense of the phrase: a film that is a beautiful piece of art as well as a thrilling story. If you love films, don't miss this one. □

for not writing down every aspect of the agreement and getting it signed by the buyers.

In fact, the real estate agent is not only incompetent but disingenuous. The man tells Nat that he is federally mandated to accept any full-price offer, even though Nat has changed his mind about selling and wants to withdraw the house from sale. Mind you, this is before any contracts have been signed or agreements have been made. The agent has also given Nat lousy counsel on the selling price. If, as we discover, the Shermans can turn around and sell the property for \$14 million, why has the agent recommended a piddling price of \$2 million? For 3 *thousand* acres?

From there the film becomes outlandishly unbelievable. Nat refuses to leave, first moving into a cave on the property and then bringing the whole family to live in the main house when the Shermans leave for the winter. We are supposed to sympathize with these squatters simply because they're fishing from the river and eating squirrel stew while the Shermans are relaxing beside a swimming pool in Palm Springs and chatting up investors to help capitalize their development plan.

Soon the entire community of Bankville is helping the squatters — yes, *squatters* — stay in their former house. The sheriff refuses to evict them for trespassing, and the town council refuses to grant building permits. Several times everyone in the community comes to the house for parties hosted by the Bankses, even though they know the house has been purchased by the Shermans. The Bankses justify their actions with high-sounding but ridiculous claims, such as, "They get the law. It's up to us to get the justice." But they have neither law nor justice on their side. Nat lost his farm because he didn't take care of it. The house was falling down. The horses were getting sick eating the corn. And he was making stupid statements like, "Farming isn't a business, it's a way of life." No wonder he ended up in debt, and dumb enough to sell his farm for only the amount he owed, instead of what it was worth.

Several years ago an extremely wealthy couple in our community sold their home on a lake to move into a larger, more modern mansion on a tonier lake in a fancier gated community.

"Crazy Like a Fox," directed by Richard Squires. Delphi Film Foundation, 2006, 98 minutes.

Squatter's Delight

Jo Ann Skousen

"Crazy Like a Fox," released to one theater in 2006 but strangely making its way into nationwide distribution now, is the ultimate example of seller's remorse. Greenwood Farm has belonged to the family of Nat Banks (Roger Rees) for over 200 years. George Washington slept there. So did James Madison. But Nat has fallen on hard times and owes a lot of money. Evidently he racked up \$100,000 in legal fees defending himself against a charge of animal cruelty when his horses got into the corn and bloated up. Somehow debts like this soared to \$2 million.

The idea is ludicrous enough to be part of an outrageous farce, but the filmmakers expect us to accept it at face value. Nat has to sell the family's 3,000 acre farm to pay the debts. So: enter the Shermans, a young, glamor-

ous, upwardly mobile couple (she's a broker, he's an attorney) who want to buy the farm, build a road to the highway, and put up 50 "McMansions." Nevertheless, they tell Nat they love his broken-down mansion and want to fix it up. They also promise to let him and his family live in the caretaker's house and manage the farm for them. "On my word of honor," the attorney tells Nat.

Not surprisingly, the minute the contract is signed, the Shermans tell the Banks that they have three days to leave the property for good. "Should have got it in writing," they shrug, when Nat reminds them of their promise to let them stay on. "That was just a negotiating tactic." And the Shermans are right. While their promise to maintain the farm was disingenuous and even dishonest, it was not legally binding. Frankly, Nat deserves to get screwed, just for believing an attorney's "word of honor," and his real estate agent deserves to be shot

Nevertheless, they loved their old house, which was built in the 1920s by a well known architect. The ink was barely dry from the real estate closing before the former owners petitioned the town council to declare the house an historic site, successfully preventing the new owners from tearing it down to build their own new home. To me, this was scandalous. If the original owners wanted that house preserved, they should have done it themselves. But to take \$3 or 4 million from buyers, then prevent them from doing what they wanted to with their own property, was completely duplicitous. Eventually the new owners donated the house to the

city and paid to have it moved to a different location so they could proceed with their plans to build on their own property. The delays were costly and frustrating, and completely unfair.

“Crazy Like a Fox” tries very hard to represent the homesteaders as victims and vilify the property rights of the purchasers. Even when Nat is reminded of the money he has been paid, he responds, “Money is nothing but ink on paper. It doesn’t mean anything.” Marx would have agreed. But is it his philosophy we want to cheer when we go to a movie? And democracy doesn’t come off any better, as the proverbial community of foxes votes on

which chickens to have for dinner.

There is no reason to see this movie. The story is uneven, never settling on whether it wants to be a comic farce or a serious drama. The acting is mediocre at best, ludicrous at worst, despite the involvement of a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company (Rees) and an Oscar nominee (Mary McDonnell as Nat’s wife, Amy). The only star of this film is the setting, which offers lovely shots of babbling streams, sunlit paths, ripening cornfields, and dappled trees. Southern Virginia is truly a beautiful place, and worth maintaining. But the film gets it all wrong. You can’t sell your property and keep it too. □

Stray Facts, from page 36

a thick, juicy slice of life. Steffens showed me how easy it was for an intellectual (Steffens) to be seduced by a dictator (Lenin), and how easy it was for a kid (me) to be seduced by a clever writer, because, up to the moment when he met the communist tyrant, I was sort of lying back, trusting the author’s guidance. Lewis’ “Babbitt” showed me — the product of an intensely provincial environment — an intensely provincial environment as it might be viewed from a sophisticated height. Steinbeck’s “Grapes of Wrath” showed me how ugly American life, and American authors, could be. Cronin’s “The Citadel” showed me that there were people who spoke the same language I do, more or less, but were different from

me in every way — and were still capable of working up one hell of an impressive literary image. Hawthorne’s “House of the Seven Gables” showed me that you can laugh at people and feel compassion for them at the same time — a proposition about 20 million light years away from anything I learned from the people I grew up with. I didn’t grasp the metaphysics of “Moby-Dick,” or even recognize that there were any metaphysics, but the book showed me, very clearly, how many interesting *things* there are in this world.

And that’s the point. Stray facts won’t explain the world, but they will certainly keep it from closing in on you. Not a bad job, Mrs. Hodge. □

In Vino Libertas, from page 38

vintners will tart up the wine by adding acid, but the prune flavors remain.

Unlike Bordeaux, Australia and California have the weather needed to produce extra-ripe grapes almost every year. So as the pendulum swung toward riper and fruitier wines, France, the homeland of the new style, suffered, while California and Australia prospered. As the years went by, the pendulum continued to swing, so that in California and Australia winemakers pushed to greater and greater extremes, cropping heavily, letting the fruit hang, stuffing the juice into small, new oak barrels for years, and adding acid to adjust the otherwise flabby flavors. The results could be a caricature: 16% alcohol, fruit like a mouthful of Smuckers with some raisins and prunes thrown in, and wooden influences that taste like a generic additive, the whole amounting to something less like wine than a cocktail. Stick a plastic umbrella in your glass and you’re good to go.

To put this in another way: the stuff can flatter the hell out of your palate and stand out at wine tastings, but it sits uncomfortably on the dinner table. It’s too rich, too sweet, too fruity, and too woody, and it just doesn’t taste good with a plate of pasta. Also, after a while, it all starts to taste the same. And for good reason: it’s all made in the same way, with the same aims, and it all includes a big dose of an important ingredient that doesn’t vary much — oak.

As a consequence of the new style, drinkers acquired a taste for what I call “wood that sticks out.” This was a subtler change but, I think, one that has made even more of a mess of things. Before the new style, the only wines that traditionally were rounded out in new oak barrels were age-worthy wines, those intended to spend years or even decades in the bottle before being drunk. That made sense, because new oak adds tannins to wine that make it last longer. It also adds flavors and scents, often described as vanilla-like or creamy, that can be agreeable. These scents and flavors fade over time and melt into the other elements of the wine. But the new drinkers who gobbled up the ‘82 Bordeaux didn’t wait. They drank it when it was young and the wood was obtrusive.

Now, there’s nothing wrong with enjoying the effects of new oak, even in young wines; but drinking only woody wines is a stupid limitation on individual taste. Most wines from traditional regions have always been made without the use of new oak and are ready to drink young. Yet most Americans drink absolutely none of those wines. When was the last time you had a sauvignon blanc or a cabernet franc from the Loire Valley, or a Rousanne from the Rhône, or a Pinot Noir from Alsace, or a Riesling from Austria, or a Poulsard from the Jura, or a Negroamaro from Puglia? I thought so.

So here we are: Americans started drinking more wine. I think that’s good, because wine can taste good, especially

with food, and it's good for you, too. Many producers were making wine that was easier to drink young. Excellent! But it all went wrong. We lost the two best things about wine: first, it's great with food, and second, it comes in an amazing variety of types, styles, colors, and flavors, changing from place to place and year to year and vintner to vintner. And that, dear reader, is a damned shame.

Now I want you to do something about it. Stop drinking just what you know. "Hey, here's a California Cab, Parker 92 for only \$17," or "Look, an Australian Shiraz, Wine Spectator 93 for only \$15!" I don't ever want to hear that again. The wine world is much, much bigger than that. Off the beaten path

there are great bargains and varied delights to discover. And there is wine you can really live with.

The mother lode of vinous diversity is in France and Italy. Try it. Try a Beaujolais Cru (no, not that Beaujolais Nouveau crap with flowers on the label). The cru is much more flavorful than a "nouveau," yet more delicate than a pinot noir. Try a simple Chianti; its gritty astringency will send you back and forth from the delights of the glass to the delights of your ravioli in tomato sauce. Try an Aglianico from Basilicata, a rich friend to your roast pork. Have a few glasses with dinner without overwhelming your food or your liver's capacity to process alcohol. Free your mind. Follow your palate. □

Complexity and Liberty, *from page 30*

adaptable, and in a constant state of change, requiring for their survival an environment that comprises a certain amount of order as well as a certain measure of disorder. If too much order is imposed, such systems become less complex, degenerating into repetitive patterns or a frozen state. For society, the result is dictatorship and stagnation. If disorder takes over instead, social institutions lose their structural integrity and cohesiveness and become unable to maintain themselves; for society, the result is the dissolution of political, cultural, and social norms, including those that libertarians consider valuable. Between these two states, in the domain of complexity, a social or political system can survive over an extended period of time, but will exhibit a significant degree of instability and must constantly adapt to changing circumstances.

Any social system will be influenced by the activities of the people ("agents") within it, and in turn will influence such activities. Such mutual feedback loops help give society its dynamic, ever-changing character. But the presence of these feedback loops also dooms any prospect of a stable libertarian social and political order. Freedom and uncertainty go hand in hand; there is no "ending point" for social change. Given this circumstance, the goal of a totally free society that will last for an extended period of time must remain forever elusive.

However, there is an upside to all of this. At any given time, societies and their political institutions exhibit areas of stability as well as areas of instability. The unstable areas are "in play," open to changes initiated by political activism and public pressure. By recognizing and acting upon such oppor-

tunities, libertarians can significantly influence the direction of such changes and achieve their share of victories on the political battlefield.

Periods of elevated instability, such as we are experiencing now, provide a multitude of opportunities for us to expand our influence on the less-than-free society in which we find ourselves. The "Tea Party" movement, the growing political effectiveness of Ron Paul's Campaign for Liberty, and the huge spike in sales of Ayn Rand's novel "Atlas Shrugged," are clear signs of the general public's growing discontent with the status quo and renewed interest in the principles of economic and personal freedom, which likely would not have occurred in calmer and more stable times.

The core libertarian ideal of maximum individual freedom is compatible with the worldview of complexity theory, far more so than the command-and-control ideologies of the mainstream right and left. To take advantage of this fact, libertarians must map out their strategies, taking into account the fact that the world's political, legal, economic and social systems are complex, adaptive, and dynamic. These systems will forever continue to evolve, never settling down into an ideological equilibrium. By adopting the perspective of complexity theory, libertarians can avoid the trap of treating freedom as a rule-based ideology or a holy grail to be achieved in some distant future, and instead focus on the more practical, satisfying, and achievable goal of continually exploiting opportunities to enlarge the sphere of liberty, wherever and whenever such opportunities arise. □

Letters, *from page 44*

aircraft), design and develop an aerosol dispensing technology capable of issuing hundreds of tons of quartz dust in a matter of hours (per flight), and excavate and process enough minerals to create . . . (surprise!) a modest-size volcano. And this is all without any understanding of the side effects such aerosol distributions might cause, not the least of which could be serious interference with commercial air transportation.

The foregoing constitute what are called "back-of-the-envelope calcula-

tions," and they illustrate Mr. Payne's failure to do due diligence for his idea. His other proposals are similarly uninformed.

The fundamental lesson of this exercise is the following: just as human cultural-technological activity is not materially sufficient to "cause" the putative "global warming," neither is human activity equal to the task of "undoing" such supposed warming.

In any case, there is no "global warming"; all we are seeing are natu-

ral fluctuations driven by variations in solar output and shifting modes of heat circulation within the oceans and atmosphere. (Global atmospheric temperatures have actually been cooling for the past decade.) Our best response is to do that which human beings have been doing successfully since we have appeared on the face of the Earth: adapt and thrive.

Michael J. Dunn
Federal Way, WA

Milwaukee

Wisconsin's finest, from the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*:

Dave Orłowski can swim 2.4 miles. He can bike 112 miles. He can run 26.2 miles. In fact, the 54-year-old athlete can do all of these one right after the other — several times a year. He completed six Ironman triathlons last year, has done three so far this year and hopes to compete in yet another one, in Austria on July 4.

But this is something the guy won't do: he won't work for the Milwaukee Police Department.

That's because the former homicide detective has been declared "permanently and totally incapacitated for duty." As an injured ex-cop, Orłowski has been paid nearly \$500,000 in tax-free pension checks by the city since 1999. He is currently receiving \$53,063 a year from the city Employees' Retirement System, plus full health benefits.

Santa Clara, Calif.

Curious methods for fighting childhood obesity, in the *Los Angeles Times*:

Convinced that Happy Meals and other food promotions aimed at children could make kids fat as well as happy, county officials in Silicon Valley are poised to outlaw the little toys that often come with high-calorie offerings.

"We went through a phase when my daughter wanted the Happy Meal just to get the toy," said Kristen Dimont. The Sunnyvale blogger said that once her child tasted fast food, it took years to coax her back to the healthful variety. Dimont likes the idea of the ban — and thinks the supervisors should consider extending it to the play yards that also attract children to fast-food restaurants.

Washington, D.C.

Admirable commitment to employment security, in the *Washington Examiner*:

A Metrobus driver fired after a deadly crash into a taxi and another canned for slugging a cop dressed as McGruff the Crime Dog are back at Metro.

Both men won their jobs back plus months of retroactive pay, the result of an arbitration decision between the bus drivers union and the transit agency. One driver is getting paid to sit at home while the agency determines where to place him. The other is expected to return to driving a Metrobus later this month.

Bow, England

Enforcement of civil political debate, in the *Guardian*:

A man who placed a poster of David Cameron containing the word "wanker" in his window has described how police handcuffed him in his home on election day, threatened him with arrest, and forcibly removed what they said was offensive campaign literature. David Hoffman said that "They burst into my house, pushed me back and handcuffed me. They said I had committed an offence under section 5 of the Public Order Act, I was being detained, and I might be arrested."

Hoffman said he would lodge a formal complaint. He has since returned the poster to his window, but replaced the word "wanker" with "onanist."

Chattanooga, Tenn.

Keeping the scum off the streets, from the *Tennessean*:

Eric Wright was arrested by Chattanooga police officer Jim Daves while rushing his wife Aline to the emergency room at Erlanger Medical Center with stroke symptoms. "The officer followed me into the emergency room and repeatedly interrupted the patient care," Mr. Wright said. "The other medical professionals had to push him aside and inform him it's not appropriate and he needed to wait outside."

Wright said Daves told him to turn himself into the Hamilton County Jail, where he would be charged with a felony. Wright said when he asked what felony he would be charged with, Daves said "I'll think of something, you shithead." At the jail, though, an employee told Wright there were no warrants against him.

Two days later, as Wright was in his wife's room at the hospital, Daves had Erlanger security arrest him.

Washington, D.C.

Pressing legal matter raised in the confirmation hearings of prospective justice Elena Kagan, from *The New York Times*:

Noting the "incredibly grueling day" Ms. Kagan had, Sen. Amy Klobuchar remarked, "I guess it means you missed the midnight debut of the third 'Twilight' movie last night." After some laughter, she added: "We did not miss it in our household."

Ms. Kagan said she was not able to see "Eclipse," but Ms.

Klobuchar nonetheless continued, "I keep wanting to ask you about the famous

case of Edward versus Jacob or the vampire versus the werewolf."

"I wish you wouldn't," Ms. Kagan said.

"I know you can't comment on future cases," Ms. Klobuchar said. "So I'll leave that alone."

Birmingham, Ala.

Potentially troublesome example of "teaching to the test," in the *Birmingham News*:

A Jefferson County teacher picked the wrong example when he used assassinating President Barack Obama as a way to teach his geometry students.

The teacher was apparently teaching his geometry students about parallel lines and angles, officials said. He used the example of where to stand and aim if shooting Obama. "He was talking about angles and said, 'If you're in this building, you would need to take this angle to shoot the president,'" said Joseph Brown, a senior in the geometry class.

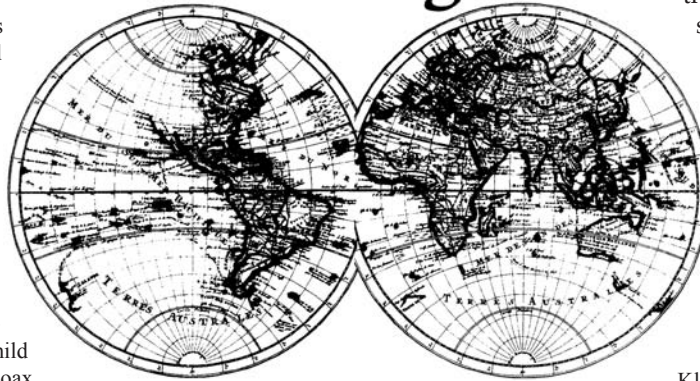
The Corner High School math teacher was questioned by the Secret Service, but was not taken into custody or charged with any crime.

Death Star

Reassuring words from the "Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation" page on America.gov:

Conspiracy theories exist in the realm of myth, where imaginations run wild, fears trump facts, and evidence is ignored. As a superpower, the United States is often cast as a villain in these dramas.

Terra Incognita



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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.)



I own a farm with my family in Lake Elmo, Minnesota.

I want to sell pumpkins and Christmas trees grown from outside of Lake Elmo, but the city now bans such sales.

I'm fighting to remind my city that our Constitution protects free trade between the states from these kinds of petty barriers.

I am fighting for my rights, and your rights, too.

I am IJ.

*Keith Bergmann
Lake Elmo, Minnesota*

www.IJ.org

*Institute for Justice
Economic liberty litigation*