

# UNFIT TO PRINT

A Selection of

DICK LEED'S  
LETTERS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I must acknowledge the editorial help I got from my wife in writing most of the letters to editors. Gerry was the type of person who does not much like to communicate with others in the early morning, a trait that inspired this bit of Happy Birthday doggerel:

It's hardly any fun  
Being only sixty one,  
So my advice to you  
Is to be sixty two.

But here's a timely warning:  
Don't do it in the morning,  
When usually your mood  
Isn't very good.

It's best you get awake first.  
Just have a little breakfast  
And listen to the news  
Before you start your sixty twos.

It was our custom to breakfast at 8, listening to the news and music, after which she would sit at the kitchen table and read for a while before rejoining the human race. I, an early riser, would put my piece of prose by her place at the breakfast table and wait for her to pick it up for her post-prandial read while I would go into the living room and pretend to read a scholarly book, which was not difficult for me as I have spent a whole career pretending to read scholarly books. With a copy of my prose in my hand, I would listen for her laughter and guess what section of it she was reading. What a pleasure it was to hear her laugh right in the face of the morning blahs! Then came a few comments, and it was always back to the drawing board for me for one thing or another—she was always right.

Richard L. Leed  
Ithaca NY  
1999

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## 1 – Miscellaneous

*Here is my favorite letter. On October 2, 1989, the editorial writer of the Wall Street Journal made a grave error: in the midst of a discussion of public policy he, or perhaps she, tried to make a point about English grammar, to wit: you can't use a noun to modify another noun. Naturally, I ignored the big issue on public policy and fixed my sights on the small detail, having learned in my old age that the Small Detail is invariably a lot more fun than the Big Issue.*

### **Nouns, All in a Row**

In your Oct. 2 editorial on the "education summit" you chided the participants for using the noun "education" as an adjective in that phrase, but in that same editorial you modified a noun with another noun 15 times: White House host, school system, market economy (one of your favorites!), Bush administration, comparison tests, performance areas, etc.

You may also have noticed that the name of your newspaper consists of three nouns in a row.

Any noun has its genitival uses, as the madam said to the bishop.

In order to dissipate the current confusion between nouns and adjectives, I am making herewith a Wall Street Journal editors emergency grammar education summit proposal to discuss the propriety of joining nine nouns together, and I will suggest that we follow the German custom of capitalizing the first one and not putting spaces between them, e.g.:

Wallstreetjournaleditorsemergency-  
grammareducationsummitproposal.

Good Luck to your Wordprocessor's Hyphenationprogram!

RICHARD L. LEED  
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*WSJ 10/24/89*

*One of the things I like about this letter is that it really did challenge their wordprocessor, which was unable to fill out the line containing my long noun. I got a lot of comments about the letter, many of them from purists who thought I had something against using a noun to modify another noun, which I don't—in fact, I think it is one of the glories of the English language. They mistook my intent, but I was flattered by all the attention anyway. One guy wrote a nice letter saying that he thought my reference to the madam and the bishop was a variant of the actress and the bishop and showed it to a Brit friend of his, who said that the variant was very appropriate for an American because in Britain the word actress can be used as a synonym of madam. I wrote back confessing that I had simply forgotten the saying and used the wrong word. I recalled my departed Irish Anglophile and -phobe friend and colleague Gerry Kelley, from whom I learned this marvelous way of making any sentence in the language sound obscene, and who would often ask me to retell one of my stories and then halfway through it stop me and disgustedly tell the listeners I was telling it wrong and finish it up for me—for him it had to be told just right, word-for-word, with the same mot juste as in the original telling. Had he still been alive in 1989 I would have called him to check, as I often used to do. I really miss him.*

*Sometimes, however, I do go in for the Big Issue, particularly when I can play the role of a tweaker of the pompous Big Person, and the bigger the tweeker, the more I enjoy it. Paul Nitze, chief arms negotiator during the Cold War, wrote a long, misguided op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal about the importance of the Russian word mir in understanding the misunderstandings in international relations. He cited Charles Bohlen, former Ambassador to the USSR, to the effect that the primary dictionary meaning of mir was "the world and those who live on it," and that "concord among peoples and nations and the absence of war" was only the secondary meaning. Thus, in Soviet usage, the word meant a combination of the two, "a condition in the world in which socialism... had triumphed world-wide... and the conditions for true peace... had come to pass."*

*My letter was printed while my parents-in-law were visiting us. My father-in-law, author of a slew of clinical chemistry papers, sat on the sofa reading and re-reading it. Finally he looked up and said, "Why Dick! This is very scholarly!" with no attempt to conceal his surprise that his vulgar son-in-law, even though holding professorship at an ivy-league school, could write something that could be called scholarly.*

*My letter appeared with a typically punnish headline supplied by the WSJ editors, bless them.*

## Sound Sense

It is unfortunate that Paul Nitze's otherwise perceptive article (editorial page, March 23) on negotiations with the USSR was marred by a misunderstanding of the Russian language. He believes that the Russian concepts of "peace" and "world" are somehow embedded together in the Russian language and that the misunderstandings between our countries can, at least in part, be traced to that fact.

It is not true that the "primary" dictionary meaning of mir is "the world and those who live in it" and that "absence of war" is a "secondary" meaning. There are in fact two words in Russian that sound alike: mir "world" and mir "peace," just as there are pairs of words in English that sound alike, e.g., bank "financial institution" and bank "river's edge."

The phrase "I'm going to the bank" is not an expression of uncertainty; the speaker knows where he is going. It is the hearer, not the speaker, who detects or is misled by ambiguities of this sort. When the Soviet government promotes peace movements, it knows what it is saying. It is using the word mir "peace" in the same sense that we use the word peace; uncontaminated by the homonym meaning "world." The Russians don't have a different concept of peace; rather, they lie. They lie in the same way they lie in using the word demokratiya "democracy," for which there is no homonym. They lie in the same way that Orwell described in Newspeak and in the same way that Goebbels did.

The linguistic evidence for there being two different words mir is that the derived adjectives look different, sound different, and are completely unambiguous: mirnyj "peace, peaceful," mirovoj "world, worldwide."

The peaceful coexistence of mir and mir in the world of the Russian lexicon cannot be used to mitigate the charge that the USSR is an evil empire nor to explain the behavior of negotiators. To attribute Soviet behavior to facts of language is in any case to divert attention from the nature of Russia and the Soviet State: a great culture embedded in an uncivilized polity.

RICHARD L. LEED  
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Ithaca, N.Y.

*I just said Bless them with reference to the Wall Street Journal editors. I regret that I cannot say the same for Ithaca Journal editors, who invariably edit my letters down instead of up. Therefore, I reprint most of them here from my original submissions rather than from the printed version. In the following one, they changed the phrase "I can't imagine their being worse than I was" to "I can't imagine they're being worse than I was," and I guess I should be grateful they didn't change it to them.*

*That sounds very snobbish. I guess it is very snobbish. My friend Gerry Kelley had a similar snobbish trait—when he would mock the poor English written by secretaries and bureaucrats in the University in various memos and regulations, I would say to him: Listen, Gerry, if they could write and speak English as good as you, they'd be professors just like you, but they ain't. Maybe the editors of our local paper will someday graduate to the big city paper and maybe they won't, but I don't want to knock them, as they do not only the best they can, but the best, the finest, the most wonderful thing they possibly could do: they print the letters submitted by Richard L. Leed.*

*This is a recent letter, printed as an op-ed article with my picture by it. I have trouble deciding whether my recent letters are good or not, for reasons elaborated in the last chapter. But I know this one is good, because a contractor who came out to my place a few weeks ago to give me an estimate on some work I wanted done on the house suddenly said to me as we were talking, "Say, aren't you the guy that wrote a letter in the Ithaca Journal about Route 13?" I said I was, and he said the guys in the shop got a big kick out of it and thought it was pretty funny. That compliment made me prouder than any professor's possibly could.*

*The letter was partly inspired by a seventeenth-century poem that reminded me of me. It is attributed to Rochester. It is about the misguided follower of Reason and reader of serious books, who,*

*Stumbling from thought to thought, falls headlong down  
Into doubt's boundless sea, where, like to drown,  
Books bear him up awhile, and make him try  
To swim with bladders of philosophy;  
In hopes still to o'ertake th'escaping light,  
The vapour dances in his dazzling sight  
Till, spent, it leaves him to eternal night.  
Then old age and experience, hand in hand,  
Lead him to death, and make him understand,  
After a search so painful and so long,  
That all his life he has been in the wrong.*

*The title of my piece, the Eiffel pun, and the part about the National Endowment for the Arts was written by my son Noah, bless him.*

#### TECHNOLOGY & NATURE—THE BIRDS I VIEW

Technological innovations have changed the landscape. Over a hundred years ago telephone poles were erected to carry wires so people could talk to each other, and many people came to hate this blotch on the landscape—all those poles and wires cluttering things up. But the birds seem to like it, otherwise they wouldn't perch on the wires all day. And from my point of view, looking at a bird sitting still up in the sky is a wonderful thing. I enjoy it every day. If it weren't for the wires, there would be nothing but branches full of leaves hiding the birds and the birds would have no clear place to perch. Telephonic technology has served Nature and Man, at least this man, very well indeed. If all those wires are put underground someday, I can't believe the birds will be very happy about it. I certainly won't.

Perhaps telephony will not go underground. Maybe all telephones will be wireless in the future. Perhaps the electronic signals will be transmitted from cellular towers. Such towers might provide a perch for a bird or two now and then, but there won't be enough towers to go around. Most birds will have to settle for branches and twigs again. As for me, my property is not suitable for building a tower on, but if I had a nice hill on my land, I'd invite Frontier to put a nice perch in my back yard. That tower would be an eyefull, not an eyesore.

Some years ago I attended meetings to protest a proposed four-lane highway to be built through my back yard. I spoke up at a meeting and criticized the representative of the state highway department for ruining the landscape with ugly concrete roads. I referred to the newly-built Route 13 by-pass on the east side of the lake as a "scar," which wasn't very original because all sorts of right-minded people were using that word to refer to highways. The representative replied: "But Mr. Leed, a highway can be a thing of beauty." At the time, I thought that was ridiculous, but since then I look at Route 13 on the east side of the lake and think not only how convenient it is, but how well-formed it is, how graceful, and, yes, how beautiful. In retrospect, I'm mildly ashamed of my self-righteousness then, though the proposed super-highway joining the metropolises of Ithaca and Trumansburg through my back yard was in fact a scam to get federal funds to build an additional bridge over the Inlet. Now we have two additional bridges, at last, and I think they are so pretty they

should have gotten a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Beauty is found in sculpture and architecture, so why not in highway construction and tower erection? Call them a “cross-country meandering ribbon of empowered sand and pebble” and a “tapered vertical out-reaching of natural alloy” and they just might get NEA money.

Just after I wrote the above, the cable company strung a wire right between my eyeballs and Lake Cayuga. I am not irate. I can see between the wires. They obscure the lake much less than all of them damn trees that have grown up in the 33 years I’ve lived here. It just goes to show: Mother Nature can be more cruel than the technology created by our oppressive, patriarchal, male-dominated society, at least in my view.

My conclusion is that most of my youthful opinions about telephone poles, roads, and most everything else, were stupid, and if I were a gloomy type of person I’d feel really guilty about them. As it is, I just laugh. And when I observe the stupidity of people younger than me today, I feel very tolerant, because I can’t imagine their being worse than I was at their age. As for people my own age, I can’t understand why so many of them seem to have the same idiotic opinions they held when they were callow adolescents. Perhaps the road they’re on is paved with good intentions rather than concrete. But that’s just from my point of view.

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*In the fall of 1948, back when nobody but Amishmen and Hasidic Jews wore beards, the Dean of Oberlin College called me into his office and gently asked me why I was wearing a beard—gently, because he knew I came from Lititz, Pennsylvania, and perhaps I was some kind of Amishman. He said all sorts of people, including townspeople, were asking him why. I told him it was none of their business, nor of his, thereby launching the snot-nosed counter-culture which now reigns supreme in this great land of ours. It’s all my fault, I guess.*

*Eventually I came to realize the truth of the old saying: If you’re young and not a socialist, you got no heart; if you’re old and are one, you got no brains. But I’m no longer sure of the first part.*

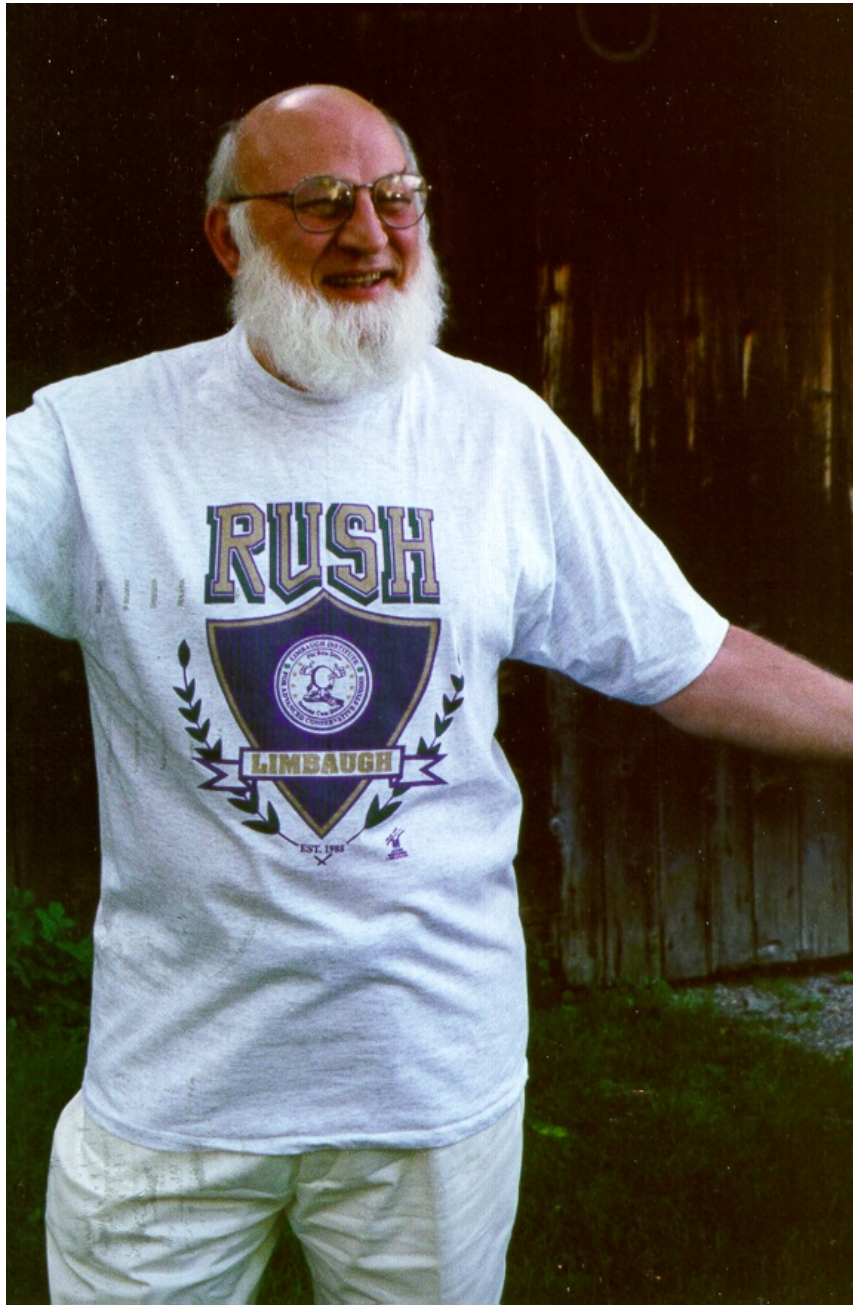
*The photo on the next page was taken by a college classmate, Mort Tabin, a photographer on the lookout for weird subjects. I also posed for sculpture classes but got no statues.*

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The Author as Youth



50 years later: The Age of Reason

## 2 – Truly Unfit

*My original idea for this book was to print the letters that had been rejected by editors, particularly the editor of the Ithaca Journal, who I thought was very severe. That's the reason for the title. Then there was a change of editors a few years ago, and the new editor printed almost everything I submitted, which ruined my plan—fortunately, as many of the letters were truly worthy of rejection. So I decided to print the fit as well as the unfit, but keep the title. Some people, I'm sure, will find it still appropriate.*

*The letters to the editor in this chapter were all rejected by the Ithaca Journal.*

January, 1990

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

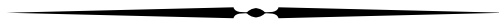
Your article of 1/16 on infant mortality carried the headline “Country infant death rate soars.” The statistics cited in that article seem to support that view...

Although I am not a statistician, the absolute number of deaths (15) is so small that a difference of one or two makes a very large percentage difference and may be statistically meaningless...I simply don't believe that “soaring” is the appropriate word for this situation.

The article also repeats the widely publicized statistical fact that the USA ranks quite low (#19) among the nations of the world in infant mortality. Less widely known is the fact that the USA ranks #1 when the children of unwed black mothers are not counted.

This fact helps us pinpoint the mortality problem more precisely on a national scale, though it doesn't tell us what to do about it. Whether it is applicable to the situation in Tompkins County may be a question that mere statistics cannot answer, but to ignore it would be no kindness to the segment of the black population most seriously affected by high infant mortality.

*Perhaps the letter was rejected because it was considered racist, though a few weeks later the Journal printed a news item on an inside page that contained the same information about children of black unwed mothers and mortality statistics.*



April, 1989

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

In your April 8 edition there was a story about the Soviet sub that sank off Norway. A headline on an inner page read: "Deaths on nuclear subs since 1954."

The story begins by saying that hundreds of US and Soviet crew members have died in accidents involving nuclear subs.

The casual reader glancing through the article can easily see that most of these accidents involved US Navy ships: of the 8 accidents listed, 5 are American and 3 are Soviet.

However, the more attentive reader will notice that in none of the American accidents did anybody die; indeed, no major injuries occurred. All of the deaths advertized in the headline occurred on the Soviet ships.

It seems as though the headline writer and the story writer want the reader to get the impression that one superpower is just as bad as the other.

The same facts could well have been headlined "Socialism kills," since the facts illustrate the point that a statist society is a more dangerous one to live in than a democratic capitalist society.

Many other facts about the USSR illustrate the same point: infant mortality rates, deaths from alcoholism, industrial injuries, and nuclear plant incidents (compare the harmless 3-Mile Island nuclear accident with the Chernobyl disaster).

Slanted headlines are not unusual in the Journal. But I am more amused than outraged by the lack of objectivity in your headlines; the crypto-socialist voters of Ithaca and their crypto-socialist city council deserve a crypto-socialist newspaper.

*I suppose there are a lot of reasons for rejecting this letter, but one that applies here is surely the one most often pointed out by my primary editor, my dear wife: it ends wrong. Even when I write something true and sensible, the temptation to end it up with a violent explosion of bilious outrage is irresistible. But I take comfort in Auberon Waugh's observation: It is irritating to those who have spent time and trouble cultivating the vituperative arts to see what passes for vulgar abuse in the proletarian newspapers. Vituperation, in the right hands, is part of life's pageant. I do my best.*

October 1990

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

In the 10/4/90 edition of your newspaper there was an eloquent article about pseudo-science by Carl Sagan.

It is true that a lot of people accept pseudo-scientific “facts” as real scientific facts. For example, a lot of people believe statements by astrologers as much as they believe statements by astronomers.

Who is to blame for this sad state of affairs? In my opinion, part of the blame must fall on the very scientists who tell us that we should not believe pseudo-scientists.

If scientists always put facts before their own personal beliefs, then we might trust them. But in recent years it has become respectable in academic circles to put belief before fact and politics before truth. Therefore, it is difficult to believe scientists any more than pseudo-scientists. In fact, it is difficult to tell the difference between a scientist and a pseudo-scientist.

Here are some examples of scientists promoting pseudo-science.

The first example has to do with global warming (the “greenhouse effect”). Some scientists believe that global warming is a bad thing and that they have a moral duty to convince people that it is a bad thing. And to convince people of this, the “scientist” exaggerates. As one scientist put it, scientists “have to offer up scary scenarios, make simplified dramatic statements, and make little mention of any doubts we may have.... Each of us has to decide what the right balance is between being effective and being honest.”

*[The fuller citation, from a Stephen Schneider article on global warming, is such a marvelous confession of the need for duplicity, it's worth inserting here. It's also worth noting that this same writer had warned in 1976 that “a cooling trend has set in—perhaps one akin to the Little Ice Age.”]*

On the one hand, as scientists we are ethically bound to the scientific method, in effect promising to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but—which means that we must include all the doubts, the caveats, the ifs, ands and buts. On the other hand, we are not just scientists but human beings as well. And like most people we'd like to see the world a better place, which in this context translates into our working to reduce the risk of potential-

ly disastrous climatic change. To do this we need to get some broad-based support, to capture the public's imagination. That, of course, entails getting loads of media coverage. So we have to offer up scary scenarios, make simplified, dramatic statements, and make little mention of any doubts we might have. This "double ethical bind" we frequently find ourselves in cannot be solved by any formula. Each of us has to decide what the right balance is between being effective and being honest.]

I can't trust people like that to be scientists. I never know whether they are giving me the facts or preaching to me.

Here is another example. It has to do with intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. Some years ago Carl Sagan and a wife of his designed a space capsule to send a message from Earth to Outer Space. This message was written in English. Various employees of the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics at Cornell University were asked to translate it into various languages of the world—27 different languages, if memory serves me right (I was associate chairman of the department at the time). Our chairman called Carl up on the phone and asked if this was really the right way to communicate with Somebody Out There. Wouldn't that Somebody expect one long message in one language rather than 27 identical messages in 27 different languages?

The answer was that, true, one message in one language would make more sense, but "our real audience is Down Here." And indeed, many recorded copies of that famous message were sold Down Here on Earth. All hype in the name of science.

The last example has to do with the politicization of science. It is a well-known fact that Professor Sagan was a leading light in the gloom and doom scenario called "nuclear winter." This project attempted to demonstrate how the world would come to a cold and wintry end if a certain number of nuclear bombs were exploded in a war. The project has been roundly criticized as being politically motivated and scientifically unsound. One wonders whether the project was scientific or pseudo-scientific.

Modern scientists' criticism of pseudo-science has a false ring to it.

August, 1986

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

I saw in your paper where President Rhodes, along with 94 other college presidents, wrote to all our Congressmen and Senators asking them to vote for sanctions against South Africa. The article said that he was “speaking as an individual.”

The politicians in Washington who get this letter might get confused by this. Are President Rhodes and his 94 friends representatives of higher education or are they just plain folks?...

Suppose President Reagan called the USSR an “evil empire” and then said “Don’t be upset; I was just speaking as an individual.” People would laugh.

President Rhodes, however, will not be laughed at, because the Cornell community, by and large, will admire his courage for doing the fashionable thing.

Imagine what the Cornell community would do if he did an *unfashionable* thing, like urge the Congress to support Star Wars. He’d have the local space sage and half the physics department down on his neck pretty quick. There’d be demonstrations galore....

There are a lot of political issues that college presidents could make statements about, but I wish they wouldn’t. Once politics gets mixed up in university administration, all of these presidents will end up being sincere but unwitting tools of one thing or another.

*The letter was way too long, and I’ve shortened it considerably. I think the last phrase in it was written under the influence of P. G. Wodehouse, who I was reading at the time. He liked to tack etcetera-like phrases onto clichés. Here are a couple of my favorites:*

[The doctor] recommends complete rest and seclusion and all that sort of thing... His finely-chiselled features were twisted with agony and what not...

July, 1990

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

Jesse Helms and I have something in common: we have poor taste in art. We think that our taxpayer's money should not be spent on pieces of art that consist of a crucifix submerged in a jar of the artist's urine.

In the 7/2/90 edition of the Ithaca Journal, David A. Hoekema disagrees with us. He says "Art often contributes most to society precisely when it upsets and discomfits." Maybe so, but it seems odd to me that he should instruct me to spend my money on what offends me.

Perhaps he likes skunky beer, too. If so, he's free to buy it, along with bottles of piss posing as art. But not with my tax money.

Why should I buy a product that offends me? Or even worse, why should I buy a product precisely because it offends me? Such behavior is perverse. It is abnormal. But I guess it is in good taste, except, of course, for skunky beer, which tastes like what artists soak crucifixes in.

He, along with the Journal's editorialist, claims that the government is censoring artists by not buying whatever they produce. That is not so. Neither the government nor Jesse Helms nor I are saying that artists should not immerse crucifixes in urine.

All we're saying is that they should do it on their own time and that they should extract payment from people of good taste like Mr. Hoekema and the Journal editors rather than from people of poor taste like me and Jesse and most other taxpayers.

Besides, the artist has no right to have his work bought any more than a writer has the right to have his letters published in the newspaper. I have sent three letters to the Journal which they have failed to publish; does that mean that the Journal is censoring me? Certainly not! It just means they have poor taste in matters of literary merit.

As for that urine, I think the narcs should test it and nail the artist on something less controversial than art.



January, 1988

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

Your editorial of January 20 on the recent Supreme Court decision used the word “censorship” wrongly. The proper word to describe the role of the school with respect to school newspapers is “editorial control,” not “censorship.”

There is no censorship in our country. In our country anybody can print pretty much what they want, though not anywhere they want.

If you insist on using the word “censorship,” then you should call yourself “the Censor” rather than “the Editor,” for surely there are things you don’t allow to be printed in your fucking family newspaper.



*I have never submitted any of my poetry for publication, as it is not suitable for adults.*

Dear, darling daughter,  
Don’t go near the water  
Eating your curds and whey.  
You’ll come back  
To marry Jack Sprat  
And chase all the spiders away.



*It is possible to be a professor of linguistics and live in the country at the same time:*

I love our friends the pussycats,  
Our subjects and our predicates,  
I love all dogs and pigs and birds  
As well as adjectives and even verbs.



Zeus (1978–1992), keeper of our sheep, joy of our life in the country

*Here's a recent letter that I rewrote several times, but all versions were rejected by the Ithaca Journal. There had been perhaps a dozen letters on the subject of the upcoming license renewal for the local NPR radio station WSKG, all inspired by a proposal to deny the renewal on the basis that there wasn't enough programming on native American Indians, labor disputes, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, AIDS, the homeless, poverty, and local issues.*

A number of recent letters, among them several eloquent ones from Alfred Kahn and L. Pierce Williams, make a strong case for leaving WSKG programming as it is, with lots of music and no additional political talk.

By and large, I have no disagreement with them. There is too much political talk on WSKG already. But I must say that the music it broadcasts is mostly stuff written after 1750, the date at which musical composition began its long downward slide to modernism. There's not too much to be said for Classical, Romantic, or Modern music, although, as Mark Twain said about Richard Wagner's music, perhaps it isn't as bad as it sounds. There are some moderns who are not too shabby, such as John Philip Sousa and Spike Jones, who will put you in a more sprightly mood in the morning than Claude Debussy, but that is a matter of taste, I suppose.

However, if WSKG is nevertheless to have more political talk, then we should follow the advice of L. Pierce Williams, who says that we should value a broadcaster who offers what others fail to provide. So the question is: what do our local purveyors of political opinion fail to provide?

Surely there is no lack of expression of left-wing opinion in a town known by some as the People's Republic of Ithaca. If a leftist group of a half a dozen activists mounts a demonstration, there is no end to publicity, while the Conservative Party's endorsements of political candidates go virtually unremarked.

In view of this absence of balance, and in light of the luminous perspective of Prof. Williams, WSKG might consider broadcasting the 3-hour daily Rush Limbaugh program. He may be popular nationwide, but in this area he was removed by the local broadcaster for lack of local advertising income. As one representative told me, "Any local businessman would have to be crazy to advertise on that show" for fear of boycotts or demonstrations or simply loss of clientele, although there were plenty of listeners....

*The remark about Spike Jones in the above letter comes from my love and death at breakfast letter reproduced below, which I sent to the station manager of WSKG ten years ago. He sent me a nice note of appreciation for cheering him up at the end of a hard day. I must say, however, that programming hasn't improved over the years. Just yesterday the announcer said, "We'll be hearing Finlandia by Sibelius—a great way to start the day."*

*The letter starts out with an encomium to their announcer, Gregory Kieler, who used to insert musical parodies and comic skits of one sort or another before the serious music began in the morning. It continues:*

...His justification of the parody [on modern music] was probably necessary, because people who like modern music are generally a humorless lot—they have to be: there aren't too many laughs in *Lulu*! And speaking of humor, I appreciate those short bits after the news very much; some I don't like much, like the fast-talking guy, but *degustibus non disputandum est*, like they say. During Gregory Kieler's absence last week his replacement one morning substituted some 19<sup>th</sup> century music for the humor bit with the comment that we might want something more "intellectually elevating." Personally, I don't need anything intellectually elevating; I get my fill of that sort of thing at my workplace, far above Cayuga's waters, where the intellectual elevation is dizzying—sickening, even.

The music he plays is generally appropriate to the hour. Lots of stations play recent popular music, which deals with self-pity, mostly. WHCU used to deal with older popular music, which dealt with love. You sometimes play 19<sup>th</sup> century music, which deals with love and death. Self-pity, love, and death are not compatible with a mentally healthy breakfast, whatever your *degustibus* may be. I am of course prejudiced, because I don't particularly cotton to music written after 1750 (or maybe 1789), except for things like Spike Jones, John Philip Sousa, and Viennese waltzes. Perhaps others of your listeners prefer to wallow in love, death, and other grand emotions with their coddled eggs, but I prefer small baroque things, preferably something joyful and bright to greet the new day. Even folksy music like 'Rise and shine and give God the glory glory' or 'Drink beer and ramble ramble, roll dice and gamble gamble' would be preferable to love and death at breakfast.

### 3 – Money

*I am fascinated by the nature of money. I've gone so far as to read books about it, including one by John Kenneth Galbraith entitled Money, the first sentence of which said that we all know what money is, so he won't bother defining it. And he didn't. One of the best books I've read about money is A Monetary History of the United States by Friedman and Schwartz. I won't review it here, as I prefer a broader historical perspective:*

*Money was invented by Croesus (pronounced like amoeba), who ruled Lydia (not his wife) from 560 to 546 (back in BC when numbers ran backwards). From then until shortly after I was born, money was something you could hold in your hand. Now it is an entity of some sort in cyberspace. It is true that my ATM will spew forth concrete green paper dollars if I ask it to, but the bulk of my money consists of abstract green numbers on the little screen that silently asks me if I want to perform any more transactions. Sometimes it runs out of paper dollars, but it never runs out of abstract numbers unless it is Out of Order. You can't help but think of what will happen when the Great ATM in the Sky goes out of order. Maybe that's what'll happen in the year 2000. Florence King, my favorite curmudgeon, thinks that all computers, and we, too, will revert to 1900 in the year 2000, and we'll all be the better for it, especially with respect to the lyrics of popular music.*

*So much for the history of money. In the here and now, the most important thing about money is how much it is going to be worth tomorrow. If you're not sure, money is very important and you have to think about it a lot and worry about going hungry. If you're fairly sure that it's going to be worth about the same as it is today, you take it for granted and find some other reason to be unhappy about Life. This aspect of money is often referred to as inflation, which is a concept almost as slippery as money itself. Some economists, like von Mises, think that there can be no such thing. Others think that there is such a thing, but it can't be measured. Others measure it anyhow. As for me, I relish the confusion. I like to write about the way people misuse numbers having to do with money, and particularly about their habit of not taking inflation into account when speaking of money over time.*

*The following letter was rejected in 1993 by the Cornell Daily Sun. They seemed interested in the calculations on tuition, but when I showed them the whole article, with its remarks on the Reagan years, they lost interest. Then I submitted it to the Ithaca Journal, which could be said to have rejected it, but what they actually do is simply ignore the submission. Then the Journal underwent a change in editorial page editors, so I submitted it again and the new editor allowed it to be printed on August 28, 1993, as a Guest Column article with a picture of me encased in it.*

### Cornell Tuition: Real and Nominal

The new academic year is starting, tuition has to be paid, and the inflation rate for the year seems to be stable. It is therefore time to check up on the claim of Cornell financial officers to the effect that the increase in tuition for 1993–4 is the smallest in the last 20 years.

Although it is true that the increase is the smallest in nominal dollars, you have to take inflation into account in order to find out whether it is the smallest in *real* dollars.

It is now apparent that the inflation rate is very close to 3% and steady. When we subtract that from the nominal tuition hike of 5.2% for the School of Arts and Sciences, we get a real increase of 2.2%.

I have made that sort of calculation for each of the past twenty years and I find that in seven of those years the real increase was smaller than 2.2%. Cornell is now faced with the choice of revising its claim or giving the students a rebate.

Over those twenty years the average annual increase in real dollars was 2.9%, so the increase for this year is not at all unusual for that time span.

In fact, the average annual increase in real dollars over the past 80 years is not much different: 3.0%.

In some years there was a real decrease. For example, in 1980–81 the nominal increase was a seemingly healthy 12.8%, but inflation was an even higher 13.5%, resulting in an accidental 0.7% decrease in tuition.

All of the decreases in tuition since the University first opened its doors have been accidental, except on one occasion a hundred years ago, when an enormous hike in 1889–90 (from \$75 to \$125) had to be reduced by 20% in the following year.

During the Depression and World War II there was no change in nominal tuition. It stayed at \$400 (roughly \$4,000 in today's money, but still rather less than the \$18,000 or so being charged today). But because of deflation, there were a number of Depression years in which real tuition accidentally went up; in 1932–33 the real increase was over 10%, despite no change in nominal tuition.

It is interesting, and even amusing, to note the years in which real tuition increased the most.

First of all, the longest stretch of uninterrupted real increases we can calculate (i.e. since 1913) took place over the last 12 years.

The phrase “the last 12 years” has been used by some people to disparage the economic policies of President Reagan as well as those of President Bush. Cornell, along with its Ivy League co-conspirators in price-fixing, has obviously been a major beneficiary of those 12 years, so I should think its liberal representatives, administrators and faculty alike, might want to change their minds about just how bad those years were.

The Reagan years in particular were richly exploited by the University. During his two administrations the average annual real increase in tuition was almost 6%, i.e. twice the historical average. One might indeed characterize those years as “years of greed,” but on whose part? The University’s tuition policy seems to be to soak it up whenever times are good, which is OK with me as long as its inmates refrain from calling good times bad times.

Is it not amusing that during these years so much real money devolved upon the very institution whose professors have so violently excoriated Ronald Reagan for instituting an era of greed? Is it not astonishing that they have not voluntarily given up some of their salary increases by way of atonement for their complicity?

(Actually, salaries have not risen as fast as tuition in real terms, so perhaps a simple apology for badmouthing a great president would constitute sufficient atonement.)

Another non-inflationary period of fairly sustained economic growth in this century was during the administrations of two other victims of liberal badmouthing: Harding and Coolidge. I suppose this must be called another era of greed, as the average yearly real increase in tuition for Arts and Sciences was a whopping 9.5%.

It looks like the trickle-down theory of economic growth espoused and effected by Coolidge and Reagan really works, at least as far as real dollars flowing into the academic world is concerned. And perhaps we should include Kennedy here, as he was fond of saying “a rising tide lifts all boats,” a synonym of “trickle down.”

What the future will bring to tuition payers and receivers, nobody can tell for sure. But if the past is any indication, the best for all concerned would be for the government to follow a Coolidge-Kennedy-Reagan low tax policy and leave the “soak-the-rich” policy for the academic financial officers to pursue.



*Doing the research for that article was great fun. First of all, I got well acquainted with two vitally important books, the Statistical Abstract of the United States and its historical counterpart. Secondly, I had a grand time in the library. I went down to the Archives and asked for every Arts College Announcement since the founding of the University in 1866. The service was wonderful. They brought out cartloads of those brochures and parked them by a table where I worked for days on end. It was very difficult to simply look up the tuition in one year, put the booklet down, and look up the next year. I had to glance through these remarkable relics from the past, hold them in my hands, and marvel how few courses were needed to teach so many so much.*

*Here's another inflation letter to the Ithaca Journal in June of 1997:*

The description of farming in Tompkins County in your June 4 issue was very interesting, and I look forward to reading the rest of the series on this subject. However, there was one potentially misleading statement in your front page story: "The market value of dairy products from Tompkins County has actually increased from \$11.4 million in 1978 to \$18.2 million in 1992."

There is no indication in the story as to whether these figures have been adjusted for inflation or not. If they are, then there has truly been a 60% increase in the value of dairy products, but if they are not, then the real value has actually decreased by about 30%, which gives you a very different picture of the development of agriculture here over the years.

In order to adjust the 1978 dollars to 1992 dollars you have to multiply by about 2.3, so the \$11.4 million in nominal dollars amounts to some \$26 million in real 1992 dollars....

Here are rough multipliers for previous years for stating prices in 1994 dollars:

1980	2.0
1970	4.0
1960	5.0
1950	6.5
1940	11.0
1933	12.5
1920	10.0
1915	17.0

*The letter ends with a snotty and preachy expression of vain hope that future articles will take such adjustments into account, or at least make it clear whether historical prices are stated in nominal or real dollars.*



*Letters to the Editor is surely the lowest form of literature. I recall with great amusement meeting a friend of my wife's, and mine, too, at an art opening; she asked me what I was doing these days, and I said I was writing a letter to the editor. "Oh," she said, "You're one of those." I really was amused, but on the other hand, sometimes when I put a letter to the editor into the mailbox at the end of the lane I half hope it won't get printed, and when it does get printed I'm half puffed with pride seeing my name in print and half embarrassed at spending my genius on such vulgar mediocrity, until I realize that mediocrity is the only thing I really excel at.*

*The Ithaca Journal inadvertently resolved my ambiguous and contradictory feelings by printing the following letter over somebody else's name, so I could be proud of seeing my words in print but nobody would know it was me. I don't know what the other guy thought about that, or whether his letter, too, was printed over somebody else's name, or whether it was printed or not, because the Journal never fessed up.*

March 1997

The Feb. 20 issue of the Journal carried a letter from State Senator Seward touting a Republican proposal called the College Choice Program. This program is intended to help middle-class families save money to pay for their children's education by exempting such savings from state taxes.

While it is true that government taxes reduce the value of savings, the really burdensome tax is not government tax, it is college tax. The more the parent or child saves, the less financial aid the student is eligible for. The effect of this college financial aid policy is the same as a government tax: it reduces the value of savings.

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal says that every dollar earned and saved by the student can cost the student as much as 85 cents in lost aid. It would therefore make better economic sense for the kid to spend every cent he or she earns, rather than to save it. Or maybe not work at all.

The noted Harvard economist, Martin Feldstein, looked into this problem some time ago. He found that a dollar saved by the family for 7 years would be worth \$.58 after the government and college taxes are taken into account. Without taxes, that dollar would have been worth about twice as much: \$1.23 at 3% interest.

The loss is even greater at a more realistic percentage increase, say, 10% (the average return from the stock market over the past 70 years). That dollar would have been worth \$2.00 rather than \$.58. In other words, the college family is left with only 30% of what it could have had in hand without these taxes.

Feldstein's conclusion was that the college tax encourages parents and children to refrain from accumulating any assets before college. The family is better off borrowing than saving in advance.

Even if Senator Seward's proposal is adopted, what is to prevent the colleges from adjusting their college tax rules ("financial aid policy") to nullify any advantage the change in government tax might bring? And in all of this complexity, how is the consumer to find out how the system works? Do parents today know what those rules are in detail? Do they have any hope of predicting today, when they start saving, what those rules will be when their children eventually go to college? Neither the government nor the colleges are likely to tell you in all frankness how to avoid their taxes.

From a political point of view, however, Senator Seward's proposal makes sense. Why create government benefits for the lower class, whose members are less likely to vote than members of the middle class? Far better to create more and more entitlements for the vast middle class. The more money a politician can give to a voter, the more likely the voter is to vote for him. In politics, job security is the name of the game.

In my opinion it would be much better to reserve government aid, subsidies, and tax relief for the truly needy and deserving. This is unlikely to happen, for the reason given by the Nobel Laureate in economics, Milton Friedman, when he explained why there will never be a simple flat tax in a democracy like ours: politicians will lose a lot of their power without a complicated tax system, a system that allows them to buy your vote by doing you favors.

From an educational point of view, the College Choice Program raises serious questions. Do we really need more college student admissions? The academic world is already overpopulated, and overpopulated with students who fail to graduate.

It seems perverse for our governments, both state and federal, to get more deeply involved in education at the very time when there is hardly a bright, young, graduable person in this whole country who can't get admitted and financed, at least partially, in some college or other.

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# LETTERS

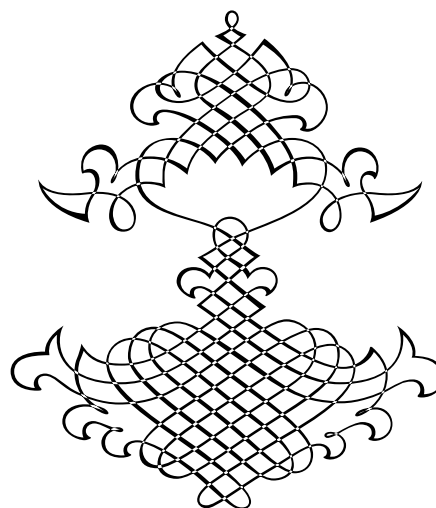
## ***Irrational Private Lives***

Michael Prowse's overview of the Austrian school of economics ["To Liberty Via America," Feb. 24] was truly fine. But the claim that everyday transactions such as buying a house or choosing a career are "no different in their essentials from the decisions of the business tycoon" is off the mark. I for one chose my house for the view of Lake Cayuga, the view being worth a mere \$1,000 of assessed value, according to the printout from the Tompkins County Assessment office. And I entered my career by chance (not choice), remained in it through sloth (in the academic world few die and none resign), and exited gracefully aged (without parachute).

As Ronald Coase pointed out recently in *Reason*, everyday personal decisions don't have to be as rational as decisions made in a firm, because in a firm if you do dumb things they'll fire you (unless, he could have added, the firm is a university).

**Richard L. Reed**  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, N.Y.

*I may have been amused by the above mislabeling of my letter in the Ithaca Journal, but it is a bit more difficult to get a letter into Bill Buckley's National Review, and I was distinctly displeased by what they did to my name when they finally did accept one. It appeared in the March 24, 1997 issue.*



*One of the unfortunate results of lowering prices of computer technology is the overuse of ornaments and flourishes.*

*The following letter of June 1986 was rejected by my wife, despite the closing "Name withheld at spouse's request." Instead of revising it and getting rid of the bitchy language, I just put it aside and never sent it in. The version below is slightly abbreviated. The occasion for the letter was professorial support for a threatened strike by Cornell janitors. Since anti-administration abuse is so popular among professors, it seemed reasonable for me to take the opposite view. The phrase "It ill behooves..." in the context of a labor dispute evokes the great speech by John L. Lewis, President of the United Mine Workers, reproaching Franklin Delano Roosevelt for his lack of support—a speech Gerry Kelley would recite word-for-word.*

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

Today's Journal carries a spate of letters from Cornell professors who think administrators' salaries are too high. One mentions President Frank Rhodes' salary as being \$120,000 per year, implying that he is overpaid.

It is easy to show that administrators are *underpaid* in comparison with those very professors who wrote those well-meaning letters.

Those professors, if they are worth their salt, are probably getting close to \$60,000 for what is called a "9-month academic year." However, in this so-called year the professors teach less than a dozen hours a week (often less than a half dozen) for less than 28 weeks. It's more like half a year than a year.

In other words, they are getting paid at the rate of almost \$120,000 per calendar year, just as much as the President himself.

To make matters worse, the professors, unlike the President, have the opportunity of holding a summer job that could bring in another \$17,000 or so....

...it ill behooves the professor to decry the gap in income between the custodial worker and the administrator unless the professor wants to take a voluntary cut in salary in order to avoid the charge of gross hypocrisy or sheer inability to count.

Clearly, administrators should get paid more, not less. Here are some reasons why: they have to take flak from professors in letters to the editor columns and elsewhere; they have no long winter and summer vacations like professors do; they have to work in offices daily, not just for a few office hours; they have no tenure in their administrative positions; they have less opportunity for sexual play with students than professor do; and they get their salaries printed up the the papers whether they like it or not.

*The letter ends there. I didn't include my poem entitled The Janitress. It is a trap for people who pronounce words like flour and flower identically, as I used to. I have a lot of trouble reading it aloud.*

She wept a widow's weeping  
As she tended to her sweepings,  
All her sorrows souring  
Amid the flowers' flowerings.

*The following was submitted to the Ithaca Journal in February 1995 and fell into oblivion, where it probably belongs, but it has a quirkiness that appeals to me. I can't remember from whom I stole the idea that insider information can be used just as well not to trade as to trade, but the hellish connection is my fault.*

### TO HELL WITH INSIDER TRADING LAWS

I see by the papers that a dozen or so corporate executives, including a couple from AT&T, got indicted for insider trading, i.e. for using their knowledge of their company's condition for personal gain on the stock market.

There are a number of good reasons why insider trading laws are bad. The one I want to discuss here is that such laws, by their very nature, are applied and must be applied capriciously, and should therefore be abolished.

The laws governing insider trading apply to you if you do something overt, like telling your brother-in-law to buy stock in a company you're the treasurer of because you know the company is going to acquire Microsoft next week.

All well and good, and very rational. However, suppose you want to buy a car and need some money to pay for it. Rather than sell the stock you know is going to go up, you decide to not sell—you borrow the money from the bank instead.

By deciding to not make a transaction on the exchange, you have committed the same sin as you did with your brother-in-law—you used your insider knowledge for personal gain—but it is not a crime and is not punishable.

It's not even catchable: maybe you borrowed the money by accident, and never even thought of refraining from selling stock.

Indeed, if your head were full of motivations for not trading each and every one of the hundreds of stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, not to mention the American, Nasdaq, etc., you would not have time to trade at all. All your in-

vestments would go sour from lack of oversight and you'd go broke and probably perish in some unseemly fashion.

Insider trading is rather like modern notions of hell. Compare, for example, these very rational attitudes towards heaven and hell:

It is easy to be rational about heaven. To get there, do good deeds. To do good deeds, just go find an opportunity. Stand on a street corner and wait for an old lady to walk up to the curb. Escort her across the intersection.

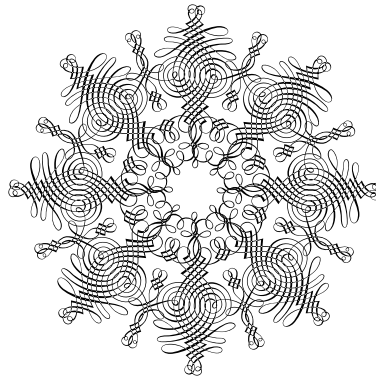
It is impossible to be rational about going to hell, or rather, avoiding going to hell. At every minute of the day you must be motivated to not do something.

Every time you open your mouth you must say to yourself: don't say a naughty word. Let's say there are a hundred naughty words in your passive vocabulary. That's a hundred thoughts you must have, all at the same time—so many, in fact, that you wouldn't have time to think of what you were going to say.

As a result, you can't get the words out to order your supper, not to mention breakfast, etc., and you waste away and die.

That is why, in this age of rationalism, hell has fallen into desuetude, even in the lowest of churches, while heaven continues to flourish (particularly heaven on earth, but that is another story).

The parallel between hell and insider trading is not perfect. But nobody's perfect. If I tried to avoid all the imperfect parallels that might be drawn, I'd fly off in all directions and not be able to write a single word.



## 4 – Save the Nation!

*Friends of mine from out of town dropped in on Ithaca not too long ago, and we went to the State Street Diner for a long, chatty breakfast. A local man of my acquaintance was walking past our booth, spotted me, and stopped to say “Dick, I haven’t seen any letters in the Journal from you yet about the elections.” He told me to write in support of a list of candidates we knew we’d agree on. He himself had run for office in the City of Ithaca but was defeated for having too much common sense and too good a sense of humor.*

*My friends and I chatted through our breakfast and beyond. My local friend was passing our booth again on his way out, stopped, clapped me on the shoulder and said, “Dick, don’t forget that letter! You’ve got to write! Save the nation!” My friends looked at each other, clearly wondering who this guy was they were having breakfast with—an old friend with an avocation they hadn’t known about: savior of a nation.*

*The fact is, there is no evidence whatsoever that anything I ever wrote had any influence on anybody or anything at all. I am certain only that I have amused a few people now and then, and that is all I ask.*

*Well, maybe I exaggerate my insignificance. There is one letter I wrote that may have had some effect in squelching the widely-discussed plan by the People to People group of the Tompkins County Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign (they never used PTPGTCNWFC as a mnemonic, if I remember correctly) to establish a sister city relationship between Ithaca and the Russian city of Lomonosov back in 1984. If so, at least I saved a small city from a small sin—a bit short of a whole nation.*

*The insertion of that nuclear reactor into the intensely serious public discussion of sister-cityship was a source of deep humor to many readers, which pleased me considerably.*

*The piece on the following page was printed in the Wall Street Journal on January 11, 1993. It may have saved the nation.*

In the Feb. 15 Journal there was a letter from the People to People group of the Tompkins County Nuclear Weapons Freeze organization soliciting contributions of letters, photos, etc., to a project in which the Soviet city of Lomonosov would become a sister-city to Ithaca.

That letter gave a very brief description of Lomonosov, saying only that it is situated in the national parks area about 10 miles west of Leningrad. Let me add a few details.

Lomonosov is one of the many cities and areas of the Soviet Union which are closed to the public. If you try to go there by road, you will find a roadblock; the suburban train does not freely discharge passengers there; the few tourist buses are carefully monitored. Only authorized persons with a clearance pass can get by the KGB agents that control access to the town.

These restrictions are not for foreigners alone, but for Soviet citizens. I know of one girl in Leningrad, for example, whose grandfather lives in Lomonosov. Although she would like to spend school vacations with him, she is permitted a pass for only a week or two at a time. It is a very quiet town.

On the outskirts of town there is a nuclear reactor. The reasons for Lomonosov being a closed city may have to do with work at the reactor.

If citizens of Ithaca have correspondence with the people of Lomonosov, you can be sure that the mail will be delivered promptly. The KGB is a very efficient organization by Soviet standards, and I would be surprised if it failed to monitor communications with Lomonosov as well as it does physical access to the town.

I know very little else about the town. Few people do, even those who live nearby.

## In Bush-Clinton Era, Beware of Hyphen Abuse

By RICHARD L. LEED

Now that the Clinton inauguration is at hand, hope bestirs the nation's heart and we think about more pertinent things as all factions come together. To wit: hyphens. Before, during and after the campaign, it was the hyphen that joined the names of Reagan and Bush in the writings of both Republicans and Democrats.

The Republicans used the hyphen in "Reagan-Bush" to display party unity, such as it was. The Democrats used the hyphen to associate "Bush" with the despised name of Mr. Reagan. Whatever the motivation, the hyphen conceals the intra-party split between Reagan conservatives (the Goldwater Republicans) and Bush liberals (the Rockefeller Republicans).

On a deeper level, the hyphen conceals the most fundamental question that can be asked about government: How big a role should government play in the lives of individual citizens? The conservative answer: smaller than at present. The liberal answer: larger than at present.

It is amusing and instructive to put hyphens in places newspapers and history books don't. "The Carter-Reagan era" sounds absurd at first, but three important issues join these two presidents. The solutions were begun by Mr. Carter and continued by Mr. Reagan: regulation, inflation and defense. Mr. Carter instituted deregulation with his appointment of Alfred Kahn to deregulate the airline industry, and Mr. Reagan continued this initiative with the deregulation of the trucking and other industries. Mr. Carter began the conquest of inflation with the appointment of Paul Volcker, who was reappointed by Mr. Reagan. And Mr. Carter's last budget, the one Mr. Reagan had to live with in the first year of his administration, had more

for defense than any of Mr. Reagan's subsequent budgets.

Today the liberal Democrat is against deregulation and the conservative Republican is for deregulation, but neither can afford to be honest about the origin of deregulation. The partisan Democrat is not going to blame Jimmy Carter for what he sees as the disadvantages of deregulation — he is going to blame the opposition, Ronald Reagan. And the partisan Republican will of course credit Mr. Reagan for what he sees as the advantages of deregulation. Neither is being candid.

President Hoover's hyphen has been mistreated by journalists and historians. He is usually hyphenated with Calvin Coolidge, his fellow Republican. But this makes the gross error of linking a small-government free marketer with a big-government statist, as philosophically jarring as the Reagan-Bush linkage.

With respect to government power, high taxes, the creation of bureaucracies, and protectionism, the hyphen makes more sense after Mr. Hoover's name than before it: "the Hoover-Roosevelt era." Both Herbert Hoover and FDR were responsible for converting a normal downturn of one or two years' duration into a decade of depression.

Another cross-party linkage seldom printed with a hyphen is the Nixon-Ford-Carter era of increased government spending, price controls and detente, an era that contrasts strikingly with the Reagan era of reduced spending growth, free markets and confrontation with the Soviet Union. On these grounds, and those of the big vs. small government question, it makes more sense to link Mr. Carter with Mr. Nixon than with Mr. Reagan.



Returning, finally, to the abominable Reagan-Bush hyphen, I will speculate that within the next four years it will seem reasonable to move the hyphen to the end of "Bush" and refer to the Bush-Clinton era of increased taxes and increased regulation: an era of bigger, not smaller, government. And Mr. Reagan will stand alone, unhyphenated, between Nixon-Ford-Carter and Bush-Clinton.

There are other grounds for positing a hyphen-free Reagan. He was seen by many as being above partisanship, the evidence for which is the large number of registered Democrats who voted for him. He himself had been a Democrat. And he annoyed many Republican colleagues by quoting Democrats like Harry Truman.

Overall, both the GOP partisan and the Democrat partisan have good reason to abuse the hyphen. The ordinary citizen interested in the truth and willing to view things in historical perspective should consider placing hyphens in unusual places, if only to stimulate some serious thinking about some serious matters.

It is a trial, however, for many people to transcend political passion, which has long had the force of religious fervor. "There is, perhaps," Lord Acton wrote in 1858, "no stronger contrast between the revolutionary times in which we live and the Catholic ages, or even the period of the Reformation, than in this: that the influence which religious motives formerly possessed is now in a great measure exercised by political opinions." And political opinions are sometimes expressed by hyphens.

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*Mr. Leed is a professor of linguistics at Cornell University.*

*The whole process of getting this piece into print was delightful as well as instructive: delightful, because the submissions editor was so good to me, instructive, because I learned that I wasn't as fine a writer as I had thought. The editorial staff of the Wall Street Journal is pretty sharp. They found all sorts of stylistic shortcomings—small things, but just the ones that make for good writing. I also learned some things about their editorial policy: last names are never used without attributes (an adjective, a title, a first name, or an honorific like Mr. or Dr.) except for convicted criminals.*

*It took many weeks for them to print the piece. The submissions editor had decided to print it, but had to wait until space allowed. In the meantime, she kept me informed. We had several phone conversations and some written communications, including the edited version of my article for my approval before it appeared. I had rarely been treated so considerately by an editor.*

*Exactly three years after the article appeared, I read an article in the National Review by its editor, John O'Sullivan, who was talking about his colleague Kate O'Beime: "Three years ago I was short of a good joke to open the NRI conference on the weekend following Bill Clinton's inauguration. She gave me the following line: 'This is not the end of the Reagan-Bush years; it is the mid-point of the Bush-Clinton years.' That got me a round of applause, a mention in the New York Times, and several quotes in Nexus by some columnist who begins: 'As John O'Sullivan shrewdly pointed out...' "*

*My academic publications on Slavic linguistics and Russian pedagogy are read by maybe a few hundred people at most. It is much more tickling to the ego to be read in a publication with a circulation of two million, an audience that includes Maggie Thatcher and other heroines of mine.*

## TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Being almost of one age with John Updike and almost of one birthplace—close enough for our Lititz High to have played his Shillington High in football during the war years—I was very moved by his essay. I am not sure, however, if I am also almost of one mind with him.

True, he says so very very well what I thought, felt, and experienced back in those years, being at odds with the peaceniks; and the reasons for his departure from the *New Yorker* were very like mine (though his departure as a writer was of course a good deal more significant than mine as a subscriber). But what he does not say is whether or not he eventually changed his voting habits. He recounts in great detail what he did during many election years, telling us, for example, that he voted for McGovern in 1972 and even telling us where he cast his vote (in Moscow, *in absentia*). But nothing is said about 1980 and 1984. Did he eventually see the light? I would like to know whether he is my political as well as geographical *landsmann*.

Even if Mr. Updike failed to vote for Ronald Reagan, he has my complete admiration for speaking out. Speaking out is not a popular thing to do among members of the Word Class (a term I use . . . because I cannot bring myself to call Dan Rather, or many a professor, for that matter, an intellectual). One loses friends if one speaks out these days. . . .

The academic world thrives on conformity to leftist notions. This is not because it is populated in the main by leftists, but because professors from the Center and the Right of the political spectrum won't speak out, partly out of fear of losing friends. There are many non-leftist university officials (deans, provosts, presidents, and the like) who in private will tell you, or who in their heart of hearts know, that the various infringements on free speech in our universities are wrong, but who either say nothing or join in the nonsense. Otherwise they would not only suffer social snubs, they would be inundated with petitions, phone calls, and various forms of public reproach. . . .

The general run of professors is a spineless crowd that proved its cowardice during the Children's Revolution of 1968 and has continued ever since to reaffirm its devotion to inaction on behalf of principle. The notion of courage has taken on a new and trivial meaning. When in 1980 I told a colleague I had voted for Reagan, his reaction was, "A lot of people seem to have voted for him. At least you have the courage to say so." I had not known before then that it was a matter of courage to say whom you voted for in this great land of ours, and moreover in the university, that bastion of free speech, that marketplace of ideas, where the free interplay, etc. etc.

So I congratulate John Updike for his courage in speaking out, then and now. On the other hand, my colleagues consider me, I think, mostly a fool, not a man of courage, so perhaps my congratulations are not very flattering.

In answer to Richard L. Leed's question, I voted twice against Ronald Reagan, while admiring his style and some of his policies; his ability to reverse or abandon a course while not surrendering an iota of abstract fervor demonstrated the touch of a true leader. And I did not, of course, abandon the *New Yorker* as a writer—I needed the magazine, and loved it—but only as a very occasional contributor to the editorials of "Notes and Comment." I cannot feel my contributions were missed.

*Updike's article, entitled "On Not Being a Dove," appeared in the March 1989 issue of Commentary, and my letter with his reply in the August issue. In the ensuing years the children of the revolution became deans and provosts and presidents, so there is now less cowardice and more swinishness in the academic world. I am not alone in thinking this. A. Bartlett Giamatti, on being asked how it felt being baseball commissioner after having been President of Yale University, said, "You deal with a better class of people."*

*There were a lot of "Peace" demonstrations back in the '80s, some of which we now know from Soviet archives published in the '90s to have been financed in part with Soviet money in an attempt to have the USA disarm unilaterally. It was serious business—worth making fun of. The Ithaca Journal, Dec. 1983:*

**Local governments are missing out on a bonanza. They could be making a lot of money by treating protesters like parking meter offenders.**

**There's a lot of money in parking meters, depending on how good the enforcement is: For the trivial offense of failing to insert a mere penny you can be fined \$10. There could be a lot of money in peace protests, too, if the fines and enforcement were adequate.**

**This course of action is fitting and proper because it is based on a well-recognized prerogative of government: Taking money from people. In the normal run of things, governments are pretty good at doing this, but in the case of civil disobedience they seemed to have missed the opportunity.**

**Another good thing about treating protesters like parking meters is that it takes all the ill feeling and political recrimination out of the whole business. Local people will welcome protests because of the tremendous tax reduction that will**

**result. They will be materially enriched. And the protesters who commit acts of civil disobedience will be given the opportunity to suffer minor martyrdom. They will be spiritually enriched.**

**It's hard to figure net income in this business, what with court costs and all. I figure at least 1,000 arrests could be made per season in Seneca County for wall-scaling, fence-cutting, paint-splattering, and similar minor offenses, depending on what kind of paint they use. A fine comparable to the one for littering, say, 200 dollars each, would give a 100 percent gross return on the investment that Seneca County is reported to have made in extra law enforcement last season (100,000 tax dollars).**

**Not bad. But you could probably do better; in view of the fact that most protesters don't seem to have to work too much for a living, the market could probably absorb a higher mark-up. Peace at any price?**  
— Make it 350.

*It is no surprise to me that there is a so-called mafia in Russia these days. Thugs and gangsters have been running the country since 1917. This is from the Ithaca Journal in September of 1983.*

America's foremost terror organization, the Mafia, is very restrained in its activities. It does not shoot too many respectable bankers in the knees like Italy's Red Terrorists, it does not attempt assassinations of the pope like the PLO-KGB, and it does not do missionary work like the Cubans in Angola and Honduras. It normally restricts its terrorist activities to nicer things like gambling, drugs, prostitution, and the manufacture and distribution of mozzarella cheese.

The citizens of America all realize that this outfit uses terror as a matter of business policy, but we deal with it nevertheless: A banker will accept deposits from it, the IRS will accept tax payments from it, and everybody eats pizza. Just because people deal with it doesn't mean that they approve of it or are willing to participate in its activities. It is widely recognized to be a bad outfit.

The Soviet Union also uses terror, as a matter of national policy, and has done so ever since it was founded in 1917. Lenin exhorted his followers "Terror! Terror! Terror!" and set up the world's first concentration camp in 1918, for which we can honor him as Hitler's teacher. Once in a while, when Americans are directly confronted with an act of Soviet violence, like Flight 007, they are reminded anew of the fact that the USSR is not a normal nation.

But soon the Western world forgets; Flight 007 will be forgotten in a few weeks just as Afghanistan has disappeared from the news; Western governments and banks will again be lending money to the USSR and its clients at low interest rates and arms talks will resume with the same old hope that the Soviets will become less aggressive.

In recent days Secretary of State Shultz has been telling Foreign Minister Gromyko that shooting down Flight 007 was wrong. I think that's wonderful; it's a forceful thing to do. Relations between the USA and the USSR have gotten bad. I think that's wonderful. Having bad relations with bad people is good. Having bad relations with Hitler was good, and it's too bad they weren't worse from the very beginning of his regime.

We can deal with the USSR like we deal with the Mafia. Keep relations bad, refuse to negotiate, and take their money. That seems a respectable policy for a civilized nation like ours. The worst policy, it seems to me, is to have good relations with pathological liars and

negotiate for hopeless agreements like "verifiable" arms freezes.

Anybody who knows anything about the USSR knows that very little there is verifiable, except what our spying and observation can discover. If a nuclear arms agreement is not verifiable, it will work no better than the existing agreements on chemical and biological warfare have worked. The Soviets will not refrain from developing nuclear weapons any more than they have refrained from gassing Afghans and poisoning Hmong.

Rather than negotiate for a useless agreement, we should disarm our nuclear establishment unilaterally and make sure our relations with the USSR stay as bad as possible, short of war. We may still find ourselves spending money for arms to support people like the Shah of Iran, but the Ayatollah is worse and the communists are worse yet.

Our policy in this country towards the Mafia is clear (anti), and therefore citizens don't have to think about it every time they eat pizza or vote. But our policy towards its international counterpart, the USSR, is not clear. President Reagan's anti-Soviet policy is not acceptable to major segments of our nation, particularly the national news media and the educational establishment, both quite "liberal" on this matter — though why being considerate to the Soviets is considered "liberal" is beyond me.

Nevertheless, the majority of voters at the last presidential election saw fit to elect Reagan and I hope they do it again the next time, if they have the opportunity. (They may have to use their long memories, because the Soviets may not be shooting down civilian airliners or invading other countries right before the election.)

Unfortunately, the voters did not remove a sufficient number of "liberal" representatives from Congress. Perhaps next year more of the congressmen who want good relations with the USSR can be removed. Our own district has an excellent candidate for removal.

— — —  
*Leed is a professor of Slavic linguistics at Cornell University and lives in Ulysses.*

## 5 – Language

*Some time ago I started collecting words that have gone out of style, like modesty, humility, loyalty, and the like. It was a nice list, and I stuck it into a letter to our local newspaper in August of 1996, and sure enough they printed some of these distasteful terms—but not all of them. The ones that the editor omitted are printed in italics in the version I reproduce below. He also omitted the first paragraph. I omit the last half of the letter, because it gets a little long-winded.*

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

*Hypocrisy in small doses is a wonderful thing. It enables us to bid a cheery "Good morning!" to people we disagree with, thus promoting civility and, indeed, civilization itself. Without it, daily life would be unpleasant and political life impossible. For example, it is altogether fitting and proper to address the president as Mr. President, even though you call him Slick Willie behind his back.*

In large doses, *however*, hypocrisy tends to be pretty disagreeable. I am particularly bothered by the hypocrisy of tolerance and non-judgmentalism which has infected our social life as well as our political discourse, whereby any reasonable conservative criticism of liberal politicians or policies is said to be a mean-spirited attack, a pot shot, dirty campaigning, an example of extremism, viciousness, and, of all things, partisanship – harsh words coming from people who claim to be non-judgmental.

Non-judgmentalism can be defined in part as the avoidance of the terms of traditional morality, such as virtue, decency, dignity, respect, *trust, integrity, honesty, loyalty, fidelity, faithfulness, modesty, wholesomeness*, temperance, moderation, prudence, *propriety, restraint, self-control, self-reliance, individual responsibility, industry, diligence, thrift, frugality, obedience, discipline, courage, duty, benevolence, humility, quietude, piety, gentility*, civility, and respect for custom, tradition, order, and one's elders, all referring to ideals unattainable for a normal sinner....



*The following letter was published in the Ithaca Journal in May, 1995. I like the last line so much—words so rarely uttered in this part of the world where Castro is a hero and shipments of scarce products such as aspirin and computers are shipped from here through Canada to Cuba. There is more about the use of the word dictator in the letter that follows this one.*

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

I couldn't believe my ears! The newscaster on National Public Radio, in reporting the Mayday festivities on Red Square in Moscow, said that people were carrying portraits of "the Communist DICTATOR Joseph Stalin."

In the many years I have been listening to NPR the word *dictator* has been reserved in their newscasts and commentaries for right-wing authoritarians like Fulgencio Batista, whereas the word *leader* has been used for left-wing totalitarians like his successor Fidel Castro.

Next thing you know NPR will be calling Castro a Dirty Commie.

It has always seemed perverse to me that the nice word leader should be used for the rulers who killed more people and made the survivors suffer more than the so-called dictators had done.

There is no question but what a whole generation of Cubans would be better off today if they hadn't traded Batista in for Castro, particularly in the areas of health and education.

In health, for example, the people in the rest of the Caribbean have improved more in the past three decades than the Cubans have.

And in education the Cubans have been deprived of the privilege of reading books the regime does not approve of, whereas Batista was much more interested in relatively innocent graft than in molding peoples' minds.

NPR's new-found use for the word dictator is but one small bit of evidence for its significant shift to the right since the November elections. It is truly wonderful how much the threat of losing government funding can affect the political slant of even the most confirmed ideologues.

God bless Jessie Helms and his friends!

*This letter appeared in the Ithaca Journal in May 1996.*

Recent editorials and letters have referred to the word “marriage” in dictionaries in order to condemn or justify granting to homosexual partners the legal privileges of marriage (including, presumably, the privilege of incurring the marriage penalty in our federal tax code).

For a long time the American tradition of dictionary writing was based on the idea that the purpose of a dictionary was to inform the user on how to use words properly.

After WWII the idea that dictionaries should simply record how people used words, right or wrong, became very influential, to the extent that some dictionaries followed a completely non-judgmental policy, making no comment as to whether a particular word in a particular meaning was proper or improper, vulgar or elegant, commonly accepted or quirky.

Another thing about standard dictionaries: they are not encyclopedias and therefore do not tell us much about what a word refers to, in this case the history, customs, traditions, social significance, and relevance to human well-being of the institution of marriage.

For these reasons it is not particularly useful to refer to a dictionary in order to justify a public policy.

Another reason for caution in using dictionaries is that dictionary makers are not free of political and social prejudice, as reflected in the Red litmus test which I have just applied to my Random House unabridged dictionary. I looked up the names of 4 famous communist rulers and 4 non-communist ones and found that Lenin, Stalin, Honecker, and Castro were all innocently described as “leaders,” while Hitler, Franco, and even the relatively innocuous Batista were described as “dictators.”

The dictionary here accurately reflects the usage of certain people, for example, the commentators on National Public Radio, but it tells us nothing about who is or is not a dictator in actual fact.

Mussolini, for some reason, comes out as a “leader” rather than as a “dictator,” perhaps because Lenin admired him so much. Or perhaps because the compilers of the dictionary were sloppy—still another reason to beware of dictionaries.

If this dictionary, as it seems, is telling us that certain of the most vicious tyrants of our age shouldn’t be called dictators, how can we trust it to tell us with any objectivity what the sex of marriage partners should be?

*The new editor at the Ithaca Journal had been on the job for about a year and was printing almost everything I submitted. I was in despair over the book of rejected letters I was planning to compile. At this rate I wouldn't have enough rejects to fill up a book. So I sent this one in in June of 1994 expecting a rejection and was rather shocked to see it printed. The next day I went in to Tioga Auto Parts to buy an oil filter and all the boys (and girl) behind the counter clapped and cheered as soon as I walked in the door.*

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

In your editorial of 6/7 you accuse Cornell of "passing judgement" because, although they will now provide spousal benefits for same-sex partners, they ignore unmarried different-sex partners.

But the Journal itself is being judgmental in ignoring certain other classes of people who surely deserve benefits on the basis of their sexual proclivities.

Take pedophiles, for example. Shouldn't the men who consort with young boys share Cornell's wealth with these little folks?

And what about people with multiple partners? Shouldn't Cornell's benefits be pro-rated among them?

Then there are spouses who avoid intimacy with their old-fashioned legal spouses, but sleep around in various ways. Once we discard the legal definition of marriage, as you suggest, and pay benefits according as to how one disposes of one's genital tensions, then surely the sleep-aroundees are more deserving of benefits than the legal spouse.

Benefits should also be pro-rated for spouses who withhold sex for specified periods. This might be difficult to enforce, but, hey, this is the era of re-regulation and we might as well do it up right. If we have thought police and smoking police, why not have sex police?

Finally, there is a class of creatures that has been totally forgotten in journalism's over-wrought concern over human sexuality, a class I shall only allude to by recalling this fine piece of poetry:

There was an old man from Rajkote,  
Whose views on sex I'll now quote:  
Take wife for duty.  
Take boy for beauty,  
But for ecstasy, sir, give me goat.



*"The Great Red Shift" I thought was a fitting phrase for a town famous for left-leaning astronomers, but I discovered that many readers weren't well versed enough in astronomy to get the pun or to appreciate "far out." This letter was sent to the Ithaca Journal in December of 1991, signed, as usual, with my middle initial, which I like (it stands for Leaman, my mother's maiden name), and with my residence given as Ulysses, a town name for a geopolitical unit containing no settlement, village, or city by the name of Ulysses, but serving very well to disassociate myself from that city of sin, that Sodom and Gomorrah of Upstate New York, the People's Republic of Ithaca.*

My liberal friend William S. Downing delivered himself of a tirade against conservatism and conservatives in a recent letter to *The Journal* (Dec. 19). His misguided letter is so well-written, it deserves an answer.

His letter is misguided in the sense that he, along with *The Journal's* editors, misperceive Mayor Nichols' opponent in the recent election as "conservative."

Misperceptions of this sort are to be expected on the part of citizens of the State of New York, because this state has undergone what I call the Great Red Shift. This means that Democrats have shifted to being socialists, the Republicans have shifted to being Democrats, and the conservatives have shifted to being Republicans, but without changing their names.

The Great Red Shift is a measure of how far out New York politics are.

The evidence for this great shift to the Left is all about us. The Ithaca "Democrats" elected a socialist mayor. The "Republican" Senator d'Amato proposed Democratic-type government regulation of credit card interest. And the Republican Herb London ran for governor on the Conservative ticket.

There are no conservatives in New York. Conservatives inhabit the rest of the world, where conservative principles have won the 20th-century battle against socialism in country after country.

We even seem to be winning the ideological war in Vietnam: Vietnam has been getting out of poverty, thanks to its privatization of agriculture, and is now exporting rice for the first time since the North's conquest of the South. Chile, thanks to the advice of the conservatives of the Chicago School, has the most vibrant economy in all of South America. Mexico is renouncing its socialist revolution and freeing its serfs. Even Sweden is getting tired of its penny-ante socialist experiment.

The only socialists left are in obscure places like Cuba and Ithaca. Elsewhere, the principles of our great President Reagan and his friend Maggie Thatcher reign supreme.

**Richard L. Leed**  
Ulysses

*I wrote a letter to the United Nations on an important matter of linguistic usage, although I never got around to mailing it except to my friend Lora, who was pained by my letter because she was in the hospital trying to recover from surgery by not laughing. I don't have a date on my copy, but it was written in the early '80s, around the time that Hollywood and rock stars were getting interested in decrying famines organized by their own socialist friends in faraway places. Lora is an emigrée from the USSR and doesn't much take to socialist-type hype.*

Dear United Nations,

I am writing to you because you are in charge of the World and maybe you can do something about the inconsistent way people name famines. For example, some famines are named after places, like the Ethiopian Famine. Others have dates attached to them, like the Famine of 1921–22. Others have descriptive phrases attached to them, like the Great Leap Forward. Still others are left nameless because some people don't want us to talk about it, like the Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33.

I suggest that all famines from 1900 on be named after people. The reason for this is that most famines before 1900 were made by God and can reasonably be called acts of God and have dates and places attached to them in order to distinguish one act of God from another. But after 1900 famines were made by individual people rather than by God, and therefore those people should be given the honor of having their names attached to their famines.

I earnestly hope that you will use the following names in your debates and correspondence from now on:

Lenin's Famine

Stalin's Famine

Mao's Famine

Gorbachev's Famine

(Remember: he sent militarily useful trucks, not food,  
to his friends in Ethiopia.)

*The American Spectator printed this bit of stylistic analysis in their January 1998 issue. Brock soon became persona non grata in that journal and among conservatives in general. His contribution to American history was curious: a mere slip of the pen, overlooked by his editor, led to impeachment proceedings against the President of the United States. It is reminiscent of the almost accidental revelation by a Mr. Butterfield that President Nixon had made tape recordings of his conversations in the White House that lead to impeachment proceedings against Mr. Nixon.*

*What Brock had done several years previously was to write a story about Arkansas state troopers in which he violated the editorial policy of the American Spectator (for which it later apologized) by using the first name of a woman involved in an alleged case of sexual harassment by Governor Clinton. It was the publication of her name that provoked Paula Jones into bringing charges against President Clinton, thus initiating a legal action which, once started, just rolled on and on as ineluctably as you please.*

*Brock's fall from grace began sometime later, when he said some nice things about Hilary Clinton, a no-no among conservatives.*

*When American History is written with a capital H the names Butterfield and Brock will presumably be forgotten, as will most of the other small things that really cause history to happen. Just ask yourself: would the face of contemporary history be clean-shaven if Dick Leed hadn't raised a beard in 1948?*

### **Hatch Keys**

Orrin Hatch is a most honorable man who deserves the praise given him by David Brock ("The Real Orrin Hatch," TAS, November 1997). Senator Hatch also deserves the criticism leveled at him by *National Review*. I take no sides in evaluating this complex man, but I do think Mr. Brock's language deserves some comment.

There are certain words and phrases that are typically used by people on the left to describe their opponents on the right. For example, they use "right-wing press" and "ultra-conservative" to the exclusion of their opposites. (The poor crippled loonybird of politics lacks a left wing in the language of the liberals, and there are no ultra-liberals in the leftist lexicon.)

It is therefore jarring to see these terms used by a conservative like Brock defending a conservative politician in the conservative *Spectator*.

Conversely, the term "activist" is a favorite of conservatives when they criticize liberals. We are jarred again: Mr. Brock uses the term "conservative activist" as a pejorative five times in his article, plus a militarizing reference to "conservative attackers."

In his article one meets "Beltway [horrors!] conservatives," "ideologues," and "creatures of the rigidly doctrinaire New Right" who use "vitriolic rhetoric," take the "low road" of attacking Reno's integrity, exert "right-wing pressure" in their "conservative insurrection," and exercise "political intimidation" through "pressure groups and a network of right-wing radio shows."

It is not the strong language I wonder at—after all, I am a loyal subscriber to *The American Spectator*—but rather at the leftish penumbra these verbal emanations generate over the seemingly conservative message of the article. Perhaps the style conveys the more trustworthy message.

— RICHARD L. LEED  
Ithaca, New York

*It is truly wonderful how violent is the language of those who accuse others of being mean-spirited and abusive and uncaring. The following letter was printed by the Ithaca Journal in November of 1994 right after the unexpected victory of the Republicans in the Congressional elections. The editors chose to headline the letters section of the editorial page with a citation from my letter, with quotation marks that seem to express amazement that anyone could say such a thing. But I shouldn't complain. I should be grateful that they printed it. Even though they omitted my middle initial.*

## Gingrich has 'wholesome political instincts'

For several days now, I have been listening to Newt Gingrich's speeches and interviews on C-SPAN. It has ~~been~~ a real pleasure to watch a man of such intellectual prowess and wholesome political instincts accept the responsibility of coming into a position of power as Speaker of the House of Representatives.

In none of those speeches and interviews have I heard a single mean-spirited word, although a lot of what this truly conservative man says would naturally upset a person who upholds the liberal views recently rejected by American voters.

Among the people upset by the conservative victory on Tuesday, November 8, are the editorial writers of the Ithaca Journal.

The editorial of Nov. 15 expresses dislike of Newt Gingrich with the following terms: his cold tactics, bluster, harsh rhetoric, acidic approach, callousness, and backlash (note the racist implications).

Gingrich is said to be like a kid in a video arcade. He is called a yapping Georgia bulldog who, far from being merely elected, is said to have elbowed his way to the fore, smashing toes along the way (with his elbow?).

He is said to be nothing short of scary and seemingly drunk with power.

All of these mean-spirited, cold, harsh, acidic terms are crowded into a rather short editorial which cannot be characterized as rational argumentation — it is simply vulgar speech.

**Richard Leed**  
Ulysees

*Although the attacks on Gingrich were eventually successful in driving him from office, I feel much more sympathy for a dedicated member of the local school board, Allen Lambert, who was mercilessly attacked over the years until he was finally defeated for reelection by a very close vote. The language used in these totally unjustified attacks was revolting.*

### **Defends Lambert's stance as being 'very reasonable'**

In your editorial of Jan. 27, you criticize school board member Allen Lambert for delivering a "tirade." He is quoted as saying people should be elected on the basis of their competence, not their race.

What Lambert said seems very reasonable to me, and I don't think the words he chose were as inflammatory as your calling him insensitive, which is right next door to calling a person a racist these days.

In any case, what he said cannot possibly be called a tirade, and even if it were, what is the matter with a tirade? Why shouldn't people be allowed to use strong and forceful language, especially when calling public officials to account?

Here, for example, are the words of Edmund Burke, calling Warren Hastings of the East India Company to account in England's Parliament 200 years ago:

...the commonwealth then is become totally perverted from its purposes; neither God nor man will long endure it; nor will it long endure itself. In that case, there is an unnatural infection, a pestilential taint fermenting in the constitution of society, which fever and convulsions of some kind or other must throw off; or in which the vital powers, worsted in an unequal struggle, are pushed back upon themselves, and by a reversal of their whole function, fester to gangrene, to death; and instead of what was just now the delight and boast of the creating, there will be cast out in the face of the sun a bloated, putrid, noisome carcass, full of stench and poison, an offence, a horror, a lesson to the world.

Now that is a tirade. That is the kind of language which, if used today, would accurately reflect many people's feelings about what has become of such institutions as the school board, the county Board of Representatives, and numerous other tentacles of government. We need more of it, not less.

**Richard L. Leed**  
Ulysses

## Repeated cries of 'racism' can be harmful to all sides

In a recent letter I said that an Ithaca Journal editorial used inflammatory language when it called Allen Lambert insensitive for reporting that some fellow school board members said they had voted on the basis of race rather than competence. I said that the word insensitive in this context was tantamount to calling the person a racist.

The Journal proved me right by headlining a subsequent article on this subject "A question of racism." Presumably this is what The Journal considers polite discourse in what the editorial calls civilized society.

Similar hypocrisy can be found in Diann Sams article, in which she calls on people to be respectful to their fellow peers. Not much respect emanates from her choice of words referring to Allen Lambert.

Here is a sampling of the words she used: his mean-spirited, hateful, debasing comments; his vicious, misinformed and biased statements...exposed him for what he is...his own racism; his "justified bigotry," his hatred.

No such inflammatory language can be found in any of Mr. Lambert's speeches or writings, so one must ask: who's civilized?

The real racists are those who use the term racist as a bludgeon to beat down their political opponents. Let us not be fooled: the self-appointed spokesmen for black people, whether they be black or white, are more interested in politics than in race; that is why they have no time for black people like Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas or school choice advocate Polly Williams.

The same is true for spokesmen for women; they have no time for conservative women like former Prime Minister Maggie Thatcher, one of the greatest political figures of our time.

As a concrete example of the use of race as a cover for leftist activism, let us recall the visit to Cornell of the late Civil Rights Commissioner Clarence Pendleton some years ago. His visit was preceded by a letter to The Journal signed by a coven of marxist professors which said that he should not be allowed to speak. Why? Because he was a black Republican, apparently a traitor to his race.

During Pendleton's talk there was an enormous amount of heckling by the leftist activists. By far the loudest boos and hisses occurred when he told his audience: Don't be afraid of being called a racist. Why the boos? Because activists know that once people of any color stop being afraid of being called racist, the activists' political power will disappear.

We would do well to recall what our wise Senator Moynihan said some 30 years ago. Almost everybody agrees now that he was right when he said that the black family was in trouble, though he was pilloried in the press at the time for uttering such a truth. Perhaps people will also come to agree that he was right when he said that it was time to treat the race issue with "benign neglect," i.e. that the constant cries of Racism! Racism! Racism! would in the end be harmful to blacks as well as whites.

**Richard L. Leed**  
Ulysses  
Feb. 17

## Accuses Journal of publishing inflammatory, racist attacks

Your May 11 article on the Ithaca School Board discussion of the Bias-Free Coalition's proposals ends up with this quotation from a Coalition member's speech:

"...you're the kind of white American male that scares the pure hell out of an African-American female like me."

This sounds more bias-rich than bias-free to me.

This is not the first time that The Journal has chosen to print, and indeed, to highlight, inflammatory racist ad hominem attacks against an undeserved target. But perhaps The Journal adheres to the oft-stated view that is impossible for an African-American to be racist.

Is it in fact The Journal's policy to give black women carte blanche to denigrate white men?

**Richard L. Leed**  
Ulysses  
May 12

*Ithaca Journal*  
5/19/94

## 6 – Animals

*An extremely self-righteous article promoting vegetarianism appeared in the Cornell Daily Sun in November of 1979. I was duly outraged. We had been raising sheep, and our friends the Hofferberts were raising pigs, and we would have a grand time getting together in the winter months slaughtering our respective crops and eating grand meals of fresh innards. Reading that article over coffee at my place of work, home of one of the largest ag schools east of the Mississippi, I felt that we, along with many other good people, were being put down in an unconscionable way. Still exercised over this affront as I got home that evening, I sat down and wrote this whole thing out in longhand and in something that might be called a snit fit if I knew what that was if there is such a thing and if so if that's the right word for it. I made few if any corrections, which is very unusual for me—maybe writing should be performed only in fits of one sort or another. The Sun printed the whole thing, along with a couple of illustrations appropriate to the content and the season. The editors added the section headings. My son Noah supplied the brilliant title.*

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### Guest Room

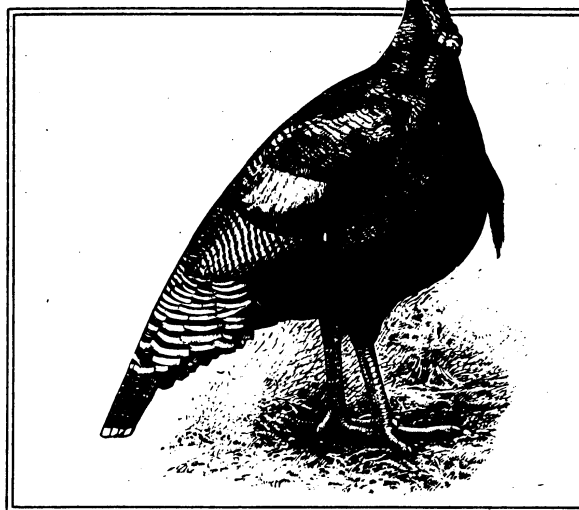
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## To the Meatless Turkey

R.L. Leed

Here is a reply to the question “Why do you eat animals?” raised in a vegetarian article by Mr. Don Herzog in *The Sun* (Nov. 16). Anti-meat-eating gets a fair amount of publicity these days, so it's probably time for an essay in defense of slaughtering animals.

I have nothing against vegetarians, by the way. In fact, I have high regard for people who abstain from consuming animal products for religious reasons. On the other hand, people who abstain on rational grounds are frequently victims of misunderstandings about the production of the goods we consume. Such people appear to be hypocrites, but, as I hope to show, they are merely victims of the pervasive ignorance that our consumerist society breeds. Therefore, they should be forgiven; I certainly do not intend to persuade anybody to eat meat.



Mr. Herzog asks, "Would you eat animals if you had to kill them yourself?" A "no" answer is perfectly respectable. My answer is "yes," and I think that's a perfectly respectable answer, too. Butchers are perfectly respectable people and I don't like to see them knocked about by people of the more elevated classes who know little or nothing about the production of the things — vegetable or animal — they consume.

Let's rephrase the question: "Would you consume X if you had to produce X yourself?" The fact is, very few people in our country ever produce any X as a whole unit. An auto worker, for instance, doesn't produce a whole auto. A cobbler doesn't make a shoe. Even a home gardener may be dependent on buying plants or manure to raise a head of lettuce. The consumerist society is one in which most of the people have no experience in producing a whole X. The result of this state of affairs is a lot of ignorance and a lot of disdain for producers. Now, if you raise, slaughter, and consume your own animals you can avoid being a total consumerist and avoid this utter ignorance. That's one reason for eating meat, an ideological reason.

#### **Efficient Death**

Here is a piece of ignorance that has to do with the act of killing. Mr. Herzog claims, "Killing animals causes them pain." He refers also to the frantic bellowing of the slaughterhouse. This just isn't so. No butcher wants to put up with that sort of thing. It's disturbing. It's inefficient. You want the animal to die quickly and get on with the business of bleeding and skinning. If you try to drop a hog with a bullet, for example, and you miss the brain, the squealing is awful and you have a lot of trouble getting a second shot because they run around so. Much better to render them unconscious forthwith, painlessly.

Or take lambs. The traditional way to slaughter a lamb is to cut the throat; it is also the most humane way, and you can't miss. Getting cut with a sharp knife is relatively painless; sometimes you don't even feel it. Just so with the lamb. The blood supply to the brain is immediately cut off, and the animal loses consciousness within seconds. The heart continues beating and drains the whole body in less

than a minute. The animal twitches and kicks, but that happens later, as reflexes. There's no noise, no pain, it's very quick and very easy. What is shocking about killing is not the alleged pain or the seeming gore, it is the ease with which it can be done.

One should not be callous about killing. It is indeed worthwhile looking at this whole business from the point of view of the animal, insofar as we can do that. But it may turn out that slaughtering for meat is much better than the alternatives. Suppose you didn't slaughter lambs for meat. What would happen to the millions of sheep in the world? They would have to be disposed of somehow, because it is economically impossible to raise them for wool alone.

The value of a ewe's wool per annum is about \$5; the value of the meat of her lambs is about \$100. If the vegetarian wants to pay 20 times more for the wool sweater he wears, that problem could be solved, but I think he'll choose to wear something else. (Or, you could simply turn the sheep loose; but over the last 10,000 years or so man has bred all natural defenses out of them and they would die a death far more gruesome than by the knife.) In any case, if you wear wool, you can't be a rational vegetarian.

Now that you've given up wool, you'll have to give up eggs, milk, and cheese, too. The logic is roughly the same. Some vegetarians do in fact abstain from these animal products. I note, however, that Mr. Herzog likes cheese. For shame.

These considerations lead to the following reason for eating meat: it is kinder from the animal's point of view, and more humane for the species than any alternative I can see.

#### **Efficient Ecology**

Another reason for eating meat is that it is ecologically efficient. Mr. Herzog says it's inefficient, but he's being misled by consumerist society again. It is true that much of the meat we buy in the store is finished off by grain feeding, and that grain feeding animals is ecologically inefficient. However, more of that meat comes from grass than you think.

Again, look at the alternative: ruminants are the only creatures that can turn grass into food for humans. There's a lot of grass growing on the earth.



Why waste this abundant natural product, when so many people in the world are starving? Grass prevents erosion (unlike row crops); grassland consumes less petroleum (unlike the tilling of fields that row crops require). The only grain I use is for lactating ewes, but the lambs we eat get none of that feed — they fatten quite fast when fed only grass.

Another misconception has to do with how certain delicate meats are produced. Mr. Herzog says, "The succulent lamb you so enjoy is white because it's kept quite thoroughly anemic throughout its life." First of all, lamb is not white. Veal is. Second, to produce white meat, veal is fed milk, and lots of it. Third, if a farmer is paid by the pound, why should he starve an animal? Finally, if you want really good veal, give up the consumerist society, raise and slaughter your own veal, and enjoy what we, in the intimacy of our family circle, affectionately call schnitzel of dead pet. It's delicious. Which is another reason for eating meat.

#### Efficient Sex

Another misconception has to do with sex in the barnyard. Mr. H. refers to cows in his discussion. He refers to hamburgers as "ground cow." It is true that meat from cows is used in some of our meat products, but mainly we eat beef from steers and lamb from wethers. It would be foolish indeed to butcher cows or ewes in quantity. Conversely, it would be foolish not to butcher steers and wethers.

What would you do with all those useless males? One ram services 30 or so ewes. If you didn't butcher the extra males, you'd have to double your hay production, pasturage, and barn space to keep them alive. So here's another reason at least some people should eat meat: to reduce the male population so as to make it economically feasible for irrational vegetarians to wear wool sweaters and eat eggs, cheese, and milk.

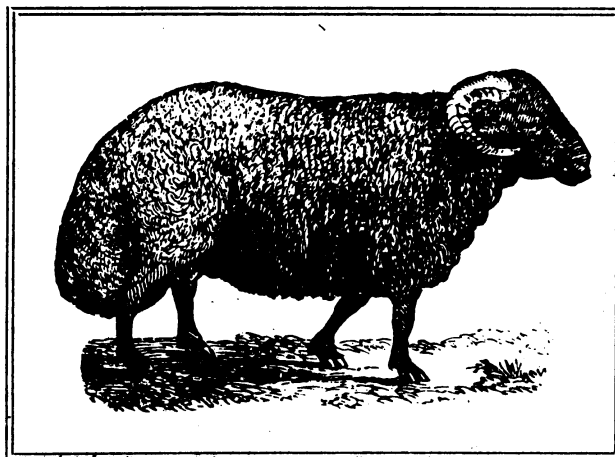
The issue of meat-eating arouses emotions in some quarters. My daughter, for example, was outraged when she read the article by Mr. Herzog. I think she was insulted. She likes animals, likes meat, and appreciates her shepherd mother and butcher father. Knows how to dung out a barn, too. She doesn't like to be put down any more than butchers do, I guess.

For my part, I wasn't outraged. I was more interested in the issues of factual accuracy and ethics. Mr. Herzog clearly feels that the ovo-lactic vegetarian is morally superior to the meat-eater. It is an understandable human frailty to want to feel morally superior. I suffer under the burden of that frailty myself: I am free of consumerism, I have no hypocrisy in my consuming habits, I don't preach to people about what they should eat, I have sympathy for the millions of people who live on one staple diet and lack meat, I don't have feelings of class disdain for producers, I observe the principle of ecological efficiency, I am inordinately proud of my expertise in butchering, learned in an abattoir, and I haven't a whit of false modesty. It sometimes disgusts me when I think how morally superior I feel.

The main issue in the relationship between man and beast has nothing to do with killing animals for meat or with consuming animal products. The important thing is how the animals are raised and cared for. To me, there is nothing sad about useful slaughtering, but the sight of an ill-tended flock or herd is sad indeed. Mr. Herzog deals with the issue of animal living conditions in his article, but vegetarianism will have little effect on the quality of animal husbandry so long as there are animals to be husbanded.

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**Prof. R. L. Leed is the chairman of the Modern Languages and Linguistics Department.**



*Reactions to my piece varied. I got a long, appreciative phone call from a colleague in the ag school. A professor from the English Department, known for his volubility, came up to me after a lecture we were attending and said, "I read your article in the Sun." He just stood there as I waited for him to continue, but he never said anything more about it. As literary conversations go, it was one of the best.*

*Poetry without rhyme or meter or stanzaic form can be printed in prose form and nobody will notice. Apparently the same is true for verse with as well as without those features, because nobody seemed to notice the doggerel in the section on Efficient Ecology.*



Gerry and I are on the left. In the center: Ute and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, visiting the Hofferberts from Germany. On the spit is one of our larger lambs. Gerry could dress very elegantly and in daring colors, but I loved her in barnyard boots, pants, and old shirts and sweaters even more.



Testing the edge of the carving knife for sharpness in 1948

*This appeared in the Ithaca Journal on December 5, 1996. It brought some compliments from my French friends, but they probably didn't catch the pun on "cut" and I didn't have the courage to explicate the text.*

## Let them eat cheese

Some years ago, when Charles de Gaulle was having difficulty in his job as president of France, he said that it was impossible to govern a country which makes 361 different kinds of cheese.

If the French took Prof. Campbell's advice to eat plant food instead of animal products like eggs, cheese, and meat (Ithaca Journal, Nov. 23), the miracle of France becoming a governable country might just come to pass. But I doubt it. The French will never give up cheese. We're not talking nutrition here, we're talking threats to cultural identity.

Customs, traditions, and culture are far more important to our society right now than the slight improvement in health that strict vegetarianism would bring about, now that capitalist democracies have virtually eliminated poverty, hunger, and early natural death, at least in com-

parison with former times and with other places on the planet today.

We no longer hear of beriberi, scurvy, pellagra, and other deficiency diseases, and we already have a life expectancy greater than the Biblical three score and ten. The critical diseases today are things like moral relativism, multiculturalism, overdosing on personal freedom, and a decrease in the number of customs that virtually all Americans can adhere to, like, for example, respect for cheese.

I don't mean to be critical of Professor Campbell, because The Ithaca Journal article is not at all clear on what he thinks of all this. On the one hand, the article is headlined "Vehemently Vegan," but in the article itself he speaks calmly of death and is described as exuding "a comforting but razor sharp serenity." Maybe "Vehemently Serene" would have been a more accurate headline.

In any case, it would seem much more gracious to console a dying loved one by attributing death to the Lord's will than to a faulty diet.

We have undergone profound changes in our customs and traditions in recent years, changes in courtship and marriage customs, in men's facial hair styles, in whether or what to smoke, in which naughty words come over TV, and the like. Nobody knows how many customs a society can afford to cut before coming apart at the seams, but surely this is no time to cut the cheese.

Man, especially the Frenchman, does not live by bread alone, but by wine, cheese and veal served with it. Vive la France!

# Pro & Con: The deer debate



**A stranded deer eventually drowned in Fall Creek Gorge last week. Should it have been saved?**

LYNN METRULIS

**CU should have used its resources to rescue deer**

RICHARD LEED

**Animal rights activists should be more 'humane'**

We did not expect a distortion of facts and a lack of interest in the plight of this deer from Cornell University officials.

While Cornell saw fit to bury its head in the sand and project the plight of this stranded animal as one of those best-left-to-their-own-devices wildlife things, a handful of us were mobilizing interested, qualified parties who were willing to rappel down the gorge for the sake of this animal. All we lacked was a tranquilizer gun, in the possession of our new multi-million dollar veterinary facility and not likely to be deployed for such an endeavor.

Kudos are in order for Glenn Grossman of the SPCA for having made the attempt to obtain from university officials permission to go to the animal's aid, though permission was denied. Also a debt of gratitude for the interest shown by Dr. Larry Carbone, not only a licensed veterinarian, but an experienced rappeller who was willing to go to the animal's assistance. Again, Cornell refused access to the animal's lair.



**Metrulis**

I'll wager a rather distasteful death awaited the terrified animal during the violent windstorm of Tuesday, March 19, when, perhaps, it lost its footing on either the loosened shale ledge or became swallowed up in the then-raging torrent.

Though some claimed to see the deer swimming at one point early Tuesday, Grossman maintains that the deer fell into the creek during the day and scrambled immediately back to what it believed was safe ground. If the animal was sufficiently endangered to lose its footing

*Here is my side of the debate reproduced here in the form in which it was submitted:*

To the Editor

The Ithaca Journal

About that deer stranded on a ledge in Fall Creek Gorge: Ronda Engman of the NY State Coalition for Animals is quoted in the Journal as saying “Cornell officials have disseminated nothing but misinformation and outright lies” and that they “are as guilty of contributing to that deer’s death as if they had shot it with a gun”—all because they failed to risk human life to save the life of the deer.

Such strong language reveals more hatred than compassion. The people with true compassion were those very officials. What could they have had in their hearts other than compassion to be the least bit concerned about the welfare of a dumb animal, a complete stranger even whose name they did not know?

Dumb animals are not only dumb, they are callous. If that had been a Cornell official on the ledge, would any doe or buck have shown concern? Only a bitch or dog would care a whit, and then only if the official were her or his mistress or master.

To have more concern for other species than for fellow humans may seem humane, but it is morally perverse. True humaneness is one of the glories of human nature. It is one of the things that makes humans infinitely superior to other species. Only a human can be humane, which is why the word humane means what it does. To be canine, or bovine, or feline, or caprid just doesn’t seem to have the same moral profundity as to be humane.

With one thing we must agree: shooting a deer may indeed “contribute to its death.” But what is so evil about shooting a deer? Although those bedeviled Cornell officials must have thought differently, you could argue that it would have been more humane to have shot that deer, relieving it of its terror, and eaten it, so that it would not have died in vain. I have respectfully slaughtered many hundreds of animals in my experience as a butcher, and in all honesty I cannot consider an animal leftist of the Engman stripe to be my moral superior.



*The Ithaca Journal, September, 1997:*

### **The Psychic Life of Squirrels**

The Journal recently published a letter from a Marion Stark of the Fund for Animals in Albany — why, I don't know. The letter asks that hunters not shoot squirrels at this time of year because they are likely to have tiny, blind, deaf, and furless babies in their nests who are likely to starve slowly to death without their mothers.

This recommendation seems to me to be heartless and cruel in view of the overpopulation of squirrels, at least in my area. There are so many squirrels (and chipmunks) around, it's a regular war out there. The poor creatures are obviously suffering.

One of my squirrels had his tail bit half off. Another looks like a rat, having no fur on his tail. Another has circular rings of light fur, raccoon-like, on his tail, possibly the victim of some trauma or other. Another I found dead in the carriage house, uneaten, with his face chewed off. And now the Reds have invaded, instituting a Great Terror among the Greys.

Peculiarities of fur growth may indicate psychic stress. Some years ago my wife submitted a fleece in a sheep growers' contest, but it won no prize. When she asked the judge why, he showed her a strand of its wool — it broke easily in his hand at a weak spot. All the wool on this fleece had a weak spot at exactly the same distance from the skin. He asked her if something had happened to the sheep about three months ago. That was exactly the time this young ram had escaped apparently unharmed physically, from a dog attack. But that one physical trace of its psychic terror remained.

There is every reason to believe that severe mental stress accompanies the constant aggression you find in an overpopulated animal society.

When it comes to killing the young, that great humanitarian, Jean Jacques Rousseau, said death would release them from the 'almost inevitable destiny that would be infinitely worse for them.' that is, growing up and suffering. (Unfortunately, he wasn't talking about other species, but about the five bastard children he sired and then abandoned to almost certain death in foundling "hospitals.")

The mindless sympathy of animal rights activists is understandable and even praiseworthy. But you don't have to be a philosopher to realize that other animal

species do not have the wonderful advantages we humans have for restricting population growth: abortion, abstention, infanticide, early suicide, homosexual union, contraception, communism, concentration camps, denigration of family life, and decadent societies. Also, their wars are not usually lethal, as ours are. We can help them avoid a death still more slow and mentally painful (winter kill, disease, strife) by destroying the very young. Shooting the mothers is the most practical means to do that, thanks to the hunters among us. If you want to eliminate the pain of orphanhood, there is a simple solution: do the youngsters in first, before you pop off the old folks.

Richard L. Leed  
Ulysses





## 7 – Lower Education

*Sometimes I would get phone calls or notes or letters in response to my writings, all of them positive, but what little printed response emerged was mostly negative. Of course I have no way of knowing how many letters the editors actually received, but I assume that many of them weren't printed because they couldn't match mine for knowledge, logic, wisdom, wit, and style.*

*I am interested as well in bad style as good also, specially malapropisms which I collect in addition to mishearings on radio and TV such as weather reports like the person who tried to call up Animosity Florida and ask about the unsure flow of air that was causing tense fog and intentionally severe thunderstorms. There's a lot of rank and vile linguistic behavior going on out there, but I bring you here only the cream of the crap. Throughout the course of just a week of listening you can hear so many errors it just raises a whole specter of questions on our educational system. I formerly used to be a schoolteacher myself, and I bring this subject up if only in order to clarify some confusion in my own mind. Nevertheless, I realize how fraught this issue is and I don't want to rush to judgment prematurely, so I will consult with my fellow colleagues before pursuing it further. Teaching methods are changing—almost rapidly—so the right course of action now could change our destiny forever.*

*Secondary education isn't foreign to my experience. I taught French for two years at a small school in Williamstown, Massachusetts, where I met Gerry my wife to be, who taught art. The notion of becoming a kindergarten teacher also came into my head at some point back then. But as the years went by I lowered my sights and drifted down into higher education—but that's another chapter.*

*Of all the subjects I have written on (and there are many—being a universal renaissance-type man broadens your horizons), our school system was the one surest to bring forth a response. The following article was unusual in that the printed response was almost as positive as the letters I received. The Affirmative Action document referred to in the article had been written about in the newspaper in general terms, but none of the gory details were ever mentioned. Incidentally, when I went down to Building L on Lake Street to get a copy of this well-advertised document, I was shunted around to several offices before one was finally found, and one is all they found—they xeroxed a copy of it for me while I waited. To the best of my knowledge, it did not get the public discussion promised in the newspaper; perhaps some did take place later in the year, but it was never reported on the front pages.*

*The editors changed a few little things—they decapitalized Red, for example—so here is the original submission:*

### **The School Board and Multiculturalism**

On September 23<sup>rd</sup> the School Board will discuss a Proposal on Affirmative Action and Multiculturalism. I would like to state my objections to this Proposal.

The educational policy promoted in this Proposal is truly disturbing. Throughout the document you will find the notion that race in hiring policy (affirmative action) goes hand in hand with multiculturalism, “an instructional approach designed to restructure the total school environment... [whose focus] extends to the areas of language, gender, race, socioeconomic class, religion, sexual orientation, age, and to people with challenging conditions...”.

The Proposal says that the teacher should have “experiences” which are “consistent with the goal of preparing students for life in a multicultural and multiethnic society.” Four things bother me about this notion, which runs like a Red thread through the whole document.

First, nothing is said in this or in any other sentence in the entire Proposal about the teacher’s ability to write, his or her breadth of reading, factual knowledge about other cultures, their history, or, in fact, anything having to do with academic training or superior knowledge in the subject matter to be taught. This might bother parents who would like to have their children taught by someone who knows more than the children do.

Secondly, that statement is simply false. Unlike Canada, our country is not a multicultural society, except for a few pockets of truly different, unassimilated cultures such as the Amish and certain American Indian tribes. There are many proofs of this. For example, a recent book describes the disillusionment of an African-American who went to West Africa thinking he had cultural roots there; he found out that he was in fact a pure American culturally, though he was an African ethnically. It has been known for many, many years now, that culture has nothing whatever to do with race. To think that it does is pure ignorance. Everybody can see, for example, that a child of any race raised in, say, France, will learn French like a Frenchman. What is true of learning language is true of learning the rest of culture.

Thirdly, the question of affirmative action, like that of multiculturalism, is a political question. After all, it was the subject of Proposition 209 in California in a political election. Whether you approve of it or not, you can’t deny that it

is a matter of contention among people of good will. To make political belief a matter of hiring policy is perfectly reasonable if parents have a choice as to which one of a variety of schools they can send their children to, but not if school districts have a monopoly on government schools which citizens of all political stripes are forced to finance. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, "To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical."

Lastly, the statement applies not only to hiring future teachers, but to what any currently employed teacher is doing or saying right down in the classroom. Not only are prospective teachers expected to "encourage students to take positive action to effect needed [social] change," but the Director of A.A. & M.E.S (Affirmative Action and Multicultural Educational Services) "will be responsible for continuous monitoring of the Procedures" and any "programs arising from the enactment of these Procedures" and to "support the progress of multiculturalism and multiethnicity in the Ithaca City School District."

The Proposal says that multiculturalism, "with its equitable treatment of all cultures, strives to eliminate omissions, correct erroneous material, provide new analyses, contradict fallacious assumption and challenge ethnocentric traditions of all kinds." I believe this statement is dishonest. Multiculturalism does not treat all cultures equitably. Multicultists in fact condemn our own English/American culture, traditions, and beliefs as "eurocentric," which is a two-fold mistake.

First, our tradition is a good tradition, not a bad one in need of artificial change by people who think they can design a better society than normal people have done simply by living normal lives.

Secondly, our tradition is not European, but English. Many of our fundamental customs (courtship and marriage, migration of children away from home, age at marriage, small family size, suckling, constitution of households, use of money payments for services, class mobility, legal traditions such as innocence until proven guilty, separation of governmental powers, rejection of absolutism, aversion to slavery, etc., etc.) differ drastically from those of most of continental Europe and go back as far as records can take us, at least 800 years.

Old England still lives, and every bit as much (if not more so) in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand as in modern England.

### **Question: Is multiculturalism really a good thing for all?**

The Journal editorial of April 12 supports the desire of Sonia Calvo, the director of Affirmative Action and Intercultural Affairs of the Ithaca School District to have multicultural education under her charge.

Putting both affirmative action and multicultural education in the same administrative office makes good sense if you want to make sure you hire teachers who are multiculturalists. The real question: Is multiculturalism a good thing?

Multiculturalism is an educational policy like creationism — it affects what teachers say and do in the classroom.

Creationists teach that the creatures on earth were created by a supreme intelligence. Multiculturalists teach, among other things, that white males are not all they are cracked up to be.

Some creationists go so far as to claim that the universe was created in six calendar days, as a theologically questionable reading of the Book of Genesis might lead one to believe. Some multiculturalists teach that Cleopatra was black, that Greek philosophy originated in Africa and other unsound ideas.

It is fine with me if a school teaches these sorts of things, but not a public school to which economically disadvantaged pupils are virtually forced to go.

What should our community do in this situation?

We should supply seed money for Lorthridge, Calvo, and Co. to set up a private school of their own so as to supply all the affirmative multiculturalism the community wants. We should then start a voucher program to enable anybody who wants to attend it or any other school.

A local voucher system will give us the opportunity to purge the public schools of politics and to support a wide variety of private schools in our area.

Such a system should put a stop to many of our quarrels about education; if you don't like one school, all you have to do is use your voucher to send your child to another. And nobody can force unwanted doctrines upon your children.

*The letter on the left was accepted by the Ithaca Journal in May of 1994. It seemed to me that equating the teaching of multiculturalism with the teaching of creationism might stir somebody up, and it did. I reproduce the response below without the author's name—who knows? maybe she changed her mind by now and would be embarrassed.*

### **Disagrees with letter-writer on issue of multiculturalism**

I had to read Mr. Leed's letter on multiculturalism a few times before I realized he is a classic example of why we need to incorporate multiculturalism into our classrooms.

To suggest that multiculturalism is an "educational policy like that of creationism" is to compare apples and, let's say, Volkswagons. Creationism is based on religious doctrine, while multiculturalism deals with the reality of our society and encourages the celebration and development of all who are a part of this society. Contrary to popular belief, Mr. Leed, multiculturalists are not "anti-white male." We are pro-human.

*This one elicited two very strongly-worded responses, taking me to task for daring to criticize Toni Morrison (one compared her with Cervantes, Rabelais, and Byron on the grounds that they were all popular) and for calling teachers dumb. I was not astonished.*

To the Editor:

Murray Cohen makes a good case in his letter of April 10 for teaching popular literature such as Toni Morrison in our schools rather than things like Shakespeare, Chaucer, and other difficult authors, on the grounds that the classics are too hard on the kids. Children can “get a lot more” from reading modern authors about race.

A still better case could be made on the grounds that the classics are too hard on the teachers. It is easier for the teachers to teach the stuff you can get off the best-seller shelf of your local book store or from reading newspapers and magazines in the dentist’s office or from watching TV at home. What’s hard to understand, though, is hard to teach.

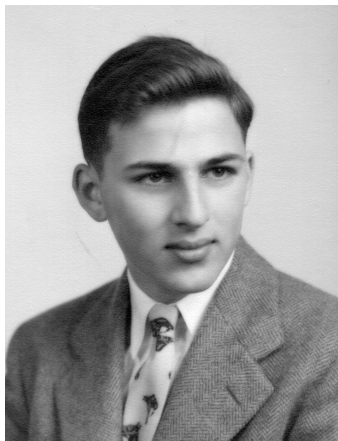
It is true that there are some very fine teachers in our schools, but on the average, teachers are not very bright. There are a number of statistics showing this to be true. For example, college graduates in education have about the same test scores as high school graduates who are entering college. Most of the dumb students who get into American colleges fail to graduate, so college graduates are a lot smarter than freshmen on the average—but not the prospective teachers from our schools of education. It would be unfair to put such people, untrained in Shakespeare and Chaucer, in the uncomfortable position of teaching Shakespeare and Chaucer to people who might be brighter than they are, because it would impact negatively on their self-esteem.

In spite of these excellent arguments for teaching Toni Morrison instead of William Shakespeare, I think a better argument can be made for emphasizing older literature, older history, and older culture as early as possible in the life of the child. The main reason is simple: childhood schooling is the only time and place that a person will be exposed to that sort of reading. How many thirty-year-olds pick up Hamlet for an evening’s relaxation, or a book of poetry, or a history of 16<sup>th</sup> century England, or a sermon by Cotton Mather? If you don’t learn about these things in school, you never will. We might as well burn such books, because nobody but out-of-touch scholars rooting around in musty libraries will ever have any use for them.

Someday there will be no reason to quarrel over such issues. There will be no reason to have constant acrimonious public debates over public school policy—the most recent example being a whole Letters section in the Journal devoted to honors programs. Someday parents will be able to choose rather than quarrel over what kind of education their children get. Even now, sprinkled over the country, there are all kinds of experimental schools, charter schools, state voucher systems, home schooling aids, Internet instructional programs, and the like, so that parents already have more choices than they used to. Just a few years ago there were only a dozen or so charter schools in the whole country, but today there are thousands.

Perhaps in Ithaca, someday, we will be able to send our children to either to a small Toni Morrison school or a small William Shakespeare school, as the individual parents choose, rather have them all indoctrinated identically in the same out-sized government institution. Parents then will have no grounds to complain about their children being forced to suffer from Chaucer deprivation.

Charter schools give choice to all parents, not just to the ones who have enough money to send their children somewhere else or to move their residence to another district. Charter schools are, in many states, freed from the restrictive rules imposed by unions and government bureaucracies, so their teachers can be chosen for their knowledge, expertise, and intellectual talent, not just for their feelings about multiculturalist issues of race, gender, class, and victimhood. For now, the State of New York is firmly anti-choice, but there is reason to hope that our grandchildren, or perhaps great-grandchildren, will have a tad more liberty in education.



Secondarily educated, 1947

*The following article appeared in the Ithaca Journal in July, 1998. I was surprised that they printed the whole thing, because it's pretty long. The editors did not use my title, which I thought was a pretty good pun on the superintendent's name. The Wall Street Journal surely would have kept it and added a few more.*

*As to the content of the article: having upset some people by calling teachers dumb in my previous article, I was really eager to write another calling them ignorant, and I added some ancillary material on charter schools, liberty, and what not.*

### **WHAT DOES THE PAST TELL?**

History tells us that bureaucracies sometimes become unmanageable, that an organization (like IBM) may become so bogged down that it takes an upstart (like Bill Gates) to start afresh. So it is with public school systems in America today. However wonderful they may have been in the past, they are now so bogged down they are being replaced by upstarts such as the one million home schoolers, the thousands of charter schools, and the numerous voucher systems in various cities throughout the country.

They are bogged down regardless of who is running them. That is why I feel obliged to come to the defense of our school superintendent, Ms. Pastel, who has been really trashed in the letters columns recently.

Just look at what a principal or supervisor or superintendent must endure: federal, state, and local regulations galore, not to mention pressures from the union, the establishment educationalists, and the multiculturalist activists. Such an official is more to be pitied than censured.

We now have two unprincipaled schools in the Ithaca district, but why blame an individual for a systemic fault? As one recent letter writer wrote, there is a shortage of principals in this country. Shortages (like the gasoline "shortage" in the 1970s) are usually caused by government regulation, and school regulation is no exception.

Theoretically, Ms. Pastel could initiate a program to aid parents in selecting teaching materials for home schooling. She could pro-

mote the establishment of charter schools. She could hire more well-educated non-professionals or lobby the state to provide a voucher system for needy parents. And much more. But is it reasonable to ask a person trained in the establishment to destroy the very institution she was hired to operate? The liberal voters of this liberal state have made their regulatory bed—let them lie in it.

There are not only shortages of principals, there are also shortages of teachers who are well trained in the subject matter they teach. A disturbingly large percentage of them are ignorant of the subject they teach. In a recent Wall Street Journal article (4/28/98) a private school teacher made the claim that nationwide, 36% of public school teachers didn't major, or even minor, in the subject they teach. The article was entitled "Let those who can, teach," and it bemoaned the fact that there are thousands and thousands of young people who are truly knowledgeable in their academic fields and who would like to teach, but are unwilling to endure the obstacles to employment created by state laws, unions, and schools of education.

To my amazement, last week the New York State Regents unanimously rejected a proposal to ban the employment of persons who lack the proper teaching credentials, i.e. boring, useless, if not pernicious courses in educational theory from schools of education. Now you can get a teaching job by passing three competence tests to demonstrate that you know something. This is a step forward for New York State, to be sure. The Wall Street Journal calls it a mild earthquake and predicts a tidal wave will follow. I have my doubts. Even if charter schools are permitted, it is still a state board that calls the shots.

Charter schools have been allowed in North Carolina for some time now. But even North Carolina has its share of liberal reactionaries. Their State Board of Education is now considering closing down one of their most successful charter schools, the Healthy Start Academy, despite its record of improving the test scores of its students in various categories from around the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile at the beginning of the year to above the 90<sup>th</sup> at the end, according to a



local Chapel Hill newspaper. The reason given is that because the school attracted black people in such overwhelming numbers, the school was therefore “segregated” and not representative of the community.

The real reason, of course, has nothing to do with segregation. The schools are closed to no one. Parents send their children there purely as a matter of choice. And choice is what teachers, teachers’ unions, school administrators, professors of education, state education officials, and the politicians they vote for fear most, because it will destroy the near monopoly the government has on the public school system and endanger their job security.

Charter schooling is not the answer to either poor schooling or bureaucratic wrangling of the sort we are seeing in Ithaca. It is merely one of many experiments that are being carried out at the state and municipal level elsewhere in the country. Its main drawback is that money still comes from the government and therefore so does control over the operation of a school and, indeed, over its very existence, as the North Carolina situation clearly shows. Perhaps a non-federal voucher system would be better. Perhaps no one system is best. But these questions can be answered only when citizens have the freedom to experiment at the local level and when parents can send their children to the school of their choice the way they can shop at the store of their choice (except in Walmart-free Ithaca, of course).



Gretel Edwards Reinhold (Leed), known to most as Gerry, here a student at Goddard College, soon to be a teacher of art at Buxton School in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

## 8 – Higher Education

*It seems that my notion of freedom is liberally circumfused with rules, restrictions, and custom. On the left: from the Wall Street Journal; on the right, the New York Guardian.*

### **Let Freedom Blare! But Not in My Tower**

In his Aug. 10 Viewpoint column "Supreme Court's Cookware Case Was No Tempest in a Teapot," Michael Gartner claims that the right to sell Tupperware in a college dorm is a matter of free speech. You'd think an editor and TV executive, and the Supreme Court, would know the difference between speech and non-speech, but they don't.

A college has the right to inhibit so-called freedoms of various kinds in order to enhance one freedom: speech.

Every spring I must evacuate my campus office to escape the exercise of pseudo-freedoms: the freedom to blare fraternity stereo rock into my office window; the freedom to sell beer on the slope by my window to 3,000 customers, and the freedom of the customers to drink it noisily and litter the cans.

I have had to put up with the freedom to occupy buildings (with or without arms and ammunition), break windows, commit arson (twice in my own hall), brandish knives, burn flags, build shantytowns, and other non-speech acts—all in the name of free speech.

I want my ivory tower back, sans Tupperware and shanties.

Speech is what's in libraries, and nobody should have the freedom to make libraries and their surroundings non-quiet. If Mr. Gartner wants to let Tupperware sell freely, he can give them carte blanche to solicit Tom Brokaw on the evening news.

Besides, Michael Gartner is hardly in the position to claim that commercial speech should be free—he charges hundreds of thousands of dollars a minute for it on his own NBC network.

RICHARD L. LEED

Ithaca, N.Y.

### **Hofstra Falls Short of Academic Freedom**

In your May/June issue you ran an article about a certain theater professor at Hofstra's New College who is alleged to have been promoting a type of witchcraft in her classroom.

A representative of the administration is said to have responded to the charge of her pursuing questionable practices in her classroom by saying "This is academic freedom."

The administrator's response reflects a widespread misunderstanding of the phrase "academic freedom" and what it has meant over the years.

Academic freedom is nothing more than a contract between the teacher and institution. The institution says: "You may work here for all of your working life without fear of being fired." In return, the teacher says, "I promise not to use my classroom podium to expound my personal opinions outside the area of expertise for which I am hired."

In these modern times only the first part of the contract, the so-called "tenure rule," is upheld. Indeed, it is only the first part that many young people have ever heard about.

The second part of the contract, i.e. the teacher's obligation to the institution, and indeed to the profession as a whole, was massively breached in 1968 and by now has fallen into desuetude. It is as if doctors had covertly renounced the Hippocratic oath.

*My dear friend Rick Hofferbert, the political scientist with whom I argued so much while butchering so many lambs and pigs, admired J. S. Mill so excessively that I had to write Rick this essay to moderate his extreme views on freedom and liberty. The educated among us older folks were raised on Mill, and we have transmitted his version of liberty to the young, who may not read much, but who absorb such self-indulgent notions as readily as did we in our youth. In my mature view, Mill's On Liberty is one of the most pernicious books ever printed, because it so convincingly puts liberty ahead of virtue.*

### J. S. Mill, a Damn'd Socialist

My college English professor assigned "On Liberty" to us and had us write a theme on it. I got a C on my theme because I couldn't think of anything to say that Mill hadn't said better than I could, as I was a mere freshman just learning how to write. Also, being young, I had no wisdom.

Assignments like that are very unfair. Why aren't freshmen assigned to write themes on stuff written by people that are even stupider than freshmen are, like, for example, instructions on how to assemble a kite manufactured in some far away place?

The professor was regarded as a conservative person. When I matured (just last month, actually) I realized he was basically just as bad as the rest of 'em.

By 'em I mean the mostly liberal people in Schools of Liberal Arts in American colleges and universities. I myself work in such an institution, but I never joined it. I was asked to, and in fact I accepted the duties and salary, but spiritually I never joined it. I am grateful for having been given a career in the academe the way you might be grateful to a zoo-keeper for letting you inside the cages the better to observe the inmates close up.

One of the things I have against the academic world is the way I was suckered into believing that Mill was expressing the basic ideas of freedom and liberty, the basic ideas underlying our Republic. I have spent most of my life believing this.

Mill says:

...it is universally considered just that each person should obtain that (whether good or evil) which he deserves; and unjust that he should obtain a good, or be made to undergo an evil, which he does not deserve.

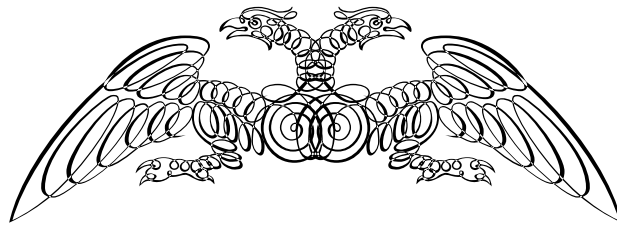
I think that is a very naughty thing to say. It is the type of thing that was said by such childhood heroes of mine as Radek, Kamenev, Bucharin, Lenin, and

various unmentionable Georgians. They were wrong. I was wrong. And my friend Rick Hofferbert is still wrong.

By all means let us follow Mill's advice and give Rick the salary and pension he deserves. In order to determine what he deserves we will set up a committee consisting of his peers in the State which employs him. The members will be: *[here follows a list of people Rick had a contentious relationship with]*.

I am confident that when Professor Hofferbert retires on a pension lower than the more deserving garbage man gets, he will change his mind about J. S. Mill, that rationalistic, utilitarian inspirer of notions like comparative worth, fairness, and rights to this that and the other thing.

The worst thing about Mill is that he clothed his naive rationalism in such nice words that all sorts of nice people took him seriously. "Social justice" for example, sounds good until it gets translated into "affirmative action." And the "marketplace of ideas" (all those smart rational people thinking up socially just ways for other people to live) sounds good until you realize that the marketplace for pantyhose and corn flakes is ultimately more beneficent. Or, as Lord Acton says, it is not the common people who have caused so much misery throughout history, but the smart guys, like Napoleon, Voltaire,... and, one might add, Nixon, Kissinger, and the like. Give me a dumb guy like Reagan any time.



## A FATHER'S POST-COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

This address was originally delivered by the father of Noah R. Leed, B.A., on the occasion of their walking to the parking lot after sitting through commencement exercises. It's kind of an antidote.

You have been told to dream, to think big, and to never give up. Don't listen to these people who tell you such things.

You're a poker player and you know very well that if you have a bad hand you throw it in. Anybody who never gives up loses his shirt. Give up when things go bad. That's what bankruptcy laws are for.

It is only in the screwball world of the academe that people are forced to not give up after midterm and are forbidden from dropping a course they should have never signed up for in the first place and have to finish the course and get an F on their permanent transcript. In the real world the only correlate of having to finish the course and getting an F is death and hell. In the real world sensible people don't get F's; they give up.

Thinking big usually means thinking up work for somebody else to do for your own glory. People who think big rarely have time to do the nitty gritty stuff that makes things work. Think small—it's a big world. Work hard, work well, and get satisfaction out of the work you do for the greater glory of God and service to your fellow man. The smaller the job, the greater the glory, because big ideas come a dime a dozen.

Don't be a dreamer. There are enough dreamers out there. Dreamers who think big and never give up have committed enormous numbers of murders throughout history and have promoted such romantic monstrosities as the French revolution and the Bolshevik coup d'état. All sorts of other religious nuts have destroyed their fellow man and innumerable institutions of civilization in the name of a dream for a brighter future in this world or that.

Don't listen to such glorious advice. Give up, think small, don't dream, and vote Republican.

*The following essay, like the above, was not submitted to any self-respecting academic journal. (Actually there is no other kind of academic journal.) Some of my colleagues seemed to like it. To some degree I have been guilty of following all three principles and some of the examples of foolish pedagogy are taken from my own textbooks.*

### THREE PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

*Richard L. Leed*

#### 1. CONCEAL THE LANGUAGE FROM THE STUDENT.

Since language is rule-governed behavior, talk about rules in class, preferably in English. Do not offer large samples of the target language, either written or spoken. Supply textbooks with writing exercises, not speaking exercises, because speaking is so much faster than writing that the student will be exposed to too much foreign language per hour of study. Supply readers which contain no more than 20% foreign language; at least 80% should consist of exercises, notes, explanations, pictures, & glossaries.

Don't let the student jump ahead of the schedule or read things like *War and Peace* on the sly. You can spot such students easily because they ask trick questions and confuse the other members of the class.

Make sure students don't learn what's not taught. Without your help and guidance they are sure to learn the language wrong. And even if they learn it right, they'll end up using the language correctly without knowing why, *i.e.* they'll end up with a narrow skill rather than with a broad liberal education.

#### 2. WRITE FOR COLLEAGUES, NOT FOR STUDENTS

If you write pedagogical materials, keep the proper audience in mind. If you publish them, be sure to write a preface about as long as your average book review—the reviewer will copy it, buzz-words and all.

If there are two ways to state a rule, choose the one that best fits current linguistic theory, even if it is more complex. This will please your colleagues in the field. After all, they are the ones who write the reviews, buy the books, and recommend you for tenure.

When you present rules to students, use symbols rather than words wherever possible. This gives your presentation an aura of rigor and economy and simplicity and elegance. For example, use capital letters to indicate the position of stress in

Russian, e.g. стол ЕЕ, not a string of Russian words like сто́л, столóм, столы́. Use underlying non-existent citation forms like писа- rather than real forms like писа́ть, пи́шут. If you give too many real forms, the students might learn them by heart and never apply your rules for generating them, with the result that a lot of time and effort is wasted (see also Principle #1); besides which, 25 years of scholarship will have been wasted, too.

### 3. DON'T SUCCUMB TO STUDENT PREJUDICE

Principles of pedagogy and theories of linguistics are more important than student whims. If your students go out and buy books you haven't ordered for them, like *1001 Irregular Verb Paradigms*, pity them, discourage them, and give them more rules. They should know that there are in fact very few irregular verbs in any language (a universal of Human L) and that all those putative irregulars are merely the predictable results of phonological rule application. (Paradigms in any case are to be avoided on the basis of Principle #1, because they are mini-samples of language).

Don't let standardized test results interfere with your principles of teaching. If your students' scores decline over the years, it's the fault of the exams, even though the exams don't change. Explain to people (especially your boss) that the students in your innovative course are learning the really important facets of the language, facets which that old-fashioned exam can't pretend to evaluate; or better yet, facets which no exam whatsoever can evaluate.

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*The following essay was printed in the Ithaca Journal of November, 1995, with a number of editorial excisions—my suggestion for a constitutional amendment, for example. Swift's Modest Proposal would never have gotten past these editors. They also omitted my quotation from Karl Marx, the only time I have ever cited him with approbation. The editors put the word 'dumb' in quotation marks in their headline, maybe because they are afraid of getting flak from the speech police if they don't make clear that they are not the ones who are using the forbidden word. Or maybe it is they who are the speech police, and the quotation marks are a flag saying 'Watch out! This guy is evil. He uses forbidden words.'*



## WHY DUMB PEOPLE ARE WISER THAN SMART ONES

William F. Buckley Jr. long ago made the oft-quoted comment that he would rather be governed by the first 500 names in the Boston phone book than by the faculty of Harvard University.

He is not alone in thinking that people of average intelligence have more wisdom (or common sense, moral rectitude, etc.) than people of high intelligence. But it is only in the past half century that this has become a problem in governing our towns, counties, states, and nation, as people with less and less common sense have become more and more influential.

Smart people before mid twentieth century were fairly evenly distributed among the various classes and professions. It was not unusual to find farmers or carpenters or even laborers who would rank very high on the intelligence scale. And in 1950 it was not difficult for a person of only moderate intelligence to matriculate into Harvard University, provided he belonged to the proper social class.

As reported in *The Bell Curve*, by Herrnstein and Murray, this distribution has changed. The very smart people are being more and more concentrated in the intellectual class, broadly speaking, a class consisting of teachers, professors, scholars, social workers, journalists, lawyers, politicians, and the like—people whose income, monetary and psychic, derives from the dissemination of ideas.

It may be—though who is to tell? who is to measure?—that wisdom is still fairly evenly distributed throughout the population. In any case, it is surely true that it is *not* being concentrated in the intellectual class.

George J. Stigler, in his delightful book, *Memoirs of an Unregulated Economist*, tells us that the intellectual class is no less driven by self-interest than, say, the business class, whose self-interest (the bottom line) is there for all to see. It is not that one of these two classes is composed of morally superior people. There are simply two classes in competition with each other for the usual advantages: money, power, status, and the like. And they are both willing to use force, i.e. government action, with all its sanctions, imprisonments, fines, and power over life itself, to attain their ends.

If you are a smart person and a member of the intellectual class, you have two inherent difficulties in achieving wisdom, both matters of self-interest.

First, to get your ideas accepted, the ideas have to be more or less correct. If

you publish a bad idea, your income will suffer. It is just as much a matter of self-interest for an intellectual to be right in the transmission of ideas as it is for a trucker to be prompt in his wordless transmission of goods.

Secondly, it is difficult for an intellectual to change his mind. If you published even a good idea one day and on the next you said "Hey, I was wrong!" your salary, your reputation, and your job mobility would suffer, particularly if you made a habit of it. Worse yet, people would laugh.

It is not that intellectuals are particularly vain (though they are) or even disingenuous, it's just that they are subject to the same laws of self-interest as anybody else, and it is in their personal and professional interest to be almost always right.

Non-intellectuals do not face these inherent difficulties. A businessman does not have to put his decisions into words the way an intellectual does. If he changes his product line all of a sudden, nobody laughs.

If you look at political polls or election returns, it has been the blue collar workers who have changed their minds. The so-called "Reagan Democrats" are an outstanding example. The intellectual class remains steadfastly liberal. The swing vote in the coming election (1996) is said to reside in the lower classes. (It is politically incorrect to call them "lower," though it is OK to call Ronald Reagan "dumb.")

Political issues are often simple ones that require very little information on the part of the voter to decide which side to take. You don't have to be an intellectual or even have a lot of information to make up your mind on most issues, and in fact being an intellectual interferes with making reasonable decisions under changing conditions. As Karl Marx said, when the train of history goes round the bend, all the intellectuals fall off.

Most working people deal with the real world, as the businessman deals with the bottom line, but intellectuals deal with words, and there is no necessary connection between words and reality. As one activist science writer stated it: there is a tension between truth and advocacy. For such people, as the economist Thomas Sowell says, reality is optional.

The ability to admit mistakes and change one's mind in the light of new facts is surely a mark of wisdom, or at least the beginning of it. It would therefore seem reasonable to take this into account in our political structure. Since the cultural elite is professionally handicapped, so that its members cannot be expected to

function wisely at the polling booth, they should be deprived of the vote by constitutional amendment.

This is only fair. These dealers in words have more opportunity than anybody else to publish, testify, and otherwise influence public policy. They arrange for their colleagues to appear on TV. They write plays and shows and novels in which the bad guys are members of competing classes—businessmen, generals, and fat Southern sheriffs. Those of them who are ignorant of public affairs, but who have gotten public recognition for outstanding performance in scholarship or the arts, are nevertheless given public hearing and listened to with great respect even when they go beyond their special area of competence and speak out in confident ignorance on public affairs.

For these great benefits, unavailable to ordinary people, the elite should pay a price. Let them propose all the rules and regulations they want on how the country should be run, but let only the wise people vote on them.

Or maybe it would be better to select our public servants simply by tearing a page out of the phone book.

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*Bill Buckley was not the first to come up with that telephone book idea. After I wrote the above, I was reading a memoir by James Buchanan and found this quotation from Thucydides, who didn't have a telephone book but had the right idea:*

...as a general rule, states are better governed by the man in the street than by intellectuals. These are the sort of people who want to appear wiser than the laws, who want to get their own way in every general discussion, because they feel that they cannot show off their intelligence in matters of greater importance, and who, as a result, very often bring ruin on their country. But the other kind—the people who are not so confident in their own intelligence—are prepared to admit that the laws are wiser than they are...

*The major field of activity in my academic career was Slavic linguistics, particularly Russian, and particularly Russian language pedagogy. I also knew something of Russian literature, Russian history, Marxist ideology, and the workings of the Soviet Union, a totalitarian organization which lasted for 73 years and whose ruling class still runs Russia. By now I have lost interest in all of those things, but I am still fascinated by the way in which societies can influence each other independently of anybody's will.*

*Why should we care if a foreign country is run by a mafia, or if it is a police state, or if its conduct of business is corrupt? So long as it is not militarily aggressive and lets its neighbors alone, can't we continue to live a relatively virtuous life in relative freedom? Not entirely. One of our virtues, for example, is relative freedom from bribery of public officials, and we even have laws that forbid bribery of officials of foreign governments. This puts our businessmen at a great disadvantage with competitors from nations lacking such laws and at a great risk of being tempted to engage in bribery despite the law.*

*Academic people are also led into temptation and not delivered from evil in far-away places. In my experience many academic people who had scholarly interests in Russia were tempted to keep silent about what they saw and heard on their travels there for fear of losing their privilege of obtaining visas for future visits, thereby running the risk having more collaborative scholarly competitors get ahead of them in the race for publication, prestige, and position. One scholar of my acquaintance even sat through two days of conference with the Soviet state censorship board, altering the text of a book he co-authored with Soviet colleagues. That took place after Khrushchev was deposed as the leader (some would say 'dictator') of the USSR, and the censors required the deletion of every occurrence of the name Khrushchev in the book. The American scholar thus had a unique opportunity of coming back to the USA and reporting on the inside workings of Soviet censorship, but to my knowledge he did this only orally among colleagues, never in print.*

*In my own case, I didn't much care if I ever went back the visit the USSR and I never had much interest in traveling to conferences, meeting with colleagues in other universities, participating in exchange programs, or making much of a name for myself in my field. Lucky me, I had never had much ambition and never felt really a part of the academic world, so it was not difficult for me to become coauthor of a number of Russian textbooks that were quite frank and honest about Soviet life. One of them contained a thinly-veiled fictional portrait of Soviet Chairman Leonid*

*Brezhnev so accurate that the publisher felt obliged to insert a disclaimer on the obverse of the title page:*

All characters in this book are fictitious, and any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Situations occurring in the book, as well as statements of fact or opinion, are those of the authors. The publisher does not necessarily either agree or disagree with the contents and takes no responsibility therefor.

*I know of no language textbook of any language published in this country that has been so honored by its publisher, and I am still proud of it.*

*This was all well and good for me, but what about the students who used the book and wanted to take them along on their study tours to the USSR? What would the Soviet customs officials do to them at the border? And what about the American professors who were in charge of these Soviet-American student exchange programs? Would they not get into trouble with the Soviet authorities with whom they negotiated and administered the programs? And what would the U.S. Department of State think about this?*

*The answer is that I got all these people either riled up or in trouble or both, and I am still proud of it.*

*I got feedback from my students who participated in these exchanges. One reported having been told by the leaders of the exchange "If you have any books by Nakhimovsky and Leed, we'll be glad to pay the postage to have them sent to your homes before you leave for the Soviet Union." The next year one of my students told me they got a printed list of books which were "not advisable to take along." She was told that the State Department had a hand in compiling the list, which allegedly included our books. The next year one of my students told me they didn't get a printed list and that only our Beginning Russian was given the honor of receiving first-class postage home. That's the book with caricatures of Lenin in it (most amusing, but in very poor taste, I must admit), the page that evoked a grimace from a customs official. All in all, I was proud, though not overweeningly, that our book was in the same league as the Holy Bible.*

*Here is a letter I wrote in 1984 to three American professors, who held high positions in a Soviet-American student exchange program for the study of the Russian language called ACTR, and who I knew personally and liked, but disagreed with on the matter of their treatment of the textbooks I co-authored.*

Dear...,

This letter is about the policy of ACTR with respect to the books written by our writing team... One of our students who has returned from the summer ACTR program in Moscow tells me that her group of students, assembled last spring in this country to depart for the USSR, was asked to turn in any copies of books by Leed and Nakhimovsky before departure...

I know that our books have been confiscated on occasion by Soviet officials at customs and I realize that seizure of unwanted books could embarrass the ACTR study-abroad program. Nevertheless, who or what would I be if I didn't protest?

It would be too much to accuse the ACTR of confiscation. If any of the students had refused to hand in their Leed and Nakhimovsky books, I'm sure they would not have been punished. Nevertheless, the net effect is the same as confiscation by Soviet customs.

Therefore, my accusation is milder: the ACTR is performing functions appropriate to the KGB. If the Soviets wish to act improperly, well, we expect that and understand that and know that that is their history. But to perform their functions for them is quite another matter.

It is reasonable to ask what the consequences would be if you were *not* to confiscate such books. There is one imaginable but not realistic consequence: that the students themselves would be harmed. No ill consequences befall such travelers. They are not imprisoned. They are not maltreated, except perhaps for verbal abuse, which is anyhow something of educational value. Rather, the books are merely confiscated. If a traveler tries to import multiple copies, of, say, the Holy Bible, then the traveler may be denied entry, but that is the worst that can happen. Consequences to the ACTR program itself are another matter; one cannot be sure of them, as much depends on how our government responds.

Some people apply the term "anti-Soviet" to our books. In the USSR the term "anti-Soviet" has meaning because the term contrasts with other terms. For example, a Soviet citizen who is not anti-Soviet can fairly be described as a "loyal Soviet citizen." The term "anti-Soviet" has official status in Soviet law and in the Soviet constitution. In American English, however, the term "anti-Soviet" has no such definite meaning...

We authors have discussed the question of whether our books are "anti-Soviet," despite the questionable semantic status of this term in American English. We have concluded that the content of these books is, rather, "objective," at least

in comparison with other textbooks used in the USA. We have support for this contention from Soviet readers. A copy of our *Advanced Russian* which escaped the notice of Soviet customs and American exchange organizations found its way into a Soviet dormitory a couple of years ago and was avidly read aloud by some Soviet students. They laughed heartily and said of the descriptions of Soviet life found in the book: "That's exactly the way it is here!"

Let me return to the term anti-Soviet as it is used in the USA. I have been puzzled by it for some time now. People will tell me that I (or our books) am anti-Soviet, and I don't know how to respond. Nobody calls himself pro-Soviet in our country, no matter how much work he does for the KGB (wittingly or not). How can I be anti if nobody is pro?...

I would like to ask you to make up for ACTR's lapse in judgment. You have contacts with the people in the Soviet journal *Russkij Jazyk za rubezhom*. Could you ask them to review the books that our team has produced? Or send in a review, perhaps? Our books have been reviewed in a number of countries. It is odd indeed that a series of non-Soviet Russian textbooks, well-reviewed and widely-used, should not be reviewed in a Russian journal entitled "Russian Language Abroad."

Sincerely yours,  
[signed: Dick]  
Richard L. Leed

*I received a very civil and detailed reply to my letter. The letter describes the incredible trials the Soviet authorities could put anybody through if they wanted to, and often did, such as body searches, isolation, threats, and the like. All of that was very true, but the phrase "protect the delicate web of relationships" in one paragraph has stuck in my mind to this day:*

The rule concerning non-Soviet Russian publications is promulgated, by the way, by the U.S. Department of State and adhered to not only by ACTR, but by CIEE, IREX [other exchanges], the National Academy of Sciences, and any other of the non-tourist related negotiated exchanges. It is not there to keep us from offending the Soviets: rather it is there to protect the delicate web of relationships both here and within the Soviet Union that make it possible for your students and mine to spend a summer, a semester, or an academic year in the Soviet Union.

*My reaction at the time was, and still is, that the existence of communist governments elsewhere on the planet makes liars of us all.*

*How did I ever get involved in higher education in the first place? It is not something I strove for, like one strives for courage. It was more like cowardice: I just kind of fell into it without hardly even trying.*

*Foreign languages interested me in my youth, and Russian seemed to be an interesting, exotic language, though it turned out to be a fairly normal Indo-European language when I learned more about linguistics. That was back when Capitalist America and Communist Russia were allies in the war against National Socialist Germany, otherwise known as World War II, and there was a lot of pro-Soviet propaganda in American journalism and film, plus wonderful recordings of the Red Army Chorus singing wonderful Red Russian patriotic songs—attractions that faded with the onset of the cold war, but my interest in the language was undiminished, despite the fact that such studies were viewed with great suspicion by the general populace. My parents never objected. As my mother told a couple of FBI agents who came around to our house in Lititz to investigate me, who had been reported to the government as a subversive character by my girl-friend's irate mother, "My boys like to argue a lot, but they're not communists." What my girl-friend's mother was irate about need not concern us here—indeed, it is none of your damn business—but it is still another example of how totalitarianism in a far away country can influence the relationship between government and citizen, parent and child, boy and girl-friend's mother, right here at home.*

*What my mother didn't know was that in fact I was a communist of sorts—an anti-Soviet communist. In college I had gotten acquainted with a bunch of Trotzkyites of the Shachtmanite persuasion who were Marxists, but had good reason for opposing the Soviet Union: Stalin had hired somebody to put a pick-ax through Trotzky's head while in Mexican exile. My interest in such things, my mediocre performance as a college student, and my abruptly quitting college several times, led my father to say later of my higher education, "If I had known this is what was to become of you, I never would have given you a nickel." Though angry, he used no expletives. There are only three attested instances of his using foul language.*

*In Oberlin, where I went to college but where no courses in Russian were offered, such courses being very rare in the U.S., I picked up some Russian words from a local tailor, from my art professor's wife for whom I baby-sat, from a Czech student who disappeared in the spring of 1948 probably to return to Czechoslovakia to take a post in the newly installed communist government, and finally, in the summer of 1954, some formal training in the*



*Middlebury Summer School of Languages, where I went because I didn't know what else to do. Perhaps I would become a high school language teacher, I thought. I didn't really know, and I didn't apply for any job, and I had never taken any courses in education and wasn't acquainted with the word 'certification.'* Sometime in August, near the end of the summer session, one of my teachers asked me what I was going to do in the fall, and when I said I didn't know, she said *Why not come to Cornell? That's where she taught Russian. Why not indeed?* I applied, with no Graduate Record Examination, which perhaps didn't exist anyhow at the time, and was accepted for September admission in the Department of Modern Languages, where linguistics was taught. I had heard of Cornell as 'a hotbed of linguistics' when I was in Oberlin, so *Why not? Maybe I would still become a high school teacher, but with a Master's Degree in hand.* I ran out of money at the end of my first semester, but my professor offered me a job co-managing an Air Force Czech language program. Knowing no Czech, I naturally said *Why not?* It brought in such a good salary (\$3,000 then was worth \$17,150 in 1994 dollars) that I felt financially secure enough to get married, which I did, though the program soon moved to Syracuse and I was demoted to teaching assistant. When the time came to get my Master's, my teachers said *Why not go on for a PhD?* So I did, never having had any intention or ambition or desire to do any such thing. After three years of study, my professor was planning to spend a year in India (he was more of an Indo-Europeanist than a Slavacist) and I was offered a one-year acting assistant professorship to fill in for him provided I finish my dissertation, so I submitted the shortest PhD dissertation in the history of Cornell and got my degree, but not before the Soviet Union launched the first artificial satellite of the earth, Sputnik, causing such a panic in the USA that Congress passed the National Defense Education Act supplying gobs of money to anybody who would study Russian. Enrollment in Beginning Russian tripled just in time for me to start my career. It was like learning to ride a horse on a wild stallion. I had no idea what I was doing, but I did it and kept on doing it for forty years. It was all an accident. I had stumbled up the academic ladder, got tenure, became chairman of the department, and, in fact, didn't do too bad a job of it. I co-authored and edited a dozen books, built a phonetics lab, and in general did my duty. But it was all an accident.

I really liked teaching small groups of students, but I was scared stiff of public speaking, giving speeches, delivering papers at meetings, or speaking to any group of more than 30 people. I still am. I will never give a public speech, ever. As long as I live. Here is something I wrote after giving a talk—a very good one, actually, that one student listener said was the best he heard since he came to Cornell, and he didn't look like a freshman, either.

*I addressed this letter to Lora, but it has no date on it. The only copy I have is from an obsolete printer, so it must be from the mid-eighties. The 'Colleague' referred to is her husband, Slava, my co-author on a number of books. She also taught Russian and has excellent taste in literature—one of my fans.*

Dear Lora,

This is my report to you of the speech I gave at the EZRA conference on computer-assisted instruction, a speech that Your Colleague talked me into giving. You may tell Your Colleague that I have tried to forgive him for talking me into giving a speech to 60 perfect strangers. I have tried and tried and finally succeeded.

Here's what happened. The day before the conference I accidentally looked at my calendar at home and saw the word EZRA in the block under the heading 'Tuesday.' That night I had bad dreams.

The next morning I took a shower out of deference to my audience and then I heated a bottle of milk to feed a lamb, which I did after walking through the barnyard shit and soiling my conference pants which I had put on after my shower. Then I hurried to the University, because my calendar failed to say what time of day my talk was scheduled for. I thought maybe it was in the morning. It wasn't. It was in the afternoon. So I spent the morning listening to other people's speeches. If they saw me in the audience they probably thought "How nice of Dick to come and listen," not realizing the accidental nature of my rapt attention. On the other hand, they probably couldn't have cared less about me. I, on the other hand, cared a lot about me: I did not want to talk to 60 perfect strangers.

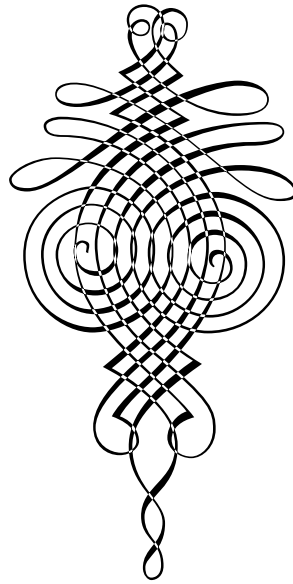
I ate lunch in my office alone, because it is easier to fret and worry and be anxious when you are alone. Then I went to the lecture room a bit early, so that I could introduce myself to the chairman of the panel. I figured she would not recognize me and might be embarrassed if she had to introduce a speaker by saying "Is Professor Leed in the auditorium?" instead of "Ladies and gentlemen, may I present Professor Leed?" I was right. She didn't know me. And I didn't know her. We were perfect strangers.

She asked me to sit in the front row, which made me even more nervous. I was to be the third speaker. I listened to the first speaker: what I remember most about his talk is thinking that I'll be next after the other guy. And what I remember most about the other guy's talk is I'm next. The closer my turn came, the sweatier my palms, the faster my heart.

Then it struck: “Our next speaker is Professor Richard Leed.” Instantly the palms stopped sweating, the heart stopped racing. Richard Jekyll Leed the professor-scholar was transformed into Richard Hyde Leed the actor-buffoon. I was on stage!

The talk went well. I had people laughing from beginning to end. They applauded, which was all that I or any other actor could have wanted. The subject matter of my talk didn’t matter much to me, so long as people laughed and applauded. And that is why I don’t like pretending to convey information to 60 perfect strangers. If I had been hired as a stand-up comic, I wouldn’t have minded.

I have appeared on the stage many scores of times, as an actor, master of ceremonies, joke-teller, speech-maker, instrumental musician, singer, concert band director, swing band director, etc. All that was mostly between the ages of 5 and 18, and mostly done without excessive good taste. Stage fright is a unique thrill, and for some professionals a necessary prerequisite to performance. I loved it. But I gave it up to become a butcher. Unfortunately, I then got miscast into the academic world.



## 9 – Various

*Gerry and I took a trip to Switzerland in the winter of 1985–86.*

### Report on Switzerland

There are no cars in Switzerland over 6 years old. I checked on this, even in small rural villages. Older cars are sent south to the slums of Europe, to people that have to speak languages like Spanish or Turkish. The lack of rusty cars and auto graveyards helps keep the country clean and rich, though it isn't really a country. It's more like a couple of counties north of New York City in NY and CN whose slums are also to the south.

Switzerland is a multilingual country where large numbers of French speakers do not admit to knowing German and sometimes English.

Overall, my trip to Europe was useless in changing my fixed prejudices. Europeans seem to be as naïve and provincial as they always were. Their tribal way of life does not allow them to change too much too fast or to lose their basic hatreds, though women can now vote in some or maybe even all cantons of Switzerland. I made a couple trips into France and noticed that French bread is less glutenous than it was 34 years ago on my last visit; it is more crumbly and fine, but is still nice and crusty, though I don't think too much significance should be attached to this in terms of general European polity. The main thing to note about Europe is that Germany hasn't started a war for the fourth time in 116 years yet, which makes it 3 years longer now than between the first and second times.

Every Swiss household has an automatic rifle, just like the American Constitution and the National Rifle Association says we ought to. However, Swiss teenagers, unlike Kansans, don't use them to shoot traffic signs. Swiss transportation engineers have installed big curved mirrors at blind intersections to serve as temptations to the young, but we saw none shot out. Some progress is being made with graffiti, and we saw some nice stone walls defaced, though amateurishly.

Swiss eat cheese, chocolate, and cigarette butts. Every restaurant we went into was filled with smoke from people smoking, but we saw no cigarette butts anywhere, neither on floors, nor streets, nor busses. Switzerland is so neat it makes Lancaster County Pa. look sloppy.

*Here's a piece that was published in Reason magazine, the leading libertarian journal, in May of 1996. It expresses some of the reservations I have about libertarians, but I enjoy reading their stuff. Some of them are pretty bright, though one finds more humor and good spirits in journals like the National Review and the American Spectator. In general, there has been more wit on the Right than on the Left over the last couple of decades—reason enough to trim one's political views accordingly.*

## Corporate Harassment

**With great amusement and pleasure** I read Thomas W. Hazlett's "Corporate Rakeovers" (February) in which he mocks the Baptists for harassing the Disney corporation, the federal government for harassing the Hooters chain, and Hollywood for harassing corporate Vegas. Corporation bashers deserve all the bashing they can get.

It is certainly true that corporations are fair game in some people's minds. One of my colleagues shoplifts only from chain stores, never from mom-and-pop establishments. She may be an intellectual, but she knows the difference between good and evil.

What bothered me about the article was the lumping of Baptists, federal law, and Hollywood all together. When any individual or group of people does something stupid, I don't really mind; it usually just makes me laugh. But when the

law does it, it is a crime, and I get mad. I am perfectly willing to laugh at the foibles and hypocrisies of the Baptists, and even at those of my fellow professors (though they are a more dangerous crowd, to be sure), but I can't laugh at a pernicious, nationwide public policy that is enforced by fines, imprisonment, confiscations, and the like.

If Disney loses money because of the Baptists' agitation—tough. After all, K-mart loses money every time you shop at Wal-Mart. Just a bit of creative destruction and spontaneous reordering. But when Hooters loses money because of federal law, it is an outrage.

I realize that many libertarians don't like either kind of limitation on their freedom of choice, social or governmental. But to an Old Whig liberal the distinction is what matters most.

*Richard L. Leed  
Ithaca, NY*

*Here is a letter of Gerry's that appeared in the Ithaca Journal in July, 1994, the year she died. Disease didn't destroy her mettle, and she used her knowledge of nature to make fun of the absurd arguments being put forth to keep WalMart out of town.*

I am astounded by the furor being caused by the Wal-Mart proposal to locate a store on S. Elmira Rd. It seems the moment some new corporate enterprise expresses a desire to serve Ithaca they are immediately cast in the role of villain, of someone attempting to gain control of our precious local assets.

Such negativism is hardly the way to stabilize the economic uncertainties of the area, or even to manage the environment.

Downtown, as a wide-spectrum shopping area, was destroyed years ago with the move to Elmira Rd. and then the arrival of Pyramid and other malls. The final demise was the removal of the Rothschild-McCurdy department store. Downtown Ithaca is now a specialty shopping area with different challenges and goals. Wal-Mart is hardly the villain, if indeed there is one.

Actually, a Wal-Mart to replace Woolworth's, Hills, and K-Mart might be an excellent solution to the sameness of merchandise and mundane appearance. None of the above three stores is exactly a bastion of quality architecture, goods, and service. Wal-Mart could perhaps be in a position to offer the Ithaca community better on all counts!

I marvel at the sudden interest in a small scrap of Ithaca flood plain largely ignored for decades, now claimed to consist of rare wetlands, fern groves, and majestic trees.

I am amused when someone is awestruck by the magnificent Box Elder (considered a nuisance in my native southeastern Pennsylvania) and stately Cottonwood trees (a weed tree on which, as I recall, some expense in time and money was spent in an attempt to eliminate it from Cass Park a few years back). Black Willow no doubt have been in the area for a hundred years or more, as they, too, readily root themselves.

All three trees are rapid growers, reaching "stately proportions" in 30 years or less.

We are not dealing with primeval forest here but a mere scattering of trees common to the area which spring up in my back fields on an annual basis.

There seems a tendency here in our "enlightened" community to seek out something to demonize, something to view as a major threat, to be dealt with by drastic measures and confrontational action. By so doing we lose hold of what is truly significant as well as the ability to define what our appropriate goals should be. When everything is overblown or judged of the same importance, nothing is meaningful.

What has happened to moderation, to our ability to prioritize and to study a problem rationally? Compromise, contrary to current persuasion, is not a bad word! Let's try it. Instead of holding Wal-Mart hostage on our flood plain, let's invite them to show us their stuff; we just might like it! —Gretel R. Leed

*I received good letters from several doctors, including our dear friend Dr. Garner, after this appeared in the Ithaca Journal in January of 1997:*

In his letter to the editor printed in the January 16 issue of the Journal, Mr. Allan Eaglesham asks whether anyone can take comfort from Dr. Lowell Garner's statement that a pain-ridden terminally ill patient may receive "evasive and aggressive pain treatment, such as physically destroying nerve sites and portions of the spinal cord, implanting pumps that deliver morphine directly to the pain source or infusing local nerves?" He thinks not.

He is wrong. I in fact did take comfort from Dr. Garner's ministrations and so did my late wife. I can attest to Dr. Garner's expertise and diligence in alleviating pain and his deep concern for the welfare of his patients. What is truly painful is to see him and his work denigrated by somebody who obviously does not know him or his work.

Dr. Garner is an anaesthesiologist, but not one who merely puts people to sleep while the surgeon wields the scalpel. He considers the alleviation of pain while you are awake to be one of the major responsibilities of his profession. How ironic that he should be criticized for that very progressive notion by someone who finds pain undignified.

Mr. Eaglesham's letter contains misrepresentations as well as denigrations. He refers to "a bodily assault that destroys the spinal cord," but nowhere in Dr. Garner's statements and nowhere in medical literature, I'm sure, is there any recommendation to destroy the spinal cord.

Perhaps Mr. Eaglesham is guilty only of a bit of harmless exaggeration here, but later he refers to the Hippocratic oath as dictating the preservation of life at all costs. This is simply not true. The Oath says merely: First, do no harm. That is what we should expect from doctors. We should be able to have complete trust in them to do their job according to the Oath.

If you want to regulate or license assisted suicide, there is a more appropriate profession traditionally entrusted with the administration of death, namely, executioners, who likewise should have the trust of their clients to do their jobs effectively. But that is not the job for doctors.

I would also like to take issue with the notion that a request to disconnect life-support apparatus is a step towards assisted suicide, an opinion attributed to Dr.

John Ferger in the original Journal article of January 11. That is an awfully big step, one that would make a murderer of me and a suicide of my wife, which I refuse to accept. She died after untold suffering, despite the fine efforts of the doctors and staff of our local hospital, when we two concluded that there was no hope and that no more antibiotics should be administered. She died with real dignity, great courage, and no self-pity. There is a right way to die.

There is a certain glibness about advocating doctor assisted suicide. It is easy to say, but when the time comes, many advocates themselves fail to do what they had advocated, much as many pacifists end up participating in war. That is why there are so few requests for a Kevorkian — after all, he is in the news precisely because he and his activities are rare and scandalous, otherwise they wouldn't be news.

It is also easy to be in favor of having somebody else do a nasty job for you instead of doing it yourself. It is easier to eat a pork chop than to slaughter a hog, which may account for why most people don't do their own butchering. It is easier to advocate abortion than to pull a well-formed premature baby dead from the womb, which is why many nurses and doctors, who experience revulsion during the procedure, refrain from doing it. Asking doctors to take life and break their oath is easy for some people, apparently, but is it ethical to even ask them to do it?

As for the propriety of suicide itself, there are certainly cases where it has been socially acceptable, as, for example, a captain deliberately going down with his ship. Macaulay, over a century ago, had some eloquent words to say in defense of assistance to suicide: "The soldier who, at the entreaty of a wounded comrade, puts that comrade out of pain, the friend who supplies laudanum to a person suffering the torment of a lingering disease, the freedman who in ancient times held out the sword that his master might fall on it, the high-born native of India who stabs the females of his family at their own entreaty in order to save them from the licentiousness of a band of marauders, would, except in Christian societies, scarcely be thought culpable, and even in Christian societies would not be regarded by the public, and ought not to be treated by the law, as assassins."

But even Macaulay refrained from listing doctors as acceptable assisters. And even if we ignore the sinfulness of suicide and legally empower somebody or other to assist a suicide, we would do well to leave doctors out of it. —Richard L. Leed



## HAPPINESS AND GRATITUDE AND VICE VERSA

I don't buy self-help books or see psychiatrists because either I am so crazy I'm beyond help or my mental health is so good I don't need any—I can't decide which. But I bought a sort of self-help book because a reviewer picked up an idea in it that fascinated me and because I had heard of the author and wanted to know more about him. The book is called *Happiness is a Serious Problem*. It is by Dennis Prager, a talk radio guy. It embarrasses me to see it on my coffee table, but it is not a bad book; in fact, it is a good one for its kind, if you go in for that kind of thing, which, as I say, I don't.

The idea that fascinated me was this: "We tend to think that it is being unhappy that leads people to complain, but it is truer to say that it is complaining that leads to people becoming unhappy." It's not that happy people are grateful people because they are happy, but that happy people are happy people because they are grateful. To a large degree, it is the expression of gratitude itself that brings happiness. You'll be a lot happier if you just say Thanks a lot and don't whine.

It is a simple lesson and doesn't take long to learn—only 50 some years in my case.

Living alone, I talk to myself sometimes, and a lot of times—daily, let's say—I talk to my dead wife. (Maybe this is sick, maybe this is healthy, but I don't much care which, because I enjoy hearing myself so much.) I say God bless you, my dear sweet Gerry. Or Thank you Gerry for making me happy. Or May your soul rest in peace. Short little impulsive things like that. It was she who brought the contentment and serenity and quiet happiness to the last decade of our life together, free of even a single harsh word or raised voice. She gave me that gift and it has lasted beyond her life and made me a happy man even without her and despite the grief. I am daily amazed by my willingness to stay alive without her being with me in the flesh. I like to talk, and she was the only person in my life that I could talk to without reservation, even though I often talk to people too much without enough reservation and blurt out a lot of things I shouldn't ought to. She put up with me with great patience and good humor, God bless her. I am thankful every day, and until I read this book I didn't realize that my thankfulness—for which I take no credit, because it is the giver of the gift that deserves that—was one of the sources of my happiness. And I mean

thankfulness not just in being thankful in some general way, but actually saying Thanks out loud. That seems to be an important part of it. Like praying. You don't just think the Lord's Prayer, you say it out loud. Silent prayers may be ok in mixed company, but it's hard to avoid thinking Gee, it's quiet in here while they are being unspoken.

Mr. Prager notes that most prayers are expressions of thanks rather than pleas for favors. That is why prayer can contribute to happiness. "People who give thanks to God before each meal... inculcate gratitude in themselves. Can a secular family invoke gratitude at each meal? In theory, yes. The family members can bow their heads and thank the farmer who planted and harvested their food, the truckers who shipped it to market, and the local supermarket. But I have never heard of a family doing so."

Every little pleasure is a great joy for me. I get delightful little pangs of joy quite often over very small things, like chickadees, though also over my new Camry. A half year from now I will have lived my three score and ten and maybe I'll get invalid, or at least less valid than I am now, and I do get a bit concerned over the worry and bother that will bring my children, but mostly I am grateful for my present good health. A bad cold has its bright side—at least it's not prostate cancer, though that bit of gratitude usually occurs to me as I am getting over it, I must admit.

Count your blessings, they say. Well, here's a list of all the things I am grateful for, starting with those chickadees. When I see one, sometimes only two feet away from me on my feeder, I say Hello, my little chickadee, because I am fond W. C. Fields movies. When a crow alights on a nearby tree, I say Hé bonjour, Monsieur du corbeau! Que vous êtes joli! Que vous êtes beau! because of the beautiful volume of La Fontaine fables I bought when I was in college. Then there is the red-tailed hawk, the ring-necked pheasant, the great blue heron, the wild turkey, the turkey vulture, the gull, the mallard, the Canadian goose, the red-breasted, red-headed, and hairy woodpeckers (haven't seen a piliated this year), the mourning dove, the common pigeon, the blue jay, the barn swallow, the tufted titmouse, the white-breasted and the red-breasted nuthatch, the brown thrasher, the catbird, the cowbird, the mockingbird, the robin, the wood thrush, the red-winged blackbird, the grackle, the starling, the Baltimore oriole, the slate-colored junco (or junk-colored slato as I sometimes call him, just for amusement), the cardinal (who I usually address as either

Mr. or Mrs. because the sexes are so distinctively beautiful and they mate with fidelity), the indigo bunting, the rufus-sided towhee, the gold finch, the house finch, the house sparrow, the white-throated sparrow, the white-crowned sparrow, the American tree sparrow, the field sparrow, the song sparrow, our favorite little sparrow the chipping sparrow, the ruby-throated hummingbird, the killdeer, the rose-breasted grosbeak, the great horned owl, who I hear out of sight, like the barn owl, and even the redpoll passing through, the first one I remember seeing since 1957 when they invaded Tompkins County and stayed the winter, but not yet this year the grouse, bobwhite, phoebe, or sharp-shinned hawk, though I suspect his presence when all of the other birds quietly disappear all of a sudden.

That makes about 50 blessings. Now for the flowers I'm grateful for: ...on second thought, there are so many things from chickadees to Camries to dear friends and relatives, I think I won't list anything else other than my dear sweet Gerry and our three children and their three spouses and our grandchildren, however many they may turn out to be. In fact, I think I won't bother finishing the book. Maybe I'm not entirely happy without Gerry, but half a life is better than none, and at least I'm satisfied, content, and serene, not to mention grateful.



Gerry and her brothers, 1990

