

**IRAN 1953: WHAT  
REALLY HAPPENED**  
RAY TAKEYH

the weekly

# Standard

JUNE 17, 2013

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## A FREE SCHOOL GROWS IN LONDON

**SAM SCHULMAN**

on Toby Young's reincarnation  
as a successful  
education reformer

A Latin class  
at West London  
Free School

PHILIP DUNLOP

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**COVER: ELEANOR BENTALL**

# The Rules of Heckling

For the record, and strictly speaking, THE SCRAPBOOK is opposed to heckling. It's rude, ill-mannered—and reflects poorly on the heckler, not the object of derision. This attitude may come as a surprise to, say, our friends in Great Britain, where Parliament resembles a bear pit at times, and every politician has a ready repertoire of snappy comebacks and devastating put-downs. But our political culture is different, as any C-SPAN viewer knows: The system of checks and balances demands a high level of civility, and public deference, no matter how insincere.

So we were intrigued last week when Michelle Obama found herself being heckled. It was a rare occasion. To begin with, it is almost invariably presidents, not first ladies, who find themselves being publicly harried. And no doubt to the disappointment of MSNBC, the person who verbally challenged Mrs. Obama was not a Tea Party stalwart or dreaded Republican but a gay rights activist named Ellen Sturtz—and at a Democratic fund-raiser in Washington, no less. THE SCRAPBOOK, which is sometimes accused of rhetorical heckling, can

look at this particular incident with strict objectivity.

And to our surprise, we find that the gathering consensus seems to be that, while no one condones the bumptiousness of Ms. Sturtz, Michelle Obama seems not to have performed so well. (*Washington Post*: “Obama at first seemed flummoxed by the interloper. And then, in a rare display of public pique, she turned stern and combative.”) For one thing, she broke the cardinal rule of heckle control by being obviously, and rather dramatically, flustered. Instead of acknowledging the heckler by telling her politely to zip it (her husband's standard technique), Mrs. Obama strode away from the microphone, and evidently feeling sorry for herself, said to no one in particular, “One of the things I don't do well is *this*”—and then, directly to the heckler: “Do you understand?”

Naturally, Sturtz, who was complaining that President Obama has not signed some gay-rights executive order, took this as an invitation to seize the microphone and hijack the event. Which is understandable: It has long been standard operating

procedure on the left to interrupt conservative speakers, storm the podium, and arrogate the right to state grievances at will. But Mrs. Obama was in no mood for polite deference, and angrily addressing both her friendly and unfriendly audience, said that Sturtz either could “listen to me, or you can take the mic. But I'm leaving! You all decide. You have one choice.”

Well, of course, a backyard full of Democratic fat cats and union functionaries was not about to let Michelle Obama storm off the premises: Ellen Sturtz was hustled away, and the first lady resumed her informal (teleprompted) remarks.

THE SCRAPBOOK, as we mentioned, is inclined to give the benefit of the doubt to anyone interrupted by hecklers. But there was something characteristic—curiously Obamaesque, if you will—about the first lady's reaction. Thrown off balance by a verbal left hook, her visceral response was self-pity, then anger directed at the wrong target. The president, we fear, seems to have the same instincts: Contempt for critics, followed by fury. Ellen Sturtz may now expect, at the very least, an IRS audit. ♦

## The Greatness of Elephants

One of THE SCRAPBOOK's favorite journals is the Ethics and Public Policy Center's quarterly, *The New Atlantis*. TNA, which has just celebrated its 10th anniversary, is concerned with unpacking matters of technology and science, and grappling with how such advances relate to human nature. If you're a Leon Kass fanboy—and, really, who isn't?—*The New Atlantis* is your *Tiger Beat*.

The latest issue features an amazing piece by Caitrin Nicol titled, suggestively enough, “Do Elephants Have Souls?” In it, Nicol grapples with the majestic beasts, explaining

what we know about them (they bury their dead; they practice art; they communicate not infrasonically, but seismically) and asking, well, whether elephants might have souls.

Nicol is making a very careful, and very heterodox, argument. She rejects the reductive reasoning of Peter Singer—a rat is not a fish, nor is it a pig, nor a dog, nor a boy. She is, instead, suggesting that on the continuum with a nematode at one end and homo sapiens at the other, elephants are probably much closer to our end of the scale. And that we ought to properly appreciate the beauty of this fact.

Some conservatives fear this beauty because they worry that recognizing soulfulness in an animal might

lead to PETA-style hippie mischief or worse—the utilitarian Singer-ism which erodes human dignity. But Nicol does a fine job of explaining why this fear is misplaced, and why an embrace of the elephant can only serve to deepen our humanity:

Staff members at the Elephant Sanctuary told me of an incident with one of their “girls,” who spotted a fallen bird outside her barn and ran right over to it, utterly distraught. She crooned and stroked it and did not settle down till it had been properly laid to rest. What did this mean to her, exactly? We don't know. But she was clearly very moved by a fellow creature's woe and had no trouble seeing it for what it was, different life forms though they were. How sad when we,

“higher” animals who share this gift, convince ourselves to dull it.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31). If a single little bird is worth the all-consuming grief of Dulary the Elephant and the cosmos-animating mind of the Father of Creation, and human worth surpasses that, then what is there to lose in holistically appreciating the life of this one bird, even insofar as it resembles ours? And how much more than the bird an elephant, which by its own extraordinary nature shows that all species are not equal—but is a portal to the world of non-human life, and the possibilities therein.

All hail the elephant. And all hail  
*The New Atlantis.* ♦

## Word to Your Mutter

The Germans are famous for melding nouns and adjectives together to form extremely long words. No hyphens, no spaces, just an assemblage of letters and umlauts as menacing as a mechanized division. For instance, the German word for xenophobia is *Ausländerfeindlichkeit*. In Austria prior to its EU membership, a foreign student visa was known as an *Aufenthaltsbewilligung*. The word for foreign travel health insurance protection? Try *Auslandskrankenversicherungsschutz*. And while we’re at it, Frau Blücher!

But according to the London *Telegraph*, we can now retire a 63-letter behemoth, *Rindfleischetikettierungsüberwachungsaufgabenübertragungsgesetz*. That’s the word for a “law for the delegation of monitoring beef labelling,” which “has been repealed by a regional parliament after the EU lifted a recommendation to carry out BSE tests on healthy cattle.”

“In theory,” notes the *Telegraph*, “a German word can be infinitely long. Unlike in English, an extra concept can simply be added to the existing word indefinitely. Such extended words are sometimes known as *Bandwurmörter*—“tapeworm words.”



WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE ?

The London daily goes on to quote Mark Twain, who once said, “Some German words are so long that they have a perspective.” ♦

## Food for Thought

Connecticut last week became the first state to pass a law which requires all genetically modified food to carry a warning label; according to Connecticut senate president Donald E. Williams, “There is mounting scientific evidence showing that genetically modified foods are harmful to our health.”

Happily for everyone living outside Connecticut, Williams is wrong. In fact, to quote the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, “Foods derived from GM crops have been consumed

by hundreds of millions of people across the world for more than 15 years, with no reported ill effects.”

Genetically modified crops ought to be universally popular: being hardy by design, they require less pesticide and less farmland to duplicate the yields of nonmodified stock—which is to say, they tackle two of environmentalists’ *bêtes noires*, chemical pollution and deforestation. They also increase food supplies and lower prices; Norman Borlaug’s dwarf wheat saved hundreds of millions of people from starving to death in India and Africa.

But genetically modified crops are not universally popular, because of the hard work of neo-Luddites. Like parents who refuse to vaccinate their children, opponents of GMed food

have decided to embrace fear of something they don't understand. And that's their right; THE SCRAPBOOK strongly supports everyone's freedom to think whatever he wants, no matter how silly. The problem here is Connecticut legislators subordinating their judgment to rabble-rousers.

There's consolation in that Connecticut's new law is, for the moment, toothless—to take effect, four other northeastern states with populations totaling 20 million will have to pass similar measures. THE SCRAPBOOK hopes that neighboring state assemblies take their jobs more seriously. ♦

## Put Down the Bong and Back Away

An email from the National Cannabis Industry Association (yes, even the potheads have lobbyists now) landed in THE SCRAPBOOK's inbox last week. The PR blast announced: "30+ Cannabis Industry Leaders Head to D.C. to Deliver a Message to Congress: 'Tax Us—Fair-

ly.'" ("Legalize it, don't criticize it," sang reggae great Peter Tosh in 1976; "legalize it, tax and regulate it!" say today's Toshes.)

The email blast also announced that "Reps. Earl Blumenaur (D-OR), Ed Perlmutter (D-CO), and Jared Polis (D-CO) [will] discuss marijuana tax and banking policy reform." A friendly note to the National Cannabis Industry Association: Yes, correct spelling is a concession to bourgeois norms, but your friendly congressman's name is Blumenauer, not "Blumenaur." ♦

## Sentences We Didn't Finish

With budgetary tantrums in the Senate and investigative play-acting in the House, the Republican Party is proving once again that it simply cannot be taken seriously. This is a shame. I don't share the GOP's philosophy, but I do believe that . . . " ("Can the GOP grow up?" Eugene Robinson, *Washington Post*, May 31). ♦



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## A Man and His Rhubarb

**M**y wife says the only thing I'll plant is what I can eat. Not entirely true, I tell her. I point to certain things I've planted: the cluster of yellow iris in the side yard, the bunch of white iris in the backyard, and the large spread of irises of many colors in the front yard, under the crape myrtle.

You could say I like irises, which are beautiful flowers that no one eats, and my irises have stories. The yellow came from a bed beside my parents' house in Hillsboro, Texas, the white from the grounds of the house in Milledgeville, Ga., where Flannery O'Connor lived (her mother grew them), and the ones under the crape myrtle from local nurseries. Among the last are some reblooming irises, including one that opened for the third time in 2012 exactly a week before Christmas. Ever heard of such a thing?

But I digress. I do like to grow fruits and vegetables, and for that purpose many years ago we put into the side yard a raised garden bed. It's about 16 feet long, 6 feet wide, and 2 feet tall. The height of the bed has protected the soil and kept varmints out, and made it easy for the gardener (me) to work the soil.

Down through the years I've tended to go with the basics: tomatoes (though some years they just aren't good), green beans (they never fail), green peppers (ditto), and yellow squash (usually okay). I've stuck with blueberries (a perennial), which you have to scare the birds away from. And then there is a recent addition—rhubarb.

Several years ago Jill brought home from the farmer's market two small rhubarb plants. I'd eaten rhubarb in pies a time or two but didn't know much about it. I discovered (online,

at the excellent "Rhubarb Compendium") that it originated 2,700 years ago in Asia, where it still grows wild, and was brought to Europe during the Middle Ages. It was first used for medicinal purposes, but eventually someone figured out that it could be made into pies and other desserts.

Rhubarb, I further learned, is technically a vegetable. It's a perennial that



forms large rhizomes (underground stems) and grows big, heart-shaped leaves on long stalks. The leaves are toxic, while the stalks, rich in Vitamin C and dietary fiber, are the edible part. You harvest rhubarb by cutting the stalks at the soil line or pulling them out with a hard twist of the wrist.

I learned, too, that rhubarb does well in colder climates. Which made me wonder: How might it do around here—comparatively mild northern Virginia?

I knew it would take a while to find out the answer, since I'd also read that rhubarb needs a good two years for the roots to establish themselves and for the stalks to hold onto their leaves. For that reason, you're advised not to harvest stalks in a plant's first year and to take only a small harvest

in its second, selecting stalks an inch or more thick and leaving the rest. By the fourth year you can harvest whenever you have mature stalks.

The first year, the stalks and leaves of our rhubarb fairly jumped out. It was hard to resist the urge to harvest at least a few stalks, but I waited, and I took only a small harvest in the second year.

Not yet into their fourth year, our plants are, well, huge and growing. Here in late spring they stand almost four feet tall. Some leaves are 20 inches long. The stalks are about the same length, green on one plant, and pink and red on the other. Harvesting the stalks—I've already cut a few this year—constrains the plants' growth not at all. Of course, the summer heat may slow it. But if the pattern from last year holds, our plants will renew their strength in the cooler days of fall.

Already I can see that early next year I'll be digging up root masses and dividing the crowns. So we'll have more rhubarb plants—insurance, I guess, against the decline of our first two, which are supposed to remain productive for 8 to 15 years.

If we had planted our rhubarb in the yard amid my wife's many shrubs and flowers, you might mistake them for decorative plants. They look that good. That's why the best descriptions of rhubarb take into account its appearance as well as its taste, which I have refrained from addressing until now. If you get the chance, order (or make, you bakers who are reading) a sweet-tart rhubarb pie.

If you agree it's hard to beat, thank the unknown Maine gardener who in the infancy of the Republic obtained rhubarb seed or rootstock from European sources and sold it to growers in Massachusetts. By 1822 it was on sale in produce markets, where doubtless it was oft chosen by partisans of good taste.

**TERRY EASTLAND**

# Born Free

In Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, the captive English maid, Blonde, scornfully rejects the advances of the powerful Osmin, overseer of Pasha Selim's harem: "Pasha here, pasha there! Girls are not good to give away! I am an Englishwoman, born free, and I defy anyone who wants to force me to do anything!"

More than two centuries later, Becky Gerritson, speaking to the House Ways and Means Committee about IRS harassment of the Wetumpka, Alabama, Tea Party, picked up the baton: "I am not here as a serf or vassal. I am not begging my lords for mercy. I'm a born free American woman, wife, mother, and citizen. And I'm telling my government that you've forgotten your place. It's not your responsibility to look out for my well-being and to monitor my speech. It's not your right to assert an agenda. Your post, the post that you occupy, exists to preserve American liberty. You've sworn to perform that duty. And you have faltered."

And so they have. Not that IRS bigwigs like Doug Shulman and Lois Lerner really believe that they faltered. They don't seem any more contrite about their bullying than Osmin was about his. The IRS poobahs aren't quite as imperious as Osmin—though they do seem to have followed the extravagant lead of Oriental seraglios when arranging their own conferences and conventions. But nothing has been more striking over the last few weeks than the annoyed dismissal by the IRS officials and their apologists, particularly the reprehensible representative Jim McDermott (D-Wash.), of the notion that their duty might be to serve the public rather than to boss them around. Nothing has been more striking than their complacent assumption that regular Americans out in the countryside enjoy their rights only at the sufferance and discretion of their political and bureaucratic masters in Washington.

That's the heart of the IRS scandal. It's about liberty. It's about self-government. As Becky Gerritson explained, "This was a willful act of intimidation to discourage a point of view. What the government did to our

little group in Wetumpka, Alabama, was un-American. It isn't a matter of fining or arresting individuals. The individuals who sought to intimidate us were acting as they thought they should in a government culture that has little respect for its citizens. Many of the agents and agencies of the federal government do not understand that they are servants of the people. They think they are our masters, and they are mistaken."

It's surely no coincidence that the IRS targeted Tea

Party groups. The Tea Parties are the clearest example in recent times of Americans coming together to act on their own, exercising what Tocqueville called the "art of association," an art crucial to self-government and threatening to the nanny state. Why did the IRS go after the Tea Parties rather than well-established conservative groups or even big Republican donors? Somehow the IRS sensed that the existence, the flourishing, and the possible success of Tea Parties represented a more fundamen-

tal threat to the soft despotism of the nanny state than more conventional conservative efforts.

The spirit of self-government manifested by the citizens who have formed and chosen to associate with thousands of local Tea Parties stands in deep opposition to the modern progressive bureaucratic state, which is all about top-down control by experts, not about citizens choosing to govern themselves. That's why liberals in Congress and the media, like the bureaucrats in the IRS, sense that somehow the Tea Party is a fundamental threat to their dominance. After all, why do liberals so loathe and fear the Tea Party? Isn't the movement unpopular, as the liberal media keep reminding us? Haven't Tea Party efforts often been ineffectual, and haven't they sometimes backfired, as the liberal media claim? If they really believed what they say, wouldn't liberals sit back and enjoy watching the Tea Parties take conservatism and the Republican party over the cliff?

But they don't sit back. They know the Tea Parties are a threat. They know what Osmin knows: When Blonde



Becky Gerritson testifies, June 4, 2013.

declares that “a heart that is born in freedom will never allow itself to be enslaved,” Osmin exclaims, “By Allah! She would be capable of making all the women rebellious against us.” The spirit of the Tea Party is capable of making Americans rebellious against their overseers in Washington. Thus the attempt to strangle this citizens’ movement in its cradle.

What is to be done by Republicans in Congress and conservatives outside? Investigate, investigate, and keep on investigating. Hold more hearings. Get the facts. Don’t take seriously the crocodile tears of liberal commentators, allegedly worried that Republicans might overreach. Sure, a few congressmen will say foolish things, and not every hearing will produce witnesses as eloquent and sympathetic as last week’s. But the key is to forge ahead, and to determine just what happened and just how pervasive the efforts to target inconvenient groups were.

Nor should Republicans become obsessed with the role of the White House. The notion that a scandal isn’t a scandal unless the president is personally involved is short-sighted. The point is not to indict the president, or some White House apparatchik, personally. The point is to indict the spirit of the Obama administration and of big government liberalism. The point is to defeat the president’s broad project to restore faith in big govern-

ment and to convince Americans to accept and embrace dependency on government.

Exposing the bureaucratic arrogance that lies beneath the claims of governmental benevolence, lifting the veil on the liberal yearning for domination and mastery that lies behind the expressions of sympathy and concern—these would be the real benefits of laying bare what happened at the IRS. As Evelyn Waugh once said about an attempt at oppression by the British Labour party, “There we have the progressive cat, a great brute of an animal, clear out of the bag.” The IRS scandal is the progressive cat, clear out of the bag.

Many conservatives are worried that the last election suggests a majority of Americans like that cat. We doubt it. One night last week Jay Leno remarked in his monologue, “President Obama says he’s renewing his efforts to close Guantánamo Bay. Guantánamo Bay? How about closing the IRS? Why don’t we do that?” Thunderous applause. Leno continued, “How about shipping the IRS to Guantánamo Bay?” Thunderous applause again. If Republicans proceed with the nerve of Blonde and the wit of Leno, they’ll get the thunderous applause they deserve. They should remember that at the end of the *Abduction*, a cheerful Blonde goes free, and a thwarted Osmin storms off the stage in impotent rage.

—William Kristol

## Hit the Road With Free Enterprise

**By Thomas J. Donohue**  
President and CEO  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

At the end of spring, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce welcomed small business owners and entrepreneurs from across the country to our annual America’s Small Business Summit in Washington, D.C., to make their voices heard. Now, with summer heating up, we’re hitting the road to see small businesses in action in towns and communities nationwide.

We’re going “On the Road With Free Enterprise,” a cross-country summer road trip to find and tell free enterprise stories all over America. At the wheel are Nate and Joe, a two-man team selected from more than 900 tour guide applicants and ultimately chosen by thousands of online supporters. Nate and Joe are longtime friends originally from Boston, who have written and reported on topics like entrepreneurship, innovation, and culture.

They will put their experience to work

on the road. Through social media, video, blogging, and good old-fashioned man-on-the-street interaction, they will tell the story of free enterprise where it lives. They will show what it means to our economy and why it is such an integral part of our daily lives.

The Chamber helped Nate and Joe kick off the tour at Nationals Stadium in Washington last week. The tour guides will visit more than 15 cities during their two-month journey, heading to the West Coast and back.

Along the way they will visit the mom-and-pop shops that run our economy. The tour will showcase examples of what makes this nation so great: hardworking folks who put it all on the line to pursue their dreams. When American entrepreneurs are free to build their own businesses, innovation thrives and jobs are born. What begins in the back of a food truck, or as a harebrained scheme in someone’s basement, can lead to businesses that enrich individuals and fuel our economy. Nate and Joe will also tour

some major corporations and manufacturing plants that contribute significantly to our economy and way of life.

Businesses of all sizes and sectors represent the free enterprise system at work in America. As that system comes under attack in our nation’s capital and by business opponents, it’s never been more important to show just what free enterprise means to Main Street. It means innovation, jobs, opportunity, prosperity, and hope. That’s why free enterprise must not only be celebrated and showcased but also protected and advanced. The Free Enterprise Tour is just one way we’ll do that this summer.

Nate and Joe will share all their experiences through daily reports from the road. You can be a passenger on this trip by following along, stop-by-stop, at [FreeEnterprise.com/tour](http://FreeEnterprise.com/tour) and on Twitter @FreeEnterprise #FEtour.



**U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**  
Comment at [FreeEnterprise.com](http://FreeEnterprise.com).

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# Losing the Middle East

After a three-week siege, the combined forces of Hezbollah and the Assad regime have taken the important crossroads town of Qusayr, which is just south of the even more important city of Homs in east-central Syria. “Whoever controls Qusayr controls the center of the country, and whoever controls the center of the country controls all of Syria,” crowed Syrian brigadier general Yalya Suleiman.

While that boast is as much propaganda as military fact, the capture of Qusayr is a happy moment for Bashar al-Assad—who has had few of them in recent years—and for Iran and its proxy Hezbollah, whose heavy investments in propping up the Syrian dictator appear to be paying off. Indeed, the Iranians “felicitated” Assad on the gain. As well they might, since the Syrian regime is becoming ever more dependent on Tehran; Assad’s army on its own had been unable to retake Qusayr.

This ought to be a further signal that, despite the predictions of some of the closest students of Arab politics, there is nothing inevitable about the fall of the House of Assad. Indeed, it may well be that the morale effects of retaking Qusayr prove more important than any tactical gain—although the deployment of large-scale and well-trained Hezbollah forces is also making a difference elsewhere in Syria. If they retake Aleppo, the effect on the Syrian opposition could be crushing. And strategically speaking, the momentum is with Iran. As former Obama State Department adviser Vali Nasr writes:

[E]vents in Syria are spinning in Iran’s favor. Assad’s regime is winning ground, the war has made Iran more comfortable in its nuclear pursuits, and Iran’s gains have embarrassed U.S. allies that support the Syrian uprising. What’s more, Iran has strengthened its relationship with

Russia, which may prove to be the most important strategic consequence of the Syrian conflict, should the U.S. continue to sit it out.

It would be rash to draw too many conclusions from a fight over a town of just 30,000 residents, but the specter that looms is nothing less than the near-complete collapse of the U.S. position in the Middle East. In dry-eyed retrospect, even the biggest Bush-bashers ought to acknowledge that, compared with where we are now, 2008—as the surge forced a halt to the civil war in Iraq and the foundations were laid for a similar effort in Afghanistan—represented a high-water mark of American power and influence in the region. Then, both allies and adversaries seemed to reckon that the U.S. commitment to reconstructing the region’s politics was a deep one.



*Assad’s tanks roll through Qusayr, June 5, 2013.*

But the “tide of war” turned with President Obama’s decision to put a time-clock on the Afghan surge. From that moment, the region increasingly has discounted the durability of the American commitment. The continuing retreat is both exposing and aggravating a multi-sided struggle for power across the western Muslim world. Across North Africa and southward through the Sahara, a congeries

of al Qaeda affiliates are encroaching on weak regimes, not least in Libya, where the U.S. intervened to topple Qaddafi and then abdicated. Across South Asia, a pack of predators looks to see what will come in Afghanistan in 2014. And, perhaps most ominously, the Syria war is now a regional conflict pitting an Iranian-Shia bloc against a looser Saudi-led Sunni bloc that includes other Gulf states and various al Qaeda associates. Indeed, if Qusayr is any kind of leading indicator, it signals that the war is likely to continue, and to continue to expand; it’s already spilled over into Lebanon, western Iraq, and northern Jordan.

It used to be the role of the United States to keep the worst from happening in the Middle East. That was not only a global public good but a critical component in reassuring allies elsewhere—not least in East Asia—whose economies rely upon the region’s energy supplies. To let the Middle East burn is to play with a very dangerous fire. After all, fires don’t usually burn themselves out if you refuse to fight them. Sometimes they spread and rage out of control.

—Thomas Donnelly

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# Gang of One

On immigration reform, Senator Marco Rubio is the indispensable man. If he bails, it fails.

Which is why supporters of overhauling our immigration system were alarmed by two statements Rubio made last week. They were uncharacteristic of the leader of a major reform effort. He was not upbeat.

Rubio said the immigration bill drafted by the Gang of Eight—four Democratic senators, four Republicans including Rubio—doesn't have the 60 votes needed for Senate approval. And he said he won't support the legislation unless tougher border security measures are added.

Had anyone but Rubio made such a threat, it might have gone unnoticed. But Rubio's role is pivotal. Without him, Senate passage of long overdue changes in immigration law would be in jeopardy. Prospects for House passage would be dimmed if not doomed.

And Republicans would suffer a strategic setback. The stigma—fair or unfair—that they're anti-immigrant, especially when it comes to Hispanics, would seem to be confirmed. Democrats and the media would certainly claim it had been. And the GOP's ability to win national elections and races in immigrant-heavy states would be diminished.

Worse, the country would be left with millions of residents here illegally but eager to become citizens. These are people for whom legal entry, after waiting for years, even decades, was never a real option. Nor is self-deportation today.

Since his election in 2010, Rubio has been the leading Republican advocate of immigration reform. Recognizing this, the other Republicans in the reform coalition—John McCain, Lindsey Graham, Jeff Flake—recruited him.

In recent weeks, Rubio has been talking to wary Republican senators and a few uncommitted Democrats. Interviewed on Hugh Hewitt's radio show, he said many may back the bill once convinced it will prevent "another wave of illegal immigration." That means the border security provisions must be tightened, he said.

Several Republicans are expected to offer strengthening amendments. One from Republican whip John Cornyn would mandate stricter border control, more Border Patrol agents, and a fully installed E-Verify system. Rubio has endorsed an amendment that "dictates the number of fences and also where they're located."

These would take effect a decade after the legislation becomes law. Before immigrants could get a green card and seek citizenship, the enhanced security would have to be in place. The amendments favored by Rubio are likely to be reasonable and politically necessary, not poison pills.

If they're rejected, Rubio said, "then I think we've got a bill that isn't going to become law and ... we're wasting our time." And he'd bail.

But he doesn't want to—despite unrelenting attacks from opponents of immigration reform, including many allied with Rubio on nearly every issue but immigration. For him, spurning their advice is risky.

Rubio remains committed to the "principles" spelled out by the Gang of Eight, one of which says a path to citizenship "is contingent upon securing our borders." Toughening security beyond what's in the bill is consistent with the gang's principles, Rubio believes.

He wants to increase the number of GOP senators voting for the bill to give it a Republican and conservative coloring. That should improve its chances in the House.

To keep immigration reform on track, two things need to happen. Rubio's brethren in the Gang of Eight must go along with security enhancing amendments. So far, they appear willing to.

Rubio made that easier by not insisting on a controversial step proposed by conservatives: a requirement the border be

fully under control before illegals can qualify as legal residents. This would lose Democratic votes.

The second involves Rubio personally. It would be a mistake for him to abandon the immigration bill even if the security amendments are spiked. Above all, Rubio must keep immigration reform alive. After Senate passage, there will be two opportunities to improve the bill, first in the House, then in House-Senate negotiations on a compromise. His influence will be critical at both stages.

In 1986, Representative Jack Kemp was under enormous pressure to vote against a tax reform bill, crafted by Democrats, that Republican leaders loathed. It set the top income tax rate at 38 percent and reduced the personal exemption. The bill passed narrowly with Kemp's vote, only to be drastically improved by the Senate. The top rate at final passage was 28 percent.

Like Kemp, Rubio will be vindicated once a fairer, more secure immigration system is the law of the land and Republicans are no longer shut out of the Hispanic community. Credit won't come soon. But when it does, Rubio will be first in line to get it.

—Fred Barnes

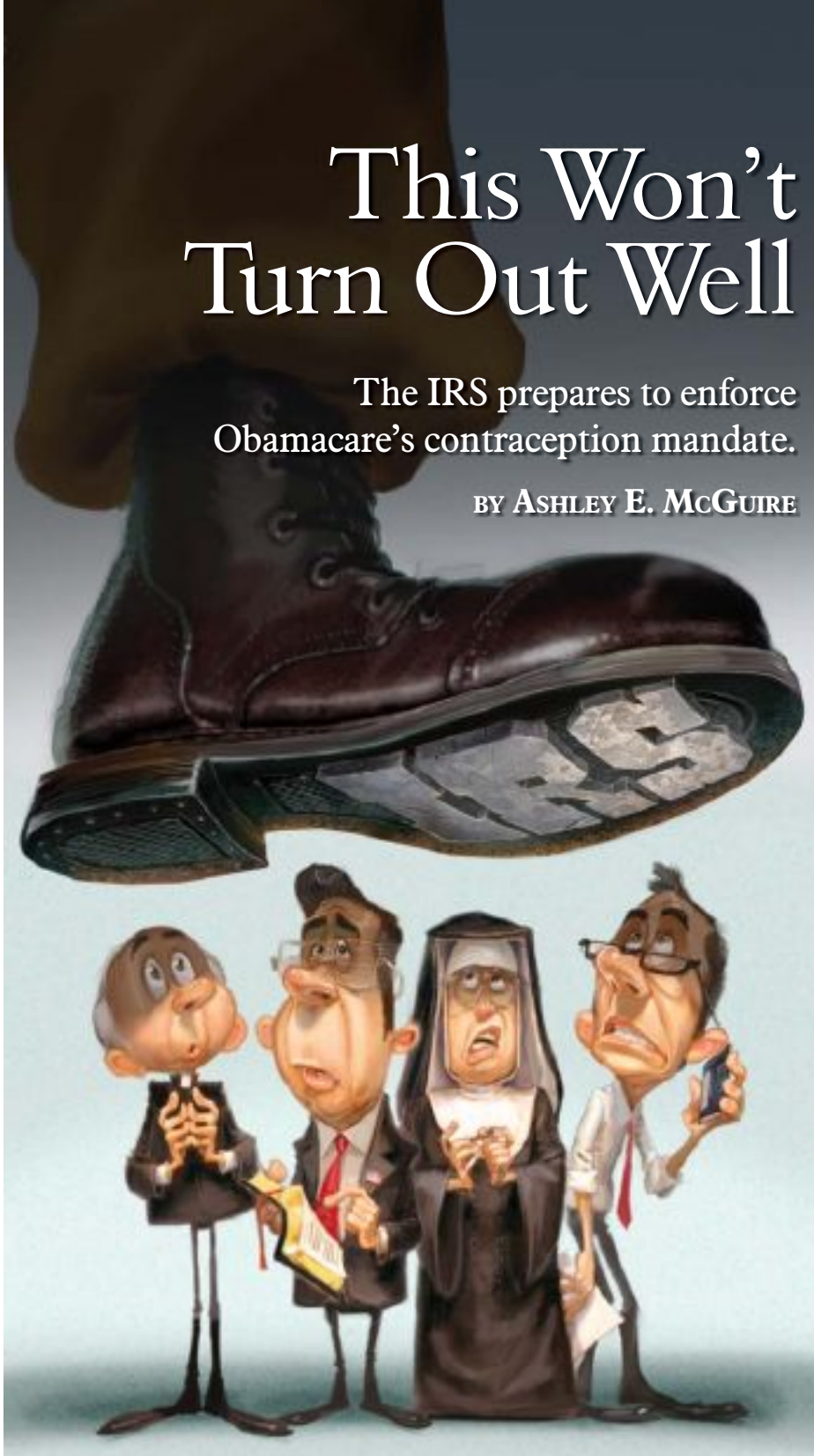


Marco Rubio, the indispensable man

# This Won't Turn Out Well

The IRS prepares to enforce Obamacare's contraception mandate.

BY ASHLEY E. MCGUIRE



**O**n August 1, the one-year “safe harbor” for religious charities objecting to provisions of Obamacare will end. Starting then, these nonprofit employers will be forced to violate their religious beliefs or pay large fines. In charge of

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collecting the fines will be our recently newsworthy friends at the Internal Revenue Service.

To recap how we got here: In 2010 a panel created by the new health care law determined that all health insurance policies provided by employers must cover contraception, sterilization, and abortion drugs free of charge. Employers not complying with this Health and Human Services (HHS)

mandate will be fined up to \$100 per employee, per day. For some, that could amount to millions of dollars a year.

The administration and its supporters promoted the mandate as necessary for women's health. They trotted out activist Sandra Fluke, who argued that women are withering under the pressure of having to pay for their own birth control. Never mind the fact that contraception can cost an insured woman as little as \$9 a month, and many without insurance have access to the same products through publicly funded programs like Title X. To question the necessity of the new requirement, its supporters said, was to make war on women.

Some have tried to create the impression that a compromise was brokered to accommodate the objectors' conscience concerns. But this is not so.

The original mandate included only a narrow religious exemption, for churches and other houses of worship, their “integrated auxiliaries,” and religious orders. This outraged many, including even some liberal Catholics. It is no small thing, after all, for plaintiffs of various faiths who believe that life begins at conception to be forced into complicity with murder when they provide their employees a drug whose own label warns it can destroy a fertilized egg. Nevertheless, the final rule was published on February 15, 2012, and went into effect for private companies on August 1, 2012.

Over 30 private businesses sued, and the Department of Justice has been flying its attorneys around the country to argue in court that business owners should check their religious beliefs at the door. So far, some 20 plaintiffs have been granted preliminary injunctions, meaning they don't have to comply with the mandate while waiting for the courts to rule on the merits of their cases. All eyes are on the Hobby Lobby case, just argued by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty before the Tenth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The financial stakes in this case are high, as the owners face potential fines of \$1.3 million a day for noncompliance with the mandate.

GARY LOCKE

Faced with the public outcry, the government did allow nonexempt religious organizations—hospitals, universities, charities, and so on—a year to get over their scruples and figure out how to comply. That year ends on August 1, when another 30 or so lawsuits filed by objecting nonprofits will be activated. But now, enter stage left: the IRS.

The way the regulation is written, it is the IRS that determines whether an organization qualifies for full exemption from the HHS mandate. To qualify, an organization must be a nonprofit as described in section 6033(a)(1) and section 6033(a)(3)(A)(i) or (iii) (oh, my!) of the amended Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and therefore exempt from filing Form 990, which most nonprofits must file annually.

Religious entities that do not qualify for the 990 exemption may seek alleged relief from the mandate by certifying to their insurance company that they cannot provide the objectionable services and products. The insurance company is then required to issue to each covered employee a separate policy covering contraception, sterilization, and abortifacients free of charge. So the employer is still in the position of facilitating the flow of objectionable services to his employees.

What's more, these employers must maintain their "self-certification" in their records for each plan year and make it available for examination upon request by "regulators, issuers, third party administrators, and plan participants and beneficiaries." The IRS may investigate and challenge any self-certification.

So the very enforcers at the IRS whose own inspector general admits they systematically targeted conservative and religious groups will now get to decide who is entitled to ladle soup into a bowl for a homeless person without violating his or her conscience.

As details of the IRS scandal continue to emerge, it's evident that religious values were indeed scrutinized by bureaucrats. A growing number of religious groups and charities are coming forward to report delays in their applications for tax-exempt status, including

the Catholics United Education Fund, Christian Voices for Life, and Focus on the Family affiliate Family Talk Action. Others, like Samaritan's Purse, underwent audits or other IRS scrutiny that seemed out of left field. One targeted group, the Coalition for Life of Iowa, was asked by the IRS about the content of its prayers.

What's more, Lois Lerner, the head of the IRS's division on tax-exempt organizations who was placed on administrative leave last month after declining to testify before a House committee, was rewarded with that job

after a history of harassing religious people in a previous position as head of enforcement at the Federal Election Commission from 1986 to 2001.

Having lost whatever reputation it had for politically neutral enforcement of the tax code, the IRS, come August 1, will nevertheless gain new authority to determine what constitutes religious activity and which religious employers are entitled to conscience rights under Obamacare. If the case for repealing this unjust intrusion on the free exercise of religion was always strong, in recent weeks it's gotten stronger still. ♦

## Republicans in the Good Old Days

They were just as conservative.

BY JAY COST

Former senator and Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole had some harsh words for his political party recently. In a *Fox News Sunday* interview, Chris Wallace asked, "You describe the GOP of your generation as Eisenhower Republicans, moderate Republicans. Could people like Bob Dole, even Ronald Reagan—could you make it in today's Republican party?" Dole replied, "I doubt it. Reagan wouldn't have made it. Certainly Nixon couldn't have made it, 'cause he had ideas. We might have made it, but I doubt it."

Left-wing commentators, sensing an opportunity, swooped in to feign sorrow about the state of their political opponents. The problem, argued the *New York Times* editorial page, is not simply that the GOP has shifted rightward; the party is no longer capable of constructive governance. A "furiously oppositional Republican party" has "mainstream conservatives like Mr.

Dole and Senator John McCain shaking their heads in disgust." Republicans "want to dismantle government, using whatever crowbar happens to be handy, and they don't particularly care what traditions of mutual respect get smashed at the same time."

Meanwhile, at the *Washington Post*, blogger Ezra Klein argued, "Over the last few years, the Republican party has been retreating from policy ground they once held and salting the earth after them. This has coincided with, and perhaps even been driven by, the Democratic party pushing into policy positions they once rejected as overly conservative."

Is the left-wing accurately analyzing the problems of the right-wing? For that matter, does Bob Dole understand his own party?

The idea that the GOP has shifted rightward over the last several generations is dubious at best. Consider the behavior of House Republicans during the Great Society Congress of 1965-66. That Congress produced Medicare and Medicaid, federal funding for

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education, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and more. On item after item, Republicans in the House opposed or tried to alter drastically these measures. In fact, none other than Bob Dole—then a representative from Kansas—was a regular vote against President Lyndon Johnson’s major reforms. Along with a majority of his own caucus, he voted against Medicare. He voted to reduce spending in LBJ’s war on poverty and retain state authority over funds. He voted against federal funding of elementary and secondary schools. He voted to cut spending for housing assistance. He voted to cut highway beautification programs. He voted to delay implementation of a new minimum wage floor. And so on.

History likewise suggests a skeptical verdict on another liberal complaint of the modern age—that Republicans used to be reliable supporters of the very sorts of programs President Barack Obama has been promulgating. Congressional Republicans opposed Harry Truman’s universal health care program after the 1948 election; Dwight Eisenhower himself disliked it. They opposed Ted Kennedy’s late-1970s proposal. They opposed Bill Clinton’s universal care plan in 1994. As for Obama’s massive 2009 stimulus, Republicans in 1993 successfully filibustered a stimulus that cost a tenth of Obama’s proposal. Leading the charge for the GOP that time? Senate minority leader Bob Dole.

Clinton’s struggles with congressional Republicans during the 103rd Congress of 1993-94 induced from the president a lament that should sound familiar to contemporary ears: He and his advisers were the true “Eisenhower Republicans”; the GOP had gone radically off the cliff. After the 1994 midterm elections, the Republicans gained control of Congress and forced a government shutdown over a budget impasse, surely a sign of the disregard for “traditions of mutual respect” that the *Times* is now tut-tutting over.

Liberal Democrats of the past—far from admiring Republicans for their inherent moderation and good sense—were well aware of the GOP’s

tendency to oppose their ideas, which helps explain why the *New York Times* has not endorsed a Republican presidential nominee in more than half a century. In its endorsement of Bob Dole’s opponent, the paper declared Bill Clinton could offer “protection from Republican excess.” Sound familiar? Of the welfare reform bill of 1996, which Bob Dole helped shepherd through the Senate, the *Times* editorial board—in a piece headlined “A Sad Day for Poor Children”—bemoaned, “This is not reform, it is



Bob Dole and Ronald Reagan in 1987

punishment.” It denounced the “harsh cut in food stamps,” the “extreme cuts in benefits for disabled children,” the “devastating” impact on cities. The paper derided the bill as “not fair” and “not humane.”

This jaunt through the last half-century suggests that in some respects Republicans have actually moved *leftward* over the years. Not on every issue, of course; the GOP can still be counted on to oppose Democrat-drafted pork barrel spending gussied up as “stimulus” and liberal designs for universal health care. But when they had complete control over the federal government from 2003 through 2007, Republicans did not eliminate the Department of Housing and Urban Development. They did not ditch Medicare Parts A and B. In fact, for the fiscal years when the GOP had total control of the budget-drafting process, discretionary nondefense spending averaged 3.8 percent of gross domestic product, about what it was during the Great Society and higher than during the Clinton years.

Here, Republicans have mostly

followed public opinion. As the American people have come to accept and expect an enhanced role for the federal government in daily life, the GOP has more or less signed off—exactly what we should expect it to do, considering that the main purpose of the party is to win elections.

So why are liberals complaining about the GOP’s lurch rightward in recent years? One obvious explanation is the “mobilization of bias.” You cannot win elections in this country as a radical; ergo, if liberals can successfully tag Republicans as radicals, then they can effectively eliminate the GOP as a competitor.

Another explanation concerns the rise of House Republicans, now the most dominant faction of the GOP within the government. For 40 years, between 1955 and 1995, the House GOP was a minority, even as Republicans won the White House and eventually the Senate. But since 1995, House Republicans have controlled the speaker’s gavel for all but four years, while Democrats have actually held the presidency for most of these years and the two sides have roughly split control of the Senate.

House Republicans are much more unruly, but a cursory read of the *Federalist Papers* suggests that this probably has as much to do with the nature of the House as with the nature of the GOP. Indeed, back in 1990, during the supposedly halcyon days of temperate, moderate Republican rule, it was the House GOP that stymied George H. W. Bush’s attempts to pass a bipartisan deficit reduction deal that included tax hikes, and in the end Bush had to cut a deal almost entirely with Democratic support. Current House Republicans also balk at tax hikes for deficit reduction.

But there may be a third, more subtle trend working its way through the political system, one that is acutely influencing Republicans, especially on the House backbench. At the height of the Great Society, polling found that more than 70 percent of Americans trusted the government to do the right thing “just about always” or “most of the time.” But with the Vietnam war,

followed by the scandals of the Nixon administration, then the incompetence of the Carter administration, that number plummeted to 25 percent by 1980. Several years of solid governance, from Ronald Reagan to the elder George Bush to Clinton, helped it rebound to about 45 percent by the 2000 election. But after a brief spike following the attacks on 9/11, trust in the government has once again declined. A Pew poll taken in January found the percentage of people who mostly trust the government to be a pathetic 26 percent, while 73 percent mostly distrust it.

The public is responding rationally to the manifest failure of the federal government to keep up its end of the implicit bargain politicians struck with their constituents. For all its regulatory expansiveness, the government failed to anticipate the economic collapse of 2008. Despite the warnings of budget gurus everywhere, it has failed to get its long-term fiscal house in order. Even as it hands out billions of dollars to special interest groups, it has failed to attend to the people's most pressing problems. The IRS scandal suggests that the government is not even capable of respecting the most basic tenets of the rule of law.

No wonder House Republican backbenchers, elected in 2010, are skeptical about the viability of the political settlement hammered out across the presidencies of FDR, LBJ, and Reagan. The bipartisan regime of low taxes, high spending, and sensible regulation that has governed politics since the New Deal is crumbling, slowly but surely. It is House Republicans who seem to have intuited this most clearly.

Of course, backbench House members are not the driving force of government, per the design of the Framers. It remains to be seen how the Republican party as a whole will deal with the nation's growing cynicism and crumbling political economy. In the meantime, it is easy to appreciate why those most dedicated to the status quo—like the *New York Times* editorial page—would be aghast at doubters, such as some House Republicans, and

would readily identify them as the cause, rather than a consequence, of the government's problems.

The future is largely uncertain, but there are a few points to be confident about. For starters, conservative Republicans will continue to oppose liberal Democrats, just as they have for generations. This opposition will be most intense in the House of Representatives. Liberal Democrats will vent their frustration using invectives like

“radical” and “dangerous.” They will dutifully forget that old Republicans similarly appalled previous generations of left-wing reformers, and they will long for the good old days when the GOP was sensible and moderate. Thus, in 30 years, wherever the nation finds itself, we can rest assured that the *New York Times* will bemoan the leadership of the GOP and look back longingly at the tenures of Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor. ♦

## A Virtuoso Pol from Nebraska?

Ben Sasse eyes the open Senate seat.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

*Fremont, Nebr.*

Ask Midland University's Ben Sasse if he's going to run for Nebraska's open Senate seat next year, and he's quick to insist that he hasn't committed to anything. But within hours of Representative Jeff Fortenberry's May 29 announcement that he would not be pursuing the seat, Sasse had a video up on Facebook announcing he was going to embark on a 45-day listening tour across the state—“from Benkelman to Beatrice”—with his wife and



Ben Sasse

three young children in tow before making a decision. That kind of timing suggests a level of planning and preparation that belies Sasse's feints at ambivalence.

He may be playing coy about the future, but when asked about his experience during the last three years as president of a small

Midwestern liberal arts college 35 miles northwest of Omaha, Sasse says “I love my day job” with convincing enthusiasm. He grew up just a few miles from Midland. His grandfather was the CFO of Midland and worked there for 33 years, and his parents met at the college. He owns cemetery plots in a nearby hilltop graveyard, adjacent to the Lutheran church where his grandfather carved the altarpiece and he and his family attend every Sunday. “We've wanted to be in Nebraska and raise our

kids in Nebraska,” he says.

Being president of the college in his hometown agrees with Sasse, but his résumé suggests no shortage of ambition. He studied at Harvard, Oxford, and St. John's, then earned a Ph.D. from Yale. His dissertation won the Theron Rockwell Field and the George Washington Egleston Prizes. The dissertation is a treasure trove of forgotten history relating to the populist backlash surrounding

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AP / NATH HARNIK

the Supreme Court's school prayer decisions in the 1960s. More broadly, it's a sophisticated and brilliant dissection of how a lot of the standard liberal narratives about American political realignment in the last 50 years are woefully incomplete at best and self-serving fictions to attack religious conservatives at worst. Given his academic background, it's not surprising that Sasse has taught history and politics at Yale and the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas.

But somehow Sasse segued from a strictly academic focus to work in business consulting, at the Boston Consulting Group and McKinsey and Company. Sasse soon discovered he had a knack for crisis management and turnaround projects. That, in turn, led him into government. Shortly after 9/11 Sasse ended up as chief of staff for the Office of Legal Policy, a sort of internal think tank at the Department of Justice, where he worked on improving coordination between intelligence agencies. From there, he did a stint as chief of staff for his congressman, the aforementioned Fortenberry. In 2007, he was appointed by President Bush and confirmed by a Democratic Senate as assistant secretary of health and human services, where he worked on strategic initiatives to rein in entitlement spending and modernize health care. Sasse's health care expertise is considerable, and he has written a number of high profile op-eds criticizing Obamacare.

Looked at in the context of Sasse's broader résumé, the return home to small-town Nebraska to become president of a college that most people have never heard of may seem like a let-down. In actuality, it might be Sasse's crowning achievement. When Sasse was appointed president of Midland three years ago, he was just 37 years old—making him one of the youngest college presidents in the country. At the time, Midland was in dire straits and contemplating bankruptcy. Sasse turned out to be a prodigious crisis manager. In the last three years, Midland's enrollment has gone from 590 students to 1,100. It's not much of an

overstatement to say that in the process of turning Midland around, Sasse reinvented the higher education wheel. Oddly enough, his vision for reforming higher ed grew out of his experience trying to fix America's dysfunctional health care system.

"The only sector that even compares with higher ed for being broken is health care. Think about how similar they are. They're both dominated by third-party payment, and that third party is mostly public funders that don't know how to hold anybody accountable for outcomes. The institutions exist primarily for the good of their own workers, not their own customers—students or patients. Quality is hard to measure, but to the degree you can measure, you have to measure things that are team outcomes, not solo, virtuoso outcomes," he says.

"We pretend in health care that there's one rock star doctor who's changing a patient's life, when the vast majority of what's wrong with most patients is that there's nobody available to coordinate their care across dozens of medical professionals engaged in their life," he goes on. "The exact same thing is involved in a college enterprise with trying to educate a kid. The rock star, solo, virtuoso lecturer? I love 'em. But the vast majority of what changes a kid's life is accountability across all of his or her classes, across all four years, where they start to do their own reading, writing, and learn to make an oral presentation, and where there's more rigor and accountability demanded of them."

And Sasse is serious about accountability measures. After some careful maneuvering, he's almost completely eliminated tenure at the school in favor of "term tenure," which ensures regular and meaningful evaluations of instructors. As for students, he's imposed a "three strikes" rule involving "high frequency, low-stakes" quizzes used to measure whether or not students are doing the work in each class. "One strike is between you and the professor, two strikes you have to meet with the vice-president for academic affairs, and three strikes you get kicked out of the class," Sasse says. "It's harder to

graduate on time, costs you money, and it embarrasses you. Our kids are engaging in classes so much more than they did two years ago."

He also took an unusual but effective approach to creating a culture that encourages students to pursue excellence in the classroom—encouraging them to pursue excellence outside of the classroom.

"Most schools when they get in [financial trouble] cut all their extracurricular budget. We've doubled down on it," Sasse says. He sees high levels of student participation in sports and extracurriculars as a way to avoid cultivating more liberal academic attitudes that would devalue achievement. There was a 20-person choir when Sasse arrived at Midland. Now 250 students are involved in a wide-ranging performing arts program.

"We're going from 18 to 27 sports," Sasse continues, "and have added 13 levels of JV competition, because these are the places where lives are changed. You see real success and real failure. It's not just social promotion and therapy. The average kid who's playing second-string linebacker on Midland's football team, you think he's contributing in the class the same way he is if we didn't have football? No way. The football coach is the accountability in his life. His teammates and not letting them down are the accountability in his life. If he wasn't taking remedial math seriously on his own, he's likely to take it seriously now."

The school just added a shooting team—Midland's new coach is Bret Erickson, six-time national trap shooting champion and the 2012 Olympic team coach—and Sasse has announced the formation of men's and women's hockey teams in the fall of 2014. The school's athletic director is Dave Gillespie, a former University of Nebraska running back who spent many years with Nebraska's hallowed football program.

The end result is that Midland has the best of all worlds. The school has adopted efficiency and accountability measures from business and has something approaching the variety of extracurricular options you would find

at Big State U. Yet it retains the kind of close-knit community you would expect at a small liberal arts college. The sticker price on a year of education at Midland is \$33,000 including room and board (Midland is expanding its on-campus living requirement from two to three years). That's positively thrifty by private college standards, but the average Midland student pays only about half of it out of pocket, largely thanks to the school's generous scholarship program. To support it, Sasse spends much of his time fundraising around the state—experience that, not coincidentally, has positioned him well to raise money for a Senate run.

Asked why he wants to run for the Senate, Sasse has an answer at the ready that makes him sound almost like a politician. “[We need] to tell the truth about entitlements and figure out how you create an opportunity society that has citizens, neighbors, communities, businesses building the future . . . as opposed to the dependency-expansion culture we’re living through in Washington right now,” he says.

“The greatness of America is the greatness of the American people,” he continues, “not the greatness of centralized bureaucracies in Washington, D.C. Why is Washington, D.C., a boomtown when the rest of the country has economic despair? Why are housing prices going up in D.C. when everywhere else in the world they’ve had a horrible five years? The federal government ain’t feeling the pain. They just keep on growing.”

If Sasse's nonexistent-bordering-on-nascent campaign has a theme, it's protecting “Nebraska values” from Washington. When it comes to touting his educational accomplishments, Sasse realizes his own criticism of “rock-star virtuosos” might be made of him. To the extent he's been able to carry out his vision, he insists it's because the community surrounding Midland dug deep financially and otherwise to support the school.

Considering Sasse's reputation as a hyperachiever, some might dismiss this as faux humility. But it's also true that Fremont, Nebraska, feels at times like the backdrop in a Frank Capra

movie. The town has roughly five times the number of churches as coffee shops. Students at Midland attend the football game on weekends, and after the game they walk across the street to sit in vinyl booths at the Nifty Fifties diner and order slices of pie out of a rotating display case.

In the meantime, Sasse isn't just preparing for his “listening tour.” He's keeping his options open, as demonstrated by the fact he's attempting to rescue yet another college. Just down the road in Blair, Nebraska, is Dana College, another small Lutheran liberal arts college that shut its doors three years ago, leaving \$80 million worth of buildings empty. Sasse led a group of investors that bought it out of bankruptcy for a song. He likes to

drive visitors up to the 150 acres overlooking the Missouri River valley in his pickup truck and lay out his plans for the place. If all goes well, Dana College will share the same administrative infrastructure as Midland and reopen its doors in the next few years.

Sasse may also have to contend with a competitive GOP primary: Former Nebraska state treasurer Shane Osborn has already announced he's running for the Senate, and there's talk of other candidates emerging. Still, Sasse remains undaunted. He's only 41, and he's already been successful at high levels of business, government, and academia. If Sasse does decide to run for the Senate, at this point in his life he's got a lot to offer and not much to lose. ♦

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# Defending the Humanities

Job one is outing scientism.

BY PETER AUGUSTINE LAWLER

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Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of the *New Republic*, gave by far the most thoughtful and combative commencement address this year, at Brandeis. He defended the humanities as our genuine counterculture. His defense of the humanities was intellectual—a defense of philosophers, theologians, poets, novelists, artists, and so forth, as knowers. In short, he defends “the reason of the philosophers” against the merely “instrumental reason” of technologism.

Technologism is the view that the point of the human mind is to manipulate nature—including other people—to maximize our power, security, and enjoyment. Reason is about the

how, and not about the why—not about “meaning.” But for the philosophers, reason opens each of us to the truth about all things, including who we are, and there's a lot we can comprehend that we can't and would never want to control. Reason, for the philosophers, has a moral dimension—it's about knowing and doing good, and knowing and avoiding evil.

For the philosophers, the why took precedence over the how for all sorts of reasons. Here's one of the most important: If you have the why—the point of your life—you can get by, you can be happy, with almost any how, as did, for example, the anti-Communist dissident Solzhenitsyn in the Gulag. But if you don't have the why—what your life is for—no amount of how, no amount of techno-generated stuff, is going to make you all that happy.

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Technologism slights thinking about the why because it mistakenly views it as obvious: Life is about “calculating probabilities” and avoiding risk factors to maximize your security and enjoyment. Because security and enjoyment are somewhat at odds, our experts now think, you’d better be bourgeois before you can be bohemian. Any reasonable philosopher or theologian—any humanist in the old-fashioned sense—can see how faulty that techno-psychology is.

The big idea Wieseltier has restored is *scientism*. That doesn’t mean he’s antiscience. Note carefully, in fact, how pro-science this humanist is. Science is based on love of the truth for its own sake, on going wherever your method, your experimental results, your empirical evidence lead you. Science is wonderfully self-correcting, and scientists are ever-conscious of the limits of what they really know.

Scientism is a comprehensive, one-dimensional explanatory scheme of all that exists. It is, as some say, a “worldview,” an ideology, an aggressive and empirically sketchy effort to dispel all doubt from the world in the service of conscious manipulation in the service of wisdom. Scientism—as an ideology—attempts to obliterate its rivals, discrediting all other claims for truth. So scientism aims

to destroy the humanities. Not only that, it aims to destroy much of what is distinctively human in each of us as a self-interpreting being.

Consider that the most destructive form of scientism so far has been Marxism. But anyone with eyes to see fears the emergence of newly tyrannical forms of scientism as the foundation of technological solutionism. No one can deny, for example, that the movement known as transhumanism aims at “the abolition of man,” at the overcoming of the distinction between man and machine on pretty much the machine’s terms.

**The place of natural science in human existence—in who we are—is not a question our natural scientists are competent to address. The relationship between science and the humanities is a humanists’ question. Philosophers have to stop tinkering with tiny issues.**

Every competent scientist and humanist knows it will never achieve its goal, as Marxism never achieved anything like the “communism as the end of history” Marx fancifully described. But humanists are right to fear what can be lost on an ideological mission impossible.

We can see neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, and economics as both science and scientism today. Neuroscience becomes scientism when neuroscientists really believe and aggressively claim that what they know can displace theology, philosophy, poetry, and so forth. Evolutionary psychologists succumb to scientism when they believe and aggressively teach that there’s a readily comprehensible evolutionary or genetic explanation for all we say and do, and that human behavior can be explained pretty much the way the behavior of members of the other “eusocial” species can. Economists

become teachers of scientism when they claim that all human behavior is based on calculation of how best to maximize self-interested preferences. Scientism depends on the claim that people will be better off when they enter the epistemological paradise of knowing how simple it is to know how everything—including oneself—really works, and that a social and political paradise constructed through enlightened scientific control might well be the result.

The most controversial claim for the humanities Wieseltier makes is that it’s the job of philosophy to determine the limits of science in any particular society. The place of natural science in human existence—in who we are—is not a question our natural scientists are competent to address. The relationship between science and the humanities is a humanists’ question, a question that has to be answered by determining the true place of the various forms of human knowing. Philosophers have to stop tinkering and fiddling with tiny questions and assume their proper role in a full articulation of what it means to be a reasonable, self-interpreting being born to die.

Many humanists today use “relativism” of some sort or another to counter scientism and technologism. They say that all human claims for “truth” should be placed in quotation marks, and that modern natural science is nothing but an ideology of logocentric domination. But the attempt to relativize science doesn’t really challenge working scientists. They know what they know and have no respect for relativistic drivel.

For the humanities to reassert themselves, they have to reasonably be able to distinguish between what scientists know and what they don’t. The distinction between science and scientism turns out to be indispensable for reinvigorating liberal education as a genuine—meaning truthful and responsible—counterculture to rein in the twin ideologies of technologism and scientism. Humanists should never miss an opportunity to out scientism for the ideology it is. ♦

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# Reagan, the Environmentalist

His administration was greener than you think.

BY ELI LEHRER

Mention Ronald Reagan to an avowed environmentalist, and you'll generally elicit a groan. In the conventional telling, the Gipper appointed right-wing extremists to key environmental positions and proceeded to give timber companies and energy interests a free hand to despoil nature. Had Congress not stopped him, the tale goes, all of the environmental progress of the 1970s would have been swept away in the 1980s.

This tale fits certain historical narratives, and Reagan's successor, George H.W. Bush, arguably helped promote it by allowing his own appointees, some of them drawn from the ranks of professional environmentalists, to criticize the Reagan administration and its policies.

Reagan's actual environmental record is quite a bit more nuanced. It's true he did not follow the command-and-control regulatory approach favored by his predecessor, Jimmy Carter, or even fellow California Republican Richard Nixon, who created the Environmental Protection Agency and signed both the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. But the approach Reagan did take—endeavoring to protect nature without expanding government or hurting the economy—may offer a blueprint, particularly in these times of sharp partisan division, for a conservation agenda that small-government conservatives, libertarians, and conservationists alike can embrace.

The enduring legacy of Reagan's conservation agenda is a set of approaches that flowed directly out

of, rather than in spite of, his free-market ideology and were implemented, in part, by those people derided as dangerous "ideologues." They include limiting government subsidies to all manner of environmental destruction; ensuring that costs are attached to environmentally harmful activities; and opening public lands for multiple uses.

Contrary to the myth of the Reagan era as one of environmental depredation, objective metrics demonstrate how well these approaches worked. Under Reagan's leadership, new lead production was virtually eliminated. Carbon monoxide emissions fell by roughly a quarter, and particulate pollution was reduced 40 percent. Reagan pushed for and signed the Montreal Protocol to phase out ozone-layer-depleting, climate change-promoting chlorofluorocarbons. His administration did the initial work on a "cap and trade" system to control acid rain that ultimately was implemented during the George H.W. Bush administration.

A classic example of Reagan's approach can be found in the Coastal Barrier Resources Act, which the president signed in 1982. The law established the Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS), a zone that today encompasses 273 million acres of land (an area larger than all but one national park in the lower 48 states) in which federal subsidies to new development—notably, subsidies for roads, housing, and flood insurance—are forbidden. Private interests may still develop the land but must do so without a penny of federal money. It is estimated the law has saved taxpayers \$1 billion since its enactment.

A similar approach was applied in the 1985 farm bill, which required farmers receiving federal subsidies to comply with various conservation standards before they could cultivate erosion-prone soils and forbade the use of federal money to drain wetlands. These standards, currently under fire as Congress considers a huge new farm bill, have saved money while avoiding hundreds of millions of tons of soil erosion and protecting millions of acres of wetlands.

While the acid rain efforts made polluters pay their own costs, the 1986 Water Resources Development Act included the administration's proposal to begin charging user fees for the inland waterway system in the form of an excise tax on diesel fuel sold in marine terminals. While the fees haven't kept up with inflation, they clearly played a role in discouraging wasteful and destructive lock, dam, and canal projects.

"Everybody was playing pork barrel before the fees," explains David Conrad, a longtime water policy consultant who has worked with just about every major environmental organization. "Reagan and his people were gutsy. They drew the line."

In addition to creating the CBRS, Reagan signed bills designating more than 10 million acres of wilderness, the highest level of protection available. But he and his appointees embraced a "multi-use" strategy for public lands that balanced conservation with other uses. Rather than continue the trend of creating more national parks than the government could effectively maintain, significant resources were focused on improving facilities and access in the existing parks.

"He understood how public lands impacted the individual soul and spirit," says Rob Sisson, the president of ConservAmerica, previously known as Republicans for Environmental Protection. "He would never lock up enough land to satisfy the League of Conservation Voters and Sierra Club. But he certainly believed in it."

At the same time, he liberalized

*Eli Lehrer is president of R Street.*

hunting and fishing on federal land and opened previously protected land—especially areas with no particular inherent beauty—to mineral exploration.

By no means was Reagan's environmental record spotless. Indeed, among the biggest blemishes on that record are leases that sold natural resources on public land at hard-to-justify bargain basement prices. He also vetoed Clean Water Act enhancements that, when later implemented over his veto, resulted in enormous pollution reductions in streams and rivers.

His environmental appointees were also hit and miss, particularly the earlier ones. EPA administrator Anne Gorsuch mismanaged the agency. Interior secretary James Watt (who did help push for the CBRS) turned out to be a political liability and ended up having to resign after noting in public that a coal-leasing panel was made up of "a black, a woman, two Jews, and a cripple."

On those few matters where environmentalists do sometimes give Reagan credit, they often learn the wrong lessons. The Montreal Protocol wasn't successful because it was an international agreement negotiated partly under United Nations auspices. It was successful because it relied on technology, gradualism, and smart policies, rather than heavy-handed regulation, to deal with a problem. And while cap and trade was a near-perfect system for fighting acid rain—a problem that resulted from fewer than 100 easy-to-identify industrial facilities—experience in the European Union has proven that it's unworkably complex as a means of dealing with vastly more prevalent sources of carbon.

But taken as a whole, Reagan's environmental legacy includes millions of acres of protected land and significant cuts in pollution. In part because of his ideology, he compiled a generally admirable environmental record that offers important lessons for those who seek to protect the environment while containing the size and scope of government. ♦

# Justice Scalia vs. Justice Roberts

A dispute among conservatives over the administrative state. BY TERRY EASTLAND

Last month, in *City of Arlington, Texas v. Federal Communications Commission*, the Supreme Court's five judicial conservatives divided on a question concerning the relationship between federal courts and federal regulators. Justice Scalia wrote the decision for a majority that included Justice Thomas, and Chief Justice Roberts wrote the only dissent in the case, which was joined by Justices Alito and Kennedy.

*City of Arlington* may or may not prove an important case in the Supreme Court reports—future cases will decide that. But it deserves attention now on account of what it yielded: disagreement among the Court's conservatives on the role of the judiciary in cases arising from within the administrative state.

The administrative state is the name given to the collection of agencies below the cabinet level that Congress has created and to which it has delegated power to accomplish certain purposes. It dates back to the early 20th century and includes the FCC, which was established by the Communications Act of 1934.

Under that statute, as amended, local zoning authorities must approve proposed sites for towers and antennas "within a reasonable period of time after the request is duly filed." In 2008, with wireless service providers encountering long delays on their siting applications, the Wireless Association (which represents such providers) asked the FCC to clarify the meaning of the term "reasonable period

of time." Agreeing with the providers that zoning authorities were, in effect, dragging their feet on applications, the FCC, acting on its broad statutory authority to implement the act's provisions, issued a "declarative" ruling under which "a reasonable period of time" means three months for existing structures and five months for new towers.

With the ruling drawing opposition from state and local governments, the Texas cities of Arlington and San Antonio sought review in the federal courts. There the relevant precedent was the 1984 case *Chevron U.S.A. v. Natural Resources Defense Council*, which produced a test for a court to use in reviewing an agency's interpretation of a statute it administers.

Under the test, as Scalia explained it in his opinion, if Congress has directly spoken to the precise question at issue—if its intent is clear—then "the court, as well as the agency, must give effect to the unambiguously expressed intent of Congress." But if the statute is silent or ambiguous with respect to that question, the court must defer to the agency's interpretation of the law, so long as it is a reasonable one.

Whether under *Chevron* a court must defer to an agency interpretation of the kind the FCC made in *City of Arlington*—of an ambiguity concerning the scope of the agency's statutory authority or "jurisdiction"—had been raised from time to time in the lower courts. Scalia answered this question affirmatively by rejecting the notion that there are two kinds of agency interpretation.

"That premise is false," he wrote, "because the distinction between

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‘jurisdictional’ and ‘nonjurisdictional’ interpretations is a mirage. No matter how it is framed, the question a court faces when confronted with an agency’s interpretation of a statute it administers is always, simply, *whether the agency has stayed within the bounds of its statutory authority.*” Scalia emphasized that “a court need not pause to puzzle over whether the interpretive question presented is ‘jurisdictional.’ If ‘the agency’s answer is based on a permissible construction of the statute,’ that is the end of the matter.” The 6-3 majority in the case also included Justices Kagan, Breyer, Sotomayor, and Ginsburg.

In his dissent, Roberts recognized the “broad power” of agencies to “construe statutory provisions over which they have been given interpretive authority.” But he disagreed about what that “broad power” encompasses, arguing that it does not include the “power to decide when Congress has given” agencies the authority to give “definitive answers to questions left to them by Congress.”

Thus, he wrote, “a court should not defer to an agency on whether Congress has granted the agency interpretive authority over the statutory ambiguity at issue.” Instead, a court should determine whether Congress has given that authority to the agency in the first place, Roberts’s essential point being an agency is a creature of Congress and has no power to act unless Congress confers power upon it.

Roberts included in his opinion a veritable essay on the administrative state. He discussed its growth over the past decades (more than 50 new agencies in the past 15 years) and the powers the agencies wield, touching “almost every aspect of daily life,” with “reams of regulations that would leave [the Framers] rubbing their eyes.” He noted their independence and how difficult it is to ensure their accountability, quoting “scholars” named “Kagan” (who said, in a law review article that first brought

her to prominence in the 1990s, that no president “could, and presumably none would wish to, supervise so broad a swath of regulatory activity”) and “S. Breyer” (who said in a recent book that “the president may not have the time or willingness to review [agency] decisions”).

Roberts clearly was concerned about what he called “the danger posed by the growing power of the administrative state.” That, he believed, was the context in which *City of Arlington* should be seen, with the question in the case this: “whether the authority of administrative agencies should be augmented even further, to include not



Antonin Scalia



John Roberts

only broad power to give definite answers to questions left to them by Congress, but also the same power to decide when Congress has given them that power.” Believing that kind of augmentation of power unlawful, Roberts voted against it, asserting a role for the courts. Not incidentally, the chief justice observed—and this was the main point of his remarks on the administrative state—that its rise “has not changed” the “duty of the judicial department to say what the law is,” as another chief justice, John Marshall, famously wrote in the 1803 case *Marbury v. Madison*.

Scalia, a stalwart defender of *Chevron*, saw a different danger. “Make no mistake—the ultimate target here is *Chevron* itself.” Savvy challengers, he said, speaking to a concern of several justices during the oral argument, would play “the ‘jurisdictional’ card” in every case. And the effect

would be “to transfer any number of interpretive decisions . . . from the agencies that administer the statutes to federal courts.” The courts would apply some sort of “totality of circumstances” test that would “render the binding effect of agency rules unpredictable” and replace excessive agency power with chaos.

Roberts acknowledged that *Chevron* guards against judicial usurpations of policy-making that properly belongs, under the separation of powers, to the executive branch. But Roberts was minded to observe another concern, also rooted in the separation of powers: that the judiciary not only remain within its proper role but “ensure that the other branches do so as well.” And “that means ensuring that the Legislative Branch has in fact delegated lawmaking power to an agency within the Executive Branch, before the Judiciary defers to the Executive on what the law is.” Especially since the administrative agencies “draw upon a potent brew of executive, legislative, and judicial power,” and especially since “the dramatic shift in power over the last 50

years from Congress to the Executive” has been “effected through the administrative agencies.”

The appeal of Roberts’s opinion lies in its attempt to push back against the administrative state. It does so, however, in a case that does not advance the opinion’s main storyline, since the FCC in its interpretation of the ambiguous term in question did not exactly try to expand its power. *City of Arlington*, after all, is about a local zoning approval process.

Roberts may have been writing for some future case. And whether his position someday prevails would seem to turn on whether Scalia can be proved wrong in his view that “the distinction between ‘jurisdictional’ and ‘nonjurisdictional’ interpretations is a mirage.” As one Supreme Court litigator told me, “There would have to be a new case where the distinction is so crystal clear as to force Scalia to look at it again.”

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# Rise of a Free School

*Toby Young's astonishing second career as an education reformer*

BY SAM SCHULMAN

*London*

In Britain, education reform is not the safe topic for conversation between liberals and conservatives it is in America. The glossiest people in U.S. media circles support school reform: Hearst and Bertelsmann supplied New York mayor Michael Bloomberg with two of his school chancellors. Attend a fundraiser in Fairfield County for the school reform outfit ConnCAN, and you may meet Cathy Viscardi Johnston, former executive vice president of Condé Nast, and her husband Doug, former publisher of *Vanity Fair*. Bigwigs at the BBC would be appalled to know that Brian Williams and Jeff Zucker generously support charter school initiatives.

Concern for the “soft bigotry of low expectations” is in short supply on the commanding heights of London’s media world. To find a journalist sympathetic to the Cameron government’s Free Schools—the English version of the charter school concept—you have to look down, not up. You’ll

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*Sam Schulman is a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

have to make do with Toby Young, who *Vanity Fair*’s editor in chief Graydon Carter described after he fired him in 1998 as “a piece of gum. He lingers on the bottom of your shoe.” Americans may remember Young as the author of a bestselling book recounting his failure to become a celebrity journalist in the New York magazine world of the ’90s, *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People* (2001), or from its movie adaptation starring Simon Pegg (2008).

Young became the public face of the Free School movement a year before the 2010 election that made the schools a reality, one of the first initiatives of Michael Gove, the Tory secretary for education in David Cameron’s Conservative-LibDem coalition. Like charter schools in 42 U.S. states and D.C. and Sweden’s *friskolor*, England’s Free Schools are nonselective, publicly funded, but independently governed institutions. After his New York misadventures, Young had returned to London to write copiously for the *Spectator*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Telegraph*, the *Independent*, and the *Guardian*, as befits a journalist approaching 50 with four small children to raise. Then, in August 2009, he published a column in the *Guardian* headed: “Why I will set up a new school to give my children the best chance in life.” The newspaper gave it this

subhead: “Toby Young, son of the visionary founder of the Open University, wants to break down Britain’s apartheid between the private and state sectors by creating a new type of ‘free’ school where access to a good education is not based on income.” He announced a plan “to create a ‘comprehensive grammar,’ that is, a school which is as close as possible to the grammar I went to—traditional curriculum, competitive atmosphere, zero tolerance of disruptive behaviour—but with a non-selective intake [i.e., no competitive entrance exam]. . . . Assuming the Conservatives are in power by June 2010, I should be open for business in September 2011.”

He kept his word. In September 2011 Toby Young’s West London Free School (WLFS) opened its doors to 120 sixth-grade students (Year Seven in British parlance). The school has since admitted one more class, and this September will add a third, bringing it to 360 pupils from ages 11-14. Eventually it will serve over 800 students, up to age 18. In England’s state-supported school systems, parents may apply to up to six secondary schools. WLFS is already among the most “oversubscribed” schools in England.

Young’s life changed after August 2009. He expected opposition from the teachers’ unions and their hard-left allies, and got it. But their social betters opened another front. The media establishment, the commentariat, and an astonishing number of heavyweight politicians, including some from the upper ranks of the LibDem party (part of the coalition government that had established Free Schools), launched a barrage of newspaper columns, televised denunciations, and custom-built NGOs devoted to attacking Young as a selfish parent and child of privilege trying to ruin the nation’s schools. It wasn’t just in the *Guardian*. *Building* magazine (“the UK’s leading magazine for construction professionals”) asked if Young was deliberately trying to alienate every school architect in the country. A BBC disc jockey joked about wanting “to punch to death” everyone who had appeared in an August 2010 BBC2 documentary on Young’s project.

How did the man who made himself famous for having

failed become so important a figure to the establishment? Young wonders about this himself. “As a self-obsessed, celebrity journalist, I wasn’t exactly universally loved,” Young says he told his wife after the BBC2 documentary aired, “but it’s only since setting out to do something genuinely worthwhile and public-spirited that I’ve become truly hated.”

The auto-da-fé prepared after 2009 by Britain’s journalists and politicians was worthy of a more prominent figure. Fiona Millar (Cherie Blair’s former adviser) and Peter Wilby (former editor of the *New Statesman*) predicted that a failure like Toby Young could never pull it off. Wilby called him “an imbecile, a prat, and a pain in the hindquarters.” The notably humorless Polly Toynbee, whose columns in the *Guardian* echo the judgments of her grandfather, the world-historical historian of the world, jokingly called it “the Toby Young school of ethics.”

For her part, Millar (Twitter handle @schooltruth) is a member of several organizations and websites that attack Free Schools in general and Young in particular, and writes columns, blog posts, and tweets aimed at him. “It’s about the nervous middle class finding another way of avoiding local schools,” wrote the granddaughter of the Labour aristocrat Anthony Wedgwood Benn, formerly 2nd Viscount Stansgate, whose ethical contortions in the 1960s trying to find a good school for his son are still widely snickered

over. Tristram Hunt, a Labour MP, himself the son of a lord and graduate of private schools, called Toby’s projected Free School “a vanity project for Yummie Mummies in West London.” Peter Wilby was the only figure on the left who showed any mercy to Young, when he concluded his column by saying “if the free school concept has any intellectual coherence”—which he very much doubted—“it is largely thanks to him.”

To me, who like many other Americans had known the *fin-de-siècle* Toby Young-about-Manhattan, the story of Toby’s transformation is as marvelous and incredible as a tale from the *Thousand and One Nights*. To



A March 2011 steering committee meeting to plan the new school



Toby Young with London mayor Boris Johnson at the launch

appreciate how high he has risen in 21st-century Britain, you must understand how low he had sunk in 20th-century America. Toby had persuaded Graydon Carter to bring him to *Vanity Fair* from London in 1995 for a monthlong tryout that expanded into three years' employment. He arrived at the Condé Nast building that year with a curious ambition: to become a celebrity journalist so important that celebrities would know Toby didn't care what they thought of him. He failed. As a journalist he rose no higher than his role as "a glorified caption-writer" for the magazine. His greatest achievement was not a scoop but a colossal faux pas: He hired a "strippergram" dancer to deliver a birthday lapdance to a colleague at the *Vanity Fair* offices. The fatal day happened to coincide with Condé Nast's Bring Your Daughter to Work Day. "They can't take that away from me," he muses in *How to Lose Friends*.

Toby is more than the diligent journalist he calls himself. He is the Shelley of self-disparagement, and his memoir of New York an *Inferno* of self-deprecation. Of course, like the *Inferno*, *How to Lose Friends* has a Virgil to guide its author: Graydon Carter. As the coeditor of the anti-celebrity *Spy* magazine before running the celebrity-dependent magazine *Vanity Fair*, and as a Canadian, Carter interpreted for Toby the differences between English and American culture, and tried to guide him over the narrow border between contempt for celebrities and adoration. Like Dante, Toby gives his Virgil some of the best lines: At *Vanity Fair*'s annual post-Oscar party in Los Angeles, "Toby, how many times do I have to tell ya, don't bother the celebrities." In England, Toby's success in launching the first Free School (there will be 180 running this fall) bothered more celebrities than he could have done at a dozen *Vanity Fair* Oscar parties. Was Condé Nast merely a boot camp for Toby's career as education reformer?

When I visited him at the West London Free School this spring, Toby quoted one of his favorite mottos, a remark by Kingsley Amis about how you should "never make a joke against yourself." I've never seen Toby follow

this advice. His inability to do so, I think, manifests an obligation he feels to demonstrate that a journalist reporting on a celebrity's feet of clay is himself constructed entirely of mud. He does so most beautifully in an article called "The St. Valentine's Day Massacre," an account of a focus group on himself run by a Madison Avenue marketing firm he hired for the occasion. The consumer panel consisted of a number of young women, all of whom he knew, including Candace Bushnell, whose *Sex and the City* series had just launched on HBO. From behind a two-way mirror, Toby observes the women talking about him in a discussion led by an executive from the marketing firm. The members of the panel know he is behind the mirror, but the conversation rolls on with increasing contempt for him and indifference to his presence.

"I met him years ago in London. . . . He was just an idiot." "I just remember seeing this very obnoxious bald guy sitting on the couch." "He didn't really make much of an impression, actually, neither good or bad." "Is he really bald or is it just that his hair's really short?" asks Bushnell. "I can never figure it out."

Toby's reaction is pure, if decaffeinated, Kafka:

By this stage they had already forgotten that I was sitting behind the two-way mirror. At least I hoped they had. The thought that this was the censored version of what they really thought about me was too much to bear. From time to time, one of them would glance over in my direction and, for a second, I'd think they were looking at me. Then I realized they were just looking at themselves in the mirror.

In late '90s New York, Toby's in-your-face self-deprecation was utterly unlike the behavior of the myrmidons of other British journalists who had come to American magazines and newspapers in the same era. The only thing we had to give Britain was *Esquire*. In return we welcomed hordes of young journalists, delightful, funny, and expensive to entertain. A whole new U.K.-made publishing category, the "lad magazine," enriched our culture. Not even Time Inc. was immune from the effortless brisk authority



*An open house for parents of prospective students*



*Straighten that tie*

of the new empire builders: In the late '90s, the most influential young executive on the 34th floor of the Time & Life Building was Isolde Motley, who had arrived in the United States as an au pair.

And then there was Toby Young. Before Toby left London for his *Vanity Fair* trial, Carter told him that Si Newhouse, Condé Nast's chief and sole owner, was very eager to meet him. Graydon had evidently made the kind of mistake Canadian emigrants must be very careful to avoid: He oversold the excellence of an Englishman to an American Anglophile. The first day that Toby showed up at the office, under the misapprehension that an "informal dress code" meant shorts and T-shirt, Graydon must have realized that Newhouse was expecting something else. Si would have been delighted to meet the Englishman that Toby ought to have looked like from the pedigree Graydon had sketched.

Toby is the son of a Labour party intellectual, Michael Young, who as a graduate student had written the 1945 party manifesto that created the entire British welfare state, and who served the Attlee government that executed the plan. Michael Young went on to create the Open University and write a brilliantly ironic dystopia, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958), which his *Telegraph* obituary claimed was responsible for destroying the old 11-plus—the examination that separated Britons into brain workers and hand workers at the age of 11. He was made a peer in 1978. The Hon. Toby Young's own curriculum vitae would also impress Si Newhouse: a first in PPE (Philosophy, Politics & Economics) at Oxford, graduate study at Harvard, cofounder (with Julie Burchill and Cosmo Landesman) and editor of one of the hippest British magazines of the early '90s, *Modern Review*.

Si would be expecting Graydon to walk into his office with someone on the same level of his English trophy editors: Tina Brown (who had saved *Vanity Fair*), her husband Harold Evans (who had amiably condescended to launch the excellent travel magazine *Condé Nast Traveler*, despite having been at the pinnacle of the English newspaper world), and above all Anna Wintour (to whom Si was devoted, despite her having singlehandedly destroyed *House & Garden*, one of the Condé Nast family jewels). Not only would Si be disappointed in Graydon, but Brown, Evans, and Wintour would make sure that Si never stopped hearing about the Hon. Toby Young. Perhaps after Toby opened a never-to-be

completed interview with Nathan Lane by asking him if he was Jewish—and then if he was gay—Carter decided never again to let Toby near the celebrities who collectively were the oxygen that kept *Vanity Fair* alive.

I hadn't seen Toby since 2000, at the birthday party of Richard Johnson, then editor of the *New York Post's* "Page Six." In order to greet my diminutive friend and his future wife Caroline, I had to maneuver past the towering figures of Sophie Dahl, Melania Knauss, and Donald Trump. Last month, Toby and I were again in a crowded space, but

the space was a library and the crowd consisted of sixth- and seventh-graders (in U.S. terms) at the West London Free School, located temporarily in a former primary school at the end of a quiet street off the busy Hammer-smith Road. It's about half a mile west of the flyover where the Great Western Road from Heathrow drops its traffic into the western edge of what is recognizably London. Toby was there as founder, worrier, and unpaid chairman of the school's board of directors.

It was the day that parents of 120 children had received offers to join WLFS's next entering class, and Toby kept checking in with the school's secretary to see how things were going. Out of some 11 state-supported secondary schools in its area, WLFS was the most oversubscribed, with 1,197

applicants, of whom 296 listed it as their first choice. Schools may not choose among applicants: The match between applicant and school is made by a pan-London admissions authority. "Essentially, we're not allowed to discriminate in any way deemed by the state to be unfair," Toby says.

Before the school opened, Toby's critic Fiona Millar suggested that the academic traditionalism of WLFS was catnip to middle-class parents and was designed to repel working-class, immigrant, and racial-minority families. WLFS is resolutely traditionalist. Students must take Latin for two years, and the basic academic subjects are mandatory through all six years: English, history, foreign language, math, and science. There are no computers or tablets, and their absence is deliberate. Yet Toby told me that the school population "is a pretty accurate microcosm of the local community." Almost a quarter of them qualify for free meals (a commonly used measure of social deprivation), a third are black, Asian, or other ethnic minority, and roughly half are children for whom English is not their first language.



*A grammar school open to all comers*

Last fall, he wrote that “the Left may imagine that if you don’t teach Citizenship and Media Studies, you’re only going to attract an educated elite, but it turns out that including Latin on the curriculum doesn’t actually put off low income families. Hard as it may be for the Fiona Millars of this world to understand, working class parents are just as passionate about securing the best possible opportunities for their children as middle class parents.”

I saw unmistakable evidence that children had not only been taught substance, but were deploying it on new material. In an English class, 12-year-olds who would have been in seventh grade here were marking up a passage from *Romeo and Juliet* to show where the author used any of some dozen specific literary devices: alliteration, simile, personification, rhyme, internal rhyme, and the like. (My daughters, veterans of private middle schools in New York, Chicago, and Virginia, told me they were spared such a naked encounter with literary devices until they were safely in high school.) Art class was, if anything, even more demanding. Each child sat at his or her seat sketching a specific square from a grid laid over a big reproduction of a Roy Lichtenstein painting hanging on the wall (a big Lichtenstein exhibit had just opened at the Tate Modern). Afterwards, their teacher told me, they would compare their sections in order to understand how even copying a comic-book style pop art painting demonstrates individual style and acts of interpretation.

We walked outside the building, past an emblem of the school’s Horatian motto, *Sapere aude*—dare to know. “So because you didn’t want to move out of London as far away as Suffolk, where Caroline told you a good primary school had openings, all this exists—all these kids *sapere audent*?”

“Err, yes, that was true, I didn’t want to,” Toby says. He has a tendency to growl. “But it was also discovering that there were so few options for anyone, even in a city like London. It angered me that parents were so beholden to local authorities.”

Toby was now visibly angry, growling more. “Really, it pissed me off.” He gave me an embarrassed look, as if he had been talking about his feelings. This wasn’t the New York Toby I remembered, who never wanted any part in political controversies.

“I know,” he says, “but I remember feeling very distinctly—it was August 2009—that this was what it was like to be politicized. And really I’ve been politicized ever since.”

“It might have something to do with a general resentment of authority I have, but I felt this, this surge of anger that there weren’t more schools, much better schools. And then I felt this stubborn refusal to acknowledge that I had to accept that there was so little choice.”

At this moment, the fog that obscured the connection between the 20th- and 21st-century versions of Toby Young lifted. “Graydon,” I said out loud. Toby gave me a crooked grin.

Toby arrived in New York expecting to be the attack dog of the same Graydon Carter who, as coeditor of *Spy*, had mocked the pretension, vacuity, and unruliness of the rich and famous. By the time Toby arrived, Graydon had joined the other side. When Graydon saw that Toby couldn’t be trusted off his leash with the most humble starlet, Toby’s idol became his jailer. Toby’s downfall was refusing to accept that he had landed in a place where wealth and fame were treated in a careful, even reverent way. Now, as a champion of Free Schools in England, Toby has once again become an unpredictable and unwelcome guest at a celebrity party. “What really surprised me was the reaction to what I



West London Free School cricketers

intended to do—the entire metropolitan elite and the journalism establishment rose up against me, almost as one.”

“Surprised?” I say, surprised. “Toby, you can’t be serious. You’ve always known these people, and known them better than anyone. How could you possibly have been surprised?”

“Err, yes, well, I had made a few enemies. But I was genuinely taken aback by this, this tsunami of hostility. These people morally disapproved of what I was doing, as if they were a secular priesthood who always knew the best thing for everyone. They couldn’t cope with a new idea. They are absolutely convinced that choice always favors the better off—or now they use the expression, the ‘information-rich.’ They’re not interested in evidence or argument. And they’re so predictable. They think that I could only be motivated by three ideas.”

He lists them: “I am a member of a small group of middle-class people who are starting their own school because we are snobs and want our children only to associate with others of our class. Or, I’m racist and want my children to be with other white children. Well, first of all, the vast majority of English people now see themselves as middle class, secondly, you can see that our school is no more white than [the surrounding borough of] Hammersmith is.

Finally they say Free Schools take money away from bog-standard comprehensives. Well, they don't, and I've proven it, but they repeat it anyway."

**T**oby is fighting against a far more formidable list of enemies than his New York antagonists—who tended to be publicity assistants armed with clipboards bent on keeping him out of seats too close to the catwalk during New York Fashion Week. The enemies of Free Schools are political heavyweights. John Prescott, a tough grammar school graduate from Hull, was New Labour's deputy leader during the Tony Blair era. (The risk of starting good schools, he is famous for having said, is that they might become popular and then everyone will want to go to them.) Vince Cable, the LibDem's most anti-Free School member, is poised to succeed Nick Clegg as LibDem leader. Fiona Millar's partner is Alistair Campbell (they refuse on principle to marry), who served Tony Blair as she served Cherie.

Toby hits back hard. "One of the few useful skills I learned as a journalist," he says, "is not to be intimidated." He debates his critics frequently on high-profile TV and radio shows: "I've debated my critics on *Newsnight* [BBC2], *Question Time* [BBC1], *Daily Politics* [BBC1], *The Six O'Clock*

*News* [BBC1], *Channel 4 News* [Channel 4], and *Today* [BBC Radio 4]. Those are the main current affairs programs over here on radio and television." He peppers the newspapers with columns and blogs. He even replies to the anonymous commenters on his own pieces and pieces about him, refuting their arguments and correcting their facts. To the posh "posh-bashers" who tell the less-well-off that the unreformed state-funded school system is plenty good enough for their children, he responds personally. Fiona Millar, Alistair Campbell, Melissa Benn, and Vince Cable went to grammar schools and then worked to "pull away the ladder that gave bright working class children a great education." Does one of his critics send his children to a state-funded school? Toby demands to know whether their children have private lessons or coaching for exams.

When he can, he seizes upon allies on the left like Tony Blair's education minister Lord Adonis, who first introduced the Academy program, by which schools can free themselves from the control of local authorities but continue to receive funding from the central government. Adonis offers Churchillian counsel to Young, which is then shared with the nation: "They're not interested in constructive dialogue. Don't you get it? If you extend any sort of olive branch they'll see it as a sign of weakness and move in for



✓Yes

✓Yes

xNo

✓Yes

✓Yes

✓Yes

✓Yes

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the kill. I dealt with the same people—the Socialist Workers Party, the Anti Academies Alliance, the NUT [National Union of Teachers]—for most of my ministerial career and they would rather stick pins in their eyes than admit they have common ground with someone like you. Their attitude to Free Schools is the same as to academies: They won't rest until every last one has been razed to the ground."

On the other hand, the weightiness of Toby's antagonists may have elevated his status from the days when he was theater critic for the *Spectator* and judge on *Top Chef*. That such an impressive phalanx of worthies pay him such attention, with such malice, has made Toby seem more and more their equal to a public not displeased to see an underdog have his day. Toby's enemies resemble the "meritocracy" that Michael Young's 1958 satire foresaw emerging by 2030: "Some members of the meritocracy . . . have become so impressed with their own importance as to lose sympathy with the people whom they govern, and so tactless that even people of low caliber have been quite unnecessarily offended." The anonymous historian who is meant to be writing the book observes that the meritocracy needs to be particularly tactful because both they and the 99 percent have changed. "Today [in 2030] all persons, however humble . . . [are] bound to recognize that they have an inferior status—not as in the past because they were denied opportunity; but because they are inferior."

"One of your critics," I say, "predicted that in the light of your well-documented incompetence, your own governing board would push you into the background should the school be so fortunate as to get up and running. How do you spend your time now?"

"I spend about 40 hours a week working for the school," Toby says. "And on top of that, we're expanding our status into a Free Schools Trust, which will allow us to open at least one new Free School in West London a year. We won't run them, but will contract with an education management organization to do so—and we're

interviewing several candidates now. I hope to be spending most of my time in the future on curriculum development, which really interests me more than the Free School idea as a whole. Do you know there's an elderly professor who retired from the University of Virginia who has a theory of core knowledge? We've had a show on it, and we're bringing him over." I assured him that I knew all about E.D. Hirsch. I was amazed that he did.

"The fact is that right now most of my time is spent on building management and our new building. I have to keep on top of half a dozen disciplines: local authority regulations, building codes, planning law, construction, risk registers, EU procurement law—each with their own technical vocabulary. I've learned how to navigate the bureaucracy of several Borough Councils . . ."

"But your consultants," I begin to say.

"Sure, we've got them, but you really need someone who can coordinate it all, and, more than that, someone who has skin in the game."

Here the old Toby and the new part company altogether. Toby is thinking and feeling like an entrepreneur or a manager with responsibility—not as a member of the priesthood that attends to celebrity by maintaining its rules of purity, in which

Graydon had to instruct Toby carefully: "Toby, from now on, assume that everyone in Hollywood is gay and Jewish," he advised him after the Nathan Lane incident.

Toby Young is so fond of the joke he made to his wife about becoming hated only after he became good, and has repeated it so often, that even Britain's secretary for education, Michael Gove, repeated it to me when I met him. But Toby isn't really one of the vast majority of middle-class people who want to do something vaguely worthwhile. He is one of the very small minority who actually has founded an institution that is worthwhile and changes lives. Although Toby has finally realized his youthful ambition to be someone to whom no celebrity is indifferent, he hardly seems to care any more. ♦



*Cello lessons: part of a traditional curriculum*



*Skin in the game: greeting pupils on the last day of the first year*

# The Myth of an American Coup

*What really happened in Iran in 1953*

BY RAY TAKEYH

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of Operation Ajax—the notorious CIA plot that is supposed to have ousted Iranian prime minister Muhammad Mossadeq. In the intervening decades, the events of 1953 have been routinely depicted as a nefarious U.S. conspiracy that overthrew a nationalist politician who enjoyed enormous popular support. This narrative, assiduously cultivated by the Islamic Republic, was so readily endorsed by the American intellectual class that presidents and secretaries of state are now expected to commence any discussion of Iran by apologizing for the behavior of their malevolent predecessors. At this stage, the account has even seeped into American popular culture, featuring most recently in Ben Affleck’s Oscar-winning blockbuster *Argo*. The only problem with this mythologized history is that the CIA’s role in Mossadeq’s demise was largely inconsequential. In the end, the 1953 coup was very much an Iranian affair.

Muhammad Mossadeq was an aristocratic politician who belonged to a narrow Iranian elite who considered high government office their patrimony. Respectful of the traditions of its class, this cohort would constitute the cabinets, parliaments, and civil service that ruled Iran for much of the 20th century. Mossadeq and his political party, the National Front, reached the height of their influence in 1950 when they pressed a nationalization law through the parliament, allowing Iran to reclaim its oil from British imperial control.

Despite the standard account of American hostility to Iranian nationalism, both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations recognized the shortcomings of British

strategy in the age of postcolonial nationalism and pressured London to accept Iran’s legitimate demands. American diplomats like Dean Acheson and Averell Harriman pressed both sides toward accommodation and compromise. For three years, the United States crafted innumerable proposals that sought to reconcile British mandates with Iranian nationalist imperatives. As with today’s nuclear diplomacy regarding Iran, all these clever formulations failed to yield an agreement.

One key problem was that Mossadeq became a victim of his own success. The prime minister’s absolutist rhetoric and pledges to end British influence created conditions that militated against a judicious resolution of the crisis. The more he galvanized his countrymen and inflamed public opinion the less likely he was to settle for a compromise accord. As the diplomatic stalemate persisted, Iran was deprived of indispensable revenue when Britain embargoed its oil shipments.

By 1953, Iran’s economy was in free-fall. Without its oil wealth and facing mounting budget deficits, the Mossadeq government was increasingly incapable of meeting its payroll. Iran could not get around the British embargo, and efforts to operate an oil-less economy proved doomed as the government relied on petroleum sales to cover much of its budget. Mossadeq responded to the crisis by behaving in an increasingly autocratic manner. A principled politician who revered the rule of law, Mossadeq now contrived referendums, rigged elections, and sought control of the armed forces, long a prerogative of the Iranian monarchy. Suddenly the champion of constitutional rule turned into a populist rabble-rouser rebelling against the traditions of his state.

Iran’s escalating economic crisis began to fracture the National Front, less a party than a coalition of like-minded organizations. The fact that it accordingly never developed its own dedicated and disciplined cadre that



*Truman with Mossadeq in 1951*

*Ray Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.*

could remain steadfast under political stress was part of what undid Mossadeq. The Front's middle-class elements, concerned about their declining financial fortunes, began to abandon him. The intelligentsia and the professional class were increasingly wary of the prime minister's autocratic tendencies and looked for alternative leadership. The armed forces, which had stayed quiet despite Mossadeq's periodic purges of the senior officer corps, now grew vocal and began to participate in political intrigues. The clerisy, long suspicious of secular politicians and their modernizing tendency, subtly shifted its allegiances to the monarchy. And here it is worth underscoring the fact that the clerical estate—despite the Islamic Republic's current position on the so-called CIA coup—played a critical role in Mossadeq's downfall.

The prospect of toppling Mossadeq was promoted by a coterie of Iranian politicians who saw that, given Mossadeq's dictatorial penchant, there was no legislative means of removing him from power. General Fazollah Zahedi, a onetime member of Mossadeq's cabinet turned oppositionist, offered himself to the U.S. embassy as a possible solution. As a member of the armed forces with ties to the clerical establishment, Zahedi assured the embassy that a robust anti-Mossadeq network already existed and could discharge its functions with minimal support from the United States.

By May 1953, a joint CIA-MI6 task force proposed a plan of action, codenamed "Ajax." The key to the plot was to gain the cooperation of the shah, who had the legal authority to dismiss his premier. Zahedi emerged as the cornerstone of the plan, for he was seen, according to the CIA's account, as the only figure with sufficient "vigor and courage to make him worthy of support." Eisenhower approved the plan in a meeting with his top national security advisers on June 22.

By that point the erosion of Mossadeq's support was all too obvious. A large portion of the National Front had abandoned Mossadeq while the military's top brass was agitating for action. All the signals coming out of Tehran were that the shah was still a popular figure, and if he intervened decisively, Mossadeq would have to yield. As with most well-laid plans, the actual course of events did not conform to the plotters' expectations.

The first phase of the CIA's operation was to inflame the existing disorder with a propaganda campaign, turning out stories about Mossadeq's corruption, hunger for power, and Jewish ancestry, the last of which, at least, was a fabrication. Other newspaper reports cited forged documents suggesting that the National Front was secretly collaborating with Iran's Communist party, Tudeh, to establish a "people's democracy" that would expunge religion from public life.

The recruitment of the shah proved a much more difficult task. The monarch seemed to welcome Mossadeq's demise but was reluctant to assume direct responsibility for his dismissal. To stiffen his spine, the CIA arranged for a series of emissaries—including the shah's twin sister, Princess Ashraf, as well as General Norman Schwarzkopf Sr., who trained the Iranian police force in the 1940s—to visit the palace. Another furtive guest of the court was the operational leader of the coup, Kermit Roosevelt. The shah wanted to gauge the degree of American commitment, and once assured of Eisenhower's personal pledge to assist his country, he issued two orders—one dismissing Mossadeq and the other appointing Zahedi to the premiership.

On the night of August 16, Colonel Nematollah Nassiri, the commander of the Imperial Guards, attempted to deliver the orders to the prime minister's residence. He failed. It appears that Mossadeq was tipped off by members of the Tudeh who had

penetrated the armed forces. Nassiri and his troops were overwhelmed and quickly arrested by forces loyal to Mossadeq. Fearing for his safety, Zahedi went into hiding. The shah fled, first to Iraq and then Italy.

It's important to note that for all the talk of a coup, the reality is that it was Mossadeq who broke the law. The shah had the constitutional authority to dismiss his prime minister—refusing to step down in contravention of the monarch's orders was an illegal act.

After the plotters' apparent failure, a mood of resignation descended over Washington. CIA headquarters acknowledged that the "operation had been tried and failed." Eisenhower's aide and confidant General Walter Bedell Smith told the president that "we now have to take



*Pro-shah rioting in Tehran, August 19, 1953*



*General Fazollah Zahedi, hours after the coup*

a whole new look at the Iranian situation and probably have to snuggle up to Mossadeq if we are going to save anything there.” As the Americans despaired, the initiative passed to the Iranians.

In Tehran, political fortunes swayed back and forth. A number of National Front members denounced the monarchy and castigated the shah as a bloodthirsty tyrant. They were joined by the Tudeh, which saw a unique opportunity to flex its muscles and depose the shah. The party’s cadre toppled statues of Pahlavi kings and called for the establishment of a democratic republic. The U.S. ambassador to Iran, Loy Henderson, cabled Washington that the masses were outraged at the Tudeh’s “gang of hooligans bearing red flags and chanting Commie songs.” This assessment was later corroborated by a prominent Tudeh member, who acknowledged that their actions had backfired, leading to “quarrelling with shopkeepers, ordinary folks and clerics, affronting, even alienating them from the government of Dr. Mossadeq.”

Zahedi and his co-conspirators renewed their efforts, largely independent of Roosevelt and the CIA. Zahedi took two initiatives. He sought first to publicize the fact that the shah had dismissed Mossadeq and appointed *him* prime minister, and therefore Mossadeq’s claim to power was unconstitutional. Next, Zahedi contacted commanders of armed units in the capital and provinces that remained loyal to the shah and told them to prepare to mobilize their forces.

In late summer, military units began to clash with Tudeh activists, while pro-shah protesters took to the streets. It is true that the CIA paid a number of toughs from the bazaar and athletic centers to agitate against the government, but the CIA-financed mobs rarely exceeded a few hundred people in a country that was now rocked by demonstrators numbering in the thousands. As Henderson cabled from Tehran, the protesters were “not of hoodlum type customarily predominant in recent demonstrations in Tehran. They seemed to come from all classes of people, including workers, clerks, shopkeepers, students.” In the end, the CIA-organized demonstrations were overtaken by a spontaneous cascade of pro-shah protesters.

In a sense, Mossadeq expedited his own demise. Determined to restore order, the premier ordered the military to put an end to the disturbances—a military whose loyalty was suspect. Armed units took over key installations and eventually moved against Mossadeq, forcing him to flee. A startled CIA reported to the White House that “an unexpectedly strong surge of popular and military reaction to Prime Minister Mossadeq’s government has resulted, according to the latest dispatches from Tehran, in the virtual occupation of the city by forces

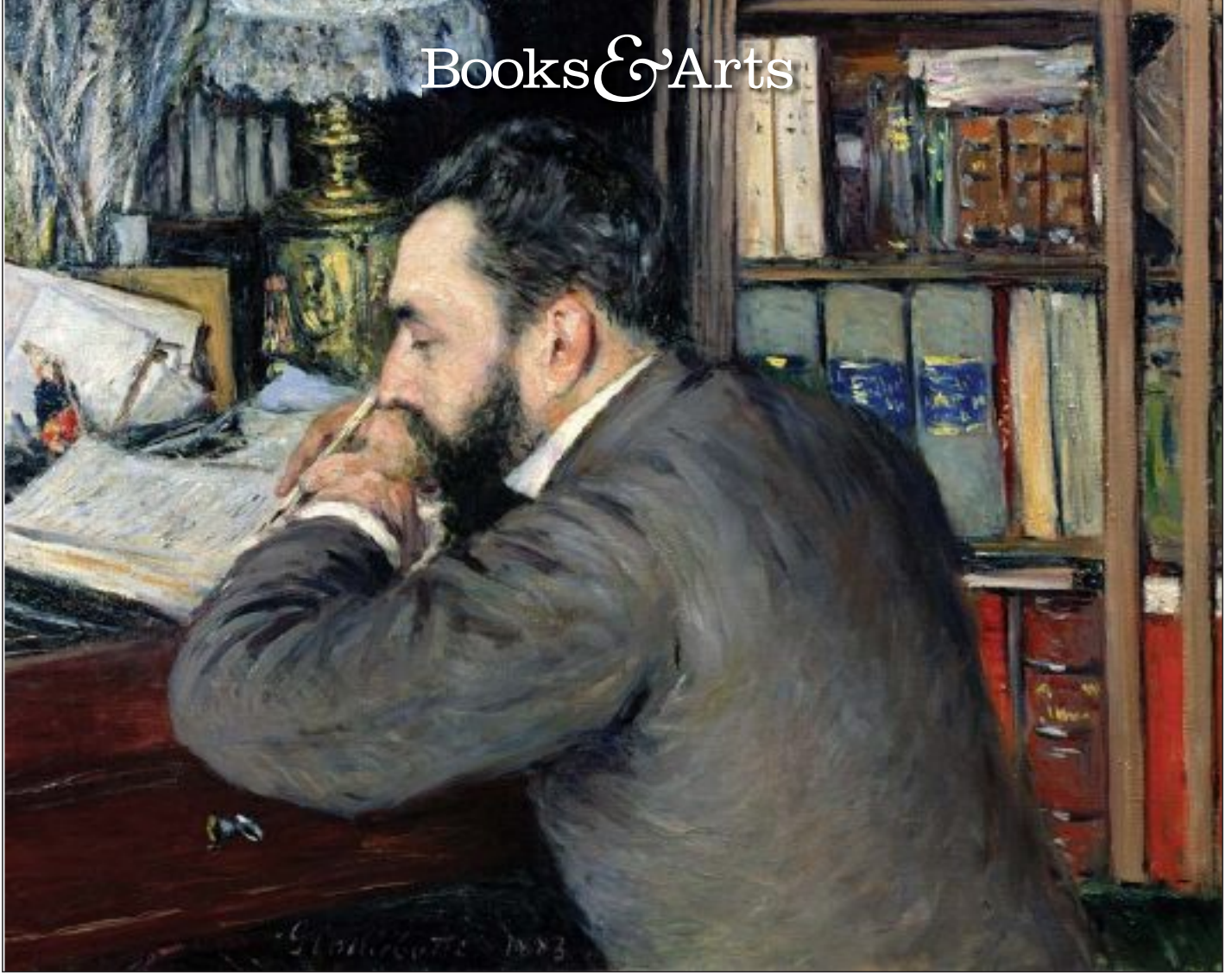
professing their loyalty to the Shah and to his appointed Prime Minister Zahedi.”

Mossadeq was too much a man of the system to remain on the run. He turned himself in to General Zahedi’s headquarters, where he was treated with courtesy and respect. Before the advent of the Islamic Republic, Persian politics were still marked by civility and decorum.

The coup that would be subject to so much historical controversy was not so much an American conspiracy as a reassertion of Iran’s traditional classes alarmed about the radicalization of national politics. The street that Mossadeq had rebelled against him. Many chroniclers of these events refuse to acknowledge that the shah was at the time a popular figure and the monarchy a trusted institution. Army officers, landowners, mullahs, and average citizens alike had confidence in the monarchy and were fearful that its absence would pave the way for the dreaded Communists.

In the ensuing decades, Kermit Roosevelt and other CIA alumni would embellish their role in toppling Mossadeq, but the U.S. government’s after-action assessment was much more modest. The CIA itself noted that it was the shah’s departure that turned the tide against Mossadeq. “The flight of the Shah brought home to the populace in a dramatic way how far Mossadeq had gone and galvanized the people into irate pro-Shah force,” a CIA cable read. Similarly, the U.S. embassy reported that “not only members of Mossadeq regime but also pro-Shah supporters were amazed at latter’s comparatively speedy and easy initial victory which was achieved with high degree of spontaneity.” Eisenhower, who as supreme commander of Allied forces during World War II knew something about covert operations, dismissed Roosevelt’s narrative as “more like a dime store novel than historical fact.”

It is often suggested that the events of 1953 made the 1979 Islamic Revolution inevitable. This is another mythological narrative with little relationship to the facts. The shah, returning from exile, had the support of the public, the endorsement of Iran’s important social classes, and the validation of a superpower benefactor. While continuing his drive to modernize Iran, he could have assembled an inclusive government and thereby built a resilient state capable of withstanding the revolutionary tremors of the 1970s. Instead, he opted for the path of autocracy and corruption that proved his undoing. Neither the Truman nor the Eisenhower administration should be blamed for not foreseeing, much less preventing, the shah’s subsequent misfortunes. Nor should current American policymakers continue to operate under the illusion, as flattering as it might be to their vanity, that the United States singlehandedly toppled an Iranian leader. Mossadeq’s fall was largely a matter between Iranians. ♦



'Portrait of Henri Cordier' by Gustave Caillebotte (1883)

# Truth of the Matter

*The writing and editing of 'fact.'* BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

**N**onfiction is a baggy-pants term, in whose bulging pockets one finds autobiography, memoir, the essay, literary journalism, and book-length studies of ideas, trends, and much else. The only thing these various forms have in common is that all are written in prose and are based, supposedly, on fact.

Attempts have been made in recent years to elevate serious nonfiction, to pump it up into the realm of high lit-

*Joseph Epstein, a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, is the author, most recently, of Distant Intimacy: A Friendship in the Age of the Internet.*

**Good Prose**  
*The Art of Nonfiction*  
by Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd  
Random House, 224 pp., \$26

erature. In their day, Norman Mailer and Truman Capote claimed to be writing nonfiction novels, by which they meant little more than that they brought a fiction writer's sensibility, and a few of the techniques of the novel, to factual material. In some academic circles, nonfiction is referred to as "literary nonfiction," or—man that pump: *huff, puff*—as "creative nonfiction," and a magazine called *Creative*

*Nonfiction* has been in existence for nearly 20 years now. But is nonfiction in all its various subgenres sufficiently unified for a book of advice on how to write it likely to be of much value?

Such a book has been written by a veteran writer of nonfiction named Tracy Kidder and his former editor at the *Atlantic*, the Atlantic Monthly Press, and Houghton Mifflin, Richard Todd, who now teaches at Goucher College. The authors claim that *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction* is

mainly a practical book, the product of years of experiment in three types of prose: writing about the world, writing about ideas, and writing about the self. To put this another way, this

GETTY IMAGES

book is a product of our attempts to write and to edit narratives, essays, and memoirs.

Though the book is written, for the most part, in collaboration, certain sections of *Good Prose* are written and signed by one or other of the two authors (for example, “Being Edited” by Kidder and “Editing” by Todd). Setting out the questions, problems, and issues that beset the writer of serious prose based in fact, it is earnest, sensible, and never foolish, if, at times—as perhaps all books of advice must—lapsing into the commonplace.

Kidder has written for magazines, but he is better known as a writer of what he and Todd refer to as “nonfiction narratives.” He has written at book-length about, among other subjects, early computers (*The Soul of a New Machine*, for which he won a Pulitzer Prize in 1982), home construction (*House*, 1985), nursing homes (*Old Friends*, 1993), environmentalism (*Mountains Beyond Mountains*, 2003), genocide in Burundi (*Strength in What Remains*, 2009), and his days as a young lieutenant in Vietnam (*My Detachment*, 2005).

Todd has been Kidder’s editor for more than 40 years. This in itself is an extraordinary fact, since editors tend to be more migratory than most birds, and rarely stay at the same publishing house for long. Publishing house editors are either fired for failing to bring in commercially successful books or they leave because, having succeeded in finding such books, they are in a position to better themselves by going to work for a firm with more prestige.

Kidder and Todd discovered each other when the latter was an editor at the *Atlantic* and the former, not long out of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, was eager to publish in a big-name magazine. Kidder’s subject was the effect of a serial killer on the people of the Sacramento Valley. Todd showed great patience in working with Kidder in helping make the piece publishable, even though the principal editor of the magazine, an obtuse man named Robert Manning, thought Kidder was without talent.

I call Manning obtuse not only because he was wrong about Tracy Kidder, but because the *Atlantic* under Manning’s editorship was unusually dull. I also harbor a mild but genuine personal grievance against Robert Manning. In 1969, he invited me to Boston to interview for a job as an editor at the magazine. We lunched at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. He ordered a carafe of red wine, almost all of which he drank on his own. I laid out various ideas for the *Atlantic*, but, as he polished off a second carafe of red wine, I was presenting my carefully rehearsed plan for enlivening his magazine to a man utterly schnoekered. If he heard a single word I’d said, the alcohol obviously erased it.

Despite Manning’s misjudgment about Kidder, Todd stood by him. The unusualness of their relationship is what makes *Good Prose* an interesting book, at the same time that it limits its general usefulness. No one is likely to come upon so full-court-press an editor as Tracy Kidder found in Richard Todd; nor is any editor likely to find so malleable a writer to work with as Richard Todd discovered in Tracy Kidder.

The way they work together is at the center of *Good Prose*. Kidder comes to Todd with an idea for a new book, which they discuss, and, if the idea appears workable, they hone and refine it. Through reading, interviews, and legwork, Kidder assembles the material required to write the book. In a great swoosh of energy, he plunges into the writing, putting down everything that occurs to him in the first of what may turn out to be 9 or 10 drafts. Todd makes points small and large, in the margin and in conversation, on the various drafts. The manuscript begins to take shape.

“No writer known to me revises so energetically and even enthusiastically as Kidder,” writes Todd. As a writer, Kidder is expansive, abundant; as an editor, Todd is meticulous and spare. And so, between the two of them, like the English nursery rhyme’s Mr. and Mrs. Sprat, they lick not the plate but the manuscript clean.

When the book on which they have been working is finally in type, author and editor go off to some distant place—Maine is mentioned; so, too, St. Martin—to read page proofs to each other and make final corrections. One of their habits when doing so, they report, is to imagine bad reviews for the book—the notion here being that such reviews once imagined will not occur in reality. Have they, I wonder, already imagined this review?

After all these years, each man is aware of the other’s weaknesses and strengths. Kidder is used to Todd’s taciturnity and respects his demands for the utmost clarity; Todd is used to Kidder’s propensity to seek out goodness in the subjects he writes about, and sometimes to overdo his emphasis on virtue. Kidder can no longer quite decipher Todd’s marginal comments, owing to his deteriorating handwriting, but so long have they been working together he knows by instinct the intentions behind them. Over more than 40 years, they report, neither has spoken in anger to the other. About how many marriages can that statement be made?

What makes the Kidder-Todd relationship noteworthy is not merely its duration but the fact that editors have long since ceased to lavish such attention on their authors. Within large publishing houses nowadays, the job of editor is often broken down into that of procurement editor and that of manuscript editor: The job of the first is to sign up the author; that of the second is to make his or her book presentable for publication. The more successful a contemporary editor in publishing is, the less likely is he to spend lots of time working on his authors’ manuscripts.

Maxwell Perkins, at Charles Scribner’s Sons, is easily the most famous of American publishing editors. Perkins is to publishing as Clarence Darrow is to law: the representative, the exemplary figure. He acquired his fame as an editor through the fame of his authors, who included, among others, Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, John P. Marquand, and Erskine Caldwell.

Some needed more attention than others. Fitzgerald required emotional support, Wolfe extensive surgery on his overblown novels. (Wolfe wrote so elaborate a dedication to Perkins for one of his later novels that the dedication, like the manuscript itself, had to be cut roughly in half.)

Not even Maxwell Perkins supplied his authors with the attention that Todd provides Kidder. Any writer reading *Good Prose* will naturally ask if he would like to have such attention paid to his own compositions. The answer will have a good deal to do with the writer's confidence in his own skill: his sense of proportion, feeling for structure, and mastery of prose style. The more confident he is of these, the less is he likely to yearn for such heavy editing.

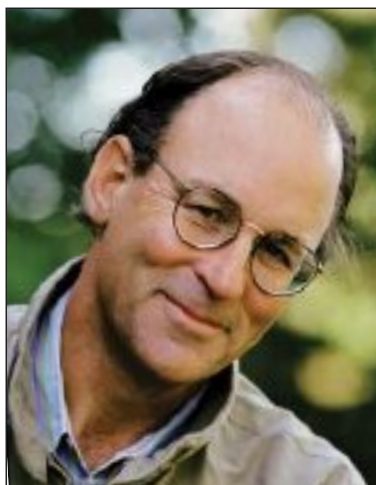
Over and above literary skill, ego often enters the equation, in some cases emphatically. In my mid-20s, I had an article accepted by *Harper's*, a prospect immensely pleasing to me. The glow of pleasure wore off, however, once I received a copy of my article, which had been edited to the point of its having nearly been rewritten by an editor there. My choices were four: (1) withdraw the article (and lose the fee and dollop of fame its publication promised); (2) accept the heavy editing (who, after all, would know, except the editor and me?); (3) work out a compromise; or (4) demand the manuscript be returned to its original form.

Those who feel that compromise should have been the clear and simple solution know little of the vanity of writers. I demanded that everything be returned to the way I had written the article, and—doubtless setting a bad precedent for the rest of my career—I got my way. The fact was, the thought of words I had not written appearing under my name, in however grand a place, made me nearly physically ill.

One gathers that Todd does not change many of Kidder's words. Instead

he edits for emphasis, structure, and flow. "The best thing an editor can do," he writes, "is help a writer to think, and this is the most satisfying part of an editor's work, collaborating at the level of structure and idea." He adds that "[e]ditors ideally can hear and see prose in a way that the writer cannot. And to notice [a problem] may be enough, preferable to trying to fix it oneself."

Kidder holds that "writers who need editors have to learn to listen, really listen, to advice that no one wants to



Tracy Kidder, Richard Todd

hear—that you should jettison hard-earned pages, that you must start again." Todd's praise is generally restrained, but his editorial advice, one gathers, though authoritative, is tactfully delivered. His relationship with Kidder has never slid into the adversarial. "Editing at its best involves the editorial engagement between editor and author," he writes. "Editing at its worst is more like combat."

Reading about Kidder and Todd, one thinks of one's own experience with editors. The fates of my book-length manuscripts in the hands of editors have been wildly varied. I had an editor for one of my books a few years ago who frequently wrote in the margins of my manuscript: "More texture." I hadn't a notion what she had in mind by "texture," and we soon parted ways. In a little book I wrote on Tocqueville, I mentioned that Tocqueville's father served as a prefect in Metz, which caused its editor to set out in my margin, "More

about Metz." I replied that if he wanted to learn more about Metz, he could consult a Baedeker, for he would get no more about the French provincial town from me.

The editor of my first book was a man in his mid-30s named Hal Scharlatt. He was one of the hot editors of the day—the early 1970s—at a time when many editors were well known, at least within the scribbling trade. Some of the better known among them were: Henry Sutton, Ashbel Green, David Segal, Robert Gutwillig, Elizabeth Sifton, Aaron Asher, and Robert Gottlieb. Unlike Richard Todd, Scharlatt was the reverse of reliable. He didn't answer letters, returned calls only after long intervals, and might show up 40 minutes late for a lunch meeting. In dealing with my manuscript, he never deigned to offer particular criticism. Instead, at the end of a chapter he might write, "Things slow down here. I'd cut this chapter by 20 percent." No indi-

cation of how or where to cut; nor any word about how he derived the figure 20 percent. The astonishing thing is that he was always right. After a French lunch and a workout on the tennis court, Hal Scharlatt dropped dead of a heart attack at 39.

I have had other good, if not so eccentric, editors for my books. The fine literary taste of a woman named Pat Straughn made itself quietly felt in a book I wrote on the subject of snobbery. A young editor named Webster Younce was largely hands-off with the manuscript of a book I wrote about friendship, except to suggest (rightly) that I ought to begin the book with what was then its third chapter. Carol Houck Smith was my editor for roughly 15 years at W.W. Norton, and I have no recollection of her ever suggesting a change or touching a sentence in the nine books I published with her. What I do recall is lots of laughter and a shared love for the singing of Blossom Dearie.

IMAGES: TRACY KIDDER, MICHAEL BAUMAN

In *Good Prose*, Kidder and Todd take up the nonfiction form of the essay, but without any special penetration. Their examples of consummate essayists comprise the usual suspects. They write the standard goop on those old bores Emerson and Thoreau, and are not much fresher on Virginia Woolf. E.B. White, like a literary Muhammad Ali at a major sporting event, puts in his standard appearance. William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb and Max Beerbohm go unmentioned. Closer to our time, they exalt A.J. Liebling and Joan Didion. They seem to miss the key note in Didion, which is depression, and the fact that Liebling, amusing though he could be, was chiefly slumming in most of his essays.

Kidder and Todd are not much better on the memoir. They fail to make the crucial distinction between memoir and confession, a mistake many contemporary writers of memoir make—much to their readers', if not their own, embarrassment. Every memoir should be "a record of learning," they write. Tell that to the duc de Saint-Simon, who used his memoir, the greatest ever written, chiefly to revenge himself on his enemies at Versailles. Kidder has produced a single memoir, *My Detachment*, about his days in an administrative, not a line, company in Vietnam, and it is one of his less successful books. The reason for this is that Tracy Kidder, an honest and an honorable writer, has neither an interestingly complex mind nor an original point of view. His virtues are doggedness and decency. He was made to write about other people, ordinary people, and he does best to include himself in his writing only when he is absolutely required to do so.

Which is why the portion of *Good Prose* devoted to what the authors call "narrative nonfiction" is the most interesting, and also the most controversial, portion of the book. Making books out of other people's lives is fraught with complications. Not the least of them is whether, as Janet Malcolm contended in her book *The Journalist and the Murderer*, all such projects are corrupted from the start.

"Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible," Malcolm wrote. Kidder and Todd, naturally enough, do not agree—or at least they think Malcolm's assertion needs to be highly qualified. They set out rules for removing the element of corruption from the transaction between writer and subject, which consist chiefly of candor on the part of the writer to his subject from the outset, in what amounts to a literary version of a prenuptial agreement.

Corruption, though, can derive from both sides. Often in these arrangements, each party (subject and writer) is out to seduce the other, each for his own motives. The writer wants his story; the subject wants to be written up in a way that will enhance his reputation, glamorize him, or one way or another redound to his greater glory. Invariably, the two are using each other, no mistake about it.

A number of years ago, I allowed a piece to be written about me by a reporter from the *Chicago Tribune*. Our interaction began with a call in which she told me how much her mother "adored" my short stories. I let her attend a class I was then teaching; she claimed to find my teaching highly polished. I took her to lunch, where we talked amiably, almost intimately, about common experiences we had undergone in Chicago, where we had both grown up. We parted amiably, she to write a profile that portrayed me as pretentious, affected, snobbish, and mildly out of it. I suppose I have no right to complain, since my motive was to come off as immensely charming, or at least likable, with the result that the pleasing publicity would bring me many new readers. The frog (me) in this case didn't know what he was getting into when he agreed to transport the scorpion (the reporter) across the pond.

Journalism entailing interviews, or allowing the writer to hang around the subject as he goes through his normal life, is a form of documentary—with a *cinéma vérité* touch added. As such, it perforce requires the writer to

be selective, to make decisions about what to put in and what to exclude. The more the element of selection is in play, the lower the truth quotient of literary, as of film, documentary. This is why "narrative nonfiction" has a lower status than fiction. "Fiction is where the truth can be found," Frederic Raphael has written; "documentary is too often where it is confected." One thinks here about the most famous nonfiction narrative of the past century, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, about which witnesses continue to come forth to attest that Capote invented some of the most crucial scenes in his very readable book.

*Good Prose* is something of a misnomer as a title, until the book's end, where the authors include eight pages of notes on grammar and usage. Here, they are, for most part, on the side of the angels. They rightly favor H.W. Fowler's *Modern English Usage* over all other guides to careful English. They allow for change in the language, yet retain a sensible distaste for many words and constructions because of their imprecision and awkwardness. "Iconic," "parenting," "impacting," and "pro-active" are among their bugaboo words, and they would outlaw all sports metaphors from contemporary prose. They don't much care, either, for "going forward" in place of "in the future" or "soon," and contemn "folks" in place of "people"—two locutions that, if legally outlawed, would render our current president nearly speechless.

Kidder and Todd fail to announce a ban on "journey," the great overworked metaphor of the day (so that now, among the psychobabblous, marriage, raising children, cancer, and life itself are flaming "journeys"). They concede that "to Google" has entered the language and that it no longer requires quotation marks. They neglect to note, though, the comic awkwardness of the phrase "I Googled myself," which is something every writer does frequently and which sounds like nothing so much as the mental equivalent of an act that 19th-century medical encyclopedias referred to as "the secret vice"—a vice Googling oneself all too closely resembles. ♦

BCA

# Britain in Bloom

*The Chelsea Flower Show celebrates its centennial.*

BY SARA LODGE



*The 'flower bricks' of Stoke-on-Trent*

*London*

In his short story “The Occasional Garden,” Saki pinpoints a subject dear to the British heart, but also key to its social anxieties. Elinor Rapsley is about to receive a lunch visit from a woman whom she detests, Gwenda Pottingdon. Gwenda’s garden is the envy of the neighborhood; Elinor’s is a barren wasteland. Gwenda is coming on purpose to crow over Elinor’s pathetic pansies while describing her own rare and sumptuous roses.

Elinor, however, has a surprise in store. A friend has told her about the Occasional-Oasis Supply Association, which, for a fee, can transform her garden for a few hours into a backdrop of cinematic splendor. When

Gwenda arrives, she is startled to see “the pomegranate and lemon trees, the terraced fountain, where golden carp slithered and wriggled amid the roots of gorgeous-hued irises,” the “banked masses of exotic blooms [and] the pagoda-like enclosure, where Japanese sand-badgers disported themselves.”

She chokes on her lunch, and we—the reader—laugh into our sleeves. For we understand that in Britain, having an exquisite garden is the ultimate social trump card. Even if the garden only lasts for an afternoon.

In 1913, the Royal Horticultural Society held its Great Spring Show for the first time in Chelsea: a display designed to demonstrate, through the construction of temporary gardens and plant exhibits, the abundance of new and exciting varieties and the visual effects the keen gardener could achieve. Nowadays, the Chelsea Flower Show is a firmly established part of the London Season. Attended

by the queen and other celebrities, it transforms the 66 acres around the Royal Hospital Chelsea into a series of temporary Edens quite as elaborate and competitive as anything that Saki could have imagined.

For five days in May, over 160,000 eager ticket-holders pour through the Garden Gate to enjoy an event that is both a tribute to Britain’s past—a throwback to the Victorian days of Great Exhibitions—and a hotbed of contemporary fashion, where gardens may be suspended from cranes, or feature space-age structures, novelty fabrics, or digital effects.

The first thing you will see as you follow the gravel path past Christopher Wren’s Royal Hospital Chelsea, an elegant, symmetrical edifice built in 1692 and dedicated to housing retired soldiers, is the Chelsea Pensioners themselves. These veterans wear a distinctive red uniform, often with medals and a tricorne hat. Their average age is 83, and they sway like cheerful scarlet poppies amidst the corn of incoming garden-lovers, collecting donations for military charities. This is their home, and you sense that the annual frenzy of floribundance is a source of quiet amusement to them.

Onward you press, along the grand, tree-lined Eastern Avenue, ignoring meantime the many commercial stalls that want to woo you with Wellington boots or secure your order for twine. You are heading for the Great Pavilion, the vast tent at the heart of the show. Here, growers specializing in particular types of plants advertise their prowess by creating displays of extravagant wonder. There is so much eye-popping color that it is easy to wander in a daze, like a child in a candy store, simply marveling at the panoply of different species in their infinite variety of form.

There are dioramas of daffodils, crowds of cacti, hosts of hostas, and fusillades of fuchsias. Some of the nurseries represented here have been in business since the Victorian era, and their gardeners still wear their trademark bowler hats and waistcoats. Jim Durrant of McBean’s Orchids, which was founded in 1879

IMAGES: SARA LODGE

*Sara Lodge, a senior lecturer in English at the University of St Andrews, is the author of Thomas Hood and Nineteenth-Century Poetry: Work, Play, and Politics.*

and has always had a stand at Chelsea, explained that orchids are worth a great deal less now than in 1913. Back then, individual specimens sold to wealthy collectors for the equivalent of £20,000 apiece. McBean's would make enough money from orders at Chelsea to pay for the running of its Sussex nursery for a whole year.

Now, owing to modern propagation methods that produce orchids in large numbers, those plants sell for around £30. Although the stand rental itself is free, transport and accommodation costs mean that McBean's takes a loss at Chelsea. But being there is a point of pride and of profile: It broadens the customer base. As I gazed entranced at the rising slope of spotted, slender-throated cream and bronze and magenta blooms behind Durrant, more hard-headed and deep-pocketed visitors were waving their order forms and credit cards, pointing fingers to indicate that they wanted five of these, and nine of those.

You can't buy plants to take away at Chelsea—at least until Saturday afternoon, when the show is dismantled. The tension between the omnipresence of beautiful plants and the fact that you can't have them (or not yet) creates a *frisson* of quasi-erotic wistfulness. Concrete as the exhibits may be, the Chelsea Flower Show is all about fantasy. It is about the garden of your imagination much more than the one in your backyard.

Ranged around the Grand Pavilion are the 15 official "show gardens," and you will have to be patient if you want a good look at any of them. Rock concert-style crowds throng and surge against the wire barriers as if trying to glimpse a zoo tiger or the *Mona Lisa*. You may suffer a middle-class, middle-aged elbow in the kidneys, or a Cath Kidston chintz tote swung perilously close to your glasses.

These mini-idylls, the largest of which is 32 by 72 feet, are scrutinized for their design as closely as any catwalk creation. Some are classical in inspiration: The 2013 Laurent-Perrier garden, designed by Swedish art-throb Ulf Nordfjell, featured a bronze sculpture of Orpheus leaping lyrically

upward in a movement echoed by five tapering oaks—tall, golden trees that had the slim, paintbrush shape of cypresses. These oaks (*Quercus fastigiata*) became one of the most talked-about items at the show. Other gardens are more urban in feel. The Midlands city of Stoke-on-Trent, famous for the industrial potteries that produce



Chelsea Pensioner

Britain's tableware, sponsored a garden this year that was designed to reflect the regeneration of the city. It contained an extraordinary open structure in the shape of a kiln, partially stacked with white china "flower bricks." Behind this was a living wall of plants in colors supposed to represent the Staffordshire landscape. Water cascaded through a series of tiered pools, toward a circular, tiled tabletop depicting plants exhibited in the garden.

I'm not convinced that I'd want any of this in my personal oasis, but, with perhaps the addition of a few flamingos, I think Gwenda Pottingdon would be impressed.

Each of the gardens and pavilion stands is assessed by a committee and awarded a class of medal: gold, silver-gilt, silver, or bronze. Part of the pleasure of the show is tutting in outrage

at the decisions. As with the Oscars, members of the public often suspect that politics trumps talent. If a garden is sponsored by Prince Harry, highlighting the plight of AIDS-affected Lesotho (as the Sentebale garden did this year), then—many whisper, and I cannot demur—it will win gold regardless of how ugly it is.

Some of the more quietly attractive gardens this year were in the smaller "Artisan" and "Fresh" categories. In "The Massachusetts Garden," inspired by the poetry of Emily Dickinson, designer Susannah Hunter, who normally works with textiles for handbags, had created a floral backdrop that was like a Japanese screen, but entirely made from appliqué leather. She estimated that there were 15,000 handsewn petals in the garden, creating imaginary hollyhocks and foxgloves and a wisteria trellis behind some lovely naturalistic planting by Catherine MacDonald, including irises, poppies, and dogwoods.

I liked the soft planting, too, in the "Get Well Soon" garden by the National Botanic Garden of Wales, which was full of medicinal herbs and restful, creamy-hued tulips ("Maureen Double"), aquilegia ("White Star"), and delphiniums ("Galahad"), with now and again a splash of wine-red anemones ("Bordeaux") to revive the drooping spirit.

The Artisan Gardens are designed to showcase natural and sustainable materials, and it is clear that concern about sustainability has risen up the Chelsea agenda in recent years. Several universities had stands in the Great Pavilion, presenting their work on grass-free lawns—why not try a wildflower meadow instead, which will need less watering?—and allowing visitors to play with scientific instruments that can measure chlorophyll in wheat varieties, making fertilizer application more efficient. Products for sale included wool compost and various kinds of batboxes, "frogitats," and "hogitats" (to encourage hedgehogs). Iconic animal species such as the nightingale, turtledove, and hedgehog have diminished by 90 percent in Britain in the last 50 years: a sad toll

that is attributed to habitat loss, pesticide use, and changing climate patterns. Hedges, which provide nesting sites for birds and allow hedgehogs to move between gardens, are currently “in”; fences are “out.”

As you can spend an entire day—from 8 A.M. to 8 P.M.—at Chelsea, it is important to remember to sit down. Visitors picnic under the chestnut trees (if the rain holds off), listening to a band play military marches and medleys from *Show Boat*. There are many concessions selling champagne with strawberries, tea with cake—or beer with fish and chips. One suspects that some visitors with few horticultural aspirations come chiefly to socialize and get pleasantly squiffy, their cheeks becoming as ruddy as carnations while the shadows fall.

The growers and designers throw their own parties. After an intense three weeks delivering and disposing of many thousands of plants—some of which are mature trees in 265-gallon pots—they are on an adrenalin high akin to the cast of a circus. Many of the people who join the gardening profession, like those in the theater, have run away from other jobs as lawyers or office-workers. They love the risk, the camaraderie, and the creativity. And it is hard to blame them.

Of course, there is plenty at Chelsea that is pretentious, vulgar, or bizarre. Among the commercial stalls in the avenues are booths purveying life-sized metal statues of gorillas, frog mariachi bands, and nude women riding dinosaurs. You can also purchase a wide variety of follies and ruins: The latter come in at about £1,500 for a small turret, and range upwards to £20,000 for the façade of an ancestral abbey. I found a sculpture of a skeleton towing a lawn-roller a good deal more disturbing than garden gnomes, which are usually banned from Chelsea on grounds of taste but which made a discreet, one-off appearance this year in a well-hidden glass case. (These special gnomes were all painted by celebrities and are to be auctioned for charity. Sir Elton John created a glam-rock gnome, with pink glitter attire and sunglasses. Lord Julian Fellowes,

creator of *Downton Abbey*, had, unsurprisingly, gone for a very traditional costume. A stately gnome, if you will.)

For all its fads and furbelows, the Chelsea Flower Show strikes at something very deep in the roots of British life. The designer plots bring out the paradox that, on a small island, gardens function both as intensely private spaces—the sites of Romantic dreams of seclusion—and as public spaces, which display our connoisseurship, our class, and our credo more frankly than anything else we Britons own.

If an Englishman’s home is his castle, his garden is his chapel. The British are not united, as Americans are, by a single flag (the Scots, Welsh, and Irish hoist their own banners, and many Englishmen prefer the Cross of St. George to the Union Jack). But the importance and delight of gardens, which feature so strongly in our literature, is a touchstone that brings us together, an anthem on which everyone can agree.

Perhaps it is because we have so little land, relatively speaking, that each single bed seems worth losing sleep over. Or perhaps more poignant fantasies are at work. The British upper and middle classes are, in the main, ambivalent about commerce and the material trappings of wealth: Cars, designer clothes, and other luxury goods are not flaunted by the arbiters of taste. But gardens are different, because they are natural—even when they are highly studied. The ultimate goal of the Chelsea Flower Show, as of so many Britons, is to create gardens that look as if they have been there forever: landscapes of timeless charm and beauty, whose expansive air of tranquility and cycles of growth and change seem unconscious of any market.

In a country where family trees and historic homes are worth far more, culturally, than new money ever could be, the rose whose rise is imperceptible has the sweetest scent of all. ♦



# Dance of Creation

*The Ballets Russes and the dawn of modernity.*

BY EVE TUSHNET

## Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, 1909-1929

*When Art Danced with Music*  
National Gallery of Art  
Through September 2

*“There was a definite puppet-like quality about [Vaslav] Nijinsky’s Petrouchka. He seemed to have limbs of wood and a face made of plaster, in which his eyes resembled nothing so much as two boot buttons. Only now and then did he make you aware that beneath this façade there was a tiny spark of human life, which you caught sight of by accident, as though it were something you were not meant to see. Gone were those fascinating features with*

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*the slanting eyes, that marvelous élévation—all had vanished, to be replaced by this wretched puppet—beaten, humiliated, and the sport of its fellows—a victim of cruel injustice, which moved by jerks and starts and hardly left the ground. Nijinsky’s Petrouchka was a puppet that sometimes aped a human being; all the other interpreters of the role that I have seen suggested a dancer who was imitating a puppet.”*

—Cyril Beaumont

**T**his show attempts to give its audience an experience almost as immersive and complete as the experience of the Ballets Russes itself. The exhibit is divided roughly by ballet, so that each gets its own room. The walls

are a deep peacock blue, often painted with images that recall the dropcloths used in the ballets themselves. The big exhibit winds through two floors, journeying through time. And it doesn't just showcase paintings, sculptures, and drawings of the Ballets Russes—by familiar names like Picasso, de Chirico, and Rodin—but includes magazines, posters, a wealth of original costumes, 3-D set designs, music composed for the company, and videos either re-creating the company's choreography or reinterpreting it.

It's ambitious, and it mostly works. Even the walk over to the exhibit feels like a part of the show: In the cool, white, high-ceilinged landing of the gallery, you walk past George Segal's 1971 plaster sculpture *The Dancers*, in which a ring of four calm and focused women practice their moves. From this image of peace and clarity you suddenly enter the dark, exotic, lush world of the Ballets Russes exhibit: a world of inspiration and ecstasy. The walls are close, the music swells, and placid white is replaced by red and gold and blue.

It's impossible to re-create ballet in an art museum, but this comes surprisingly close. Sculptures show the dancers in gravity-defying poses, every limb arched and crooked. Boris M. Frödman-Cluzel's 1909 bronze of Adolph Bolm as the Polovtsian Chief from *Prince Igor* shows the dancer in a pose which is all angles and abandon: head thrown back, stomping, swooning, saber raised on high. Valentin Serov's lithograph of Anna Pavlova from the same year shows the curves to Bolm's sharp corners. She's all lissome, regal control. And the costume designs by Léon Bakst are delirious works of art in themselves. His design for Nijinsky in *Afternoon of a Faun*, which serves as the exhibit's poster, shows the black-and-white-spotted faun romancing a snaky, jewel-toned scarf and a Dionysian bunch of purple grapes. There's more snakiness in Bakst's sketch for a Bacchante from *Narcissus*.

All Bakst's sketches are sultry, with more than a hint of danger. In contrast,

Jean Cocteau's poster for Nijinsky in *Le Spectre de la Rose*—and, seriously, it seems as if everybody who's anybody is in this show—portrays the dancer in a soft, almost boneless, lilting pose.

There is also more direct representation: A 33-second clip of a Ballets Russes rehearsal from 1928 plays on one wall, showing Mikhail Fokine's



Vaslav Nijinsky in 'Siamese Dance' by Jacques-Émile Blanche (ca. 1910)

choreography and Serge Lifar just hanging in the air like a firework. Other, bigger screens show the Joffrey Ballet's re-creations of the original choreography for *Faun* and *The Rite of Spring*. These screenings don't quite work, largely because they're physically too close together: You can hear the dulcet Debussy while you're trying to watch the pounding, anti-dulcet Stravinsky, and vice versa. On the exhibit's top floor, a 2010 short film inspired by *The Firebird* has some striking images of black and flame-filled women's silhouettes. But

it's too didactic and respectful, too PBS. It pales in comparison to the original Natalia Goncharova *Firebird* backcloth which hangs on the opposite wall.

There's a wealth—almost a surfeit—of provocative and gorgeous artwork in this show, but there are also glancing attempts to answer the underlying question: Why was Sergei Diaghilev's transformation of the ballet so shocking?

The exhibit doesn't hammer on this question, but it does offer a few possibilities. And these suggestions make it obvious that our own time is not far removed from Diaghilev's age of revolution. Some of the suggestions have to do with sex, of course, in all its manifestations: The "star" performer is objectified by the audience, even as he (and with the Ballets Russes, it was often a man) compels and commands it; he's often displayed in sexually provocative costumes, but he awes by the physical power of his leaps and turns. There's a sexual ambiguity here which remains controversial. (The National Gallery's captions are matter-of-fact about the offstage homo- and bisexuality of several of the men at the center of the company's success.) But there's a deeper current of human emotion, a yearning for ecstasy and escape, for which sex is only one of the many outlets or symbols. Sex isn't the reason the premiere of *The Rite of Spring* degenerated into a near-riot. It isn't the reason that, as the National Gallery notes, "many of the dancers were as baffled by the ballet as the audience was."

Ballet, with its extreme stylization, seems to stretch the boundaries of the human. The pointed toes, the ferocious toe-stepping which combines the sound of drumming with the visual impression of floating, the huge leaps—all of it seems more than human. It is close to hubris. And it carries an unspoken threat: If we can make ourselves something more than human, we can make ourselves something less. By inverting the conventions of the ballet (turning the toes inward rather than out, decking the dancers in heavy cloth or huge, nodding surrealist boxes), the

Ballets Russes sometimes suggested that the stylization of a man might make him a beast or machine, a faun or a puppet. The fact that this threat sometimes slips into view is the exhibition's most unexpected achievement.

In the end, we're returned to the

white and merely pretty gallery spaces. The last room of the show—the final tent at the midnight carnival—is dedicated to *The Blue Train*, a confection about holidaying, with costumes by Coco Chanel. It's a relief, but it's not what visitors will remember. ♦



# Wisdom of the Sage

*The idea, and the reality, of King Solomon.*

BY AARON ROTHSTEIN

In the best-known court case in the Hebrew Bible, two women come to King Solomon, the wise, wealthy, and powerful king with the following quandary: One of their children died in his sleep, while the other remains alive. There are no witnesses, and each mother claims that the living child is hers. Solomon requests a sword to cut the baby in half; but the real mother, “overcome with compassion for her son,” the Bible tells us, relinquishes custody in order to save the baby’s life. This woman, Solomon concludes, is the true mother.

In the 1920s, Judge Vincent Brennan, a former Republican congressman, presided over a similar case. Steven Weitzman—professor of Jewish culture and religion at Stanford, and author of multiple books on the Bible and Judaism—describes this dilemma in *Solomon*: Two mothers presented to Judge Brennan’s courtroom were fighting over custody of the same child; in a Solomon-like move, the judge threatened to send the child to an orphanage. He recorded both women in order to study their reactions with psychological experts, and awarded custody to the woman who, Weitzman writes, was “crying, sobbing, lips quivering—rather than to the other woman, who stood expressionless.” But the judge turned out to

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**Solomon**  
*The Lure of Wisdom*  
by Steven Weitzman  
Yale, 240 pp., \$27.50

be wrong, and the woman who gained custody of the child was not, in fact, the real mother.

Judge Brennan’s attempt to imitate Solomon was misguided, as Weitzman points out. We now know that parents form deep bonds with their adoptive children, in some cases deeper than the biological bonds formed between the real mother and her child. The more interesting question, and the thrust of Weitzman’s book, however, is not case-based. Rather: What is it about King Solomon that moved Judge Brennan, along with many others throughout history, to attempt to replicate or understand the king’s wisdom?

Weitzman provides other examples of how the story of Solomon has inspired scholars and explorers. Christopher Columbus petitioned Ferdinand and Isabella to search for Solomon’s gold in Ophir and Tarshish, mysterious locations in the Bible where Solomon ostensibly stored his wealth. In a letter to the Spanish king and queen, Columbus outlined his motive: to “know the secrets of the world.” In the 1870s, a German geologist named Karl Mauch went in search of Solomon’s treasure

in Africa. Currently, Thomas Levy of the University of San Diego and a Jordanian archaeologist named Mohammad Najjar are excavating for Solomon’s wealth in Jordan.

But it is not just Solomon’s mysterious wealth that we have pursued. In addition to Brennan’s derivative judgment strategy, Christian, Islamic, and Jewish stories arose out of an attempt to describe or comprehend the kind of wisdom which Solomon possessed. In one Islamic tale, for instance, Solomon, as a precocious child, is cleverer than his father, King David. In another story, King David gives a poor widow a bag of meal. On her way home, the wind takes away the bag, leaving the woman with nothing. Solomon brings her to his father. He convinces his father to give him the scepter, crown, and throne in order to gain the power of the king. Solomon calls upon the wind and asks why it took away the woman’s meal. The wind replies that it used the meal to plug a leak on a ship that was filled with passengers on their way to Mecca. Solomon pardons the wind, and David gives the poor widow another bag of meal.

Here, Solomon not only has the wisdom and power to call upon the wind, but he even convinces his father to temporarily give up the throne in order to resolve this case, thereby demonstrating his superior powers of persuasion. (In another story, the origins of which are traced to Abyssinia, Solomon’s wisdom extends beyond worldly talents; confronted by a demon, he destroys it through his hidden knowledge of mystical prayer recitation.)

Given this history of intellectual and geographical exploration, the subtitle of *Solomon—The Lure of Wisdom*—comprises more of the interesting and relevant aspects of this work than do descriptions of Solomon himself. Weitzman attempts to use different methodologies to analyze the king’s biography, such as Freudian analysis, biblical criticism, and rabbinical interpretation—which can ultimately be more disorganized and confusing than elucidating. This is because, as Weitzman writes, “after

more than a century of textual and archaeological investigation, we know virtually nothing about the historical Solomon.” Thus, any biographical analysis will be almost all guesswork. Moreover, the Bible itself offers little information about this apparently integral figure’s wisdom and life.

The Bible describes what we do know. After Solomon’s rule is established, God comes to him in a dream and asks him what he desires. Instead of requesting wealth or power or the death of his enemies, Solomon asks for “an understanding mind to judge Your people, to distinguish between good and bad.” God, impressed by what Solomon does *not* ask for, grants Solomon riches, might, and wisdom beyond simply the ability to distinguish between good and bad. “There has never been anyone like you before, nor will anyone like you rise again,” God says. He gives Solomon wisdom “as vast as the sands on the seashore.”

But we have only two examples of this: Solomon’s adjudication between the two mothers, and his deep knowledge of “beasts,” “fishes,” “trees,” and the rest of the natural world. Otherwise, there is no concrete evidence of Solomon’s great wisdom. Even the queen of Sheba, thought to be located in present-day Yemen, hears of Solomon’s wisdom and comes to “test him with hard questions”—though we are never told what these questions are, merely that Solomon could answer all of them.

Eventually, despite his unparalleled and unexplainable wisdom, and his wealth, wide territorial holdings, and architectural accomplishments, God takes away much of Solomon’s kingdom. Solomon accumulated many foreign women in his harem—700 royal wives and 300 concubines from all different nations of the known world—who “turned away Solomon’s heart after other gods.” Solomon did this despite an explicit passage in Deuteronomy which forbids the king from having “many wives, lest his heart go astray.”

Weitzman explores why someone so wise could violate such an obvious prohibition: It is not in spite of his wisdom, but because of his wisdom,

that Solomon is led astray, Weitzman suggests. Perhaps Solomon believed himself wise enough to accumulate a surfeit of wives while still avoiding temptation. “Whatever it is that Solomon understood about the world or God or the biblical text,” writes Weitzman, “might even be what got him into trouble by removing the

barriers that prevent us from breaking more serious laws.

Solomon’s downfall, then, demonstrates the danger of too much understanding—a biblical version of the Faustian tale. Still, we share Solomon’s desire for wisdom. This cryptic figure lures us to travel the world in search of his gold, or base a court judgment on his



‘Solomon’s Judgment’ by Franc Caucig (ca. 1817)

limits that normally constrain where the mind can go.”

This concept pervades Judaic thought. The rabbis conceived of *gezeirah*, alternatively known as building a fence around the Torah. One places certain restrictions on lifestyle in order to (in Rabban Gamliel’s words) “keep a man far from transgression.” Orthodox Jews do not carry money on the Sabbath, not because it is a grave sin against God but because it will prevent them from being in a position to buy something, an action associated with work, which is expressly forbidden. Solomon reasoned away the fence. Since Solomon knew the explanation for the prohibition against many wives—to avoid idolatry—he thought he could concentrate on this larger purpose rather than worry about avoiding lots of foreign women. In other words, if we understand the secrets of why we do certain things or why certain laws exist, we remove the

one known ruling despite the dearth of information on how he judged or what he knew. Perhaps it is because of our curiosity about what exactly his wisdom entailed that we search for some way to explain it. And, paradoxically, Weitzman observes, we interpret the Solomon story, and come to the conclusion that “curiosity can go wildly astray,” because of our own curiosity.

Like Solomon, we push the boundaries of knowledge to “know the secrets of the world,” with many subsequent benefits. But, aware of the possible dangers that result from pushing these boundaries, we at once pull back. We develop nuclear weapons, yet seek to eliminate them; we sequence the genome, but are uneasy about the possibility of eugenics. Despite our ignorance about Solomon and his wisdom, we are drawn to this story of a quintessentially enigmatic human figure, with a life that “mirrors our own strivings and doubts.” ♦

**"The IRS is a good political issue for Republicans. But are they in danger of overreaching on it?"**  
—WashingtonPost.com, June 3, 2013

**PARODY**

## Alberto Gonzales Is a Good Political Issue for Democrats

*But Are They in Danger  
of Overreaching on It?*

August 8, 2007 — Congress returns to Washington this week, with a schedule chock full of hearings in the Democrat-controlled Senate focused on Alberto Gonzales' firing of several U.S. Attorneys and his role in a secret NSA eavesdropping program. But if Democrats unearth nothing new—or nothing major—there may come a time when it behooves them politically to begin to refocus on other topics. There are real issues the public would like to focus on, after all, and

May 24, 1973

## Watergate a Good Political Issue for Democratic Party

*But Are They in Danger of Overreaching on It?*

It has been a week since the Senate convened hearings on the Watergate scandal. Though this paper has indeed done excellent work in covering the scandal to date, what remains to be seen is how long Senate Democrats can—and should—continue to focus on the president and his alleged wrongdoing. The public can grow tired of scandals, and if this goes on for too much longer, Democrats may face serious political fallout from the appearance that the

after an unnamed senior administration official said the president made it clear to his cabinet members, he put it, "The liberal get me and my administration I have no interest for them."

Special Undersecretary showed he

MARCH 5, 1987

## Iran-Contra: A Good Issue for Democrats

*But Are They in Danger  
of Overreaching on It?*

By the end of the week, there will have been several hearings in Congress regarding the Iran-Contra scandal, which leads to the question: How many is too many? Perhaps it is time to get on with the business of legislating, before the Democrats' attempts to paint this administration in scandal unleash a public backlash, which often happens when scandals are dragged out for purely political purposes.

## Whiskey Ring Scandal a Good Issue for Democrats

*But are they in danger  
of overreaching on it?*

FEBRUARY 12, 1876—Of late, there is no question that President Grant's conduct, and that of his underlings, in the alleged propagation of an illicit and corrupt whiskey-tax evasion conspiracy has been the focus of much questioning by Democrats under the Capitol's dome and among its dusky halls. But what, pray tell, might come of such queries? Indeed, it is possible that they will serve the interests of the questioned more than the questioner, so enervating and irritating is their effect on the consciousness of the populace. Better to desist, perhaps, than to heat a quarrel that dead, home to

the weekly  
**Standard**

JUNE 17, 2013