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THE FUTURE OF FREEDOM FOUNDATION

11350 Random Hills Road
Suite 800
Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: (703) 934-6101
Fax: (703) 352-8678
Email: fff@fff.org

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R.W. Bradford
(1947–2005)
founder

Stephen Cox
editor

Patrick Quealy
publisher

Andrew Ferguson
managing editor

John Hospers
Bruce Ramsey
Jane S. Shaw
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Letters

Nostalgie de la Book

Bruce Ramsey's article on Laissez Faire Books ("Laissez Faire: R.I.P.?", Jan.–Feb.) brought back some fond memories. I had read in a small libertarian magazine (I think it was The Abolitionist) in early 1972 that a libertarian bookstore would be opening on Mercer Street in Manhattan. Since I worked in the area, I went over at lunchtime and found John Muller putting some bookshelves together. He had not yet opened, but invited me in. I was amazed at the collection offered: books, pamphlets, newsletters, and journals that I never knew existed. I immediately bought about $20–30 worth of items including the original "Market for Liberty" by the Tannehills. John told me I was the first customer of Laissez Faire Books and it became a regular stop for me. I became friendly with John and with Sharon Presley and the other workers at the store. You never knew who would show up sooner or later, but they were all there: Sam Konkin, David Friedman, and Murray Rothbard along with other luminaries.

It became a real social center and I will never forget the time spent there. It was part of a lively history, and I am glad that it will continue to survive.

Philip Dinanzio
Yonkers, N.Y.

Remembrance of Things Past

I was delighted to read Bruce Ramsey's fascinating and well-documented history. Here's my take: as a lifelong bibliophile, I have been a major financial supporter and patron of Laissez Faire Books for over ten years, and was president of LFB when it was owned by the Foundation for Economic Education in 2002. Andrea Rich was indeed a hard negotiator with my publishers on all my books, and more often than not, I had to give up my royalties in order to sell my books in bulk to LFB. But I did so willingly because it was a cause I believed in, and LFB was the premier outlet to all things libertarian. I loved the colorful LFB catalogues that came in the mail, with reviewers like Roy Childs, Jim Powell, and David Brooks who understood the free market and what was going on in the freedom movement.

Those faceless bookstore giants like Barnes & Noble, Borders, or Amazon couldn't hold a candle to the people behind LFB like Anita Anderson, Dyanne Petersen, and Kathleen Nelson. So I gladly bought books from LFB, promoted LFB to my newsletter subscribers and libertarian friends, and arranged for LFB to be the official bookstore at the annual Blanchard investment conference in New Orleans, encouraging attendees at the podium to go to the conference bookstore. Whenever I came to San Francisco for the Money Show, I gave a talk at the LFB store near Union Square. It was a privilege to be highlighted as an author alongside Rothbard, Mises, and Hayek in the catalog, and I even had my caricature portrayed on the LFB T-shirt. In the summer of 2002, C-SPAN's Book TV interviewed me for half an hour about LFB.

In late 2001, when I became president of FEE, Andrea and Howie Rich approached me about taking over LFB. I did so with enthusiasm, even though its finances were poor. Ramsey's story is accurate, except his statement that we at FEE "had not even bothered to move the business." Actually, we were well on our way to moving all the books to FEE headquarters in New York in the summer of 2002, but the FEE board vetoed it. I even personally

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donated $10,000 to keep LFB afloat, but the board was more interested in the bottom line than perpetuating a great institution. A few months later, they gave it back to the Riches.

I am delighted that Vince Miller and James Peron at the International Society for Individual Liberty have taken over LFB, and are trying to make a go of it. They have accepted my invitation to be the official bookstore at this year's FreedomFest. Long live Laissez Faire Books!

Mark Skousen
Irvington, N.Y.

Here, O Israel

Reader David Witter (Letters, Jan.–Feb.) asserts that one of the underlying motivations for the invasion of Iraq was "because the Iraqi regime was causing the Israelis intense discomfort." Witter concludes his letter with the claim that U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East "is driven entirely by Israel's interests."

I am surprised that author Jon Harrison, in his response, appears to accept this statement. A great deal has been written in recent years about the alleged influence of the so-called "Israel Lobby," particularly following the publication of a paper by that name, authored by Messrs. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. That Walt's and Mearsheimer's thesis (not to mention reader Witter's) is at best controversial ought to be acknowledged. A number of commentators have termed it utter rubbish.

I was in Israel in February 2003, during the buildup to the Iraq War. None of the Israelis with whom I spoke, covering the full range of the political spectrum, expressed anything close to "intense discomfort" over Saddam Hussein's regime, not even then-mayor of Jerusalem, Ehud Olmert. Most Israelis did not see Iraq as much of a threat, and no small number expressed concern that a war in the region would place Israel at greater risk. Then, as now, it was Iran's theocratic regime which was seen as the more looming danger.

I concede that I do not have any particular insight into the motivations of the Bush Administration in undertaking the Iraq War. But I must take exception to the implication that Israelis and Zionists had any sort of nefarious influence over the decision to go to war.

W. Luther Jett
Washington Grove, Md.

Harrison responds: I don't believe that U.S. policy in the Middle East is driven entirely by Israel's interests. That's an oversimplification. However, it's demonstrable that a cabal of prominent intellectuals and policy-makers, aka the neocons, strove from the early 1990s to direct U.S. policy along lines favorable to Israeli interests. One of the cabal's most prominent goals was the removal of Saddam Hussein. The record is plain on this.

It is quite true that both the Israelis and the neocons were more worried about Iran than Iraq. However, they needed the U.S. to "do" Iraq first. Iraq was to serve as the *point d'appui* when Iran's turn came.

The paper by Mearsheimer and Walt was expanded and published as a book ("The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy") by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux in 2007. The authors are respected academics. They have endured vicious personal attacks for having had the guts to expose the machinations of the Israel lobby. Their book is carefully sourced. Those who term it "rubbish" are simply desperate to remove the spotlight from AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and its fellow travelers.

I wouldn't call Israeli and Zionist influence over U.S. policy nefarious — they are simply pursuing their own interests. Nevertheless, their interests and those of my country are at loggerheads. I favor policies that promote the interests and welfare of the American people. Israel is just another foreign country to me. I would think any American would feel this way. Given that the Israelis killed a beautiful American girl, Rachel Corrie, not to mention 34 sailors on the *USS Liberty*, I think my attitude is charitable.

Ganging Up

To my mind, Tim Slagle was barking up the wrong tree when he criticized ten Chinese grad students for urging

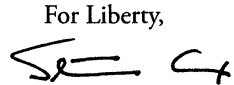
Watching this year's primary election returns, I've often been reminded of a remark made by R.W. Bradford, who knew more about American elections than anyone you're ever likely to meet.

Bill said there were two types of presidential candidates: (A) people whom sizable numbers of other Americans always wanted to be president; (B) people whom no one but themselves ever had that idea about. In the A group were William Jennings Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, Robert Taft, and Ronald Reagan. In the B group were Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and both of the Bushes.

I think that this year all the candidates who've had any chance of being nominated have fallen in the B category. Nobody wanted them to run, although once they started a few of them attracted the "glamour" that hovers in the media and is bound to attach itself to someone.

Now, as Bill recognized, just being in the A list doesn't make you a good candidate, in the sense of having good ideas. No, not at all. A-list candidates make the spectacle more interesting to report, but ideas are still the most important thing. At Liberty, we're going to continue to report on the spectacle of 2008, but with an emphasis on ideas that rise above the flat gray plains of electoral politics.

For Liberty,



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their countrymen to "revert to Chinese traditions" (Reflections, Jan.–Feb.). It is a misperception to characterize their action as "ivory tower elitism" and "in line with American multiculturalism." These Chinese youths are trying to protect their own culture's ancient forms from the corrosive effects of American popular culture — the culture of Starbucks and NASCAR, country music and "Survivor," Britney and Oprah. It is, moreover, wrong to characterize the students as "retro-communists." Mao's number one cultural goal was the effacement of Confucianism and the high culture handed down from the Imperial age. It is the Communist Party that has overseen the transformation of China's economy to consumerist pseudo-capitalism.

I say the world needs more kids like this Gang of Ten. A "Revolt of the Elites" is needed to prevent the proletarianization of culture worldwide.

Jon Harrison
Poultney, Vt.

Slagle responds: I hear this kind of elitism all the time: chamber music is better than rock and roll; Shakespeare is better than American cinema; opera is better than musicals. In the marketplace, however, the dollars would disagree. The only way classical music and Shakespeare even survive today is with generous grants, usually with tax funds pilfered from the pockets of NASCAR fans.

It is wrongheaded to try to force a culture onto people, and impossible without forfeiting liberty. Totalitarian governments tried to impose classical music on their populations last century, and used some fairly ugly tactics to get it done (just for the sake of *music*, mind you). Not only was it an abject failure, victims of Communism in some Eastern bloc nations still credit underground rock and roll for the overthrow of those tyrannical governments.

Cultures do not exist in harmony, they are like organisms that survive in Darwinian competition with each other. When one vanishes, it is a natural displacement, and good for humanity. The only fair way to judge the validity of a culture is through the lens of history, and time will tell whether American Christmas is better than Chinese tradition. This "Gang of Ten" is not fit to judge the free choices of individuals.

Cultures that do not survive will be forgotten. And that's good. Imperial Chinese culture is essentially dead. It wouldn't work in a rapidly expanding high-tech economy. However, those portions of Confucianism that have validity in this New China will remain, despite the influence of Santa Claus and American Christmas.

Cityscape

I can sympathize with Randal O'Toole's assessment of Portland, Ore. But to get the full flavor of what it's like to live in a planned city, he really ought to move here instead of hiding out in little Bandon, where he can view things on a purely academic level.

I have spent nearly all my life on the east side of the Willamette in an area that can only be called the low-rent district. About halfway between my home and the suburb of Gresham there was a dairy farm. It was kind of pastoral riding past those bovines on a Sunday drive. Then, uphill from that farm, a speculator built dozens of McMansions. The new neighbors complained loud and long about the constant smell of cow pies. I really don't know what they expected to smell, perhaps Old Spice aftershave lotion. The Andreggs, who had farmed that land for several generations, finally got tired of the complaints, sold off their cows (or slaughtered them; maybe both), and put row after ugly row of identical doublewides on the pastureland. Now those hoity-toity city folk have a panoramic view of trailer trash, day after day, without end.

A block up the street from me lives a man with a brain injury that makes it impossible for him to work. His mother bought the property for him so he would have a place of his own after she was gone. His house has one of the last remaining side yards in the area. Developers knock on his door and offer him truly fetching prices for the side yard so they can put up a skinny house. He'd rather have a place for his dog to romp, and not have to hear his neighbors flush their toilet day and night.

The city is currently building another extension to light rail, all the

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Reflections

A long way down from Lincoln — President Bush is rightly challenged for his bumbling rhetoric and undiagrammable syntax. But worse could follow. Consider Hillary Clinton, responding to her defeat in Iowa by screeching like a Valley girl who's just seen a new pair of shoes: "I am SO ready for the rest of this campaign. And I am SO ready to lead." Lead me to the exit, Senator. — Stephen Cox

After the surge — Early January saw Clinton and McCain win their respective party primaries in New Hampshire; but a more important development for some libertarians came a few days *before* those votes. The New Republic magazine published a major hit piece on Republican presidential candidate Rep. Ron Paul. The implication was that Paul is a bigot — racist, antigay, and antisemitic. The evidence was excerpts from a number of articles that appeared in several newsletters that Paul published or was otherwise involved with during the 1980s and early 1990s. The excerpts were selective, of course. But some of the quotations are troubling:

> Order was only restored in L.A. [after the 1992 "Rodney King" riots] when it came time for the blacks to pick up their welfare checks three days after rioting began. . . .
>
> . . . opinion polls consistently show only about 5% of blacks have sensible political opinions. . . .
>
> . . . I miss the closet . . . . Homosexuals, not to speak of the rest of society, were far better off when social pressure forced them to hide their activities.

Not all of this was news. In October 2001, Paul told Texas Monthly magazine that he had not written the offending articles but acknowledged a "moral responsibility" for the barmy things published in his name. Still, The New Republic (despite several highly-publicized instances of fiction presented as fact in its pages) remains an influential publication in establishment media circles. So, the story may hurt Paul's candidacy.

Paul polled about 10% of votes in the New Hampshire GOP primary. That, combined with his early successes raising money, suggests that he could run a credible campaign through the GOP convention in a few months. For those of us interested in hearing a voice for principled limited government, that credibility is important.

Ron Paul isn't likely to win the nomination. But he could influence the debate on issues from the Iraq War to so-called health care "reform." And he could mark a trail for other libertarian candidates to follow in the GOP. If he's marginalized as a crackpot bigot, these good ends will be lost.

It's a reality of the libertarian movement that some crackpots have mingled in our midst. The same can be said of *any* political movement; oddballs are often drawn to the intensity that political discourse can generate.

Some of liberty's crackpots are conspiracy theorists. Their opposition to statism and establishment parties comes not from philosophical resolve but from neurotic fixations on chimeras like "the organized power of the gay lobby" and "mostly black welfare recipients" — language that the recent article sourced to Paul newsletters.

Classical liberalism is better than this. And Paul seems to realize it. His official response reads:

> The quotations in The New Republic article are not mine and do not represent what I believe or have ever believed. I have never uttered such words and denounce such small-minded thoughts.

The rest of the spring will tell how much a closer scrutiny of past writings will affect Paul's candidacy. The best case will be that he brings the term "libertarian" a little closer to the political mainstream without tarnishing it. — Jim Walsh

Don't stop believing — Thirty seconds on Google at any time in the past several months would have revealed to any interested party the gist of James Kirchick's Jan. 8 TNR

story. Posting it the day of the New Hampshire primaries was undoubtedly meant to do the most damage: it would hit before the Paul campaign explained this is an old, old story that won't die.

That the establishment feels threatened enough to attack Paul is a good sign. It means they take him seriously. Did they ever feel threatened enough to dig through Badnarik's past? Or Browne's? Only Liberty, the "inreach journal" of the libertarian movement, bothered to give those gentlemen a through investigation. They were Libertarian Party candidates, and Paul is not the LP candidate for 2008, but surely he is "the libertarian candidate."

Last year, a debate moderator asked Paul, "Are you suggesting we invited the 9/11 attack, sir?" Paul had said no such thing, but he didn't even have the presence of mind to say "no" before pressing on with this point! Rudy Giuliani followed

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

I had a dream the other night, and in this dream I was driving across the state of Michigan with my two friends Paul and Mehmet, and we got stuck at a gas station in Eaton Rapids. That's the town where they put up a road sign saying, "You Are Now Leaving the Only Eaton Rapids in the World." In my dream, however, we couldn't leave that unique metropolis, because some piece of our car had to be fixed.

I asked the guy who was fixing it how long the job would take, and he answered straightforwardly, "Half an hour." Then I made the mistake of saying, "Really?"

My little display of skepticism must have stung him, because he came back at me with the longest list of evasions I ever heard:

> "Well, that was just one possibility."
> "That was just one man's view of the situation."
> "It's hard to estimate these things."
> "You can't really tell."
> "Maybe yes, maybe no."
> "I wouldn't swear it in court."
> "I'm no prophet."
> "All these things are different."
> "Every mechanic does it his own way."
> "You never know what you're gonna find, once you open one of these babies up."
> "It's hard to work while you're being watched."

And so on and so forth: so many evasive cliches that on waking, I complimented myself on my ability to dream them all up. It was very clever, my little nightmare about the use of language to obscure and annoy. Even while I was dreaming, its cleverness impressed me very much, although I'm sorry to say that Mehmet and Paul didn't share my taste. They just stood there, waiting gravely for the guy to fix our car.

What really needs to be fixed, however, is the language we use in public. On this score, practically the only ground for optimism that I've recently seen appeared in November 2007, in a remark made by Juan Carlos, King of Spain, King of Castile, King of Aragon, King of Navarre, King of the Two Sicilies, King of Jerusalem, King of the Isles and Mainland of the Ocean Sea, to Mr. Hugo Chavez, Demagogue of Venezuela. "Why," said the king to the kingfish, "don't you just *shut up*?"

Now don't you feel better about the Bourbon dynasty?

Many people do. Within a week, the monarch's question had been downloaded as a ringtone by over 500,000 people, and a T-shirt company had taken what is described as "a year's worth of orders." The effect was even better in the original Spanish, because in addressing his antagonist the king used a form of the pronoun *tu* instead of the ordinary *usted*. "Why dost thou not shut up?" is the literal translation, but the archaic formality of the English second-person singular isn't what comes through in Spanish. In Spanish it's more like, "Why don't you just shut up, boy?"

Highly satisfactory. Yet politicians wasted no time in smothering this ray of linguistic light. A fine example of political correctness was provided the very next day by a man named José-Miguel Insulza, who, in case you didn't know, is the Secretary General of the Organization of American States. Mr. Insulza is not very friendly with Mr. Chavez. Indeed, Chavez made news last January by calling him an "asshole." (Reuters defined "asshole" as one of Chavez's "strong verbal swipes," apparently with no pun intended.) But when asked by reporters whether "freedom of expression and freedom of the press are under great stress in Venezuela," Insulza answered:

"I think that journalists don't have a good time in several parts of Latin America, Venezuela being one of them. But one must admit, though, there are other places where, for example, organized crime has killed journalists. That has not happened in Venezuela. So I don't think it's fair to say that the problems some journalists are having are only in Venezuela."

That's four sentences, none of which answers the question that was asked, although they do manage to answer at least six other questions: Do journalists have a good time in several parts of Latin America? Is Venezuela part of Latin America? Have criminals killed journalists? Ought one to admit this? Have criminals killed journalists in Venezuela? Is it fair to say that journalists have problems only in Venezuela?

Insulza was also asked whether Latin America was falling behind the rest of the world in economic growth. Here he made an even closer imitation of my dream-state garage mechanic. He began with a forthright "we are lagging behind." But that wasn't good enough. He couldn't resist the temptation to lead his listeners (as the old ladies who lived in my home town used to say) *all around Robin Hood's barn*. He asserted that "the size of GNP of Latin America linked to the world economy is much larger than it was 10 years ago." He allowed that "several countries have a problem with education." He emphasized that "some of the new big economic powers of the world . . . have more poor than Latin America and have more illiterate than Latin America and more malnutrition than Latin America." I suppose he was talking about

up: "That's an extraordinary statement . . . that we invited the attack because we were attacking Iraq. . . . I would ask the congressman to withdraw that comment and tell us that he didn't really mean that." After a lot of applause from the audience, Paul simply continued to make his point. Not even a denial that "we invited 9/11"; he just didn't have enough ego caught up in it to bother. He was concerned with what was right for the country and would not be derailed.

China, but that's just my guess. In other words, we are lagging behind, but maybe not — not really.

That's one way of evading any definite meaning: multiply words until your listeners give in, doze off, or just forget whatever it was you were talking about; bring up other topics, refuse all concrete reference ("several countries"; "there are other places"), and go on adding words and sentences until you've worn everybody out.

But there's another means of evasion: make one meaningless word take the place of all the words that might have been meaningful.

At the moment, my favorite meaningless public-pronouncement word is "unacceptable," an expression that occurs "about 16,601 times" in the current index of Google News. "Unacceptable" means "bad" in a vague, undefined, often illogical, but always serious, deeply serious way. Thus, an atomic bomb attack is "unacceptable," but so is the absence of Tagalog interpreters at the local PTA meeting.

According to internet news indices, it is now considered *unacceptable* for a Confederate flag to appear on a beach towel, for water supplies to be protected from massive amounts of bird turd by the killing of Canada geese, for mute swans to be kept from destroying fragile environments, for children to curse in front of adults, for girls to wear "revealing" prom dresses, for trash to be dumped on the streets of Detroit (how could you tell if it was?), for "persistent questioners" to be tasered at John Kerry speeches, for students to be suspended from schools for any reason, for flying saucers to be prevented from landing at O'Hare Airport, for insufficient charitable contributions to be made at Christmas, for religion to be used to "manipulate voters," and, of course, for healthcare to "be denied any US citizen" (but you knew that, didn't you?).

"Unacceptable" is a plague that has spread from America throughout the world. News reports indicate that it is *unacceptable* for Kenyans to lose at soccer, for Palestinians to conduct political kidnapings, for Palestinians not to have a state, for Kosovo to be called "a future state," for food to taste bad in British hospitals, for British officials not to be prosecuted for allowing sailors to sell their stories to the media, for policemen to be paid at different rates in Scotland and in England, for 17,000 South Africans to use one toilet, for Parisians to riot, for gambling to be legalized on Saipan, for foreigners to interfere with Pakistan, for foreigners to interfere with Lebanon, for foreigners to interfere with Uzbekistan, for fin whales to be hunted in the Pacific, for Afghan women to be photographed, for pornography to be exhibited to Australian aborigines, for school fees to be raised in Vietnam, for antiterrorist profiling to be used in Europe, for priests to pin their hair up in Russia, for fundamentalism to exist in India, and for poverty to exist in Canada, or anywhere else on earth.

To which I respond: Why don't you just shut up?

The man is an open book. Ron Paul is, at best, a mediocre politician because he is honest to a fault. If he hated blacks, Jews, gays, and whoever else he's accused of hating, we would know it. It would slip out on stage at every public appearance.

Some awful things were written, and Ron Paul's name was on the newsletter. I doubt he personally penned the more vicious writings; I believe him when he says it was poor oversight of other writers, for which he accepts blame. That means he is a bad manager, and, perhaps, therefore unfit to be president. Fine; he's not going to be the next president. He's still the only candidate saying what libertarians want to be said, and doing it loudly, and doing it so that the mainstream press have to cover it. That's the best, and the only realistic reason to support him — and that's why he still deserves our support.

More representative of Paul's character than the things that appeared in old newsletters, I suspect, is something Tucker Carlson wrote — also in TNR — just a few weeks ago, after spending a couple of days with the Paul campaign:

> On board the campaign's tiny chartered jet one night . . . Paul and his staff engaged in an unintentionally hilarious exchange about the cabin lights. The staff wanted to know whether Paul preferred the lights on or off. Not wanting to be bossy, Paul wouldn't say. Ultimately, the staff had to guess. It was a long three minutes.

This is the hateful, spiteful, antisemitic, gay-bashing monster Ron Paul. Well, okay. This laissez-fairy isn't scraping the Paul bumper sticker off his car anytime soon.

— Patrick Quealy

Guild system — I'm quite certain that Americans are tired of hearing about the Hollywood writers' strike. Yeah, they know there are writers behind the crap they watch every single night, but they really don't want to hear about it. Just like they probably know there's bits of kidney and lung in their breakfast sausage. So what? Slap it on a McBiscuit, wrap it in paper, shove it through the window, and shut up already.

The writers guild has nothing in common with the other unions in America. They're fighting for residuals. Auto workers don't understand residuals. Auto workers go to work, they build a car, the car is sold. Transaction complete. From the WGA perspective, it's not fair to the workers who built your car that you get to use it for whatever you want, and don't have to pay them a dime for it. In their minds, you should have to pay the auto workers every time you wanted to drive it somewhere. Part of the fight is that writers want a share of the profits if something is sold on the internet. Could you imagine having to pay an auto worker more money if you wanted to sell your used car online? — Tim Slagle

Bring back the smoke-filled room — I don't watch reality shows and I haven't seen any of the presidential debates. But I repeat myself.

Listening to inside-the-beltway friends talk about the debates — apparently they watch them avidly — makes me think that the presidential campaigns are nothing more than reality shows for the intelligentsia. Perhaps because I live in one of the last states to hold a 2008 primary, I find it irrelevant: in all likelihood, the decisions will be made by the time I am given any nominal say in the process.

Even if I lived in New Hampshire or Michigan, I'd find

this primary process bizarre. First of all, both political parties agree that Iowa has to go first — why? So that Archer-Daniels-Midland can be guaranteed its corn subsidies for another four years.

Then we have an extremely unpopular war, but most of the Republican candidates are trying to outhawk one another and most of the Democrats are afraid to speak out (or, in the cases of those in Congress, do anything) against it.

But I make the mistake of thinking issues count. Hillary turned around the New Hampshire election simply by shedding a couple of tears. Many said that Obama's speeches won their support by shivers up their spines when, as near as I can tell, the semantic content of his speeches is exactly nil. Ron Paul lost many votes because so many of his supporters are unsocialized geeks who, until now, hardly left their parents' basements.

I think we were better off in the days of back-room deals. Donors would save the millions spent on primary campaigns. Voters could concentrate on their daily lives rather than be subjected to empty rhetoric for at least two out of every four years. Congress could make decisions without polarizing every issue. And the outcomes probably would not be much different. The only thing we would lose would be the entertainment, and I'd be glad to give that up. — Randal O'Toole

Buzz Huckabee — If Mike Huckabee ever follows Fred Thompson into an acting career, he would be ideal for the role of Buzz Windrip in a film version of Sinclair Lewis' novel "It Can't Happen Here."

Like Huckabee, Windrip is a folksy and affable populist presidential candidate from a poor and socially conservative state:

> Usually he was known as "Buzz." He had worked his way through a Southern Baptist college, of approximately the same academic standing as a Jersey City business college, and through a Chicago law school, and settled down to practice in his native state and to enliven local politics. He was a tireless traveler, a boisterous and humorous speaker, an inspired guesser at what political doctrines the people would like, a warm handshaker, and willing to lend money . . .
>
> He had a luminous, ungrudging smile which (declared the Washington correspondents) he turned on and off deliberately, like an electric light, but which could make his ugliness more attractive than the simpers of any pretty man.
>
> [H]e was the Common Man twenty-times-magnified by his oratory, so that while the other Commoners could understand his every purpose, which was exactly the same as their own, they saw him towering among them, and they raised hands to him in worship.

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To find out what happens, read the novel. You'll be dolefully amused. The results aren't exactly what the voters would have predicted. — David T. Beito

The Inferno — When, on the eve of the New Hampshire primary, Hillary Clinton broke down and cried, I felt for her. Here is an intelligent and capable person who has devoted the past six decades of her life to the insane delusion that she was chosen by God to become president of the United States. To this delusion she has literally sacrificed her life.

She married a boorish huckster whose idea of bliss was to have sex with morons, and whose idea of self-exculpation was to insist that oral intercourse is not really sex.

She surrounded herself with liars and cheats and spent every moment of her own time either scheming or covering up her schemes.

She developed not only a contempt for simple honesty but a violent temper and the conviction that it was her responsibility to rule the world — two characteristics that are sentences to a lifetime of constant pain.

She became the most unpopular person in America. When, after many years, she finally found this out, she tried to ingratiate herself with voters by acting the part of the nice, funny, easy-going gal next door. People laughed at her. She gave way to tears, or at least pretended to; and they laughed at her again. At last she achieved the victory of a few thousand votes in a tiny New England state, thus reviving her faith in the only goal of her existence, the possession of the Oval Office.

Whether she attains that goal or not, hers is a life that one must pity.

Much the same can be said about the other big-name presidential candidates. About Barack Obama, a moderately smart, moderately engaging person who has convinced himself that, by the potent magic of not being Hillary Clinton, he has discovered the answers to all of America's questions. About John McCain, who was so worried that his age might make him lose New Hampshire that he went on TV to confess, in a jolly voice, that he was "as old as dirt." And about all the rest of them. I don't need to fill up the list.

How much would someone have to pay you to say what these people say, and act as these people act? How much would someone have to pay you to live any of their wretched lives? And of these people, one is to become the president.

— Stephen Cox

Cycles of history — In 1787 Alexander Tytler, a Scottish history professor, had this to say about the fall of the Athenian Republic some 2,000 years prior:

> A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can exist only until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury.
>
> From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse over loose fiscal policy, always followed by a dictatorship.
>
> The average age of the world's greatest civilizations has been about 200 years. These nations always progressed through this sequence:
>
> From BONDAGE to SPIRITUAL FAITH; from spiritual faith to GREAT COURAGE; from courage to LIBERTY; from liberty to ABUNDANCE; from abundance to SELFISHNESS; from selfishness to COMPLACENCY; from complacency to

APATHY; from apathy to DEPENDENCY; from dependency back into BONDAGE.

I agree with his widely quoted words, though I'd substitute MORAL CERTITUDE for spiritual faith, which is not necessarily a virtue. And I'd leave out selfishness, since that's not necessarily a vice. But as far as the basic sequence, almost all observers, perhaps starting with Plato, agree. Almost everything is cyclical, from the markets, to the climate, to civilizations, to the fate of the universe itself. And it's getting late in the cycle for the American Empire. — Doug Casey

Not Kristol clear — At the end of 2007, the New York Times announced that it had hired Bill Kristol as an op-ed columnist. A curious development, to say the least. The Times has traditionally (at least since it hired Bill Safire back in the '70s) had one conservative columnist in house. Now it has two, David Brooks being the other.

The Times has two op-ed columnists worth reading (sometimes) — Brooks and Tom Friedman. Now, with the addition of Kristol, it will still have two. Kristol joins left-wing mediocrities Frank Rich, Maureen Dowd, Paul Krugman, etc. Perhaps he was hired to provide some ideological balance to the silliness. Or maybe the Times just hopes to sell more papers.

The Times already suffers from a sagging reputation. While its best reporters continue to provide readers with solid news coverage, it has been guilty of awful editorial mistakes. Recall the Judy Miller mess, or that kid (I forget his name — Jason something?) who got promoted way beyond his skill level, and then went on to write made-up stories. Add to these the paper's heavy ideological slant — a slant that too often obscures the facts of an issue — and you have a journalistic behemoth with feet of clay. Adding Kristol only makes the behemoth look more wobbly. No one on the Right has been more consistently wrong in his prognostications than the smirking Kristol.

Kristol's motive for joining the Times is even harder to make out. He has criticized the paper often, and in no uncertain terms, calling it "irredeemable." He even urged that it be prosecuted for revealing a U.S. program tracking international banking transactions. So why is he taking the job?

This marriage is so mixed that dark and complex motives seem necessary to explain it. On the other hand, perhaps it's so very simple. What we're seeing is indeed what we're getting: two whores coming together. — Jon Harrison

The business terminator — When art imitates life, it's unsurprising; but when life imitates art, it's at least unusual. When Governor Schwarzenegger pitches his new healthcare scheme, he seems to be imitating cinematic art — namely, his own Terminator series. In the first Terminator movie, he was a tough, calculating machine determined to destroy girlie-humans. By the last Terminator movie, he was a gentle, motherly machine just trying to help the kids.

Campaigning against the free-spending former Governor Gray Davis — a man who personified his name magnificently — Arnold was the original Terminator, opposing new taxes, demanding a cut in the auto license fees, and so on. During his first term, he pushed a special election on several major reform initiatives: one to limit the growth of state spending, one to curb the power of unions to confiscate their members' money for use in political campaigns, and one to redistrict the state to overcome the gerrymandered system that permanently cemented politicians in office.

But his tactics were fatally flawed. First, he should have pushed one initiative at a time, starting with the most important one, viz., the proposal to cap the growth of state spending. Had he gotten that through, the budget would be in surplus today, and his name would live in glory forever, for more than his career in sports and movies. Second, he should have put proposals on the ballot only in general election years, rather than placing them in special or off-year elections, when the public is less likely to vote, making it easier for public-employee unions to bring out their own, well organized voters.

After he was soundly beaten, Arnold started mutating into the kinder-gentler-more-loving Spender Terminator. Suddenly, he dropped all talk of capping government growth and proposed massive new spending programs.

He won reelection in a landslide.

With the introduction of his new health insurance plan, the mutation has become complete. Under his scheme — quite a scheme coming from a professed admirer of libertarian economists Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman — all Californians will be required to have health insurance. Those that can afford it will be forced to buy it, and those that can't afford it will be given it by an expanded Medi-Cal and other welfare programs. Businesses with more than ten employees will either have to provide health insurance to their employees or have to pay a 4% tax on their total wages, to fund health insurance for those who can't afford it themselves. Doctors and hospitals will also be hit by a new tax that will disgorge into the fund — docs 2% of their revenues, hospitals 4%. And insurers cannot deny coverage for reasons of health or age.

In short, employers will be hammered even more in taxes, in a state second only to New York for its unfriendly business environment. Chambers of commerce in such states as Texas, Florida, and Nevada must be rubbing their hands at the prospect of the current flood of California businesses moving out of state becoming a torrent. And outsourcing will become even more tempting.

"I'll need your Social Security number."

Middle class people forced to buy insurance they don't want, businesses and doctors taxed to buy insurance for everyone else, premium prices totally controlled — yes, indeed, that's something Milton Friedman would have loved.

— Gary Jason

Honor among thieves? — Charles Cashmore, one of O.J. Simpson's co-defendants, will plead guilty to a reduced charge in exchange for testimony against the disgraced football legend and four other defendants in the recent armed robbery case in Las Vegas.

Good to know that O.J. might not escape this time, that laws of nature and numbers are catching up with him.

Cashmore's testimony is good for this specific case, but as my grandmom used to say, "even crooks should have some ethics." Yes, Cashmore would have been better off doing hara kiri than testify against his boss, for he is not doing this because of a change of heart, but because of a "bribe" he is getting from the American prosecutors. Americans would have been better off — much, much better off — by letting O.J. go free for lack of evidence, than reduce Cashmore's jail term for his testimony. Cashmore should actually get an increased term for being utterly spineless, for being a disgrace to humanity.

And should the state prosecutors not go to jail for offering bribes? Really, over the long term, termites are far, far more dangerous than a lion. — Jayant Bhandari

Back to work — A loathsome story out of Greenburgh, N.Y., where the property taxes have risen so high that elderly widows on fixed incomes can no longer afford to pay the amounts due on the houses they own free and clear.

Now, the idea of a "property tax" has always rankled in me. Why should anyone have to pay for the continued privilege of owning something already paid for in full? It's renting one's own property from the government. And it's especially pernicious when such rents are demanded from those least able to pay. It's a situation tailor-made for some smug town politician to announce his compassionate plan to ease their tax burden, invariably by raising slightly the taxes on everyone else because God knows the budget isn't going to get cut.

Thus was I surprised to see Greenburgh Town Supervisor Paul Feiner offer an equally smug but far more patronizing solution to the problem: put those widows to work! Says an article in the Lower Hudson Valley Journal-News (Dec. 31, 2007), "Under the plan, seniors could work in Town Hall and other municipal departments for $7 an hour, and earn up to $700." Feiner has appropriated $25,000 to give the program a trial sit. And besides, it's not like the elderly do anything in those houses their husbands worked for decades to buy; as the article points out, "the proposal may have beneficial side effects, including the structure that a part-time job can provide to those who may find the days of retirement too long to fill and too isolating to enjoy."

At this point in my life, I can't imagine what retirement would be like. Could it really be so bad that some would welcome working in a municipal department, just to fill the hours? If so, I swear I'm working till the maintenance crew hauls my carcass away from the desk over which I've keeled.

— Andrew Ferguson

Opposite of panacea — In a recent letter to The Wall Street Journal, a planning professor at Ohio State University blamed urban sprawl for the demise of the afternoon newspaper. Other people have blamed sprawl for obesity, global warming, the Columbine shootings, and other ills. Gee, is there anything sprawl *can't* do? — Randal O'Toole

Buffett gives it away — Warren Buffett, a man fattened by the virtues of capitalism, told the Congress recently that he favored the estate tax, which for the next couple years kicks in at 2 mil per parent. "I think we need to . . . take a little more out of the hides of guys like me." It's rumored that several well-off congressmen fainted after first buttoning their back pocket. But I was not surprised. Of course WB favors the death tax — he's not going to inherit a nickel from anyone.

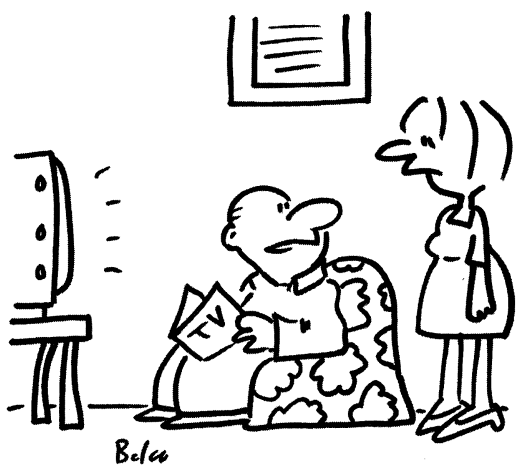
His kids? They're probably keeping a log of his eccentricities, to use in court. Anybody, anywhere, of any means who's in favor of giving family money to the government is a strong candidate for the looney bin.

I began to lose respect for Buffett the day he gave Bill Gates a multi-billion dollar check — for his foundation. Not a profit-making corporation, the kind that purveyed Windows to the world, but a foundation: a non-profit, non-incentivized factory of sound and fury and press releases.

But on the up side you must credit the great philanthropist for his understanding of the tradeoffs involved in pleasing the human palate: proved by his chunk of ownership of Dairy Queen — dubbed DQ by its rotund patrons. DQ makes the best chili dog in this town or any other. They sell for $1.85 each or two for $1.99! Can you believe it? Now that's the real Warren Buffett making his contribution to society.

— Ted Roberts

Damn lies and statistics — A recent article on cancer myths, distributed online by Johns Hopkins and flagged by Yahoo as a Number 1 story, bewails the fact that 39% of the American populace believes that you're more likely to get lung cancer because you live in a "polluted city" than because you smoke a pack of cigarettes a day.



"What do you want to watch — the State of the Union address or a reality show?"

How did this preposterous idea take hold? The reporters of the statistic — the authors of a survey undertaken for the American Cancer Society — blame the victims. They "point to studies showing that people who engage in behaviors like smoking or unprotected sun exposure tend to underestimate their own personal risks from these choices, despite their knowing of the risk to the general public."

Well, maybe. But what accounts for their belief that air "pollution" is worse than cigarettes? Where could they possibly have gotten that silly idea? Could it have been from the environmental "activists" (i.e., cranks) who ceaselessly preach the doctrine of "second-hand smoke," industrial "befoulment," and the demon automobile? — Stephen Cox

An improbable victory — American President Bush and Peruvian President Alan García have signed the free-trade agreement that Peru and the U.S. started negotiating back in 2003. The initial agreement was concluded in 2005, but the new, protectionist Congress delayed approval and forced García to renegotiate its terms. Essentially, the Democrats demanded that the agreement be made more palatable to organized labor and environmentalist groups.

The effect of this pact will not be earth-shaking, because Peru is not a huge economy. Still, the U.S. International Trade Commission estimates that it will raise trade between Peru and the U.S. by nearly 20%. For several reasons, it is amazing that this modest agreement survived to get finalized.

First, it is surprising that Bush, with a 30% approval rating and only a year left in office, still had the juice to get the agreement through a hostile, anti-free-trade Congress, completely controlled by the opposing party.

Second, President García had himself attacked the agreement during his election campaign in 2006. But once in office, he worked to get it implemented, and is now urging American fishing, manufacturing, and mining companies to invest in his country, promising "long-term security."

Third, even though the modified agreement stiffened environmental and labor rules on businesses starting operations in Peru, organized labor still opposed it. This Congress has rolled over for every demand made by Big Labor, no matter how outrageous, so this treaty was not a slam dunk.

Finally, there is a swelling antiglobalist sentiment in this country. A recent Wall Street Journal article pointed out that Americans oppose global free trade by 58% to 28%. In the face of this backlash, even Republicans are retreating from free trade — so getting enough Democrats and Republicans to vote this deal through was again no slam dunk.

— Gary Jason

What makes the heart grow fonder?— More and more states are refusing federal money for "abstinence-only" sex education programs. According to an article in the Dec. 16 Washington Post, no fewer than 14 states have turned up their noses at the federal dollars, an increase from four states in 2006.

For the past 75 years, Washington has done its best to make states dependent upon federal handouts. And the states have cooperated willingly. It's news when states just say no to money from Uncle Sugar, even when their objection is to the strings attached.

Apparently, states have found that preaching abstinence doesn't work. Really! Raging hormones beat the government's proclaiming, "Thou shalt not." Who could've imagined it?

It's very important to educate young people about sexual hygiene, birth control, and the burdens of being a parent. Such knowledge can save at least some kids from major grief. It's not government's business to promote virginity, any more than it should be in the business of advocating promiscuity. In a society such as ours, drenched as it is in tease and innuendo (for the advertising industry has not yet found it possible to mainstream graphic sex), a strictly hands-off attitude (no pun) is not good enough. Education there must be, but please, let's be real. Kids are doing it, and they're going to keep on doing it. Let's work to make the playing field as safe as possible.

— Jon Harrison

Silly Season 2008 — Presidential campaigning started much earlier than usual — not just several months or even a year before the election but a full 15 months. To my growing surprise, the networks are still covering the candidates and their debates; even the purported nonprofit NPR and the self-consciously august New York Times apparently succumbed to the expanded calendar.

Nonetheless, does the mass public care? Are viewers rushing home to view the latest staged debates among the many candidates? Are they reading columns upon newspaper columns about Barak and Hillary, John Edwards and Sen. Whomever Aspires? If not, will the free market in which the media operate drive them to return to their regular fare of reality shows, sit-coms, sports, and local news, letting the hustling candidates languish in No-news Limbo?

One result of popular disinterest should be a reconsideration of the traditional myth about voting percentages. If nearly 100% of the people voted in totalitarian countries whose governments were feared, shouldn't a low turnout indicate disinterest permitted only by a lack of government intimidation? If that's true, an indisputably successful country would be one where voluntarily no one votes at all.

If public disinterest in the 2008 campaigns persists past the primaries next year, will the media "forget to cover" the final run-up (or is it run-down?) to the presidential election next summer and fall? If Nov. 4, 2008 became nothing more than another shopping holiday, would the U.S., confronted with the fact of no president at all, have gotten to the prerequisite for splitting ourselves apart? — Richard Kostelanetz

English only — How oft we see the law of unintended consequences bite statists in their butts. A recent illustration is the brouhaha about English-only requirements on the job.

Contemporary left-liberals are frequently what I call multiculturalismists. That is, they subscribe to an extreme form of multiculturalism and use it as a tool to attack American society. Broad multiculturalism is simply the view that all cultures have their good and bad aspects, and none is so good that it ought to replace all others. I am myself a moderate multiculturalist or, as I prefer, a cosmopolitan. I am very pleased to be an American. I think that American culture is not on the whole inferior to others. But I surely would not want to see it supplant all other cultures, and I have a visceral aversion to the idea of imposing it on other countries. I hope the French, the Mexicans, the Greeks, and so on retain their distinctive identi-

ties, because I so enjoy visiting those countries and experiencing (however superficially) their cultures.

I am not extreme in this multiculturalism. I don't hold, for example, that there are no dysfunctional cultures. The culture of (say) Nazi Germany comes to mind. A few cultures have such virulently nasty features that the whole of them becomes repellent. Moreover, while I am a moderate multiculturalist, I am also an assimilationist. I believe that if I were to emigrate to some other country, with the intention of becoming a citizen there, it would be my moral obligation to learn its language, culture, and customs. If I moved to France, I would attempt to become fluent in French, as hard as that would be for a linguistically challenged individual such as I. I would broadly assimilate to the culture. I wouldn't demand bilingual ballots in French and English, or insist that the American flag be flown at French sporting events.

These thoughts come to mind when I see the entrenched resistance by multiculturalismists in government to attempts to get immigrants to learn English. I mean, it just seems obvious that all new immigrants should learn the language. Polls consistently show that the vast majority of people — including Hispanics — agree with this notion, and it remains one of the requirements for attaining U.S. citizenship. It's a matter of assimilating to the country and culture the immigrant has *freely chosen* to join, not a chauvinist claim that English is superior to all other tongues.

But alas, resistance to common sense runs deep in the bastions of the Left.

Consider what happens to companies that introduce English-only rules. Such rules seem quite reasonable for many businesses: they promote workplace harmony, and they guarantee that important information (such as about imminent workplace dangers) can be conveyed quickly. But the EEOC has been extremely aggressive against these rules, filing 200 lawsuits against them during 2006 alone.

When Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) — hardly an ultra-rightwinger — tried to introduce an amendment to bar such government lawsuits, it was blocked by the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, led by Rep. Joe Baca (D-CA), with the backing of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA).

There is also a continuing attempt to push for bilingual education, the daffy idea that the best approach to getting an immigrant child proficient in English is to teach him or her in *another* language for an indefinite period. In California, this insanity has supposedly been ended by a constitutional amendment; yet educators keep inflicting it on students stuck in the public school system.

Ironically, the multiculturalismists of the Left make it hard for those of us who favor reasonable amounts of legal immigration to convince the average citizen of its benefits. Ironically, the leftist fetish about multiculturalism — specifically, the opposition to English language requirements — is one cause of the rising tide of anti-immigrant feeling throughout the country. An unintended consequence, indeed.

— Gary Jason

"May I have a dollar for a cup of black coffee, sir? — I want to get sobered up so I can go down to the polls and vote."

Rudy's "social liberalism" — Strangely, Rudy Giuliani maintains a reputation in some quarters as libertarian-friendly on the social issues — especially those related to "getting government out of the bedroom."

Perhaps this is true, to a limited extent, on abortion and gay marriage; but it's pretty thin gruel. Rudy's new receptiveness to a proposed constitutional amendment defining marriage as only between a man and a woman has made it thinner still. Of course, Rudy has always been a zealous social authoritarian on the war on drugs and civil liberties.

The myth of Rudy's social liberalism became still more apparent at a speech he made at the Family Research Council. He pandered to the censors, boasting (according to JoinRudy.com) that his administration had chased the pornographers "out of Times Square and other public spaces. In 1987, there were 35 pornographic theaters and shops on just one stretch of 42nd Street. When I left office, there were zero. . . . This fight . . . extended throughout the city. We significantly reduced pornography throughout the city of New York." Wonderful.

— David T. Beito

Epistemology — According to Peter Baker, reporting for the Washington Post, President Bush recently "raised the specter of World War III" over his issues with Iran. Further in the story, Baker says, "Although in the past [Bush] has said it is 'unacceptable' for Iran to possess a nuclear bomb, [he] said Wednesday that it is unacceptable for [Iran] to even know how to build a bomb."

Epistemological terrorism is a novel concept: "Surrender, America! We have theoretical knowledge of thermonuclear destruction." "Hand over all your money; I've got the concept of a gun." I appreciate the president's point: at a time when more foreign students can spell "nuclear war" than American students can, this unbridled stealing of American knowledge must stop.

Senators from the breadbasket states urge Bush to include knowledge of agriculture and how to feed oneself as further unacceptable knowledge in foreign hands. Plans are underway to develop an Undersecretary of Prohibited Knowledge in the Department of Defense. Efforts are also ongoing to push the Vatican to add all books by Einstein to the Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

— Ross Levatter

Diff'rent strokes? — I can't get enough of John Edwards complaining about "Two Americas" from the porch of his mansion, bemoaning the shrinking middle class while

7-11 in Las Vegas!

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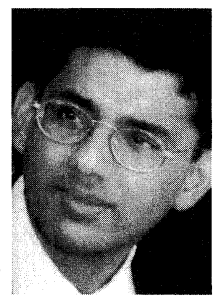

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I look forward to seeing you again in Vegas on 7-11!
Mark Skousen, *Producer, FreedomFest*

getting a $400 haircut. I guess it's because I assume that when someone is a Democrat, he should actually live the Democratic Party's rhetoric.

That is seldom the case. Rich Democrats who decry racism often find themselves living in monochromatic neighborhoods. Those who trumpet the need for public schools, and loathe school vouchers, will send their own children to private academies. Those who ridicule the Republican obsession with taxes scour their personal records annually for every tax deduction they can find, gun-control advocates hire armed bodyguards, and the staunchest environmentalists find themselves traveling on private jets. Wealthy Democrats live exactly like wealthy Republicans, they just talk differently — and make sure their maids always sort the trash into the proper recycling bins. — Tim Slagle

God in heaven! Can this be happening? — Mandatory seat-belt laws are about public health — and maybe some other things.

Consider a case from Washington state. In Everett, north of Seattle, a policewoman pulled over a car. She asked the names of everyone in the car, and when the guy in the back seat with a dog on his lap said his name was "Antoine Carver," she remembered him, and that his name was different. She wanted to search him, but she had to arrest him first — and for what?

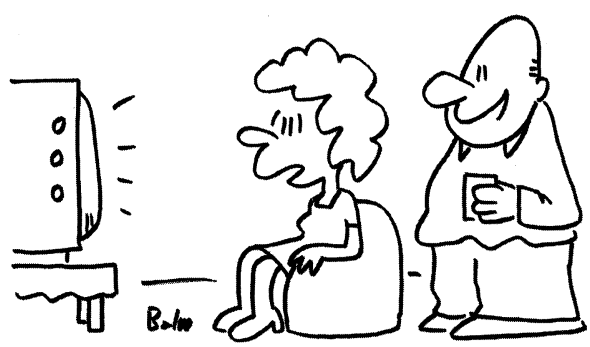
She arrested him for the dog, which was a pit bull that by city ordinance was supposed to be in an enclosure. She also noted in a supplementary arrest report that he hadn't been wearing a seat belt.

She searched him and found cocaine, methadone, and $800 in cash. He was convicted of illegal possession with intent to deliver and sent to prison for five years.

The trial judge ruled that the arrest for the dog was not valid. The car was an enclosure, so the dog was OK. The judge also ruled that the false name was not a crime in itself; there had to be some other violation of law to make it so. And there was: the man had not buckled his seat belt. That, the judge said, made the false name a crime — thereby giving the officer cause to arrest and search him, thereby finding the contraband and sending him to prison for five years.

The man went to prison and his case went to the Washington supreme court. In October the court came down with its ruling on *State* v. *Moore* (his real name). The arrest was invalid, the court said, and his conviction was overturned. The reason was that the cop hadn't arrested him for the seat belt. She had arrested him for the dog, and that was the wrong reason. If she had arrested him for not buckling his seat belt, the court would have smiled upon her act, and the man's five-year sentence would have stood.

It's not just the public health. — Bruce Ramsey



"What if Obama *was* a drug dealer?" "No problem — Huckabee can pardon him!"

Sex, Marx, and football — If you think the annual American Economic Association (AEA) meetings are stuffy affairs of ivory-tower academics, think again. This year's event was held in the Big Easy at the same time as the national football title game between LSU and Ohio State. It was a strange mixture of nerds and jocks. (Since I'm both a sports fan and an academic economist, I fit right in.) But the meetings proved that economics is hip.

The key figure was Chicago economist Steve Levitt, author of the bestseller Freakonomics, who (dressed without a coat and tie) explained to a standing-room-only crowd the economics of the sex trade in Chicago. The almost all male audience, leering at every word, was told that there were approximately 4,400 prostitutes in the Windy City, who turned 1.6 million tricks in a year. During the July Fourth festivities in Chicago, the quantity of hookers increased 60%, but prices only 30% because of an increase in out-of-towners and temporary workers. The laws of supply and demand are at work everywhere. Rumor has it that Levitt is coming out with a new book soon, and I think it should be called "Hookonomics."

Regarding sports and economics, two people presented an amazing econometric paper showing, by reference to the number of fouls called on white and black players, that NBA referees show racial biases. They conclude that black referees are more prejudiced against white players than white referees against black players. Their study was recently highlighted on the front page of the New York Times.

Quite a few free-market economists showed up, including Florida State's Jim Gwartney, whose new textbook, "Economics: Private and Public Choice," offers two pages of economic freedom indexes from the Fraser Institute. Jim told me that his textbook, now co-authored with three other economists, is gaining in sales. Cato and others were there exhibiting their books; and Institute for Humane Studies (IHS) held a cocktail reception for friends and colleagues, including faculty members of George Mason University. The big news was the forthcoming second edition of the New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics, considered the source for what economists are up to. The first edition came out in 1987 and was criticized heavily for being dominated by heterodox Marxists. I was told by the new editors that their edition has scaled back the contributions of the Marxists dramatically, and increased the contributions of the Austrians, supply-siders, new classicists, and other free-market economists.

The AEA meetings still have an overabundance of sessions held by the Union of Radical Economists, appropriately labeled URPE. I attended one on Venezuela. The main speaker was a Chavez government official who handed out an invitation to a 125th anniversary conference on Marx in Havana; the subject is how to "contribute to the overthrow of capitalism." Will Marxism ever die?

I wish that Austrian economists would hold their own sessions at the AEA meetings. That would be a great opportunity

to expose the profession to the sound economics of Mises and Hayek. Austrian economics is growing in influence — Glenn Hubbard, the dean of Columbia Business School, gave the annual luncheon address on entrepreneurship, and mentioned Hayek and Schumpeter by name. — Mark Skousen

Iran is getting the bomb . . . Not — On Dec. 3 of last year, the United States government released an intelligence report stating that Iran was not in fact building a nuclear bomb. This reversed a 2005 conclusion, which had been the basis for the president's repeated warnings to the nation that World War III might be just around the corner.

Intelligence reports come and go; we can't be certain that this one is any more accurate than the one from 2005, or any others to come. It does seem as if the sourcing for this assessment was superior to what U.S. intelligence had to work with before. But that's not the point. The question we really need to consider is: why would a nuclear-armed Iran be so dangerous that America would have to go to war?

If at some future time Iran has one, or two, or 20 nuclear bombs, what is that to us, with our arsenal of thousands upon thousands of warheads? They're not going to drop the big one on New York, in return for which we would wipe the Iranian state and the Persian race off the planet. For the same reason, they aren't going to pass a nuke on to terrorists who want to strike the U.S. Despite the perfervid formulations of various neocons and other disreputable persons, the mullahs in Tehran are not seeking martyrdom for their country.

Yet Mr. Bush has said (in an Oct. 17, 2007 press conference), "If you're interested in preventing World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them [Iran] from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon."

Now, after seven years, it's all too clear that Bush is a fool when it comes to international politics. He simply never fails to say, do, or (so it would appear) *think* the wrong thing. Whether he's launching a war against Saddam Hussein, or being duped by Vladimir Putin, or writing love notes to North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il (his latest brainwave, and one made all the more remarkable by the fact that Kim actually has the bomb, and has lied to us repeatedly about his weapons programs), he just never gets it right. So I suppose it's only natural that he thinks Iran can cause World War III.

Another voice, and one with a far cleverer mind behind it, has sounded a similar note. Richard Perle, a founding father of the neocons and the Mephistophelean figure who helped inspire Bush's war in Iraq, has said that in dealing with nations like Iran, America faces the choice of "victory or holocaust." His use of the latter word, so highly charged, reveals his inner motivation. The idea that a bunch of ragtag states in the Islamic world has the potential to annihilate the American people is ludicrous. Perle's thinking, and that of his fellow neocons, clearly is focused on Israel. It would be better all around if they had the guts to just come out and say so. But they don't, for the simple reason that they are afraid the American people will never willingly send their sons and daughters to die for Israel. And they're probably right. — Jon Harrison

Bush as Carter redux — Hearing Dubya give an unrehearsed press conference in Israel just after Three Kings Day, I realized that, wonder of wonders, he might have finally grown into his job, so to speak — become thoughtful and articulate to a level he'd not attained before. Whether he succeeds in negotiating a new agreement there, he is looking clearly at posterity and understanding that he'd better shape up — that's Up — to get out of the historical garbage pail to which his name will otherwise be consigned. (How doubly embarrassing to earn the Quincy Adams fate of being less than his father.) Impressive though his new smarts are, they probably come too late for him to be a better president.

Some years ago I wrote in these pages that the previous president most resembling Dubya is Jimmy Carter, both suffering, to quote myself, "self-righteous incompetence, not only politically but economically," in addition to "an internal, yes spiritual arrogance that kept them from correcting policies that failed in the real world."

News You May Have Missed

Bush: Imaginary Countries Pose Real Threat

WASHINGTON — President Bush is prepared to order U.S. troops to the Lost Continent of Atlantis, according to administration sources.

Having spent most of his presidency dealing with fictional threats posed by real countries, like Iraq and Iran, the president has decided to turn his attention in the limited time he has left to real threats posed by fictional countries. The troops, numbering over 100,000, would be drawn from military personnel that the United States doesn't currently have, and Congress would be asked to provide funding the nation can't currently afford.

Bush is convinced that the strategic position of Atlantis, in the middle of nowhere, would make it a direct threat to countries just out of the range of any sophisticated phantasms it may be developing in secret underground locations that are believed to be speculative.

Atlantis, the sources say, is just one component of what the president has privately referred to as an "Axis of Fable." It consists of dozens of countries, all of them deceptively posing as unreal, that have been identified by rogue intelligence analysts occupying a broom closet in the Office of the Vice President, where, under the cover of darkness, they have been busy sifting through old legends, fairy tales, novels, and similar documents looking for new nonexistent threats.

Besides Atlantis, the president has named Ultima Thule, El Dorado, Shangri-La, the Kingdom of Prester John, Lilliput, Xanadu, Erewhon, Ruritania, Kakania, Ishmaelia, Zembla, Freedonia, Cloud-Cuckooland, and Canada as among the countries that will have to be invaded and occupied just as soon as he can find them on a map. — Eric Kenning

My prediction now is that, much like Carter before him, Dubya will devote the remainder of his life to high-minded projects, well-publicized no doubt, that, thanks to the Good Luck that recurs in his life, will earn him a Nobel Prize.

— Richard Kostelanetz

The magic year for Social Security — On Jan. 1 of this year, the very first baby boomer—Kathleen Casey-Kirschling, the first baby born on Jan. 1, 1946 — turned 62 and thus became eligible for Social Security. She is the first of the wave of 3.2 million boomers who will become eligible for Social Security this year. At least half of them will likely start drawing benefits (which are lower by about a third than the full benefits they receive if they wait until age 66).

In three years, this initial wave of boomers will be eligible for Medicare, and a year after that, the half that didn't take the early Social Security benefits will be entitled to full benefits.

When the last wave of boomers retire (in 2030), the number of Social Security recipients will have exploded from the present 50 million to a staggering 84 million, an increase of nearly 70% — while the number of Medicare recipients will have jumped from the present 44 million recipients to 79 million, an increase of nearly 80%.

In terms of the so-called entitlement trust funds (i.e., the IOUs the government issues to cover the surplus payroll taxes used to augment general revenues), Medicare — which already spends more than it takes in — will completely empty its trust fund within eleven years. Social Security will start spending more than it takes in easily within nine years, and will empty its trust fund within about 30 years. All of these projections assume no massive economic downturns.

Not surprisingly, none of the Democrat presidential candidates duking it out in the primaries have mentioned this important milestone — not surprising, since they all promise to give even more entitlements, like free health care, to nearly 50 million more citizens.

But none of the Republican candidates (except Fred Thompson, who is not doing well) has mentioned it either, perhaps because they remember how badly Bush was beaten up when he tried to address Social Security reform a few years back.

— Gary Jason

Grownups in the military — Last Nov. 30, on the 14th anniversary of the "don't ask, don't tell" law concerning gays in the military, 28 retired generals and admirals released a letter calling on Congress to end the policy.

The former brass weren't asking Congress to return to the old no tolerance rules — rather, they want gays to serve openly. They provided data indicating that some 65,000 gays and lesbians currently serve, and that there are some one million gay veterans. "They have served our nation honorably," the letter stated.

What a refreshing contrast to the attitude of former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Peter Pace, who called homosexuality "immoral," thus stigmatizing a significant portion of the force he oversaw. It is a tribute to serving gays and lesbians that they continued to carry out their duties despite being slurred by the nation's top officer.

Gen. John Shalikashvili, who was JCS Chairman at the time don't ask, don't tell was introduced, was not among the signers of the letter. However, he had already come out (no pun intended) in favor of openness back in January 2007. Clearly, he was motivated in part by the stretching of the force and the difficulties in recruiting that the Army and Marine Corps were experiencing. But he also seems to have had a real change of heart.

I say it's about time. The fact is that gays don't hurt combat efficiency. Going back to the beginning of recorded history, successful armies have contained open homosexuals. Think of "mighty Achilles" and his lover Patroclus, or the Sacred Band of Thebes. The latter was a *corps d'élite* of 300 men — 150 pairs of gay lovers. They were the heart and soul of the Theban army that overthrew Sparta's hegemony in 4th century B.C. Greece. They were never defeated until Alexander the Great, possibly history's greatest captain (and a bisexual, by the way), annihilated them at the Battle of Chaeronea.

Cavalry, the dominant arm from the Middle Ages to the Boer War, was notorious for its large percentage of homosexuals. One could go on. The point is that sexual orientation has never mattered to the success or failure of a military force.

The U.S. military has integrated heterosexual women into the force without a discernible drop off in efficiency (and this despite the fact that a great deal of hanky-panky goes on — at home, on board ship, and even during deployments to war zones). It will be able to do the same with openly gay soldiers. The discomfiture of officers of Peter Pace's ilk is nobody's problem but their own.

America may finally be growing up. Congress should have the guts to repeal "don't ask, don't tell" and let gays and lesbians serve openly as well as honorably.

— Jon Harrison

Food sovereignty — Early in November, the Bolivian government announced a plan to achieve "food sovereignty." In order to eliminate agricultural imports, the Morales administration will now spend over 60 million taxpayer dollars on various projects, including the construction of a new soybean processing plant, the creation of a new rice and wheat enterprise, and a plan to resettle cattle nationwide.

I am resigned to the fact that my home away from home, Bolivia, is not satisfied with simply shooting itself in the foot. Evo Morales wants to reload and keep firing. The goal of food sovereignty amounts to little more than a rejection of the most basic economic principles of comparative advantage and the division of labor, but this is to be expected from the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) party.

But then I watched the Republican YouTube debate on CNN on November 28th. The candidates were asked if they would work to eliminate farm subsidies here in the U.S. Both Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani answered that farm subsidies were needed to ensure that we are not dependent on foreign countries for a secure supply of food.

Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised. After all, I'm a small-government, free-market kind of guy, and I understand that there's no place for me in the GOP. But even the most dyed-in-the-wool Republican should be concerned when two of the front-runners for his party's nomination have recommended the same economic policies espoused by a communist like Bolivia's Evo Morales. Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani showed that they either do not understand the free market, or that they do not believe it really works. Either way, they should be ruled out as viable candidates for the GOP bid.

— Stephen M. Smith

A Successful Surge?

by Jon Harrison

It's time to look beneath the surface of events and understand exactly what's been going on.

As we enter the election year of 2008, the war in Iraq has become almost a secondary issue. Both violence throughout the country and U.S. casualties have dropped markedly. Such longtime supporters of the war as John McCain and Bill Kristol are basking in the surge's apparent success. The current optimism extends even to such people as Democratic Congressman John Murtha, an outspoken critic of the Bush administration's policy, who returned from Iraq in late November to report that real success on the ground was indeed being achieved.

Clearly, the situation in Iraq has improved over the past year. Statistics for once don't lie; the mayhem and near anarchy of 2006 have been succeeded by a much lower level of violence. Has the surge then succeeded? Has a turning point in the war been reached?

These questions cry out for answers. Readers of Liberty may recall that a year ago I predicted failure for the surge. Now, despite tactical successes on the ground, I see little that causes me to reconsider that prediction. I remain pessimistic for reasons that I hope this essay will make clear.

From the beginning of the surge to the end of August 2007, violence in Iraq declined by almost 50%.[1] Even so, in August nearly 2,000 Iraqi civilians died violently. The improvement, though real, was impressive only in comparison to the carnage of late 2006 and early 2007.

What caused the drop off in violence? The new tactics introduced by Gen. Petraeus, such as moving U.S. troops out of large firebases and into Iraqi neighborhoods, erecting blast walls to deter car bombings, etc., unquestionably had some effect. More important, however, was the spread of the "Anbar Awakening" from that province to the rest of Sunni Iraq.

In late 2006, both U.S. military intelligence and the CIA concluded that Anbar was irretrievably lost to the Sunni insurgents. Beginning soon thereafter, however, a sharp cleavage arose among the Sunnis, pitting the majority against "Al

Qaeda in Mesopotamia," the fanatical and murderous Iraqi wing[2] of that terrorist organization.

Al Qaeda simply had overplayed its hand. Fanatical thugs that they are, they had no compunction about forcing the population to adhere to their twisted version of Islam, under which a man could be murdered for refusing to marry his daughter to an al Qaeda member, or even for trimming his beard. Enraged by the behavior of their erstwhile allies, Sunni tribal leaders approached the U.S. command for help, offering in return not just a trove of intelligence on al Qaeda — its operations, personnel, and facilities — but active cooperation in fighting it as well. Naturally, our military responded favorably, even going so far as to provide cash, arms, and training to its newfound friends. The result was the rout of al Qaeda in Anbar.

Though battered, al Qaeda's organization remains largely intact. Its surviving members have been content to move elsewhere and wait their time.

The idea of cooperating with the U.S. military against al Qaeda spread from Anbar to the rest of the Sunni community. Al Qaeda has been pretty much on the run ever since. In November, the U.S. command declared that it had been driven completely out of Baghdad.[3] This clearly is good news — for us, and for the Iraqi people. Without question, the only good al Qaeda member is a dead one.

However, decisive success has so far eluded us. Al Qaeda has lost momentum, but it has by no means been finally crushed. Whenever it has been brought to battle by U.S. forces or our Sunni allies, it has been defeated. But these defeats have been relatively small-scale — 60 killed here, a couple dozen there. Though battered, al Qaeda's organization remains largely intact. Its surviving members have been content to move elsewhere (the north of Iraq, for example) and wait their time.[4]

For the U.S., the split between the Sunnis represented the killing of two birds with one stone. The majority of the Sunni insurgents stopped attacking us, while simultaneously taking up the fight against al Qaeda. Under such favorable circumstances, a nearly 50% decline in violence was by no means surprising.

The million-dollar question is how long these favorable circumstances will persist. We should keep in mind that from the Anbar Awakening to the present, our Sunni allies have been operating on the principle of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." To say that they have become pro-American would be a gross overstatement. So long as they continue to receive American cash and arms, they should continue to cooperate with us. A diminution of U.S. largesse might cause them to resume the insurgency. Equally worrisome is the possibility that they will decide to take up arms once more against Iraq's Shiites, rekindling the civil war that began in February 2006.[5]

Shiites make up the majority of the Iraqi population. They dominate its government and armed forces.[6] The Shiite militias, backed by Iran, constitute the most formidable obstacle to U.S. policy goals in Iraq.

On Aug. 30, 2007, Muqtada al-Sadr, the radical cleric and leader of the largest Shiite militia, the Mahdi Army, declared a unilateral six-month ceasefire, to include operations against the Americans. The event that provoked al-Sadr's action was Shiite-on-Shiite violence during a pilgrimage to the holy city of Karbala, in which dozens died.[7] Four months old at the time of this writing, the ceasefire has so far been respected by the Sadrists.

Al-Sadr's decision to stand down, together with the ongoing Sunni awakening, caused a further steep decline in violence. Iraqi civilian deaths fell from over 1,000 in September to 481 in December. U.S. combat fatalities, which hit a high of 126 in May, totaled only 21 in December.

Al-Sadr appears to have ordered the ceasefire in order to gain greater control over the Mahdi Army, which was splintering and becoming involved in faction fighting. According to U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, al-Sadr was ordered to stand down by the Iranians.[8] In the event, al-Sadr's position has been weakened. U.S. forces have arrested hundreds of Mahdi Army leaders in Baghdad. The Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, which controls the other big Shiite militia, the Badr Brigade, has taken advantage of this to chip away at the Mahdi Army's position in southern Iraq.[9]

Why al-Sadr has remained passive in the face of these setbacks is unclear. He has indicated that he plans to extend the ceasefire beyond the end of the six-month period in February. This seems to be a tactical decision, based perhaps on his current weakness. He may prefer to accept a further, temporary erosion of his position in order to ensure the continued withdrawal of U.S. troops. Alternatively, he simply may be following Tehran's instructions.

As I predicted in this magazine's pages last year, the U.S. military chose not to force a military showdown with the Sadrists. An all-out assault on the Mahdi Army, which would have given the surge a real chance for long-term success, was never contemplated, for the simple reason that it would have led to very heavy U.S. casualties. Additionally, it is unlikely that Iran would remain indifferent to such a U.S. escalation. Finally, an operation on this scale would threaten to wreck such infrastructure as remains in Baghdad and elsewhere.

Instead, the U.S. is supporting the Islamic Supreme Council as a counterweight to the Sadrists. This is a dicey proposition, given that the ISC wants an autonomous Shiite entity in Iraq (the Sadrists support a unitary state, which is in line with Bush administration policy). The U.S. appears to have adopted a policy of divide-and-rule toward the Shiites, just as it has with the Sunnis.

A very disquieting recent development is the emergence of Shiite street thugs, very young men prone to murder and other crimes. They have filled the vacuum created by the absence of senior leaders of the Mahdi Army, men currently detained or in hiding.[10] These Iraqi "technicals" could

conceivably turn Baghdad into another Mogadishu as U.S. troops depart.

One further factor has contributed to the decline in violence: sectarian cleansing has virtually ended. The segregation of the sects in Iraq is now all but complete.

The overall decline in violence is, then, the result of events not directly connected to the surge — the Sunni awakening, al-Sadr's stand down, Iran's new moderate line, and the end of ethnic cleansing. The surge operations have played a secondary part.

Perhaps the surge itself was a prerequisite for at least some of these developments. That is to say, without more U.S. troops on the ground, the local actors (Sunnis, Shiites, al Qaeda, and the Iranians) might have behaved differently (i.e., worse). If the purpose of the surge is defined simply as the creation of a more peaceful environment — one that would permit Iraqi political factions to reach some sort of compromise concerning their country's future — then, obviously, this much has been achieved.

But the quiet seems unlikely to last. That is not merely my own view. Some members of the policy community have expressed the same opinion.[11] The crucial factors in the reduction of violence have been the Sunni awakening and al-Sadr's stand down. Increased U.S. forces and improved tactics have played a part, but a lesser one. In any case, the U.S. troop presence will soon be back to its pre-surge level, with further reductions to follow. As the U.S. presence withers, violence is almost certain to increase.

Should this occur, what of a lasting nature would have been achieved by the surge? There is precious little evidence to show that Iraqis are coming together to build a nation.[12] If they indeed fail to do so, then the surge will be nothing more than a footnote in history.

I could of course be wrong. Perhaps Iraqis of all sects and ethnicities will tire of the violence and the waste of their human and natural resources, and come together to forge a reasonable, livable outcome to the American intervention. But the evidence for this is very, very slight.[13]

We already know that an American-imposed solution is beyond our ability. Probably the best the U.S. can hope for is something that looks like de facto partition, with American influence maintained by each side having to rely to a greater or lesser extent on us for support. To me it seems more likely that the majority Shiites will seek to dominate the Sunnis. This could lead to sectarian conflict on a *regional* basis. A major Shiite-Sunni war in the Persian Gulf would make the Saddam Hussein era look golden by comparison.

Post-Cold War America is repeating the experience of Rome after the defeat of Hannibal. Like Rome, we have reached out to the east to counter perceived threats and secure wealth.

The Bush administration is planning for a long-term presence in Iraq. It expects to have at least 100,000 troops in the country when the president leaves office.[14] In this scenario,

One further factor has contributed to the decline in violence: sectarian cleansing has virtually ended. The segregation of the sects in Iraq is now all but complete.

the Army and Marine Corps will remain under unprecedented strain. Both services are experiencing recruitment and retention problems.[15] The war in Afghanistan is not going well,[16] and the whole region from Pakistan to Lebanon and south to the Horn of Africa is brimming with crises, any one of which may eventually require U.S. armed intervention.

Iraq is but one symptom of a larger American problem — the crisis of empire. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, I got rid of my copy of Paul Kennedy's "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers." Surely, I thought, we will now begin to redress the overextension of our nation's power overseas and the militarization of our society at home. At first, this seemed to be happening. Under Bush I and Clinton, U.S. defense outlays were cut by about 30%. Given the fact that no real threat to U.S. security existed, the cuts were eminently justified. They helped bring about a balanced federal budget and with it the possibility of paying down the national debt.

Peace seemed to have broken out — and why not? The one potential threat on the horizon, China, was 30 years away. The conflicts of the post-Cold War period looked to be short and, as wars go, cheap — *vide* Gulf War I. We could lick our Cold War wounds and plan for the future of America — *America first,* as opposed to an American global empire.

In retrospect, we can see that Gulf War I was a hint of what was to come. Now, almost 20 years after that swift but incomplete victory, it is clear that post-Cold War America is repeating the experience of Rome after the defeat of Hannibal. Like Rome, we have reached out to the east to (A) counter perceived threats[17] and (B) secure wealth (for the Romans, gold, slaves, and Greek *objets d'art;* for us, oil).

Imperial overstretch was a key factor in the death of the Roman Republic.[18] To say that history repeats itself may be too facile. Nevertheless, the fate of Rome stands as a warning — a warning that virtually no one of influence deigns to acknowledge.[19] Defense Secretary Gates, without question the ablest person to serve under Bush II, is creating plans for fighting future Iraqs — he simply wants to do it better next time.[20]

We do need to fight better. War is not going to go away anytime soon. But the mindset that accepts U.S. military interventionism around the world as a matter of course is

disturbing. We need to start thinking about the *whys* that lurk behind our policy of interventionism.

Why are we still in Iraq at a cost of a trillion dollars and counting? Why does the drumbeat for war with Iran continue even after U.S. intelligence has concluded that Iran's nuclear weapons program was shut down four years ago? Why should the *American* people spend their blood and treasure if Iran does indeed come to possess a few nuclear bombs?

In the power centers of the United States, such questions are answered by appeals to "national security." The nation is said to be at risk because a third- or fourth-rate power is misbehaving. The application of U.S. military force usually follows, resulting all too often in the *weakening* of America — militarily, economically, and spiritually. Vietnam and Iraq are the obvious examples.

Today, optimism about Iraq prevails in America's power centers. Casualties and violence are down, but festering problems, such as the financial drain of the war and the chronic overstrain of U.S. ground forces, are largely ignored. The national security establishment and its media lapdogs have started to say, and believe, that it's going to turn out all right, after all.

But we are almost certainly experiencing nothing more than a lull in Iraq. What has been achieved looks transitory. It still seems only a matter of time before George Bush's war joins the long list of the follies of empire.

In attempting to analyze the results of the surge so far, I have been particularly impressed by two pieces of writing. One is "The War as We Saw It," an op-ed published in the New York Times on Aug. 19, 2007. Written by seven U.S. soldiers coming to the end of their 15-month deployment in Iraq, it stands as a vital first-person account, ground truth if such ever existed.[21] The second is "Inside the Surge," Jon Lee Anderson's article in the Nov. 19, 2007 issue of The New Yorker — a remarkable piece of reporting. I urge anyone seeking to obtain a clear picture of the surge to read both. ❑

Notes

1. For the data see "Hints of Progress, and Questions, in Iraq Data," New York Times (Sept. 8, 2007). Casualty figures reported by the Iraqi Government are invariably higher than those put out by the U.S. military. Monthly deaths were, and probably still are, *under-reported* by both sources, as indicated by the number of unidentified bodies that continue to be found (often in mass graves) throughout the country.
2. Al Qaeda in Iraq (as U.S. sources term it) appears to be a largely homegrown phenomenon. How much of its leadership is Iraqi remains unclear (its top man has always been a foreigner). In any case, it represents a franchise of the al Qaeda movement, and is not under the direct control of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Many of the foreign jihadis in its ranks are drawn from Saudi Arabia and North Africa. See "Foreign Fighters in Iraq Are Tied to Allies of U.S.," New York Times (Nov. 22, 2007).
3. "Militant Group is Out of Baghdad, U.S. Says," New York Times (Nov. 8, 2007).
4. See for example, "Pushed Out of Baghdad, Insurgents Move North," New York Times (Dec. 6, 2007). It also appears that many foreign recruits are currently being sent to Afghanistan.
5. See "In a Force for Iraqi Calm, Seeds of Conflict." New York Times (Dec. 23, 2007).
6. U.S. pressure has been applied with some success to get more Sunnis into the Iraqi army and police. The arming of the Sunnis by the U.S. has been rather more helpful in redressing the imbalance between the two sects.
7. See "Sadr Suspends His Militia's Military Operations," New York Times (Aug. 30, 2007).
8. See "Iran Cited In Iraq's Decline in Violence," Washington Post (Dec. 23, 2007). If Iran can indeed exert such control over the Shiites, then U.S.-Iranian engagement will become even more important to U.S. goals in the region. I found it heartening to learn that Secretary of State Rice had stated, in reference to Iran, "We don't have permanent enemies."
9. See "Shiite Contest Sharpens in Iraq," Washington Post (Dec. 26, 2007).
10. See "Iraq's Youthful Militiamen Build Power Through Fear," Washington Post (Dec. 13, 2007).
11. See for example the comments of Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute (a hotbed of pro-war thinking) in the December 17 Washington Post article, "Bush Faces Pressure to Shift War Priorities."
12. For a look at "nation-building" in action see "Nonstop Theft and Bribery Are Staggering Iraq," New York Times (Dec. 2, 2007). Regarding the ability of Iraqis simply to live together in one polity, there are both favorable and unfavorable indicators. For the favorable see "In Mixed Slice of Baghdad, Old Bonds Defy War," New York Times (Nov. 13, 2007). On the other hand, according to an AP dispatch of Dec. 9, 2007, some 40 Iraqi women have been killed and mutilated by religious fanatics in Basra. The women are being slaughtered for "un-Islamic behavior," such as failing to cover their hair or wearing makeup.
13. It is being hailed as a triumph for reconciliation that Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomans were able to *agree to postpone for six months* a referendum on the future of Kirkuk. See David Ignatius, "Skirting the Abyss in Iraq" in the Dec. 19, 2007 Washington Post.
14. "Pentagon Chief Talks of Further Iraq Troop Cuts," Washington Post (Sept. 15, 2007).
15. The recruitment of felons and of mentally and physically challenged persons is at all-time highs. The age limit for Army recruits has been raised to 42. At 42, a soldier ought to be completing his or her 20 years in, rather than just entering boot camp. According to an AP report of Nov. 16, 2007, the Army desertion rate is at it highest level since 1980.
16. "Bush Faces Pressure to Shift War Priorities," *op. cit.*
17. For Rome, the perceived threats were the Macedonian and Seleucid empires. For America, they were the "Axis of Evil" and a few pan-Islamist fanatics. In neither case was the danger nearly as great as was claimed by those who fomented war – that is, the position of the reigning superpower was never really threatened. Yet war resulted nonetheless. The causes are beyond the scope of this essay. The consequences were terrible for Rome (and will be for us?). Imperial overstretch doomed Roman liberty. On the other hand, financially the Romans made out like bandits. Victory in the east brought in untold wealth, to the extent that taxes on Roman citizens were abolished. I daresay we Americans will not be so fortunate in this regard.
18. Comparisons between Rome and America are, of course, nothing new. For a recent example, see Cullen Murphy, "Are We Rome?" (Houghton Mifflin, 2007). For those who wish to move beyond a popular understanding of the issues, the key sources are Polybius, Rostovtzeff, and Toynbee. The latter's "Hannibal's Legacy" (Oxford, 1965) is an underrated but profound work.
19. Including those who ought to know better. See for example the comments of Victor Davis Hanson in National Review Online, Nov. 3, 2007.
20. See "Gates Says Military Faces More Unconventional Wars," New York Times (Oct. 11, 2007).
21. Lamentably, two of the seven were killed shortly after the piece's publication, while a third was wounded.

The Attack on the Liberty Dollar

by Bruce Ramsey

From the fringes of the coin world comes something that looks like money . . .

On November 14, 2007, the FBI raided a storefront in Evansville, Ind. It was labeled "LIBERTY DOLLAR," and it was located between a gun shop and an empty storefront. The FBI also raided the Sunshine Mint, a company in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, that minted Liberty Dollars under contract. There government agents commandeered almost 200,000 ounces of silver and 150 ounces of gold.

In Indiana they carted away two tons of Liberty Dollars, including 50,000 copper $1 rounds emblazoned with the image of presidential candidate Ron Paul.

The seizure made page one of the Washington Post, probably because it was an offbeat story and also because of the monetary-crank aura that some people see around Rep. Paul. When asked by the press about the incident, Paul said, "I like competing currencies. The market should decide what is money." But he hastened to add that he was not involved with the Liberty Dollar: "I do not know the people."

The person behind the Liberty Dollar — he calls himself its "monetary architect" — is Bernard von NotHaus, 63. Like Paul, he has been a hard-money man for a long time, and he has blended the doctrine into his career. But he has done it in a completely different way. Instead of advocating gold and silver currencies, as Paul does, he has undertaken to create one.

In researching this story, I talked to von NotHaus. It was a difficult conversation. He was vehement, argumentative, and much of the time he was grilling me. He was not kindly disposed to Liberty magazine. It annoyed him that its founder, the late R.W. Bradford, had not supported the Liberty Dollar, and when they talked, had undertaken to tell him what the Liberty Dollar was and why it wouldn't work. The Cato Institute people had not been any better, he said, nor the people at the Ludwig von Mises Institute. All were useless. These libertarians talked about hard money. He had

done something about it — and, he said, "I'm facing federal prison right now."

The real issue of the Liberty Dollar, he said, is whether "we have a right to protect ourselves in a hyperinflationary era, or do we not? Are we relegated to using government money and being screwed by the invisible tax of inflation?"

"Welcome to the fascist states of America," he said, bitterly.

Von NotHaus would not talk to me about himself, though he has at other times. He told another interviewer that in 1974 he read Harry Browne's "How to Profit from the Coming Devaluation," and it had a great effect on him. He said that one of the major influences on his economic theory was Murray Rothbard (1926–1995), the libertarian economist and editor of Liberty; and he mentioned Rothbard's tract, "What Has Government Done to Our Money?" He also mentioned writing his first paper on monetary theory in September 1974. (In 2004, he would publish a 504-page book called "The Liberty Dollar Solution to the Federal Reserve," which is available on the internet.)

In 1998, von NotHaus came from Hawaii to the mainland and began producing Liberty Dollars in silver and gold, and in the form of paper "warehouse receipts" backed by the metallic Liberty Dollars.

In the 1980s, von NotHaus cofounded a private organization that he called the Royal Hawaiian Mint. He made a business selling gold and silver medallions to collectors; he also nurtured a "secret project." He later wrote about it:

> I wanted to create a totally new inflation-proof currency that met the demands of the free market in precious metals and would represent real gold and silver stored in an independent warehouse.

In 1998, von NotHaus came from Hawaii to the mainland and began producing Liberty Dollars in silver and gold, and in the form of paper "warehouse receipts" backed by the metallic Liberty Dollars. Later he offered electronic credits backed by metal.

For a long time, the federal government let him alone. But in 2005 it began investigating him, and on Sept. 14, 2006, the U.S. Mint issued a press release warning that Liberty Dollars were not legal tender and that their use in trade was a crime. In November 2007 came the raid. Von NotHaus now faces the possibility of federal prosecution under 18 USC 486, which reads:

> Whoever, except as authorized by law, makes or utters or passes, or attempts to utter or pass, any coins of gold or silver or other metal, or alloys of metals, intended for use as current money, whether in the resemblance of coins of the United States or of foreign countries, or of original design, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than five years, or both.

Von NotHaus's defense rests on his denial that Liberty Dollars are coins. He writes:

> Every effort has been made to promote and market the Liberty Dollar with educational tools by clearly and repeatedly pointing out that the Liberty Dollar is not United States Mint fiat money, is not legal tender, is not a coin . . .

He argues that "coin" has a legal meaning: a disk of metal stamped by the government. And, of course, Liberty Dollars were not stamped by, or authorized by, the government. Therefore they are not coins.

But if that is true, then what does 18 USC 486 forbid? It seems to forbid unauthorized coins but, if anything unauthorized would not be a coin, the law would therefore forbid nothing.

Set that aside. The metallic Liberty Dollar is in the form of a coin. The design on the obverse side looks like U.S. coins of a century ago. Most Liberty Dollars have a profile of Miss Liberty and the word "LIBERTY" above her head. Stamped below her neck is the date. On the reverse side are a torch, the name "Liberty Dollars" in script, the denomination in dollars, and the weight and fineness of the metal. There are variations. Some Dollars bear the names of states. One bears the likeness of King Kamehameha and is called the "Hawaii Dala."

Obviously this is not the government's money. The government does not circulate $5, $10, $20 or $1,000 coins. The U.S. Mint has never made circulating currency out of pure silver or gold. Its money says "United States of America," "E Pluribus Unum," and "In God We Trust." Liberty Dollars don't say those things. Some say "USA," and most of them say "Trust in God," except for one version that makes no mention of the Almighty. That one is marketed on eBay as the "godless" Liberty Dollar.

In its press release, the U.S. Mint took care to call metallic Liberty Dollars medallions. Lots of companies have minted medallions, and von NotHaus doesn't use that name for Liberty Dollars. In court papers he has described the Liberty Dollar as a "private voluntary barter currency" and not "'legal tender,' a 'coin.' or 'current money.'" On Nov. 21, 2007, when Larry Kudlow of CNBC's "Kudlow & Co." asked

The law seems to forbid unauthorized coins but, if anything unauthorized would not be a coin, the law would therefore forbid nothing.

him if Liberty Dollars weren't really investments, he said no, they were "circulating currency."

In its press release the Mint asserted that von NotHaus's company was marketing Liberty Dollars "to compete with the circulating coinage of the United States." He had said as much many times; to me he compared the Liberty Dollar to the competition of Federal Express against the Post Office. He had named his company the National Organization for Repeal of the Federal Reserve Act and Internal Revenue Code (NORFED), though after the Mint's press release he changed the name to Liberty Services.

He also took the "USA" off his medallions, partly to put the date under the bust of Liberty and partly, he said, "to be responsive."

The Mint said that under the U.S. Constitution, "Congress has the exclusive power to coin money of the United States and to regulate its value." Von NotHaus replied on Sept. 20, 2006, that the Constitution's grant of power — "to coin Money, [and] regulate the Value thereof" — is not exclusive. About the Constitution, he said,

> the states are restricted from coining money. The people are not, and in fact numismatists are aware that the United States has a rich and well-documented history of private mints producing private circulating currency which, while not "legal tender" was "lawful money." Americans create new forms of private money all the time, from casino tokens to debit cards to PayPal to GoldMoney.

Probably he is right about the Constitution and Americans' practice of creating their own money. Regarding the statute, he has said that 18 USC 486 was originally meant as "an anti-counterfeiting law, not to ban private currency." Still, it says what it says.

The law does not apply to private paper currencies, of which there are several in the United States. One is Burlington Bread, based in Burlington, Vt. Another, backed by the E.F. Schumacher Society and circulating in southern Massachusetts, is BerkShares. Both are projects of left-liberals who want to fight distant corporations and reduce their carbon footprint by encouraging localism. They are issued to be spent only in local communities. A BerkShare dollar is redeemable by a regional merchant at 90 U.S. cents. Essentially it is a 10% discount coupon.

None of these projects produces gold and silver currency that looks like old U.S. money, and none seems to have attracted the FBI.

In March 2007, in anticipation of some kind of crackdown, von NotHaus filed a lawsuit against the Treasury in U.S. District Court in southern Indiana. He petitioned the court for an injunction to stop the government from moving against the Liberty Dollar. At press time, the court had not issued any injunction.

To obtain a warrant for the November 2007 raids, FBI Special Agent Andrew Romagnuolo of Charlotte, N.C., swore out a 34-page affidavit. According to it, the FBI had sent three undercover agents to sign up as Liberty Dollar distributors, to receive von NotHaus' book, and to attend his Liberty Dollar "university." Referring to one of these agents, von NotHaus said, "We knew about Karen from day one. We knew who she was. It was obvious."

He said he sold her a Liberty Dollar T-shirt.

The FBI took a silver Liberty Dollar to its laboratory and tested it to verify that it was really .999 fine, as it claimed to be — and it was. Nonetheless, Romagnuolo's affidavit calls

The metallic Liberty Dollar is in the form of a coin. The design on the obverse side looks like U.S. coins of a century ago. Most Liberty Dollars have a profile of Miss Liberty and the word "LIBERTY" above her head.

the Liberty Dollar fraudulent because it claimed to be "100% backed" by silver, and the amount of silver — one ounce per $20 in Liberty Dollars — was less than the face value. As of Nov. 8, 2007, Romagnuolo noted, one ounce of silver was worth only $15.34.

It is true that the Liberty Dollar's metallic backing is not set at 100% of denominated value. It cannot be, because of the way the Liberty Dollar is defined. A simple silver-standard currency would be a unit defined as an amount of silver. The Liberty Dollar defines itself as a dollar, asserts a trade value equal to the U.S. dollar, and is backed by an amount of silver worth less than a U.S. dollar.

This brings up the issue of gain. Liberty Services sold its private currency for U.S. dollars at a mark-up over the silver value but at less than face value. It made its sales to its Regional Currency Officers and Liberty Dollar Associates. These were expected to sell Liberty Dollars at a lesser discount to member merchants, who were offered the right to reverse these transactions.

The Liberty Dollar was, therefore, part of a business. Says the affidavit:

> NORFED uses Federal Reserve Notes (FRNs) to conduct business. FRNs are used to buy Liberty Dollar currency. This reliance upon FRNs by a group opposed to FRNs demonstrates that the American Liberty Dollar monetary system is simply a drain on the United States Government's monetary system for financial profit . . .

There was profit in it, though von NotHaus says he didn't take a penny in the first five years. The affidavit lists various checks and wire transfers to von NotHaus, office manager Sarah Bledsoe, and others. From December 2006 to August 2007, the affidavit reports checks from the company's bank account to von NotHaus for $65,250 and to Bledsoe for $27,300. There is a small check to NotHaus' son, Random von NotHaus. The affidavit does not say which of these sums were for living expenses and which for expenses of the business, but even if they were all living expenses they are not huge amounts. It says that von NotHaus and his wife Mary own "a luxury vehicle" — a silver Cadillac deVille. It is,

however, a 1999 model, and von NotHaus says it is worth only $2,000 to $3,000.

Liberty Dollar's business model pencils out only if the price of the underlying metal stays within certain ranges. Originally the one-ounce silver Liberty Dollar was stamped $10. In November 2005, when silver rose above $7.50, the Liberty Dollar was "rebased" at $20 — and suddenly became more profitable to sell. The affidavit said that the next rebasing, to $50, would occur when the 45-day moving average price of silver crossed $16.50.

Agent Romagnuolo's affidavit makes the rebasing sound like part of a "profit scheme," and you could call it that in a courtroom. It also is a kind of money that, in respect to its eBay price, has risen in value against the U.S. dollar — a fact von NotHaus does not let pass. "Would you rather have your savings in a currency that depreciates, or one that appreciates?" he says.

The affidavit makes claims about von NotHaus's political motivation, quoting from company materials. Says Romagnuolo:

> These statements highlight the intent of NORFED ... to replace and/or compete with the financial systems of the United States of America to undermine the existing economic system.

The intention was there, certainly; but it was never very likely that the Liberty Dollar was going to accomplish all that. Von NotHaus has been promoting Liberty Dollars for nine years. The affidavit says he claimed that $21 million was in "circulation"; he says it's more than that. But how much is circulating in trade?

Who takes the Liberty Dollar in trade? In the affidavit, Agent Romagnuolo says he was told that the three communities where the Liberty Dollar had made the greatest inroads were Austin, Texas (pop. 709,893), Asheville, N.C. (pop. 68,889), and Berryville, Ark. (pop. 4,500).

Romagnulo's affidavit tells about his investigation of Kevin Innes, a music teacher in Asheville who, it says, drives a 1992 white Volvo sedan. Like the three undercover agents, Innes paid $250 to become a Liberty Dollar Associate. And what did undercover FBI agents find out about this threat to the Republic? For a while Innes rented a storefront in Asheville for his Liberty Dollar business, then gave it up and worked out of his house. An undercover agent bought Liberty Dollars from Innes at his house and in a parking lot of a Target store. The agent reported that Innes had sold Liberty Dollars at a gun show, at several meetings of the Patriot Network, and at the 2005 Atlanta Freedom Conference. The affidavit quotes from a news story about Innes in the Asheville Citizen-Times, Nov. 13, 2006. In it, Innes expresses some frustration at the difficulty of convincing people to take Liberty Dollars; he says he leaves them in restaurants as tips.

Liberty Services sold its private currency for U.S. dollars at a mark-up over the silver value but at less than face value. It made its sales to distributors who were expected to sell Liberty Dollars to merchants.

The New York Sun quoted Ron Goodger, a Liberty Dollar distributor in Michigan, as saying, "It never did do what the organization really wanted it to do — become widely accepted as a medium of exchange." Goodger said, "It's a tremendous amount of work to get the public to accept something it wasn't familiar with."

In an interview in 2001 with Jacob's Libertarian Press, von NotHaus said:

> I tell people this over and over again. You don't talk people into an alternative currency. The currency is a clever device to get the choir to identify themselves. . . . We use the currency as a way of coaxing people out of the closet to identify themselves as being part of the choir, because when you show the currency to people, people invariably say something, they respond. "Oh what a bunch of bullshit." Ah, you're not part of the choir. Some people say, "That's pretty neat, we ought to have currency like that." Then they probably are part of the choir. So it's under those sort of auspices that the currency functions. The currency functions as, you've probably read, a proactive educational tool. Well, it actually acts as a device to get people to identify themselves, to pull together a consensus of people that are dedicated to return the ownership of the money to the people as a means of returning control of the government to the people. That's it in a nutshell.

In his affidavit, Agent Romagnuolo sounds like a man ferreting out counterfeit money. He warns that businesses might give Liberty Dollars in change "and the recipient . . . may assume that it is United States coinage."

That seems unlikely, with the possible exception of the one-dollar copper piece. On Feb. 15, 2007, the U.S. Mint began circulating new presidential dollar coins. They had a brassy color, different from that of other U.S. coins and unfamiliar to the public. Some of them carried the bust of John Adams. Like the one-dollar Liberty disc, they were stamped with "$1." Still, the copper Liberty Dollars were about 50% bigger in diameter, were a different color, and carried the likeness of Ron Paul — who is not, despite his libertarian political philosophy, one of the Founding Fathers.

You'd have to be a fool to take Liberty Dollars as legal tender. But that statement works against von NotHaus as well as for him.

All silver and gold Liberty Dollars are of 99.9% pure gold or silver, which is what medallions, not coins, are made of. I put it to von NotHaus that this shows he did not design them as a circulating currency. The old U.S. coins, designed to be used in trade, were never more than 92% silver or gold in an alloy hard enough to bang around in people's pockets. Besides, eBay always has lots of Liberty Dollars offered for sale, some of them seven years old, and every one I've seen has been offered in brilliant, proof-like condition. All are uncirculated.

Therefore, Liberty Dollars are not currency.

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College and the State

by Jane S. Shaw

After the three R's come the three A's: accreditation, asset management, and academic freedom.

During my first eleven months as head of a higher education policy institute I have learned a lot. Unfortunately, much of it has been about how state and federal governments are trying to expand their role in higher education.

Oddly, market-oriented people whom I respect think that some interventions might be better than what we have now. Are things so bad that we want to give the government more control?

Let me share with you my "three dilemmas" — dilemmas over accreditation, asset management, and academic freedom.

But first, here is the assumption I start with: American higher education is as good as it is because it is competitive. In this country, around 2,500 four-year colleges and universities (not to mention two-year schools) compete for students. This is in sharp contrast to the K-12 public school monopoly, for example.

Yet despite vigorous competition, the crown jewels of our education system are tarnished, as pundits like to say. We have deteriorating educational standards, higher tuition, more money spent on administration, many faculty devoted to research rather than teaching, and left-wing faculty dominating decision making. The latest complaint is that universities sit on giant endowments but keep raising tuition.

These flaws reflect the fact that most colleges and universities are nonprofit organizations — tax-favored entities that have no residual claimants (i.e., owners). And a growing number of students are attending public universities, which have even less accountability than others (watch how a state legislature disburses money and you'll see what I mean).

Given this marketplace, there is pressure for more government regulation, and three issues "demand" intervention. Let's start with accreditation.

Accreditation

Unfortunately, this is a sleep-inducing topic that few scholars have bothered to address (I've asked around but

found only one book on it). Recently, however, it has attained notoriety.

At one time, accreditation was like the Underwriter's Laboratory seal for electrical appliances — a voluntary way to signal that minimum standards (for safety, in the UL case) were met. Schools got together and formed regional associations that made sure each school met minimum standards.

As federal aid grew, federal government officials looked for ways to avoid funneling money to "diploma mills." They gave the regional accrediting bodies power over schools' access to government student aid.

So now we have a government-protected cartel composed of six regional accreditors that simply divide up the country. These organizations can and do demand mind-numbing accounting of inputs. At one school the process took two years; a history professor had to stop teaching entirely for a year to chair the accreditation committee, and a junior faculty member had to give up a course in order to write the required myriad of reports. At another school, an elite university, the process takes even longer; the administrator in charge of undergraduate education, a committee of ten faculty members, and innumerable staff bang away at the project, year after year, their labors lightened only by jokes about its total uselessness. This, I have been assured by a person who has been a faculty leader for the past 20 years in one of the nation's leading state university systems, is the ordinary course of events.

Accreditors often push schools to adopt educational trends and fashions such as today's "experiential learning." The reviews are conducted by staff members from "peer" institutions — other members of the cartel — with one exception: the people who are willing to serve are often those whose own careers are moribund but who delight in traveling to other places and lording it over other people. This is a little like having Apple visit Dell's operations and tell it what it can and cannot do — except that Apple needs to produce something that satisfies a normal customer.

This past spring, the federal government, in the person of education secretary Margaret Spellings, expressed frustration with the accreditors. She doesn't think they are doing enough to assess student outcomes — the new buzzword — and they probably aren't. In any event: in a bizarre move, she reprimanded the one nonregional accreditor that actually offers some competition — denying it the right to accredit institutions.

Government should get out of the business of recognizing accreditors. It shouldn't take two years of exhaustive complaince to prove that a school isn't a diploma mill.

If you've had trouble following this, let me repeat that accreditation is an obscure aspect of higher education, and labyrinthine as well. More than a decade ago there was an effort to damage the cartels. Distinguished proponents of a classical education such as Jacques Barzun and Edwin O. Wilson formed the American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE). This was supposed to accredit schools that offered a traditional education with a strong classical "core curriculum." Amazingly, then-secretary of education Richard Riley recognized the group as a legitimate accreditor.

But when Spellings began to push the accreditors to concentrate on measurable student outcomes, and didn't like their slow response, her gaze fell on this newest and most vulnerable organization, not the biggies. So AALE can't accredit any new schools now. (As soon as it looked as though Spellings might rap the knuckles of the regionals, Congress intervened and told her to stop being so mean.)

In my view, the federal government should get out of the business of recognizing accreditors.

A classical liberal colleague chides me for this. After all, he says, with billions of dollars of student aid and grants flowing to colleges, someone has to be the gatekeeper!

Maybe. My compromise is for the federal government to start recognizing other accreditors. It shouldn't take two years of exhaustive compliance to prove that a school isn't a "diploma mill." Let's get a little competition going.

Asset Management

The newest higher education issue is the vast endowments that some schools have been building up for decades, and even centuries. Unlike most nonprofit foundations, they don't have to spend any of it if they don't want to. In fact, according to one commentator, Robert Blumenthal of Oglethorpe University, they are free to define endowments in any way they want.

And they don't have to report what they do spend. This seems to be true of many nonprofits, and two leading members of the Senate Finance Committee are trying to fix this.

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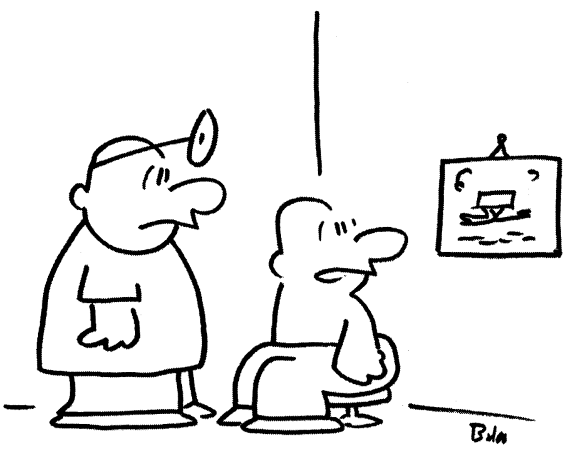

"I've never seen a diploma with an expiration date before."

Storm Bound

by Jim Walsh

A week off the grid reveals much about the nature of society and the people who try to live in it.

I live with my wife and five children in Aberdeen, Washington — about 100 miles south and west of Seattle. We're on the Pacific coast but off the beaten path.

On Sunday night, December 2, we attended a Christmas party at the town's modest golf club. Late November had been stormy, so a lot of the small talk was about the weather. The main hassle of living in Aberdeen is that, most winters, we lose electrical power several times.

When my wife and I griped about a recent outage, one of her fellow Young Mothers — a little bold on holiday cheer — boasted that her house didn't have that problem. "We're on Eighth Street. The hospital grid. We *never* lose power. And all of our neighbors hate us! I mean, just across the alley, they'll be dark. But our lights are on!"

Somewhere in the deep, a sea god swung his fist toward coastal Washington to smite this woman's chatty hubris. A few hours after the party ended, a major Pacific storm came ashore. Its winds reached 81 miles per hour and gusts were reported as high as 160.

The *whole* town lost power that night. And we were about to learn several interesting lessons: how much modern civilization relies on material supports, what happens when those supports vanish, how accustomed Americans have become to comfort and convenience, and how infantile it is to expect the Nanny State — or any human collective — to control Mother Nature.

Back from the party, the rest of my family went to bed. I'd read the media predictions for the storm and planned to stay awake through as much of it as I could. I made a fire in the living room, put on some music, and set to work on my laptop.

The winds definitely picked up. I could see the trees whipping back and forth. Around midnight, the power went out. No surprise there. My laptop was fully charged and the fire was going nicely. I gathered flashlights (including three crank-operated ones that didn't require batteries) from the kitchen and took them to the various nightstands in each of the bedrooms. I explained that the power was out and got a series of groggy acknowledgments.

Downstairs again, I put on a small, battery-powered radio and listened to a local talk station for news. The station, which was running a nationally-syndicated show, didn't take any special notice of the storm.

Violent Pacific storms don't get as much attention as Atlantic hurricanes. In Asia, Pacific storms are called "typhoons"; here, they're just "storms." And people in the Pacific Northwest don't worry much about them.

We learned several lessons: how much modern civilization relies on material supports, how much Americans have become accustomed to convenience, and how infantile it is to expect the Nanny State to control Mother Nature.

A little after midnight, I went outside to feel the wind. It was blowing. And I could sense the low air pressure. That feeling is hard to describe. It's something like the feeling you get when landing in an airplane or driving through a mountain pass — although your ears don't pop as noticeably.

Around 3 a.m., I was tired and my laptop was running out of its battery charge. So, I grabbed a flashlight and headed to bed.

The storm was still building. Local authorities would later estimate that the strongest winds blew between 4 and 5 a.m. The roar kept me from falling soundly asleep.

Our house is a big old Victorian with some Gothic touches, built in 1899 by the general manager of a Boeing mill in Aberdeen. (The Boeings were in the lumber business before they got into the airplane business.) Its beams — true 8" x 8" or 8" x 4" spans — were cut from logs so big that the grain looks like straight lines. The house is designed to breathe with the wind. When the wind is blowing near 100 mph, that breathing can be pretty scary.

Sometime in the pre-dawn hours, a loud crack and boom woke me. From the sound of the crash, I figured a tree must have fallen. But it was too dark and stormy to see what had fallen where. I'd have to wait for daylight.

The power was still out and the rain was still falling at morning light. With a keen sense of the possible day off from school, our kids tuned the small radio to a local morning disc jockey, who said that electricity was out to most of the county (his station was broadcasting on generator power). And the main roads in and out of town were all blocked by fallen trees. Calls were coming in about major damage to commercial and industrial buildings in town. And, finally, schools were canceling classes.

The loud crash from the night before had been a pine tree falling into our front yard from the neighbor's, plowing through the eight-foot hedge that separates the two. The tree, held a little off the ground by the hedge, was creaking and groaning. It had hit the side of our house on its way down, leaving some nasty scratches. But the serious damage was to the roof: a lot of shingles had blown off and there were several holes where flying debris had punched right through.

Branches, shingles, and trash littered our yard. It was raining too hard for a thorough clean up, but I drafted our older kids to pick up as much as they could.

We left the fallen pine alone: too dangerous. My wife used her cell phone to call our neighbors at their vacation cabin to let them know about the tree. Then she called our insurance company to open a file on the damage. The customer service rep hadn't heard about the storm. His ignorance was encouraging, in a way — maybe we were overreacting.

By noon, we'd done as much mitigating as we could. I'd moved enough wood into the living room to keep the fire burning strong. We had plenty of food and enough barbecue supplies to cook out for a couple of days, if needed.

Kids from the neighborhood came around and, after lunch, all of them had table games going on. I read a book and played chess with my older son.

The morning DJ stayed on the air because his replacement couldn't get to the station. By early afternoon, his reports were sounding more desperate. The local utility wasn't offering estimates of when power would be restored. Businesses were all closed. There had been some reports of looting. The Sheriff's Department was advising people to stay in their homes. The hospital and government offices were still out of power. Even with its emergency generators, the hospital was running at partial capacity. And the government wasn't opening at all.

The significance of this was that Monday was the first business day of the month — and people on government aid would normally have gone to government offices to get their checks. They couldn't do that, so many were calling the radio station to ask what they should do. The DJ's suggestion that they be patient and wait didn't go over very well.

As the afternoon proceeded, the wind died away and the rain turned to mist. The sky was still cloudy but the sun peeked through a little. My wife and I walked around the block with our smaller kids and spoke with a few of our neighbors. They seemed okay; everyone had enough food and candles to last a few days. We made a quick tally of the neighbors who'd been out of town and now couldn't get in.

The DJ was sounding ragged. The station's generator was running out of fuel and all the local gas stations were closed.

We saw one of our neighbors shuttling back and forth between his house and business, shoring up leaks in his buildings. We invited his family over for a barbecue.

Back at the house, the board games were still going strong

but the DJ was sounding ragged. The station's generator was running out of fuel and all the local gas stations were closed. Fortunately, some listeners took it upon themselves to stop by with gasoline; the DJ said they'd brought enough fuel to keep the station on until early evening.

We took inventory of our camping equipment. We had candles to keep the bathrooms and kitchen lighted for a night or two. I wished we had more.

We had enough batteries to keep several flashlights and our radio working for a few days.

The really useful tools were the hand-crank flashlights. They threw off as much light as a small battery-powered light and were fine for getting around. And we had enough firewood to last a week, though some of it was wet.

We'd cook out as much meat as we could on the grill on our back porch; it would last longer as cooked leftovers than half-frozen in plastic bags.

I went out to my car and set up a power inverter that plugged into the cigarette lighter. This inverter — a common camping tool — generated enough current to run a few small appliances. We could use it to charge cell phones and run laptops. But the car had to be running to generate the juice, so at some point there might be a gasoline issue. I had more than half a tank; that would last a week if I used it carefully. I moved the car close to our back door and linked together four extension cords to bring at least a little power into the house.

I also ran a quick mental inventory of my security tools. I didn't want to frighten the kids by cleaning a rifle or sharpening the gardening machete. Maybe when they were asleep. The ready weapons would be the older kids' aluminum baseball bats — and my heavy-duty Maglite flashlight. I knew that cops swear by Maglites as reliable truncheons.

Our utility is the Grays Harbor Public Utility District, known locally as the P-U-D. The Grays Harbor PUD exists, essentially, at the mercy of the Bonneville Power Authority (or BPA). The BPA is one of the lasting legacies of the Roosevelt-era public works programs, a huge hydroelectric system based on a series of dams and generators along the Columbia River.

Throughout the Pacific Northwest, local utilities like the Grays Harbor PUD count on the BPA to provide cheap electricity at the wholesale level. As a result, there are a lot of political battles over who should benefit from this cheap and plentiful power — the end-users or the utilities that deliver it. The BPA has never been excited about selling cheap electricity to middlemen like the Grays Harbor PUD. At various times, the BPA's managers have tried to manipulate the complex series of contracts and subcontracts that control electricity distribution in the region. To simplify slightly, the BPA would like its wholesale prices for electricity sold to local PUDs to reflect the market rates that independent, for-profit companies pay for power.

The local PUDs characterize the BPA's efforts as market manipulations and — clinging hard to some tortured court decisions slightly in their favor — call the market pricing mechanisms "illegal." The Grays Harbor PUD has led the opposition to any effort by the BPA to allow market pricing models into its wholesale system.

All this sounds rather academic and abstract. In practical terms, the result is that the BPA runs power into the Grays Harbor PUD by only one set of high-tension lines. If those lines go down, it's like the master circuit in your house breaking. Everything goes dark. That's what happened after the December storm.

Throughout the Pacific Northwest, local utilities count on the BPA to provide cheap electricity at the wholesale level. So, there are a lot of political battles over who should benefit — the end-users or the utilities.

The one set of main power lines into Grays Harbor went down — and the local PUD had to count on the BPA to get those main lines back up. It's possible, given the political trouble that the local PUD had given the BPA, that the wholesale supplier let a few hours go by before it repaired the main line — just to remind the trouble-making retailer who was boss.

Our barbecue went well. We cooked a leg of lamb and some pork chops that had been in our freezer, and a turkey breast that our neighbors brought over from theirs. Potatoes were easy to bake on the grill. The real surprise was the frozen vegetables that we sprinkled with salt and olive oil and wrapped in aluminum foil; they cooked nicely.

My neighbor, not a heavy drinker, had a martini (made with precious ice) and several glasses of wine with dinner. He was drinking to take off a nervous edge. That edge could have come from his work . . . or from more general concerns.

Our neighborhood — a section of town called Broadway Hill — has a shabby-genteel charm: wide streets, deep front yards, and big old houses built in the eccentric style of the turn of the last century. With high-speed internet service and satellite TV, it's possible to live in our small town but stay connected to news and culture.

But not all of Aberdeen has aged so well over the last 30 years. The Endangered Species Act wiped out most of the logging industry in the area (coastal Washington was ground zero of the spotted owl controversy). Our county has one of the highest unemployment rates in the state. The public schools don't perform well on standardized tests. And methamphetamine use among the unemployed and semi-employed is a problem for the local cops.

So the charms of Broadway Hill come mixed with harder sentiments. Several of my neighbors talk about the guns and gold they keep stored in their basements in case anarchist mobs march up the Hill.

A hundred years ago, our area was a hotbed for the IWW — the Wobblies — who'd come to organize logging industry

workers. They didn't have much lasting success with the workers; their main legacy was to leave the people on the Hill wary of angry mobs during crises.

After dinner, the adults had drinks around the fireplace and the kids heated milk for hot chocolate. Our middle daughter played some Christmas carols she was learning on the living room piano. The scene was agreeable — and it occurred to me that it might have been familiar to the guy who'd built the house more than 100 years ago.

The shelves that were already empty were the ones for potato chips and snacks. With a grocery store open and disaster around them, people had reached first for the Doritos.

A 21st-century intrusion: calls on cell phones from various friends and family members in other places. Apparently, media outlets were carrying stories about the storm and our isolation from the rest of civilization. The callers seemed surprised by our happy circumstances.

We saw our neighbors back to their house. The night was rainy but not much different from most in December. The eerie thing was how dark the neighborhood was. Literally dark. Not only were the houses out of power but the street lights were out and the ambient light from the city was gone.

At home, we moved everyone upstairs (some of our kids normally sleep in bedrooms on the ground floor). They didn't mind much — and I felt a lot better. I could protect the whole family on the second floor.

Things were still eerie Tuesday morning. The kids didn't even expect to have school. They listened to the same DJ, who was reading about school closures, road closures, and warnings against risky behavior like a war correspondent. He announced that the storm's heavy rains were causing some local rivers to flood. Following the hard rules of nature, the worst of this flooding would come a few days *after* the storm had passed. Local fire departments were making sandbags available, though no one was sure whether the people who needed the bags most could get to the fire stations. A disaster-management Catch-22.

The neighborhood kids gathered at our house again, but they seemed more shaken than they had the day before. They brought stories about their parents being worried about not being able to get back to work.

I needed to get online for my work. I wasn't optimistic about what the power from the car's lighter could do; we had to be careful about how much it could run without breaking its circuits. The printers had to go. But I could run a laptop and the DSL modem from the extension cord reaching out to the car. To my surprise, the DSL line was still functioning.

My wife and I took turns reading emails and dashing off quick replies. I was able to check my bank accounts and other financial assets — which was fortunate. The local banks were still closed and the ATMs dark. Closed banks are never an encouraging image. Banking online allowed me to pay some bills and, more important, confirm that we hadn't been wiped out financially.

I also read some online news sources, to see how the storms were being described outside. There wasn't a lot of coverage. The mainstream media was more interested in Britney Spears' child-custody problems.

My wife wanted to see what was going on around town. Plus, we needed milk and supplies for our 18-month-old. We took the toddler and left the older kids behind locked doors, under the care of the oldest. She had her own cell phone, so she could call if there was any emergency.

My first instinct was to try the convenience stores. But I was wrong — they were closed and boarded up. We couldn't tell whether the boarding was in response to glass broken by nature or by looters. Something about the bits of safety glass on the ground suggested the latter.

My car radio is usually tuned to big city stations — but, this day, we went back to the same local DJ the kids had chosen. He was reading a short list of businesses (mostly advertisers on his station) that were opening. We had some luck: one was a locally-owned supermarket nearby.

The supermarket's lot was nearly full. Several large employees guarded the one available entrance, eyeing everyone who walked in. They weren't visibly armed — but they seemed ready to handle any trouble. Our toddler elicited nods and smiles. As my wife has pointed out before, a smiling baby can open many doors.

We found a shopping cart and grabbed diapers, milk, bread, charcoal briquettes, as many candles as we could find, and two leaky bags of ice. Ice was the real premium; we were among the first people in the place and the bags were almost gone. We heard a female employee explaining that the store's ice-maker was back on — but it would take half an hour or so for the new ice to be ready.

I read some online news sources, to see how the storms were being described. There wasn't a lot of coverage. Mainstream media seemed more interested in Britney Spears.

Weirdly, the shelves that were already empty were the ones for potato chips and similar snacks. With a grocery store open and disaster around them, nervous people had reached first for the Doritos. Even before candles and ice.

For us, the issue of marginal utility came into play when we stood in front of the milk. There was plenty in the store — but how long would it last in our cooler or somewhat-cool

refrigerator? The survivalist in me wanted to grab every gallon the store had; the pragmatist told me one gallon at a time. I didn't want to have an overstock of the ultimate perishable good. I took one gallon.

The store was running on generator power, which meant its aisles were dark and only a handful of checkstands were working. The lines were long but unevenly so. The registers on either end of the check-out plaza had longer lines than the ones in the middle. Many of the customers seemed content to wait. After standing in an unmoving line for ten minutes, we switched to a middle line and moved more quickly.

The man immediately in front of us tried to pay for $50 in groceries with a state-issued electronic benefits transfer (also called EBT or "food stamp") debit card. In Washington, these cards are recognizable from a distance — a gray-and-blue outline of the state gives them away. Where we live, most retail food outlets accept these welfare cards as if they were normal debit cards; beneficiaries can even get small amounts of cash back on them. But, in this store, the cashier told the guy that cards were useless as long as the place was working on half-power. He'd have to pay by cash or check.

A woman behind us groaned audibly. People in Aberdeen often react with exasperation when they see the state welfare cards. There's a general belief — formed by a few cases of meth addicts swapping cards for drugs — that the program is misused. And there *is* something infuriating about an able-bodied man wearing Oakley sunglasses and Nikes who buys steaks with a welfare card.

In an inversion of stereotypes, the man on the dole was a stocky Anglo and the exasperated woman was Hispanic. The man heard the woman groan but reacted instead to the inconvenience of the cash-only policy. He shook his head and fished a wad of bills out of his pocket.

A lot had changed by the time we headed out to our car. There was a huge line — over 100 people — and the doormen weren't as agreeable as they'd been 20 minutes earlier. They were barking orders and letting only a few people at a time into the store. An older woman leaving in front of us said that the line looked "like Russia." She was right.

Driving home, we noticed that a chain drug store and the state-run liquor store were both boarded up.

As we headed back up Broadway Hill, we were met by a couple of police cruisers parked on either side of the main street into our neighborhood. They weren't set up as a roadblock, exactly. But they did form a sort of bottleneck. I made eye contact with the policeman in the car facing opposite. He nodded as we drove past.

It was hesitant to discuss details, but the police department's strategy was to work the perimeters of Aberdeen's main neighborhoods. Moving across those boundaries, drivers who looked out of place might be stopped. I could understand the logistical efficiency of this approach. But it underscored the importance of my keeping our own house secure.

The storm clouds were clearing, but dinner was going to be what you might diplomatically call a "mixed grill." We were emptying out the freezer. The kids thought this was great and invited friends to stay for dinner. My wife walked around to talk with the various parents and swap cell phone numbers for those she didn't already have. I stoked the fire.

Local radio stations were buzzing with information. The rivers were flooding, as predicted. One or two gas stations were open — but working on a cash-only basis and limiting sales to ten gallons. Some people were saying that a nearby dam had burst (not true). Others called in to complain about cash-only policies. None of the ATMs in town were working. None of the banks had reopened.

People in Aberdeen react with exasperation when they see the state welfare cards. And there is something infuriating about an able-bodied man wearing Oakley sunglasses and Nikes who buys steaks with a welfare card.

But someone *had* figured out a way out of town. By heading south and then following a complicated combination of minor roads, it was possible to connect with U.S. Highway 101 east to Olympia. That was big news.

Our neighbors who'd been to dinner the night before decided to inch their way out and stay with relatives until things got back to normal. Another family in the neighborhood had been planning a long Christmas vacation in southern California; they decided to start early and locked up their house for the month.

My wife was worried about the water. Several neighbors were putting a few drops of bleach into each gallon they drank and used some when they washed dishes. But we were out of bleach. So I took one of my daughters and headed out again, looking for something other than the crowded grocery store.

An anchor tenant of one of the main shopping plazas is a big, high-end, chain grocery store. It was open. Without lines or bouncers at the doors. Inside, it felt like FAO Schwarz. The lights were all on and it had *everything*. I got the bleach; then my hording impulse kicked in. I loaded up on six solid bags of ice and batteries and a dozen candles. At the register, the cashier could take everything — including cards. I paid for my supplies and got $100 back.

My daughter asked for some chewing gum and, though I usually say no, I let her get what she wanted. It was strange how normal it felt to buy things in a standard way. Our daily lives are full of small retail transactions; it's disorienting when they disappear.

"How are you guys doing this?" I asked.

"Two big generators."

This store had reopened just a few hours later than the other one, but it didn't advertise on the local radio station.

At dinner there were just as many people as the night before, but there wasn't so much wine. Our main achievement was cleaning out the freezer.

Frozen food becomes a liability when there's no electricity. Once again, it's a matter of marginal utility: buying in

bulk makes no sense if the bulk food spoils. All around town, people conditioned to buying in bulk from warehouse stores ended up having to throw out microwavable pizzas, frozen dinners and novelty ice cream treats.

In our house, the kids made s'mores in the fireplace. For them, this was the high point of the evening, maybe the week. For me, the high point was seeing that chess maintained its appeal, after the kids had burned out on other board games.

On Wednesday — the third day without power — I got up in the morning, started the car, connected my laptop and did business online for several hours. This was beginning to feel like a routine.

I was surprised by how little people in other parts of the country had heard about our problems. Some friends emailed me that natural disasters hold intense but very *local* interest. Our experience seemed to validate that theory.

The radio sounded different. The sense of team spirit was gone. Callers complained about family members and old people who were cold and starving. These angry callers wanted "answers." But they weren't really asking questions. What they wanted was a firm schedule for when power would be restored, government offices would be open, and their lives would go back to normal. The PUD was still being cagey, estimating anywhere from five to 10 days ... .

PUD spokespeople and local government types seemed to be managing expectations — making things sound as bad as possible so the slightly-less-bad would appear as a victory.

In the meantime, our dirty clothes were starting to stink. We kept the fire stoked and heated water. We could wash some clothes by hand and hang them to dry near the fireplace. Still, a family of seven generates lots of laundry.

I started thinking about buying a gasoline generator. There weren't any to be found in the Aberdeen area — the radio had made that clear. If I could drive into Olympia or up to Seattle, I might be able to find a generator somewhere. It would be an investment; generators that produce enough electricity to run a washer and dryer cost over a thousand dollars.

Once again, marginal utility came into practical application. How much did we need the asset in order to survive until the power came back? If it was back in a few hours, we didn't need to spend a thousand dollars for a partial solution. On the flip side, if the power really wasn't coming back for 10 days — as the PUD was implying — we'd need something more than a skinny, hiccupy extension cord powered by the car.

The radio sounded different. Angry callers wanted "answers." But they weren't really asking questions.

That night we ate leftovers from the big cookout the night before. The family was starting to get cranky.

On the fourth morning, Thursday, I started the car and did business and work stuff online. The Washington State Patrol website showed that the main highway into Olympia and up to Seattle was partially cleared. Down to Portland was a problem, though; Interstate 5 was still closed south of Olympia. I transferred money from my savings account into my checking account to cover the cost of a generator, if I could find one within a reasonable drive.

Stores stocked up on ice and batteries. One of the chains brought in two trailers full of ice — a sad misreading of marginal utility. Two truckloads were too much.

There was other good news. The BPA had reconnected its damaged main line into the PUD grid. So there was power in the Aberdeen area. Within a couple of hours, the hospital grid was online — and my wife's chatty acquaintance had her electricity back. So did the main commercial zones. But not the residential. It was going to take several more days for the local linemen to get everyone plugged in again.

That night, we could see some of the city lights below. The kids asked why, if the power was back on, it wasn't on everywhere. My wife and I did our best to explain how power grids work (we'd been through this a few times in recent days). But as with the angry callers on the radio, the question didn't really want an answer. It wasn't a question; it was a complaint.

With the roads partially cleared and some power restored, the grocery stores stocked up on ice and batteries and candles. One of the chain stores brought in two semi trailers full of ice — a sad misreading of marginal utility. The two truckloads were too much, and the store ended up giving the stuff away.

Friday morning, the power from the car hiccupped several times, interrupting our internet connection and convincing me that I needed to buy a generator. My wife suggested that, before driving four or five hours each way, I buy one heavy-duty extension cord from a local store. The power hiccups could be resulting from the small cords and the multiple connections that reached from the car into the house.

Fair enough. I headed out to the Home Depot store that had just reopened. On the way, I stopped in my regular gas station for my ten-gallon allotment. The lines were a little longer than usual — about on par with a busy summer weekend. When I got to the pump, I was relieved to see no gallon limit. I filled my tank and paid with plastic.

Like the chain store of a few days earlier, the Home Depot was not as crowded as I'd expected. I noticed that most of the customers were heading straight toward the far side of the store. There, in the garden department, was a trailer-load of 1,500-watt generators, stacked three or four high. The employees weren't even waiting for people to ask — they were just

loading the machines onto flat carts and turning the handles outward to any takers. The miracles of capitalism!

I saw a father from my kids' school pushing several generators away. I asked him how he was doing. He didn't even hear my question. "This is amazing. The price is wholesale! I was about to drive to Seattle to get generators to get Sue's office open." His wife was an eye doctor whose offices were still dark. "If you don't have a generator, you should get one of these while they're here."

His enthusiasm sold me. I took a cart and headed for a cashier. The price — about $430 with tax — was a bargain, less than half of what I'd budgeted. I asked the cashier how they'd ended up with so many generators at such a great price, while everyone else was out.

"Our manager called corporate last night and they drove a truck up from Vegas." She didn't seem to appreciate the importance of that achievement.

As I pushed my purchases out, I noticed a long line of people with flat carts at the Home Depot credit desk, waiting to apply for "instant" credit to buy their generators. It never ceases to surprise me how naturally people borrow to buy things. In the Northwest, a generator is probably a prudent household purchase — but did so many people need to borrow the four hundred bucks? And applying for store credit suggested that their bank credit cards were maxed out.

Money was a big issue all around. And, Home Depot's instant credit line notwithstanding, most of the money involved the government.

The local newspaper, which normally banged a populist gong of outrage about waste in Olympia and Washington, immediately called for government bail-out of homeowners who'd built in flood plains. In the days immediately after the storm, the paper ran stories about federal government programs that would give emergency funds to local governments — but not to individuals.

One front-page story featured a man whose new house had been flooded. He "was supposed to have" flood insurance but didn't; so, he was appealing to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Small Business Administration (SBA) for money to rebuild.

It was news to me that the SBA makes low-interest loans without standard credit checks to people — not small businesses — who don't have insurance coverage in the wake of natural disasters. Maybe the agency should change its name to the Foolhardy Homeowners Administration.

Flood insurance is *already* a government subsidy to people who live in flood plains. They pay below-market rates for coverage against damage to their structures and personal effects. But in the wake of the storm and floods, people who'd gambled by turning down this cheap coverage, and lost, were standing in line so that Nanny State would make them whole.

There was a nefarious effect of all this. When you're living in the aftermath of a natural disaster — and FEMA and the SBA have moved in with trailers and personnel intended to make taking government money easy — you begin to feel like a fool if you *don't* take the money. FEMA and the SBA practically advertise the fact that they'll lend $20,000 to $200,000 at 3% annual interest with very loose credit checks. It's like a mini sub-prime lending bubble, funded by ... er ... *you*.

Local attitudes toward the government handouts were dysfunctional — simultaneously cynical and demanding. A local gym has a marquee on which the owners set topical bits of humor in moveable black letters. The owners put up the quip: "Wonder if FEMA will blow as hard as the storm?"

Making fun of the government while you wait for it to pay you for the results of your bad choices is hypocritical. Like something from the old Soviet Union. It's citizens acting like resentful children.

As life returned to normal, this infantilization took various forms. People crowded the handful of stores mentioned on the radio but left other stores practically empty. They called into radio shows to complain about seniors being left alone but didn't take them into their own homes. After the main roads reopened, many preferred to keep complaining rather than driving a reasonable distance to stock up on supplies.

Most strikingly, people looked to elected officials to "make something happen" so more federal money would be available. But these same political hacks had drafted or supported the anti-business laws (such as the Endangered Species Act) that had driven away the logging industry and damaged the local economy in the first place.

The leader of the hacks was Washington governor Christine Gregoire, who struggled mightily to look concerned during a whirlwind media appearance several days later. Decked out in foul-weather gear, the rodential Gregoire promised government money for everyone affected by the storm. And that's what most people wanted to hear. Clearly, she understood something about retail politics that eludes me.

My older son and I set up the generator under our back porch. This way, it would be covered from the rain but still be outside, so its exhaust wouldn't collect inside and asphyxiate us. We set up an alternate electrical system through the first floor of the house, using our various extension cords and power strips.

It worked. Now we had lights, heat, laundry machines, and everything else. The kids were happy to have the TV working again. My wife said, "You know, this means they're going to have our power back on in a few minutes." She was off slightly. A couple of hours later, the lights upstairs flickered on for the first time in almost six days.

Decked out in foul-weather gear during a whirlwind media appearance several days later, Gregoire promised money for everyone.

My son kept the good attitude he had throughout: "We'll be ready right away the next time there's a big storm." That optimism trumped the marginal utility of the $400 machine. And, to me, it was worth infinitely more than the millions that FEMA and the SBA would slosh around to their ungrateful beneficiaries who'd been eating Doritos in the dark. ❑

The Attack on the Liberty Dollar, *from page 26*

Maybe this is what R.W. Bradford said to von NotHaus years ago — I don't know. But it sure set him off.

"We are not a collector organization," he insisted. "We are not a numismatic organization. At least we were not until we were raided. We are a currency."

Why, then, are most Liberty Dollars made of .999 fine silver?

"Do you know how much an alloy piece costs? A lot," he said. "It comes down to the marketplace. Everything about the Liberty Dollar is about the marketplace. It would not function in the marketplace as an alloy. People want silver. They don't give a damn for an alloy."

As for the Liberty Dollars on eBay, he said, "If you go to eBay, what do you think you're going to find but collector stuff? You're looking in the wrong place. Talk to the people who are using them. Wal-Mart, Pizza Hut. Do you have any of those stores in Seattle? All those stores are using them. People are using them. It's exciting. Pull your head out! Bullshit!"

I have never seen anyone offer or receive a Liberty Dollar in trade or seen any business say that Liberty Dollars were welcome — or even unwelcome. Nor have I seen one in the drawer of a cash register, or in anyone's coin purse. I conclude that Liberty Dollars are a pretend money. They are medallions for sale to hard-money conservatives and libertarians who will pay a premium over the metallic content because von NotHaus has stamped a special monetary and political meaning on them. He has made his medallions look and feel like money, partly because he has denominated them in dollars.

"If it [the Liberty Dollar] didn't have a denomination, it wouldn't function," he says. He denies it is denominated in U.S. dollars. "It's denominated in Liberty Dollars. Do we mention U.S. dollars on there?"

Well, no. It says dollars. But in the United States, what is a dollar? If von NotHaus meant to denominate his currency in a unit other than the government's dollar, he might have called it a peso, a silvercredit, or a NotHaus. He called it a dollar and declared that it trades at par with the government's dollar.

That is what the market wanted. But the market for money used in commerce also wants a unit accepted by the banks as a dollar, and no bank will accept Liberty Dollars as anything. And as long as that is so, the market for Liberty Dollars is the collector market, and Liberty Dollars will have no ability to undermine the Federal Reserve or "the existing economic system" of the United States.

Libertarians may wish von NotHaus well, and those feeling this strongly may send him some dollars. He is hoping to embarrass the government if it takes him to trial, and hoping also to stay out of federal prison. His case may make monetary history, not because the Liberty Dollar was itself a threat to the economic system, which it was not, but because what von NotHaus has done in a small way may someday be done in a big way, by a bank or a consortium of banks. You never know.

Meanwhile eBay has some beautiful coins for sale. We can call them that, even if their creator cannot. ❑

College and the State, *from page 28*

Okay, there may be a problem. So what to do?

Lynne Munson, former deputy chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, takes the view that colleges, like most other foundations, should be required to pay out 5% of their corpus each year. Blumenthal says that the schools should be required to provide the kind of financial disclosure that the SEC requires for businesses (which, of course, don't get even the tax advantages of nonprofits).

But I suggest that the best strategy may be for Munson and Blumenthal to shed a bright light on these schools' maneuvers. Do we always have to have a government response? Isn't sunlight the best disinfectant? Or am I being old-fashioned?

Academic Freedom

Then there is academic freedom, an issue related to state, not federal, governments, and one that has been debated for many years. It is true that the glare of publicity over politics in the classroom (think Ward Churchill) has not removed political bias. So should we bring in the state legislature?

That's what David Horowitz of the David Horowitz Freedom Center has been trying to do — get state legislatures to adopt an academic "bill of rights. " Some libertarians have properly questioned the idea of enacting such a law, but other freedom-loving higher education reformers have supported it, supposing that it will do something to keep partisan politics out of the tax-supported education system.

While the American Council of Trustees and Alumni emphasizes that administrators and trustees should take the lead in stopping the infiltration of political views into the classroom, the group also advised (in a December 2005 report) state and federal legislators to take action "by holding hearings to educate the public and making it clear to the universities that they are expected to ensure a free exchange of ideas and classes free of political abuse."

There's something a bit weird about expecting legislators to guard against political abuse. This reliance on state government bothers me. I don't buy it. But people I respect do buy it.

Oh, and Law Schools

I have just about exhausted the dilemmas over government intervention that I've come upon in ten months, but not quite. I just read a (yet to be published) paper by respected scholars, including a libertarian, recommending that the state of North Carolina allow anyone who is allowed to take a bar exam in any state in the United States to take the bar exam in North Carolina. Well and good, a definite improvement. But there is another way, isn't there? Perhaps the state government could let anyone, a law school graduate or not, take the bar exam — or for that matter practice law without a license. And that would return the practice of law to something like the place where it was when Daniel Webster, Stephen A. Douglas, and Abraham Lincoln were practicing law.

So there we are: three-plus instances of cases in which government intervention might do some good, but where backing off might be better. In these cases, in my view, less is more. ❑

The Two Libertarianisms

by R. W. Bradford

In this learned and probing article, first published in May 1988, R.W. Bradford challenged libertarians to identify and evaluate the basis of their ideas. It is one of Liberty's most provocative essays.

— Stephen Cox

There are two varieties of libertarian theory current today. The difference between the two libertarianisms lies in their reason for advocating liberty. The libertarian moralist advocates liberty because he believes liberty is the condition that results from men acting under the moral law of nonaggression. The libertarian consequentialist advocates liberty because he believes liberty is the optimal arrangement for human society, a way of life under which human beings thrive.[1]

Libertarian Moralism and Consequentialism

Libertarian moralism is typified by Ayn Rand: "There is only *one* fundamental right (all the others are its consequences or corollaries): a man's right to his own life. Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action — which means: the freedom to take all the actions required by the nature of a rational being for the support, the furtherance, the fulfillment and the enjoyment of his own life."[2]

To the moralist, recognition of others' property is inherent to recognition of their right to life: "The right to life is the source of all rights — and the right to property its only implementation. Without property rights, no other rights are possible. Since man has to sustain his life by his own effort, the man who has no right to the product of his effort has no means to sustain his life," Rand wrote.[3]

The leading advocate of this moralistic theory of liberty today is Murray Rothbard, whose defense of natural rights in "For a New

Liberty" seems almost to be cribbed from Rand: "The nature of man is such that each individual person must, in order to act, choose his own ends and employ his own means in order to attain them. . . . Since men can think, feel, evaluate, and act only as individuals, it becomes vitally necessary for each man's survival and prosperity that he be free to learn, choose, develop his faculties, and act upon his knowledge of value. This is the necessary path of human nature; to interfere with and cripple this process by using violence goes profoundly against what is necessary by man's nature for his life and prosperity. Violent interference with a man's learning and choices is therefore profoundly 'antihuman'; it violates the natural law of man's needs."[4]

Perhaps libertarians are aware of the theoretical weakness of their position and are anxious to hide it from the light of day.

Ludwig von Mises, on the other hand, typifies the consequentialist libertarianism. For him, liberty is valued because it enables men to optimize their wealth and happiness. He described his political philosophy thus: "Liberalism is a doctrine directed entirely towards the conduct of men in this world. In the last analysis, it has nothing else in view than the advancement of their outward, material welfare."[5]

Property is just as important to Mises as it is to Rand. "The program of liberalism . . . if condensed to a single word, would have to read: *property*."[6] But Mises values property for its consequences: "In seeking to demonstrate the social function and necessity of private ownership of the means of production and of the concomitant inequality in the distribution of income and wealth, we are at the same time providing proof of the moral justification of private property."[7]

For the consequentialist, property is good because it maximizes human well being. For the moralist, property is good because it is in harmony with fundamental moral principles.

Nonsense on Stilts?

As developed by Rand, Rothbard, and others, moralistic libertarianism claims to provide its adherents with a logically compelling, objective moral theory. This morality has implications for all men in their social behavior.

Libertarian moralism can be understood as the belief that it is always wrong to initiate the use of physical force against another human being. When Rand first states this moral imperative she writes it in ALL CAPITAL letters, and for good reason. Rothbard concurs, "The central axiom of the libertarian creed is nonaggression against anyone's person or property."[8] It is this "nonaggression axiom" that implies the positions that distinguish libertarian moralism from other political beliefs. The universal opposition to taxes, to conscription, and ultimately to the institution of the state is the immediate consequence of this proposition.

The ultimate meaning of the nonaggression axiom is: all men have an obligation to refrain from using force or fraud against the life or property of another. This obligation cannot have its origin in contract, for the validity of contract depends on the validity of the nonaggression axiom itself. From what else can an obligation be derived?

For the libertarian moralist, the nonaggression axiom is a consequence of the position that men possess inalienable rights. It was Rand who first formulated the nonaggression axiom, and she formulated it as a corollary to the right to life: "A right cannot be violated except by physical force. One man cannot deprive another of his life, nor enslave him, nor forbid him to pursue his happiness, except by using force against him. . . . Therefore we can draw a clear-cut division between the rights of one man and those of another. It is an objective decision — not subject to differences of opinion, nor to majority decision, nor to the arbitrary decree of society. NO MAN HAS THE RIGHT TO INITIATE THE USE OF PHYSICAL FORCE AGAINST ANOTHER MAN."[9]

The first problem with this theory is the derivation of the nonaggression axiom from the notion of inalienable rights. Even if one grants that nature or objective morality confers certain inalienable rights on all men, one can argue that the nonaggression axiom does not follow. For example, nature or objective morality could sanction two individuals to try to possess the same piece of property, in which case one or the other would either have to initiate the use of force or simply abandon the property whose pursuit has been sanctioned.

In response to this sort of thinking, the libertarian moralist has generally proposed that objective morality can never sanction such a conflict because, as Rand argues, "there are no conflicts of interest among rational men."[10] This universal has not satisfied the critics, who have spent considerable energy contriving hypothetical situations, some realistic, others fanciful, in which the interests of rational men conflict. These critics generally argue along the following lines: "Suppose you are on a ship which sinks. You and another rational man come upon a lifeboat, which only has room for one person. Both of you are on the verge of exhaustion. Is this not a genuine conflict of interest between rational men?"

Rand's response to the better contrived of these situations is that they are emergencies, and that normal rules do not apply, and men should act appropriately for the emergency: "An emergency is an unchosen, unexpected event, limited in time, that creates conditions under which human survival is impossible. . . . In an emergency situation, men's primary goal is to combat the disaster, escape the danger and restore normal conditions. . . . By 'normal' conditions, I mean *metaphysically* normal, normal in the nature of things, and appropriate to human existence. . . . The fact is that we do not live in lifeboats — and that a lifeboat is not the place on which to base one's metaphysics."[11]

The problem with this definition is that it destroys the universality of the nonaggression axiom: if one dispenses with observing the nonaggression axiom in any situation in which conditions "appropriate to human existence" do not prevail,

as a practical matter one may dispense with it whenever one doesn't like his circumstances. One should always obey the nonaggression axiom, it is argued, except in emergencies. What is to keep an individual from declaring a personal state of emergency whenever it seems expeditious to initiate the use of force?

But more importantly, in granting the validity of certain emergencies (however limited and tightly defined) the libertarian moralists have given up on the universality of the nonaggression axiom. To the question, "When is it legitimate to initiate the use of force against others?" the libertarian moralist answers, "Never! Unless, of course, you really *need* to initiate force . . ."

In challenging the sensibleness and universality of the nonaggression axiom, the critics are not getting to the heart of the matter. For practically every libertarian moralist, the nonaggression axiom is the logical consequence of the inalienable rights of the individual. Whether or not the nonaggression axiom can be formulated in a reasonable and universal way is clearly secondary to the issue of whether inalienable rights exist; if the concept of inalienable rights is not rational, the formulation and defense of the nonaggression axiom is an irrelevant intellectual exercise.

Just what are these "natural rights" or "moral rights" upon which the nonaggression axiom is based? Perhaps natural rights can be understood in the same way as legal rights: just as one's legal rights are those rights conferred by law, so natural rights are rights conferred by nature or by objective morality.

At first inspection, there is much to be said for this understanding of rights. The notion of legal rights is widely understood and makes perfect sense. We all speak fluently of legal rights in a variety of contexts: rights to manufacture a certain item, rights to use exclusively a certain piece of property, rights to produce a certain play, etc. Legal rights are the products of declarations by the state that it will defend an individual's taking certain actions against other individuals who might interfere. When one says, "I have a legal right to do this," one means "the state will defend me against anyone's preventing my doing this."

The obligation to refrain from using force or fraud cannot have its origin in contract, for the validity of contract depends on the validity of the nonaggression axiom itself.

Can we understand natural or moral rights in this same fashion? Perhaps we can understand natural rights to be rights conferred by nature, rather than the state; and moral rights to be rights conferred by morality. Just as it is meaningful to say that a trespasser is violating one's legal rights (i.e., is invading the property that the state guarantees one's exclusive control of), so we can argue that the trespasser violates moral law or natural law.

Alas, neither natural rights nor moral rights can be understood by this analogy. When we talk about legal rights we necessarily talk about the ability of the state to enforce them.

The curious thing about libertarian consequentialism is that even libertarian moralists grant the truth of its arguments.

When we talk about natural or moral right, do we imagine that nature or morality mobilizes some kind of police power to enforce these rights? Of course not. Legal rights are nugatory unless people enforce them.

In "Textbook of Americanism," Rand defines a right as "a sanction of independent action." But this definition has a problem. The word sanction is a bit obscure: in some cases sanction is a synonym for "support, encouragement, approval"; in others, sanction is a synonym for "provision of law that secures obedience."[12]

If Rand means sanction in the sense of "support, encouragement, approval," her notion of rights will obviously not result in anything akin to the nonaggression axiom. At most it might imply lack of support, discouragement or disapproval of initiated force — not the prohibition of initiated force.

On the other hand, if Rand means sanction in the sense of "provision securing obedience," her definition has the same problem as rights understood by legal analogy have: obedience must be secured by an agent. For a sanction to have meaning in this sense, it must be enforced, and this enforcement requires an agent (e.g. the state). Neither nature nor morality is an enforcer.[13]

If natural or moral rights are not to be understood by analogy with legal rights, or as sanctions, then how are they to be understood? What is the "stuff" of rights? What are rights made of?

Some 17 years after publication of her definition of rights as "sanctions" Rand offered another definition. Perhaps she recognized some of the problems of considering rights to be a particular type of sanction. In her essay "Man's Rights" she defines a right as "a moral principle defining and sanctioning a man's freedom of action in a social context." But this definition is hardly any improvement: even when defining rights as a particular type of "principle," Rand cannot avoid the concept of sanction (and all its concomitant problems).[14]

In view of the murkiness of the concept of inalienable rights, it is not surprising that supporting arguments often

depend on outright obfuscation rather than logic. Rand's argument in "Atlas Shrugged" is typical:

> "*Rights* are conditions of existence required by man's nature for his proper survival. If man is to live on earth, it is *right* for him to use his mind, it is *right* to act on his own free judgment, it is *right* to work for his values and to keep the product of his work. If life on this earth is his purpose, he has a *right* to live as a rational being: nature forbids him the irrational. Any group, any gang, any nation that attempt to negate man's rights is *wrong*, which means: is evil, which means: is anti-life."[15]

This may be powerful as rhetoric, but it is no argument at all. By repeating the term right five times in italics and once otherwise, Rand may create a parallel in some readers' minds. But certainly *right* as a synonym for "morally proper" and *right* as a synonym for "sanction" are two different terms, and she has failed to demonstrate how any objective moral sanction against initiation of force follows from the moral propriety of taking certain actions.

The concept of rights makes perfect sense in a legal context. But legal rights are always alienable: they are enjoyed as a product of the state, and cease to exist when the state defining them ceases to exist. In the end, inalienable rights theory fails because it appears entirely chimerical.

Somehow, the various arguments for absolute natural rights seem to most people to be a bit like the actions of a three-card-monte artist: it is impressive to watch, and you seem be following it, but you know the artist is a skilled manipulator and in the end you aren't really surprised that you have been fooled.

It is this chimerical nature of natural rights theory that causes it to lead to the absurd consequences that I mentioned at the beginning of this essay. If natural rights theory makes no sense at its foundation, should we be surprised that it leads to silly consequences? If the concept of inalienable rights is nonsense, then the consequences are indeed, to use Bentham's delightful phrase, nonsense on stilts.

In my previous essays in Liberty[16] I demonstrated that the libertarian moralist must logically defend political institutions and laws that he knows are destructive to human prosperity, liberty, and life provided that such institutions and laws have their origin in contract, and that libertarian moralism ultimately implies either that (a) a good person cannot use any government services whatsoever, including such benign services as the post office or government roads; or that (b) a good person can use virtually any government service whatever, including the use of the police to take the property of his neighbors for his own benefit.

These are, of course, patently absurd propositions. The fact that these patently absurd propositions are the logical consequences of libertarian moralist theory is not an argument against that theory. If the theory is objectively true, then the fault lies in our notion of absurdity. Any valid attack on it must challenge its logical antecedents: either the propositions that underlie it or the specific argument by which it is defended.

To the question, "When is it legitimate to initiate the use of force against others?" the libertarian moralist answers, "Never! Unless, of course, you really need to initiate force."

One should always obey the nonaggression axiom, it is argued, except in emergencies. What is to keep an individual from declaring a personal state of emergency whenever it seems expeditious to initiate the use of force?

I have discussed some of the problems that exist in the development of that theory, but I have not systematically attacked it. Such an attack is beyond the scope of this paper, for it would be required to address each variation of the derivation of the moralistic libertarian position. I have, however, indicated the problems exhibited by most formulations of the moralistic libertarian position.

The Road to Slavery?

Consequentialist libertarianism provides its adherents with a cohesive, rational approach to political theory. As developed by its leading theorists (e.g. Mises, Hayek, Donisthorpe) it provides the intellectual tools to understand human action. Because the consequentialist libertarian has developed a systematic way to study human interaction, he can make public policy recommendations, even in the context of the real world.

The curious thing about libertarian consequentialism is that even libertarian moralists grant the truth of its arguments. Indeed, one of the leading libertarian moralists, Murray Rothbard, by training an economist, is happy to defend the truth of the core belief of consequentialist libertarianism — that a free society is far more productive and conducive to human happiness than an unfree society.

The moralist critics take two lines of attack against consequentialism. On a theoretical level, they argue that consequentialism is wrong because it denies the propriety of an objective moral theory, inalienable rights and the universal prohibition against aggression. The other moralist criticism of the consequentialist position has nothing to do with its

truth or falsity. It is that consequentialism fails to inspire moral fervor. This criticism grows out of its ability and willingness to make policy recommendations within the context of a nonlibertarian society; somehow this requires that the consequentialist abandon the moral high ground. "The utilitarian . . . will rarely adopt a principle as an absolute and consistent yardstick to apply to the varied concrete situations of the real world," writes Murray Rothbard. "To say that a utilitarian cannot be 'trusted' to maintain libertarian principle in every specific application may sound harsh, but it puts the case fairly."[17]

Even if one concedes that consequentialism's theory is rational, logical, and scientifically sound, it does a poor job of advancing liberty. "Who in hell would join a radical minority movement, and commit him- or herself for life to social obloquy and a marginal existence, for the sake of 20% more bathtubs or 15% more candy bars? Who will man the barricades, either physically or spiritually, for more peanuts or Pepsi?" asks Murray Rothbard. "Look at all the radical or revolutionary movements of the 20th century, whether they be Communist or fascist or Khomeiniite. Did they struggle and move mountains for a few more goods and services, for what we used to call 'bathtub economics'? Hell no, they moved mountains and made history out of a deep moral passion and would not be denied. What moves men and women and changes history is ideology, moral values, deep beliefs and principles."[18] This criticism is clearly *ad hominem:* it portrays the consequentialist as coldly making calculations in exclusively material terms, assuming that consequentialists do not ever consider valuing anything outside the money nexus.

Is Synthesis Possible?

Given the theoretical divergences between libertarian moralists and consequentialists, it is surprising that the two groups get along so well. Most radical political or religious groups fragment over matters of far less importance to their central beliefs. Given the fervor of many advocates of both moralism and consequentialism, one might expect the libertarian movement to be split into irreconcilably bitter, hostile factions over the matter.

In actual fact, aside from an occasional argument in an academic journal or other obscure place, the issue is hardly noticeable. What accounts for this peculiar phenomenon?

One might be tempted to think that the absence of acrimony over the issue is the product of people's rationality and good manners. But libertarians have long shown a willingness to argue over points far less significant. Battles over the presidential nominations of the Libertarian Party, for example, often move members to tears; the nomination of David Bergland in 1984 touched off a mass exodus of many longtime party activists, including most of those who had managed the 1980 presidential campaign.

A more cynical hypothesis is that libertarians are aware of the theoretical weakness of their position and are anxious to hide it from the light of day. There may be some truth to this, I suppose, though most libertarians' willingness to consider and accept so radical and unpopular a view as libertarianism indicates that they are open to peculiar ideas and willing to stand on their own judgment.

There is, I believe, a better explanation for the remarkable lack of controversy on the issue. I am convinced that most libertarians have little interest in the controversy because they find elements of both beliefs within themselves.

This hypothesis first occurred to me almost a decade ago after a conversation with a friend, a fairly prominent libertarian. On a lark, I asked him if he would consent to my interviewing him about his beliefs as though I was a nonlibertarian journalist. He consented and the game was on.

"Why do you advocate freedom?" I asked.

"Because men have moral rights to life, liberty and property," he replied. He was confident, almost brash.

As I questioned him further, leading him along the same critical lines of thought about rights theory that I summarized above, his demeanor gradually changed. His air of certainty receded; he grew defensive. After an hour or so, he admitted with a little exasperation that he was quite aware of the problems in rights theory. In fact, he went on, he did not believe that rights theory was defendable. "It's just that I think everyone should be free. The world would be a far better place if all men were free."

He had admitted that rights theory is wrong, and that consequentialism is right. What an extraordinary turn of events, I thought. My friend advocated moralism only because he thought it more rigorous, more respectable, more defensible. His advocacy of libertarianism was moralistic; his defense of libertarianism was consequentialist. Perhaps other advocates of rights are actually closet consequentialists.

A few days later, I was involved in a similar discussion with another natural rights advocate. But he could see where my line of thinking was leading. He cut me short and took the lead. Before long he was asking me questions like the following: Would you violate another man's rights if doing so had little risk and would likely mean substantial wealth for you?

I shall not bore you with details . . . Suffice it to say that within a few minutes I admitted I would not steal under such circumstances, and that in an important sense, I was a libertarian because libertarianism seemed morally right, though I could not rigorously defend that morality.

It occurred to me that I wasn't much different from my moralist friend. Just as he had a moralist ideological offense but a consequentialist defense, I had a consequentialist offense, but could not dispense with my own moral sensibilities. Both of us had psychologically synthesized our beliefs.

R.W. Bradford participated in a panel discussion at the 2004 Liberty Editors Conference with Charles Murray, David Friedman, and David Boaz, on the subject

"Liberty: What's Right vs. What Works"

To order recordings of this and other conference panels, see pages 48–49 of this issue!

We agreed that the consequentialist position made good sense and neither of us could dispense with our own moral views. He considered the moralist element of his thinking to be more acceptable to others, so his offense was moralist, but deep in his secret heart, he realized that the moralist argument was lacking.

I remain convinced that the moralism of inalienable rights and the nonaggression axiom is just plain wrong: its derivation is fallacious and its logical consequences sometimes silly. But I have not dispensed with morality altogether.

So I suggest before we conclude that the two libertarianisms are mutually exclusive that we reflect on their psychological compatibility and consider the possibility of philosophical synthesis. Perhaps we should consider the two libertarianisms to be two aspects of the same belief, or different emphases of the same basic belief. If libertarianism is a proper theory there is no reason to doubt that it is both morally right and eminently practical. ❑

Notes

1. There is also another school of libertarian thought. Certain libertarians, S.E. Parker, for example, defend liberty on strictly personal, egoist grounds. For them liberty is good because they want it. This rather idiosyncratic school of thought is relatively uninfluential within the libertarian movement at present.
2. Ayn Rand, "The Virtue of Selfishness" (New York: New American Library, 1964) 93. It is impossible to understand the modern libertarian movement without coming to grips with Ayn Rand. Indeed, the development of libertarianism in many ways can be understood as the development of the implications of the nonaggression axiom and reactions of other thinkers to it.

   Although Rand eschewed the radical libertarian theory that the nonaggression axiom implied, those who admired her thinking did not. If no man or group of men has the right to initiate force, how can a group of men form a government, that is, form an institution that claims a monopoly on the use of force within a given area? This sort of thinking was apparent to Rand's followers, and led to the birth of the modern libertarian movement.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
4. Murray N. Rothbard, "For a New Liberty" (New York: Macmillan, 1973) 26. Rothbard acknowledges his agreement with Rand and his debt to her. In "The Passion of Ayn Rand" (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986) Barbara Branden writes: ". . . Rothbard has stated that he 'is in agreement basically with all her philosophy,' and that it was she who convinced him of the theory of natural rights which his books uphold." (p. 413)
5. Ludwig von Mises, "Liberalism" (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand & Co., 1962) 4.

   It should be noted that Mises used the term "liberalism" as it was understood everywhere in the 19th century and is generally understood in Europe today: as a belief in a maximum individual freedom and a minimal state. The term "libertarianism" in its present meaning did not come into common use until the 1960s. Cf. "The Decline of Classical Liberalism: 1860–1940" by Stephen Davies, "Humane Studies Review," 5 (Winter 1987) 1–2, 15–19.
6. "Liberalism," p. 26.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
8. Murray N. Rothbard, "For a New Liberty" (New York: Macmillan, 1973) 23.
9. Ayn Rand, "The Textbook of Americanism," (New York: Nathaniel Branden Institute [n.d.]) 6. Reprinted from "The Vigil," 1946, a publication of The Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, of Beverly Hills, Calif.
10. Rand, "The Virtue of Selfishness," p. 56.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
12. So, at least, says Webster's New World Dictionary.
13. In actual fact, the enforcement need not take the form of punishment by aggressive violence. In primitive hunter-gatherer cultures, the enforcement frequently takes some form of ostracism. The threat of ostracism is usually effective only in a small society where survival and well being are dependent on remaining in good standing of that society. The use of ostracism as punishment in a highly civilized society is rarely effective except within families and cults, where conditions parallel primitive society in many ways.
14. Rand, "The Virtue of Selfishness," p. 93.
15. Ayn Rand, "Atlas Shrugged" (New York: Random House, 1957) 1061.
16. Ethan O. Waters, "Reflections on the Apostasy of Robert Nozick," Liberty (Oct. 1987) 14; and "Libertarianism, Moralism and Absurdity," Liberty (March 1988) 14–15.
17. Rothbard, "For a New Liberty," p. 24.
18. Murray N. Rothbard, "On the Duty of Natural Outlaws to Shut Up," New Libertarian, No. 13 (April 1985) 10–11.

Letters, *from page 6*

way out to Clackamas Town Center. I forget how many billions it is going to cost, but I'd wager it would be cheaper for them to give all the future regular riders a lifetime pass on a taxi of their choice.

I'm not schooled in economics or sociology, but I do have a bit of common sense. I understand the need to preserve farmland, but I would hope that those who own farmland would be better able to make decisions that would continue to put food on our tables and allow us to live in peace with the smells.

Marilyn Burge
Portland, Ore.

May Be

Bruce Ramsey graphically depicts some horrors of poverty ("The Half-Open Door," December 2007), and says they'd follow free immigration. Nonlibertarians think those same horrors would follow laissez faire. Maybe our principles are only true sometimes.

Tom Porter
Reseda, Calif.

If a Body Falls in the Park . . .

I must take exception to Dana Peterson's description and conclusions about Antonioni's film "Blow-Up" ("L'Eclisse: Bergman and Antonioni Die on the Same Day," December 2007). The film is about a photographer (who may or may not have been living a bored life) who takes a series of photos in a park. When he returns to his studio and begins enlarging the prints (the "Blow-up" of the title) he sees a body in one of the photos. He returns to the park and confirms that the body is there. During the course of the film the body disappears and the film and prints from his camera also are stolen. (This is admittedly a truncated description.) In the end there is no evidence that there ever was a body. Without evidence, should the photographer believe that his experience was real? I interpreted this to be another version of the "If a tree falls in the forest" debate. Was anything resolved at the end? Perhaps in the same sense that the sun resolves a fog bank. It just disappears into the air and life goes on.

David Kirkpatrick
Klamath Falls, Ore.

Peterson responds: Mr. Kirkpatick is right. Let's round up the usual suspects for the discussion: Kant, Russell . . . I still hold, however, that

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Reviews

"Mises: The Last Knight of Liberalism," by Jörg Guido Hülsmann. Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007, 1,159 pages.

Life of a Hero

Warren Gibson

If you're going to write a biography of Ludwig von Mises (1881–1973), you have your work cut out for you.

You face a mountain of books, articles, speeches, and correspondence by and about the great libertarian economist and his forebears, contemporaries, disciples, and critics, much of it in German. Because his productive career lasted from the 1880s into the 1960s, you have to be thoroughly grounded in the intellectual and political history of that time, sweeping all the way from Marxism, historicism, and fascism, through Keynesianism, and into the beginnings of monetarism. You must be conversant not just with economics, but with history, sociology, and philosophy, since Mises ranged over all these subjects. You must focus on the political and military events that shaped Austria and its neighbors in the early 20th century, because Mises was personally involved in many of them. You must come to grips with terms and concepts that are central to Mises but unknown outside the Austrian School of economics, of which he was a part — terms such as praxeology, catallactics, thymology, etatism, and *Verstehen*.

Your own prejudices will likely be activated either by Mises' extreme positions or by an occasional belief that he failed to follow through on his own principles. You must try to divine the mental and emotional life of a man who kept his feelings to himself and whose devoted wife very likely took a number of his personal secrets to her grave. Lastly, you must condense and shape your work into something people will want to read.

Jörg Guido Hülsmann has risen to all these challenges and produced "Mises: The Last Knight of Liberalism," a work that is outstanding in several respects, starting with the volume itself. The type face is pleasing, the binding is sturdy, the bibliography is exhaustive: 31 pages, including 73 Mises citations. There are separate subject and name indices, and notes placed where the Lord intended: at the foot of the pages. (While some footnotes are just citations, many are worthwhile amplifications.) Photographs, many never seen before, are sprinkled conveniently through the text, not bunched in the middle.

The table of contents hints at the organization of the work, which can be seen as three different books, any of which could exist on its own, woven together like the strands of a rope. Strand A might be called "Mises the Man," presenting snapshots and stories that illuminate his character. I would call Strand B "The World of Mises," an account of the impact of local and world events on him, and of his role in shaping some of them. Strand C would be "Mises the Theoretician," a summary of the principles of Austrian economics and the epistemological foundation that Mises provided for it.

The movements from strand to strand help make this book quite readable, despite its 1,100-page length. Chapter 21, for example, "The Epistemological Case for Capitalism," is a difficult chapter that demands careful attention, but we get a change of pace in the next chapter as Hülsmann switches back to Strand B with "Fragmentation of the Movement."

Mises the Man

In addition to Margit von Mises' memoir of her husband, "My Years with Ludwig von Mises" (Arlington House, 1976), a small autobiographical volume is in print entitled "Notes and Recollections" by Mises himself (Libertarian Press, 1978). Mises wrote these notes in 1940, the low point of his

life and career, and put them aside with instructions to Margit to preserve them for posthumous publication. Thirdly, Israel Kirzner authored a short intellectual biography in 2001, "Ludwig von Mises: The Man and His Economics" (ISI Books, 2001). Hülsmann recaps information already available in these works and adds considerable new personal material. In so doing, he conveys a more vivid sense of the man than we have had up to now.

He accomplishes this without descending into excessive speculation about Mises' psychology: his devotion to his mother, his long bachelorhood, or the sacrifices of his wife, before and after their marriage. Hülsmann mentions the relationship between Ludwig and his brother Richard, an accomplished mathematician and aerodynamicist. They were never close, but Hülsmann does not uncover any feuds or animosity. He does find it curious that the chapter in Mises' "Human Action" about probability theory makes no mention of Richard's previously published views on the subject, even though the two were in substantial agreement.

There was never any question in Mises' mind that he would serve his country in the Great War — World War I, as we now call it. Unable or unwilling to finagle a desk job in Vienna, he went to the eastern front, where he commanded an artillery company and suffered a painful and lingering injury. We are told that Mises' army buddies nicknamed him *Rotwild* (wild deer) — a name that had nothing to do with politics.

Mises got expert instruction before attempting such activities as tennis, automobile driving, even mountain hiking.

We learn that Mises' intellectual thoroughness spilled over into his recreational life. He got expert instruction before attempting such activities as tennis, automobile driving, even mountain hiking. Yet we also learn that although he liked to drive (he acquired a snappy Ford V8 in 1936) he was a terrible driver. He and Margit were once in a serious automobile accident — fault unspecified.

On a more serious note, the "wild deer's" demeanor sometimes handicapped him. As his student Fritz Machlup put it, "He is usually too reserved and all buttoned up, so to speak . . . He will stick stubbornly to his convictions. Although this is really a merit it sometimes antagonizes people" (367). In a video interview for "The Commanding Heights" (PBS), Milton Friedman chuckles over an incident that took place at the founding meeting of the classical liberal Mont Pelerin Society, where Mises "stormed out of the room, exclaiming, 'You're all a bunch of socialists!'" Friedman adds that the topic under discussion was income redistribution, a concept on which one would expect all libertarians to have similar views. Mises never developed Friedman's ability to "disagree without being disagreeable," and this may partly explain the fact that his influence on the post-war world was much smaller than Friedman's.

Mises' skills as a businessman evidently lagged substantially behind his academic prowess. Thus when he agreed to have publisher Gustav Fischer handle "Socialism," his pathbreaking 500-page treatise, their February 1922 agreement, signed in the midst of Germany's raging hyperinflation, made no specific reference to inflation adjustments. Nevertheless, when the book came out in July 1922, Fischer generously increased his payment to Mises by 50% — to 1,920 marks, then worth about US$38.92! Had he held these marks until October, they would have slipped to about $6.04. Presumably he changed them to Austrian krone, which were managing to hold some of their value against the dollar, but he cannot be said to have profited much from his book (392).

Mises and His World

At its peak, Mises' influence in Austria approached that of Alan Greenspan in America. Although Mises held no government post, his position in the Chamber of Commerce made him, by his own reckoning, Austria's number one economist. Greenspan chose to couch his public statements in "Fedspeak" so as to avoid roiling the markets; Mises, in his anti-inflation campaign of 1919, was "so carefully read that he preferred to publish some of his pieces anonymously." For a time, the Neues Wiener Tagblatt sent a stenographer to his apartment every morning at 8:00 to transcribe articles to be published anonymously in the next day's paper (352).

Hülsmann conveys a more vivid sense of the man than we have had, without descending into excessive speculation about Mises' psychology.

Conditions in Austria following World War I were dire. Strikes and shortages were pandemic. The government was feeding a large portion of the population, especially in Vienna, and paying its bills by running the printing press. Questions of monetary policy had moved out of the academy and onto center stage. Decisions had to made quickly, and the wrong decisions could bring starvation or bloodshed. While Mises continued to write and speak against the evils of inflation, he sometimes felt compelled to support compromises that seem directly contrary to his teachings. Thus in 1919 he resigned himself to printing money as simply the only way to maintain law and order through the winter (344). Hülsmann reports that "in a truly grotesque episode from mid-January 1919, the champion of sound money provided hands-on support for banknote production" by arranging the importation of a number of printing presses for the Austro-Hungarian bank to use in stamping banknotes (347). The reason for this measure was to distinguish them from notes that were circulating outside the greatly shrunken Austria. Outsiders would thus be unable to bring notes into Austria and use them to

drain real resources out of the country.

Hülsmann clearly disapproves of these astonishing episodes, attributing them to Mises' utilitarian social philosophy. But later in 1919, in a confidential memorandum, Mises proposed a radical tactic that would have pleased some of his latter-day anarchist followers. In a desperate tone, he wrote, "Political ideas that have dominated the public mind for decades cannot be refuted through rational arguments. They must run their course in life and cannot collapse otherwise than in great catastrophes." Citizens should "simply ignore the government and make the reform of the monetary system an affair of the country's leading bankers, merchants, and industrialists" (358). Fearing a collapse of the krone, he called on entrepreneurs to seek a credit of 30 million Swiss francs, in small denominations suitable for paying workers and suppliers — knowing full well that this was contrary to Austrian law. (There is no record that this proposal was ever implemented.)

And so it appears that during this time of crisis Mises veered first into opportunism and then toward anarchism. But perhaps we shouldn't be too quick to pass judgment from our comfortable vantage point. Who among us is so "principled" that he might not feel compelled to "compromise" in a crisis situation?

In any event, Mises was unable to arrest the tide of hyperinflation, which lasted until 1922 when a credit was granted by the Allied nations. Perhaps he took some solace in the fact that the Austrian price level at the end of 1922 was "only" 14,000 times the prewar level,* in contrast to Germany where the price level reached a factor of trillions.

For many years, Mises conducted a private seminar for advanced students that met in his office in the Chamber of Commerce. He wholeheartedly supported women students with encouragement and letters of recommendation at a time when barriers to their participation in academic life were just beginning to fall. Many years later, one of them recalled, "I am sure there does not exist a second circle where the intensity, the interest and the intellectual standard of the discussion is as high as it was in the Mises Seminar." Mises' uncompromising standard in favor of classical liberal ideas in a world that was increasingly socialist earned him the moniker *der Liberale*, which we might translate as "Mr. Libertarian."

Mises foresaw the Nazi takeover of Austria and knew that he would be a prime target, partly because of his Jewish descent, but mainly because of his liberal views. He fled to Switzerland, where he secured a good post at the Graduate School of International Relations, later fetching Margit from Vienna and marrying her. But as the Nazis swept over Europe, he began to feel unsafe even in neutral Switzerland. In 1940, he and Margit undertook a harrowing journey by automobile, train, and ship, finally landing in New York, a strange land where he had few contacts and an inadequate command of the language. But at age 60, and with unwavering help from Margit, he pulled himself out of his depression and launched another 25-year period of productivity, during which he published his greatest works, including the monumental "Human Action" (1949).

It is a telling indictment of the state of the American academy that Mises was never able to achieve a regular

*According to the web site of the Austrian National Bank.

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academic appointment in the United States. He did get appointments at New York University (as a visiting professor), at the National Association of Manufacturers, and at the libertarian Foundation for Economic Education as a part-time staff member. None of these provided him with a power base for significant involvement in current affairs. Perhaps the best reception he received in the New World was in Mexico, where he and Margit spent six weeks in 1942. There he received an offer to become the head of the economics departments of two business associations, at a comfortable salary (813). He was sorely tempted but in the end had to say no because of his poor grasp of Spanish as well as the roots he had already put down in New York.

In 1919 Mises resigned himself to printing money as simply the only way to maintain law and order through the winter.

Hülsmann recounts Mises' sometimes stormy friendship with novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand, as documented in Barbara Branden's biography "The Passion of Ayn Rand" (Doubleday, 1986). Mises praised Rand's novel "Atlas Shrugged" as "a cogent analysis of the evils that plague our society," and Rand respected him, in turn, for his intellect and courage. But she abhorred his utilitarian ethics, and he was appalled by the way she treated people who asked her questions. Be that as it may, many students, including this writer, first came to Mises and the other Austrian economists through the institute founded by Rand and her associate Nathaniel Branden, which advertised Mises' books on its list of recommended readings. Hülsmann's dismissal of Rand's Objectivist movement as simply a cult (996 ff.) is disappointing but not surprising, since this was the attitude of Mises' disciple Murray Rothbard and many of his current Mises Institute followers. Both Barbara and Nathaniel Branden freely admit that the New York circle exhibited cult-like behavior, but none of it could be found in the Cleveland Objectivist group to which I once belonged, and probably not in many other groups outside New York. Fortunately, disinterested scholars have begun to analyze and extend Rand's significant achievements, leaving the craziness behind.

If in his years in America Mises had gotten the recognition he deserved, admittance to his seminars would have been reserved for serious academics. But in 1970 anybody, including this reviewer, who was then a graduate student in engineering, could get into a FEE summer seminar at which Mises spoke. I don't remember what he talked about, just the sense that I was in the presence of a very great man, but a man who was tired and discouraged. His voice was low and his facial expression was sullen. At one point he must have seen or imagined someone acting restless in the audience, because he said something like "I know my time is almost up and I will soon finish." Perhaps he was thinking not just of the restless student but also of his coming death. Afterward in the library, he dutifully autographed copies of "Human Action," including mine, but after he had signed a few, George Roche, the director of seminars at FEE, stopped the proceedings, explaining that Mises' "writer gave out." Perhaps the times felt to Mises like the "last night of liberalism." He died three years later.

Mises the Theoretician

Mises secured a place for himself as a top theoretician with the 1912 publication of his "Theorie des Geldes und der Umlaufsmittel." As Hülsmann points out, the title chosen for the English translation, "Theory of Money and Credit," was poor. It should have been "Theory of Money and Fiduciary Media," which, though ponderous, would have conveyed Mises' crucial distinction between money and money certificates, on the one hand, and unbacked fiduciary media on the other. Mises argued that unbacked or partially backed paper money was necessarily unstable and inflationary. This is an issue that splits the present-day Austrian movement, with Rothbard and others insisting that only gold or fully backed certificates are legitimate money, whereas Lawrence White and George Selgin demonstrate that fractionally backed money can arise via "immaculate conception" — without fraud or deception — and that private banks tempted to over-issue unbacked paper will be disciplined by actual or threatened bank runs. (See White, "Free Banking in Britain" [Institute of Economic Affairs, 2nd ed., 1995]; Selgin, "The Theory of Free Banking" [Rowman & Littlefield, 1988].)

A major accomplishment of Mises' book was an integration of monetary theory with the rest of economics. Mises refuted the idea of the neutrality of money — the idea that money is simply a placeholder for other goods and can therefore be explained fully in historical and legal terms. He applied to money the laws of supply and demand, much as they are applied to ordinary goods and services. He also saw that one could not do full justice to monetary theory outside the wider context of economics, although circumstances prevented him from elaborating that context to the extent he would have liked. He foresaw the coming of a world war and knew that academic publishing would cease for the duration, so he got "Theorie des Geldes" into print sooner than he wished. While the book drew considerable notice among German readers, an English translation

A major accomplishment of Mises' book was an integration of monetary theory with the rest of economics.

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did not appear until 1934, when it was swept away by the Keynesian tide.

It may be difficult to appreciate, so many years later, what a bombshell Mises set off with the 1922 publication of his "Socialism." He demonstrated that full socialism is simply impossible, even conceding the best intentions of the socialist planners and the enthusiastic agreement of all the citizens. Because, in essence, under socialism capital goods would not be traded, no real prices for these goods could arise. Economic administrators would therefore be deprived of any capacity to determine how to allocate scarce capital and achieve the results desired. Mises' challenge was taken quite seriously. One reviewer, who "loaded his two reviews of 'Socialism' with invectives against the author," admitted that "economic calculation in terms of marginal utility is not a feature of any particular economic order, but can and must be applied in the communist order as in the capitalist one" (403). Mises was accurate, if perhaps immodest, in assessing the result: "All arguments in favor of the great reform collapsed. From that time on socialists no longer based their hopes upon the power of their arguments but upon the resentment, envy, and hatred of the masses" ("Theory and History," 1957, quoted in Hülsmann 399).

Mises wholeheartedly supported women students at a time when barriers to their participation in academic life were just beginning to fall.

In "Nationalökonomie" Mises realized his dream of publishing a comprehensive treatise on economics. The book appeared in May 1940, "just in time to survive the collapse of its publisher, only to be buried under the avalanche of the war" (759). But this was not the end; Mises prepared a revised English version that was published as "Human Action" in 1949, and that work received far more notice, continuing in print to this day. Hülsmann views "Human Action" as having "completed the project Mises had started in 1912 with his treatise of money," calling the mature Mises "a better monetary theorist than the author of 'Theory of Money and Credit.'" In the later work, Mises emphasizes the demand for money as truly "a demand for cash balances." Hülsmann also points out "Human Action's" more radical analysis of the detrimental effects of monetary expansion as compared to his 1912 analysis, which allowed that monetary expansion "might be needed to accommodate greater growth under plausible circumstances" (786).

Notwithstanding these shifts, Hülsmann's summaries convey a remarkable degree of consistency across the long span of Mises' professional career.

Last Knight of Liberalism

What of Hülsmann's subtitle, "The Last Knight of Liberalism"? Some might say that "liberalism" has been lost to statists and we must fall back on "libertarianism" or "classical liberalism." But "liberalism" mostly retains its classical meaning outside the United States. In this reviewer's opinion, the refusal to concede "liberal" to the statists is worth the cost of occasional misunderstanding.

Others might object that Mises was first and foremost a theorist, so we should call him the "Last Knight of Praxeology," the theory of human action. The phrase would, of course, greatly confuse casual browsers. Yes, Mises' most important contributions were theoretical, and he kept them separate from his political views; nevertheless, they were motivated by a burning passion to preserve the great achievements of Western civilization. Near the end of "Human Action," we read, "It rests with men whether they will make the proper use of the rich treasure with which . . . knowledge provides them or whether they will leave it unused. But if they fail to take the best advantage of it and disregard its teachings and warnings, they will not annul economics; they will stamp out society and the human race" (4th ed., Regnery, 1966, 885). Hülsmann's subtitle is a good one, and his book is a major contribution, one that will inform both newcomers to Mises and veteran students. ❑

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2006

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"There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind," by Antony Flew with Roy Abraham Varghese. HarperOne, 2007, 246 pages.

A Curious Conversion

Leland B. Yeager

Many books tell a tragic story. This book is itself a tragedy.

I eagerly bought Antony Flew's account of his renouncing atheism, expecting an intellectual challenge. With one exception, noted below, I had long admired Flew's keenly argued discussions not only of philosophy and religion but also of economics and politics from a classical-liberal point of view.

Flew now accepts some sort of deism or theism (using sometimes one word, sometimes the other). He accepts "the God of Aristotle" (92), a first cause or prime mover: "[O]nce the work of creation is completed, God leaves the universe subject to the laws of nature, although perhaps sometimes providing a rather distant and detached endorsement of the fundamental principles of justice" (156). God has the attributes of "immutability, immateriality, omnipotence, oneness or indivisibility, perfect goodness and necessary existence," attributes pretty much the same as the Judeo-Christian God (the philosopher David Conway, quoted with approval on page 92; notice the treatment of existence as an attribute). In his own words, Flew accepts "the existence of a self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, and omniscient Being" (155). Here and there he quotes or paraphrases various other theologians' descriptions with apparent respect, not examining them for mutual consistency.

The book's subtitle is inexact: Flew does not tell *how* — or why, either — he became convinced of error in his earlier views. Not a single theistic or anti-atheistic argument in the book looks new to me, nor could it have looked new to the author of "God and Philosophy" (Delta, 1966) and "Theology and Falsification" (his widely reprinted article of 1950). Flew appeals to the old argument from design (or *to* design, as he prefers to call it), now just casually decorated with brief and scattered allusions to advanced scientific findings and remaining mysteries. These include the apparent fine-tuning of the laws and constants of nature, life and its origin and teleological organization, DNA, the Big Bang, and the very existence of the universe. These pieces of evidence "can only be explained in the light of an Intelligence that explains both its own existence and that of the world" (155). But these newly mentioned wonders of the world are of the same type as those already cited in the old argument from design. Flew does not pinpoint *how* he went wrong in previously accepting some and rejecting others of the old arguments about God, nor does he say why he might have changed the weighting accorded to some arguments over others.

What is gained by violating Occam's razor and postulating an Intelligence that mysteriously explains itself? Who, then, created that Intelligence, and so on in an infinite regress? What supposed findings of science point, in particular, to an entity possessing the scarcely mutually consistent characteristics of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic God? It is ironic to cite the still unexplained wonders of reality as grounds for accepting a particular explanation of them. It is a *non*explanation, actually, for vague words about some sort of "ultimate Source" or "infinitely intelligent Mind" explain nothing. It is particularly ironic when the very science that Flew now invokes continues to push back our ignorance of the wonders that impress him and the rest of us. Possibly God (or whatever the best term might be) is intermingled or identical with all the laws and matter-energy of the universe, as pantheism holds. Anyway, it seems irreverent toward our wondrous universe and the challenges facing science to claim easy insight into what they are and how they originated.

Flew paws away at the problem of evil, invoking the old free-will excuse for God. He tries to explain away only human wickedness, quite ignoring natural disasters, painful diseases, and what Tennyson called "Nature, red in tooth and claw."

What is gained by violating Occam's razor and postulating an Intelligence that mysteriously explains itself?

Flew himself recognizes the legitimacy of asking why people some-

times accept dubious doctrines ("God and Philosophy," p. 80, 181–90) or, one might add, curiously change their minds. He distinguishes between two senses of reason for believing something: reason as *grounds* (evidence and argument) and reason as *motive*. Was Stalin Lenin's right-hand man in the revolution of 1917? Historical evidence says not; but during Stalin's tyranny, his subjects had a reason — a motive, prudence — for accepting his claim anyway. Similarly, some people once did and perhaps still do try to believe in Christian doctrines because of the prudential motive of Pascal's Wager.

Flew's own conversion, however, appears not to be a case of prudently "cramming for the finals" (as a believer here in Auburn, Ala., urged an aging atheist to do). Flew is not taking out Pascal's insurance against there being a vengeful God who would terribly punish unbelief; for he says that, as before, he still does not believe in life after death.

I suggest a variant of Flew's second sense of reason — reason as motive — for holding an implausible belief: facts about the believer himself or his life. Flew may have already lost serious interest in theological issues decades ago, as at least one episode suggests. Yet curiously, he now expresses satisfaction (67) at the thousands who attended "The Warren-Flew Debate on the Existence of God" at North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, Sept. 20–23, 1976. This debate provides the exception, noted above, to my admiration for Flew's earlier work. To judge from the transcript, which I happened to read and take notes on years ago, Flew gave a sloppy performance, as if he did not consider his opponent and his audience worthy of much preparation. He waived options to use visual materials and to address written questions to his opponent. On the other hand, Dr. Thomas Warren, a Church of Christ minister (who appeared to reject evolution and accept creationism), did exploit these options and did submit questions, to which Flew responded lamely. Flew passed up opportunities to expose Warren's debating tricks, including pretentious but flawed formal logic. He wandered, dragging in bits of irrelevant and questionable erudition. No wonder that National Christian Press decided to publish the book (Jonesboro, Ark., 1977).

As this 1976 episode suggests, inattention or forgetfulness might enter into explaining belief. Alluding to critics' references to his "advanced age," Flew himself implies (2) his being the target of *argumentum ad hominem*. He was born on Feb. 11, 1923. In the interest of full disclosure, I should confess to being within two years as old as he.

I also confess to reading Mark Oppenheimer's largely biographical diagnosis of Flew, "The Turning of an Atheist," New York Times Magazine, Nov. 4, 2007.*

Other articles about Flew's recent life and associations include Mark Stuertz, "God in the Details," Dallas Observer News, May 3, 2007,† and Richard Carrier, "Antony Flew Considers God . . . Sort Of," The Secular Web Kiosk, 2004, with updates as recent as November 2007.‡

Despite these articles, I have until now respected the polite convention that Flew wrote his new book. He acknowledges writing "with" a coauthor, which is a standard sign of ghostwriting to some extent. (Another sign of unprofessionalism in a supposedly serious book is lack of an index.)

*http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/magazine/04Flew-t.html

†http://www.dallasobserver.com/2007-05-03/news/god-in-the-details/full

‡http://www.secweb.org/index.aspx?action=viewAsset&id=369

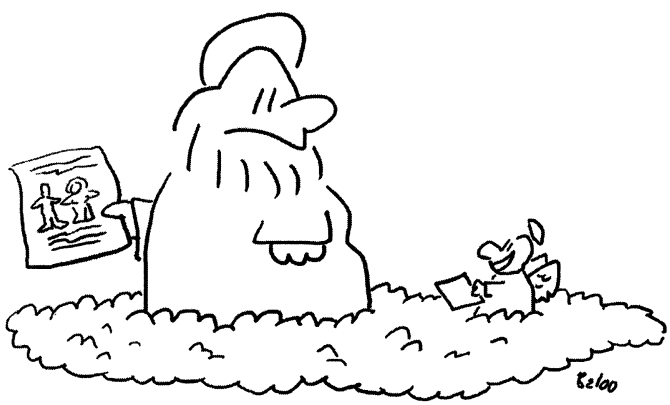
According to internet sources, Flew's collaborator, Roy Abraham Varghese, is a technical consultant who has a hobby of running a religious think tank and writing pro-Christian books. He wrote the 18-page preface and also Appendix A, a critique of the "new atheism" of five recent authors.

Flew says that, as before, he does not believe in life after death.

In Appendix B, Bishop N.T. Wright, a New Testament scholar, explains God's self-revelation through Jesus. An introduction to it in Flew's name says that "the Christian religion is the one religion that most clearly deserves to be honored and respected, whether or not its claim to be a divine revelation is true."

Further evidence on who wrote what could be found, I suppose, by statistical study of Flew's and Varghese's writing styles in their current and previous works.

A few religionists of dubious intellectual integrity have apparently latched onto Flew's academic fame and reputation for their own purposes, sullying his career toward its end. That is why I called the book a tragedy. ❑



"I found a way to save a bundle on this project — we can recycle 98% of the chimp DNA!"

Medianotes

Not at all — A new play by Mark Twain? Hasn't he been dead for nearly a century? Well, yes. But "Is He Dead?" (directed by Michael Blakemore; Lyceum Theater, Broadway) is indeed a new play by America's original humorist, rediscovered in a UC Berkeley filing cabinet five years ago by Twain scholar Shelley Fisher Fishkin and adapted for Broadway by playwright David Ives. The play is based loosely on real-life artist Jean-Francois Millet ("The Gleaners," "The Angelus") whose works enjoyed a bidding frenzy after his death.

Starring Tony winner Norbert Leo Butz as the starving artist whose friends and colleagues are about to be thrown to the wolves by a dastardly landlord, this play combines the best of melodrama and farce, including mistaken identities, unrequited love, bawdy humor, a coffin in the parlor, and a lead character in drag.

When a potential customer withdraws his offer to purchase one of Millet's paintings after learning that the artist is still alive, Millet and his friends concoct a plan to stage his terminal illness and eventual death in order to drive his prices up. Butz consequently appears in most of the play as his "twin sister" Daisy Tillou, who is comforted by Millet's grieving girlfriend and courted by both the dastardly landlord and the father of his girlfriend. Yes, mayhem ensues.

A picketer proclaiming "abortion is murder" does not sway Juno, but the information that her 12-week-old fetus already has fingernails does.

Pacing and confusion are everything in farce; good farce is not so much directed as choreographed. Even the funniest script will fall flat if the production does not gather speed and energy as the play progresses — and this is not the funniest script. Fortunately, however, the timing of Michael Blakemore's direction is close to perfect. At the play's climax Butz has stashed 2 suitors, 2 girlfriends, 3 royal visitors, and a police inspector in various side rooms, with satisfyingly frenetic opening and slamming of doors as he tries to keep each from learning about the other. Butz, who proved in "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" that he will stop at nothing for a good laugh, leads an excellent cast.

Bankrupt and worried about his own legacy when he wrote this play in 1898, Twain would probably be pleased to see the box office receipts of this production, whose biggest draw is the fame of its dead playwright. See it while the original cast is still in the production.

— Jo Ann Skousen

Surprised by charm — At Christmas my 9-year-old daughter, Kate, told me that she very much wanted to see three movies: "The Water Horse," "The Golden Compass," and "Enchanted." Being interested in cryptozoology, I was keen on "The Water Horse." "The Golden Compass" looked promising, filled with drama and action. The prospect of seeing "Enchanted," however, left me rather cold; Disney, I'm afraid, just doesn't agree with me. I had it in mind to let her mother or an auntie take her to that one.

While on a trip to Boston a few days later, I proposed to Kate that we take in a movie. She chose "Enchanted" (directed by Kevin Lima; Disney, 2007, 107 minutes). Resigned to 90-plus minutes of ennui, I put down 16 bucks for the matinee.

What I saw was a charming story full of drollery and whimsy, with a bit of self-parody thrown in. And there was no need to visit the concession stand, for a delicious piece of eye candy (Amy Adams) filled the screen.

This is Ms. Adams' movie. We see her first as an animated character, a fairy princess-to-be named Giselle, who is pushed down a well at the behest of a jealous virago (Susan Sarandon), the stepmother of the fairyland's handsome but dim prince. She emerges (now in the flesh) in Times Square, where she falls into the arms of Robert, a lawyer and single dad (nicely underplayed by Patrick Dempsey). The evolving relationship between the two requires multiple suspensions of disbelief — but there's too much fun along the way for us to care.

Two musical numbers, both superbly choreographed and one containing some nice animation to boot, put the movie into overdrive. It rarely slows down from there, and when it does, one simply switches to feasting one's eyes on the lovely Ms. Adams.

A love triangle develops between Robert, Giselle, and her prince (James Marsden), who like her is transformed from cartoon to flesh by traveling down the well to New York. A further complication is the presence of Robert's fiancée (Idina Menzel). All is resolved in an utterly over-the-top conclusion involving a costume ball, Ms. Sarandon as a dragon, and a scene reminiscent of the climax of "King Kong." But no matter. Love triumphs as it should, and everyone (except the dragon) lives, we must presume, happily ever after.

Of particular note is the film's subtle send-up of Disney movies in general, and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" in particular. For a Disneyphobe like me, this made the movie easier to take. The wonderful performance of Ms. Adams did the rest.

"Enchanted" is fine for children as young as seven. It should not be underrated as a date movie. The guy who takes his girl to it will score high on both the romance and sensitivity scales, and is likely to receive an appropriate reward.

— Jon Harrison

Blueprint for tough situations — "Juno" (directed by Jason Reitman; Fox Searchlight, 2007, 96 minutes), a film about a 16-year-old girl who must decide what to do when she

becomes pregnant, is timely and topical. More importantly, however, the film is witty, engaging, and emotionally moving without being preachy or political.

The film opens with Juno (Ellen Page) taking her third home pregnancy test of the day, hoping each time that the results of the previous tests have been wrong. Typical of a 16-year-old, when the truth of the pink plus sets in, she turns first to her friends rather than to her parents for advice and heads for the most convenient solution, the local abortion clinic. A picketer in front of the clinic proclaiming "abortion is murder" does not sway her, but the information that her 12-week-old fetus already has fingernails does. She flees the clinic and turns to the next best option: the classified ads in the PennySaver. There, next to ads for puppies and cockatoos, she finds a couple (Jason Bateman and Jennifer Garner) seeking to adopt a baby.

When Juno finally tells her parents (J.K. Simmons and the marvelous Allison Janney) about her pregnancy, they react wonderfully — surprised, yes, and dismayed, but without anger or recrimination. Like the rest of the film, the scene is witty, the comic timing spot on, the undercurrent of affection solid. They listen to her plans and support her decision, as good parents in a bad situation should do. On occasion I have had college students come to me with serious problems, including two who were pregnant and one who had AIDS. Each time I urged them to tell their parents, and each time they were amazed to discover how supportive, loving, and nonjudgmental their parents turned out to be. This film is a blueprint for how to handle a tough situation.

I also appreciate the film's liberal approach to choosing an adoptive family, challenging the idea that adoptive parents must be icons of "wholesome spirituality." Why should adoptive parents be held to a higher standard of perfection than natural parents are? Juno is edgy, creative, and musical, and she lives with her father and stepmother. She wants parents for her child who are also edgy and creative, and is drawn to the adoptive father's interest in alternative music and campy horror movies.

The film also challenges the current trend of open adoptions, whereby the natural mother maintains an interest and connection with the child. "I'd be happy to just pop the thing out and hand it to you right now," she tells the adoptive parents when they suggest she might want letters and pictures throughout the child's life. Juno recognizes that she is merely the conduit, and they are the parents. Still, no matter how logical and practical the decision is to give a child up for adoption, it is the hardest one a girl will ever make. I was touched by Juno's father's words of

Notes on Contributors

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

David T. Beito is an associate professor of history at the University of Alabama, and author of *Taxpayers in Revolt* and *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State.*

Jayant Bhandari is a writer based in Vancouver.

R.W. Bradford (1947–2005) was the founding editor of *Liberty.*

Doug Casey is a contributing editor of *Liberty.*

Scott Chambers is a cartoonist living in California.

Stephen Cox is a professor of literature at the University of California San Diego and the author of *The Woman and the Dynamo: Isabel Paterson and the Idea of America.*

Andrew Ferguson is managing editor of *Liberty.*

Warren Gibson teaches economics at San Jose State University and mechanical engineering at Santa Clara University.

Jon Harrison lives and writes in Vermont.

Gary Jason is an adjunct professor of philosophy and a contributing editor of *Liberty.* He is the author of *Critical Thinking: Developing an Effective World View* and *Introduction to Logic.*

Richard Kostelanetz has written many books about contemporary art and literature.

Ross Levatter is a physician in Phoenix.

Randal O'Toole is an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute.

Patrick Quealy may be found in his natural habitat, a Seattle coffee shop.

Bruce Ramsey is a journalist in Seattle.

Ted Roberts' humor appears in newspapers around the U.S. and is heard on NPR.

Jane S. Shaw is executive vice president of the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy.

Jo Ann Skousen is entertainment editor of *Liberty.* She lives in New York.

Mark Skousen holds the Benjamin Franklin Chair of Management at Grantham University and is the author of *The Big Three in Economics: Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and John Maynard Keynes.*

Tim Slagle is a standup comedian living in Chicago.

Stephen M. Smith lives in Fort Worth, Texas, where he holds down a corporate job in order to support his blogging habit.

Jim Walsh is an assistant editor of *Liberty.*

Leland B. Yeager is Ludwig von Mises Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Economics at Auburn University.

comfort in the delivery room: "You'll be here again someday, on your own terms."

Despite all the wise decisions and sensitive parenting portrayed in this film, it is not likely to be embraced by the Religious Right. The casual conversations about sex, full of crude slang, are off-putting at first, and the sardonic, wisecracking personality of the title character seems more appropriate to a worldly college student than a high school junior who has gotten pregnant from her first sexual encounter. And that's a shame, because once you get past the casual vulgarity of the first ten minutes, the film settles into becoming a gem. We've had enough glorification of single parenting; Juno is a sparkling, savvy, self-assured, and noble role model whose footsteps are well worth following. — Jo Ann Skousen

Aiming for redemption —

Theologically, the word "atonement" is often separated into its parts — at-one-ment — in order to demonstrate that the concept means to become united (at one) with God. But this handy wordplay oversimplifies the mystical concept of atonement by focusing on the outcome rather than the process of becoming whole again. It trivializes the oft-painful relationship between transgression and the search for solace, and overlooks the transgressor's role in trying to make amends for an injury that may be beyond repair.

In the film "Atonement" (directed by Joe Wright; Working Title Films/ Universal, 2007, 123 minutes), young Briony Tallis (Saoirse Ronan), who fancies herself a writer, happens to see a series of events between her older sister Cecilia (Keira Knightley) and Robbie Turner (James McAvoy), a man on whom Briony has an adolescent crush. Motivated by jealousy, confusion, and an overactive imagination, she accuses Robbie of rape. Once an aspiring doctor, Robbie is sent to prison and from there to the front lines of World War II; Cecilia leaves home; Briony abandons her opportunity for college to become a nurse; and both families are irreparably shattered.

Occasionally the story is hard to follow, especially in the war scenes and in an odd conversation between the older Briony (Romola Garai) and a wounded French soldier. I suspect that these are areas where the story was streamlined in the interest of time, and that reading the book by Ian McEwan on which the film is based would clear up the confusion.

All of the actors perform well, the way one expects actors to perform in a British period film. Vanessa Redgrave delivers a knockout performance that seems to have come from deep within her own regrets over past transgressions. But it is the often unsung artists, led by supervising art director Ian Bailie, who make this film soar.

Like many period pieces, "Atonement" begins slowly, luxuriating in the gorgeous north England setting and the handsomely appointed country mansion — castle, really — where the Tallis family resides. A film based on bringing a secret to light, "Atonement" is exquisitely lit, both in its interior and exterior scenes. Camera angles and panoramas seem to have been meticulously planned and executed (by cinematographer Seamus McGarvey), adding to the mystique of the story, which is often told and then told again, first from the incomplete perspective of the naive and imaginative eyewitness and then backing up to fill in details that exonerate the young lovers.

Perhaps the most creative artistry is the lush, romantic soundtrack by Dario Marionelli, who incorporates the story into his music in imaginative ways. As the film opens he turns Briony's typewriter into a percussive instrument, returning to its motif throughout the film. When a distraught Mrs. Turner (Brenda Blethyn) pounds on the police car that is taking her son Robbie to jail, Marionelli uses her pounding to form the driving rhythm of the music. During one orchestral passage a harmonica is highlighted, just before we see a soldier in the distance, playing the harmonica. In another, a piano key is struck repeatedly, ending with a "plunk" as a petulant Briony pulls the string of the family piano. Each intrusion is an unexpected delight, drawing attention to the music without distracting from the film.

As a nurse five years later, Briony seems determined to atone for her sin of false witness by caring for the wounded soldiers who are shipped back to London. Their shattered bodies stand in for the lives she has shattered. Musically the typewriter motif begins to sound like bullets, metaphorically communicating that words are weapons that can wound and even kill. The ending is a powerful statement about atonement — reparation, making amends, seeking wholeness and at-one-ment when the injured party has been broken beyond repair.

— Jo Ann Skousen

Letters, *from page 42*

discussions about the film (and all his films for that matter) are open to many interpretations wherein one often does not make another one wrong. For me, Vanessa Redgrave's character's visit to the apartment to steal the film is evidence enough that there was foul play in the park and if David Hemmings' photographer was not passive he could have still gone to the police after the film was stolen. To a large degree, I saw the film as thriller that never gets going. Put differently, for me the tree did fall, now what?

In Passing

Mark Rand I wasn't aware you had any interest in politics or knowledge. I sometimes read the rag at a Borders or B&N store. Not worth the $4.00 although I did enjoy the Kennedy article by Harrison ("The Continuing Story of the Kennedys," November 2007).

Richard Villar
Topeka, Kan.

Letters to the editor

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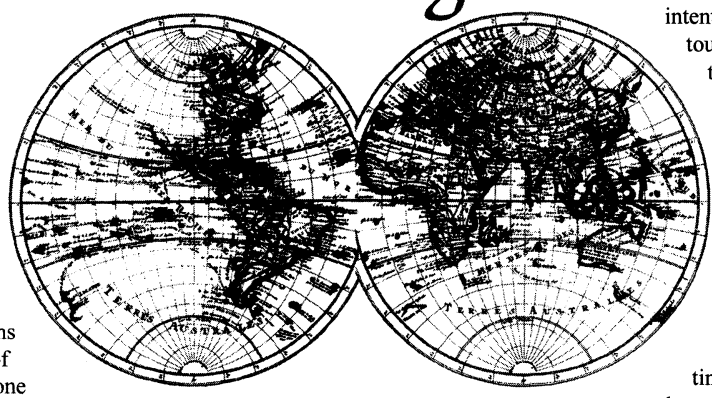


New Zealand

Middle Earth says "No fat chicks," according to the *Daily Mail:*

A British woman planning to start a new life with her husband in New Zealand has been banned from entering the country because she is too fat.

Rowan Trezise, 33, has been left behind in England while her husband Richie, 35, has already made the move down under leaving her desperately trying to lose weight. When the couple first tried to gain entry to the country they were told that they were both overweight and were a potential burden on the health care system.

St. Charles, Mo.

Movement toward a more family-friendly saloon, detailed in the *Tulsa World:*

The town of St. Charles is considering a bill that would ban swearing in bars, along with table-dancing, drinking contests, and profane music. City officials contend the bill is needed to keep rowdy crowds under control because the historic downtown area gets a little too lively on some nights.

Eretz Yisrael

Mitzvot minus one, noted in the *Jerusalem Post:*

A group of Israeli environmentalists encouraged Jews around the world to light at least one less candle this past Hanukkah to help the environment. The founders of the Green Hanukkah campaign found that every candle that burns completely produces 15 grams of carbon dioxide. If an estimated one million Israeli households light for eight days, they said, it would do significant damage to the atmosphere.

"The campaign calls for Jews around the world to save the last candle and save the planet, so we won't need another miracle," said Liad Ortar, the campaign's cofounder.

North Pole

Diktats for Saint Nick, rounded up by the *Boston Herald:*

America's top doc has said that Santa Claus should slim down. "It is really important that the people who kids look up to as role models are in good shape, eating well and getting exercise. It is absolutely critical," acting U.S. Surgeon General Rear Adm. Steven K. Galson said in an interview after a presentation on obesity at the Boston Children's Museum.

The Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas agrees with the acting surgeon general that Santa is just too fat. The organization has suggested its 800 members lose weight in time for its July convention to "set an example."

Donna Rheaume, spokeswoman for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, added: "We would recommend people leave [Santa] healthier snacks like a nice apple or carrot and celery sticks, which have an added benefit because they are tasty for his reindeer, too."

Monroe, Wash.

Innovation in criminal rehabilitation, noted in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer:*

As they lie in their 12-by-8 foot cells, gazing up through narrow windows at a tiny slice of sky, the criminals in solitary confinement at Monroe Correctional Complex, the state's largest prison, will be using low-energy lights to read by and collected rainwater to flush their toilets.

Theirs is to be the first prison unit in the state to be certified as "green" by the U.S. Green Building Council, and officials at the Department of Corrections believe it may be the first such cellblock in the nation.

Delta, Colo.

Lamentable outbreak of negative campaigning, detailed in the *Denver Post:*

A Delta school board candidate says he still plans to run for office after an anonymous letter to the district revealed he was a registered sex offender.

Dale Haag said he was convicted in 1987 of misdemeanor assault with intent to commit sexual abuse after he touched a 19-year-old developmentally disabled woman at a Doon, Iowa group home. "I pinched her in the boob and patted her on the butt. It was a flirtatious situation. She knew what she was doing," Haag said. "It was blown way out of proportion."

The case was marginal against him at the time, he said. It was overblown because at the time he was on parole for first-degree manslaughter after he set a fire at a halfway house that killed two women.

Haag said the release of information is suspicious. "It's like [my opponent] had this little thing in his back pocket and he's using it now to blow me out of the water," he said. "I'll tell you up front, I've got zero to hide."

Minneapolis, Minn.

New tourist attraction in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, from the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune:*

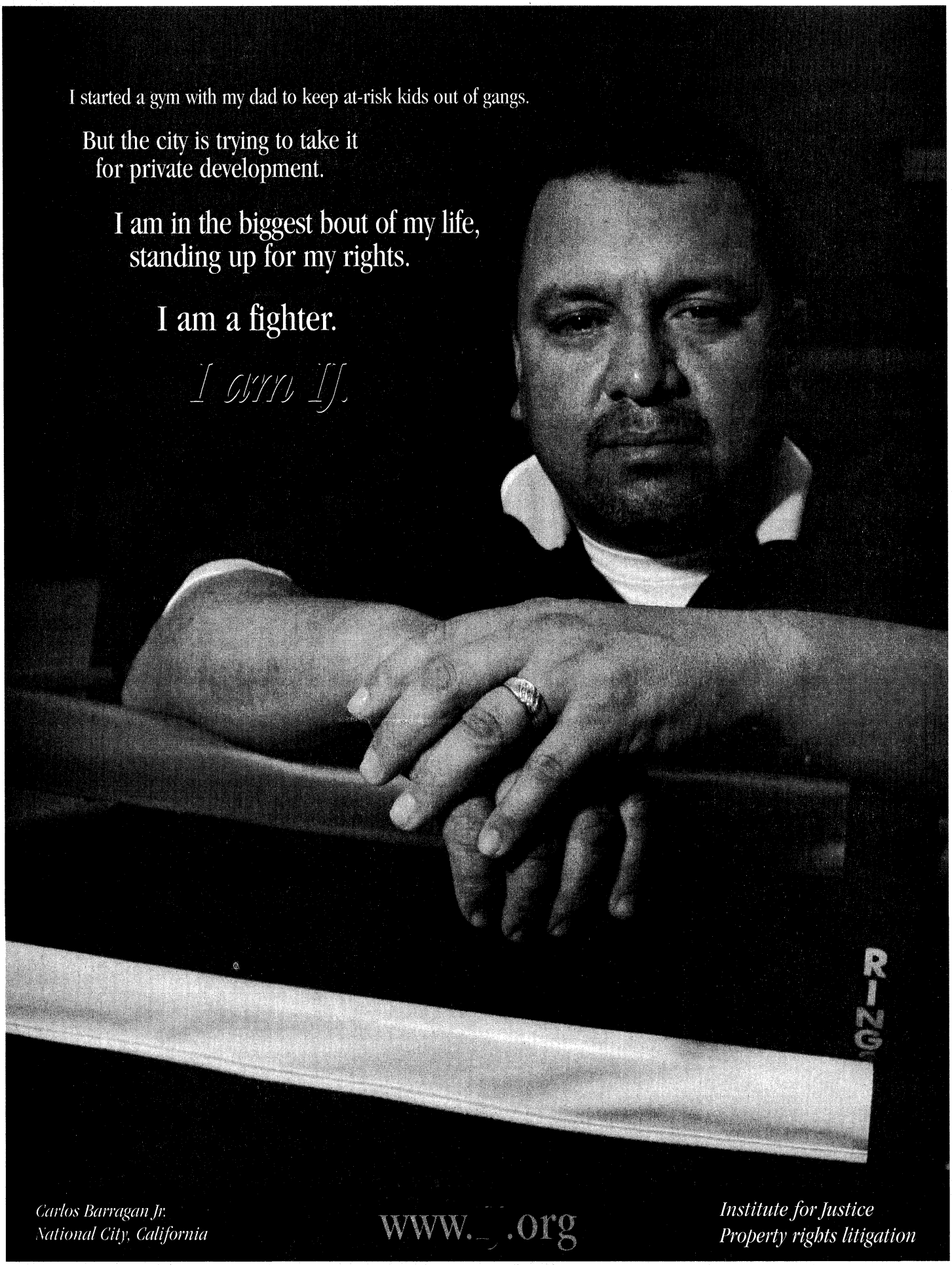
When tourists ask for the bathroom in the Minneapolis airport lately, it's usually not because they have to go. It's because they want to see the stall made famous by Sen. Larry Craig's arrest in a sex sting.

Karen Evans, information specialist at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, said she had been asked directions to the new tourist attraction four times. "People are taking pictures," she said.

On their way to Guatemala, Jon and Sally Westby of Minneapolis made a visit. "We had to just stop and check out the bathroom," Sally said. "In fact, it's Jon's second time — he was here last week already."

Special thanks to Russell Garrard and Bart Cooper for contributions to Terra Incognita.

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


I started a gym with my dad to keep at-risk kids out of gangs.
But the city is trying to take it for private development.
I am in the biggest bout of my life, standing up for my rights.
I am a fighter.
I am IJ.
RING
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