

Keep Rootin' For Putin

KEEP ROOTIN' FOR PUTIN

**ESTABLISHMENT PUNDITS AND THE TWILIGHT
OF AMERICAN COMPETENCE**

BARRETT BROWN

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Designed by Nikki Loehr
nikkiloehr.com

*For my mother, to whom I owe everything and more.
No acknowledgement will ever suffice.*

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FOREWORD

FIRST CAME ACROSS BARRETT BROWN in a 2009 issue of *Vanity Fair*, where Barrett had written an article called “Thomas Friedman’s Five Worst Predictions.” The article perfectly showcased what I subsequently learned were the Barrett Brown trademarks: iconoclastic insight; hilarious wit, ranging from the dry to the outrageous; a broad and deep frame of reference; incisive argument; complete fearlessness about offending anyone deserving of offense; an abiding sense of citizenship and patriotism.

I was knocked out by the article—both its substance, and, even rarer among political writers, its style. I sent Barrett an e-mail telling him how much I had enjoyed it. A conversation ensued, during which Barrett asked if I’d be interested in reading the manuscript of his forthcoming book, with a chapter apiece on Friedman and bloviators like him. I told him it would be my pleasure. And it was—the book is a knockout, a hilarious, inarguable skewering of the self-indulgent empty-headedness and hypocrisy of Friedman and various other members of establishment punditry, the strength of whose brands somehow mysteriously manages to outpace the wreckage of all their mistaken judgments.

I told Barrett at length how much I enjoyed the book. He made a few changes, then sent me the revised manuscript and asked me to safeguard it in case anything untoward happened to him. I thought he was being melodramatic.

He was not.

In 2009, Barrett founded Project PM, “dedicated to investigating private government contractors working in the secretive fields of cyber-security, intelligence, and surveillance.” He was particularly instrumental in using documents obtained by the hacktivist collective Anonymous to expose secret collaboration between the government and various contractors. The covert factions Barrett’s work threatened are powerful, and fought back. In 2012, Barrett was arrested and now faces 100 years in prison—yes, you read that correctly—allegedly for threatening an FBI agent, concealing evidence, and linking to a website that contained stolen credit card numbers. The allegations themselves are sufficiently preposterous, and the threatened sentence sufficiently draconian, to make it clear that Barrett, like William Binney, Thomas Drake, Daniel Ellsberg, John Kiriakou, Chelsea Manning, Jesselyn Radack, Edward Snowden, Aaron Swartz, Thomas Tamm, and many others, is in fact being persecuted as an example to anyone else who would dare challenge America’s Deep State.

If you agree with Martin Luther King’s dictum that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, and if you believe that threats to journalists like Barrett are a threat to the dignity and freedom of all citizens, there’s something you can do to fight back. Get this book. Read it. Tell others about it. All proceeds go to Barrett’s legal defense fund. You’re not just standing for Barrett. You’re standing for the First Amendment and for the values of freedom and Constitutional government that all Americans should hold dear.

In trying to destroy Barrett Brown, the powers-that-be are sending all of us a message. Let’s send a message back.

Barry Eisler
July 4, 2013

KEEP ROOTIN' FOR PUTIN

INTRODUCTION: A WORD ALBUM, LOL

“A firm rule must be imposed upon our nation before it destroys itself. The United States needs some theology and geometry, some taste and decency. I suspect that we are teetering on the edge of the abyss.”

– John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*

IN 2002, the Pulitzer Prize in the category of commentary was awarded to *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman. In 2004, Friedman was made a member of the Pulitzer’s Board of Directors. Our nation is killing itself from within.

Every nation kills itself from within. Each nation’s golden age occurred some 50 years prior, and every such golden age could have gone on forever had it not been brought to an end by some misguided contingent of its own countrymen. A nation’s political enemies are always in control of the state, if only covertly or indirectly; in the modern age, they’ve branched out into the media for good measure.

Crime, you’ll recall, spiraled out of control in the ’70s, increasing exponentially until the federal government ceased to function altogether. Wealthy citizens moved into self-contained enclaves defended by private mercenary armies, while the poor organized themselves into communal military tribes, some seizing territory within the ruined cities, some taking to the highways in order that they might launch raids on the fortified hamlets into which rural Americans had organized themselves out of desperation.

On another occasion, the proliferation of nuclear power plants throughout the United States resulted in the accidental destruction of several major cities. Likewise, the proliferation of evolutionary theory and the decline of Biblical literalism result-

ed in the inevitable rise of a global government, itself led by a New Age tyrant who demands to be worshiped alongside some unspecified mother goddess.

The sexual revolution led to an epidemic of lesbianism and infanticide. Welfare reform led just as inevitably to mass starvation in the inner cities. The New Deal continued to snowball until 90 percent of the U.S. workforce was digging trenches and putting on Eugene O'Neill plays under the Works Progress Administration. Mega-corporations replaced most remaining national governments in the late '90s. Everyone is now a crack addict.

Eight hundred thousand years from now, the human race will be divided into two species—one shall live on the surface, and the other beneath the ground.

To the extent that we look back and examine the predictions of our predecessors, we find ourselves confronted with a great deal of nonsense. This is a fine thing, as nonsense is wholly important. In studying nonsense, we find certain common characteristics that we may use to identify further nonsense of the contemporary sort, the nonsense that plagues us just now. We may determine, for instance, that many of the foolish predictions made in the past are quite clearly the result of ideology. If one opposes nuclear power, nuclear power will lead to disaster. If one opposes the theory of evolution, the theory of evolution will lead to immortality. If one opposes the sexual revolution, let us ignore him.

If we were to divide the causes of poor predictions into two categories, we would probably make ideology one of them. The other category would be that of extrapolation, the act of making determinations about the future based on the trends that have reached us here in the present by way of the past and which, one tends to assume, will continue their growth into the future.

When I was a kid, I came across an old copy of *National Geographic* from 1949 or thereabouts. An article, which had been entitled “Your Future World of Tomorrow” or some such stupid fucking thing in accordance with the low-concept style employed by our ancestors, detailed several technological innovations that would soon come to revolutionize our lives. One of

these would be the practice of filling rockets with express mail and then shooting them across the Atlantic, to be retrieved by either Europeans or Americans as the case may be. Note that at the time of this prediction, the transatlantic cable had already been in existence for nearly 100 years. On the other hand, a lot of rockets had been fired lately. So perhaps even more would soon be fired, except with mail inside of them.

The problem with extrapolation is that it is entirely necessary. When we drive a car—I guess it has two steering wheels—we drive a certain speed in a certain direction. A tree is straight ahead. We extrapolate that, if we are to continue on our present course, we will hit that tree and then the cops will come and they'll probably find what we've got stashed in the glove compartment. But having extrapolated this tree-hitting scenario from our present course, we will probably just turn the car a bit so that we are no longer headed for this problematic tree. Perhaps we will get back on the highway, where there are considerably fewer trees to hit, but at any rate we have used the art of extrapolation to avoid hitting the tree and are more likely to make it to our destination, which is Enrique's dealer's crib.

If some pedestrian is observing the car as it is headed towards the tree, he might very well make an extrapolation of his own—that, because the vehicle has been heading in a particular direction, this trend will continue until the car hits the tree. This is not the best bet to make, as the car's driver almost invariably turns before hitting that object. In this case, the pedestrian forgot to allow for another extrapolation—that just because cars rarely hit things, *this* car is not likely to hit anything either.

Let us not conclude from the failures of past predictions that we ought not to make any of our own; we must simply learn from the errors of the past and properly apply the data of the present. Cars do sometimes hit things, after all, and this need happen only once for everyone inside to be killed.

The purpose of this book is to convince the American reader that our republic is in the midst of an extraordinary structural crisis that threatens to cripple the nation and end its reign as the world's foremost superpower.



“So, DIG THIS.”

Clearly, CNN anchorperson Kyra Phillips was about to lay something heavy on the viewing public.

“A man was bulldozing a bog in central Ireland the other day when he noticed something unusual in the freshly turned soil. Turns out he’d unearthed an early medieval treasure: an ancient book of Psalms that experts date to the years 800 to 1000. Experts say it will take years of painstaking work to document and preserve this book, but eventually it will go on public display. Now here’s the kicker. The book, about 20 pages of Latin script, was allegedly found opened to Psalm 83. Now, if you’re a scholar, as you know, Psalm 83: ‘God hears complaints that other nations are plotting to wipe out the name of Israel.’”

This would have been a hell of a kicker if it were true; the dapper president of Iran had just recently made a campaign promise to “wipe Israel off the map,” and thus, said psalm would have neatly applied to the international situation in 2006. It would have also neatly applied to the international situation in 1948, 1967, 1972, and most especially to the time in which Psalm 83 was actually written, when Israel was engaged in perpetual hostilities with a great number of neighboring tribes.

But as it turned out, the psalm to which the miraculous manuscript was open—no doubt due to the divine intervention of Yahweh Himself—had nothing to do with complaints, plots, or the wiping out of anyone’s moniker, as Psalm 83 by the Latin reckoning of that period actually corresponded to Psalm 84 of the Greek reckoning from which our modern psalms are taken. And so the psalm in question actually concerned an annual Hebrew pilgrimage and how swell it was to undertake. This was explained in due course by the archaeologists involved, but the various news outlets had already reported the more newsworthy Israel angle—newsworthy in the modern sense, not in the sense of it actually being true—and if The Reader is familiar with the way these things work, The Reader will consequently be unsurprised that few corrections were printed or reported.

In the dynamics of cable news, a miracle is a miracle whether it’s a miracle or not, and the Incident of Psalm 83

made for a swell segue into Kyra Phillips' live interview with a modern-day prophet and another modern-day prophet's co-author. The latter was Jerry Jenkins, who collaborated with Evangelical minister Tim LaHaye in the ominously successful *Left Behind* series. The former was the increasingly popular Joel C. Rosenberg, lone author of several bestselling prophecy-oriented techno-thrillers and whose own contribution to the ominousness of the times lies not so much in the success of his books among the sort of people one might expect to read them, but rather in the success of his books with the sort of people who run the country.

For his part, Jenkins was either completely stunned or not stunned at all by the psalm discovery, which he called "amazing," "incredible," and "not terribly surprising" all within the space of 20 seconds, further adding that "it would probably have to be told in fiction form because people are going to find it hard to believe"; this sentence being literally true insomuch as that an incident that did not actually occur would indeed have to be told in fiction form, but also being literally false insomuch as that people would not find such a thing hard to believe because people will believe anything. Take for example the old myth that CNN is a respectable source for news instead of a degenerate entertainment outlet where anchorpersons say things like, "from books to blogs to the back pews, the buzz is all about the End Times," which is exactly what Kyra Phillips had said just a moment before.

Rosenberg, meanwhile, saw an opening with which to move onto his two favorite topics: the imminent invasion of Israel by Russia, and Rosenberg's own mysterious ability to predict things that have yet to happen, such as the imminent invasion of Israel by Russia. "Yes, people are interested [in bullshit Hebrew prophecy], because the rebirth of Israel, the fact that Jews are living in the Holy Land today, that is a Bible prophecy. When Iran, Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Russia, they begin to form an alliance against Israel, those are the prophecies from Ezekiel 38 and 39," Rosenberg said, pretending for the sake of his own argument that such an alliance actually exists between those nations and that the Old Testament Book of

Ezekiel predicted it. “That’s what I’m basing my novels on. I have been invited to the White House, Capitol Hill. Members of Congress, Israelis, Arab leaders all want to understand the Middle East through the—through the lens of biblical prophecies. I’m writing these novels that keep seeming to come true, but we are seeing Bible prophecy, bit by bit, unfold in the Middle East right now.”

One can understand why Rosenberg’s insight into world affairs would be so sought after around the White House and Capitol Hill; the ability to write books “that keep seeming to come true” would be an incredible asset to the national intelligence infrastructure of any geopolitical entity, particularly one as troubled as our own. In fact, it’s a wonder that the NSA is permitting Rosenberg to write anything at all; as things stand now, any Iranian intelligence agent could show up at LAX, amble into a gift shop, and pick up a copy of one of these popular books “that keep seeming to come true,” thus gleaning invaluable information about the not-so-distant future without having to resort to the rigors of human intelligence, electronic intelligence, geospatial intelligence, or—my personal favorite—foreign instrumentation signals intelligence. Likewise, any Chinese spy could download a bootlegged copy of one of these books for his communist masters, and without paying Rosenberg a dime in royalties. Shouldn’t the U.S. intelligence community declare Rosenberg a national resource and whisk him off to some undisclosed location? The answer, of course, is no, because Rosenberg cannot really predict the future, as we will see.

The next obvious question, then, concerns how Rosenberg manages to write “these novels that keep seeming to come true” if he is incapable of doing so via some sort of supernatural shortcut, such as reading the Book of Ezekiel. There are two potential answers. The first potential answer is that Rosenberg—who worked as a “communications consultant” for various political and corporate figures before beginning his career as a novelist—is a keen geopolitical observer, and is thus able to extrapolate from current and past events in order to hypothesize probable future events. The second potential answer is that Rosenberg cannot do any such thing, and that “these novels that keep seeming to come true” only “seem” to

come true in the sense that fortune cookie messages “seem” to come true if one disregards the fortune cookie messages that don’t “seem” to come true at all, such as the one I got recently that said, “Romance will soon come your way,” which is extraordinarily doubtful in light of the fact that I’ve had the same case of athlete’s foot for years. I actually sort of cultivate it because when the respective areas between your toes start to itch and you rub them, oh, man, it feels amazing. I feel sorry for the vast majority of humanity for not having thought of this like I have.

But let’s hear Rosenberg—or at least whoever writes his marketing copy—out. According to his website, our prophetic friend has quite a track record of predicting the not-so-distant future. “The first page of his first novel—*The Last Jihad*—puts you inside the cockpit of a hijacked jet, coming in on a kamikaze attack into an American city, which leads to a war with Saddam Hussein over weapons of mass destruction,” it says. “Yet it was written before 9/11, long before the actual war with Iraq.” That actually sounds pretty impressive. I mean, that’s exactly what ended up happening!

Let’s examine that last sentence, the one that ends “long before the actual war with Iraq.” A more accurate way of putting this would have been, “long *after* the *first* war with Iraq, not quite as long after the establishment of the No Fly Zones in two large sections of Iraq, which consequently put U.S. and Iraqi forces into a decade-long series of shooting incidents, and not very long at all after Operation Desert Fox, which had at then point been the most recent military conflict with Iraq, and which was also fought over weapons of mass destruction.” That’s somewhat better, although not quite as impressive from a marketing standpoint, which is to say that it’s now true.

Still, though, Rosenberg did indeed write up a scenario in which we’d fight yet another undeclared war against Iraq over WMDs, which certainly ended up happening. Did he predict that 150,000 U.S. troops would be deployed to Iraq, topple Saddam, occupy the country, and find out that there aren’t any WMDs after all? Because that would be pretty impressive if he did. But he didn’t. Instead, his book details how Saddam tries

to blow up the U.S. with ICBMs launched from his super-secret ICBM launchers, at which point the U.S. gets all huffy and nukes Baghdad and Tikrit. My memory is a little hazy, but I don't remember any of that actually happening.

There's also the matter of Rosenberg's hijacked airplane, the one that comes in "on a kamikaze attack on an American city." In *The Last Jihad*, said plane crashes into the presidential motorcade in an attempt to assassinate the commander-in-chief. Well, that didn't happen, either, but surely the fact that Rosenberg used a plane crashing into an American city as a plot element makes him an extraordinarily important person whose views should be sought out by the White House, Capitol Hill, and Kyra Phillips. But what if he had written a scenario in which terrorists attempt to crash a commercial airliner into the World Trade Center itself, and said scenario had been released in narrative form just a few months *before* 9/11? That would be more impressive still, right?

In fact, that scenario was indeed written, and said scenario was indeed released in narrative form just a few months before 9/11. But it wasn't written by Rosenberg, or by any other modern prophet. Rather, it was an episode of the short-lived *X-Files* spin-off called *The Lone Gunmen*. I don't know who the writer was, but I'm pretty sure he hasn't been invited to Capitol Hill or the White House or even CNN. But why not? Coming up with a scenario in which such a significant event happens before it actually happens is, as we've determined, a valuable skill, perhaps even more valuable than Rosenberg's ability to predict a few things that sort of happen along with a bunch of shit that will never happen at all. As Condoleezza Rice put it during her 2002 testimony before the 9/11 Commission, "No one could have imagined them taking a plane, slamming it into the Pentagon . . . into the World Trade Center, using a plane as a missile." No one but the guy who wrote that one show with those guys from that other show, that is.

I'm kidding; plenty of people aside from that guy who wrote that one show with those guys from that other show imagined that such a thing could happen, and Condoleezza Rice is, of course, a liar. In 1993, the Pentagon itself commissioned a study

in which the possibility of airplanes being used as weapons against domestic U.S. targets was looked into; similar reports on the topic conducted by various other agencies would follow over the next few years. In 1995, an Islamic terrorist plot to crash 11 planes into various world landmarks was foiled by international authorities. In 1998, the Federal Aviation Administration warned airlines to be on the alert for hijackings by followers of bin Laden, and a number of reports that circulated through the intelligence community over the next two years warned that said followers might try to crash airliners into skyscrapers. And in 1999, Columbine assailants Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold wrote out their initial plan to shoot up their school, blow up the building, escape to the airport, hijack a plane, and crash it into New York City, but only got around to doing the first part. Had they refrained from doing any of it and instead simply described that last event in a book, they probably could have looked forward to lucrative post-9/11 careers as novelists/cable news mainstays, insomuch as that they would have been “writing these books that keep seeming to come true” to the same extent that Rosenberg does.

Ah, but Rosenberg has written other books as well. Back to his website: “His second thriller—*The Last Days*—opens with the death of Yasser Arafat and a U.S. diplomatic convoy ambushed in Gaza. Six days before *The Last Days* was published in hardcover, a U.S. diplomatic convoy was ambushed in Gaza. Thirteen months later, Yasser Arafat died.”

That a U.S. diplomatic convoy might be ambushed in Gaza is hardly a tough bet; the reason that it was a U.S. diplomatic convoy in the first place, and not a U.S. diplomatic bunch-of-cars-driving-around-individually-without-a-care-in-the-world-through-a-very-dangerous-region-where-anti-U.S.-sentiment-is-high-and-everyone-is-armed, is that Gaza is a very dangerous region where anti-U.S. sentiment is high and everyone is armed. For instance, I looked up the search terms “convoy ambush Gaza” on Google News just now, and the first thing that comes up is the headline “ Hamas ambushes convoy of U.S. weapons intended for Abbas agencies,” relating to an incident that occurred on May 15th of 2007, that being two weeks previous

to the time of this particular writing and a few weeks after I compiled my notes for this particular diatribe (yeah, I procrastinate). Oh, man! Here I was, writing and thinking about convoys being shot up in Gaza, and here was this convoy being shot up in Gaza! How is that I manage to write these books “that keep seeming to come true”? Someone should invite me to fucking Capitol Hill and ask me about it. I’ll tell them that I figured it out by interpreting the Norse Ragnarök myth in a literal fashion. Or maybe I’ll just tell them the truth, which is that convoys get shot up in the Palestinian territories all the time, and that if you write a big long book in which things get shot in the Middle East or Middle Eastern terrorists blow something up—which is to say, a big long book filled with things that are constantly happening—a couple of these plot points are going to sort-of-kind-of-come-true-at-some-point, and then everyone will think you’re neat. I probably won’t tell them that, though. I’ll just say it’s Ragnarök. I can’t wait to launch my career writing Ragnarök-based techno-thrillers.

In fairness to Rosenberg, his plot points don’t simply involve things that have already happened several times or things that have almost happened several times or things that are happening right now; occasionally, he goes out on a limb by describing events that can only happen once, such as the death of Yasser Arafat mentioned above. The Reader will no doubt recall that Arafat did indeed die of undetermined health complications in 2004, having reached the age of 75 in a region where life expectancy is a bit lower than that and also after having been in and out of hospitals for several years, which is generally the sort of situation that leads one to die. And so it would have been pretty easy to predict in 2003 that Arafat might very well pass away in 2003 or 2004 from a combination of disease and plain old age.

But as easy as such a prediction might have been to make, it was still too difficult for our prophetic friend Rosenberg; *The Last Days* opens with Yasser Arafat being blown up in a suicide blast along with the U.S. secretary of state . . . in 2010. So, although Rosenberg does indeed predict the death of Arafat, whereas many people less astute than himself had no doubt predicted that Arafat might live forever, the actual death of

Arafat, coming seven years before his fictional techno-thriller death in 2010, actually made Rosenberg's own scenario not more but less accurate and, in fact, impossible. Nonetheless, this is one of a handful of plot points that Rosenberg uses as an example of how he's managed to write "these books that keep seeming to come true."

Well, that's good enough for Kyra Phillips. Back at the CNN interview, Rosenberg was demonstrating his expertise on matters Middle Eastern by explaining that many Arabs don't like Israelis and would like to see them conquered and occupied. "Saddam Hussein, or Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, or Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah—they're all drunk with the dream of capturing Jerusalem," our friend informs us, although it's somewhat doubtful that the capture of Jerusalem was at the forefront of Mr. Hussein's mind when this interview was conducted in July of 2006, seeing as how he was at the time living in a jail cell and being tried by a bunch of Shiites for killing a bunch of Shiites. But the larger point is indeed valid, so I'll stop interrupting for a second here. "That's what [Rosenberg's poorly written novel *The Copper Scroll*] is about, which is about this battle—this intense battle—to liquidate the Jewish people and liberate Jerusalem," Rosenberg continued. "I mean, are we seeing that happen? It's hard not to say that we are. That's why I've gotten invited over to the CIA, and the White House, and Congress," he reminded us again, later noting for good measure that "Bible prophecy" is "fairly remarkable intelligence. And that's why my novels keep coming true," which they don't. He continues that "they have this feeling of coming true," which is true in the fortune-cookie sense described earlier. He mentions that "a million copies have sold," which is simultaneously true, annoying, and unsurprising. "They are coming true bit by bit, day by day," by which he apparently means that Saddam will come back to life and fire his nonexistent nuclear missiles at the U.S., which will in turn nuke Baghdad and Tikrit; that Yasser Arafat will come back to life and live long enough to be blown up by a suicide bomber in 2010; and that a convoy will be shot up in Palestine. In fairness to Rosenberg, one of those things is indeed likely to happen. Again.

But on the question of the imminent destruction of Israel, Phillips—in accordance with established CNN procedure—wanted a second opinion from a guy who totally agrees with the guy who gave the first opinion.

“Jerry, what do you think about what Joel wrote, about watching the Russian-Iranian alliance seeking to wipe out Israel?”

“Well, I find it very fascinating,” Jenkins replied, “and of course, Joel is a real geopolitical watcher.”

★ ★ ★

THE FIRST GREAT PROPHET OF THE 20TH CENTURY was Herbert W. Armstrong, a former advertising copywriter who dispensed his dispensationalism by way of a radio program called *World of Tomorrow*, a monthly magazine entitled *Plain Truth*, and the occasional booklet, and whose second career as a harbinger of doom spanned more than 50 years. Like most advertising copywriters of his time, Armstrong had nothing but contempt for the written form of the English language. In his popular 1956 pamphlet entitled *1975 in Prophecy!*, Armstrong’s jihad against subdued English communication begins on the title page and continues without pause; let The Reader be warned that this is only the first of many inappropriate exclamation points used therein. More to the point, Armstrong here pioneers the art of modern eschatology and serves as a shining example for those who would come later, largely by being wrong.

1975 begins with an acknowledgment of the general sense of optimism for which the post-war U.S. is often remembered, and concedes that man’s technological feats will indeed usher in a new era of convenience. “You’ll no longer bother taking a bath in a tub or shower,” Armstrong tells his contemporaries. “You’ll take an effortless and quicker *waterless* bath by using supersonic waves!” An exciting prospect, to be sure; from the beginning of time, man has yearned to be free of his bubble baths. But instead of going on to describe how the drudgeries of adolescent love will soon be performed by robots, thus leaving young people with more free time in which to labor at the robot

factories, Armstrong warns us that our budding, supersonic way of life is already threatened by a familiar enemy: the Germans. This may seem counter-intuitive; one would think that no other race would be more inclined to leave undisrupted a world in which love and leisure are soon to be sacrificed on the altar of robot efficiency. Nonetheless, the signs of the times were present for all to see, if only one knew where to look.

It seemed, for instance, that the Krauts were already protecting themselves against the elements. One picture of Berlin is captioned, "Notice MODERN apartment building—a common sight in the NEW Germany." That these NEW Germans were disinclined to replace their bombed-out dwellings with reproductions of 11th-century Crusader fortresses, opting instead to build 20th-century apartments in the 20th century, would probably have ranked pretty low on most people's lists of alarming German behavior, even bearing in mind that such a list would, at that point in history, be pretty fucking long. But there was more to be worried about, said Armstrong. "Already Nazis are in many *key* positions—in German industry—in German education—in the new German ARMY!" To be sure, the concept of a new German ARMY is quite a bit more alarming than the concept of a new German PRE-FAB CONDOMINIUM. And in addition to what Armstrong lists here, Nazis already occupied "*key*" positions in the American rocket program, the feds having by this point made pets of many of the more useful fascists by way of Project Paperclip. With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that nothing particularly bad came of any of this. Armstrong, though, was supposed to have possessed the benefit of foresight.

Nonetheless, the Germans were clearly preparing for something. "They plan to strike their *first blow*," Armstrong continues, "NOT at France or Poland in Europe, but with hydrogen bombs by surprise attack on the centers of AMERICAN INDUSTRY!" Had I been writing this sentence, I would have probably been inclined to put "hydrogen bombs" in all caps and just left "American industry" with conventional lettering; incidentally, the "hydrogen bombs" in question are elsewhere referred to as "Hydrogen Bombs" and "hydrogen-bombs." Any-

way, the resourceful Krauts were conspiring not only to blow up Flint, Michigan with unconventional weaponry, but also to unite Europe under the inevitable Fourth Reich—which in turn would be led by the nefarious Antichrist. But who? “At a certain moment”—by which Armstrong apparently means “an uncertain moment,” since the moment in question is not cited with any certainty at all—“the new LEADER of this European combine will suddenly appear in the public eye. He’s already behind the scenes—in action! But the world does not yet recognize him! He still works under cover,” even to the extent that such an accomplished futurist as Armstrong himself had yet to identify him, although he does venture a guess. “Already I have warned radio audiences to *watch* TITO.” Anyone who followed Armstrong’s advice would have been occasionally amused by the Yugoslav dictator’s wacky antics, but otherwise disappointed with his failure to unite the Greater European Combine under an apocalyptic, hydrogen bomb-tossing regime. One might also wonder why all these meticulous Nazis would be inclined to put a Slavic untermensch in charge of their hard-won Aryan shadow empire, which seems like an oversight.

But Armstrong’s most stunning prediction is that not all of the problems of tomorrow will be caused by Europeans, as had been the case in the recent past; Americans will soon be to blame as well. “Our peoples have ignored God’s agricultural laws,” he notes. “Not all the land has been permitted to rest the seventh year.” Although largely forgotten today, the failure of American agriculturalists to follow Old Testament farming guidelines was once akin to homosexual nuptials in its allegedly mortal threat to our national viability. The collective failure to follow these gastronomic guidelines, Armstrong knew, would result in a major famine that would strike the U.S. “probably between 1965 and 1972.” The imminence of this catastrophe was quite plainly evident even back in 1956; as the ongoing de-Yahwehification of our soil continued apace, the nation’s “food factories are removing much of what minerals and vitamins remain—while a new profit-making vitamin industry deludes the people into believing they can obtain these precious elements from pills and capsules purchased in drug stores and ‘health

food' stores!" If only these misguided nutritionists had gotten into something legitimate, like the supersonic bath industry.

The rest of *1975* consists of what has become fairly standard Christian End Times spiel inasmuch as that the Antichrist briefly takes over the world, most of which is eventually blown up. Armstrong's text does deviate from the norm in that instead of inviting the reader to accept Christ into his or her heart and then put all trust in Him, he invites the reader to accept Christ into his or her heart and then await further instructions from Armstrong, who has an idea about what might be some good places to lie low for a while; unlike most of his modern-day contemporaries, Armstrong does not subscribe to the concept of the pre-Tribulation Rapture, which is to spirit away the world's Bible-believing Christians before all the bad shit goes down. Also somewhat unique to Armstrong is the charming admonition printed on the final page: "This booklet is exceedingly brief and condensed. The reader is advised to read it a second time. This disclosure is so amazing, so different from the common conception, you probably did not really grasp it all the first reading."

Aside from such minor novelties, Armstrong is a fundamentally typical specimen of the professional prophet inasmuch as that he possesses the one attribute common to all of them, which is persistence, persistence having been Armstrong's strongest characteristic, stronger even than his penchant for exclamation points, which was very strong indeed. This is to Armstrong's credit; in matters of prophecy, persistence is what separates the men from the boys, or, rather, what separates the men from the crazy old men who think they can divine the future. If you or I had predicted in 1941 that Hitler would eventually take over the planet as the "beast of Revelation," as Armstrong had done before later moving on to Tito, and if Hitler ended up dead four years after this prediction, as Hitler did, you or I would probably have given up right then and there and gone into real estate or something. Not Armstrong, though. Armstrong kept at it for 40 more years.

Like real estate, prophecy is a crowded field, and Armstrong eventually came to face just as much competition as you and I

are going to come up against when we go into business together doing land flips in Southern California. Billionaire faith healer Benny Hinn, for instance, has dozens of failed prophecies under his belt, ranging from the wacky (1989 prediction that all of the nation's gays are going to be killed by "fire" no later than 1995; perhaps he meant that they would be "thrilled" by "Fire Island") to the not-so-wacky-yet-unfulfilled-nonetheless (another 1989 prediction that Fidel Castro would die in the '90s). Ditto with Pat Robertson, who predicted that the apocalypse would occur in 1982, and then again in 1984. Luckily, it didn't, and thus Robertson was able to run for the GOP presidential nomination in 1988—that being the same year in which an engineer named Robert Faid wrote a book called *Gorbachev! Has the Real Antichrist Come?*, the title of which sort of makes it sound as if he's trying to get the Russian premier's attention and then ask him his opinion on the matter, but the text of which, of course, posits Gorbachev himself as the Antichrist. In *666: The Final Warning*, a fellow named Gary Blevins proposes that the Antichrist could very well be Ronald Reagan; Blevins wrote this in 1990, two years after Reagan had already left the White House, so one has to give him some credit for going out on a limb. The very prolific author Yisrayl Hawkins predicted that nuclear war would occur on September 12, 2006; when this didn't turn out to be the case, he decided that such a war had simply been "conceived" on that date. As of this writing, the world's water has yet to break.

One of the more financially successful of these modern prophets was Edgar Whisenant, who appears to have sold something on the order of four million copies of his 1988 book, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Occur in 1988*, in which he puts the event at sometime between September 11th and September 13th of that otherwise uneventful year. Then, on the 14th, he changed his prediction to the 15th. Then, October 3rd. Then he wrote another book called *89 Reasons Why the Rapture will Occur in 1989*; I would imagine that the extra reason had some thing to do with 1988 having been ruled out by process of elimination. When the world made it to 1990 unscathed, Whisenant wisely decided that his particular brand of prophecy might work better in a periodical format, and so he began putting out

a new publication entitled *Final Shout—Rapture Report 1990*. The next year, it was called *Final Shout—Rapture Report 1991*. This went on for several years, but what's truly unusual is that it didn't go on forever. Whisenant's eventual obscurity in the face of failed predictions is the exception, not the rule, to the usual career arc of the modern Evangelical prophet, who may generally depend on a reliable income stream regardless of whether or not any of his predictions actually hit the mark. To be fair, this phenomenon isn't limited to the Evangelical world, and in fact often applies to the realm of mundane, secular prophets, which is why William Kristol still has his own magazine.

★ ★ ★

WE SEE THAT THE VARIOUS great religious prophets of the last century were both perpetually wrong in their predictions and perpetually successful in selling more of them even after the earlier ones had already proven to be wrong. What we shall soon see is that the most respected and influential columnists of the last decade work in a similar fashion. That is the crisis with which this book is concerned—that, and the greater crisis, which will almost certainly follow as a result.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN

THE SOVIET UNION officially ceased to exist on New Year's Eve of 1991, replaced in large part by the Russian Federation. Such a transition as this was without precedent, although the country itself was still overflowing with precedent, most of it terrible.

In December of 2001, Thomas Friedman took a trip to Moscow in order that the American citizenry might be better informed regarding the nation with which it had previously been locked into a half-century struggle that had ended millions of lives and threatened a billion more. The resulting column began with two observations; it seemed that “sushi bars are opening all over (yes, from borscht to Big Macs to California-Kremlin rolls in one decade!), and so many people have cars now that traffic is permanently snarled.”

One could have perhaps ascribed such growth to the 1998 devaluation of the ruble, several years of significant increases in the price of oil and other Russian exports, or to the economic reforms that had been spearheaded largely by former Prime Minister Primakov a few years prior to Friedman's writing, but such things as those lack a certain thematic oomph. The Russians, Friedman explained, had finally gotten themselves a leader worth having in the transformative person of Vladimir Putin. “He's not a tougher Mikhail Gorbachev, or a more sober

Boris Yeltsin,” our columnist told us then. “He is Russia’s first Deng Xiaoping—Mao’s pragmatic successor who first told the Chinese that ‘to get rich is glorious’ and put in place the modernizing reforms to do it.” If one was not already convinced that Putin is what Friedman said him to be, one had only to read the words that Putin would himself have written if Friedman were writing them for him, which is exactly what Friedman did:

That is Mr. Putin’s basic message to Russians: ‘For a decade, we’ve tried every bad idea, from default to devaluation to shock therapy. Now there’s only one idea left: passing real reform legislation so we can get real investment to build a real modern economy. Because in this world, without a real economic foundation, you’re nothing. So we’re going to focus now on the only line that matters—the line for money.’

Having expressed the Russian president’s views and intentions for him, *The New York Times* columnist was perhaps in the best position to summarize the significance of the fictional monologue he had just composed. And so he did that, too: “This is Putinism: From Das Kapital to DOScapital.”

It is fine to know such things or at least believe them, but faith without works is dead. Friedman therefore ends his column with the following call to action: “So keep rootin’ for Putin—and hope that he makes it to the front of Russia’s last line.”

★ ★ ★

ON NEW YEAR’S EVE OF 1999, Boris Yelstin suddenly resigned, thereby elevating Vladimir Putin to the presidency of the Russian Federation. Within hours, Putin had signed into law his first decree, which protected Yeltsin and members of his family from any and all corruption probes.

Earlier that year, Yelstin had dismissed the nation’s most highly placed prosecutor, Yuri Skuratov, who himself had been investigating Yelstin and others close to him regarding various allegations of corruption. For instance, \$600,000 had made it into the credit card accounts of the president’s two daughters, having been put there by a Swedish firm that had previously won a lucrative government contract and thereafter had its

offices raided by Swedish law enforcement.

A few days after the sacking, Russian state television ran a video clip of a man resembling Skuratov in bed with a pair of young whores. The following month, a press conference was held in which it was announced that the post-KGB intelligence agency, the FSB, had run an expert analysis on the tape and determined the man to indeed be the nation's former top prosecutor; it was also alleged that the prostitutes had been provided by leading figures of the Russian mafia. The press conference was presided over by two men: Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin and FSB chief Vladimir Putin.

On June 6th of that same year, Moscow-based journalist Jan Blomgren reported that top Kremlin leaders were planning to carry out a series of bombings in Moscow that would be attributed to Chechen terrorists.

On August 9th, Putin was elevated to one of the three First Deputy Prime Ministerships that existed under Yeltsin, who let it be known that he intended Putin to eventually succeed him. A week later, Putin was elevated again, this time to the position of prime minister. Yevgeny Primakov, the extraordinarily popular and seemingly incorruptible former prime minister whom Yeltsin had fired from that position the previous May, was widely seen as the favorite to win the upcoming presidential election. In contrast, a major poll showed Putin receiving about 2 percent of the vote.

On September 9th, an explosion originating from the ground floor of an apartment building in Moscow killed 94 people and injured several hundred others. An anonymous call to the Russian news agency Interfax characterized the strike as "our response to air strikes against peaceful villages in Chechnya and Dagestan;" the latter republic had been invaded by a small force of Islamist fighters led by Chechen militant and political figure Shamil Basayev during the previous month, prompting a successful military response by Russian forces. The apartment bombing was immediately attributed to Chechen terrorists.

On September 13th, another Moscow apartment was hit by a similar bomb, and caused even greater casualties than the first bombing. Soon thereafter, Gennadiy Seleznyov, speaker of

the Duma, interrupted the legislative body's proceedings after having been handed a note by a man who was later identified as being a member of the FSB; he announced that he had just been informed of another massive explosion that had destroyed a portion of an apartment building in Volgodonsk. No such attack had actually occurred.

On September 16th, another massive explosion destroyed a portion of an apartment building in Volgodonsk.

On September 22nd, residents of an apartment building in Ryazan called local police after noticing suspicious activity by three individuals who had arrived in a car with a partly concealed license plate. A bomb squad discovered and diffused an explosive device, which their gas sniffing equipment identified as employing hexagen, the same rare explosive used in the previous blasts. The surrounding area was evacuated for the evening; agents of the FSB arrived to pick up the explosives. On the following morning, government spokespersons announced that the Ryazan police had successfully prevented a terrorist attack.

Later in the day, police located the suspects' car, which had Moscow plates. Meanwhile, a long-distance telephone operator contacted police after overhearing a conversation in which the caller reported that local cops were sweeping the city; the voice on the other line provided the following advice: "Split up and each of you make your own way out." The number that had been called, it was discovered, was to the FSB offices in Moscow.

The three suspects were found and arrested within hours. All three of them were in possession of cards indicating their status as employees of the FSB, and all were soon released on orders from Moscow. The FSB announced that the foiled attack had in fact merely been a test conducted in order to determine the readiness of local investigators and congratulated the Ryazan police force for having passed with flying colors. Spokespersons for that agency claimed that the bags, now in FSB possession, had been filled only with sugar and dismissed the initial police tests indicating the presence of hexagen as an equipment malfunction.

On October 1st, Putin announced that Russian forces stationed in and around Dagestan had entered into Chechnya in

an attempt to establish a buffer zone north of the Terek River by which to prevent further terrorist attacks originating from terrorists based in that country. As Russian attention came to focus more on the perceived military triumphs that would follow, and as Putin came to be most closely associated with those triumphs, the prime minister's popularity skyrocketed. Parliamentary elections in December saw major gains for those parties with whom Putin had publicly associated himself.

A few days after Putin's sudden elevation, the U.K.-based newspaper called *The Independent* published excerpts from an interview with Sergei Stepashin in which the former interior minister and one-time prime minister—the same fellow who had presided over the sex tape press conference with Putin back in April—revealed that the plan to invade Chechnya “had been worked out in March” by key Kremlin figures including himself.

After easily winning the March 2000 presidential election, Putin set to work reorganizing Russia's institutions. He proposed that the Federal Council be “reformed” in order to provide himself with direct control of it, a move he described as being necessary due to widespread corruption within that governing body (Putin was now concerned with corruption). In May of 2000, he successfully ended the independence of the nation's semi-autonomous state-level entities by dividing them into seven regional jurisdictions, each presided over in turn by one of his own appointees. By the end of the year, he had also managed to gain effective control over all three national television networks.

In December of 2001, Thomas Friedman traveled to Moscow and reported back that sushi restaurants had sprung up across the city and that more people seemed to own cars these days. He ascribed this economic resurgence to “Putinism.”



THOMAS FRIEDMAN IS AMONG the most respected and widely read American pundits working today, which is to say that he is among the most influential. His books crowd the bestseller lists. His lectures are much sought out and attended by the economic elite of every city on which he descends. If one goes home for Thanksgiving and waits around long enough, one will hear him praised

by both elderly old Republicans and elderly old Democrats.

Friedman's 2003 bestseller *Longitudes and Attitudes*—which is called that—begins, reasonably enough, with an introduction. The introduction is entitled, “Introduction: A Word Album.” You've probably heard of a photo album before, but what's all this about a word album?

The columnist is happy to explain; the book is a composite of columns that he wrote mostly in 2001 and 2002, followed by a great deal of previously unpublished notes from a similar time frame. “My hope is that this collection and diary will constitute a ‘word album’ for the September 11th experience,” he writes. “There are many photo albums that people will collect to remind themselves, their children, or their grandchildren what it was like to experience 9/11. These columns and this diary are an attempt to capture and preserve in words, rather than pictures, some of those same emotions.”

This is the mentality of Friedman and his readership—that it would be reasonable to compose a personal photo album about September 11th and maybe keep it in a special drawer.



CONTEMPT FOR THE MEDIA is now ubiquitous but largely misdirected to the extent that these criticisms are based on the view of the media as some sort of monolithic entity.

The news media is the product of a million individuals, each subject to a million impulses. The cable TV news producer in the pink scarf doesn't understand what's to be debated on this morning's program and doesn't care; she's in the green room talking to another girl from guest booking about the latter's old boyfriend and the former's pink scarf. The freelancer on deadline need not get the feature right if he can just get it done before the girl he's seeing arrives with a bottle of vodka. The publisher lives in the shadow of the father who bequeathed to him the most iconic paper in America; he knows that many see the paper's recent failures as deriving in part from his own; he knows what's said about him in the newsroom; he will prove his worth and his dynamism, he thinks to himself, when he gives William Kristol a column on the op-ed page. Maybe that was too specific.

There is also, of course, the consumer. The woman who subscribes to *The New York Times* may or may not read the op-ed page, which is to say that she may or may not contribute to the paper's profitability—and thus its continued existence—based on what appears in that section. If she does read it, she is probably unaware that her favorite columnist has been demonstrably wrong about many of the most important issues facing both the U.S. and the world at large. The columnist's errors have been pointed out by several bloggers, but she has never heard of them, and at any rate does not bother with blogs as she subscribes to *The New York Times*, which is a very respected outlet and has been around for well over a century, whereas these blogs seem to have come out of nowhere. The columnist, she knows, has won several Pulitzers, has written a handful of bestselling books, is forever traveling to some far-off place. She has formed her views on foreign policy in large part from his writings as well as from the writings of other, similarly respected journalists, and she votes accordingly.

When systems develop under a free society, no one is minding the store. Things happen because they happen, and things do not necessarily happen because they ought to, but rather because they do. The journalist is promoted to columnist, the consumer finds the columns to her liking, the columnist becomes more prominent, the publisher wants columnists of prominence, the editor is disinclined to cross the publisher and is most likely an idiot himself, the columnist writes more books, the consumer buys them, the columnist's prominence increases, and at some point we have entered into a situation whereby it is to the advantage of the publisher, the editor, and of course the columnist to maintain the status quo. Whether the columnist deserves any prominence whatsoever does not necessarily come up, particularly after such point as he reaches a critical mass of notoriety. Once a pundit is made, he is rarely unmade.

★ ★ ★

THOMAS FRIEDMAN IS FOREVER CALLING THINGS THINGS. He introduces his readers to the concept of 21st-century trade thusly: "These global markets are made up of millions of investors

moving money around the world with a click of a mouse. I call them the Electronic Herd, and this herd gathers in key global financial centers—such as Wall Street, Hong Kong, London, and Frankfurt—which I call the Supermarkets.” He elsewhere informs us that he is “a big believer in the idea of the super-story, the notion that we all carry around with us a big lens, a big framework, through which we look at the world, order events, and decide what is important and what is not.”

Friedman is correct that it is wholly necessary to conceptualize our data into understandable frameworks in order that we might better understand it. But the framework into which Friedman has forced the world is almost entirely dependent on wordplay, on convenient structural similarities between unrelated terminology, on rhymes and sayings. In 2000, the columnist composed a “super-story” regarding Colin Powell, whose nomination for secretary of state was expected to be confirmed later in the week.

One way to think about Mr. Powell is this:

He spent thirty-five years of his life with America Onduty, as a military officer. But for the past two years he’s been associated with America Online, as a member of the AOL corporate board. So which perspective will Mr. Powell bring to his job as Secretary of State—the perspective he gleaned with America Onduty during the cold war or the perspective he gleaned with America Online in the post-Cold War?

No serious discussion of Powell’s record or policies follows; no new information is provided; it is never acknowledged that perhaps Powell is capable of thinking of the world in both the terms of a military officer and the terms of an information-age corporate advisory board member even though Powell has clearly served as both of these things. After all, Friedman has already coined the term America Onduty, contrasted it with the term America Online, and provided some allegedly clever distinction between the two mentalities represented thereby. We are informed, for instance, that those who fall under the category of ‘America Onduty’ enjoy the film *A Few Good Men* and see the world in terms of walls and nation states, because,

you see, a character in that very film delivered some line to that effect and it seems to have made an impression on Friedman. Those associated with the 'America Online' mentality, by contrast, enjoy the film *You've Got Mail* because such people as these understand that the world is now integrated, and that the receiving of e-mail is a wonderful metaphor for the relatively recent dynamic whereby things occurring elsewhere now affect us all directly and with complete immediacy ("When a Russian financial crisis occurs, we've got mail"). Wrapping up the column, Friedman restates the question: "So which lens is Mr. Powell wearing—the one he developed with America Onduty, or with America Online?"

Even such an insufferable framework as this would be of value to the extent that it truly assists in helping Friedman and his citizen-readers to understand Colin Powell and the mentalities that inform him, to draw useful conclusions from this understanding, and to make wiser and better-informed decisions in terms of the manner in which they vote, contribute, advocate, purchase, and otherwise interact with the various entities into which man's efforts are organized. If the public understanding is increased by dividing Powell's consciousness into that of America Online and some variant of that brand name and then characterizing in turn each of these mentalities by reference to concepts from popular films, then there's really no problem here other than that the whole America Onduty thing is fucking stupid.

Suppose, however, that such frameworks as these do not seem to grant Friedman any particular insight into a particular subject, and in fact seem to lead him and his admirers astray. This might indicate to us that such frameworks are not actually useful, and that those who compose such frameworks may perhaps not be worth listening to, and that to the extent that they contribute to the national understanding they have damaged it in so doing, and that to this same extent they are responsible for the astounding errors that have been made in our country's recent past. Suppose all of that!

Friedman's frameworks provide him with nothing. What he does is fine for writing a reader-friendly column in a pinch, but his cute semantic tricks do not translate into accuracy as much

as we might hope that they would. He was not able to provide any useful predictions regarding Powell, for instance, although he certainly tried, announcing in another column that “it was impossible to imagine Mr. Bush ever challenging or overruling Mr. Powell on any issue.” Moreover:

Mr. Powell is three things Mr. Bush is not—a war hero, worldly wise and beloved by African-Americans. That combination gives him a great deal of leverage. It means he can never be fired. It means Mr. Bush can never allow him to resign in protest over anything.

Of course, Powell did indeed leave the administration under circumstances that we may ascertain to involve firing, resignation, or some typically Washingtonian combination thereof—after having first been overruled by Bush on several decisions involving the most significant question of that presidency. To Friedman’s credit, his failed prediction was based on the standard media narrative of the time as well as popular assumptions made solely on appearances, which is to say that it was sourced.

Elsewhere in this column, Friedman notes that it “will be interesting to see who emerges to balance Mr. Powell’s perspective.” That person, who ended up not so much balancing Powell’s perspective as smothering it in its crib, was Cheney. The vice president was not exactly a “war hero,” “worldly wise,” or “beloved by African-Americans,” which is to say that he was in many ways Powell’s opposite number—which is to say in turn that Friedman’s assumptions regarding what sort of person would have the greatest degree of influence over Bush were not just wrong, but almost the exact opposite of the case.

★ ★ ★

AS NOTED, FRIEDMAN WROTE his sushi-oriented pro-Putin column in December of 2001. In March of that same year, Friedman had written another column on Russia in which he summarized our post-Cold War espionage efforts by way of the following framework:

What is it that we and Russians are actually spying on each other about?

This whole espionage affair seems straight out of *Mad* magazine's [sic] "Spy vs. Spy" cartoon. The Russians are spying on us to try to find out why we are spying on them. I mean, to be honest, is there anything about the Russians today you want to know?

Ha! Ha! I guess not!

We are here confronted with one of two possibilities: either Friedman does not really mean what he appears to mean by this, or he does. If it is the former, then he is wasting our time with nonsense. If it is the latter, he is doing something even worse—he is telling everyone who will listen that it is wholly absurd for the U.S. intelligence community to be collecting information on Russia's government, its societal trends, and its military. In fact, he is indeed telling us the latter, as the next paragraph makes clear:

Their navy is rusting in port. Their latest nuclear submarine is resting on the bottom of the ocean. We know they're selling weapons to Iran and Iraq, because they told us. And their current political system, unlike Communism, is not exactly exportable—unless you think corruption, chaos, and KGB rule amount to an ideology. Khrushchev threatened to bury us. Putin threatens to corrupt us.

This person—this extraordinarily influential, respected, recognized, widely read person had decided that there was simply no good reason to continue spying on the Russians. Having made such an unusual assertion, Friedman next notes the following conundrum: "How you pull a country like Russia away from becoming an angry, failed state, acting out on the world stage, and make it a responsible member of the world community has no easy formula."

We have here two assertions, then. Allow me to organize them into a list:

1. We have no good reason to be covertly gathering intelligence on Russia.
2. Unless it is somehow "pull[ed] away" from doing so, Russia is set to become "an angry, failed state, acting out on the

world stage.”

Remember that these assertions are both made in the space of a single column.

The especially attentive reader will perhaps have noticed something peculiar about the excerpt above, in which Friedman contrasts the Soviet era to our current one. “Khrushchev threatened to bury us,” he wrote. “Putin threatens to corrupt us.” A few months later, of course, Friedman was hailing Putin as the impetus of positive reform for whom we all ought to be “rootin’.”

In 2008, the large, adversarial, and nuclear-equipped nation upon which we apparently need not bother to spy launched a military incursion into Georgia. Friedman responded with a column entitled “What Did We Expect?” that begins thusly:

If the conflict in Georgia were an Olympic event, the gold medal for brutish stupidity would go to the Russian prime minister, Vladimir Putin. The silver medal for bone-headed recklessness would go to Georgia’s president, Mikheil Saakashvili, and the bronze medal for rank short-sightedness would go to the Clinton and Bush foreign policy teams.

The bronze medal winners, in this case, had advocated NATO expansion after the end of the Cold War, whereas Friedman and other leading foreign policy experts, Friedman explains, had opposed such a move on the grounds that it might antagonize the Russians without providing the West with any particularly crucial benefits.

The humiliation that NATO expansion bred in Russia was critical in fueling Putin’s rise after Boris Yeltsin moved on.

Let’s make a little timeline here:

December 2001: Friedman hails Putin as a great reformer for whom we all ought to be “rootin’.”

August 2008: Friedman mocks two presidential administrations for having accidentally “fueled” Putin’s rise to power, accusing the foreign policy teams in question of “rank

short-sightedness.”



VLADIMIR PUTIN OPPOSED all inquiries into the Ryazan “training exercise.” Legislators belonging to his de facto political party, United Russia, each voted in favor of sealing all records pertaining to the incident for 75 years; two investigations proposed in the Duma were shot down by way of similar party-line votes. Two Duma members who had served on an independent committee that was created to look into the matter were likewise shot down by assassins in 2003. Ooooh, play on words!

After revealing that the basement of one of the bombed buildings had been rented by an FSB officer, and promising to reveal further information in court, lawyer Mikhail Trepashkin was arrested on charges of illegal firearm possession and revealing state secrets. Exiled tycoon and former Yeltsin administration official Boris Berezovsky held a press conference in London in 2002 during which he alleged that the bombings had been a false flag operation carried out to redirect public anger from Yeltsin and his inner circle towards Chechnya and to provide a justification for the re-taking of that territory.

In 2002, Putin finally managed to implement his intended reworking of the Federation Council in order to strip it of its independence; earlier opposition was squashed when he threatened to open criminal investigations directed at certain key members. The elections of 2003 and 2004 were deemed by a number of international monitors to have been the most undemocratic in post-Soviet history; these and other NGOs also complained of harassment by the authorities as well as by unknown parties. The nation’s television networks remained under Kremlin control, and independent journalists critical of Putin and his allies began receiving unusually high numbers of death threats and deaths. The war in Chechnya was pursued with brutal enthusiasm, leaving some 100,000 people dead.

In May of 2004, Thomas Friedman made the following awkwardly worded announcement: “I have a ‘Tilt Theory of History.’” The particular tilt theory of history of which he was apparently in possession had provided him with a framework

by which to assess the past, present, and future of Russia:

Is Vladimir Putin's Russia today a Jeffersonian democracy? Of course not. But it is a huge nation that was tilted in the wrong direction and is now tilted in the right direction. My definition of a country tilted in the right direction is a country where there is enough free market, enough rule of law, enough free press, speech and exchange of ideas that the true agent of change in history—which is something that takes nine months and 21 years to develop, i.e., a generation—can grow up, plan its future and realize its potential.

In 2007, Friedman finally noticed that Russia could no longer even be termed a democracy and promptly wrote a column to this effect. I will spare The Reader a long account of the unseemly events that occurred within that nation between the time of Friedman's 2004 column and the 2007 column in which he finally admits to Putin's autocracy; suffice to say that the political situation in Russia continued to degenerate to such a great extent that even Thomas Friedman eventually managed to figure out that something was wrong.

★ ★ ★

FRIEDMAN SPENT MUCH OF 2001 in contemplation of technology. *The New York Times* sent him off to the Davos World Economic Forum in January of that year; Friedman sent back a column entitled "Cyber-Serfdom," announcing therein that the Internet would soon be replaced by the "Evernet," itself the next step in the trend towards greater connectivity. But was humanity walking the dog, or was the dog walking humanity? One might well ask!

The year 2005 loomed large. By that year, Friedman explained, "we will see a convergence of wireless technology, fiber optics, software applications, and next-generation Internet switches, IPv6, that will permit anything with electricity to have a web address and run off the Internet—from your bedroom lights to your toaster to your pacemaker . . . People will boast, 'I have 25 web addresses in my house; how many do you have? My wired

refrigerator automatically reorders milk. How about yours?” This thing that didn’t end up coming anywhere close to happening was of great concern to the columnist. “I still can’t program my VCR; how am I going to program my toaster?” Much of the column was presumably cribbed from an Andy Rooney monologue circa 1998.

Later that year, there occurred an unprecedented attack on U.S. commercial and military assets. This shifted Friedman’s lens back towards the Middle East, where he would begin sifting the sand in search of super-stories. Our protagonist knew the Middle East well, having won two Pulitzers in recognition of the reporting he did from that region throughout the ’80s. Back then, the system had identified him as worthy of advancement, and today it would call upon him to inform the citizenry’s decisions on a matter of extraordinary importance. The future of the United States and that of several other nations was now, to some small but measurable extent, in the hands of Thomas Friedman.



IT WAS A MONTH INTO THE WAR in Afghanistan. “A month into the war in Afghanistan,” Friedman wrote, “the hand-wringing has already begun over how long this might last.”

Hand-wringing is something that old ladies do. They are always wringing their little hands, worrying themselves over some matter that is actually well under control. Friedman, confident that Colin Powell had things under control over at the White House, was not so neurotic as to concern himself with the potential length of a military intervention in such a place as Afghanistan. “This is Afghanistan we’re talking about,” he explained. “Check the map. It’s far away.”

While others wrung their hands due to their misinformed takes on the situation, Friedman expressed doubts based on his knowledge of ongoing events—though not significant doubts, of which he had few. “I have no doubt, for now, that the Bush team has a military strategy for winning a long war,” he explained, although one element of the plan did strike him as worrisome. “I do worry, though, whether it has a public

relations strategy for sustaining a long war.” Obviously the Powell administration would win in Afghanistan, but would President Bush and his top advisers be too busy winning wars and otherwise attending to their duties to give any thought to influencing the opinion of voters?

Just in case, Friedman utilized subsequent columns in defending the administration’s aforementioned “military strategy for winning a long war”:

Think of all the nonsense written in the press—particularly the European and Arab media—about the concern for ‘civilian casualties’ in Afghanistan. It turns out that many of those Afghan ‘civilians’ were praying for another dose of B-52s to liberate them from the Taliban, casualties or not. Now that the Taliban are gone, Afghans can freely fight out, among themselves, the war of ideas for what sort of society they want.

As seen, Friedman in those days took to using the terms “civilian” and “civilian casualties” in scare quotes, as if such terminology does not really apply. As dead as these Afghans may be, they do not really mind being killed or maimed—this, at least, is how it “turns out,” as if Friedman is suddenly privy to some new information that confirms all of this. In the space of two sentences, then, the most respected columnist in the country has attempted to imply the inaccuracy of demonstrably accurate and crucial elements of the question under discussion. And he has followed this up with a significant assertion regarding that question based on some unspecified new information that plainly doesn’t exist. All of this is followed by an announcement that “the Taliban are gone.”

★ ★ ★

IN APRIL OF 2003, Friedman introduced a new framework by which the American people might better understand the events of the past few years:

Wars are always clarifying, and what this war clarified most was the degree to which there were actually three bubbles that burst at

the beginning of the 21st century: a stock market bubble, a corporate ethics bubble and a terrorism bubble.

The stock market bubble we're all too familiar with. When it burst three years ago, millions of people all over the world were made more sober investors. The second bubble was the corporate governance bubble—a buildup of ethical lapses by management that burst with Enron and Arthur Andersen, producing a revolution in boardroom practices.

Bubbles being bubbles, and these bubbles having burst, Friedman determined that the problem represented by each bubble had thereby become less of a problem. Having identified a characteristic common to all three of them, Friedman had learned the pertinent lesson better than most observers:

Like the stock market and corporate bubbles, the terrorism bubble was the product of a kind of temporary insanity, in which basic norms were ignored and excessive behavior was justified by new theories.

Being temporary, the insanity was now presumably over. The bubbles had all burst.

A column in which three bubbles burst makes for a fine column indeed, the number three being of special significance to the human mind: thesis, antithesis, synthesis; Father, Son, Holy Spirit; the tripod; primes. It generally takes three elements to establish a pattern, and thus it is that in comedy, one tends to find groupings of threes—one sees a pattern being formed but the pattern is disrupted just as it is about to be established for certain, and therein lies the humor. One lists this mundane thing, this other similar thing, and OH SHIT THIS FAR-OUT THING YOU DIDN'T EXPECT!

Three bubbles it is, then. And they must be bubbles, and the bubbles must be of a singular nature—each must have expanded by way of, in this case, “a kind of temporary insanity.” Each must have done so in a similar time frame. Having been bubbles, each must have been expanding previous to their popping. Having popped, each must now be on the steep decline. The resulting

framework dictates that the Enron scandal will be followed by a period of renewed responsibility in terms of corporate governance, that the “dot-com crash” will prompt investors across the globe to reign in their exuberance, and that the worst of the terrorist strikes are now over.

If we step outside the framework and into reality, we find that the world’s markets continued to operate by way of the same complex amalgamation of investor confidence, concern, anxiety, and especially exuberance that had always determined such things. The “revolution in boardroom practices” was not so revolutionary as to prevent the nation’s financial institutions from collapsing so magnificently as to entirely eclipse the petty Enron debacle. By any measure other than that of American media attention, terrorism increased in the years ahead.

There is nothing wrong with frameworks. Our data must indeed be integrated into such things in order that we might make better use of it. It is of no help for us to know every little thing that ever happened throughout the Roman Empire if we cannot conceptualize these little things into larger groupings. And so we look at records of land sales and determine with confidence that at some point, a sizable portion of small landholders sold off their property to larger farming interests until such time as the cities were flooded with landless plebeians. We may call this a super-story if we’re so inclined; looking back on the subsequent years of imperial affairs, we can even characterize this whole phenomenon as a bubble that eventually popped with the onset of urban food riots—but only if there were considerably fewer food riots afterwards.

Let us say that I am a Roman pundit named Barriticus and I am living a few years after the initial food riots have occurred. When I give my magnificent oration, after first having made love to several high-born young ladies of the sort who hardly cut with water the wine they serve at the table, would it be right for me to characterize the earlier food riots and the circumstances that led to them as being best thought of as a bubble that has popped? Only if there were good reason to do so, such as if the emperor had passed an edict barring small landholders from selling their plots or had arranged for sufficient levels of

public grain distribution or both. If, on the other hand, I am unable to determine with any certainty that this phenomenon will not just repeat itself over and over again through subsequent years, then I ought not call it any such thing, as this would give a false impression to the citizenry about a matter of extraordinary importance; they will be left believing that the problem has been addressed and that they need not force the state's hand or alter their own individual plans for the future. That was kind of a strange example.

Friedman fooled himself into expecting the worst of the terrorist phenomenon to be over because he was taken in by his own thematics. This de facto prediction did not derive so much from rigorous analysis as it did from the purely stylistic desirability of working three bubbles into a column instead of two or four, and similarly the rhetorical symmetry of describing all three of them as bubbles instead of making one of them a square and another the color blue and another a sex act of some sort.

It is not enough to be wary of forcing a story into an inappropriate framework to the detriment of accuracy; if one is to fulfill one's duty as a commentator, one must also be a competent observer of the world and its workings. It also helps if one is not so emotionally committed to some emotionally satisfying narrative that one is prevented from realizing that the narrative in question is ridiculous.

On May 30, 2003, Friedman appeared on *The Charlie Rose Show* to explain the wisdom of the administration's current strategy in the Middle East.

I think [the invasion of Iraq] was unquestionably worth doing, Charlie. I think that, looking back, I now certainly feel I understand more what the war was about . . . What we needed to do was go over to that part of the world, I'm afraid, and burst that bubble. We needed to go over there basically, and take out a very big stick, right in the heart of that world, and burst that bubble.

. . . And what they needed to see was American boys and girls going from house to house, from Basra to Baghdad, and basically saying: which part of this sentence do you not understand? You don't think we care about our open society?

Well. Suck. On. This.

That, Charlie, was what this war was about.

We could have hit Saudi Arabia. It was part of that bubble. Could have hit Pakistan. We hit Iraq because we could. That's the real truth.



AS PREPARATIONS FOR THE BABYLON expedition were underway in February of 2003, Friedman once again found himself in Davos, Switzerland, where a meal taken at the Hotel Schweizerhof was interrupted by an intriguing discovery:

At the bottom of the lunch menu was a list of the countries that the lamb, beef and chicken came from. But next to the meat imported from the U.S. was a tiny asterisk, which warned that it might contain genetically modified organisms—G.M.O.'s. My initial patriotic instinct was to order the U.S. beef and ask for it “tartare,” just for spite. But then I and my lunch guest just looked at each other and had a good laugh.

It would seem that, despite the fact that the management of a hotel catering to an international clientèle had decided to warn customers that some American meat is prepared in such a way as that they might prefer not to eat it, one could also find Europeans acting in an unhealthy manner:

But practically everywhere we went in Davos, Europeans were smoking cigarettes—with their meals, coffee or conversation—even though there is indisputable scientific evidence that smoking can kill you . . . So pardon me if I don't take seriously all the Eurowhining about the Bush policies toward Iraq—for one very simple reason: It strikes me as deeply unserious.

It does not occur to Friedman that one may find similarly warning-marked menus in the U.S. and that Americans are themselves proverbial for their own unhealthy habits; he has found his anecdote, and thus European objections are “deeply

unserious.” Friedman does acknowledge that there exist sound reasons to oppose the upcoming military experiment, though he also adds an important qualifier:

As I said, there are serious arguments against the war in Iraq, but they have weight only if they are made out of conviction, not out of expedience or petulance—and if they are made by people with real beliefs, not identity crises.

Later that year, Friedman appeared on NPR to give yet another live rendition of how the Middle East was this big bubble that we had to pop with a stick by invading Iraq:

And the message was, “Ladies and gentlemen, which part of this sentence don’t you understand? We are not going to sit back and let people motivated by that bubble threaten an open society we have built over 250 years. We really like our open society. We mean no ill to you, OK? But we are not going to sit back and let that bubble fundamentally distort our open society and imprison us.” And that’s what I believe ultimately this war was about. And guess what? People there got the message, OK, in the neighborhood. This is a rough neighborhood, and sometimes it takes a two-by-four across the side of the head to get that message.

To Friedman’s credit, he didn’t start delivering deranged macho dialogues about how the U.S. was now going from house to house telling people to suck on things and hitting the Middle East upside the metaphorical head with a similarly metaphorical two-by-four until it appeared that the war had worked out well. During the run-up to that conflict, his commentary was notable for its equivocation; he dedicated one column to telling antiwar liberals why they might be wrong to oppose the war and the next column to telling conservatives why they might be wrong to favor it (and it should be noted that this was an intentional exercise in examining both sides of the question, not some silly accident on Friedman’s part).

Despite the pseudo-quietism he displayed on the subject early on, one could watch him develop his Middle East as

Bubble framework throughout the pre-war period. Liberals, he wrote, “need to take heed. Just by mobilizing for war against Iraq, the U.S. has sent this region a powerful message: We will not leave you alone anymore to play with matches, because the last time you did, we got burned.” It’s not clear to which period Friedman here refers when the U.S. left the Middle East “alone” and was burned as a result. The U.S. was instrumental in reshaping the Levant by assisting in the creation of Israel in 1948, remaining heavily involved in that country’s affairs forever afterward; engaged in covert and entirely amoral operations in Iran throughout the 1950s, during which it assisted in the toppling of the country’s democratically elected president and supported the installation of the shah, whom it backed until the fellow’s death. It sent Marines to Lebanon, funded Islamist fighters in Afghanistan, sold weapons to Iraq, and made secret deals with Iran throughout the 1980s. It jumped right into the fray when Iraq annexed the little kingdom of Kuwait and threatened to invade the theocratic monstrosity of Saudi Arabia. It enforced a strict regimen of economic sanctions against Iraq, which is credibly estimated to have resulted in the deaths of over 100 of that country’s children each day. Two of its recent presidents maintained close, almost familial relations and lucrative business arrangements with the same royal family responsible for the de facto enslavement of Saudi Arabia’s women, even as both harangued other nations with free female populations about human rights. And it has for decades maintained military bases across the region. Before all of this, America’s closest allies in Europe ruled over the various Middle Eastern populations for generations and without anyone’s consent. The Middle East had not been so much “left alone to play with matches” as it had been burned with cigarettes.

As the war’s fortunes ebbed and flowed, Friedman degenerated back into what might be politely referred to as “nuance.” Liberal bloggers began to notice that Friedman’s televised and print advice to the American people almost invariably involved waiting for another six months or so, during which time everything would presumably become apparent:

We've teed up this situation for Iraqis, and I think the next six months really are going to determine whether this country is going to collapse into three parts or more or whether it's going to come together.

There's only one thing one can say for sure today: you won't need to wait much longer for the tipping point.

What we're gonna find out, Bob, in the next six to nine months is whether we have liberated a country or uncorked a civil war.

I think we're in the end game now. I think we're in a six-month window here where it's going to become very clear and this is all going to pre-empt I think the next congressional election—that's my own feeling—let alone the presidential one.

This is crunch time. Iraq will be won or lost in the next few months.

During the next six months, the world is going to be treated to two remarkable trials in Baghdad. It is going to be the mother of all split screens. On one side, you're going to see the trial of Saddam Hussein. On the other side, you're going to see the trial of the Iraqi people. That's right, the Iraqi people will also be on trial—for whether they can really live together without the iron fist of the man on the other side of the screen.

In 2006, Friedman finally got tired of waiting around and began calling for a military withdrawal from Iraq.

★ ★ ★

I'M RUNNING OUT OF SEGUES and paragraph transitions at this point. I'm also increasingly irritated by my own writing style.

Here's some stupid thing that Friedman wrote back in 2002:

September 11 happened because America had lost its deterrent capability. We lost it because for 20 years we never retaliated against, or brought to justice, those who murdered Americans.

This is nonsense. We bombed Libya in response to the country's apparent involvement in the Berlin disco attack that killed two U.S. troops. Those responsible for the World Trade Center car bombing in 1993 were caught, sentenced, and imprisoned. After the African embassy bombings, Clinton launched some 75 cruise missiles against targets associated with bin Laden. In

fact, Friedman even notes this himself in the introduction to *Longitudes and Attitudes*, where he writes:

Osama bin Laden declared war on the United States in the late 1990s. After he organized the bombing of two American embassies, the U.S. Air Force retaliated with a cruise missile attack on his bases in Afghanistan as though he were another nation-state.

Let's take a closer look at these two assertions:

... for 20 years we never retaliated against, or brought to justice, those who murdered Americans.

... the U.S. Air Force retaliated with a cruise missile attack ...

... we never retaliated ...

... retaliated with a cruise missile attack ...

... never retaliated ...

... retaliated ...

So, this other time, Friedman is chastised by a Chinese fellow for chastising the Chinese fellow about the extraordinary levels of pollution being produced by his fellow Chinese fellows. The Chinese fellow was of the position that China can hardly be blamed for following in the footsteps of those Western nations that had themselves dirtied the world via their own industrial transitions:

Eventually, I decided that the only way to respond was with some variation of the following: "You're right. It's your turn. Grow as dirty as you want. Take your time. Because I think America just needs five years to invent all the clean-power technologies you Chinese are going to need as you choke to death on pollution. Then we're going to come over here and sell them all to you, and we are going to clean your clock—how do you say 'clean your clock' in Chinese?—in the

next great global industry: clean power technologies. So if you all want to give us a five-year lead, that would be great. I'd prefer 10. So take your time. Grow as dirty as you want."

This is basically the clever and nationalistically aggressive thing that Friedman wishes he had said to some Chinese guy he once met. Also notice how much longer this goes on than it should.

"How do you say 'clean your clock' in Chinese?" Yeah! Take that! *Semper Fi!*

Which reminds me that Friedman once ended a column with the words "*Semper Fi.*" I can't even remember which one now. I wish I had been there to see Thomas Friedman wrapping up his column with the words "*Semper Fi*" and maybe staring at the screen for a few moments afterward and then sighing in satisfaction.

Speaking of China, sort of, in 2000 Friedman decided that the regime would soon find itself threatened by a major unemployment crisis caused by an influx of American wheat and sugar into that country. In fact, American wheat and sugar failed to make any inroads whatsoever, while Chinese unemployment figures remained at generally low levels for about seven years.

Here are some actual sentences Friedman has written:

All the shah's horses and all the shah's men, couldn't put his regime back together again.

Well, there is one thing we know about necessity: it is the mother of invention.

What if it's telling us that the whole growth model we created over the last 50 years is simply unsustainable economically and ecologically and that 2008 was when we hit the wall—when Mother Nature and the market both said: "No more."

I confess. I'm a sucker for free and fair elections.

No, something is going on in the Middle East today that is very new. Pull up a chair; this is going to be interesting.

This last example blows my little mind. Why the fuck would you tell your readers to “pull up a chair”? How is the reader supposed to react to the phrase “pull up a chair”? “Okay, Tom.”

Fuck Thomas Friedman and his readers. I'm going to serve all of my readers some imaginary tea. We're all going to have an imaginary underwater tea party and we're not going to invite Friedman or his degenerate little enablers at *The New York Times*. Would you like a cup of imaginary tea? If you do not take a cup of this tea, I shall become ever so cross with you!

WILLIAM BENNETT

OCCASIONALLY, a book is best reviewed well over a decade after it's been written. William Bennett's *The De-Valuing of America*, published in the otherwise uneventful year of 1992, is such a book.

To judge from the dust jacket review blurbs, Bennett's first foray into the literary genre of the ex-politico memoir—traditionally a haphazard mash-up of policy suggestions, political narrative, and personal musings—appears to have been a well-received one. Rush Limbaugh calls the book “inspiring.” Beverly LaHaye, president of Concerned Women for America (and, tellingly, wife of Tim LaHaye, brain of the *Left Behind* empire) gushes that “[h]is keen strategies help equip all of us involved in the accelerated warfare for the very heart and soul of America's children.” And *The Wall Street Journal* refers to Bennett as “Washington's most interesting public figure,” apparently intending this as a compliment.

But praise from allies is like a mother's love. More surprising is the dust jacket quote from *The New York Times*, of all things, informing us that Bennett “brings refreshing intelligence and common sense to a debate long dominated by ignorance and confusion.” This strikes me as a nice way of saying that Bennett is better educated than most of the people who believe the things that he believes.

Whether or not this is what the *Times* meant, it's certainly the case. Bennett is fairly unusual among cultural conservatives; his background is in academia in general and liberal arts in particular, a status that's somewhat comparable to being a cultural liberal whose background is in truck driving in general and the transport of veal calves in particular. And just as our hypothetical cultural liberal might have a few choice words for the veal calf industry, Bennett is none too fond of modern American academia, certain members of which he groups together with a cadre of unspecified media heavies and then categorizes under the designation of "elites." These elites, as Bennett informs us early on, derive particular satisfaction from criticizing the beliefs and practices of "the American people," a term he uses throughout the course of the book and which, from the context in which it invariably comes up, appears to mean "people who agree with William Bennett." Now, the elites are motivated in their criticisms not by any legitimate concerns they may have with "the American people," who are presumably beyond criticism by virtue of being people who live in America, but rather by a desire for status. The liberal elites "hope to achieve reputations, among other elites especially, for being original, deep, thoughtful, and unconventional," we're told by Bennett, who, being a spirit entity from Neptune and composed of pure energy, lacks the sort of universal mammalian regard for one's own reputation with which the rest of us are unfortunately cursed.

Bennett summarizes the elites thusly: "*Odi profanum vulgus* ('I hate the vulgar crowd') is a fitting slogan." It's an expansive sort of hypocrisy that can criticize others for desiring to be considered "deep" and then, in the very next sentence, throw out an unnecessary Latin phrase coined by some old Roman crank known only to a handful of Americans so that it may then be explained to the reader what the phrase means. But then, Bennett is an expansive fellow. We must give him that.

Bennett is so disdainful of the elite mentality that, in a show of solidarity with the common man, he limits his writing style to that of an awkward seventh grader who's still getting the hang of sentence parsing. "At a gathering of the elite, an often performed ritual is to mention a derided object or individual, followed by a superior laugh and roll of the eyes," he explains to

us with some effort.

The “derisive” nature of those incorrigible elites seems to be a sticking point. In the course of his overarching indictment, Bennett denounces them chiefly as “critics of American practices.” This is an odd enough thing to take issue with in and of itself; surely any society has practices that are worthy of criticism, even if that society happens to be one’s own. But such a denunciation is doubly odd when one remembers that Bennett himself has spent a good portion of his own career as a “critic of American practices.” The use of drugs, for instance, is certainly an “American practice,” this being a pursuit that Americans practice on a regular basis. And Bennett has been quite famously critical of this “American practice.” But whereas the “elites” are content to simply study and sneer when they find something about the American character of which they don’t particularly approve, Bennett goes a step further and actually seeks out political appointments that will allow him to take an active role in putting “American practice” practitioners in prison.

In 1988, a few months after resigning from his position as Secretary of Education under Reagan, Bennett lobbied for the newly created position of drug czar under incoming President Bush. In the fourth chapter of *De-Valuing*, entitled “The Battle to Save Our Kids from Drugs,” the reader is treated to both the behind-the-scenes jockeying and subsequent birth pains, all in excruciating detail.

“Things got off to a rocky start,” Bennett notes, “at least as far as some outside observers were concerned.” Actually, things got off to a rocky start by Bennett’s own admission; the “outside observers” remark is simply an excuse to attack the press by implying that the media narrative of the time was somehow inaccurate. But it plainly was not; Bennett himself has just spent an entire page describing how Bush was reluctant to take him on, and in the very next sentence after the “rocky start” comment, he points out that he wasn’t invited to the nascent administration’s first cabinet meeting, further noting that Bush refused to include Bennett in the cabinet at all. Thus Bennett is essentially saying, “A is true, but the press wrongly reported A, and also, A is true.” An odd duck, that Bennett. An odd, disingenuous duck.

Bennett claims not to have been fazed by the cabinet snubbing. “I was not particularly distressed at this turn of events; I had my fill of cabinet sessions while I was secretary of education.” Bennett had never wanted that sort of prestige, and besides, he’d already had it.

After going to great lengths to show the reader how nonchalant he’d been about his lack of cabinet-level status and how unconcerned he was regarding what everyone might say about this, Bennett goes on to relate what everyone was saying about this, treating us to several old media blurbs on the subject including one from *U.S. News and World Report* indicating that he might “slowly sink into bureaucratic quicksand and be rendered irrelevant.” On the contrary, Bennett tells us, “Sinking into bureaucratic quicksand and being rendered irrelevant was, frankly, never much of a concern of mine.” He then goes on to explain why it was a concern of his that he might sink into bureaucratic quicksand and be rendered irrelevant: “Here I had little direct authority, no ability to dispense government grants, a 100-person staff (infinitesimal by Washington standards) . . . There were some inherent, potentially debilitating, institutional weaknesses that I had to overcome.” Many people contradict themselves now and again, but William Bennett manages to do so in perfect ABAB stanza.

Bennett was so innately drawn to the role of drug czar that he began practicing for it well before the position even existed. In *De-Valuing*, Bennett describes his first big bust, pulled off in his capacity as a dorm administrator while studying at Harvard and which involved two students caught selling drugs out of their room. Bennett triumphantly details how the two pushers feared that Bennett might physically harm them, though he reports having been equally disappointed that Harvard failed to punish the students to his own specifications—which is to say, expulsion and criminal prosecution.

This slash-and-burn approach to illegal drug use would become a familiar theme. Upon taking over as secretary of education under Reagan, one of Bennett’s first tasks seems to have been getting rid of all those excess teachers that had for so long been plaguing the nation’s educational system. “Early

in my tenure,” he writes, “I contacted the heads of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, urging them to adopt a policy of requiring teachers using drugs to resign.” This was more than just a clever attempt to cut art and music programs out of the local school budgets; in a 1986 speech given in Tennessee, Bennett explained his reasoning: “They should be drug-free, not for reasons of national security, but for reasons of setting an example.” It’s not entirely clear what he meant by this; presumably, there were already policies in place that would have led to the firing of any teacher caught lighting up a spliff in fourth period English. What Bennett seemed to be calling for was a policy that would have either required the unprecedented monitoring of adult private lives, or instead be totally meaningless—and thus it would have served as a great metaphor for U.S. anti-drug policy in general, and thus also as a great teaching aide for our hypothetical fourth period English class when it came time to cover poetic constructs.

The president of the Metro Nashville Education Association wasn’t buying. “Teachers should be careful of their actions in front of the student, but teachers are still part of society,” he responded in a statement. “It’s unrealistic for teachers to be so different. Substance abuse is an illness and should be treated as such. No group is going to be 100 percent clean, be it chiefs of police, ministers or teachers.” Bennett’s aside to us: “Here again was an example of the teachers’ union getting in the way of sound reform, this time because of a startling lack of moral clarity or moral courage,” which is to say that the teacher’s union didn’t want teachers to automatically lose their jobs for issues unrelated to their teaching.

But the nation’s educational ills wouldn’t be solved just by getting rid of teachers, of course; the kids would have to be gotten rid of, too. Upon becoming drug czar, Bennett fought to implement a national policy whereby any student found to have come in contact with any drugs in any manner whatsoever would be automatically expelled from school. Between the crusade against teachers and the crusade against students, Bennett may have really hit upon something here. After all, most problems that a school faces can be easily solved by just getting

rid of all the people associated with it, and thus this would be a fantastic set of policies if the purpose of a school is to simply exist as a pretty building, rather than to educate children, a good portion of whom would have been eligible for expulsion if Bennett had gotten his way.

Luckily for those students, he didn't. Testifying before the House Committee on Idiotic Policy Implementations (or something like that), Bennett came up against some resistance from the always-energetic New York Representative Charlie Rangel. During a contentious back-and-forth over Bennett's proposed mandatory expulsion policy, Rangel expressed some reservations about the idea of denying education to students caught with drugs. Though Rangel's preferred policy is here unreported and thus left to our imagination, Bennett summarizes it for us thusly: "I think what Rangel hoped for from us was something less severe; a course of instruction, a drug education program, lectures, slides, and tapes—in short, a magic bullet that would inoculate the young from ever using drugs." All of which is to say that Rangel wanted a series of measures in place that would seek to discourage and reduce drug use among students, whereas Bennett wanted a single, forceful measure that would allegedly solve the problem in one fell swoop—in short, a magic bullet. Wait a second.

Okay, so Bennett doesn't seem to know what the term "magic bullet" means. That's understandable; I myself used to have trouble with the term "ruled out." When it was said that police have ruled out the possibility of foul play, I wasn't sure if that meant that the police had spread the possibility out on the table to get a better look at it, or rather that they'd thrown it out so that it wasn't really something they were still considering as a possibility. But that was when I was, like, 12.

Luckily, Bennett does a slightly better job of explaining the "moral clarity" of his position in a down paragraph metaphor. "Of course we want to teach children not to play with matches. But if a house is burning, we've got to put out the fire—and we've got to grab matches out of some hands before they start any more fires." Actually, this is a terrible metaphor, unless, of course, he meant to add, "and then we've got to throw the

little bastards out on the street.” He is, after all, talking about a mandatory expulsion policy, not a “taking drugs out of some hands before they use any more drugs” policy, which is what the schools have always had.

If Bennett’s use of metaphors and common English terminology leaves something to be desired, his use of supporting evidence is atrocious. Having just firmly established his position that zero-tolerance, one-strike-you’re-out policies are totally the way to go, he attempts to illustrate the point with an anecdote. This is a reasonable enough thing to do; anecdotal evidence is a kind of evidence, after all, even if it’s often countered by contrary anecdotal evidence, and is thus not all that useful as a policy-making tool. But whereas you or I might try to use a piece of anecdotal evidence that lends weight to our position, Bennett does something quite a bit more unconventional—he uses a piece of anecdotal evidence that runs contrary to his own position, apparently without even realizing it.

In discussing a Miami school that appears to have steered clear of the drug menace and which he describes as an example of his “principle in action,” Bennett describes for us the school’s drug policy: “The first time a student is caught using drugs, he must enroll in a drug-intervention or private rehabilitation program—or, depending on the severity of the infraction, he may face suspension. Subsequent infractions lead to suspension and possible expulsion from school. If a student is caught dealing drugs, he is turned over to a police agency and faces either suspension or expulsion from school.” Which is to say that, in this particular high school, students caught with drugs aren’t necessarily suspended from school, much less expelled (and are in fact enrolled in what sounds very much like one of Charlie Rangel’s strangely multifaceted “magic bullet” programs of the sort to which Bennett was opposed just 15 seconds ago, back when it was convenient for Bennett to feel that way), and the possibility of expulsion doesn’t even arise unless the student is caught several times, while even those found to be actually dealing drugs aren’t automatically expelled, either. This is the example that Bennett has chosen to use in order to illustrate for us how his preferred policy of automatic expulsion for all

levels of drug use could be used to improve the nation's public schools. Again, just to be clear, here's what Bennett is saying: "I think schools should do A. Here's a great school that does B. Isn't it swell how doing A helped that school become great?"

In addition to mass expulsions, bad metaphors, the misuse of anecdotal evidence, and the butchering of English idioms, Bennett's inherent sense of moral clarity also called for large, theatrical explosions. During the Reagan administration, the U.S. military was already doing plenty of this by way of its air bombing campaign in Bolivia, but it takes more than a few bombs to please Bennett. After being told that nine planes were currently being used for this purpose, and that a minimum of 15 would be needed to eradicate Bolivian coca production for a year, Bennett wanted to know how many planes were available. A Department of Defense official told him that this was classified information, which we can imagine probably pissed Bennett off quite a bit. Then he was told that an increase in American military planes dropping an increase in American bombs on an increase of Latin American peasants might lead to an increase in anti-American sentiment in an already volatile region, particularly if those American planes were clearly marked as being American.

"Then paint the face of Daniel Ortega [the head of the communist government in Nicaragua] on them," Bennett claims to have replied, once again exhibiting his moral clarity. After all, why just kill Bolivians when you can lie to them, too? To be fair, though, Bennett probably didn't mean this as a serious proposal; rather, it appears that he includes the exchange here simply in order to give the reader a taste of the gruff, take-no-prisoners wit to which his colleagues were no doubt treated on a daily basis.

Bennett's unusually hands-on approach to the drug war wasn't just limited to sitting around in Washington and second-guessing the military; Bennett writes extensively about his drug czar-era experience on the "front lines" of major urban areas, where he undertook nifty tours of crack house raids and was thus in a position to second-guess the police, too. In Detroit, Bennett encounters a beat cop whose forays into the drug war are presumably more professional than touristy, and who at some point summarized the problem by asking Bennett, "Why

should a kid earn four bucks an hour at McDonald's when he can make two or three hundred dollars a night working drugs?"

"For a lot of reasons," Bennett replies. Instead of listing those reasons, though, Bennett goes on to explain to the reader how the beat cop in question had been unwittingly brainwashed: "The police officer had picked up this line of reasoning from the media." A bit later: "Not surprisingly, a lot of youngsters picked up on this argument." The implication, made on the basis not of evidence but rather of inane conjecture fueled by convenient media hatred, is that the desirability of illegal, high-profit activities over legal, low-profit activities is something that "the media" had to come up with, after which it was duly "picked up on" by hapless Americans (of whom Bennett famously hates to be critical unless it suddenly becomes convenient to do so). This is why smuggling had never occurred in human history until 1851, when *The New York Times* came into existence, shortly after which the term "smuggling" had to be invented, presumably by *The New York Times*.

According to Bennett, "the media" came up with all of this due to some sort of inherent racism; in the course of building on his argument, he claims that the four-bucks-at-McDonald's versus 300-bucks-selling-drugs meme is some sort of slur against American blacks. "If people think poor black children aren't capable of moral responsibility, they should say so," Bennett writes in response to his unspecified adversaries. "I think otherwise. I know they are capable of it."

This would be a very lovely sentiment if it wasn't terribly dishonest and intended to paint those who sympathize with (or excuse) black Americans as racial determinists, while at the same time depicting Bennett himself as a champion of color-blindness. Nor do we need to simply assume this on the basis of the drug czar's overall taste for the disingenuous turn of phrase; Bennett made his position quite clear during a 2006 broadcast of his syndicated radio program.

In the course of a general discussion on demographic arguments put forth in the influential book *Freakonomics*, Bennett took a call from a fellow who noted that the practice of abortion had probably robbed the federal government of some large chunk of

taxable income in the years since *Roe v. Wade*. Bennett countered by noting that this particular argument wasn't necessarily a useful criticism of abortion, and further explained, "But I do know that it's true that if you wanted to reduce crime, you could—if that were your sole purpose, you could abort every black baby in this country and your crime rate would go down. That would be an impossible, ridiculous, and morally reprehensible thing to do, but your crime rate would go down. So these far-out, these far-reaching, extensive extrapolations are, I think, tricky."

Unsurprisingly, this incident led to criticism from some quarters, and so Bennett released the following statement in his own defense: "A thought experiment about public policy, on national radio, should not have received the condemnations it has. Anyone paying attention to this debate should be offended by those who have selectively quoted me, distorted my meaning, and taken out of context the dialog I engaged in this week. Such distortions from 'leaders' of organizations and parties is a disgrace not only to the organizations and institutions they serve, but to the First Amendment." The funny thing about this—or, rather, one of the funny things—is that one of these "leaders" who had allegedly become a "disgrace not only to the organizations and institutions they serve, but to the First Amendment" as well, was none other than President George W. Bush, who had released a statement calling Bennett's comments "not appropriate." And thus it was that, by simply criticizing something that Bennett had said, the president had finally managed to do something to attract the fellow's moral outrage.

In Bennett's defense, his comments had indeed been "a thought experiment about public policy," and not a serious proposal to abort black fetuses. Bennett is not only a staunch opponent of abortion, but is also, in his own, confused way, a humane sort of guy. On the other hand, "in Bennett's defense" might be a poor choice of words on my part, because no serious commentator was claiming that this was the case, and Bennett need not be defended from charges that never existed. Bennett chose to take issue with a largely nonexistent, red herring set of criticisms in order to avoid having to defend his unambiguous statement to the effect that aborting the fetuses of the nation's

black population would result in a decrease in the crime rate.

Aside from illustrating Bennett's tendency towards intellectual dishonesty when defending himself, the aborting black babies comment also illustrates Bennett's similar rate of intellectual dishonesty when attacking others. A man capable of criticizing his opponents for supposedly operating under the assumption that "poor black children aren't capable of moral responsibility" while simultaneously believing that "you could abort every black baby in this country and your crime rate would go down" is a man who is clearly not debating in good faith, but rather in an effort to score cheap points. Whereas many of Bennett's obvious intellectual contradictions may be written off as the accidental collisions of a disorganized and mediocre mind, this particular fender-bender can be considered nothing less than intentional, malicious dishonesty, in apparent service to some higher Truth for which lesser, mundane, run-of-the-mill truths are only accessories, to be discarded when inconveniently cumbersome. One might even be tempted to adopt a melancholy attitude regarding the whole situation, to wonder why a citizen who might otherwise have contributed to his nation's public life has instead seen fit to make himself into yet another partisan hack. On the other hand, the guy doesn't even know what a "magic bullet" is, so to hell with the fat narc anyway.

★ ★ ★

THIS IS NOT TO IMPLY that Bennett is entirely useless, of course. I did learn a few things from his book. Did you know that Prohibition was a resounding success? Neither did I. Actually, I still don't, because it's not true. So, I guess what I really learned is that some people still think that Prohibition was a resounding success, and that at least one of these people has gone on to help shape American drug policy.

During a wider discussion on the merits of federal fiddlin', Bennett drops the following bombshell, almost as an aside: "One of the clear lessons of Prohibition is that when we had laws against alcohol, there was less consumption of alcohol, less alcohol-related disease, fewer drunken brawls, and a lot less public drunkenness. And, contrary to myth, there is no evidence

that Prohibition caused big increases in crime.”

This is a pretty incredible statement to just throw into a book without any supporting evidence. Bennett hasn't just expressed an opinion on an ambiguous topic, like, “Gee, the old days sure were swell” or “Today's Japanese role-playing games are all flash and no substance” or something like that. Rather, Bennett has made several statements of alleged fact that can be easily verified or shot down by a few minutes of research. But Bennett didn't bother to research it, and I know this because the federal government has a tendency to keep records, and the records prove Bennett wrong.

“Less alcohol-related disease”? In 1926, a number of witnesses testified before the House Judiciary Committee regarding the ongoing effects of Prohibition; several New York State asylums officials noted that the number of patients suffering from alcohol-related dementia had increased by 1,000 percent since 1920, the year after Prohibition had gone into effect. Also in 1920, deaths from undiluted alcohol consumption in New York City stood at 84. In 1927, with Prohibition in full swing, that number had swelled to 719.

But those are just snapshots in time. A look at the larger picture shows that Bennett is not just kind of wrong, but entirely and unambiguously wrong about every single thing he's just said.

In 1991 the Cato Institute commissioned a retroactive Prohibition study by Mark Thornton, the O.P. Alford III Assistant Professor of Economics at Auburn University. Citing hard data gleaned mostly from government records, Thornton concluded that Prohibition “was a miserable failure on all counts.”

Despite Bennett's assertion that “when we had laws against alcohol, there was *less consumption of alcohol* [italics his],” a cursory glance at the federal government's own data shows that there was *not* [italics mine, thank you very much]. Now, per capita consumption did indeed fall dramatically from 1919 to 1920, but then increased far more dramatically from 1920 to 1922—after which it continued to increase well beyond pre-Prohibition levels. So, when Bennett says that “there was less consumption of alcohol,” he's right about a single one-year period, but wrong about the next dozen or so years—or, to put it another way, he's entirely wrong. If I decided to reduce my

drinking for a week, and I drank quite a bit less than usual on Monday but then drank the same amount I usually do on Tuesday and then drank more than I usually do on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and if the average alcohol consumption on my part during that week was much higher than my average alcohol consumption on the previous week, then one could hardly say that “there was less consumption of alcohol” in my apartment that week. Or, rather, one could say that, but one would be wrong. In this case, though, one could be excused for being wrong, because I don’t usually keep exact records on my alcohol consumption, and neither does the federal government (I think). But in the case of Prohibition, there is no excuse for ignorance, and even less for spreading it around. That allegedly noble experiment may not have been the cause of increased alcohol consumption, but it clearly wasn’t the cause of any overall decline, no overall decline having actually occurred.

Not only didn’t alcohol consumption decrease during Prohibition, the American taxpayer was at that point paying quite a bit of extra coin to enforce the decrease in alcohol consumption that they were not getting. From 1919 to 1922—a period, which, as mentioned above, saw an overall increase in alcohol consumption—the budget for the Bureau of Prohibition was tripled. Meanwhile, the Coast Guard was now spending 13 million dollars a year, Customs was blowing all kinds of cash, and the state and local governments, which had been stuck with the majority of enforcement issues, were throwing away untold amounts of money to boot.

Beyond the easily calculable nickel-and-dime costs of running an unsuccessful nanny-state boondoggle, the American citizen was being screwed on other fronts, too. Unlike those umbrella-twirling, petticoat-clad temperance harpies of the time (and their equally insufferable apologists of the present day), Thornton considers other social costs of a massive government ban on non-coercive behavior. Of the alcohol consumed under Prohibition, hard liquor made a jump as a percentage of total alcohol sales that had not been seen before, that has not been seen since, and that will probably never be seen again. The sud-

den ascendancy of whiskey over beer can be easily explained (and could have easily been predicted): If one is smuggling something above the law or consuming it on the sly, it makes more sense to smuggle or consume concentrated versions of the product in question than to deal with larger, more diluted concoctions. A similar phenomenon occurred in the cocaine trade under William Bennett's watch as drug czar.

So alcohol consumption was up, and the alcohol being consumed was now of the harder, more brawl-inducing variety. But what about the savings? The aforementioned busybodies in petticoats had predicted great social gains for Americans—money spent on alcohol would now go to milk for babies, life insurance, and, presumably, magical unicorns that grant you three wishes. Of course, this didn't turn out to be the case. Not only was alcohol consumption up, but records show that people were now paying more for it, too. Of course, they were also paying higher taxes to aid in the government's all-out attempt to repeal the law of supply and demand. And don't even think about approaching one of those unicorns to wish for more wishes. That's against the rules.

What about crime? Apparently, there are some wacky rumors going around to the effect that crime actually went up during Prohibition. But Bennett clearly told us that “contrary to myth, there is no evidence that Prohibition caused big increases in crime.”

Pardon my French, but *le gros homme possède la sottise d'un enfant humain et la teneur en graisse d'un bébé d'éléphant*. And if you'll indulge me further by pardoning my harsh language, Bennett is so full of horse shit on this one that he could fertilize every bombed-out coca field from the Yucatan to Bolivia. The idea that “Prohibition caused big increases in crime” is not so much a myth as it is a verifiable fact. Again, believe it or not, the feds tend to keep records on such things, and again, believe it or totally believe it, Bennett has failed to consult these records before providing his sage commentary on the subject.

In large cities, for instance, the homicide rate jumped from 5.6 per 100,000 residents in the first decade of the 20th century to 8.4 in the second, during which time 25 states passed their

own localized Prohibition laws in addition to the federal government's implementation of the Harris Narcotics Act, which in turn paved the way for the then-nascent drug war. And in the third decade, during which Prohibition was the law of the land not just in rural states governed by puritanical yahoos but in every state of the union, that number jumped to 10 per 100,000. Meanwhile, the rates for other serious crimes increased on a per capita basis by similar leaps and bounds, despite an environment of booming prosperity for which the 1920s are known to this day.

Now, a particularly stubborn statist of the William Bennett school of disingenuous argumentation might try to counter by claiming that this increase in serious crime could have been attributable to other factors, such as increased immigration; Bennett himself might be tempted to remark that things would have been different if only we had aborted every Italian baby in the country or something like that. But this hypothetical counter-argument would not hold up, because the crime rate continued to soar until 1933, when it saw a sudden and dramatic decline.

The year of 1933, of course, was when Prohibition was repealed.

So, William Bennett to the contrary, Prohibition did indeed lead to "big increases in crime." But Bennett is incapable of recognizing this, because he's already made up his mind. After all, Bennett advocates the federalization of private conduct, and, as the nation's first drug czar, acted to implement this vision. And because Bennett is a possessor of both "moral clarity" and "moral courage," his views must be both morally clear and morally courageous. And because America's failed experiment with Prohibition was an early and dramatic example of the federalization of private conduct, and thus an early version of Bennett's chosen ideology, Prohibition must have logically been a success, rather than a failure.

Indeed, Bennett was enthusiastic about the possibility of replicating the glorious Cultural Revolution of Prohibition. "This is one issue, Mr. President, where I, a conservative Republican, feel comfortable in advocating a strong federal role," Bennett reports telling Bush senior in 1988. Putting aside the question of whether or not this is how Bennett really talks—and

if so, he's certainly more eloquent in private than he is in public—this is a telling remark, and it's unfortunate that Bennett doesn't explain why a strong federal role would be merited here and not elsewhere. Something about the criminalization of private conduct scratches an itch that social assistance programs just can't seem to reach.

“Often it seems that any idea that fits the zeitgeist, that can be linked to a ‘need’—anyone’s need, anywhere, anytime—is funded,” he writes at one point. “Frequently, it is funded at the costs of hundreds of millions, or even billions, of dollars without the slightest regard to whether the program will work, whether it will be held accountable, whether it is appropriate for the federal government to fund it, or whether it is something people can or ought to do for themselves.” It does not occur to Bennett that he has just described the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Elsewhere: “I know of no other group in America that is more cocksure of its right to full entitlement to the United States Treasury than the leadership of higher education.” Bennett must believe the drug war to be funded by voluntary subscription and perhaps further offset by vouchers, and seems to have seen nothing “cocksure” in demanding that the military bomb more of Bolivia at his command. And during his no doubt Marcus Aurelius-inspired treatise on the education of children found elsewhere in the book, he tells us that if “we want them to know about respect for the law, they should understand why Socrates told Crito: ‘No, I submit to the decree of Athens.’” Perhaps they should also understand why Socrates was sentenced to death by the mob in the first place. The answer, of course, is that he was found guilty of “corrupting the youth.”

Like the Athenian mob, Bennett is also opposed to the corruption of the youth by way of such things as marijuana and favors the death penalty for those found guilty of it. At one point in the book, he recalls an appearance on *Larry King Live* when a caller suggested that drug dealers be beheaded. The moral clarity of the proposal seems to have excited Bennett. “What the caller suggests is morally plausible. Legally, it’s difficult . . . morally, I don’t have any problem with it.” But the moral plausibility of this was, as usual, lost on the nation’s intellectuals

while being perfectly understood by the common folk, who like the Russian serfs before them are in eternal adoration of their drug czar (and it is also understood by the totalitarian Chinese, who have been executing drug dealers for quite a while, no doubt due to the inherent moral clarity of its communist dictatorship). “Many of the elites ridiculed my opinion. But it resonated with the American people because they knew what drugs were doing, and they wanted a morally proportional response.” Bennett’s evidence of this, seriously, is that then-chairman of the Republican National Committee, Lee Atwater, called him from South Carolina and reported that the people he had spoken to there seemed very keen on the idea. Meanwhile, as Bennett points out, the elites had the audacity to run headlines like “Drug Czar: Beheading Fitting” to describe an incident in which the drug czar had said that beheading is fitting. “The reaction was illustrative,” he writes.

Indeed, much of the book (and much of Bennett’s public career since) follows a familiar pattern. Bennett says something wacky, the “elites” criticize him for it, and then Bennett either sticks to his guns or pretends he didn’t mean what he obviously meant. Weirdly, he sometimes manages to do both at the same time. Speaking to a Baptist group during his tenure as drug czar, Bennett told attendees the following: “I continue to be amazed how often people I talked to in drug treatment centers talk about drugs as the great lie, the great deception—indeed a product, one could argue, of the great deceiver, the great deceiver everyone knows. ‘A lie’ is what people call drugs, and many, many people in treatment have described to me their version of crack, simply calling it ‘the devil.’ This has come up too often, it has occurred too much, too spontaneously, too often in conversation, to be ignored.”

This time, the reaction was not simply “illustrative,” as had been the case with the beheading thing. Rather, “The reaction was absurd but illustrative.” I should have pointed out that the Bennett Pattern described above invariably ends with Bennett describing the situation as “illustrative.” Anyway, the reaction was illustrative of the media’s tendency to report things that government officials say when they say something unusual, a

practice to which Bennett seems to be opposed, no doubt on moral grounds. *The San Francisco Chronicle's* story was headlined "Bennett Blames Satan for Drug Abuse." Bennett reminds us that he was simply "reporting what I had heard from people in drug treatment and speaking of drugs in a moral context," but then immediately goes on to refer to this as "my view." Nor would he have been very likely to report all of this and describe it as having "come up too often, too spontaneously, too often in conversation, to be ignored" if he didn't believe it had some sort of merit. If Bennett had, for instance, gone to a number of drug treatment centers and been told that crack was invented by the CIA under the direction of George Bush, Sr. in order to exterminate the black population, which is another popular piece of theology among certain drug addicts, Bennett probably would not have gotten up in front of several hundred people and begun "reporting what I had heard from people in drug treatment" and then noted that Bush, Sr.'s alleged black-op narco-genocide "has come up too often, it has occurred too much, too spontaneously, too often in conversation, to be ignored," because Bennett would not have agreed with such a sentiment, or, if he did agree, he would not have said it because he would have known all of this to be true as he had in fact helped to launder the drug money by way of his casino mobster connections, and at any rate he would not find it prudent to talk about all of these things in public.

Occasionally a member of the media goes so far as to directly confront Bennett about his silly utterances. In 2006, John Roberts—former CNN anchor and thus a member of "the elite," rather than the conservative chief justice of the Supreme Court, who is presumably not a member of "the elite"—asked Bennett about something he had recently said to the effect that certain reporters should have been thrown in prison.

ROBERTS: Let's talk about your comments earlier this week about James Risen, Eric Lichtblau of *The New York Times* and Dana Priest of *The Washington Post* who won Pulitzer Prizes for their work uncovering CIA secret prisons in Europe and, as well, the NSA spying scandal. What were your listeners saying about that this morning?

BENNETT: Well, we had a lot of people weigh in. I said that I wondered whether they deserved the Pulitzer more, or actually more deserving was a subpoena or perhaps going to jail. Look, [former *New York Times* reporter] Judy Miller went to jail, and I don't know why we should treat these folks differently than Judy Miller, particularly, when this is—

ROBERTS: Yeah, but Judy Miller went to—Judy Miller went to jail for contempt of court.

BENNETT: Right, well, let's see if these guys are asked—

ROBERTS: These people haven't been charged with contempt of court.

BENNETT: Well, if James Risen is asked, right, or Dana Priest is asked, "Who are your sources?" the people who gave them this information committed a crime, leaked classified information. If they are asked, and they do the same thing Judy Miller does, which I expect they would, don't you?

ROBERTS: Right.

BENNETT: Then, they—then, they would go to jail. Also, there's the Espionage Act.

ROBERTS: But, they—but, they—but they haven't been asked yet. You know, they haven't been asked yet, though.

BENNETT: We—I don't know. If they haven't been asked yet, I assume they will. Then, you can change the tense of my remarks, but not the substance of them.

Which is to say that Bennett was asking why three people had not yet been imprisoned for crimes they might potentially commit in the future. This is a very interesting question. Similarly, one wonders why it is that Bennett has yet to be imprisoned for the triple homicide he will pull off in 2017 at

the behest of a Russian mobster to whom he owes \$3 million in gambling debts, and for whom Bennett will also have been acquiring legislative favors for by way of a network of friendly congressional staffers who are mixed up in the Southeast Asian slave trade. I myself have made repeated calls about this to the FBI, where I was hung up on, and to MI5, where I was listened to politely for a few minutes and then hung up on in a very charming and understated manner.

Even while proposing more executions for drug dealers, more bombs for Bolivia, and more prison time for reporters, Bennett means well. "I always speak with good will—that is, with the hope of arriving at a conclusion we can all share," he writes. And if his style is blunt, perhaps the times demand it. "The modern age and the bearers of some of the modern age's sentiments pushed hard against me. I pushed back." Bennett will not compromise with these modern-age sentiments. He is, like his church, uncompromising until compromise becomes convenient, which it often does.

There is something to be said for the holding of strict moral standards, but there is also something to be said for taking a break from this every once in a while, such as during the tail end of the Reagan administration. "I was appalled, when the Iran-Contra crisis broke out," Bennett recalls, unable to bring himself to refer to it as a scandal, "to witness how silent many people in the Reagan administration, including the cabinet, were in defense of the president. They headed for the tall grass and waited out events. The first impulse in this kind of situation should be to rally to the defense of the president." Bennett has some sort of secret reason for why this is the case, and he does not choose to share it with us. At any rate, the portion of the book in which he glosses over Iran-Contra is one of the very few in which he does not call for firings, expulsions, more jail time, executions, "moral clarity," "moral outrage," "moral courage," "moral plausibility," or for children to be taught why Socrates told Crito that he submits to the rule of Athens, the government of which must also have had a law against secretly selling weapons to Iran back when Iran was Persia (one could, in fact, be executed for even displaying warm feelings towards

Persia at this time in the history of Athens). When Bennett takes his break from morality, we are spared much.

Bennett does not take his break for long. “Washington at its worst can be a vicious, sick city. Nothing so captivates the Washington mind as the anticipation of a scandal or that a person in power is about to fall from grace.” These words, of course, were written just before the Clinton years; otherwise they would not have been written. There was a period between 1992 and 2001 in which the vicious sickness of Washington underwent divine transubstantiation back into “moral clarity.” I do not know why this is because I am neither a chemist nor a theologian, but at any rate, Clinton had been involved, not in an affair or a crisis, but in a “scandal,” as Bennett accurately called it in 1998, although suddenly no longer associating its “anticipation” with “vicious sickness.” “Through his tawdry, reckless, irresponsible conduct, he has plowed salt in America’s civil soil,” Bennett wrote of Clinton in that year. “For that, and for much else, he has rightfully earned our obloquy.” I am unclear on the meaning of this last word but from context I assume that it means “moral outrage.” It is, however, a shame about the salt in America’s civic soil, from which neither the wheat of virtue nor the barley of justice was ever to be yielded again; the harvest was now tyranny. “We know that Mr. Clinton has invoked claims of executive privilege that are even broader than Richard Nixon’s—claims few legal scholars defend.”

Mr. Bennett eventually took an eight-year break from his former vigilance on the subject of executive privilege, during which time he seemed to have expanded the pool of legal scholars who may be found to defend broad claims of same; Inauguration Day 2001 brought on another transubstantiation, a miracle of the sort upon which both Catholic and Evangelical may agree.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

EVEN IF WE LOOK VERY HARD, we find nothing truly funny in service to fascism or communism. But we may find that communists and fascists have otherwise promoted their totalitarianism by way of great and glorious contributions to film, music, and the performing arts—which is to say that anti-individualistic political persuasions may produce fine works of aesthetics, but apparently not humor.

This may lead us to suspect that humor is not subject to whatever strings together the totalitarian-accessible arts. It may also lead us to be wary of any political movement that has lost its ability to put forth comedic works in defense of itself and in opposition to its opponents—and not necessarily because such a movement thus shares a trait in common with communism and fascism, as some traits are superficial and this could perhaps be one of them. Rather, we should be wary for another, more self-evident reason. Political humor is heavily dependent on the ability to perceive and present irony; if a political population consisting of tens of millions of people cannot produce at least a few competent political humorists, we might draw some insulting conclusions about such a population.

For over a decade, the finest political humorist in America was P.J. O'Rourke, a reporter and veteran of *National Lampoon* whose early adulthood was marked by a gradual transition from

Maoism to conservatism. O'Rourke's conservatism was never of the populist strain; he simply favored free market economics and a somewhat hawkish foreign policy stance in such situations as a hawkish foreign policy stance might be in order. One of the more common elements of O'Rourke's earlier, more readable work was scorn for the histrionics that so often go hand in hand with mass politics, and particularly the empty ritualism of marches and protests. Conservatives, he asserted on several occasions, do not engage in such activities because they have jobs.

After the election of 2008, when the ongoing descent of conservatism into populism and anti-intellectualism brought us the Palinist tea party movement, the same humorist who had so consistently mocked the mentality of the protest-goer was suddenly unable to find anything funny in large gatherings of misshapen, chanting people. Instead, he criticized those media outlets that had been insufficiently respectful of such things, beginning an August 2009 *Weekly Standard* piece with the following paragraph of populist boilerplate:

Us right-wing nuts sure is scary! That's the message from *The Washington Post*. To put this in language a conservative would understand, the fourth estate has been alarmed once again by the Burkean proclivities of our nation's citizens. The *Post* is in a panic about (to use its own descriptive terms) "birthers," "anti-tax tea-partiers," and "town hall hecklers."

"Burkean" is probably not the first term I would use to characterize large demonstrations by self-described "regular folks" in opposition to some perceived contingent of political elites, but then O'Rourke is certainly entitled to his hilarious delusions.

He goes on to complain about a sidebar by Alec MacGillis in which the reporter begins with the assertion that "[h]ealth care reform is not that hard to understand, and those who tell you otherwise most likely have an ulterior motive." O'Rourke chooses to take this, as well as the entire piece, as some sort of elitist assault on his Burkean masses, to which he responds with a sarcastic quip that is supposed to summarize the intent of this *Post* piece: "All you town hall hecklers, calm down and go home."

This is an odd interpretation of the article in general and that first sentence in particular, as the very next sentence of MacGillis' piece goes on to clarify the intent of the first as such: "Reform proponents exaggerate the complexity of the issue to elevate their own status as people who understand it; opponents exaggerate it to make the whole endeavor out to be a bureaucratic monstrosity." The rest consists of a summary of the major elements of health care reform proposals that were then under debate—who was objecting to what and why and what compromises were likely to be reached as the process continued and that sort of innocuous thing. But O'Rourke repeats his bizarre characterization of what this is all supposed to convey: "But calm down and go home, because *The Washington Post* said so."

One must read between the lines, apparently. In fairness to O'Rourke's unfairness, though, the *Post* did indeed assign one reporter to compose a sort of political fashion piece in which the particular slovenliness of the heckler crowd is detailed. As O'Rourke characterizes the article:

Then, to add idiocy to insult, the *Post* sent Robin Givhan to observe the Americans who are taking exception to various expansions of government powers and prerogatives and to make fun of their clothes . . . Meeting with Givhan's scorn were "T-shirts, baseball caps, promotional polo shirts and sundresses with bra straps sliding down their arm."

We learn, then, that making fun of other people's clothes now constitutes "idiocy" according to O'Rourke, who must not be as familiar with his own body of work as I am.

O'Rourke once began an article on the 1990 Nicaraguan elections with a multi-paragraph critique of the sort of clothes worn by those visiting American liberals who supported the Sandinistas. He included similar critiques of liberal dressing habits in an article on the 1994 Mexican elections. He spent a good portion of an essay on the general increase in world travel decrying the fashions of tourists in general and the French in particular, and elsewhere took issue with the appearances

of those among the Great Unwashed who now fly on commercial airliners. He made fun of those who appeared before the Supreme Court in opposition to a flag-burning ban for their general ugliness. He spent much of the '90s mocking youngish leftists for wearing nose rings and black outfits—in fact, he did this so much as to actually ruin it for everyone else through overuse—and did so on at least one occasion in the pages of *The Weekly Standard* itself. He's written an entire article in which he and his girlfriend roam around an Evangelical-oriented theme park and make fun of everyone present for their general tackiness. And he once asserted that Hillary Clinton should stop messing with her own hair and instead “do something about Chelsea's.”

And, you know what? He was right. Aging liberals who run around Latin America and Mexico dress like idiots. Today half of the people one encounters on a domestic flight would have been rightfully barred from the plane by the captain in a more civilized age. I don't even know where to start with the sort of French people who wander Manhattan in August. Earnest young leftists should be wearing suits or at least a button-down shirt instead of whatever the fuck they think they're doing now. You can probably imagine what a bunch of Middle American Evangelicals look like when they're at the mall. Chelsea Clinton was indeed a late bloomer, although I'm not sure that the appearance of a teenage girl who did not choose to participate in the political arena is of any more consequence than the appearance of a large number of screaming adults who have.

Seeing William Kristol pretend to admire the innocent primitivism of the sort of people with whom he would rightfully never associate is one thing; Kristol has always been worthless. But O'Rourke was once the greatest political humorist of the conservative movement, as well as a strong advocate of taste back when taste still favored Republicans. Today, he must defend the people he once despised; the GOP is now filled with little else.

If we agree that the inability to produce humor on its own behalf is a sign of degeneracy on the part of a political movement,

and if we identify the modern American conservative enterprise as being incapable of producing viable political humor relative to its counterparts, and if we understand humor to be dependent on irony and understand irony in turn to be a sign of intellect, we may reasonably conclude that the actual intellectuals produced by such a movement as this will be relatively mediocre. But perhaps we should check just to be sure.

Like O'Rourke, Charles Krauthammer is a refuge from liberalism who eventually became a highly effective advocate of conservatism. Unlike O'Rourke, Krauthammer is just as talented today as he's ever been. Also unlike O'Rourke, Krauthammer was never particularly talented to begin with.

These things being relative, he is today considered—rightfully—to be among the Republican Party's greatest intellectual assets. In a profile piece that appeared in mid-2009, Politico's Ben Smith proclaimed the Canadian-born commentator to be “a coherent, sophisticated and implacable critic of the new president” and a “central conservative voice” in the “Age of Obama.” Around the same time, *New York Times* mainstay David Brooks characterized him as “the most important conservative columnist right now.” When Krauthammer was presented with an award that summer by Rupert Murdoch in recognition of his having done a lot of whatever it is that makes Rupert Murdoch happy, Dick Cheney himself was on hand to congratulate him. In liberal terms of achievement, this is somewhat akin to winning an award from Noam Chomsky while being fêted by the ghost of Louis Brandeis.

Krauthammer's prestige is such that, when foreign publications find themselves in need of someone to explain the conservative outlook, they are as likely to turn to our chapter subject as to anyone else. In October of 2009, *Der Spiegel* published a particularly comprehensive interview in which Krauthammer held forth largely on foreign policy. Among other things, he derides Obama as a wide-eyed amateur who lacks the columnist's own grounding in reality:

I would say his vision of the world appears to me to be so naïve that I am not even sure he's able to develop a doctrine. He has

a view of the world as regulated by self-enforcing international norms, where the peace is kept by some kind of vague international consensus, something called the international community, which to me is a fiction, acting through obviously inadequate and worthless international agencies. I wouldn't elevate that kind of thinking to a doctrine because I have too much respect for the word doctrine.

In pronouncing judgment upon a president's competence in the arena of foreign policy, Krauthammer thereby implies that he himself knows better. It is a fine thing, then, that we may go through the fellow's columns from the last 10 years and see for ourselves whether this is actually the case.

In 1999, NATO sought to derail yet another potential humanitarian disaster in the Balkans by way of an air bombing campaign against Serbia. Krauthammer promptly denounced Bill Clinton in a column that began thusly:

On Monday, as "genocide" was going on in Kosovo (so said the State Department), Bill Clinton played golf. The stresses of war, no doubt. But perhaps we should give him the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he needed to retreat to shaded fairways to contemplate the consequences of his little Kosovo war.

Our columnist seems to have since changed his mind on the propriety of playing golf in the midst of conflict, but then if we are to concern ourselves with every little thing for which he has denounced his opponents while giving a pass to his allies, we will be forever distracted, so knock it off. Better for us to note that Krauthammer uses the term "genocide" in quotes and implies such a characterization to be the work of the foolish Clintonian State Department; the intent here is to cast suspicion on Clinton's judgment by implying that no such thing as genocide is actually taking place. And in the very next paragraph, when Krauthammer asserts that NATO's intervention thus far has failed to prevent "savage ethnic cleansing, executions of Kosovar Albanian leaders, the forced expulsion of more than 100,000 Kosovars"—with no such terminology being put in quotes this time—the intent is to cast even greater

suspicion on Clinton's judgment by implying that some sort of genocide is taking place.

Krauthammer goes on to argue that air strikes would be insufficient to force Serbian forces from Kosovo. Bizarrely enough, he even tries to convince his readers that General Wesley Clark agreed with him over Clinton, quoting the then NATO commander as telling Jim Lehrer, "we never thought that through air power we could stop these killings on the ground." No doubt due to space constraints, Krauthammer leaves out the rest of Clark's answer, in which it is explained that "the person who has to stop this is President Milosevic" and that the purpose of the air campaign was to force him to do just that—which, of course, it did.

Even after Clinton's "little Kosovo war" proved successful, Krauthammer remained ideologically committed to chaos in the Balkans, having also predicted in 1999 that NATO's involvement "would sever Kosovo from Serbian control and lead inevitably to an irredentist Kosovar state, unstable and unviable and forced to either join or take over pieces of neighboring countries." When an ethnic Albanian insurgency arose in Macedonia along its border with UN-administered Kosovo in 2001, he felt himself vindicated, announcing that "the Balkans are on the verge of another explosion," making several references to Vietnam, and characterizing our continued presence in the region as a "quagmire." The violence ended within the year, having claimed less than 80 lives. Kosovo has since joined both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and is now recognized by three of five permanent members of the Security Council; as of late 2009, Macedonia is preparing for membership in NATO as well as the European Union.

Like most others who had cried apocalypse in Kosovo, Krauthammer bumbled into the Afghanistan war in a haze of amnesia and inexplicable self-regard. When *New York Times* contributor R.W. "Johnny" Apple wrote a piece in late October 2001 proposing that the conflict could develop into a "quagmire," our columnist ridiculed him for using a term that he himself had wrongly applied in his own Balkans-as-Vietnam column from earlier in the year. The Apple article in question proved to

be among the more prescient compositions of that period. Unlike Thomas Friedman, who was in those days proclaiming that Afghans don't really mind having bombs dropped on them and was otherwise engaged in the inexplicable application of scare quotes around the word "civilians," Apple predicted that civilian casualties would become a major source of discontent among the population and that this might very well be problematic for U.S. efforts to win such people over. He ended the piece by pointing out that there exists "a huge question about who would rule if the United States vanquished its foe. Washington never solved that issue satisfactorily after the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, and solving it in Afghanistan, a country long prone to chaotic competition among many tribes and factions, will probably not be much easier." And, of course, he was right.

Long after others had abandoned the illusion of quick and long-term success in Central Asia, Krauthammer was still mocking anyone foolish enough to express concern over whether the illusion might be illusory. "Before our astonishing success in Afghanistan goes completely down the memory hole, let's recall some very recent history," Krauthammer politely suggested in a December 2004 column. "Within 100 days, al Qaeda is routed and the Taliban overthrown. Then came the first election in Afghanistan's history. Now the inauguration of a deeply respected Democrat who, upon being sworn in as legitimate president of his country, thanks America for its liberation . . . What do liberals have to say about this singular achievement by the Bush administration? That Afghanistan is growing poppies." This was indeed noted by liberals of the time—along with a whole range of other concerns that Krauthammer does not bother to address, with one exception:

The other complaint is that Karzai really does not rule the whole country. Again the sun rises in the east. Afghanistan has never had a government that controlled the whole country. It has always had a central government weak by Western standards.

But Afghanistan's decentralized system works. Karzai controls Kabul, most of the major cities, and much in between. And he is successfully leveraging his power to gradually extend his authority as he

creates entirely new federal institutions and an entirely new military.

As it turns out, this “deeply respected Democrat” won the 2009 election by deeply undemocratic means, further de-legitimizing himself in the eyes of Afghans already angry over the corruption that marks not only Karzai’s cabinet but also certain members of his immediate family. The former monarch’s authority, meanwhile, has not so much been “gradually extended” as it has since retracted. American analysts of both the private and public sort are now virtually united in their contempt for the fellow.

Krauthammer also explains to us the following:

What has happened in Afghanistan is nothing short of a miracle Afghanistan had suffered under years of appalling theocratic rule, which helped to legitimize the kind of secularist democracy that Karzai represents.

The “secularist democracy” of Afghanistan proclaims Islam to be its official religion, holds that none of its civil laws may violate the teachings of Islam, and punishes conversion from Islam by death—all of which was already the case at the time of Krauthammer’s writing.

Elsewhere in the column we are confronted by the following declarative interrogatory: “The interesting question is: If we succeeded in Afghanistan, why haven’t we in Iraq?”

The Interesting Question: If we succeeded in Afghanistan, why haven’t we in Iraq?

Answer: Because our nation’s foreign policy was informed, in large part, by people who thought we had succeeded in Afghanistan.

★ ★ ★

MODERN AMERICAN CONSERVATIVES possess what they consider to be an intellectual sector, this being a collection of think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and scholar-jurists such as Charles Krauthammer. The purpose of this sector is, of course, to generate and distribute information that might assist in efforts

to advance conservative legislation or to deter that which is put forth by non-conservatives. Ideally, the information is accurate, but at any rate it flows into the public consciousness by way of a number of routes.

“[I]n the Netherlands and places where they have tried to define marriage [to include gay couples], what happens is that people just don’t get married,” Evangelical kingpin James Dobson told a typically credulous Larry King in November of 2006. “It’s not that the homosexuals are marrying in greater numbers,” he continued, although obviously homosexuals are indeed marrying in greater numbers since that number used to be zero and is now something greater than zero, “it’s that when you confuse what marriage is, young people just don’t get married.”

If what James Dobson says is true, New Jersey is going to be in huge trouble, and Massachusetts, which legalized gay marriage in 2004, must already be. Of course, James Dobson is wrong. But whereas James Dobson generally contents himself with simply being wrong in his priorities, sensibilities, instincts, historical perspective, theology, and manners—which is to say, wrong in a mystical, cloudy sort of way—he has here managed to be wrong in such a blatant sense that his wrongness can be demonstrated with mathematical exactitude. In fact, we should go ahead and do that. It’ll be like an adventure—a math adventure.

First, let’s prepare our variables. X is any country “where they have tried to define marriage [to include gay couples],” as Dobson manages to term these nations with just a little clarification from us. Y is the all-important marriage rate among heterosexuals before country X has “tried to define marriage [to include gay couples],” and Z is the all-important and allegedly damning heterosexual marriage rate that exists after 10 years of gay civil unions. Now, the Dobson Theorem, as we shall call it, plainly states that “if X, then Y must be greater than Z.” Or, to retranslate it into English, “if a nation allows for civil unions, the marriage rate among heterosexuals at the time that this occurs will be higher than it is 10 years later,” because the marriage rate among heterosexuals will of course decline for some reason.

Let us now test this Grand Unified Dobson Theorem, as I renamed it just a second ago when you weren't looking. Now, like most things with variables, the Grand Unified Christological Dobson Super-Theorem of Niftiness (which needed more pizzazz) requires that X be substituted for various things that meet the parameters of X—in this case, northern European countries. Luckily, Dr. Dobson himself has provided us with some. During the *Larry King* interview, Dobson mentioned Norway and “other Scandinavian countries” as fitting the description. We'll also need values to punch in for Y and Z. These may be obtained from all of the countries in question, which have famously nosy, busybody governments.

Conveniently enough, these numbers may also be obtained from the October 26th edition of *The Wall Street Journal* op-ed page. It seems that William N. Eskridge, Jr., the John A. Garver professor of jurisprudence at Yale University, and Darren Spedale, a New York investment banker, had recently written a book (called *Gay Marriage: For Better or For Worse? What We've Learned From the Evidence*), and had chosen to present the thrust of their findings in op-ed form.

Denmark, the authors noted, began allowing for gay civil unions in 1989. Ten years later, the heterosexual marriage rate had increased by 10.7 percent. Norway did the same in 1993. Ten years later, the heterosexual marriage rate had increased by 12.7 percent. Sweden followed suit in 1995. Ten years later, the heterosexual marriage rate had increased by 28.7 percent. And these marriages were actually lasting. During the same time frame, the divorce rate dropped 13.9 percent in Denmark, 6 percent in Norway, and 13.7 percent in Sweden.

As The Reader will no doubt have determined at this point, the Dobson Theorem or whatever it is that we've decided to call it is obviously bunk, since it stated that countries which allow gay civil unions will see a decline in the marriage rate among homosexuals, when in fact the opposite is true. But since we've already gone to the trouble of expressing Dobson's goofy utterances in the form of a theorem (or rather, since I've gone to the trouble—you were no help at all), we might as well punch in these figures just to make absolutely sure:

If X, then Y will be greater than Z. We punch in Denmark for X, Denmark's marriage rate in 1989 (n) for Y, and Denmark's marriage rate in 1999 ($n + n(10.7)$) for Z: If Denmark, then n will be greater than $n + n(10.7)$.

Well, that's obviously wrong, since n is not a greater number than n plus any other positive number. It is, in fact, a smaller number. If Denmark's policies reduce marriage, the residents of Denmark have yet to realize this and act accordingly.

The ridiculously false information that was conveyed to millions of citizens during the *Larry King* broadcast and in countless other manifestations as well was first concocted by Heritage Foundation gadfly Stanley Kurtz, who took issue with Garver and Eskridge's preliminary findings back in 2004, before they were published (in fact, Kurtz weirdly dismisses them as "unpublished" not once but twice in the course of his own *National Review* article, in which he nonetheless uses their numbers; now that these findings have appeared more formally, Kurtz will no doubt praise them as "published"). Confronted with statistics indicating that marriage in Scandinavia is in fine shape, Kurtz instead proclaimed that "Scandinavian marriage is now so weak that statistics on marriage and divorce no longer mean what they used to."

Brushing aside numbers showing that Danish marriages were up 10 percent from 1990 to 1996, Kurtz countered that "just-released marriage rates for 2001 show declines in Sweden and Denmark." He failed to note that they were down in 2001 for quite a few places, including the United States, which of course had no civil unions anywhere in 2001. And having not yet had access to the figures, he couldn't have known that both American and Scandinavian rates went back up in 2002. As for Norway, he says, the higher marriage rate "has more to do with the institution's decline than with any renaissance. Much of the increase in Norway's marriage rate is driven by older couples 'catching up.'" It's unclear exactly how old these "older couples" may be, but at any rate, Kurtz thinks their marriages simply don't count, and in fact constitute a sign of "the institution's decline." So Kurtz's position is that Norwegian marriages are in decline because not only are younger

people getting married at a higher rate, but older people are as well. I don't know what Kurtz gets paid per word, but I'm sure it would piss me off to find out.

Kurtz also wanted us to take divorce. "Take divorce," Kurtz wrote. "It's true that in Denmark, as elsewhere in Scandinavia, divorce numbers looked better in the nineties. But that's because the pool of married people has been shrinking for some time. You can't divorce without first getting married." This is true. It's also true that Denmark has a much lower divorce rate than the United States as a percentage of married couples, a method of calculation that makes the size of the married people pool irrelevant. Denmark's percentage is 44.5, while the United States is at 54.8. Incidentally, those numbers come from the Heritage Foundation, which also sponsors reports on the danger that gay marriage poses to the heterosexual marriage rate.

Still, Kurtz is upset that many Scandinavian children are born out of wedlock. "About 60 percent of first-born children in Denmark now have unmarried parents," he says. He doesn't give us the percentage of second-born children who have unmarried parents, because that percentage is lower and would thus indicate that Scandinavian parents often marry after having their first child, as Kurtz himself later notes in the course of predicting that this will no longer be the case as gay civil unions continue to take their nonexistent toll on Scandinavian marriage.

Since the rate by which Scandinavian couples have children before getting married has been rising for decades, it's hard to see what this has to do with gay marriage—unless, of course, you happen to be Stanley Kurtz. "Scandinavia's out-of-wedlock birthrates may have risen more rapidly in the seventies, when marriage began its slide. But the push of that rate past the 50 percent mark during the '90s was in many ways more disturbing." Of course it was more disturbing to Kurtz. By the mid-'90s, the Scandinavians had all instituted civil unions, and thus even the clear, long-established trajectory of such a trend as premature baby-bearing can be laid at the feet of the homos simply by establishing some arbitrary numerical benchmark that was obviously going to be reached

anyway, calling this milestone “in many ways more disturbing,” and hinting that all of this is somehow the fault of the gays. By the same token, I can prove that the establishment of *The Weekly Standard* in 1995 has contributed to rampant world population growth. Sure, that population growth has been increasing steadily for decades, but the push of that number past the six billion mark in 2000 was “in many ways more disturbing” to me for some weird reason that I can’t quite pin down. Of course, this is faulty reasoning—by virtue of its unparalleled support for the invasion of Iraq, *The Weekly Standard* has actually done its part to keep world population down.

Why is Kurtz so disturbed about out-of-wedlock rates? Personally, I think it would be preferable for a couple to have a child and then get married, as is more often the case in Scandinavia, rather than for a couple to have a child and then get divorced, as is more often the case in the United States. Kurtz doesn’t seem to feel this way, though, as it isn’t convenient to feel this way at this particular time. Here are all of these couples, he tells us, having babies without first filling out the proper baby-making paperwork with the proper federal agencies. What will become of the babies? Perhaps they’ll all die. Or perhaps they’ll continue to outperform their American counterparts in math and science, as they’ve been doing for quite a while.

★ ★ ★

THREE WEEKS INTO THE IRAQ CONFLICT, Krauthammer was hailing it as “The Three Week War” and mocking those who weren’t. Six months later, he was calling for some perspective.

On the reconstruction of Iraq, everybody is a genius. Every pundit, every ex-official and, of course, every Democrat knows exactly how it should have been done. Everybody would have had Iraq up and running by now, and as safe as downtown Singapore. Everybody, that is, except the Bush administration which, in its arrogance and stupidity, has so botched the occupation that it is “in danger of losing the peace”—so sayeth John Kerry, echoing Howard Dean, Ted Kennedy, and many others down the Democratic food chain.

A bit of perspective, gentlemen.

The last time Krauthammer had called for perspective was two weeks into the Iraq conflict:

The first gulf war took six weeks. Afghanistan took nine. Kosovo, 11. We are now just past two weeks in the second gulf war. It's time for a bit of perspective. This campaign has already been honored with a 'quagmire' piece by *The New York Times'* Johnny Apple, seer and author of a similar and justly famous quagmire piece on Afghanistan published just days before the fall of Mazar-e Sharif and the swift collapse of the Taliban.

I try not to resort to numbered lists, but fuck.

1. Afghanistan did not so much take nine weeks as it did more than a decade.
2. Kosovo did indeed take just 11 weeks, during which time Krauthammer kept calling the whole thing a "quagmire" and comparing it to Vietnam and continued to do so for years afterwards.
3. Krauthammer makes fun of Johnny Apple for having written an earlier piece warning that Afghanistan might develop into a "quagmire."
4. Krauthammer makes fun of Johnny Apple for having written a more recent piece warning that Iraq might develop into a "quagmire."
5. Krauthammer makes a passing reference to the "swift collapse of the Taliban."
6. The paragraph itself does not really flow all that well.

The column that Krauthammer wrote six months into the Three Week War ends with the following taunt:

Losing the peace? No matter what anyone says now, that question will only be answered at the endpoint. If in a year or two we are able to leave behind a stable, friendly government, we will have succeeded. If not, we will have failed. And all the geniuses will be vindicated.

This was in 2003. In 2005, Krauthammer penned another column in which he acknowledged that his errors had assisted in the promotion and failed perpetuation of one of the most terrible foreign policy mistakes in American history, and of course he stopped making sarcastic attacks on those other commentators and public figures whom he had previously mocked for their far more accurate predictions. Having done a great deal of soul-searching and realizing that he had been dreadfully wrong about the three most recent American wars, and recognizing that the distribution of poor information harms the ability of voters and policymakers to make wise decisions regarding matters on which the lives and well-being of millions are at stake, he also decided to refrain from providing further commentary on military affairs. Then he blew up an Iranian missile silo with his mind.

Just kidding. Instead, he eventually took to denouncing retired military figures as the “I-know-better generals” for second-guessing Rumsfeld, whom he continued to support well after even William Kristol had begun calling for the defense secretary to be dismissed. “Six of them, retired, are denouncing the Bush administration and calling for Donald Rumsfeld’s resignation as secretary of defense,” he noted in the April 2006 column. “The anti-war types think this is just swell. I don’t.” He then explains the various things that he knows better than the “I-know-better-generals”:

In his most recent broadside, retired Army Maj. Gen. John Batiste accuses the administration of ‘radically alter[ing] the results of 12 years of deliberate and continuous war planning’ on Iraq. Well, the Bush administration threw out years and years and layer upon layer of war planning on Afghanistan, improvised one of the leanest possible attack plans and achieved one of the more remarkable military victories in recent history. There’s nothing sacred about on-the-shelf war plans.

More like General Wrong Batiste, amirite? Man, these guys aren’t just generals—they’re I-know-better generals! Whatta buncha maroons!

The failure of so many retired military men to understand things they obviously understood perfectly well was eclipsed by another, deeper concern on the part of our intrepid military historian:

We've always had discontented officers in every war and in every period of our history. But they rarely coalesce into factions. That happens in places such as Saddam's Iraq, Pinochet's Chile or your run-of-the-mill banana republic. And when it does, outsiders (including United States) do their best to exploit it, seeking out the dissident factions to either stage a coup or force the government to change policy.

That kind of dissident party within the military is alien to America. Some other retired generals have found it necessary to rise to the defense of the current administration. Will the rest of the generals, retired or serving, now have to declare themselves as to which camp they belong?

Nope.



CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER, Stanley Kurtz, and other similarly scholarly figures within the conservative enterprise serve two unconscious functions within the greater structure. The first involves the production of informational collateral that appears on the surface to be rigorous and reasonable but which often turns out to be haphazard and disingenuous; as with the non-sensical gay marriage article discussed earlier, such things are then disseminated to the public by way of other conservative figures with greater functional visibility, thus going on to influence the opinions of millions of voters and thereby reemerging in some cases as actual policy, policy being more or less the result of the opinions held by those millions of voters.

The other role of the conservative intellectual is to obscure the fact that the conservative enterprise has become an essentially anti-intellectual force—populist, superstitious, fueled by tribalism, and increasingly subject to the unwholesome desires represented in particular by certain of our Catholic and Evangelical fellow-citizens. Being of a relatively secularist bent and

not awaiting any particular messiah, Krauthammer and others like him serve as a reasonable face for a movement that has become increasingly unreasonable, that has abandoned such things as scholarly essays extolling the benefits of free enterprise in favor of historical revisionism of the sort that makes Puritan zealots of the Founding Fathers and Founding Fathers of Puritan zealots.

Back in October of 2006, the wonderfully named Family Research Council held a televised event entitled Liberty Sunday, which, although vague in its billing, was supposed to have something to do with homosexuality, and which was consequently expected to draw some high level of attention. As FRC President Tony Perkins put it, with characteristic exactitude, “We’ve got thousands, literally millions of people with us tonight.”

These millions, literally billions of viewers were first treated to a suitably campy video-and-voice-over presentation in which Mr. Perkins waxed nostalgic on the virtues of John Winthrop, the original governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony and an apparently fond subject of the Christian dominionist imagination. Perkins quoted Winthrop as having warned his fellow Puritans that “the eyes of all the people are upon us so that if we deal falsely with our God in this work, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world.” Winthrop’s prescience is truly stunning; the early Puritan colony of Salem did indeed become a “byword” for several things. But an obvious gift for prophecy notwithstanding, Winthrop is perhaps not the most judicious choice of historical figure upon which to perform rhetorical fellatio at the front end of an event billed as a celebration of popular rule. “If we should change from a mixed aristocracy to mere democracy,” Winthrop once wrote, “first we should have no warrant in scripture for it: for there was no such government in Israel,” and was right in saying so. He went on to add that “a democracy is, amongst civil nations, accounted the meanest and worst of all forms of government,” and most people did in fact, uh, account it so. Furthermore, to allow such a thing would be a “manifest breach” of the Fifth Commandment, which charges us to honor our fathers and mothers, all

of whom are presumably monarchists.

Solid as these age-old talking points may have been from a Biblical standpoint—and they seemed solid enough to Biblical literalists ranging from King David to King George to King Saud—it wasn't the intention of Perkins to discuss his buddy Winthrop's anti-democratic sensibilities (of which Perkins is probably unaware anyway, not being a historian or even properly educated); rather, this was meant to establish a narrative of contrasts. On the other side of the Massachusetts time line from Winthrop and his gang of roving Puritan theocrats, as Perkins tells us in slightly different words, we have the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court of the early 21st century. This far more modern, considerably less blessed body had recently handed down a majority ruling to the effect that the state could not deny marriage licenses to same-sex couples, as to do so would violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Massachusetts constitution. "These four judges discarded 5,000 years of human history when they imposed a new definition of marriage," Perkins said, "not only upon this state, but potentially upon the entire nation." Note that Perkins is here criticizing the judiciary for not giving due consideration to the laws and customs of the ancient Hebrews when interpreting United States law; he elsewhere criticizes the judiciary for providing consideration to the laws and customs of nations that exist right now. It's also worth mentioning that the Founding Fathers discarded those very same "5,000 years of human history" when they broke away from the British crown in order to establish a constitutional republic, thus committing that "manifest breach" of the Fifth Commandment which so worried John Winthrop.

But the mangling of history had only just begun; still in voice-over mode, Perkins was now on about Paul Revere. When Revere made his "ride for liberty," the lanterns indicating the manner of British approach ("one if by land, two if by sea") were placed in the belfry of the Old North Church by what Perkins described as a "church employee." This, Perkins pronounced, was an early example of "the church [giving] direction at critical moments in the life of our nation." And here, in the present

day, we have the homosexuals laying siege to American life with the public policy equivalent of muskets, ships-o-the-line, and archaic infantry formations. “Once again, people are looking to the church for direction.” Because back in 1776, you see, people were literally looking at this particular church for guidance. That’s where the signal lanterns were kept. The actual soldiers were kept in whorehouses.

The video clip ended. First up among the live speakers was Dr. Ray Pendleton, senior pastor of the Tremont Temple Baptist Church, Liberty Sunday’s storied venue. The good doctor acknowledged that the evening’s events had garnered some degree of controversy—they were, after all, holding a hard-right, Evangelical-led gay bashing event in downtown Boston, of all places—but, as Perkins noted, “This church is not foreign to controversy.”

“No, indeed we’re not,” Pendleton agreed, very much in the manner of a Ronco pitchman who’s just been prompted to confirm the utility of a juicer. “From the very beginning, we’ve been part of concerns for liberty and freedom. We were part of the Underground Railroad, the first integrated church in America.” Wild applause. “I think the abolitionist’s message is pretty clear.” Actually, it was pretty clearly in opposition to the Bible. Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, was aware of this, even if Dr. Pendleton is not, and once noted that the peculiar institution of slavery was not peculiar at all, and had in fact had been “established by decree of Almighty God” and furthermore “sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation.” Davis was right, of course; and not only is slavery justified in the New Testament book of Ephesians as well as within several books of the Old Testament, but the proper methodology of slave beating is even spelled out in Exodus 21:20-21: “And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his property.” Which is to say that one may beat his slave without punishment, assuming that the slave in question does not die from his wounds

within the next couple of days. Tough but fair. Never mind all that, though; Pendleton's point was that this church had been opposed to slavery 150 years ago, that it was now opposed to gays with equal vigor, and that we should draw some sort of conclusion from this. My own conclusion was that they were right the first time purely by accident.

Next up was yet another pre-recorded video segment, this time featuring some fellow named Peter Marshall who was standing next to Plymouth Rock. "All of us were taught in America that the Pilgrims came here as religious refugees running away from persecution in Europe," Marshall tells us. "That really isn't true; they had no persecution in Holland where they'd spent 12 years before they came here." Marshall is correct; by the Pilgrims' own account, they left Holland not due to persecution directed towards themselves, but rather because they found the free-wheeling and numerous Dutchmen to be difficult targets upon which to direct their own brand of persecution. "The truth," Marshall continues, "is that they"—the Pilgrims, not the fortunate Dutch, who appear to have dodged a bullet—"had a much deeper and broader vision. The Lord Jesus had called them here, as their great chronicler and governor, William Bradford, put it, 'because they had a great hope and an inward zeal of advancing the cause of the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in these remote parts of the earth.'" And from this it is clear that the United States was indeed founded upon Christian dominionist rule, particularly if one sets the founding of the United States not in 1776 when the United States was actually founded, but rather in 1620, when a bunch of people suddenly showed up in the general area.

Of course, if the founding of a nation really occurs when people arrive on a parcel of land, as Marshall seems to be implying, and if the characteristics of a nation are really determined by what said arrivals happen to be doing at the time, as Marshall is certainly implying, then the United States was actually founded a few thousand years earlier when Asiatic wanderers crossed the Bering Strait in search of mammoth herds or whatever it is that induces Asiatic types to wander around. By this reckoning, the U.S. was meant to be characterized by the "Indian" practices of anthropomorphism and the cultivation of maize, rather than

the “Pilgrim” practices of Christianity and nearly starving to death because you’re a stupid Pilgrim and you don’t know how to farm properly.

But there does exist a more profound defense of the Pilgrims and their claim to American authorship, one which Marshall neglects to mention but which I will provide for you in his stead simply because the Pilgrims need all the help they can get. In the early stages of the relationship between saint and savage, God seems to have signaled his displeasure at the practices of the latter, while simultaneously signaling his approval of those of the former. At least, Tony Perkins’ boyfriend John Winthrop seems to have thought so. “But for the natives in these parts,” Winthrop wrote in regards to what was left of his heathen neighbors, “God hath so pursued them, as for 300 miles space the greatest part of them are swept away by smallpox which still continues among them. So as God hath thereby cleared our title to this place, those who remain in these parts, being in all not 50, have put themselves under our protection.” Of course, God didn’t get around to doing all of this until a group of European colonists brought smallpox to Massachusetts in the first place. Timing is everything.

Back in the present day, our new friend Peter Marshall continued to elucidate on the motivations of our blessed Pilgrim overlords: “The vision was that if they could put the biblical principles of self-government into practice, they could create a Bible-based commonwealth where there would truly be liberty and justice for every soul.” Except for the witches among them, who had no souls. “That was the vision that founded America. Morally and spiritually speaking, our nation was really founded here by the Pilgrims and the Puritans who came to Boston about 30 miles up the road.”

Next up was a series of taped interviews with various American theocrats ranging from the notable to the obscure. C.J. Doyle of the Massachusetts Catholic Action League tells us that “when religious freedom is imperiled, it never begins with a direct frontal assault on the liberty of worship. It always begins with attempts to marginalize the church and to narrow the parameters of the church’s educational and charitable activities.” The Catholics

would be the ones to ask; the “parameters of the church’s educational and charitable activities” have indeed been narrowed quite a bit since the days when said parameters encompassed the globe and included the enslavement of the indigenous population of South America, the theocratic dictatorship of as much of Europe as could effectively be controlled, the burning of heretical texts and heretics along with them, several Crusades, scattered inquisitions, and the wholesale persecution of those Protestant religious denominations whose modern-day adherents were now assembled at Liberty Sunday, nodding in sympathy at the plight of Mr. C.J. Doyle and his Church. Of course, Protestants can now afford to let bygones be bygones, the temporal ambitions of Rome having since been relegated to the feeding, clothing, and molestation of children. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*



WHEN THE SURGE WAS PROPOSED in 2007, Krauthammer was among the few conservatives to come out against the idea, explaining in a 2007 column that the strategy “will fail” due to the perfidy and incompetence of the Maliki government. “If it were my choice,” he wrote in January, “I would not ‘surge’ American troops in defense of such a government. I would not trust it to deliver its promises.” The guy was pretty down on Maliki for a while, in fact, elsewhere asserting that the U.S. “should have given up on Maliki long ago and begun to work with other parties in the Iraqi Parliament to bring down the government” and call for new elections. “As critics acknowledge military improvement, the administration is finally beginning to concede the political reality that the Maliki government is hopeless,” he elsewhere observed. “Bush’s own national security adviser had said as much in a leaked memo back in November. I and others have been arguing that for months.”

Later in the year, the surge had become a reality and Krauthammer had become a convert, his original objections having disappeared in the face of what was beginning to seem like a viable strategy. Meanwhile, though, a number of his congressional co-ideologues had adopted his own past objections:

To cut off Petraeus' plan just as it is beginning—the last surge troops arrived only last month—on the assumption that we cannot succeed is to declare Petraeus either deluded or dishonorable. Deluded in that, as the best-positioned American in Baghdad, he still believes we can succeed. Or dishonorable in pretending to believe in victory and sending soldiers to die in what he really knows is an already failed strategy.

That's the logic of the wobbly Republicans' position. But rather than lay it on Petraeus, they prefer to lay it on Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and point out his government's inability to meet the required political "benchmarks." As a longtime critic of the Maliki government, I agree that it has proved itself incapable of passing laws important for long-term national reconciliation.

But first comes the short term.

When Petraeus proposed the surge, Krauthammer opposed it—which is to say that by his own logic, Krauthammer himself must have likewise considered Petraeus to be "either deluded or dishonorable" inasmuch as that our columnist believed that the surge would be a failure and thereby waste American lives. He does not bother to note that he himself opposed the strategy that nobody else must now oppose lest they insult Petraeus in the same manner that Krauthammer apparently did. He also doesn't bother to note that he, like all these "wobbly Republicans," also considered Maliki to be incapable of making use of any such surge. Instead, he here deems the surge as falling under the category of "short term" reconciliation and that Maliki is capable of taking advantage of such—without, of course, admitting that he himself had argued the exact opposite case seven months before.

At any rate, Krauthammer today considers the strategy to have been a success after having initially predicted its failure. Thus it is that this most respected of conservative commentators may be the only pundit in the country to have been wrong about every significant U.S. military question of the last decade.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER IS NOT always wrong, of course. He is only sometimes wrong.

Here's a goofy old riddle: "I am telling you a lie." But, wait! Isn't that a lie, too? Does this mean he is actually telling the truth? But then he would be lying about telling us a lie, right? OH MY GOD WHAT IS HAPPENING TO MY MIND?

Imagine some fellow tells you, "I am always wrong." Is this, too, an impossible riddle? Never! We determine that he must be sometimes wrong, as to be wrong all the time would have precluded him from correctly conveying his universal wrongness and to have never been wrong would preclude him from being wrong in telling us of his allegedly universal wrongness. Never!

Riddles of this sort are not particularly fleshed-out in terms of plot and character development. When we confront this hypothetical Fellow Who Claims To Be Telling Us A Lie, for instance, it is only a brief encounter with an abstraction.

The Fellow Who Is Sometimes Wrong is more reliable than his ever-lying counterpart, whom we would obviously not consider employing as a columnist with the newspaper we run in our hypothetical world (we run a newspaper in our hypothetical world). Rather, we have an antechamber filled with sometimes-wrong people who are here to apply for that columnist position. Knowing that each applicant is sometimes wrong to some varying extent, just as in the real world, and being concerned only with the applicant's ability to be right (remember that we are fantasy-world publishers), how do we make a decision? There are a variety of ways depending on the parameters, i.e., whether we can we ask them questions about past events or otherwise test them. But this is already getting complicated, so let us devise another scenario. Let us say we are publishers and that we long ago hired three columnists out of our original pool of people who sometimes get things wrong. Our intent is for the columnists we employ to be as right as possible as often as possible, and we are fully capable of finding new columnists to replace our existing ones. How shall we proceed?

One way would be to look over all of the columns that each of our columnists have written for us thus far and see if they're

all full of shit, in which case we should fire the columnist in question and replace him with a new one. Notice how extraordinarily obvious this solution was.



BACK AT LIBERTY SUNDAY, former Mormon bishop Mitt Romney was introduced by his Mormon wife, Ann. Romney, of course, was here to speak about why traditional marriage is a sacred and inviolable practice consisting of a single man and a single woman—a concept that his church had vigorously opposed until several showdowns with Congress in the late 19th century ended with a conveniently timed new revelation to the effect that God had changed his mind about polygamy.

After Ann Romney had announced to wild applause that she herself was a direct descendant of the splendid William Bradford, Mitt Romney took the podium to say his piece. The nation's values, he said, were under attack. "Today there are some people who are trying to establish one religion: the religion of secularism." Unfortunately, the religion of secularism's operations have yet to be declared tax exempt, which is why I can't write off all of my Gore Vidal novels, tweed jackets, and imported coffee.

A bit into his speech, Romney went off-message when he noted that "our fight for children, then, should focus on the needs of children, not the rights of adults," thus admitting that the point of all of this was to limit rights, rather than to protect them. But if our Mormon friend went on to elaborate regarding his advocacy of federalized social engineering, I wasn't able to catch it, and neither were the "thousands, literally millions" of others watching via the telecast; the transmission broke up in mid-sentence, and didn't resume until after Romney had finished speaking. Apparently, Yahweh does not approve of his True Church being rendered unclean by the presence of Mormons, who believe, among other things, that Jesus and Satan are actually brothers. A message from the Family Research Council came up asking me to "click stop on my media player. Then restart it," and to repeat this—not a word about prayer. Later on, after the transmission had been fixed, Tony Perkins

took the stage and said something about someone having pulled a power cord. Never fret, though: “We know where the real power comes from!” Then there was applause, presumably for the engineer who plugged the cord back in.

James Dobson appeared via a pre-recorded tape. He was in Tennessee on that particular evening. “Tennessee has an open Senate seat,” he explained. Fair enough. Dobson cited some scripture, as well he might. “For this cause,” he quoted, referring to the cause of matrimony, “a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.” It certainly sounds as if Yahweh has stated His opposition to letting the in-laws move in. Judeo-Christianity is not without its charms.

“More than 1,000 scientific studies conducted in secular universities and research centers have demonstrated conclusively that children do best when they’re raised by a mother and father who are committed to each other,” Dobson asserted. In his 2004 book *Marriage Under Fire: Why We Must Win This Battle*, Dobson had written something similar: “More than ten thousand studies have concluded that kids do best when they are raised by loving and committed mothers and fathers.” How that figure managed to shrink from 10,000 to 1,000 in the space of two years would be an interesting question for a theoretical mathematician or quantum theorist. How do 9,000 things go from existing to not having ever existed at all? Actually, this is indeed a trick question. The trick answer is that those 9,000 things never existed in the first place, and it’s doubtful that even 1,000 did, either. The liberal watchdog group Media Matters for America once tried to figure out exactly how Dobson had arrived at his oft-stated “more than ten thousand” figure, which has since been cited by a couple of politicians on various cable news programs. It seems that Dobson was referencing some books and articles to the effect that children are at a disadvantage when raised by a single mother, although none of the studies cited dealt with the question of whether or not “mothers and fathers” were necessarily preferable to two mothers, two fathers, or a mother and a grandmother (I myself was mostly raised in this last fashion, and I don’t believe I’m the worse for

it, but then I'd never thought to ask James Dobson). But even aside from Dobson's slight misrepresentations regarding the nature of the studies that actually do exist, the 10,000 figure is ludicrous anyway; as Media Matters put it, such a number could only be possible "if a new study reaching that conclusion had been released every day for the past 27 years." This does not appear to be the case. Nonetheless, Dobson was back to citing the 10,000 figure just a few months later.

Eventually, Dobson was called out on this particular instance of nonsense by two researchers whose work he referenced in a December 2006 essay that was published in *TIME* and cutely entitled "Two Mommies is Too Many." Until this point, neither of the researchers in question had been aware that Dobson was running around citing their work in support of his contention that gay marriage was the pits; they had, in fact, no reason to expect this, as their work supported no such contention. New York University educational psychologist Carol Gilligan requested that Dobson "cease and desist" from referencing her work, and Professor Kyle Pruett of the Yale School of Medicine wrote him the following letter, which was reprinted on the gay advocacy website Truth Wins Out:

Dr. Dobson,

I was startled and disappointed to see my work referenced in the current *TIME* magazine piece in which you opined that social science, such as mine, supports your convictions opposing lesbian and gay parenthood. I write now to insist that you not quote from my research in your media campaigns, personal or corporate, without previously securing my permission.

You cherry-picked a phrase to shore up highly (in my view) discriminatory purposes. This practice is condemned in real science, common though it may be in pseudo-science circles. There is nothing in my longitudinal research or any of my writings to support such conclusions. On page 134 of the book you cite in your piece, I wrote, "What we do know is that there is no reason for concern about the development or psychological competence of children

living with gay fathers. It is love that binds relationships, not sex.”

Kyle Pruett, M.D.
Yale School of Medicine

To its credit, *TIME* later published a response to Dobson’s essay, entitled (almost as cutely) “Two Mommies or Two Daddies Will Do Just Fine, Thanks.”

Dobson had more concrete matters about which to be livid. It seems that there’s a book called *King and King* floating around the nation’s public schools. The plot concerns “a prince who decides to marry another man,” Dobson tells us, and then, visibly disgusted, adds, “It ends with a celebration and a kiss.” Dobson thinks this to be very bad form, and, for once, I agree with him. I wouldn’t want my children being taught that the institution of hereditary monarchy is some sort of acceptable “alternative lifestyle,” either. If I caught my kid reading any of that smut by John Winthrop, for instance, I’d beat him with a sack of oranges until my arm got tired. I’m just kidding. I don’t have any kids. Yet.

Dobson’s list of grievances went on. A school in Lexington, Massachusetts, had sent students home with a “diversity bag,” which included some materials to the effect that homosexuals exist and are people. In response to the inevitable parental complaint, the district superintendent had said, “We couldn’t run a public school system if every parent who feels some topic is objectionable to them for moral or religious reasons decides their child should be removed.” Dobson read the quote and then delivered the following pithy retort: “Well, maybe, sir, you have no business running a school system in the first place!”

Tony Perkins had gone into some more depth regarding the Lexington Diversity Bag Heresy in a recent newsletter. “You may remember us reporting last year on David Parker, the Lexington, Massachusetts father who was arrested because of insistence on being notified by school officials anytime homosexual topics were discussed in his son’s classroom,” Perkins wrote at the time. “He made this reasonable request after his six-year-old kindergarten came home from school with a ‘diversity’ book bag and a book discussing homosexual relationships.” Obviously, Mr.

Parker wasn't arrested because of his "insistence" on anything; he was arrested on a charge of trespassing after refusing to leave the school office, even after having been asked several times by the principal as well as by the police. And Mr. Parker had indeed been "notified" about the bags, along with all of the other parents, twice. A sample had even been displayed at a PTA meeting at the beginning of the year, where it was made clear that children were not required to accept them. But, hey, whatever.

Dobson had another one. "And did you hear two weeks ago that a 13-year-old girl at Prince George's County Middle School was silently reading her Bible at lunch time, when a vice principal told her she was violating school policy and would be suspended if she didn't stop?" This actually did happen; the vice principal apparently didn't understand school policy, which clearly states that students may read religious texts. They can also start religious clubs. The problem seemed to be that the vice principal in question mistakenly believed otherwise, perhaps because Evangelicals like James Dobson (and Catholics like William Bennett) are always running around claiming that it's illegal to pray in public schools.

Then, all of a sudden and apropos of nothing, Dobson warned that "our country is in great danger from the radical Islamic fundamentalism, which is telling us now that they plan to destroy the United States and Israel, and I'm convinced they mean it." Really puts that diversity book bag thing into perspective, huh?

The video ended and it was back to the Liberty Sunday live feed. Perkins noted that the DVD version of the event could be ordered from the FRC website, and that it included bonus material.

A bit later, Massachusetts Family Institute president Kris Mineau came on. "The leadership of this state is beholden to the homosexual lobbyists," he announced. "Homosexual money is flooding into this state to deny the citizens the right to vote, to deny our freedom of speech." The homosexual money in question was apparently too limp-wristed and faggy to actually accomplish any of this, though, seeing as how Mineau was exercising his freedom of speech at that very moment and the 2006

mid-terms had yet to be canceled by the Homosexual Agenda Electoral Commission.

Wellington Boone took the stage. This made me very happy. Boone is a black Charismatic preacher with a penchant for shooting his mouth off about “faggots” and “sissies,” as he had done at the recent Values Voter summit, explaining at that event that he is “from the ghetto, so sometimes it does come out a little bit.” The crackers in attendance had eaten this up with a spoon.

Like most Charismatic types, Boone comes from the Arbitrary Implementation of Vague Biblical Terminology school of ministerial presentation, whereby a preacher selects an apparently random verse or even just a phrase of the Old Testament and then ascribes to it some sort of special significance, mystical as well as practical. The most popular item of fodder for such a sermon is “the sowing of seeds,” which invariably entails that the sermon-goer should give the preacher a hundred bucks, because God will totally pay back him or her (usually her) at a rate of return that makes a Reagan-era share of Apple look like a Roosevelt-era Victory Bond. In a way, “the sowing of seeds” was also the subject of tonight’s presentation, insomuch as that everyone had gathered to advocate the supremacy of vaginal intercourse over its lesser, non-child-yielding counterparts.

Boone was right out of the gate, noting that “God does not play concerning righteousness.”

“We know what a family is,” continued Boone. “My wife said to me this morning, she said, ‘Well, okay, then. It’s sodomites because they’re not gays; it’s a misnomer. They’re sodomites.’” That’s a pretty clever thing to say, and so one can understand why Boone would be sure to relate this to everyone.

“There were sodomy laws in this country all over from [the] 1600s and it was [at] one time a capital offense,” he went on. “How could we make it a capital offense? Because most lawyers studied from William Blackstone, who was the foundation of—it was a foundation book that helped those lawyers get a clue as to how they should govern and how they should practice law. Where did he get it from? The Bible. The Bible was the book.” It sure was. It was a foundation book.

Then came what I consider to be the best moment of the evening. “So if this is just a small matter, I’ll tell you what—let two women go on an island and a whole bunch of—all women, if you’re sodomites, go on an island, stay by yourself, all women, put all the men on another island—this is my wife talking to me this morning—let them stay. I’ll tell you what: ‘We’ll come back and see you in a hundred years.’” There was total silence in the auditorium, as opposed to the approving laughter that Boone had no doubt come to expect from his wife’s anecdotes. The problem, he seemed to have thought, was that the subtlety of the joke had gone over the audience’s collective head, and so, like any good comedian, he explained the punch line: “Do you get it? Because a man and a man and a woman and a woman will not make a child.”

Though a failure at comedy, Boone’s real function for the evening was to provide cover for the event’s anti-homosexual sentiment by showing everyone that he himself, as a member of a group that has been persecuted, was more than willing to lend his support to the persecution of yet another group, and that this modern-day persecution was, ipso facto, hardly akin to the earlier persecution of blacks to which he himself had obviously been opposed and to which most of the crackers assembled were officially opposed as well. To this end, Boone noted the various ways in which blacks had been persecuted over the years. “Now, if you tell me your issue is the same as that issue,” he said, addressing any gays who might have been watching the anti-gay event, “I’ll say you better get a clue. Get out of here. You’re not getting over here.” There was wild applause. “And you’re not getting on that. You’re not getting any of that. No sir.” Perhaps Boone has a point. If so, he refrained from making it. If I was making a speech about gays, and if I was planning to spend the fifth minute of said speech claiming that gays have no license to compare their struggles to that of the blacks, I would probably have refrained from spending the third minute pointing out that gays used to be executed on the basis of Biblical law and that I thought this was a swell thing, as Boone had done, nor would I have menacingly added, “If you’re in the closet, come out of the closet and let God deal with you and let

the nation deal with you and don't hide out," as Boone also did. If you're a homosexual, don't listen to Boone. It sounds like a trap. Stay in the closet with a shotgun.

Boone was also upset that Condoleezza Rice and Laura Bush had recently presided over the induction ceremony of the new, gay Global AIDS Initiative director Dr. Mark S. Dybul, was particularly peeved that Dybul was sworn in with his hand on a Bible held by his homosexual partner, and was quite unhappy indeed that Rice had referred to Dybul's partner's mother as Dybul's "mother-in-law" during the ceremony. Boone had "a real problem with that." As he explained a bit later, "That ain't no family!"

The incident had riled up a good portion of the Evangelical hornet's nest for a variety of reasons; a few days before Liberty Sunday, an FRC spokesman had told the media that "[w]e have to face the fact that putting a homosexual in charge of AIDS policy is a bit like putting the fox in charge of the hen house," because, I suppose, gay people like to eat AIDS, presumably for brunch.



WHEN BARACK OBAMA BEGAN positioning himself as a presidential aspirant towards the end of 2006, Charles Krauthammer offered some encouraging words. Obama, he wrote at the time, has "an affecting personal history." More importantly, he had something in common with another once-popular presidential aspirant, Colin Powell; both, it turned out, were black. "Race is only one element in their popularity," Krauthammer noted, "but an important one. A historic one. Like many Americans, I long to see an African-American ascend to the presidency. It would be an event of profound significance, a great milestone in the unfolding story of African-Americans achieving their rightful, long-delayed place in American life." The column made a strong case for Obama's candidacy in terms of his identity, but included not a word concerning what the first-term Senator might bring to the table in terms of policy.

Less than two years later, Krauthammer was expressing disgust with those who would make the case for Obama's candidacy

in terms of his identity, rather than his policies. “The pillars of American liberalism—the Democratic Party, the universities and the mass media—are obsessed with biological markers, most particularly race and gender,” he helpfully explained, adding that the 2008 Democratic primary represented “the full flowering of identity politics. It’s not a pretty picture.”

In his earlier Obama column, our columnist set out to explain that, should Obama run, “he will not win. The reason is 9/11. The country will simply not elect a novice in wartime.” He provides the senator with the following advice:

He should run in '08. He will lose in '08. And the loss will put him irrevocably on a path to the presidency . . . He’s a young man with a future. But the future recedes. He needs to run now. And lose. And win by losing.

Obama actually did end up trying this, although it didn’t go as planned. In the meantime, Krauthammer predicts, the White House will probably go to a Republican—“say, 9/11 veteran Rudy Giuliani.” Krauthammer also warns that the “reflexive anti-war sentiments” of the left “will prove disastrous for the Democrats in the long run—the long run beginning as early as November ’08.”

The 2006 race, he notes in its aftermath, “was an event-driven election that produced the shift of power one would expect when a finely balanced electorate swings mildly one way or the other . . . Vietnam cost the Democrats 40 years in the foreign policy wilderness. Anti-Iraq sentiment gave the anti-war Democrats a good night on Tuesday, and may yet give them a good year or two. But beyond that, it will be desolation.” But then the 2008 election ended up being event-driven, too.



WHEN NOT CRITICIZING HOMOSEXUALS, the nation’s Evangelical leadership is making excuses for them. It could use a little more practice in this. The Evangelical response to the Mark Foley scandal was so bad that it was still being bad long after the Foley scandal was over. A few weeks after Foley had escaped into

rehab, when the Ted Haggard scandal arrived on the scene to help break up the monotony, Tony Perkins apparently decided that it would be of sudden and marginal convenience to attack Foley. "The media is attempting to politicize the incident by comparing Ted with Mark Foley," he wrote, in reference to the prominent Evangelical leader who had been snorting meth and fucking gay prostitutes. "On MSNBC yesterday I said that there is no comparison. After Foley was caught sexually pursuing minors, he publicly declared his homosexuality as if it were a potential defense. Ted did not try to change the rules of conduct to match his behavior and submitted to the decision of the overseers to remove him from the church he started," at least after he'd been caught lying five or six times.

But just a few weeks before, Perkins' good buddy Dobson had decided that Foley had instead handled everything well and that everyone should have thus shut up about it. "A representative who has been a closet homosexual for years, apparently, was finally caught doing something terribly wrong and when the news broke, he packed up his things and went home," he wrote. Having been merely a gay political sex scandal occurring on the cusp of an election, Dobson was saying, the story certainly had no legs of its own and thus shouldn't have been reported. Nonetheless, "the media and the Democrats saw an opportunity to make much, much more out of it, impugning the morals and character, not only of this disgraced congressman, but of the entire Republican Congress."

Whereas the media and Democrats wanted to make much, much more out of it and impugn the morals and characters, not only of this disgraced congressman, but of the entire Republican Congress, Tony Perkins wanted to make much, much more out of it and impugn the morals and characters, not only of this disgraced congressman, but of the entire Republican Congress in a fun, paranoid way that might have helped to raise funds. It seems that Perkins had unraveled a high-level homosexual conspiracy in which the GOP was complicit. "The ricochets of the Foley scandal continued to whistle overhead this weekend," Perkins wrote in one of the delightful e-mail newsletters to which I subscribe: "As a

guest on *Fox News Sunday* I again raised last week's report by CBS's Gloria Borger about anger on Capitol Hill that 'a network of gay staffers and gay members protect[ed] each other and did the Speaker a disservice' in the Foley scandal. On Friday, an Internet site quoted a 'gay politico' observing that '[m]aybe now the social conservatives will realize one reason why their agenda is stalled on Capitol Hill.' *Sunday's New York Times* revealed that a homosexual former Clerk of the House of Representatives, Jeff Trandahl, was 'among the first to learn of Mr. Foley's' messages to pages. The Clerk's job is described as a 'powerful post with oversight of hundreds of staffers and the page program.' This raises yet another plausible question for values voters: has the social agenda of the GOP been stalled by homosexual members and or staffers? When we look over events of this Congress, we have to wonder. This was the first House to pass a pro-homosexual hate crimes bill. The marriage protection amendment was considered very late in the term with no progress toward passage. Despite overwhelming popular approval, the party seldom campaigns as the defender of marriage. The GOP will have to decide whether it wants to be the party that defends the traditional moral and family values that our nation was built upon and directed by for two centuries. Put another way, does the party want to represent values voters or Mark Foley and friends?"

That's an interesting question, but Dobson had already decided that no such questions should be asked. And he was still asking why everyone was still asking about things. "What Mark Foley did was unconscionable. It was terrible," he noted. "Thankfully he's gone. But tell me—now that he's gone, why is it still with us? Why are they still talking about it? Why are they trying to blame somebody for it? It is because they are using that to suppress values voters."

Actually, it was because then Speaker Dennis Hastert himself had ordered a House Ethics Committee investigation into the matter. And Tony Perkins wouldn't shut up about it, either. "I would like to see all the facts," he said on CNN around that same time. "I hope they're forthright and forthcoming in the

next 48 hours and present this information to the American public.” Why Perkins was apparently trying to “suppress values voters” is a mystery. But when he wasn’t apparently trying to “suppress values voters,” Perkins was also agreeing with Dobson that the media was trying to “suppress values voters,” too. “Story after story on the elections seem to repeat the same spin—that conservatives are too turned off to turn out the vote,” he wrote. And when Perkins wasn’t agreeing with Dobson that the media was trying to “suppress values voters” by claiming that conservatives would be “too turned off to turn out the vote,” Perkins was elsewhere claiming that conservatives would be too turned off to turn out the vote. As he told the country, again on CNN, “I think this is a real problem for Republicans . . . This is going to be, I think, very harmful for Republican turnout across the country because it’s inconsistent with the values that the Republicans say that they represent.”

If there was such a lack of coordination between Dobson and Perkins that neither could make a statement on the issue without contradicting the other (and if Perkins couldn’t even make a statement on the issue without contradicting himself), it should hardly be surprising to find a lack of coordination between Dobson and Perkins on the one hand and the larger social conservative pundit battalion on the other. “Those truly interested in protecting children from online predators,” Dobson stated, “should spend less time calling for Speaker Hastert to step down, and more time demanding that the Justice Department enforce existing laws that would limit the proliferation of the kind of filth that leads grown men to think it’s perfectly OK to send lurid e-mails to 16-year-old boys.” At this point, those calling for Hastert to step down as Speaker included the ultraconservative, Evangelical-friendly *Washington Times*, the ultra-conservative, Evangelical-friendly Bay Buchanan, and the ultra-conservative, Evangelical-friendly Paul Weyrich (who eventually changed his mind after a phone conversation with Hastert, who apparently explained to Weyrich that he didn’t feel like stepping down), among others. And it’s not entirely clear what sort of “filth” Dobson was talking about, unless he was referring to the Catechisms or something; when Foley, who

is Catholic, released a statement to the effect that he had been molested by a priest as a young man, Catholic League president and occasional Dobson ally William Donohue wondered aloud, “As for the alleged abuse, it’s time to ask some tough questions. First, there is a huge difference between being groped and being raped, so which was it, Mr. Foley? Second, why didn’t you just smack the clergyman in the face? After all, most 15-year-old teenage boys won’t allow themselves to be molested.” These are all good questions, and I certainly agree with Donohue that any young boy who expects to find himself alone with a priest should be prepared to fight when the priest inevitably tries to touch his penis. But, again, Dobson had already decided that to continue to talk about Foley was tantamount to trying to “suppress values voters.”

In a way, the Evangelical punditry is admirable in its decentralized nature; if everything that every Evangelical leader says contradicts everything else that every other Evangelical leader says, one can hardly accuse the Evangelicals of toeing a single party line. Instead, they decentralize their disingenuousness so that each particular disingenuous assertion can compete in the marketplace of disingenuous ideas until one eventually proves viable and may then be generally agreed upon. This is sort of like how capitalism works, except that capitalism works, whereas the decentralized nature of the Evangelical punditry simply reveals a rhetorical opportunism that is too incompetent to properly disguise itself as collective moral clarity. Or, as Focus on the Family’s Vice President of Public Policy, Tom Minnery, put it to James Dobson during an October radio broadcast, “I fear that we’re in a society in which you will be held to the standards which you claim.” I have no idea where he’s getting this.

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THE FOLLOWING EXCERPTS are taken from two columns Krauthammer wrote in 2001:

As the Bush administration approaches a decision on stem cell research, the caricatures have already been drawn. On one side are the human benefactors who wish only a chance to use the

remarkable potential of stem cells—primitive cells that have the potential to develop into any body tissue with the proper tweaking—to cure a myriad of diseases. On the other side stand the Catholic Church and the usual anti-abortion zealots who, because of squeamishness about the fate of a few clumps of cells, will prevent this great boon to humanity.

There is a serious debate about war aims raging in Washington. And then there is the caricature debate in which, on the one hand, you have the reasoned, moderate, restrained doves who want very limited war aims. And on the other hand, you have the unreconstructed hawks—those daring to suggest that the war on terrorism does not stop with Afghanistan—aching for blood and continents to conquer.

This is probably one of the stupidest rhetorical tricks I have ever come across, and I have come across plenty of them in the course of reading through Krauthammer's mediocre nonsense.

I've also had to watch clips of him on TV, as the fellow is of course a prolific cable news pundit and not much better. Two days after the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, he appeared on *Fox News* in order to allege that the Korean-born perpetrator was in fact a symptom of the problem of Islamic terrorism—a problem long underestimated by many of his ideological opponents, as he has explained at length elsewhere:

KRAUTHAMMER: And he did leave the return address 'Ismail Ax.' 'Ismail Ax.' I suspect it has some more to do with Islamic terror and the inspiration than it does with the opening line of *Moby Dick*.

BRIT HUME: Which was, "My name is Ismael."

Close enough, Brit. But in his very next column, Krauthammer denounces "the inevitable rush to get ideological mileage out of the carnage," ending the piece with the only moderately catty hope that "in the spirit of Obama's much-heralded post-ideological politics we can agree to observe a decent interval of respectful silence before turning ineffable evil and unfathomable grief into

political fodder.”

He also announces that some people who advocate gun control have been trying to turn the shooting into a debate concerning gun control. Of course, Krauthammer thus has no choice but to join the debate as well.

It is true that with far stricter gun laws, Cho Seung Hui might have had a harder time getting the weapons and ammunition needed to kill so relentlessly. Nonetheless, we should have no illusions about what laws can do. There are other ways to kill in large numbers, as Timothy McVeigh demonstrated. Determined killers will obtain guns no matter how strict the laws. And stricter controls could also keep guns out of the hands of law-abiding citizens using them in self-defense. The psychotic mass murder is rare; the armed household burglary is not.

He pauses long enough to lament that it “is inevitable, I suppose, that advocates of one social policy or another will try to use the Virginia Tech massacre to their advantage.”

★ ★ ★

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CHAPTER, I have spent several hours poring over Scandinavian marriage statistics. So have a number of other people. This tells me that Scandinavian marriage statistics are very important things over which to pore. These other people seem to agree. The pro-gay marriage folks say that because the institution of Scandinavian marriage doesn't seem to have collapsed in the wake of gay civil unions, the United States shouldn't fret about gay civil unions, either. The anti-gay marriage folks say that because the institution of Scandinavian marriage doesn't seem to have collapsed in the wake of gay civil unions, we just aren't looking hard enough or interpreting the results with adequate degrees of intellectual dishonesty, and that anyway we shouldn't allow gay civil unions because our gods do not care for them. The general consensus, though, is that the manner in which adult American citizens choose to conduct their personal lives is the government's business, and that such things as divorce rates are

so important that they must be kept down even by excluding some groups from participating in the institution of marriage.

Well, so be it. If there is some sort of War on Marriage to be fought, let us fight it. But because you and I lack an army or even political power (I'm assuming you don't chair any significant House committees), we will instead have to settle for what is called a "war game." A war game is a make-believe exercise of the sort that is often conducted by the Navy and the editors of *The Atlantic* for the purpose of testing various scenarios, most of which seem to involve the invasion of Iran. Since I've never been invited to one of these, I'm not entirely sure how they work, so we'll just have to improvise a bit.

★ ★ ★

IT IS THE YEAR 2016, AND I have seized control of the United States, declaring myself God Emperor. All engines of the state are at my command. Wherever power flows, it flows first from my personage. I have cybernetic arms.

"Pardon me, God Emperor Brown . . ."

"What is it, High Priest Dobson? Can't you see that I'm oiling my cybernetic arms?"

"My apologies," Dobson mutters, his eyes downcast lest the sun shine off of my shiny cybernetic arms and blind him. "It's just that—the people, sir. They are discontented."

"Well, that's understandable. They've all been put into forced labor camps."

"No, my liege. They're worried about the state of American marriage."

"Why? I married 200 slave girls just last week."

"Me, too," says Mitt Romney.

"Oh, snap!" interjects Court Jester Wellington Boone.

"That reminds me of something funny my wife said to me this morning . . ."

"Too many people are getting divorced," Dobson interrupts, rudely enough. "The American people would like to see lower divorce rates."

"Hmm," I say to myself, stroking my chin with my long, cybernetic fingers. "High Priest, bring me the following records

from the days of the Old Republic . . . ”

A couple of God Emperor Brown Neo-Temporal Day Division Units later, Dobson and I are looking over U.S. Census Bureau statistics from 2003.

“The key here is to identify the root of America’s high divorce rates,” I explain to Dobson, who is sitting next to me, and to Boone, who is sitting next to me and beating a gay man to death with a hammer. “This is actually quite simple, as the numbers indicate marked regional variances. For instance, notice how the northeastern states have exceptionally low divorce rates. Also observe that Massachusetts, the most gay-friendly state in the Union and the first to allow for gay marriage, has the lowest divorce rate of all.”

“But it is impossible!” cries out Dobson. “There are 10,000 . . . er, 40 million studies that indicate otherwise!”

“And just as you’ll find the lowest divorce rates in the relatively secular Northeast, you shall find the highest divorce rates in the relatively religious Bible Belt. Notice how Texas, for instance, has one of the highest in the country. Now, what does the Bible Belt have more of than does the Northeast, aside from illiteracy and exorcisms? Bibles! And possibly belts.”

“But the Bible strengthens marriage,” says Dobson. “It says so in the Bible.”

“Apparently not. Here’s a major study done in 2000 that shows the rate of divorce among born-again Christians to be 27 percent—second only to Baptists, with 29 percent. The lowest divorce rate is found among atheists and agnostics, with 21 percent. This is in accordance with other studies.”

At that moment, Stanley Kurtz arrives. He had been off in Sweden again, trying to rescue the Swedes from the Swedes.

“Perhaps these divorces are occurring partly among older people,” says Kurtz. “Then they wouldn’t count for some reason known only to me, Stanley Kurtz.”

“But in any case,” says Dobson, “these married couples were probably getting divorced before they accepted Christ.”

“Actually,” I point out in my wisdom, “it says here that the vast majority are getting divorced afterwards. And thus we have only one option. In order that we might have a lower divorce

rate, the state will no longer grant marriage licenses to Baptists and Evangelicals. So it is written; so it shall be done. Dobson!”

“Yes, my liege?”

“Bring me Slave Girl 146. I shall receive her in my . . . private quarters.”

“Y-yes, God Emperor. It shall be as you say.”

And with that, I crush my solid gold goblet and raise my cybernetic fist into the sky.

“All hail to Baal, fertility deity of the Carthaginians! Baal, I give unto you glory as I plant my seed!”

A Neo-Druidic chorus emerges from a dozen sidelong chambers, each of its members clad in a simple cloak of black.

Aaaaaaaaaaahhhh

Aaaaaaaaaaahhhh

We come from the land of the ice and snow

From the midnight sun where the hot springs blow

Hammer of the gods

We'll drive our ships to new lands

To fight the horde

Sing and cry

Valhalla I am coming

On we sweep with threshing oar

Our only goal will be the western shore

Aaaaaaaaaaahhhh

Aaaaaaaaaaahhhh

We come from the land of the ice and snow

From the midnight sun where the hot springs blow

How soft your fields so green

Can whisper tales of gore

Of how we calmed the tides of war

We are your overlords

On we sweep with threshing oar

Our only goal will be the western shore

*So now you'd better stop
And rebuild all your ruins
For peace and trust can win the day
Despite of all your losing*

“Be sure to check me out at National Review Online,” says Stanley Kurtz.

★ ★ ★

SORRY ABOUT ALL THAT. So, Charles Krauthammer. That guy.

I will here note that to have been wrong about key aspects of the Afghanistan operation, as Krauthammer was, is not in itself some magnificent crime against the republic—or, if it is, then it is a crime of which most of our commentators and private citizens are guilty to some extent or another, which is to say we might be compelled to provide for a general amnesty on this matter since it is not practical for us to make fun of every perpetrator and would be unfair for us to single out a few for the crimes of many—you know, that thing I’ve been doing, as it suddenly occurs to me. At any rate, I am already so overwhelmed in cataloging the failings of some half-dozen prominent commentators that I have already begun to crack, as The Reader has perhaps gathered from the surreal nonsense found directly above. Perhaps The Reader would like to go through several hundred poorly written columns and then essay to comment upon the worst of these to the tune of some 80,000 words, and then we will see how The Reader holds up through all of this. Back up off these nuts, Reader.

General amnesties tend to involve conditions; we might be compelled to let everyone off the hook for widespread faults, but we would probably not be inclined to provide any such favors to those whose failings went above and beyond those of the commentariat at large. When we let illegal immigrants off the hook, for instance, we tend to still punish those who may have committed felonies in addition to the non-crime of having provided the U.S. with cheap labor for so many decades. Perhaps this is a bad metaphor inasmuch as that an illegal immigrant at least provides something of value to the economy whereas a columnist who

corrupts the national information flow has the overall effect of fucking things up. But now I am confusing myself again. Anyway, Krauthammer was, in addition to sharing in the common wrongness of 2001–2002, at this time also inventing new and original things about which to be wrong, items of wrongness that even many of his mediocre colleagues did not manage to think up. He is the Thomas Edison of wrongness.

I was just now about to begin detailing the manner in which Krauthammer predicted, quite wrongly, that America's apparently unprecedented military victory in Afghanistan had consequently shown NATO to be obsolete and Europe's various military bodies to be even more so, and then of course I would point out that the U.S. ended up relying quite heavily on European assistance in our ongoing bid to keep Afghanistan from crumbling as a result of the negligence demonstrated by the Bush administration and its various rhetorical backers. This contemporaneous Krauthammer quote was sitting amongst my notes, just waiting to be mocked:

Everyone knows that all the talk of the 'coalition' in Afghanistan was a polite fiction.

Oops! And then:

Afghanistan made clear that NATO has no serious military role to play in any serious conflict.

In fact, NATO has ended up being forced to play a serious military role in Afghanistan itself. And then we have this other, similarly goofy assertion:

The proximal cause of the Soviet Union's death was painful defeat in Afghanistan. The proximal cause of NATO's death was victory in Afghanistan—a swift and crushing U.S. victory that made clear America's military dominance and Europe's consequent military irrelevance.

Insomuch as that I can only think of so many ways to point out that there was no victory in Afghanistan and that it is there-

fore somewhat unlikely that the victory in Afghanistan could have had any such effect on NATO's relevance inasmuch as that the victory in question did not actually occur, I was instead going to focus on Krauthammer's first sentence regarding what it was exactly that put the Soviet Union to death. I could have sworn, after all, that the Soviet Union died out because President Reagan had said mean things about it and had otherwise peer-pressured that degenerate empire into building more missiles than it had already built in the past and thereby bankrupting itself, or that at least this was the common conservative position. And of course I was planning to assert that Krauthammer is here resorting to a less ridiculously partisan explanation of the Soviet Union's downfall in the course of producing a similarly partisan explanation of NATO's downfall, and I had hoped to back up this assertion by finding Krauthammer elsewhere ascribing the Soviet Union's downfall to the pro-Reagan explanation without bothering to note such details as Russia's failed Afghanistan incursion, as he does here out of what I hoped to show was simply the rhetorical convenience of the moment. But in the course of my Googling, I came across something else that I simply must address because it is so bizarrely relevant not only to the intent of this chapter, but also to the thesis of this book as a whole.

In December of 2009, the conservative publication *Human Events* ran a piece by Krauthammer in which he waxes nostalgic over his quarter-century of doing whatever it is that he thinks he does. Let us first dispense with the line that brought me upon this particular column in the first place:

Looking back on the quarter-century, the most remarkable period, strangely enough, was the '90s. They began on Dec. 26, 1991 (just as the '60s, as many have observed, ended with Nixon's resignation on Aug. 9, 1974) with a deliverance of biblical proportions—the disappearance of the Soviet Union. It marked the end of 60 years of existential conflict, the collapse of a deeply evil empire, and the death of one of the most perverse political ideas in history. This miracle, in major part wrought by Ronald Reagan, bequeathed the ultimate peace dividend: a golden age of the most profound peace and prosperity.

Aficionados of the English language will note the contradiction in referring on one day to the Soviet Union's collapse as having its "proximate cause" in the failed Afghanistan incursion of the 1980s and referring on another day to that same collapse as having been "in major part wrought by Ronald Reagan." By this point, though, such historical opportunism as this, which claims the Soviet Union to have crumbled mostly because of its Afghanistan invasion in one column and mostly because of Reagan in another—ought not even faze us. Rather, I direct your attention to the rest of this column, which Krauthammer begins as follows:

Twenty-five years ago this week, I wrote my first column. I'm not much given to self-reflection—why do you think I quit psychiatry?—but I figure once every quarter-century is not excessive.

When someone writes a self-deprecating line, we ought not jump on such a thing in agreement. But when someone writes a self-deprecating line that happens to embody something truly terrible about the person writing it of which that person is clearly unaware and about which he seems to simply be joking, we may probably be excused if we do express agreement with it. And so let us agree with Krauthammer that the columnist is "not much given to self-reflection"—were he given to any such thing, he would have probably by this point taken the time to examine his *de facto* foreign policy scorecard and decided that he is not at all qualified to put forth his opinion on matters of war and peace, having been consistently wrong on such things in the past even as he shamelessly continues to weigh in on them up to the present day.

Longevity for a columnist is a simple proposition: Once you start, you don't stop. You do it until you die or can no longer put a sentence together.

I was amazed to come upon this entirely correct assertion, not so much because it is entirely correct but because I have

been trying to make the very same point in this very book, having noted in the introductory chapter that “Once a pundit is made, he is rarely unmade.” But in making that point, my purpose was to convey that the longevity of the American columnist is a problem that leaves our countrymen perpetually misinformed on matters of life and death and that perhaps this is something that ought to concern us if we prefer life to death, which I suppose we do; Krauthammer, on the other hand, seems to think that the longevity of the American columnist is an amusing quirk to be observed in passing, its actual consequences to be ignored. He would presumably not think this about any other crucial occupation in which those charged with great responsibilities are so unaccountable in terms of their results that not even a series of great disasters will prompt such people to lose their positions; instead of voicing a concern that perhaps he himself has no good reason to be as respected as he’s come to be, Krauthammer follows up his observation regarding his own *de facto* tenure with the following quip:

It has always been my intention to die at my desk, although my most cherished ambition is to outlive the estate tax.

Let us get the estate tax repealed, then, so that Krauthammer can fulfill his most cherished ambition as quickly as possible and then die happily; perhaps he can be subsequently replaced with someone whose most cherished ambition is to actually assist the citizenry in coming to correct conclusions instead of incorrect ones that lead to the unnecessary deaths of 100,000 people. Besides, it would be a shameful thing if some large portion of the money Krauthammer has made in the course of his failures were to eventually go to offsetting the trillion dollars that have thus far been spent on the war he demanded in the very columns from which his money largely derives.

Wow, I just cut my finger on my own over-the-top sarcasm. I didn’t know you could do that.

Krauthammer concludes the column thusly:

To be doing every day what you enjoy doing is rare. Rarer still is to be doing what you were meant to do, particularly if you got there by sheer serendipity. Until near 30, I'd fully expected to spend my life as a doctor. My present life was never planned or even imagined. An intern at *The New Republic* once asked me how to become a nationally syndicated columnist. "Well," I replied, "first you go to medical school . . ."

. . . and then a bunch of other people go to Iraq. Sheer serendipity!

Medical school does not seem to have adequately prepared Krauthammer for his inexplicable future role as an influential geopolitical analyst. As the result of some oversight, students of the psychiatric arts are apparently not trained to avoid perpetually contradicting themselves in the event that they find themselves working as syndicated columnists; in addition to having countered his own assessment of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as the "proximate cause" of the fall of the Soviet empire with the elsewhere-stated assertion that this same fall was actually "in major part wrought by Ronald Reagan," Krauthammer in 2004 sealed the obviousness of his confusion with the even stronger and more clearly contradictory assertion that Reagan "won the cold war." But then I am beating a dead horse even as Krauthammer was beating off a dead president. Did I just write that? Well, I'm going to leave it in, out of spite, like the Underground Man. And I'm going to leave in that rather ostentatious literary reference as well. Is my spleen diseased? Well, let it get worse! Let's move on.

I spoke just now of Iraq, which is just as well inasmuch as I need a segue by which to reintroduce that topic once again; Krauthammer engaged in a bit of media criticism back in August of 2002, having noticed that certain media outlets were actually going so far as to print material which could be construed as contradicting the case that Krauthammer and others were then making in favor of war. As he began:

Not since William Randolph Hearst famously cabled his correspondent in Cuba, "You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war," has a newspaper so blatantly devoted its front pages to editorializing about

a coming American war as has Howell Raines's *New York Times*. Hearst was for the Spanish-American War. Raines (for those who have been incommunicado for the last year) opposes war with Iraq.

Of course, Krauthammer has no way of knowing if this is true, since he clearly hasn't familiarized himself with the front pages of every American newspaper as they appeared in 1914, 1917, 1938–1941, 1949–1950, 1963–1968, 1990–1991, 1998–1999, and 2001; it is not very likely for that matter that he had taken any real tally of what was going into the front pages of newspapers in 2002–2003, and even less so that he would be honest or even perceptive enough to note any front-page editorializing in favor of the Iraq War on the part of, say, *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Sun*. What we have here, then, is a transparently false assertion to the effect that whatever war-related slant may have been detectable on the part of Raines' *New York Times* is some huge aberration from how newspapers generally go about such things.

Krauthammer continues by listing the various front-page stories that had recently appeared in the *Times*, which would seem to support the columnist's thesis. One such item noted that an Iraqi opposition leader had failed to show up to a meeting; Krauthammer retorts, not unreasonably, that there are a dozen more where that came from. Less reasonably, he goes on to note the following: "A previous above-the-fold front-page story revealed—stop the presses!—that the war might be financially costly."

Though I'm unable to locate the particular story to which Krauthammer is here referring, I'm going to go ahead and assume that the article in question did not so much hinge on any revelation "that the war might be financially costly" as it did on the strong possibility that the war could end up being far more costly than was being admitted by its backers, many of whom famously quoted figures well below the \$100 billion mark and some of whom even proposed that the whole thing would pay for itself in the oil revenue that grateful Iraqis would be happy to pay us in the aftermath, assuming they had any money left over after buying flowers to toss at our troops. Perhaps we

ought not to ascribe to mendacity what could be more readily ascribed to competent reporting. Or perhaps we ought:

Then there are the constant references to growing opposition to war with Iraq—in fact, the polls are unchanged since January—culminating on Aug. 16 with the lead front-page headline: “Top Republicans Break with Bush on Iraq Strategy.” The amusing part was including among these Republican foreign policy luminaries Dick Arme y, a man not often cited by the *Times* for his sagacity, a man who just a few weeks ago made a spectacle of himself by publicly advocating the removal of the Palestinians from the West Bank. Yesterday, he was a buffoon. Today, he is a statesman.

Krauthammer does not bother to cite any instances in which the *Times* had contradicted any polling data regarding the public’s take on war, and so we may assume that he is being disingenuous, particularly seeing as how his subsequent take on the August 16th piece is exceedingly disingenuous and it is of course difficult to go from non-disingenuous to exceedingly disingenuous in the space of two sentences, just as acceleration takes time in even the finest of sports cars. I’ve found the article to which he refers, in which it is noted that Dick Arme y has expressed some opposition to the strategy being proposed by Bush—hence the title, “Top Republicans Break With Bush on Iraq Strategy.” Through the use of loaded terms and false restatements of *Times*’ sentiments, though, Krauthammer here seeks to give the impression that there is something contradictory in citing some notable thing that Arme y has said and with which liberals might happen to agree after having previously cited some notable thing that Arme y has said and with which liberals might happen to disagree. The *Times*, of course, never referred to Arme y as a “buffoon” nor as a “statesman;” had it done so, then we would indeed have here some contradiction, and Krauthammer would be right in pointing this out. But those characterizations are Krauthammer’s—and he makes those characterizations and then attributes them to the *Times* because he has nothing substantial with which to make his non-case that the *Times* is being hypocritical in this matter.

Krauthammer comes closer to hitting upon a legitimate objection in pointing out the overreach on the part of the *Times* in including Henry Kissinger among those who had made some “Break with Bush on Iraq Strategy.” Though the former foreign policy kingpin did indeed write an op-ed noting his concerns regarding whether or not the U.S. was willing to follow through after any invasion, Kissinger had at the same time agreed with the administration that such an invasion was wholly necessary to the future safety of the West. The *Times* later ran a correction in which it was explained that Kissinger’s expressed views on the subject had been more nuanced than one might have gathered from the piece. Krauthammer, meanwhile, has never gotten around to correcting his own, far more dishonest misrepresentation of Wesley Clarke’s expressed views regarding whether or not Clinton’s air campaign in Kosovo would be sufficient to accomplish NATO’s goals in the region, as described earlier in the chapter. He does, however, sum up Harold Raines’s misdeeds thusly:

It is one thing to give your front page to a crusade against war with Iraq. That’s partisan journalism, and that’s what Raines’s *Times* does for a living. It’s another thing to include Henry Kissinger in your crusade. That’s just stupid. After all, it’s checkable.

What’s really stupid is characterizing a newspaper as doing something “for a living.” Does *The New York Times* bring his paycheck home to his little wife every other Friday and give her a great big kiss? Are the two of them rather poor but nonetheless very much in love? In the days leading up to Christmas, did *The New York Times* sell his father’s pocket watch in order to buy her some tortoiseshell combs with which to arrange her luxurious head of hair, and did she meanwhile sell that same hair in order to buy a nifty chain for his now-sold pocket watch? Is it too much to ask that a Pulitzer winner learn how to parse a fucking sentence? These are all important questions, sort of.

Of course, the general thrust of Krauthammer’s column is that, because some articles appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* that might be construed as contradicting the case for war, someone at the *Times* must therefore have been

waging some covert campaign by which to defuse pro-war sentiment. And perhaps this is really what was going on. After all, here are these articles that might be construed as contradicting the case for war. If the editors of a newspaper are running front page articles that might be construed as either supporting or contradicting the case for a war, after all, we may perhaps suspect that these editors are operating under some sort of political agenda, and not simply doing their jobs.

Less than a month after Krauthammer wrote his column, *The New York Times* featured a front-page piece by longtime Middle East correspondent Judy Miller and reporter-turned-author Michael Gordon in which it was alleged that Saddam Hussein had ordered an array of aluminum tubes which were likely intended for use in a nuclear weapons program; her sources turned out to be several administration officials, and the story was in turn trumpeted by several other administration officials on the various Sunday public affairs programs. All of which is to say that, a month after Krauthammer accused the powers-that-be at *The New York Times* of being blatantly opposed to the war, Dick Cheney was citing *The New York Times* in the course of making the case for same.

Clearly, *The New York Times* is possessed with Multiple Personality Disorder! And he's gone and sold his father's pocket watch! And his star columnist is Thomas Friedman! Life is full of twist endings.

Krauthammer wasn't done with the *Times* and its pro/anti-war sentiment quite yet; a few days after the paper ran Miller's later-discredited article to the effect that Iraq was probably building nuclear weapons that very instant, Krauthammer recapped his own position that, an earlier *Times* piece to the contrary, there was no real opposition to the administration's war strategy among top-ranking Republicans. After dismissing the ambiguous statements of Brent Scowcroft and others who had reportedly been concerned about how this all might play out, Krauthammer proceeds to analyze the supposed opinions of the then secretary of state:

That leaves Colin Powell, supposedly the epicenter of internal

opposition to the hard line on Iraq. Well, this is Powell last Sunday on national television: ‘It’s been the policy of this government to insist that Iraq be disarmed. . . . And we believe the best way to do that is with a regime change.’ Moreover, he added, we are prepared ‘to act unilaterally to defend ourselves.’ When Powell, the most committed multilateralist in the administration, deliberately invokes the incendiary U-word to describe the American position, we have ourselves a consensus.

Unless, of course, Powell was objecting to the strategy in private while toeing the administration line in public—which, as we now know, is exactly what he was doing.

Here’s the pertinent excerpt from the *Times* piece in question:

At the same time, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, who summoned Mr. Kissinger for a meeting on Tuesday, and his advisers have decided that they should focus international discussion on how Iraq would be governed after Mr. Hussein—not only in an effort to assure a democracy but as a way to outflank administration hawks and slow the rush to war, which many in the department oppose.

Again, we now know that this is indeed what was happening at the time, which is to say that the reporting in this case was both solid and relevant—which is to say in turn that, contrary to Krauthammer, we did not actually “have ourselves a consensus” at all.

The tale gets funnier, as such tales often do. Just a few months after haranguing *The New York Times* for claiming that Powell was somehow objecting to the war strategy, Krauthammer discovers a credible report that Powell was not only objecting to the war strategy, but even to the war itself, beginning a January 2003 column with the following:

The single most remarkable passage in Bob Woodward’s “Bush at War” has, to my knowledge, gone unremarked. In early August 2002, Colin Powell decides that the Iraq hawks have gotten to the president, and that he has not weighed in enough to restrain them. He feels remorse: “During the Gulf War, when he had been chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Powell had played the role of

reluctant warrior, arguing to the first President Bush, perhaps *too mildly* (emphasis added), that containing Iraq might work, that war might not be necessary. But as the principal military adviser, he hadn't pressed his arguments that forcefully because they were less military than political." Now, it is well known that Powell had been against the Gulf War and for "containment." What was not known was that, if Woodward is to be believed, Powell to this day still believes that sanctions were the right course and that he should have pushed harder for them. This is astonishing.

Very astonishing indeed, particularly if one spent 2002 blindly flailing ones arms in the direction of any reporter with the gall to report that perhaps the unilateralist dove with a penchant for stopping at sanctions was acting like a unilateralist dove with a penchant for stopping at sanctions. Quick, let's jump into my magical time machine and look at Krauthammer's original claim:

When Powell, the most committed multilateralist in the administration, deliberately invokes the incendiary U-word to describe the American position, we have ourselves a consensus.

Remember that Krauthammer was basing all of this on what Powell was willing to say on television at such time as he was serving at the pleasure of the president in the run-up to a war. That's some astute political commentary there, Charlie. I wish my magical time machine was a real thing and not just some silly product of me being kind of drunk. We could send Krauthammer back to the Byzantine Empire circa 1034 and have him serve as palace affairs correspondent for the *Constantinople Times-Courier*. "Emperor Romanos III drowned in his bathtub today in a freak accident. Theodora said so on *Meet the Scribes* and I believe her." Get it, *Meet the Scribes*? Like *Meet the Press*? Because they had scribes back then. Look, fuck you.

Actually, Krauthammer would indeed have carried water for the various degenerate Byzantine Emperors, being the sort to hold his tongue when Christian theocrats misbehave—or at least he is today; back in the mid-1980s, the fellow wrote

harshly on the subject of those fifth-column Rapture-watchers who today make up a frighteningly large portion of the electorate—and with whom Krauthammer today shares what remains of the Republican Party, having apparently decided that his adapted views on foreign policy are so exceedingly important that, to get them implemented, he is willing to trust Washington to the psychotic whims of those who sincerely believe that some future U.N. secretary general will turn out to be the Antichrist. In 2001, Krauthammer took the nation's secularists to task for having largely opposed John Ashcroft's cabinet nomination and thereby exhibited "the last remaining significant religious prejudice in the country—the notion that highly religious people are unfit for high office because they confuse theology with politics and recognize no boundary between church and state."

This is one of those instances in which Krauthammer is presumably typing so fast that he forgets to check and see if what he's typing happens to be true. To assert that suspicion of "highly religious" office-seekers is "the last remaining significant religious prejudice in the country" is absolute nonsense, easily refuted by reference to any number of polls that have been taken on the subject, not to mention common sense of the sort that recognizes that America is, compared to its friends and allies, a highly religious country, and thus not likely to punish the highly religious more than anyone else. A 1999 Gallup poll indicated that, though only 6 percent of those polled would refrain from voting for a Jew and 38 percent would refrain from voting for a Muslim, fully 48 percent of Americans would decline to vote for an atheist; no other group scored lower in terms of popularity. Other polls taken since Krauthammer's column have resulted in similar findings—as had polls taken earlier.

Now, it's possible that distrust of atheists does not count as a "significant religious prejudice" according to Krauthammer inasmuch as that atheism is not a religion, and that such a thing would simply constitute a significant prejudice held by the religious and not a significant religious prejudice and thus not even be worth noting in a column about how sad and totally

unprecedented it is that some secularists may not be keen on the same highly religious people who are none too keen on them. Life is full of possibilities, most of them sarcastic. For instance, it totally does not constitute a significant religious prejudice at all that 38 percent of Americans would not vote for a Muslim. We know this because Krauthammer told us that distrust of the “highly religious” is “the last remaining significant religious prejudice in the country.” I am telling you a lie! Wait, that was from an earlier bit. God damn, this turned out to be a long fucking chapter.

RICHARD COHEN

CERTAIN THINGS ARE OBVIOUS, or at least seemingly obvious after having been pointed out. The implications of these obvious things, though, tend towards obscurity.

★ ★ ★

IN APRIL OF 2009, *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen expressed some concern over America's ongoing debate on the subject of torture, a discussion he worried had been "infected with silly arguments about utility: whether it works or not." Those silly-billies who believe that it does not work, we are told, are simply being gloomy gusses. "Of course it works—sometimes or rarely, but if a proverbial bomb is ticking, that may just be the one time it works," he hypothesized, or something.

Fair enough; there are quite a few commentators who believe likewise, and Cohen is certainly entitled to his opinion. In fact, he is apparently entitled to two of them. In another column written just a couple of weeks later and in which Cohen again talks torture on the occasion of Cheney's latest declarations in defense of such things, our latest chapter subject suddenly goes from confirmed Jesuit to open-minded agnostic. "I have to wonder whether what he is saying now is the truth—i.e., torture works," he wonders, allegedly. Perhaps his earlier certainty that

torture does indeed work had simply slipped his mind at this point; two weeks is, after all, a long time in which to maintain a very strong opinion, or even to remember what that opinion might be. More likely, he was hoping to suddenly cast himself as undecided on the issue in order that he might portray his end-of-column contention that torture may indeed work as something he's come to suspect just recently, and only after having given due consideration to some new and very convincing insight that should presumably convince the reader as well.

Looking back to 2007, we find Cohen proposing that the real concern everyone should have had about Hillary Clinton "is not whether she's smart or experienced but whether she has—how do we say this—the character to be president . . . In a hatless society, she is always wearing a question mark." Throughout 2007 and 2008, in fact, Cohen had plenty else to say about Clinton. She "would, it seems, rather be president than be right." More damningly, "She is forever saying things I either don't believe or believe that even she doesn't believe." All in all, he tells us, "She is the personification of artifice." Fair enough, and we may even agree with Cohen on this—but if we do, we're in for a rhetorical beating from Cohen himself, who has more recently decided that those who said in 2008 that "Clinton had no integrity, no character," and "lied about almost everything and could be trusted about almost nothing" are guilty of having perpetrated "a calumny, a libel and a ferocious mugging of memory itself. But it was believed." By, uh, Cohen, who in this case is very much akin to a narc who hands you a joint and then arrests you for having it, except that the narc is doing his job.



IN JULY OF 2005, Richard Cohen alerted his readers to the perils inherent to our age:

I am forever coming across columns I've totally forgotten writing and I now, routinely, have to check to see if I have already staked out a position on some matter of importance—and what, exactly, it may be . . .

I yearn for the freedom to be what I want to be. I don't want to lie, but I want to be comforted by my own version of the truth. I want to own my life, all of it, and not have it banked at Google or some such thing. The trove of letters that some biographer is always discovering, the one that unmask our hero and all his pretensions, has been moved from the musty attic to sleek cyberspace. I am imprisoned by the truth, a record of what I wrote and the public's silly insistence on consistency—a life sentence without hope of parole. For me, the future is the present. It's not that I cannot die. It's rather that I cannot lie.

In the months running up to the arrival of the year 2000, a number of feature articles appeared in various American news publications in which the technological innovations of the last century were summarized and put into context. Many of these began with an anecdote involving a U.S. Patent Office employee who had resigned at the end of the 19th century, complaining that there was nothing left to be invented. There is no evidence that any such amusing incident actually occurred, and in fact *The Skeptical Inquirer* had investigated and debunked the story in 1989. The freelancers in question surely meant no harm; neither the *Inquirer* article in question nor any summary thereof was easily accessible at that early point in mankind's collective effort to organize its cultural products into a searchable database, a project that would have been virtually impossible just a half-century ago but which was foreseen by some and which is now quite famously coming into fruition. A decade after the myth was ubiquitously touted as fact—just a few days before the onset of 2010, that being the time of this writing—it took me less than 30 seconds to check on the veracity of that claim and find it lacking.

In writing and researching this book, I have read hundreds of op-ed columns and nearly as many articles on the subjects discussed therein. I have studied eschatology, the politics of modern Russia, the history of false flag attacks on the part of nation states, the U.S. elections of 2006 and 2008, New Age mysticism, the chronology of a half-dozen military conflicts, federal documents relating to crime rates before, during, and

after Prohibition, the interlocking structure of American Evangelical political action committees, trends in wheat production and consumption in China from the turn of the century to the present day, and early French pulp fiction, among other subjects—a regimen of research that would have been prohibitively time-consuming were it not for the nature of our nascent century. I have also run comparisons of various keywords by columnist—“Krauthammer,” “Arab,” and “democracy,” for instance—in order to discover any hypocrisy or even simple confusion on the part our subjects on such occasions as I have had reason to suspect such things. Such a book as this could not have been written just 15 years ago, at least not in any way that would have accomplished its purpose.

Any individual who decries the arrival of the communications age on the grounds that the truth has become more accessible is an enemy of truth and of man’s ability to discover it. Still, anyone whose assertions are confused, whose facts are false, and whose opinions are occasionally composed in service to the expedience of the moment rather than some steady guiding principle is correct to despise the dynamics of our rising era, just as the lion would have been correct to despise the spear.

There is an exception to this, as there are dangers inherent to the universal accessibility of certain sorts of information, particularly the sort that informs us in the methodology of killing as many people as possible. The second part of the 20th century was in some part defined by this exception; our own age will likely be defined by it to an even greater extent.



IN 1914, H.G. WELLS wrote a story in which the armies of Europe made use of a fanciful new weapon that could level a city in a single strike. He called this the “atomic bomb.” The tale ended with the world’s nations coalescing into a single planetary government as a means by which to ensure that the inevitable dissemination of such technology did not result in unprecedented and perpetual disaster.

In 1940, Robert Heinlein wrote two short stories dealing with the potential consequences of nuclear power and radiological

weaponry, respectively, before either such development had actually occurred. In the latter story, a congressman decides that the only proper course of action is to have the U.S.—now in possession of the world's greatest supply of radioactive dust and thus capable of destroying dozens of cities at a time if need be—demands that the world's nations cede their sovereignty to a single planetary government as a means by which to ensure that the inevitable dissemination of such technology did not result in unprecedented and perpetual disaster. The story was entitled "Solution Unsatisfactory."

Both Wells and Heinlein predicted the advent of atomic weaponry before such weaponry came to exist, and both were successful in that prediction. Both Wells and Heinlein posited a consequent world government with the intent of preventing such an age from turning into one of unprecedented and perpetual disaster, and both were unsuccessful in that prediction. Both Wells and Heinlein, it seems, underestimated the curious and collective nonchalance that humanity seems to exhibit in the face of unprecedented and perpetual disaster. They may be excused for this, as it is easier to predict the advent of technology than to predict what social changes that such technology might bring forth; Heinlein himself never tired of noting that many saw the automobile coming but that no one saw how such an invention might change the nature of courtship in particular and the family dynamic in general. Additionally, before 1945 there did not seem to be the potential for such things as unprecedented and perpetual disaster, at least not as we can imagine it; gather up all the infantry you'd like and march across the globe, but you'll still be operating on the same fundamental level as Attila, Genghis, and Tamerlane, which is to say the world will always recover even if it vaguely remembers your name. After 1945, the stakes had become so much higher as to be fundamentally different in nature; the obliteration of civilization was now possible, and forever will be.

Of course nuclear Armageddon never actually got around to occurring; by several twists of fate, the Allies obtained the bomb before the desperate Nazis could have managed it, and by the time the Soviets had managed to overcome the hurdles

inherent to the new weaponry, it was too late for anything but a wary stalemate. Incidentally, congressional hearings that occurred shortly after the war included testimony by several supposed experts—generals, mostly—to the effect that it would take from five to 10 years for the Russians to develop their own nuclear weapons, if not longer. The Soviet Union tested its first bomb in 1949.

The weapon that Wells hypothesized a few decades prior had been invented, tested, and used within the space of half a decade; its availability had spread to several other governments just a few years on and continues to spread today, as it will tomorrow. The accelerating ingenuity of our species is such that our circumstances can now change dramatically and without warning, and even those who see these things coming are often at a loss to guess as to what will come next.

And what, we might well ask, will come next?



CALL HIM ISHMAEL. Call him a terrorist or a suicide bomber or anything else you want, but understand that he is willing—no, anxious—to give his life for his cause. Call him also a captive, and know that he works with others as part of a team, like the September 11 hijackers, all of whom died, willingly. Ishmael is someone I invented, but he is not a far-fetched creation. You and I know he exists, has existed and will exist again. He is the enemy.

It would be difficult to convey how terrible it was to have read through some hundred or so of Richard Cohen's *Washington Post* columns. The average Richard Cohen column is not particularly bad; rather it is simply not worth reading, even to mock. Part of the problem, at least from the standpoint of a smart-ass on the prowl for smart-ass fodder, is that Cohen himself is indeed adequate to the task of, say, pointing out that some obviously dishonest politician is dishonest or noting that racism is mean, and so most of his columns are not particularly wrong. The other, far more significant part of the problem is that this basic level of competence is today considered worthy of column space in such a significant national outlet as *The Washington*

Post, the editors of which must either be unaware of Cohen's deficits or indifferent to them.

Let me be so presumptuous as to make an assumption about *The Reader*. First, I'm going to stop calling *The Reader* "The Reader" because the novelty wears thin very quickly. I am going to be so additionally presumptuous as to give *The Reader* a name, as if he or she were some kind of dog. It will be a good name, though, as opposed to a dog's name, so I am not being quite as presumptuous as it may appear. I shall call you Augustus Alexander Tiberius Ataxerxes Aurelius Khan. Now, Augustus Alexander Tiberius Ataxerxes Aurelius Khan, let us assume that you spent your youth in study and contemplation, familiarizing yourself with the various attempts that have been made to get the universe all nice and figured out—*anarcho-syn-dicalism*, *existentialism*, *Christianity*, the *Green Party*, *germ theory*, *goofy Ayn Rand novels*, *electronic voice phenomenon*, *romantic love*. At some point in adolescence you came to realize the horrifying truth that human affairs are run terribly, and that the most capable and otherwise virtuous of men do not seem to have nearly as much control over the global apparatus as we might prefer. It also sounds like you may be descended from royalty, on account of your name and all.

Now, let us say instead that you are only of moderate intelligence and don't know much about much, in which case you might be inclined to read Richard Cohen. He will explain to you that Hillary Clinton's campaign rhetoric was not particularly honest, for instance, or that the Bush administration was in many ways a travesty. But in telling you such things, he will often tell them to you late, or will even contradict himself on the very same issue some time later. And so the reader of moderate intelligence has some use for Richard Cohen in the same sense that anyone would have use for a sip of water when one is thirsty.

Let's go back to assuming that you are rather intelligent. That's better. Now let me tell you the problem as I see it—the sort of people who are most likely to get these everlasting gigs as columnists are the same sort of people who are willing to apply for such a gig. And how does one go about doing that?

Often, one first serves as a reporter. Then one perhaps writes a sample column. The sample column is mediocre. The reporter or whoever it was is nonetheless accepted as a columnist, at which point he becomes, to some extent or another, known. In being known as a newspaper columnist, one of course takes on a degree of prestige, which just as of course increases over time. Finally we have reached the point at which we have some moderately capable columnist in such a position that would more properly be occupied by, say, a very capable columnist.

We have, at this moment, very capable columnists already. In preparation for this book, I spent several hours reading through the work of Michael Kinsley until such time as I realized that Michael Kinsley is not in the habit of saying anything stupid and is thus useless for my purposes. So to hell with Michael Kinsley—or, rather, kudos to Michael Kinsley. Gail Collins, Nicholas Kristof, George Will, William Safire assuming he is still alive, and even David Brooks are all, to some or another extent, rather good at what they do. I mean, you know, relatively.

But if it is our intent to be as well informed as we possibly can, we must entirely abandon print newspapers. As a means of delivering time-sensitive information, they have already been rendered obsolete by the new formats now available to us by way of the Internet. As a means of providing the citizenry with accurate and relevant opinion and analysis, even the best of our columnists have collectively failed to match the quality of output we find among the best of our republic's bloggers, as shall be demonstrated at the end of the book. Incidentally, books are not obsolete. They smell nice, for instance, and can also be used as coasters. We must always account for the needs of the flesh, after all. Particularly mine.



WHEN TOP CHENEY AIDE Lewis Libby was indicted on half a dozen counts of wholesale malfeasance, Richard Cohen knew this to be simply a manifestation of the left-wing id. “An unpopular war produced the popular cry for scalps and, in Libby’s case, the additional demand that he express contrition—a vestigial Stalinist-era yearning for abasement.” Indeed, Stalinism reigned

supreme in the dark days of 2005, when federal prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald stalked the land in search of new victims with which to fill his minimum-security gulags. “At the urging of the liberal press (especially *The New York Times*), he was appointed to look into a run-of-the-mill leak,” summarized Cohen, who occasionally gets “the liberal press” mixed up with “the CIA,” that being the entity which actually requested the investigation in the first place. After the dust had settled, Cohen wrote, Libby was “convicted in the end of lying.” Actually, Libby was convicted on one count of obstruction of justice, two counts of perjury, and another count of making false statements to investigators, but then Cohen was probably just trying to save space.

Still, Cohen wrote, “This is not an entirely trivial matter since government officials should not lie to grand juries, but neither should they be called to account for practicing the dark art of politics.” The problem, one may suppose, is that both Fitzgerald and the jury were unaware of the little-known “dark art of politics” clause whereby anything that can be characterized as such by a notable columnist is perfectly legal. If only Richard Nixon had been reanimated as some sort of zombie, the defense could have brought him in to explain all of this on an *amicus curiae* basis. Of course, someone would have to explain to him how it came to be that a liberal columnist for *The Washington Post* has necessarily excused Watergate by way of the accidental implications of what he’d stupidly written; that Zombie Nixon would already be drunk would only add to the confusion.

Better yet, they could have brought in Richard Cohen himself, who has the uncanny ability to determine the guilt or innocence of a given party simply by virtue of being Richard Cohen. Amidst the 2007 investigation into whether or not Justice Department officials had been practicing the dark art of politics in conjunction with the suspicious firings of several U.S. attorneys, among other things, Cohen explained to his readership that Alberto Gonzalez, Karl Rove, and George W. Bush had “unforgivably politicized the hiring and firing of U.S. attorneys—and Congress is not only right in looking into this but also has an absolute obligation to do so.” But “looking into this” is where the “absolute obligation” should end, explained

Cohen, who worried that anything more substantial than peeking could result in something unthinkable, like actual jail time for someone working in the Beltway. Justice Department Deputy Director Monica Goodling, for instance, was in danger of having to answer to Congress for crimes that she may have either witnessed or conducted herself and just then opted to plead the Fifth lest she potentially incriminate herself. At the time, Cohen noted that “some thought has to be given to why Monica Goodling feels obligated to take the Fifth rather than merely telling Congress what happened in the AG’s office.” Many of those less astute than Cohen had assumed that Goodling had pled thusly in order to avoid any real accountability for the crimes she had committed, in the same sense that one might bring an umbrella outside on a rainy day. But Cohen knew better; Goodling, as he explained with the same degree of certainty he’d felt about Clinton’s dishonesty (before later concluding that she was honest) and about the obvious utility of torture (before later pretending that it wasn’t obvious after all), was completely innocent, but still at risk of having her life destroyed in some Stalinist purge of the sort that had already brought down the likes of Lewis Libby and . . . well, he was the only one. As Cohen concluded, “She’s no criminal—but what could happen to her surely is.”

Contrary to the conclusions of Cohen’s non-investigation, Goodling did indeed turn out to be a criminal (and I should note for clarity that I use the term “criminal” to denote someone who has committed crimes, in contrast to Cohen’s usage as a term denoting someone who has committed crimes while also not being important enough that Cohen himself might run into such a person at some cocktail party). After Congress agreed to grant her immunity in exchange for information, Goodling herself told the nation that she “may have gone too far in asking political questions of applicants for career positions, and I may have taken inappropriate political considerations into account on some occasions,” adding that she had “crossed the line” in these and other respects. And so by her own admission, she had violated the Hatch Act, which makes it a federal crime for civil servants to take political affiliations into consideration when

making hiring decisions; this was also the conclusion reached after a later investigation conducted by the Department of Justice, the officials of which seem not to have realized that Cohen had already declared her to be innocent.

But Cohen's concern never seemed to hinge on whether or not any crime had been committed. Rather, he worried aloud about the chilling effect that would result from the possibility that Very Important People could be punished for violating something as irrelevant as federal law. "Now," he wrote, "only a fool would accept a juicy federal appointment and not keep the home number of a criminal lawyer on speed dial," particularly if that person intends to violate federal laws barring partisan cronyism while serving with a government entity that concerns itself with federal crimes. Worse still, "ordinary politics—leaking, sniping, lying, cheating, exaggerating and other forms of PG entertainment—have been so thoroughly criminalized that only a fool would appear before Congress without attempting to bargain for immunity by first invoking the Fifth Amendment."

Cohen knows foolishness, having studied the subject since at least 2003, when he proclaimed that Colin Powell had recently proven "that Iraq not only hasn't accounted for its weapons of mass destruction but without a doubt still retains them" and putting the issue to rest thusly: "Only a fool—or possibly a Frenchman—could conclude otherwise."

Conveniently enough, this brings us back to where we began, with Cohen ruminating on the possibility that Cheney is right about torture's utility. Being a left-of-center columnist, though, Cohen feels obligated to attack the former vice president a bit first, recognizing that a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. "Cheney is a one-man credibility gap," Cohen wrote. "In the past, he has said, 'We know they [the Iraqis] have biological and chemical weapons,' when it turned out we knew nothing of the sort." By "we," Cohen is presumably referring here to fools and Frenchmen, and not to Cohen himself, who knew all of this just as well as Cheney did and who gleefully mocked the vice president's opponents for not knowing this as well.

But Cohen has as much contempt for Cheney as he does for those who once deemed Clinton to be untrustworthy. "As a used

car dealer,” he quips, “he would have no return customers.” It’s hard to see why not; *The Washington Post* still has subscribers.



LET’S BACK UP A BIT.

The Neolithic hunter who wandered Europe after the most recent ice age was not particularly erudite. No matter his innate intellectual gifts, his gaze was largely limited to some patch of woodland or another, his focus necessarily restricted to the herds upon which his livelihood depended—and of course the herds provided only so much stimulation by which to increase the range of his thoughts. A few times a year, he would stop at one of the small settlements that we know to have dotted the continent at that time; he would trade bits of antler, the teeth of a deer, a skin, some desirable root, and in return he would perhaps receive some number of seashells.

These seashells, which we find scattered even hundreds of miles inland among the simple dwellings of that era, would have come from those who peopled the northern coast of the Mediterranean, and who themselves capitalized on the genius of their location by trading these natural art pieces with those who’d chosen to settle farther north. In some instances, these were provided as gifts to communities dwelling among nearby inland locations, the members of which would reciprocate with some commodity that was either lacking on the coast or so desirable that one could never have too much of it. Such exchanges, our archaeologist-historians suspect, were a means by which to smooth over the hostilities that might otherwise arise between two populations finding themselves in relatively close proximity to each other. On other occasions, and increasingly through time, this very practical ritual evolved into trade in the modern sense, conducted more for purposes of material advancement than in conjunction with the necessities of Neolithic diplomacy. At any rate, it was these exchange networks that brought seashells from the coast to the hillocks by way of perhaps a dozen hand-offs or more, and thus eventually into the possession of our Neolithic hunter.

What did our hunter know of these seashells, other than that

he found them pleasing? He would only know what he was told by those from whom he received them; his access to knowledge about these and, of course, all other matters were limited to his circumstances, as is the case with every individual. Being either unable or disinclined to travel to the seaside villages himself, he would never have truly direct knowledge of the massive expanse of water from which his new property derived; even to the extent that he could conceive of such a thing as the Mediterranean as seen from the coast, his conception of it would be flawed to some extent or another.

Those residing in the seaside village from which the seashells were gathered did not live the same sort of existence as our hunter, and as such would be less informed than he on the habits of the herd—as ill-informed, perhaps, as was our hunter on the subject of seashells. In terms of seashells and herds, then, our villagers and our hunter are basically matched in their ignorance and knowledge—but of course these early human networks conveyed other products than these, along with the cultural conceptions that go along with any observable thing, and our seaside village is located deeper in the network than is our hunter. Makeshift boats arrive, bringing all manner of those products that together make up the “Neolithic package;” the products bring with them new perceptions, and thus fodder for new thoughts. All in all, they bring memes—a unique design found on a piece of pottery from Greece, where we find relatively high levels of variance in terms of decoration during this era; a previously unknown improvement on a common tool; and most significantly, if perhaps not fundamentally different from a zigzag pattern or a better carving knife in terms of their value as intellectual stimuli, they would bring all manner of information of the purely immaterial variety. These would include assorted items of vocal collateral consisting of everything from simple sounds to complex songs, the locations and traits of other population centers, and other data of the sort that would enhance the awareness of those receiving it. To the extent that humanity had collectively increased the level of novelty to be found anywhere in the human world, we would find the greatest degree of it in the early villages well before we would find it among

the outlying nomads with whom the villages interact. Thus it was that the mind of the villager who lives within a node of the thought-product network would be familiar with all of these things in a manner that the occasional rural visitor would not, the latter merely existing on the edge of the network rather than being connected to it by perhaps a dozen links.

The cultural apparatus of our village increases over time, slowly but consistently, some artifacts being discarded but others being invented or improved upon; the progeny of our earlier villagers will have seen perhaps a dozen unique designs on the pottery that arrives at its makeshift port, and perhaps some among the new generation will be inspired to invent new patterns, these being built upon the foundations of those already existing and thus potentially more complex than anything yet seen. These younger villagers will have had the advantage of their circumstances, after all; they have access to as much information as anyone else, and generally more. And thus the average villager, having been conceptually stimulated to such a relatively high degree, could be depended upon to produce new additions to the thought-product network in such a way that we could not expect from our rustic hunter, who has little conceptual fodder with which to create anything; one is at pains to improve upon that of which one is unaware.

The village, and in turn the city, remained the incubator of new developments due to the advantages of proximity—perpetual proximity to one's fellow city dwellers with whom one could interact in such a manner as to increase the complexity of thought-products, as well as proximity to other population centers from which additional new stimuli could sometimes be obtained as well. To the extent that the city is located towards the center of the thought-product network, and to the extent that those raised in such an environment will have had their minds long exercised by the highest availability of stimuli, and to the extent that they would in addition be able to draw upon these specific stimuli as the foundations by which to create new thought-products of greater complexity, we would look to these population centers in searching for the most intellectually advanced individuals of the Neolithic age.

Proximity in the literal sense began to decrease in importance with the development of such early technological media as the alphabet; such things serve the crucial purpose of expanding our ability to communicate in space-time to a greater extent than is possible by way of our biological endowments, particularly our ability to perform gestures and speech. Information could increasingly be conveyed to other locations without the communicator being present, and it could now be conveyed through time as well, though only forwards. To this extent, one need no longer be punctual or even present to convey one's own cultural contributions or to receive those of others. But the physical limitations inherent to tablets, papyri, volumes, copied books, and eventually books of the printed sort were still such that it was generally better to live in Alexandria than in some backwater settlement without a significant library; even as such limitations were reduced by the evolving field of information technology, access to knowledge remained subject to the barriers of time and space, though thankfully to a lesser extent. This would be the case throughout human history, even to the present day inasmuch as that there is still some advantage to living in New York or Berlin or some such major node; one is more likely to encounter cultural products of value or novelty when one's circumstances entail physical proximity to those working in cultural pursuits. But today, the same people may also be encountered from virtually anywhere else in time and space, and the ones from whom one might benefit most in terms of creative exchange can now be found and conversed with more easily by way of our new technological circumstances than by way of wandering the bars, the art receptions, the public squares, and other such once-crucial sub-nodes of the thought-product network—because, of course, the thought-product network has of late gone through an absolute revolution that has already begun to turn our civilization and its institutions upside down.

Ten thousand years ago, we would find our most stimulated thinkers in the city. Twenty years ago, we would still find our most stimulated thinkers in the city. Today, for the first time in human history, we can find them anywhere. More importantly,

they can find each other. The implications of this are still obscure to many, and of course even the most astute observer will be limited in his ability to predict where this is all going. Nonetheless, if we put this development into context and familiarize ourselves with certain of the results that we have seen thus far, we can say with extraordinary certainty that we are headed into an age of such dynamism and unpredictability that there is no sufficient way in which to finish this sentence. We will return to this topic later, as it is relevant to the second, more supremely important crisis with which this book is concerned and to which our original subject—the specific failures of our most respected opinion-drivers—is merely peripheral. Richard Cohen is only relevant to the coming world by contrast; his irrelevance is perfectly relevant.



KINDLY RECALL RICHARD COHEN'S TAKE on the Valerie Plame affair, which I quoted in part above and which I'll now quote at greater length so that we may better examine Cohen's own contributions to the modern thought-product network:

With the sentencing of Lewis 'Scooter' Libby, [prosecutor Patrick] Fitzgerald has apparently finished his work, which was, not to put too fine a point on it, to make a mountain out of a molehill. At the urging of the liberal press (especially *The New York Times*), he was appointed to look into a run-of-the-mill leak and wound up prosecuting not the leaker—Richard Armitage of the State Department—but Libby, convicted in the end of lying. This is not an entirely trivial matter since government officials should not lie to grand juries, but neither should they be called to account for practicing the dark art of politics. As with sex or real estate, it is often best to keep the lights off.

Cohen is factually incorrect here; New York Times reporter Judith Miller, whom we had occasion to discuss in our Krauthammer chapter and who was at that time of such great prominence in the conventional media structure that she was forever being granted off-the-record scoops by administration officials

on stories that turned out to be nonsense, testified under oath that Libby had indeed leaked the identity of Plame to her before Robert Novak revealed that information to the world more than six months later.

The fact that a prominent columnist was running around stating as fact things that he couldn't possibly know and which were indeed revealed to be wrong after such time as the prosecutor he'd been bashing had fulfilled his duty to investigate the matter ought not to faze us at this point, even as we look back at what bizarre nonsense the fellow was writing at the time:

As Fitzgerald worked his wonders, threatening jail and going after government gossips with splendid pluck, many opponents of the Iraq war cheered. They thought—if “thought” can be used in this context—that if the thread was pulled on who had leaked the identity of Valerie Plame to Robert D. Novak, the effort to snooker an entire nation into war would unravel and this would show . . . who knows? Something.

“Worked his wonders,” “government gossips”—both of these are loaded phrases that provide zero information and in fact have the effect of reducing the reader's understanding of the situation, particularly if the reader in question is easily taken in by obfuscatory rhetoric. Why, the nerve of this prosecutor, to think of himself of working wonders when such things are more properly the provenance of messiahs and gods! Fitzgerald is no messiah! He is merely a prosecutor! And how dare he investigate people for something so innocuous as gossiping? Everyone gossips, after all! Next thing you know, this self-proclaimed god will be arresting people milling about at the water coolers!

Imagine you are at your office. Richard Cohen looks through the window and decides that he doesn't approve of your work. “Oh, I see that you are working your wonders!” he calls to you sarcastically. And you're just sitting there thinking, “What the fuck? I've neither said nor done anything to indicate that I have some inflated sense of self-regard. I'm just sitting here doing my work. I mean, fuck!” That is what you would think, more or less. And you would be right to think it, as of course what Cohen

would be doing is ascribing to you by implication some sort of trait you've never actually exhibited and then sarcastically criticizing you for this implied characterization of your labors that he himself has composed and then ascribed to you by, yes, implication. Like, what the fuck?

Aside from all of this transparent semantic nonsense, Cohen also has a go at revealing the alleged hypocrisy of those who were disinclined to join him in characterizing Fitzgerald as having some sort of messiah complex without Cohen having cited anything at all that would merit such a characterization:

For some odd reason, the same people who were so appalled about government snooping, the USA Patriot Act and other such threats to civil liberties cheered as the special prosecutor weed-whacked the press, jailed a reporter and now will send a previously obscure government official to prison for 30 months.

After all, here are these people who opposed the Patriot Act and various extra-constitutional infringements on civil liberties, yet here they are failing to oppose a prosecutor who's been asked by the CIA to investigate a potential crime and who is doing so by way of totally constitutional means. Apparently there is some hypocrisy to be found here, although Cohen cannot pinpoint it exactly and must again resort to loaded terminology to the effect that Fitzgerald "weed-whacked the press." Other than pointing out again that such phrases are deployed only for the purpose of obscuring the true facts—"weed-whacked the press" sounds worse than some more objective phrase that might actually provide the reader with useful knowledge of exactly what it was that Fitzgerald had actually done—we might also note an actual item of hypocrisy, though on the part of Cohen and not his intended targets.

Recall what a big deal our columnist made of the prospect that government appointees would all now be justifiably worried about having to testify before Congress and perhaps be thrown in prison due to Monica Goodling having had to answer for the crimes she obviously committed, if only in the literal sense. Recall also how sad it made Cohen that government offi-

cials would all have to have criminal defense lawyers on speed dial and that perhaps many virtuous men might turn down such positions lest they be persecuted in the same manner that Goodling, uh, wasn't. With that in mind, we might ask why it is that Cohen is not similarly worried that CIA employees with covert status might now have to worry about being outed to the world by executive branch officials who would do so off the record and subsequently try to cover their tracks. If Cohen is so concerned about the prospect of government employees facing some unjust situation, then why does he express so much concern for a woman who clearly violated the Hatch Act and so little concern for another woman who did nothing wrong but whose covert status was blown forever in the course of the Bush administration's score-settling?

Were Cohen a conservative, we would not be amiss in attributing this discrepancy to principle-free partisanship of the Krauthammer mode. But Cohen is a liberal, and though he is a rather moderate one relative to, say, the average person one would meet at an organic food market of the sort that pops up on weekend mornings in downtown-area vacant lots, he is not in the habit of carrying water for Republican presidential administrations except on such occasions when it comes time to invade Iraq and insult the French for being right about things. Having ruled out ideology, we can put forth two motivations for Cohen's incompetent defense of Libby. For one thing, Cohen no doubt felt great empathy for those who, like Libby, had gotten Iraq wrong and had ended up looking silly thereby, as Cohen is of course one of those people and had at this point already been widely mocked by his superiors in the blogosphere for his notorious remark regarding fools and Frenchmen. This would also explain the degenerate carelessness of his prose on the subject, including the following line—*itself so wonderful that I must reproduce it again*:

An unpopular war produced the popular cry for scalps and, in Libby's case, the additional demand that he express contrition—a vestigial Stalinist-era yearning for abasement.

When someone who is presumably free of brain tumors or schizophrenia decides that those who demand that someone apologize for having outed an employee of the CIA in the course of a political dirty trick are best described in relation to the collective mindset of the Soviet Union under Stalin, one can probably expect that this particular someone has had his feelings hurt. This is doubly true when the someone in question has also written an entire column about how unhappy he is that people can use Google to find his various wrong and contradictory assertions, as The Reader will recall Cohen had done back in 2005.

But there is another, better explanation that accounts not only for Cohen's sudden mental association between a request for an apology and one of history's greatest mass murderers, but also for his defense of Goodling and a few other things to boot. Cohen, like many who have been successful in D.C. by virtue of lack of virtue, does not like to see his fellow denizens of The Beltway treated as they would be treated if they were someone other than his fellow denizens of The Beltway. This protectiveness we see from Cohen and certain other colleagues derives in large part from the incestuousness between the national media and the federal government, at least on the level of the cocktail parties in which employees of both entities mingle freely even after having been at odds earlier in the day. Everyone knows everyone, and no one wants to see anyone be accountable to those on the outside; potential prison time for a prominent politico (sorry) is as unthinkable terrible to such a figure as Cohen as regicide for Louis XVI was to any other equally guilty king of Europe. If this comparison seems outlandish, think back to what even relatively moderate monarchists like Edmund Burke—not even a king, mind you, but simply a fan of such things as kings—were saying about the French Revolution at the time, and then compare this to what Cohen was saying of the prospect that some Extraordinarily Important Fucking Person With A Suit might potentially face a shorter stint in jail than many other, less prominent people would face for selling marijuana. Allow me to refresh The Reader's memory yet again:

An unpopular war produced the popular cry for scalps and, in Libby's case, the additional demand that he express contrition—a vestigial Stalinist-era yearning for abasement.

“Abasement.” As if Libby were going to have to go on national television and denounce himself as a counterrevolutionary guilty of counterrevolutionary hooliganism before later being reformed to ardent and heartfelt revolutionary fervor after five years in a work camp. Think back to Cohen's characterization of “ordinary politics—leaking, sniping, lying, cheating, exaggerating and other forms of PG entertainment,” which he complained had been “criminalized.” Notice again the rhetorical tricks that pop up here and in every other instance in which someone he might run into socially might be held accountable for anything, even if only by way of a damaged reputation of the sort that Cohen himself has suffered due to the Stalinistic tendencies of those critical of those others who were in turn critical of others who were right about Iraq even as those whom I first termed as “those” were wrong about it. I mean, nothing could be clearer.

Seriously, though, note that “cheating,” which in the context of politics often entails a serious crime against the citizenry itself, is lumped in with “exaggerating,” a practice which his readers are meant to perceive as far more innocuous—yet still comparable to “cheating.” Why, it ought not be a crime to exaggerate, to be sure! And it seems that exaggerating is akin to cheating because Cohen has listed them all together! And thus cheating is no more significant of a crime than is exaggerating, which, of course, is not a crime at all! Let the politicians cheat, then, lest we all be prosecuted for exaggerating! After all, these are all merely forms of PG entertainment!

Note that I am not accusing Cohen of consciously using these sorts of rhetorical tricks to intentionally deceive his readers and to protect himself and his fellow Washingtonians from any real accountability for their failures. Rather, I am accusing him of being a disorganized thinker who operates not on any sort of consistent grouping of principles or determinations but rather by way of a confused collection of impulses whereby his

output immediately degenerates into contradictory nonsense at any such point as the topic at hand might challenge his view of self. If half of the country must be compared to Stalin-era inquisitors in order to make Cohen feel better about having idiotically written that “only a fool—or possibly a Frenchman” could have failed to agree with himself and Cheney that Iraq was an existential threat to the West, then Cohen will render half of the country Stalin-era inquisitors. The alternative to this—that Cohen should otherwise be forced into such introspection as might cause him to realize that he is unnecessary to the republic, harmful to the public understanding, and irrelevant to the future—is too terrible for consideration.

MARTIN PERETZ

THOSE SELECTED FOR INCLUSION in this book were picked out by reference to two criteria, with the first of these entailing that the chapter subject be well known and respected among those who generally ascribe to the pundit's politics. Martin Peretz is only slightly well known among liberals and moderates of the general population, and being no more widely respected than he is widely prominent, he certainly wouldn't seem to make the cut. But as the other bit of criteria entails being unqualified to serve in whatever role one plays in the national dialogue, Peretz more than makes up for his lack of mainstream notability, sort of like when someone does very poorly on the math section of the SAT but still pulls a 790 on the verbal, except in a bad way.

This is not to say that Peretz would have done poorly on either section of his SATs, as even his enemies are quick to acknowledge. His academic background is considerably impressive, having served as an assistant professor of social studies at Harvard and that institution having honored him in 1993 with the establishment of the Martin Peretz chair in Yiddish Literature. Most notably, he has served for over three decades variously as editor-in-chief and owner of *The New Republic*, which in turn has served for over a century as one of the nation's most justifiably respected sources of social and political commentary.

Peretz, then, is a smart fellow and knows quite a bit about

quite a bit. The problem is that he doesn't seem to know how the things he knows should fit together. If knowledge were a jigsaw puzzle, Peretz would not begin by sorting the pieces into groups based on similar color schemes in order that he might better undertake the gradual process of fitting them all together, as is the common practice among those who make it their business to complete jigsaw puzzles. Rather, he would begin by composing a poorly-written editorial to the effect that the Arabs are a warlike and untrustworthy people. Incidentally, Peretz's more bizarre outbursts are almost inevitably prompted by scorn for Arabs and Muslims, as we'll see. Perhaps more incidentally, the jigsaw puzzle was of some ducks swimming in a river, and then there's a bunch of trees off to the background and a couple of deer.

Peretz's penchant for general ridiculousness when confronted with certain subjects is so glaring that it is accepted as simply an obvious fact of life by an unusually large percentage of those who actually agree with most of the chap's political views and who might otherwise respect him for his more positive qualities. His poor reputation in this regard even extends to his own magazine, an open secret that I have unnecessarily confirmed by way of conversations with two former *TNR* staffers. Here's a pertinent excerpt:

ME: Does anyone at *The New Republic* respect Peretz as a writer or a thinker or—

FORMER STAFFER: No.

The person in question was quick to add that Peretz is indeed smart and well informed, and that his virtues as a publisher and editor are just as universally acknowledged among those associated with the publication as are his vices as an essayist. He or she wasn't just trying to be nice, either; under Peretz's run, *TNR* has published consistently superior content by some of the nation's most relevant and capable commentators on the subjects of politics and culture.

Were Peretz content to serve in that capacity, he would

be rightfully known as among the finest of publishers. Our universe being a flawed one, though, he chooses to write as well—frequently on his *TNR*-associated blog, occasionally for the print magazine itself, and sporadically in the pages of conservative publications such as *Commentary* and *The Wall Street Journal*, where he may occasionally be found expressing agreement with Republicans on foreign policy and matters of topical adjacency. This willingness to criticize his own party on a range of issues is admirable, and would be more admirable still if his criticisms were not so often directed at the wrong things, or if these criticisms did not so often apply also to those for whom he has only praise, or if so many of these criticisms were not demonstrably insane.

Worse than Peretz's various offenses against logic is the great violence that he insists on doing to the English language by way of astonishing stylistic deficits and endless grammatical errors. To his credit, those stylistic failures are so original that Noam Chomsky should probably be analyzing them for clues with regards to the origins of human linguistics, and even the manner in which the editor tramples upon fundamental aspects of grammar is consistently innovative. Let us examine a few examples culled from his blog:

I count as authoritative someone who hasn't misled me too much. Well, I sat with one of these authoritatives last night and she was giving me news, future news about the news.

The New York Post and Reuters both report not exactly that Bernie Madoff has cancer. But that he's told his fellow inmates that he has cancer, pancreatic cancer, at that. Which means that, if the tale is true, he'll be a goner soon, very soon. Unless there's a medical miracle, as sometimes there is even in such terrible afflictions of the pancreas.

Even the U.N. characterizes Congo as 'the rape capital of the world.' Alas, there are 18,000 U.N. peacekeepers in the country . . . and they only make the circumstances worse. Yes, quite literally.

This last instance merits special attention. When the term “literally” is deployed in error, it is almost always in the his-ears-were-literally-steaming sense, yet Peretz has here managed to invent an entirely new misuse of the adverb. He is worth reading if one approaches him as a sort of anti-William Safire, perhaps useful for those who have gotten too stuffy and self-congratulating in their command of the English language and who are thus inclined to perhaps cripple themselves via exposure, much like a long-distance runner who trains in the oxygen-depleted mountains except not at all because the metaphor doesn’t work, really, and now I’m too confused to figure out how to fix it. See, Peretz has already cured me of my literary self-regard, and not a moment too soon; I was planning to write the next chapter about the various classical sources from which I draw my prose style and the means by which others may come to emulate the resulting aesthetic. But now I’m not going to do that.

The second of the three instances listed above also merits special attention insomuch as that anyone who writes such a thing as this does not deserve the protection of our state and federal laws. Here, let me show it to you again:

The New York Post and Reuters both report not exactly that Bernie Madoff has cancer. But that he’s told his fellow inmates that he has cancer, pancreatic cancer, at that. Which means that, if the tale is true, he’ll be a goner soon, very soon. Unless there’s a medical miracle, as sometimes there is even in such terrible afflictions of the pancreas.

I don’t even know how to make fun of this other than to simply repeat it over and over again without additional comment.

One could reasonably dismiss Peretz’s poor style as irrelevant to the question of his usefulness to the republic. Alternatively, each of these terrible, terrible sentences could be used to focus on particular topics that Peretz has gotten terribly, terribly wrong. And that is what we shall do.



PERETZ ON IRAN

“There is much that even an economically challenged West can do to put Iran back into the well, let’s say the twentieth century. (Nothing can yet bring it to the twenty-first.)”

– Martin Peretz, February 2009

Soon after Iran’s state news agency released what it claimed to be the results of the nation’s 2009 presidential election, Western analysts came to general agreement that President Ahmadinejad’s alleged 63 percent victory could only have been the result of fraud. Middle East experts such as Juan Cole noted that the official results flew in the face of well-established regional and ethnic electoral trends, and as the days went by, international observers confirmed dozens of blatant irregularities.. The obviousness of the electoral theft was such that American pundits of every ideology found themselves in rare unity on the subject, with most everyone concerned expressing support for the millions of Iranians who took to the streets in an attempt to restore the fundamental right that had been stripped from them.

As is always the case with such affairs as this, there were those whose agendas demanded that the electoral results be considered legitimate. Ahmadinejad, for instance, was firmly in his own corner on this one, while the Chinese and Russian governments were both quick to congratulate the incumbent on maintaining the status quo in a nation strategic to both regimes. Kim Jong Il expressed particular delight over his Persian counterpart’s overt intention to deflect Western pressure and thereby score a victory for the self-determination of despots.

And then there was Martin Peretz. “I wish I could harbor even a smidgen of the confidence the vice president has that Dr. Ahmadinejad’s sweep was really a fraud,” he wrote at the time in reference to a statement Biden had made to the effect that the election had probably been stolen. “My impression is that the incumbent’s margin of victory was too big to have been fraudulent and the loser’s numbers also too big. Tyrannies don’t play around with the numbers like this. A dictator usually wants 99 percent

of the voters to have been for him . . . Maybe the regime fiddled around a bit with the numbers at the polls and after the polling. Still, the outcome had a sense of authenticity.”

So, there you go. Tyrannies don't play around with numbers like this and the margin of victory was too great to have been fraudulent—but perhaps the regime “fiddled around a bit with the numbers,” as opposed to having “play[ed] around with the numbers,” which is presumably something entirely different from “fiddling” with them—but at any rate, there is some “sense of authenticity” to such results.

Peretz is smart enough that he would not have come to this self-contradictory and obviously incorrect conclusion unless he had some overriding purpose for doing so. In this case, that purpose is to prevent his readers from coming to another self-evident and obviously correct conclusion: that the majority of Iranian voters had rejected the worst of Iranian presidents. Peretz prefers to avoid such a conclusion because inasmuch as it humanizes the bulk of the Iranian people, it works against one of his most commonly expressed desires, which is to see Iran dealt with militarily, and soon.

The desire for either the U.S. or Israel to strike at Iran in order to prevent its fundamentalist regime from acquiring nuclear weaponry is a common position. It is also a position worthy of serious consideration if one holds, as I do, that any relatively free nation is well within its rights to attack the military assets of any dictatorial regime at any time. In fact, I happen to agree with Peretz and many Iran hawks that opposition to military action is groundless to the extent that it derives from the belief that a theocratic government has some sort of right to operate without outside interference. But there also exists a very reasonable cause for opposition to the bombing approach: that air strikes against Iran would not necessarily assist in either Western security or Iranian freedom, and would likely run counter to both.

It does not take an extensive reading of history to be aware that foreign threats generally prompt domestic unity, itself almost invariably taking the form of “pragmatic” statism coupled with scattershot nationalism. Nor does it require a deep understanding

of modern Iran to determine that Ahmadinejad would use any military action against his nation as a means by which to discredit domestic opposition for supposedly siding with Iran's enemies. We see this phenomenon everywhere, even in the public discourse of our own republic; The Reader will no doubt recall a time not long ago when a certain Texan megalomaniac took to painting his opponents as taking the side of America's most despicable adversaries. I am referring, of course, to two paragraphs back, when I associated Martin Peretz with North Korea, Russia, and China for having joined the leaders of those amoral countries in supporting Ahmadinejad's claim to electoral legitimacy.

Being a mediocre thinker who has attached himself to a cause in a way that defies introspection, Peretz is no more interested in reasonable objections to his preferred option of air strikes than he is in the evidence that the Iranian people might very well be on course to doing away with the mullahs themselves. The Iranian people as a whole, he would have us believe by way of his most-Per-sians-love-Ahmadinejad meme, are collectively inclined to act against us without due cause, and thus the only solution is for us to act against them without undue hesitation. He is either unaware or unimpressed that our nation's previous interferences with Iran have clearly resulted in damage to that nation's democratic institutions while likewise contributing to the advancement of both its religious zealots and secular thugs. Presumably, he does not find any lessons in the shameful conduct on the part of the CIA during the early '50s, during which time that viper's nest spearheaded the overthrow of Iran's democratically elected prime minister through disinformation campaigns, financial aid to fascist politicians, and strategic support for known gangster Shaban Jafari, among other things; all of this is now publicly acknowledged by our own government and detailed with charming neutrality in our national archives. That these prior interferences—so much akin in spirit to the proposals now being made by our modern-day hawks—subsequently resulted in a quarter-century of dictatorship by a degenerate shah; that this state of affairs was followed by a predictable backlash whereby most any degenerate who promised to stand up to the U.S. was given a place in the new regime; and that this final revolution produced the very government that is now causing us so much trouble, does not seem

to strike Peretz as relevant or even worthy of mention.

Likewise, Peretz has no interest in the real significance of the 2009 election and its aftermath—that the majority of the Iranian people are today desirous of securing their own liberty and improving their material circumstances, that they will tomorrow be capable of seizing these things, and that the sooner this is accomplished, the sooner will they be inclined to give up such distractions as anti-Israeli sentiment in favor of their own pursuit of happiness. Reducing the possibility of an Iranian attack against Israel is Peretz's reasonable objective, and here we have a viable and ethical method by which this may soon be accomplished—one that will bear the added legitimacy of having been carried out by the Iranians themselves. But Peretz is not interested in solving the problem so much as he is in solving the problem in a particular way—one that is risky, will almost certainly result in civilian casualties, and which will provide a criminal and theocratic regime with the opportunity to redirect public anger from itself to the U.S. and thereby increase its own legitimacy in the eyes of many Persians while also discrediting the opposition as foreign puppets. Simply stated, Peretz seeks to solve a problem in a manner that will almost certainly end up exacerbating it. Also:

The New York Post and Reuters both report not exactly that Bernie Madoff has cancer. But that he's told his fellow inmates that he has cancer, pancreatic cancer, at that. Which means that, if the tale is true, he'll be a goner soon, very soon. Unless there's a medical miracle, as sometimes there is even in such terrible afflictions of the pancreas.

Peretz on His Various Enemies

“Yes, let me assure you, this hater of Israel [Princeton professor Richard Falk] is a Jew. And, also yes, this hater of America is an American. They are one and the same individual. So Wikipedia begins its narrative with the simple characterization, ‘Jewish American.’ No one will claim him, perhaps not even his mother. But that I don't know.”

– Martin Peretz, April 2008

If you or I decided to accuse someone of possessing some sort of negative trait, we would probably begin by finding one or more occasions on which the person in question had exhibited that trait. Aside from helping us to back up our assertion, such instances would also present the added bonus of helping us to ensure that our attack is warranted. If we're especially honest, we might also pause a moment to consider whether other people we're in the habit of defending do not also bear this particular trait, in which case our especial honesty might prompt us to either acknowledge that this is the case or scrap our objection altogether lest we give the impression that our enemies are in some unusual habit not found among our allies. Peretz rarely gets past the first of these tasks, whereas you and I would of course go through each of them out of our obligation to the truth. You and I are quite alike, it seems. And the smell of you intoxicates me.

Whereas you and I—united together by way of sexual tension and civic virtue—would never attack a fellow citizen without having first done our due diligence, Peretz does this to such a great and perpetual extent that one might reasonably suppose that such things get him high, just like you get me high when I take in the sight of you, when I gaze into your eyes as you gaze back into mine.

At the time when Peretz was among the few to have gotten the Iranian election story wrong, Juan Cole was among the many who got it right; though fraud was apparent to many from the beginning, the author and Middle East expert did a particularly outstanding job of identifying specific instances of electoral irregularities on a province-to-province basis. That Cole has in this and other instances displayed a specified working knowledge of the region far beyond anything Peretz has ever demonstrated does not seem to have deterred our antihero from menacing the scholar with the following interconnected array of specified symbols which may very well be intended to convey some sort of semantic meaning:

For Cole, though a popular blogger, is certainly not sensible and he has, on many issues, kept himself acidulously ill-informed. Smart

he is, however, though mostly in his efforts to get to the top of the heap of popular experts about the Arabs.

“Smart he is, gurgle comma blargle comma blarg comma however comma comma comma the Arabs.” Fucking abominable.

Peretz is also in the habit of targeting *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof for special criticism, apparently because Kristof has failed to target the Arabs for the same thing. Having once begun a blog post by conceding that Kristof himself was among those who first brought attention to the Darfur genocide, Peretz immediately points out that he “can’t recall whether Kristof has ever noted the overwhelming Arab backing for these heinous deeds.” This would be a reasonable thing for Peretz to have written had he written it from some 19th century Montana homestead and had no legs. Inasmuch as that Peretz actually exists among us in the dawn of the information age, he could have Googled “Kristof,” “Sudan,” and “Arabs,” like I did, and found that Kristof had indeed called out the Arabs on their collective complacency regarding Darfur less than a month before Peretz had called out Kristof for not calling out the Arabs on their collective complacency regarding Darfur. One doesn’t even need legs to do this sort of research; otherwise I wouldn’t have done it.

So, a month before the point at which Peretz couldn’t recall if Kristof had written anything like the following, Kristof had written the following:

Unfortunately, the Arab League’s secretary general, Amr Moussa, who quite properly denounces abuses when suffered by Palestinians, has chosen to side with Mr. Bashir rather than the hundreds of thousands of Muslims killed in Darfur. If Israel bombed some desert in Darfur, Arab leaders might muster some indignation about violence there.

Kristof 1, Arabs 0! Aside from wondering aloud whether or not Kristof had ever noted Arab complaisance regarding Darfur when he could have looked that up in something under 30 seconds by way of 21st-century super-science, Peretz goes on to imply further degrees of fascist coddling on the part of the

monstrous Kristof by way of an assertion that two *TNR* contributors who also helped to bring attention to the Darfur story are in possession of some insight into the overall situation that Kristof allegedly lacks:

[Richard] Just and [Erick] Reeves do not believe the the [sic] United Nations is able or, for that matter, willing to do what needs to do be done to stop the killing. After all, China and Russia are structurally empowered to block any constructive moves on the matter by virtue of their veto rights on the Security Council [hey, that was actually a pretty well-composed sentence].

It is fantastic that Just and Reeves understand this very obvious thing, but Peretz's implication that Kristof does not is typically ridiculous. In the very same column in which he'd taken issue with the Arabs on Darfur—the column he'd written just a month before, I here note again for emphasis—Kristof asserted that the Chinese must be compelled to cease supplying weaponry to the Sudanese antagonists and summarized the matter as follows:

If China continues—it is the main supplier of arms used in the genocide—then it may itself be in violation of the 1948 Genocide Convention . . . Incredibly, China and Russia are acting as Mr. Bashir's lawyers, quietly urging the United Nations Security Council to intervene to delay criminal proceedings against him. Such a delay is a bad idea, unless Mr. Bashir agrees to go into exile.

Kristof, then, knows every bit as well as Just and Reeves and Peretz do that the UN is worthless in such cases as these and that the Russian and Chinese regimes are not particularly concerned about the well-being of Africa's rural animists, although this does not deter Peretz from implying otherwise, as Peretz is an unstoppable force and cannot be deterred by anything. This will remain true no matter what revolutionary new models our physicists and cosmologists might someday develop to explain our universe.

The occasion for the bizarre criticisms we've just examined was a more recent Kristof column to the effect that, although

Kristof eats meat, he suspects that history will judge meat eaters very poorly from some vantage point in the future. Based on such an irritatingly introspective and self-critical little essay as this, full of hemming and hawing about all the poor little animals, Peretz concludes that Kristof “has the vanity of the absolutely righteous.” One might wish that Kristof had any such thing, but clearly he does not.

Peretz has elsewhere gotten after journalist Roger Cohen, not to be confused with superbly mediocre *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen. Journalist Roger Cohen, as we'll go ahead and call him, is attacked in a Peretz post that begins thusly:

Roger Cohen has the *Times* beat in Iran. Well, not exactly. No one has the *Times* beat in Iran. I don't know how many Western newspapers have their own journalists in the country. I do know that the *FT* does but it is an Iranian who holds it. Anyway, the datelines from Iran are commonly from Arab capitals, mostly Beirut.

This is how Martin Peretz chooses to begin an essay. Do you see now that we must all arm ourselves and prepare to rip our own nation asunder and destroy all of our institutions and spill the blood of our very cousins if that is what it takes to prevent such paragraphs as this from ever again being written? Do you? He goes on to “explain”: “Cohen's standards for an evil regime are quite specific and tough. He will not judge Tehran harshly until it murders many many Jews.”

Many many many. Peretz then asks us the following question, presumably more out of sadness than anger or honest curiosity: “So how has Cohen dealt with the torments to which hundreds of thousands of Iranians have been treated since the election?”

This seems to be a hypothetical question in that Peretz does not answer it or even suggest that such a thing can have an answer. He does subsequently admit that an analogy he had just made himself two paragraphs back in which he'd compared Iran to Nazi Germany might be “a bit overwrought, although I'm not at all sure it is.” Which is to say that he doesn't actually admit it. What? We do not get any answer as to how this mullah-loving journalist deals with the crackdown on protesters in that country.

If we had asked someone who bothers to read the work of those whose work he claims ought not to be read, we would have learned that Cohen has dealt with it by reporting on it, decrying it, and otherwise doing everything it is that a journalist can do short of shooting thousands of Basij paramilitaries or rescuing a brilliant scientist from the clutches of an underground prison complex and then having him invent a nanovirus that seeks out the brains of conservative ayatollahs and covertly rearranges their neurons in order to turn them into moderates without this process being detected by Iran's counter-nanotech forces, as Peretz has presumably done. Cohen, being less heroic, is content to simply write such things as this:

The Islamic Republic has lost legitimacy. It is fissured. It will not be the same again. It has always played on the ambiguity of its nature, a theocracy where people vote. For a whole new generation, there's no longer room for ambiguity.

Cohen goes on to rail against the regime in flamboyant and irritating terminology of the sort that he probably would not have submitted to his editor were he a marijuana user, in which case he would have almost certainly realized for himself that the entire column was kind of ostentatious. "A nation has stirred," he announces, shamelessly. "Provoked, it has risen." It is Jesus, Emperor of Persia. But then I am being unnecessarily mean to a reporter who of course does fine work in explaining a country that requires so much explanation. The point is that Peretz has once again wrongly criticized yet another columnist for having not done something that he did in fact do. He's going to keep doing that throughout this whole section. That's what this section is about.

Peretz is so intemperate as to have even attacked staffers of his own magazine on such occasions as they've written articles he deems incompatible with his personal hodgepodge foreign policy. In August of 2008, Peretz denounced *TNR* senior editor John Judis for having written that the U.S.'s late-20th century dealings with Cuba are comparable to Germany's early-20th century dealings with Belgium; Judis was referring in this

case to Imperial Germany, although Peretz does not manage to figure this out. “*(I can't believe that even he would compare us to the Nazis)*,” Peretz mused, both parenthetically and in italics, a combination that he must have thought to be particularly devastating around about the moment in which he instead ought to have been thinking about whether or not it was likely that anyone would single out Belgium as having been the most memorable national victim of Nazi Germany.

Still, Judis did compare the U.S.'s approach towards Cuba to that of the German Empire towards Belgium as well as to that of Iraq towards Kuwait, and such an argument certainly merits a counter-argument based in historical fact and context. He begins his screed against the journalist with “John Judis has often had a soft spot for America's enemies” and ends it with the following prepositional experiment: “There is nothing less than Henry Wallace, doughface tripe.” There is how Peretz writes when he's particularly angry about nothing less than tripe. There is how it seems to me, at least.

A few hours after having written this nonsense, Peretz apologized for the outburst. “There is great embarrassment for me,” he wrote. Just kidding. Here's the real apology, inserted as an update to the blog post in question:

Judis' item obviously upset me. And I have had my differences with John over the years. (As you know, I revel in intellectual give-and-take) But re-reading this item a few hours later, I realize that my rhetoric was a bit too rough. Since our disagreements are fierce, I wish my language had been less angry.

I wish his language had been Mandarin so that I wouldn't have had to learn from Peretz that Peretz “revel[s] in intellectual give-and-take” and that everyone knows this. Also note how he's managed to once again misplace his parentheses. Of course, he does not bother to correct his erroneous contention that one of his writers compared U.S. foreign policy to that of the Nazis, presumably because this would have taken up precious blog ink.

Contributor Gabriel Sherman once made what was apparently the terrible mistake of writing a piece on William Kristol's

inexplicable new role as a mainstream newspaper columnist in which he or she or whatever Gabriel is reported that certain people are unhappy with the prospect of such a fellow as Kristol being given such an outlet as this. "Why?" Peretz asks himself or possibly us. "Because Kristol has slammed the *Times* on several occasions, even waged war on it?" Probably not. Kristol has been so wrong about so many things that it is now passe to even point this out, which is why I was reluctant to write this sentence and in fact have decided not to leave it in (but my delete key is broken). Peretz does not see it this way. "You do know this about the new columnist: he won't be a patsy. And he won't be boring." In fact, he did turn out to be kind of boring.

Sherman had to be reprimanded for having done whatever it is that the dual-gendered special correspondent did wrong. Peretz characterized the piece as "very informative but slightly nasty" and then immediately notes it as including "the usual stuff about Arthur Sulzberger, some of it either wrong or irrelevant." He forgets to provide examples of what it is exactly the writer got wrong, content in having unfairly maligned the work of someone who has already suffered so much from society's misunderstanding of the two sets of genitalia with which it was born. See, I can make up shit, too. Someone should give me control of *The New Republic*.

Among Peretz's various ham-fisted attacks on his superiors, one finds a pattern of hypersensitivity to criticism of U.S. foreign policy both past and present. To his credit, this almost certainly stems from the publisher's long and reasonable opposition to those among the Old Left whose philosophical degeneracy led them to sympathize with the Soviet Union and its hangers-on over the United States and the other relatively free nations of the world. But most of these people are dead.

Peretz, then, is right to keep an eye on whatever manifestations of Old Left sentiment might arise in the pages of *The New York Times Sunday Book Review* or Unitarian church services or the next Gore Vidal autobiography (there have been three so far). The difficulty here is that he cannot differentiate between Bolshevik propaganda and reasonable historical analysis. In 2006, writer James Carroll, being a writer, wrote an article for

The Boston Globe in which he argued that the North Korean dystopia came about in part as a reaction to the U.S.'s involvement in the peninsula. He did not argue, incidentally, that North Korea is the glowing sun of harmony to which all faces turn from every corner of the Earth, its children looking to Kim Jong Il for hope and guidance as they struggle against the white-skinned dog men who burn them for fuel in the factories of the West.

You wouldn't know this from reading Peretz's take on the piece, though. Carroll, it seems, "didn't tell his readers that the present communist tyrant Kim Jong Il is the son of the last communist tyrant Kim Il Jong, who ran the tyranny in 1948." There is a good reason for Carroll not to have done so even aside from the fact that Kim Jong-Il's father was not the nonexistent Kim Il-Jong but rather Kim Il-Sung: the vast majority of Americans who would be inclined to read an article on some subset of 20th century Korean history would also be aware that the current ruler is the son of the previous one and that this might very well reflect poorly on the regime's commitment to popular governance and the rule of law, so there is no more reason for Carroll to explain this to them than there would be for him to note that North Korea is north of South Korea.

Still, Peretz determines that Carroll's nonexistent defense of the North Korean regime is so dangerously existent that it must be publicly refuted. With this in mind, the erudite publisher reveals the following piece of inside baseball:

And, if you want a retrospective judgment on the cold war, just compare North Korea with South Korea, the most backward and brutal heavily armed industrial country in the world and its neighbor, an exemplar of market capitalism, democratic politics, and strategic independence of its allies, like the United States.

Though initially skeptical, I've since verified this with several National Security Agency veterans, and although I am still analyzing the data and would thus be uncomfortable in publishing any definite conclusions as this time, I am prepared to note that my preliminary determination is in apparent agreement with Peretz's own findings to the effect that South Korea may very

well have done better than North Korea. Extrapolating from what I've managed to determine thus far, I can also predict at this early point that as the data continues to be analyzed, my own research will continue to largely support the foundations of Peretz's contentions as a whole, although I have run into a sticking point insomuch as that I have no idea what "strategic independence of its allies" is supposed to mean.

In all seriousness, Peretz's contention that Carroll has sought to downplay the vast culpability of the Kim dynasty can only be the result of dishonesty or incompetence or some Peretzian hybrid thereof. In his apparently controversial article, Carroll makes reference to "the Stalinist character of the North Korean regime" and elsewhere employs such terminology as "the tyrant Kim Jong-Il," this being the exact phrase that Peretz himself uses in the course of accusing Carroll of trying to hide the fact that Kim Jong-Il is a tyrant.

One can probably imagine the treatment given by Peretz to those who actually ranked among the Old Left and who actually did sympathize with communism and its various national manifestation. Our chapter subject once took issue with a recent book on the author and leftist public intellectual I.F. Stone with the following assertion: "A review of *All Governments Lie: The Life and Times of Rebel Journalist I.F. Stone* in [the wacky old leftist journal] *In These Times* fails to tell you that Stone somehow believed that the Stalin regime was an exception to this rule." Had the review told you that, it would have been wrong, as Stone obviously knew perfectly well that lies were the favored means of communication by the Soviet regime in general and the Stalinist one in particular:

Whatever the consequences, I have to say what I really feel after seeing the Soviet Union and carefully studying the statements of its leading officials. This is not a good society and it is not led by honest men.

Contrary to Peretz's typically unsourced accusation, then, Stone did not consider Stalin and his comrades to have been the only honest rulers in all of human history. What bizarre assertions

one has the occasion to shoot down when dealing with Peretz, whom I suspect would actually recognize the foolishness of his own implications were someone to explain to him what those implications were. Perhaps he needs an intern.

Desmond Tutu once delivered an address to an American congregation in which the Christian activist offered the Israelis some unsolicited advice regarding what they ought to be doing with all the Palestinians they've collected over the years. According to Peretz's highly original account of the speech, the bishop's advice was that they all get ready to be killed by some impromptu horde operating under his own personal command. As our publisher-scholar relates:

With his characteristic sneer [Tutu] actually threatened Israel—and not just the State but the whole People. “Remembering what happened to you in Egypt and much more recently in Germany—remember and act accordingly.”

Such a quote as this could certainly be construed as having been intended to convey to the Israelis that they deserve to receive another round of persecution and that this could very well come about, particularly if one rips the quote out of the context that quite obviously indicates it to be something else entirely, which is of course exactly what Peretz did because he is some sort of trickster deity.

Hey, here's that context right over here! C'mon, gang—let's attach it to the piece that Peretz discovered and see if any secret messages are revealed! Those mummies have just got to have some sort of weakness:

My address is really a *cri de coeur*, a cry of anguish from the depth of my heart, an impassioned plea to my spiritual relatives, the offspring of Abraham like me: please, please hear the call, the noble call of your scriptures, of our scriptures . . . Be on the side of the God who revealed a soft spot in his heart for the widow, the orphan and the alien . . . This is your calling. If you disobey that calling, if you do not heed it, then as sure as anything one day you will come a cropper. You will probably not succumb to an outside assault

militarily. With the unquestioning support of the United States of America, you are probably impregnable. But you who are called are they who are called, asked to deal with the oppressed, the weak, the despised, compassionately, caringly, remembering what happened to you in Egypt and, much more recently, in Germany. Remember and act appropriately. If you reject your calling, you may survive for a long time, but you will find it is all corrosive inside, and one day, one day, you will implode . . . Somebody has said if something has happened once, then clearly it is something possible. It happened in South Africa; why not in the Middle East?

Which is to say that the former Archbishop of Cape Town did not actually threaten Israel with anything, not even destruction, much less annihilation or a big hammer—and contrary to threatening Israel “and not just the State, but the whole People,” as Peretz characterized him as doing, Tutu actually states his belief that the country is safe from anything that might constitute a significant threat. The allegedly threatening portion of the quote, meanwhile, is directly preceded by the word “caringly,” which is preceded by the word “compassionately.” Note that Peretz is so helpful as to have capitalized the “r” in “remembering” as presented in his chosen quote lest his readers realize that it’s actually pulled from the middle of a sentence and then be forced to go look up the speech for themselves and thereby get distracted by all of the boring context. It’s quicker and easier to just let Marty lie to you.

Peretz is not so unnice as to not ever be nice. His niceness comes in irritating little bursts, often directed at the wrong people for the wrong things. This leads to incidents so terrible that the resulting terribleness cannot even be measured by existing instruments and would instead have to be estimated by cosmologists.

In April of 2009, Peretz attended a lecture given by Thomas Friedman and then wrote about it on his blogfdgsdh4deg. bk.zdj

I’m sorry, I fell out of my chair.

Duly impressed by Friedman’s erudition, Peretz writes a rather lengthy blog post in which he singles out one of his recent *New York Times* columns in particular:

Tom makes a surprisingly fresh argument about Iraq. “If we, with Iraqis, defeat them by building any kind of decent, pluralistic society in the heart of their world, it will be a devastating blow.”

The assertion that this is some sort of “fresh argument about Iraq,” surprisingly so or not, is absolutely ludicrous, even relative to all of the other absolutely ludicrous things we have encountered so far. This sentiment had at that point been uttered—and in much the same terminology as this—perhaps millions of times, by President Bush and other members of the administration, by countless pundits, by a hundred thousand drunken uncles, and probably by Peretz himself. In the absence of WMDs, it had even evolved into the central justification for the war; even before the WMDs were found to be not found, it had been a peripheral justification for the invasion of Iraq. In fact, it served as a major argument for the invasion of Iraq well before 9/11 pushed the issue back into the public dialogue. The assertion that this idea is somehow new, much less “fresh,” is so amazingly wrong-headed that I do not think it would be amiss for me at this point to call for Peretz to be stripped of his citizenship and perhaps even his legal status as a human being. He should be abandoned to a pack of seals or something so that he can learn to catch fish or otherwise be trained in some useful task. Then he should be arrested and shot out of a cannon and then arrested again for speeding and then released back to the pack of seals so that they may shun him for what even a pack of seals must know to be the incredible degree of nonsense inherent to claiming that there is anything original at all in noting that it would good for us and bad for al Qaeda if we succeed in building a pluralistic society in Iraq. Then we should shoot all of Peretz’s seal friends and make him join us in eating their flesh.

On another occasion, Peretz held forth on the virtues of former Clinton advisor and current populist commentator Dick Morris, who possesses not a single virtue, not even the religious sort that would preclude one from cheating on one’s wife with a prostitute and having said prostitute suck one’s

toes or whatever it is that the disgusting little fellow did that one time. Wrote Peretz: “You may not much like Dick Morris. But one thing you know about him is that he is a shrewd political analyst . . . and prognosticator.”

I know nothing of the sort and neither does any other sentient being with even basic knowledge of this creature’s history as an analyst or prognosticator. In 2006, Morris released a book entitled *Condi vs. Hillary: The Next Great Presidential Race*. The first sentence reads, accurately, “On January 20, 2009, at precisely noon, the world will witness the inauguration of the forty-fourth president of the United States,” after which point the text descends into absolute madness. His most recent book, *Catastrophe*, is based on the premise that “we must act before President Barack Obama fully implements his radical political agenda. Because after Obama has won his war on prosperity and canceled the war on terror, it will be too late to regain our liberty or our security.” He is not so much a prognosticator as he is an opportunist, and not so much an opportunist as he is a disgusting, overgrown boy of the sort that one’s mom would force you to invite to spend the night because she and his mom are friends, and then he would try to touch one while one is asleep and then pretend that he himself was sleeping when one wakes up to find a hand on one’s buttocks. I am extrapolating a bit here, but at any rate the man is a contemptible fool with absolutely no insight into anything other than self-aggrandizement and sexual perversion.

Also:

The New York Post and Reuters both report not exactly that Bernie Madoff has cancer. But that he’s told his fellow inmates that he has cancer, pancreatic cancer, at that. Which means that, if the tale is true, he’ll be a goner soon, very soon. Unless there’s a medical miracle, as sometimes there is even in such terrible afflictions of the pancreas.

Peretz on Iraq

“There are many reasonable, and even correct, reproofs that one may have for the conduct of the war. They are, to be sure, all retrospective.”

– Martin Peretz, August 2006

Take a look at that quote. That's as close as Martin Peretz has ever gotten to admitting that those who turned out to be right about Iraq are almost as deserving of credit as those who turned out to be wrong, such as Martin Peretz himself.

The warnings that our republic was about to cripple itself in a dozen ways were made well in advance of the war's launching, of course. Nonetheless, Peretz considers these to have been "all retrospective," presumably because some of them were reiterated after the fact while others were necessarily made at such time as new mistakes were revealed. Peretz's view of the world and its workings does not provide for the possibility, or even the obvious fact, that he might have been wrong to advocate on behalf of the war with such scattershot bravado, and that other people who don't even have their own magazines were right to raise concerns about the project. Every objection to the war, no matter when it was made, is thus by necessity "retrospective."

This is not to say that Peretz is unwilling to accept responsibility for Iraq. Someone has to assign the blame, for instance, and our publisher friend has done an admirable job of leading the way on this lest potential lessons be lost upon those of us possessing less insight than does Martin Peretz. As he explains:

Whom do we have to hold responsible for the situation in Iraq?
The same person who is responsible for the sheer fact of Iraq. That person is Gertrude Bell, an archaeologist, a poet and, most significantly, a British colonial servant.

Bell, you see, was involved in organizing this particular portion of the British Empire into a semi-cohesive administrative unit. But the resulting unit was somewhat artificial in terms of traditional nation-statehood, being home to several different socio-ethnic groups following several different religious creeds. Later, she was awakened from the warm slumber of death by means of Thelemic nanomagic, after which point she began to roam the earth, forcing people such as Martin Peretz to advocate an invasion of Iraq without regard for the potential consequences. This was unkind of her.

In fact, the creation of Iraq could have been handled better, but one can say the same regarding quite a few pieces of the dying British Empire. Pakistan, for instance, did not turn out to be a particularly viable entity inasmuch as that a large portion of the country broke away in the midst of civil war and chaos and subsequently became the all-terrible Bangladesh. I also seem to recall there having been some spirited disputes now and again regarding the borders of another partial British creation, Israel.

Incidentally, neither Bangladesh nor Israel is home to hundreds of thousands of U.S. military personnel and civilian contractors, and the U.S. does not seem to have sunk some trillion or so dollars into either of those countries. There is something different, then, about Iraq, and I suspect that this difference may stem from the fact that our republic recently occupied that country at the behest of people like Martin Peretz.

Peretz does deserve a strange sort of credit inasmuch as he was one of those who helped to advocate the invasion of Iraq well before this “product” was “introduced,” as the incorrigible Andy Card put it in 2002, which is to say that he was for the war even before being for the war became the cool new hip happening trend among liberal moderates. Just a few days after 9/11, our chapter subject was among those who formally asked the Bush Administration to invade and occupy Iraq in the interests of U.S. security and power projection capabilities, having signed his name to an open letter to this effect composed by the Project for a New American Century crowd (which had called on Clinton to do the same thing in another, similar letter composed in 1999, as you probably know if you’ve ever read a liberal blog or even walked into a room while someone else was reading one).

People deal with their own failures in different ways. Peretz, for instance, wrote “The Politics of Churlishness,” an essay that was chosen to appear in a volume entitled *The Best American Political Writing* of 2005. The churlishness in question is being perpetrated by those who have for some reason failed to grant Peretz and his colleagues their due credit for having done whatever it is that they think they’ve managed to do. The nattering nabobs of negativity—who do not speak for the great silent

majority, mind you—are, as the conservative trope goes, rooting for failure despite the clear evidence of success.

“They are not exactly pleased by the positive results of Bush’s campaign in the Middle East,” nor with the administration’s “unprecedented success” in the region, as Peretz explains to us. “I refer, of course, to the political culture of the Middle East, which the president may actually have changed.” As difficult as it may be to imagine now, the Peretz crowd was consumed with another round of preemptive triumph in the period from 2004 to 2005. An election in Lebanon seemed to spell the end for Hezbollah, and thus the end of Syrian and Iranian influence over that country’s affairs. The streets of Beirut were filled in those days with typically beautiful Lebanese females of Druse, Christian, and secularist backgrounds, all demonstrating against Islamic oppression and in favor of the Enlightenment or something approaching it. Photos of such pretty demonstrations were prominently displayed on the blogs of our own nation’s war enthusiasts, many of whom no doubt fantasized that they would someday meet these girls and tell them how hard they had advocated for the Iraq invasion that had peripherally granted them their liberty in turn, and then the girls would also see in them what our local girls have for some reason failed to see, and of course they would be filled with gratitude for their white knights . . . Incidentally, when Israel bombed Beirut and other civilian areas in 2006, the war bloggers appeared to have forgotten all about these Lebanese girls, as we did not see any more pictures of them. Obviously, I am not accusing these swivel-chair war bloggers, such as Glenn Reynolds of Instapundit, of opportunism or hypocrisy or of not really caring about the well-being of certain populations for whom they claim to be concerned advocates; it is simply hard to get good pictures of Lebanese girls when they’re crying in darkened basements as bombs drop upon their city, is all.

Let us return to the crucial subject of churlishness. We are informed that the blame for 9/11 lies mainly with President Clinton, and not Gertrude Bell as one might expect. “The Clinton administration seized on every possible excuse—from the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, right through

the atrocities in Kenya and Tanzania, to the attack on the USS Cole—not to respond meaningfully to Osama bin Laden.” Insomuch as that bin Laden was not at all involved in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, had at that time just spent a decade fighting our Soviet enemies under partial U.S. coordination, had offered to help protect Saudi Arabia from our new Iraqi enemies in a 1990 meeting with the Crown Prince of that alleged U.S. ally, and otherwise refrained from doing anything that could have reasonably prompted President Clinton or anyone else to consider the fellow a significant threat until the embassy bombings of 1998, Clinton can probably be forgiven for not going after bin Laden in 1993 or even giving the fellow much thought until the point when he actually started killing Americans instead of America’s enemies. The president did, however, fire a few cruise missiles in the fellow’s general direction in 1998; even this small step was widely denounced as a distraction from the impeachment proceedings, as was the Kosovo war the following year. The Bush Administration, in contrast, did eventually pursue bin Laden—after the worst attack on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor. But let us not rehash the squabbles of the past.

Despite the churlishness that apparently drives the anti-war crowd, Peretz tells us that a few of their number began to achieve sentience around 2005, like so many fictional computers. “Some liberals appear to have understood that history is moving swiftly and in a good direction . . .” Forward, we may suppose.

Not content in having written one of the best American political essays of 2005, Peretz in 2006 treated the readers of *The Wall Street Journal* to one of the best American political essays to have appeared in the August 7, 2006 morning edition of *The Wall Street Journal*. This was, not-so-incidentally, the article in which he informs the citizenry that all objections to U.S. conduct in Iraq are, “to be sure, retrospective.” The subject this time, to be sure, was Ned Lamont’s campaign against Joe Lieberman, an effort that Peretz considered to be unseemly. “Mr. Lamont has almost no experience in public life,” Peretz notes retrospectively. “He was a cable television entrepreneur, a run-of-the-mill contemporary commercant with unusually easy

access to capital.”

Speaking of “unusually easy access to capital,” this might be a good time to mention that Martin Peretz was able to buy *The New Republic* only because he first married the heir to a sewing machine fortune. In Peretz’s defense, he has never done anything so crass and commercial as to actually start a business.

The real purpose of the piece, though, was to warn the nation about what might happen if people such as Martin Peretz were to lose their influence over the Democratic Party. “If Mr. Lieberman goes down, the thought-enforcers of the left will target other centrists as if the center was the locus of a terrible heresy, an emphasis on national strength . . . The Lamont ascendancy, if that is what this is, means nothing other than that the left is trying, and in places succeeding, to take back the Democratic Party.” This may be the only occasion on which someone has denounced a political candidate for having spent too much time in the private sector and not enough time solving everyone’s problems by way of the government—before going on to warn everyone that the liberals are about to take over.

Peretz on the Arabs, the Arabs

Being the Point of All This Anyway

“Alas, apricots don’t grow in the dessert [sic].”

– Martin Peretz

Deep down, you always knew, throughout the whole of your life, that you were being trained for something special, that every supposedly mundane hardship was in fact a means by which unseen forces were building you up for the task that has always been your destiny. You were wrong, of course.

But throughout this chapter, at least, I have been preparing you for something that would have been impossible to you before picking up this book. Through repeated exposure, you have been desensitized to the worst series of sentences ever written—the one concerning Bernie Madoff’s pancreas. You see, we are about to examine the context in which it was originally written. Without adequate preparation, you would have been too distracted by Peretz’s awful paragraph to take in the signif-

icance of what Peretz is attempting to do in the essay in which the paragraph appears.

Of course, you had no idea that you were being manipulated. Don't be embarrassed; I am like unto the owl who sees in all directions but who himself is only seen when he so chooses. I am very much like unto such an owl as that, quite frankly. You, meanwhile, were distracted by red herrings, by misdirection. When I appeared to be hitting on you early in the chapter, for instance, it was simply to direct your perception away from the training I was about to provide to you without you knowing—unless, of course, you find me attractive, in which case we should explore that, but only if you want to. I don't want to screw up our friendship. I just feel that maybe we could have more. More sex, LOL.

Anywho, on the occasion of the suddenly-cancerous Lockerbie bomber's release from a Scottish prison in 2009, Peretz began his commentary with the following oft-mentioned bit of nonsense:

The New York Post and Reuters both report not exactly that Bernie Madoff has cancer. But that he's told his fellow inmates that he has cancer, pancreatic cancer, at that. Which means that, if the tale is true, he'll be a goner soon, very soon. Unless there's a medical miracle, as sometimes there is even in such terrible afflictions of the pancreas.

To understand what Peretz thinks he's getting at, you must first understand that Peretz's entire reign at *The New Republic* has been marked by a cartoonish brand of hawkishness directed almost entirely against the Arab and Muslim peoples. His own writings are given over largely to accounts of Arab and Muslim perfidy; among other things, he has asserted that Arabs are incapable of maintaining a "truly civil society." In content, approach, and intent, his output is no different from that of the various websites that catalog the real or imagined crimes of blacks or Jews or both. Not that I am bothered by his or anyone else's racism, which is directed only towards mere people. But why his perpetual assault on grammar, which

he must truly despise? Grammar isn't an Arab, Marty. You're thinking of al-gebra.

Logic, likewise, is no Muslim, and yet Peretz insists on demeaning it as if it were on Hajj. The point he approaches in the blog post we are here concerned with is spelled out more clearly in his headline: "Madoff Has Cancer, Too. Why Not Release Him or At Least Send Him Home on House Arrest?" What he means is that the Lockerbie bomber was to be released to his home by virtue of late-stage cancer while imprisoned in a country that sends terminally ill prisoners home as general policy, and now here's Bernie Madoff, who never even killed anyone, and he's supposedly dying of cancer but has yet to receive the same sweet deal that was given to this murderous terrorist. Lest anything be left to chance, Peretz amplifies his insight thusly:

So the master Ponzi schemer is now in the hands of the president as top man in the federal penal system. Since Obama seems to think that Libyan terrorist al-Megrahi, who had 16 years of a 27-year 'life' sentence yet to serve, should be put under house arrest until death, why not do the same kindness for Bernie?

Peretz clearly believes, then, that 1) Barack Obama is the "top man in the federal penal system" and is thus in a position to demote Madoff's sentence to mere house arrest; that 2) Barack Obama wants al-Megrahi to spend his last days at home; and that 3) if Scotland follows its own regulations to the effect that a terminally ill prisoner is released to his home, then the U.S. should follow the same nonexistent U.S. regulations in respect to a certain prisoner who happens to have been well-known at the time that Peretz decided all of this.

If Peretz were someone other than Peretz, he would know that 1) Obama is not the "top man in the federal penal system" and has no power whatsoever to reduce a man's sentence to house arrest; that 2) rather than believing that al-Megrahi "should be put under house arrest until death," Obama had already clearly stated that al-Megrahi should have remained in the Scottish prison; and that, contrary to Peretz, and 3) it is hardly hypocritical for Obama to refrain from using a power he

doesn't have to do something of which he doesn't approve based on a regulation that doesn't apply.

In the early days of 2007, street battles between Shiite and Sunni militias were once again flaring up across Iraq. Never one to avoid controversy, Thomas Friedman wrote a column in which he explained that it would probably be best if everyone concerned were to stop killing each other and instead dedicate themselves to the peace which passes all understanding, not the least of which his own. He also asked:

Where is the Muslim Martin Luther King? Where is the "Million Muslim March" under the banner: "No Shiites, No Sunnis: We are all children of the Prophet Muhammad."

There is much to mock in such a sentiment as this, particularly if one recalls after whom Martin Luther King was named and why. Peretz does not do subtlety, though, and instead responded to Friedman's treacle in the following ludicrous manner:

Poor Tom Friedman. He is looking for a Muslim Martin Luther King. There is none, Tom. If one were living on earth, they'd break his windows. Imprison him. Or kill him. Finished.

It does not cross Peretz's mind that this is exactly what happened to the actual Martin Luther King, and that it is therefore not much of an indictment of the Muslim world that their own incarnation of such a fellow might very well end up just as dead as the original. We would probably not expect him to ruminate over whether or not the centuries of circumstances that made Martin Luther King necessary tells us anything about the Judeo-Christian West's own cultural deficits, because to the extent that any such deficits rise to our attention, the deficits of the Arab Muslim world are thus minimized by comparison and context.

Peretz has no use for context, particularly such context as may lead us to remember, for instance, which socio-ethnic group it was that illicitly seized control of which region in the course of establishing which world-spanning empire upon

which the sun never set. Such things are irrelevant to Peretz, as is anything else that could possibly be used to argue that the Arabs and Muslims are not necessarily the greatest villains of both the past and present, or that much of their actual villainy could be explained as a reaction to the villainy that has been visited upon them by the outside world. Thus it is that his writings on the Arabs and Muslims are entirely devoid of intellectual honesty, and in fact often read very much like the output of some Internet-based anti-Semite.

In July of 2009, two Jakarta hotels were hit with bombs. As Peretz reported at the time, “More than 50 injured were carted away to hospitals. Maybe the casualties will go up. They certainly won’t go down.” To this brave prediction, Peretz adds the following sentence, set off into its own paragraph in order that its significance not be lost: “Who are the guilty? We all know. But we can’t say.”

This particular trope—that there exists some group which perpetrates great crimes but which cannot be publicly identified as doing so—is a staple of the anti-Semitic rhetorical aesthetic. It is especially absurd in this particular context. Is Peretz truly incapable of stating outright that a bombing, which is clearly the work of some Islamic militant group or another is clearly the work of some Islamic militant group or another? If so, how has he managed to write such things in the past without suffering retribution at the hands of the International Islamist Conspiracy? If even a liberal publication such as *The New Republic* publishes articles which refer in passing to “the murderous Arabs”—and, under the direction of Peretz, the magazine has done just that on at least one occasion—can it really be said that anyone is being prevented, by way of some nonexistent hate speech laws or popular sentiment or any other such forces, from noting that a bombing in Jakarta is probably the work of Islamic terrorists?

Of course not. What has actually happened here is that Peretz, in the midst of writing his post, decided that it would work in his favor and in the favor of his ideological objectives to portray himself as being unable to write freely on the subject of Islamic perfidy lest he be silenced or boycotted or tsk-tsked

or perhaps even have his windows broken out like some Islamic Martin Luther King. It is a common and stupid trick to portray one's self as being in possession of some true-yet-controversial sentiment yet also constrained by the great power and influence of one's enemies. It is especially absurd when one lives in America and one's enemies are Muslims, who are distrusted by about half the population even if they have become the latest pet project of certain pseudo-intellectual liberals who will defend Islam for the same things for which they attack Christianity when they ought to be attacking both. As long as Peretz steers clear of dinner parties attended by members of the Old Left, he is perfectly free to knock the Muslims without significant repercussions, just as he's always done, and just as I myself have done on occasion while somehow escaping retaliation.

Just as every instance of black violence or Jewish success is seen by the tribalist as endemic to the violent nature of the black man or the conspiracy of the Jew, every occasion of actual misbehavior on the part of an Arab or Muslim is, to Peretz, another indictment of the Arab and of the Muslim. There is no fundamental difference between his *modus operandi* and that of anyone else whose mentality is driven largely by opposition to some or another socio-ethnic group.

When a soccer riot occurs, Peretz rightfully ignores it, as such things carry larger significance only to the extent that anything carries significance to a writer on deadline. When a soccer riot occurs among Arabs, we are treated to such things as this:

But the Arab soccer wars are nothing to laugh about. You can read about them in the attached news reports, along with photos. Still, nothing explains the riots in France where thousands and thousands of mostly young and temper-torn French-born men and women who hail from Algeria took to the streets and ripped them up, broke shop windows, muscled non-participants and wrought general havoc.

When Peretz claims that "nothing can explain" an incident in which young men riot in celebration of a sporting victory pulled off by their country of origin, he is presumably not speaking

literally; such things go on all the time and are easily explained by nationalism, youthful exuberance, and other manifestations of douchebaggery. What Peretz really means is that this soccer riot is somehow different from all the others, and that the perpetrators, too, are somehow different from those who came before them. He's right; this incident differs from the many others that have gone down in the years since Peretz began blogging inso-much as that Peretz did not cover any of them, even those that resulted in far greater violence than this one. Those others did not belong to a race for which Peretz has any particular scorn, after all; those of us who are not Arabs are free to riot all we want without Peretz hassling us and otherwise coming down on our good time, which is certainly good to know.



THERE IS LITTLE TO BE DONE about such people as Martin Peretz; it is always possible that some unqualified fellow will somehow get his hands on someone else's money and then use it to take by wealth what he could never have achieved by his own talents, as was the case with Peretz when he married money and promptly bought himself a magazine. Like anyone else whose foolishness damages the public interest to the extent that his foolishness is taken seriously by those who might have otherwise taken in the work of some less foolish media figure and been better-informed as a result, Peretz must be dealt with by mockery. If you happen to run into him, you might explain that he has more in common with Muhammed than he might think inso-much as that both married wealthy women and neither could write. Better yet, think up something cleverer and tell him that instead.

EPILOGUE

“Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible to them.”

– Book of Genesis

BY THE TIME OF SOCRATES, the Greek alphabet had been in existence for well over 200 years, although it was not until the period in which he lived that its use became widespread. Paintings and simple symbols had long before ushered in the practice of recording information in our environment, rather than in our minds; writing extended the utility of this in such a dramatic way that we are correct to think of it as fundamentally different from the simpler methods of informational permanence that we see in its earliest forms as cave paintings depicting the herd and crude sculptures of astoundingly fertile women.

Before the onset of writing, Greek culture was driven by orality—the state in which a population conveys its accumulated information largely by way of speech and stores it largely in the minds of its members. Poems, with their artificial structures and rhyme schemes, served as mnemonic reminders of the content held within, as well as delivery systems by which to transfer the information to others. Overall, these particular arrangements of a culture’s accumulated information served not

only to instruct but also to stamp minds with some degree of commonality, which in turn would assist in holding the population together as a unit distinct from others.

Upon the adaptation of written language, the essence of Greek thought began to change to such a great extent that a number of 20th-century academics have been able to make a convincing case that the onset of literacy had the effect of molding Greek minds to such an extent as to allow for truly abstract thought, which had not existed as such beforehand and which was at any rate necessary to the development of complex social construct which in turn allowed for the implementation of such things. Due to the constraints of the medium, the products of orality did not allow for any such complexity. Due to the constraints of the medium, the same conceptual complexity was largely confined; heroes were all too abstract, but their words rarely were, and a culture dependent on such two-dimensional protagonists to transmit its information could therefore not expect to convey any particularly deep abstractions nor the advanced forms of thought-products that proceed from them—and they would not have been able to conceive of any such things anyway, as far as we can determine. Written prose allowed for fundamentally higher levels of consistency and logic in a culture that had previously been based largely on inconsistency and illogic, its shared cultural infrastructure having beforehand been based on mythology in general and Homer in particular. In an age of unreason, literacy promoted reason, which requires consistency in order to function. Constructive examinations into ethics and politics were now possible. A seemingly fantastic degree of blunt memorization, meanwhile, was no longer a necessity, and thus the mind began to take on a new and different character as the manner in which it was employed shifted to some extent from that of passive receptacle to active laboratory.

The mind of the earlier, orality-based Greek, then, was far different from that of the literacy-based Greek, who was able to go on to achieve one of the highest forms of civilization that the world would see for quite a while. The gulf between those who benefit from a significant advance in information technology and those who do not is not always so dramatic as we see with the Greeks of 2,500 years ago. It sometimes is, though, and on

such occasions we see similarly dramatic changes in the societies that take advantage of such things. We also see changes in other societies to which such things find their way as well; the Greek alphabet eventually made it to the Italian peninsula, for instance, where the residents adopted its especially useful, vowel-incorporating structure to their own conceptual needs. Those needs happened not to coincide with those of the Greeks from whom they'd obtained the technology.

It's important to keep an eye on these things.

The examination of the manner in which the fundamental nature of Greek thought changed as a consequence of literacy—a study which draws on comparisons between the content expressed in Greek orality (some of which was of course recorded in writing upon the development of the new technology) on the one hand and the content expressed in Greek literacy on the other—originated largely with the British classical scholar Eric Havelock, whose original work on the subject in the 1930s would be expanded upon by the Jesuit thinker Walter Ong in his 1982 work *Orality and Literacy*. But a third philosopher of linguistics who made no special examination of Greece and whose most important work was conducted in the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan, took the same general concepts and applied them in a different direction, thereby managing to make accurate predictions regarding trends that have already come into play, including a sort of “new orality” whereby a segment of the population will react to the availability of oral messaging in the same way that anyone whose literacy decreases would—in an irritating manner that would render them all the more unreasonable. Even accounting for the limitations of extrapolation and the difficulties inherent to futurology as a whole, we may predict that these trends will presently overwhelm our civilization with possibilities even as it causes what we would probably term a regression in the minds of some great portion of the population—while also dramatically improving the minds of another, partly self-selecting portion of that same population. Those among the latter group will be at an advantage in accessing the other, essentially unrelated means by which members of the spe-

cies will soon be able to develop their minds to even greater extents. We cannot predict what such people as this will think and do any more than a Neolithic hunter could predict any such thing about one of us. Consider the gulf between our ancestor and ourselves, and then consider the increasingly rapid rate at which we have been developing lately, and you may come to agree that we are facing matters of such unprecedented importance that we can no longer abide those responsible for perpetuating the crisis by which the citizenry at large is being provided with something less than reasonable means by which to make informed decisions at such a time as informed decisions will soon become necessary not just to our success, but to our survival and that of mankind.

It's important to keep an eye on these things.



IF WE DETERMINE THAT the mind of the Neolithic hunter has been less stimulated than that of the mind of the Neolithic coastal villager, and we make this determination based on the fact that the latter would have had access to more and better accumulations of the thought-product network and been more stimulated thereby, and if we agree that a great deal of stimulation is more conducive to the development of new contributions to the thought-product network than is a lesser degree of stimulation, then we have of course also determined the Neolithic coastal villager will be in a better position to develop new contributions to the thought-product network than is the Neolithic hunter. In the process of this reasoning, we have additionally determined that, all things being equal, increased access to the thought-product network is likely to result in greater and more complex contributions back into same on the part of those who take advantage of that increased access.

Proximity, as we noted earlier in the book, has become increasingly irrelevant by way of the relatively sudden advances in information technology that have popped up throughout. The Internet is the most recent of those advances that we can reasonably point to as potentially having as relatively dramatic of an effect on the mindset of its users as, say, the printing

press. We could go further and float the idea that this Internet of ours is so extraordinary in terms of the communicational possibilities that it suddenly opens to us as to be more properly comparable to the more dramatic development of orality, which is to say speech itself. Forced to justify this latter conjecture to some passerby who happens to overhear us going so far as this, we could perhaps compose some convincing defense by which to get such a person off of our respective backs. Speech, we would explain to him, was a means by which to convey orality-compatible portions of our thought-products to other humans in the network, if only to those with whom we are connected by range of sound at a given moment; as time proceeds, those who have directly received the thought-products of our orality may go on to convey these to others with whom they in turn find themselves in range of sound—over and over again and at virtually any point in the future life of that person, as well as to more than one person at a time. Taken together, the medium of orality allows an individual to convey thought products over great time and distance to a large number of recipients, each of whom has the option to convey it further. But the process takes some amount of time, is subject to all manner of barriers (if a lion eats a bearer of the thought-product before he reaches another village, said bearer will have difficulty conveying it), and is subject to the corruption of data that occurs from each speaker to each listener, and of course such corruption of data usually remains in subsequent deliveries and is compounded by future errors. This latter dynamic may be illustrated by a children's game of telephone, or in the tracing of irrelevant and false gossip from its original source to its publication in *The Daily Mail*. Meanwhile, the requirement that these thought-products be memorized taxes the brain in ways that may enhance memorization skills but may stifle other potential forms of mental development—worse, and perhaps related, is that orality does not appear to be conducive to critical thinking to begin with, much less conveying some abstract treatise on ethics or metaphysics from one end of the Mediterranean to the other.

The Internet, we would explain to our eavesdropper, is of

course an effectively fundamental leap from orality, as all of our immaterial thought-products may now be conveyed to 100 million people almost instantaneously regardless of location, without error, and accessible for eternity for all intents and purposes. The eavesdropper, who is no longer an eavesdropper but a participant in our conversation, would reply that this is obvious, and that at any rate what we were supposed to demonstrate is that the leap from orality to the Internet is comparable in its significance to the leap from pre-orality to orality. We might respond that we never said any such thing. The eavesdropper would mumble an apology and leave.

Silly eavesdropper. We did indeed make that claim, but we did so through the medium of orality—which is to say that there is no accessible written record of what transpired. You and I are free to lie then, and thus get away with it. No one can prove anything. Meanwhile, we ourselves have already forgotten the exact wording of what it is that we had claimed. I have, anyway. Perhaps we ourselves are not actually lying, then; we may simply have remembered incorrectly. Or, rather, you remembered incorrectly, whereas I was lying my ass off. Plus I stole the guy's wallet. Hey, you can't prove anything.

Oops! I wrote all that down. Did I already make the joke about my delete key being broken? Well, I'm making it again.

The eavesdropper—lied to, stolen from, insulted behind his back—would have been better served had there been a complete written record of what transpired, as would the truth itself.

Luckily, for me—

“Barrett Brown!”

Oh, shit! The eavesdropper came back! But how does he know?

“I am Apollo, god of truth and light! I wander the earth in human form in order that I might punish those who do me ill and reward those who do me, uh, good.”

“You're thinking of Zeus.”

“Even better!”

It turns out that Zeus, using his god-like omniscience, had . . . actually, that makes the metaphor too complicated. Let's say that he had an assistant hiding behind a corner writing down everything that occurred. Literacy has been introduced

into our scene, which is some marketplace. Are we in ancient Greece? No, wait, we were talking about the Internet. We live in some alternate modern world in which the Greek gods roam the world as they did in ancient mythology. That's pretty cool, actually. At any rate, literacy has arisen; a record has been taken of the conversation and my subsequent theft; those who seek out the resulting prose work will know that I lied about what I'd said earlier in the conversation and stolen from Apollo or Zeus or whatever we decided upon. Of course, the prose work is located only at the library and a few private homes here and there, and thus I may continue to lie and steal to the extent that such information is inaccessible to those with whom I interact.

Now let us abandon this whole scenario before Salvador Dali pops up with a paintbrush with which he begins to paint pictures of what look to be books on some nearby wall and I lose my train of thought and you give me a bad Amazon review. Incidentally, I am used to being able to go back to what I have written just a few moments previously in order to ensure that this train of thought makes at least a little sense, as well as that I have used my pretentious invented term "thought-product" with some consistency. Like you, I have the good fortune to be born to literacy.

Now let us think of the Greeks, as we were probably about to do again anyway. A sophist stands on a street corner, challenging all comers to debate him. He is a very talented sophist with a remarkable memory, and is thus well-equipped to engage in purposeful dishonesty—shifting a definition here and there for the benefit of his stance and to the detriment of a given opponent's, claiming something to have been said when in fact it was said differently or even uttered by someone other than to whom he attributes the quote, and otherwise taking advantage of the limitations of his medium—limitations which are actually advantages to those skilled in the art of dishonest orality.

Ah, but around the corner we see Zeus' intern, who has been writing everything down! For the sake of argument and demonstration, we know the account to be entirely accurate

because Zeus' intern cannot lie, nor can he work a fucking spreadsheet, apparently. He can lie on his resume, one supposes, but that is it. Anyway! He steps forth all of a sudden and demonstrates that the sophist has contradicted himself by way of changing definitions, that he has attributed quotes to his opponents that actually derive from himself, that he did the third thing I listed in the last paragraph but in slightly different words. This whole incident, too, is written down, and those with the means to access it can now see for themselves that this sophist is nothing more than a sophist, which is not all that surprising when one thinks about it, really.

In another case, a sophist who is shown to be wrong may not have actually been lying; he is simply not proficient in terms of orality, to say nothing of literacy, and is thus confused as to his own opinions and thereby a slave to the whims of the moment. That citizen over there, he says, neglected to donate money for the new trireme; he forgets that another citizen with whom he is generally allied has neglected to donate money for both this trireme and the previous one for which funds were collected, and perhaps he simply didn't know this in the first place as he lacks such conscience as to check.

At any rate, this confused sophist is not used to having his words taken down with absolute precision and then analyzed for flaws; he is adrift in a world that is coming to be defined by a fundamentally new phase of our thought-product network.

If the society in which he lives is anything like ours, though, he will nonetheless retain his position. He is well-known; most of his fans will not read the book or hear of its contents; others are keen on his ideology and will disregard any evidence that he is no more clever or knowledgeable than anyone else and has in fact been wrong in the past and so is that much more likely to be wrong in the future. Meanwhile, the fellow who pays his wages and those of other sophists, and who is in turn paid by merchants to have the sophists stand outside their shops in order to attract crowds and thereby customers, will most likely never realize that some of his employees are mediocre, as he is probably mediocre himself inasmuch as that he hired this fellow to begin with.

Even if he learns of an employee's mediocrity, he may deem it to his perceived advantage to keep his most respected sophist in place, knowing that sheer recognition is valued by many of his customers.

Meanwhile, many of those who are highly proficient in orality or at least moderately efficient in literacy will learn of the sophist's flaws by way of oral or written transmission of this new thought-product—namely, the evidence showing Incompetostenes the Sophist to be incompetent. There are also the more prosaic barriers unrelated to mediums of thought-products—inattention, for instance. They will spread the word among their clever counterparts throughout the town, but then they can only reach so many people, some of whom will not listen anyway. A few of those who are largely aware of the present situation will see the future one as hopeless; they see that there are diminishing returns in attempting to inform others of this problem inasmuch as that those of basic literacy or advanced orality are not likely to be taken in by the fellow to begin with, and many of those who have been taken in cannot read the accounts that prove the fellow to be incompetent or are of insufficient skill in orality to follow a spoken account of the fellow's incompetence, either.

A few others, though, most of whom will be literate rather than oral and thus better-equipped to know the past and present and to determine the future thereby, will recognize that the same new phase of our thought-product that has allowed them to recognize and partly disseminate the facts surrounding the crisis of information structure also confers other advantages as well. These few will tend to be young enough to have grown up at such a prodigious time as to have their minds formed by the availability of literacy, a still-new development of information technology. But some of them will be older individuals who happen to be adaptable or clever and who, despite possessing minds that lack the advantages of having been influenced from early childhood by aspects of the new medium of literacy, will consequently possess minds with such advantages that are considerably lesser, but at any rate different and perhaps even complementary, to the advantages conferred on our younger

individuals who grew up with literacy; in this case, adeptness at memorization would be one such skill that an older individual might combine with the extent of his proficiency in literacy to what may amount to great effect, comparable perhaps to the totality of the skill sets we find among the younger.

Some individuals, then, would be astute enough to understand the dynamics of the world around them, to identify the crisis in that world, and to recognize the potential that exists in being the first generation with minds formed by a new medium and minds informed by the improved information access that the medium brings. Some of these individuals may decide that, inasmuch as that they are in possession of a new and perhaps superior sort of mentality; and inasmuch as that most of the incompetent sophists who do damage to the city by way of disinformation are too old to share in such happy accidents of birth even if some of them have managed to take some relatively lesser advantage from the medium itself and the information it makes available; and in due consideration of the peculiarities of the politics, the population, and the environment as a whole, that, contrary to the pessimistic view, it is indeed quite possible to diminish the power of these lesser sophists, to replace them with better ones who make good use of the new medium, and to thereby solve the crisis that has led the city into foolish wars, proper wars conducted foolishly, and other such things that, should they be allowed to continue, will leave their city further weakened and thus at the mercy of others. They will realize, for one thing, that this revolution began on the day when the first sophist was discredited in front of a few people here and there, and continues so long as that sophist and those who back him are kept on the defensive. It need only be stepped up.



THE INTERNET IS THE NEW MEDIUM. It is not some cure-all, though, any more than orality, literacy, the printing press, television, or any other form of information technology one would care to categorize as having fundamentally shaped the minds of man past and present could be reasonably pointed

to as having cured all. Poems, written prose, mass-produced books, and the availability of instantaneous one-way communication have all been used in manners both conducive and deleterious to mankind's strivings. Looking back, though, one would probably agree that orality was an improvement upon body language, that literature was an improvement upon orality, that the printing press was an improvement upon the copied volume, and that television was an improvement over James Fenimore Cooper. Literature in particular has provided for great strides by way of both the effect that reading and writing themselves have on the human mind as well as the onset of our ability to place our thoughts outside of ourselves, permanently and perfectly.

There are many ways of thinking about the Internet in relation to these previous media, but for our purposes let us think of it as the next step in the evolutionary process by which literature was its predecessor and orality the predecessor to that. We may also think of it as the latest leap in the inevitable march towards transhumanism, a relative neologism that generally refers to the phenomenon whereby humanity will expand upon its inherent nature in order to add to its capabilities—it is today generally associated with the decreasing dichotomy between man and his thought-products, most commonly in terms of cybernetics, but also in relation to a great number of other things that I will not list here because I am already tiring of this topic. Though the term transhumanism as used today was coined in the '80s, transhumanism itself has existed since man first supplemented his strength and reach with the "artificial" means of a stick and has since continued with such other enhancements as knives, instruments, spectacles, false limbs, false teeth, and heart transplants. Less readily apparent as falling into that category are the carving tools which first allowed man to record information somewhere beyond his own mind, to be accessed later as if it were an extension of his own memory, to be accessed by others as if it were a component of shared race memory, and to be accessed well into the future as if it were some immortal component of the creator.

If a notepad is an artificial extension of one's mind which

frees one from the necessity of memorizing all things we may wish to know later, and if a mass-produced book is an artificial extension of one's mind that allows thousands of others access to an organized and compartmentalized segment of our thoughts, then the Internet defies easy description. We could think of it as a crude form of universal consciousness; already, it has begun to automatically catalog an increasing portion of our interactions, our work, our play, our assertions, our falsehoods, and has done so in such a way that these things are now virtually permanent as well as accessible in such a way as that no information has been made accessible before. Beyond this partial record of our saying and doings, it also presents us with an expanding record of everything else—one which has solved the essential problem of organization by way of the search engine, itself capable of doing in less than a second what the most erudite of research assistants would have in some instances required days to accomplish and in other instances would be incapable of accomplishing at all. This is to say that a great many feats of information which would have been impossible 20, 15, or even 10 years prior to the time of this writing are now suddenly possible. It is just a matter of realizing that they can be done—and then, of course, doing them.



THE SECOND CRISIS with which this book is concerned is not something I am capable of describing with any specificity, as I do not yet know what it is exactly.

Someone might. Our most respected columnists certainly don't. Thomas Friedman knew in 2002 that the most important thing he could write about after having attended a global technology conference was the prospect of homes having two dozen web addresses associated with various household appliances and whether this might be bothersome. Two decades ago, he was covering the Middle East as a journalist—and rather competently, in fact, at least when he stuck to writing about interesting things that Lebanese people did with bombs and guns and cars and combinations thereof. He is not particularly erudite, we could say, and he does not seem to know what is

going on any better than any other person who keeps up with world affairs. He does not need to be tapped for his views on technology, the start-up scene, global commerce, military strategy, or the psychology of world figures, or even the Middle East, apparently. He has failed in these things. One might defend him by noting that perhaps he has made some uncommonly correct predictions that more than counteract his commonly or even uncommonly wrong ones. I would love to see them, and anyone is free to go over the same body of work as I did in search of something that might prove Friedman to be anything other than damaging to the viability of our discourse, and thus our decisions, and thus our future as a nation. I am using the same Internet as is everyone else, and drawing only upon that upon which anyone can draw.

It is not enough to have the Internet sitting around nearby. One must understand its dynamics. Those of us who are young enough to have grown into adolescence at such time as the Internet had already come about are at an advantage, of course, insomuch as that our intellectual lives were enhanced by access to most any such instance of the thought-product network, past and present, as is today known to humanity at large. But those old enough to have made good use of the Dewey Decimal System are perfectly capable of using the new medium in much the same way as we do, even if their minds were not formed in such a way as to make best use of it. The most intellectually honest and useful commentators today are more intellectually honest and useful than any of the people we have been discussing, and some of them are well into their 30s, which is to say I consider them to be old. Any American who wishes to be informed on issues regarding constitutional law should read Glenn Greenwald, and for the issues in the Middle East, Juan Cole, a professor who writes his own blog, "Informed Comment." Both of these commentators came to prominence by way of the direct means of the Internet; the success of both should demonstrate that we have a chance to dismantle the obsolete media structure that has already crippled our nation to some great extent and will cripple it further unless those of

us who recognize this problem take some sort of, like, action.

If people so old and decrepit as to be in their 30s and 40s can learn to use Google and put it to good use, then certainly those respectable columnists who are slightly older and more decrepit can hire interns to teach them how to do so inasmuch as that they are paid vastly more for their foolish opinions than their superior blogger counterparts are for their reasonable opinions. Or they can just not pay the intern. Or, since I'm obviously kidding and all of these columnists know full well how to search for information on the Internet, said columnists can simply go ahead and do that.

Indeed, search engines are extraordinarily easy to use. Richard Cohen, one may recall, thinks this a sad thing:

I am forever coming across columns I've totally forgotten writing and I now, routinely, have to check to see if I have already staked out a position on some matter of importance—and what, exactly, it may be . . .

I yearn for the freedom to be what I want to be. I don't want to lie, but I want to be comforted by my own version of the truth. I want to own my life, all of it, and not have it banked at Google or some such thing. The trove of letters that some biographer is always discovering, the one that unmask our hero and all his pretensions, has been moved from the musty attic to sleek cyberspace. I am imprisoned by the truth, a record of what I wrote and the public's silly insistence on consistency—a life sentence without hope of parole. For me, the future is the present. It's not that I cannot die. It's rather that I cannot lie.

Here's an idea: Google yourself and figure out what the fuck it is you think before you attempt to influence the thinking of others. Better yet, resign.

All of our chapter subjects could benefit greatly from the humble search engine, in fact. Thomas Friedman presumably is unaware that he called on the U.S. to "keep rootin' for Putin" in 2001, seven years before attacking two American presidential administrations for their "short-sightedness" in having pushed for NATO expansion in the '90s, Russian resentment

of which he claims to have been “critical in fueling Putin’s rise after Boris Yeltsin moved on.” Richard Cohen presumably has no idea that he accused Hillary Clinton of “forever saying things I either don’t believe or believe that even she doesn’t believe” back in 2007, before next year going on to accuse those who likewise claimed that the candidate “lied about almost everything and could be trusted about almost nothing” of having participated in “a calumny, a libel and a ferocious mugging of memory itself,” which he himself had forgotten having participated in. Martin Peretz presumably doesn’t remember that he was essentially alone in backing Ahmadinejad’s claim to legitimacy after the 2009 election and that this might be something for him to remember next time he composes some deranged attack on other, better Middle Eastern analysts who actually care about the facts rather than simply advancing their own confused foreign policy agendas. William Bennett presumably doesn’t remember that the Virgin Mary sees all of his lies. Charles Krauthammer presumably doesn’t remember having been essentially wrong about every military and foreign policy matter on which he’s opined from 1999 to 2010, as he was back on *Fox News* in September of 2009 making his latest already failed prediction:

CHRIS WALLACE: Best guess: Will the president end up giving McChrystal the troops he wants, or will he change the war strategy?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I think he doesn’t and McChrystal resigns.

The president did, and McChrystal did not (until later).
This nonsense will continue until we ourselves put an end to it.

★ ★ ★

THE MOST IMPORTANT FACT of the 21st century is that any individual on the planet can now communicate with any other individual on the planet. The great preponderance of human activity is the result of communication between two or more individuals. A great amount of human activity, both devastat-

ing and wondrous, has already occurred in a past defined by great limitations on communication between individuals. The Internet came to public availability in the mid-'90s and has improved drastically as a means of communication in only 15 years' time. Some people will find these facts to be of crucial importance and will act on them. This is an important thing to keep in mind.

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