



Return of the Music Man Yes, Economic Development Is a Sham

“Rent-seeking is the act of growing one's existing wealth by manipulating the social or political environment without creating new wealth. Rent-seeking activities have negative effects on the rest of society.” — *Wikipedia*

“When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security.”



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- Emphasize the primacy of the individual in addressing public concerns.
- Recognize that equality of opportunity is sacrificed in pursuit of equality of results.

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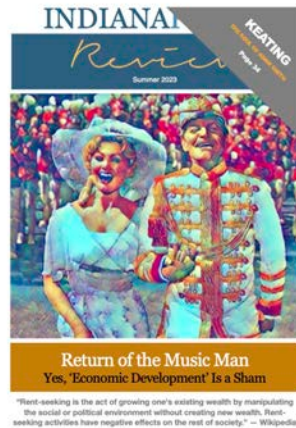
The Cover

Return of the Music Man

"Friend, either you're closing your eyes to a situation you do not wish to acknowledge,

"Or you are not aware of the caliber of disaster indicated by the presence of a pool table in your community.

"Well, you got trouble, my friend, right here, I say, trouble right here in River City." — Harold Hill, "The Music Man"



It is hard to get the score of “The Music Man” out of your head when reviewing the typical economic-development deal. Almost every Indiana city has one or more, and yes they are what they seem to be — shams.

These projects, designed to Hoover state and federal grants while leveraging local tax revenue, are built without market tests. They are meant to go belly up in 20 years, at which time the insiders buy them at what amounts to a sheriff’s sale — that or more taxpayer money is leveraged to revive the project and start the process over again, all the time circumventing a banking system that might ask embarrassingly hard questions.

That understood, the 76-trombone enthusiasm is predictable. We all want to see our community grow and prosper. We all like the idea of a vibrant “destination” downtown. We all want to dine and work in nice places.

“In many cases, the (downtown) office reflects a company’s culture,” a commercial real-estate agent told an unquestioning Fort Wayne Journal Gazette recently. “And people want to take pride in where they work and be taken care of where they work.”

But remember, an inarguable good is the beginning of every scam.

Indeed, there is an unnatural, facelift feel to the projects pushed by the economic-development agencies. They have no actual investors or entrepreneurs behind the hotels, convention centers, athletic venues or, ahem, marching bands. There are only stagers (Potemkin-like architects, real-estate agents, lawyers, engineers, grant-packagers and political bag men) all paid up front regardless of a project’s success or failure. They merely organize, permit and arrange the rebar and concrete. To be technically exact, they are what economists call “rent-seekers,” aptly defined here by Wikipedia:

“Rent-seeking is the act of growing one’s existing wealth by manipulating the social or political environment without creating new wealth. Rent-seeking activities have negative effects on the rest of society. They result in reduced economic efficiency through misallocation of resources, reduced wealth creation lost government revenue, heightened income inequality, risk of growing political bribery, and potential national decline.”

Clear enough? Again, these supposed public-private “partnerships” have no business plan that a commercial bank would recognize. There are no real consequences except for the public half of the deal. The only guaranteed return is for the private organizers, none of it justified by present value or any potential stream of community benefit. That is despite billions and billions of dollars in state funds put at risk (the arcane process makes it is difficult to determine the exact amount).

How is this done in Indiana, a state historically touted for its constitutional prohibition against government using your money to borrow on speculation?

The prohibition is an artifact of conditions in the state when it passed its 1851 constitution. The state was riddled with debt stemming from the collapse of the canal system and the bonds that were issued to support their construction. (Railroads basically killed the canals).

Indiana legislators and courts began nullifying the constitutional prohibition not long afterward. You can wade through the tortured rationale for yourself of why the Constitution didn't really mean what it said and why the state therefore should borrow to beat the band. It is all in [the March 1933 Indiana Law Journal](#).

Today, Indiana gets around the prohibition by creating government-sponsored agencies such as IEDC (Indiana Economic Development Corporation) and the IDDC (Indiana Destination Development Corporation).

The state also manages local government debt issuance through the IFA (Indiana Finance Administration) and encourages the municipalities to borrow for projects they work on with the IFA. And the state administers federal disbursements that it lends to the municipalities such as the State Revolving Fund that Fort Wayne uses to fund sewer projects.

Finally, there is no prohibition on municipal borrowing in itself, as exemplified by the city of Indianapolis floating a \$625-million bond proposal to build a downtown hotel in a flooding convention market.

"Despite the constitutional prohibition from borrowing, the state has still found ways to do so," concludes Jason Arp, a Fort Wayne city councilman and former banker. "I'm very concerned that IEDC and IDDC will become the next source for financial woes for the state in the future."

We are approaching the fourth year that low office vacancy has been blamed on an epidemic. But there is another explanation. Office workers and their employers don't see a value in downtown real estate today despite the money put into economic development there.

Indianapolis and Fort Wayne now claim office vacancies below 25 percent but the numbers are supplied by . . . wait for it . . . the people who sell office space.

A better indicator is downtown cellphone usage. It is 41 percent of what it was five years ago in Indianapolis. Other Indiana cities are likely

similar. That would indicate not only vacancies but fewer visitors to the dining and entertainment venues promised by economic-development projects.

There have been other signs in recent years that Indiana has taken a dangerous path. This foundation has checked off several of them:

✓ The correlation between campaign contributions to a typical Indiana mayoral race and subsequent municipal contracts approaches 1:1 in certain professions related to economic-development projects. The state attorney general has blocked attempts by a city council to prohibit such an unholy alliance of interests, better known as "Pay to Play." (See "Boosters Gone Wild," *The Indiana Policy Review*, fall 2017.)

✓ Dr. Sam Staley, an urban policy expert, says that the modern downtowns that have proven sustainable have been those that allowed prices to fall to where actual private developers would step in to fill a more modest vision — smaller markets limited to an odd mix of DINKs (dual incomes, no kids), retired couples and upper-income swingers with "downtown" tastes and habits: "Most of the people who locate in these areas are singles, empty-nesters or young childless couple who will move to the suburbs when they begin families. In other words, downtown revitalization efforts, as successful as many seem to be, need to be understood as niches, and not as a general formula for transforming entire cities. The chief accomplishment of some is to offer a more stimulating lunchtime environment for downtown office workers who have commuted from the suburbs." (See "Boondoggle or Boomtown," *The Indiana Policy Review*, winter 2020.)

'Not That Cool Anymore'

"We've always talked about millennials as urban people, living in apartments, using Uber and going out for brunch," Hyojung Lee, a professor of housing and property management at Virginia Tech, told Axios. "But it turns out they're

not that cool anymore.” About 45 percent of millennials expect to buy a home in the suburbs, according to a recent Bank of America survey reported by Fortune.

In fact, the donut counties are the fastest-growing areas of Indiana: Hamilton County (2.1 percent population gain), Hendricks County (1.7 percent), Boone County (1.6 percent) and Hancock County (1.5 percent).

As for the cities themselves, now comes new census data that says despite the fortune that has passed through Indiana’s economic-development agencies this last decade there has been little or no real growth.

Vintage 2022 Population Estimates finds eight of the state’s top 10 cities or townships experiencing decreases in population.

North Township in Lake County, a favorite economic-development recipient, saw its population drop by nearly 1,200 people. In Southwestern Indiana, Evansville lost population as did the capital of eco-devo, Indianapolis, which fell by nearly 1,800.

We asked Arp to examine the census data for his city for this issue of the journal:

“The Census Bureau data dispels the narrative that the public-private-partnerships pushed by Greater Fort Wayne Inc. and others has created growth in our city. The data shows that incomes are lagging the state, that the population growth has largely come from refugees . . .”

And in an accompanying article, John C. Mozena, president of the Center for Economic Accountability, explains his group’s findings that the job-creation efforts of state economic-development agencies don’t make a meaningful difference to the workforce or economy, and that is based on the agencies’ own data.

The latest Indiana Economic Development Corporation report, for example, takes credit for 24,059 “expected” new jobs. That is a pathetic 0.35 percent of the state’s 6.79 million population or 0.71 percent of its 3.39 million workforce.

As the man at the next desk notes, if it were not for rounding up there would be no numbers at all, and the ones they claim may include the dubious

multipliers (jobs or visitors that supposedly attract other jobs or visitors).

“That return on investment is so bad it makes Sam Bankman-Fried look like Warren Buffett,” quips Mozena. “If private-sector investment professionals were delivering results like this to their customers they’d be fired, in jail, or both.”

And metaphorically, when the band instruments do arrive they cost three times the assessed valuation.

If the economic-development agencies are ineffective in actually creating wealth they are super effective at changing a region’s political makeup and economic strategy. Policies proven to attract investment such as guarantees of property rights, lower taxes, public safety, open competition, freedom from regulation, etc., are abandoned for the magic of those public-private “partnerships.”

Economics by press release takes over. City councils fill with unquestioning boosters of fiscal schemes in the disguise of inarguable goods managed by self-serving insiders.

The latest of the inarguable goods is programs to save the homeless. A law signed by Gov. Eric Holcombe this session allows Indianapolis to form a special taxing district to address an increased number of vagrants in the downtown sector.

Why are they downtown? Because of the no-strings-attached welfare services offered there. How will the new tax-funded public-partnerships help? Well, they will supply more no-strings-attached welfare services there.

Shazam, San Francisco on the White River.

The result of all this is a deepening cynicism in a citizenry promised easy, immediate prosperity — that and a loss of competitive position vis-a-vis other states even as we say that our indebtedness is necessary to make us more competitive.

Several years ago we asked a friend’s reaction on visiting uber-progressive, sparkling downtown Carmel. Her reaction sums up that of our experts: “It’s impressive,” she said, “But it doesn’t look natural.”

It’s not. — *tcl*

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Would They Lie About a City's Economic Growth?

New Census Bureau data dispels the narrative that public-private partnerships have created growth in Fort Wayne. Rather, incomes are lagging the state and any population growth has largely come from refugees.

Jason Arp, for nine years a trader in mortgaged-backed securities for Bank of America, is serving his second term representing the 4th District on the Fort Wayne City Council. He is the designer of the legislative scoring system, IndianaScorecard.org. A version of this essay originally appeared in the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette.



Arp

Every 10 years in this country a census has been taken since 1790. This decennial census was created for the purpose of establishing and maintaining congressional districts and has been used by states, counties and municipalities for their own redistricting needs. From the beginning there were data needs besides simply counting the residents. Since the Constitution originally had partial representation for slaves (three-fifth compromise) they needed to be counted in the census. Over the years, as government continued to add complexity and differentiation based on characteristics such as sex and race more and more data has been collected. The Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 and the 1986 Supreme Court ruling in *Thornburg vs. Gingles* have impacted the usage of the census demographic data, creating the mandate for majority-minority districts. Thus, special attention is paid to race in application of census data to the challenge of redistricting.

In 2022, the Fort Wayne City Council went through its redistricting utilizing the most recent

2020 U.S. Census data and the 2010 data as a baseline. The data we were supplied is down to the census tract, which is slightly smaller than a zip code area but larger than a precinct. This allows council members the ability to make rather precise adjustments if needed to council district boundaries to satisfy the mandates of nearly equally populated districts and maintaining districts that are not in violation of the 1965 VRA. The data sets are available to the public here.

Being on the redistricting committee in 2021 and as Council President in 2022 I was involved in going through this process for the city. I was struck by how this data laid bare the lie that the local eco-devo cartel continues to peddle that the massive government subsidies to commercial real estate has brought people to Fort Wayne and has encouraged people to move into the central city. Even a cursory examination of the statistics shows that the district that is home to our downtown, which has seen nearly a billion dollars of subsidy over the last 10 years, was the only district to outright lose population despite the many apartment building projects. The second thing that sticks out is the rapid growth in the population from Southeast Asia. This can be nearly completely attributed to the Burmese population introduced by Catholic Charities. Fort Wayne grew by 10,000 people in the census period. 7,000 of those new inhabitants are refugees. So, the idea that these folks were attracted to our community by the shining new office complexes just doesn't hold water.

An anomaly that jumped off the page was the drastic decline in what the Census Bureau reported as the "white" population of Fort Wayne. A decline of 15,477 or 8.3 percent from 186,731 in 2010 to 171,254 in 2020. Further investigation revealed similar drops nationwide with the United States losing some 19 million white residents, a decline of 8.6 percent. It turns out that the way Hispanic people are counted has changed, and now large increase in the "two-races" subcategory for white and "other" had growth that explains most of the drop in the white population in the national data set. It is known that 6,100 of the 15,500 decline of white alone in Fort Wayne can

be attributed to this change related to identification of Hispanic people. There was a 2,000-person increase in those identifying as two-races white/ Native-American. That is likely residents changing their self-reported identity from 10 years ago. So for Fort Wayne, roughly half the decline in white population is merely reporting differences and not net migration or deaths. That leaves an unattributed decline in the white alone population of about 7,000. Lastly the other demographic with a material change was “other” which had 56 percent growth to 14,724. This may or may not be related to the reclassification of some individuals, or actual increase in population to the city in this category.

The Census Bureau divides the population into seven categories on the basis of race. Those groups are White, Black, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, Other and Two-or-more. Those with positive growth were Black (+3.1%), Native American (+38.4%), Asian (+82.5%), Other (+56 percent) and Two-or-more (+131.7 percent). The only cohorts with declines in population were White (-8.3 percent) and Pacific Islander (-22.1 percent)

The chart above summarizes the top-line categories for which Census publishes data.

	2010	2020	Change	Percent
White	186,731	171,254	-15,477	-8.3%
Black	39,085	40,312	1,227	3.1%
Native American	939	1,300	361	38.4%
Asian	8,378	15,292	6,914	82.5%
Pacific Islander	154	120	-34	-22.1%
Other	9,441	14,724	5,283	56.0%
Two or More	8,930	20,688	11,758	131.7%
Total	253,658	263,690	10,032	4.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The American Community Survey is a more frequent exercise the U.S. Census Bureau conducts. It has a lot of data about economic factors and more descriptive statistics such as marriage, education and employment. One element of concern in this data set is that Fort Wayne is falling further behind

the rest of the state in average household income. In 2010 the median household income in Indiana was \$44,613 where by 2020 it had increased some 30.5 percent to \$58,235. Contrast that with Fort Wayne where median household income in 2010 was \$42,609 and grew to \$51,454 by 2020, an increase of only 20.8 percent. Clearly the narrative that somehow Fort Wayne is doing it right, while lagging the state in median household income growth by 32 percent is ludicrous.

In sum, the Census Bureau data easily dispels the narrative that the public-private-partnerships pushed by Greater Fort Wayne Inc. and others has created growth in our city. The data shows that incomes are lagging the state, that the population growth has largely come from refugees and it is likely the city has experienced a sizable decline in what the Census Bureau describes as it’s white population (perhaps 4 to 5 percent). All that despite over a billion dollars in downtown redevelopment efforts. ♦

Economic- Development Agencies Don't Matter

Add up all 50 state economic-development agencies' claims for how many jobs they "created or retained" last year and they moved the national workforce numbers by less than four-tenths of a percent.

John C. Mozena is president of the Center for Economic Accountability, a nonprofit group that seeks to advance economic opportunity by promoting transparency, accountability and free-market-based reform of state and local economic-development initiatives. © the Center for Economic Accountability, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved, <https://economicaccountability.org/>.



According to their own data, the job-creation efforts of America's state economic-development agencies don't make a meaningful difference to the nation's workforce or economy.

In honor of Economic Development Week (May 8-12), the Center for Economic Accountability (CEA) analyzed annual reports, websites, audits and other published materials from economic-development agencies (EDAs) in all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. It determined that those agencies collectively claim to have "created or retained" a combined total of fewer than 625,000 jobs in their most recent fiscal years.

That figure is less than four tenths of a percent of the total U.S. workforce, which should have Americans asking elected officials hard questions about the billions of dollars that EDAs distribute in tax credits, abatements, guaranteed loans,

grants and other forms of corporate subsidies every year to achieve those reported results.

In a nation of more than 330 million people and an economy with 164 million workers, the 625,000 jobs a year claimed by economic-development agencies are a tiny drop in a massively expensive bucket. For all of the claims that states' economic-development agencies are critical to economic competitiveness, their own data shows that their results are a rounding error at best for the economy as a whole.

The 625,000 jobs advertised by EDAs would be just the 29th largest city in the country, roughly equivalent to the population of Memphis, Tenn. That's less than five percent of the 15 to 17 million gross jobs naturally created by the American economy in any given year, which is equivalent to a new job every year for every worker in Texas, the nation's second-largest state economy.

Even when we're setting aside our skepticism and using the economic-development agencies' own marketing numbers, we still see just how little their work matters in the context of the economy as a whole. State economies are massive, complex, constantly evolving things and trying to change them by subsidizing a few thousand jobs here or couple hundred jobs there is like trying to get a cruise ship to turn by throwing ping-pong balls at it.

While the results might be insignificant, the costs EDAs impose on state budgets are anything but. Before the COVID-19 pandemic upended state finances, researchers estimated the total aggregate cost of state and local economic-development programs at roughly 95 billion dollars nationwide, a figure equivalent at the time to the 11 smallest state budgets combined. In the wake of the pandemic, the nation has seen a rapid increase in gigantic subsidy deals with price tags of a billion dollars or more.

Last year, a CEA analysis found that a total of 12 billion-dollar-plus subsidy deals had been announced across the country, shattering the previous record of three (inflation-adjusted) deals in a year.

When price tags reach ten figures, even large state budgets start feeling the burden. For instance, the CEA recently pointed out that the estimated \$1.75 billion taxpayer price tag for a planned electric vehicle battery plant in Michigan is more money than the state had distributed in total unemployment benefits in 2021.

American taxpayers spent enough on economic-development agencies' job creation programs to fund almost a dozen state budgets, and we got, at best, one mid-sized city's worth of jobs, spread thinly across the entire country. That return on investment is so bad it makes Sam Bankman-Fried look like Warren Buffett. If private-sector investment professionals were delivering results like this to their customers they'd be fired, in jail, or both.

However, even that insignificant ROI (return on investment) figure requires accepting state EDAs' figures and ignoring the evidence that the real world results are much worse. Specifically, the consensus of dozens of studies by independent experts into the actual results of economic-development subsidies is that EDA job creation figures tend to be at least four times larger than they should be. That's because agencies' reports consistently take full credit for every job created or retained by subsidized companies, regardless of how much of a role – if any – the subsidy truly played in the business's decision-making process.

The most definitive and widely cited review of the research to date, published by Timothy Bartik of the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research in 2018, found that “for at least 75 percent of incented firms, the firm would have made a similar decision location-expansion-retention decision without the incentive.” This assessment is consistent with the site selection

industry's own research, which regularly finds subsidies and incentives to be ranked eighth or worse among factors that influence business site selection decisions.

Applying even the most optimistic “one in four” filter to the CEA's findings results in EDA

job creation results dropping from 625,000 to 156,000. This means that rather than the population of Memphis, those jobs collected in one place would rank in the 160s among American cities, equivalent to the population of a suburb like Lakewood near Denver, Roseville outside Sacramento or Hollywood between Miami and Fort Lauderdale.

Whether you accept economic-development agencies' figures as correct or not, whether you apply magic ‘multipliers’ to their economic impact or not, you simply cannot arrive at a result that justifies the bloated price tags of today's economic-development programs. Governors claim all the time that their state can't afford to ‘unilaterally disarm’ in the economic-development wars, but it's clear from these results that the question isn't whether they can afford to disarm; it's how much longer they can afford not to.

Notes on Methodology

The CEA contacted the relevant economic-development agencies, as listed in the U.S. Economic Development Administration's directory, for all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and asked, “How many jobs were directly or indirectly created (or ‘created or retained’ if that's the metric you use) thanks to your agency's programs in the most recent full fiscal year for which you have those figures”

Representatives from 15 state agencies responded with relevant information. The CEA then reviewed agency websites, annual reports,

“Governors claim all the time that their state can't afford to ‘unilaterally disarm’ in the economic-development wars, but it's clear from these results that the question isn't whether they can afford to disarm; it's how much longer they can afford not to.”

audits, press releases and other published documents from official sources to attempt to identify whether non-responsive states had publicly reported such figures. Not all per-state figures are exact: In four cases, states only reported multi-year job creation figures and in those cases, the CEA annualized those numbers to arrive at a one-year number. In seven states, the CEA was required to manually add up program-by-program numbers from different reports to arrive at a best estimate of a state's total claimed results and may not have identified all relevant programs as a result, or may have double-counted jobs for projects that participated in more than one program. EDAs in three states – Alaska, Montana and New Hampshire, accounting for less

than one percent of the nation's population – neither reported “job creation” figures in any relevant format that the CEA could identify nor responded to multiple requests for information. Those three states were artificially assumed to have reported jobs at the national average rate of 0.19 percent of the state's population.

The analysis did not include job-creation claims by economic-development agencies at the municipal, county or regional level, other than the city government of Washington, D.C. (In most states, projects with significant job creation subsidized by local or regional EDAs would tend to include some form of state agency participation and be captured in those agencies' reports.) ♦

The Soul of Adam Smith's Classical Liberalism

Maryann O. Keating, Ph.D., a resident of South Bend and an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, is co-author of "Microeconomics for Public Managers," Wiley/Blackwell. A version of this essay originally appeared May 17, 2023, in [adamsmithworks](#). Reprinted here with permission, all rights reserved.



In 1987, critics — including some in his own Republican Party — viewed Vice President George Bush as a politician who lacked the ability to clearly articulate his fundamental beliefs and policies. A friend suggested that Bush go alone to Camp David for a few days to figure out where he wanted to take the country. “Oh,” said Bush in clear exasperation, “the vision thing.” It is equally important that Classical Liberals take time to figure out Adam Smith’s “Vision Thing.”

Smith’s vision is the foundation of Classical Liberalism. Different assumptions about human nature and how individuals relate to society as a whole underlie policy conflicts between socialists and classical liberals. Adam Smith, in “The Theory of Moral Sentiments” (TMS, 1790), tries to plumb the essence of human nature aside from the norms of his own and other cultures. “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations” (WN, 1776) extends this analysis to aggregates, i.e. nations. Smith concludes that nations animated by individuals tending to their innate moral sensibilities foster societies best suited for wealth and personal wellbeing. Liberty brings about the good.

The policy stances of Classical Liberalism may be summarized as support for limited government, constitutional democracy, free trade, private property, the rule of law, open franchise and federalism. However, the convictions underlying these policies are actually based on an

integrated entity, which Nobel laureate James M. Buchanan calls the soul of classical liberalism, as developed by Adam Smith. Buchanan, in “The Soul of Classical Liberalism,” recommends that the integrated entity be stressed rather than the current emphasis on policy recommendations (The Independent Review, Summer 2000, 111-119).

Adam Smith developed a vision of a desirable and somewhat approachable order of human interactions. Policy principles for constructive reform follow from this vision. These principles contrast with those of utilitarian dreamers who seek to change human nature and control outcomes.

How do Classical Liberals go about presenting their position aside from treatises demonstrating comparative advantage and engineering efficiency?

First, Classical Liberals might explain that Adam Smith’s system prioritizes the liberty to act in congruence with an individual’s natural sense of morality and societal norms.

Secondly, they could describe how a nation granting people the liberty to pursue immeasurable personal goals increases the probability of attaining outcomes that increase individual and aggregate well-being.

‘The Vision Thing’

In “The Moral Imagination,” historian Gertrude Himmelfarb selects 15 brilliant and provocative thinkers to show how each retained a moral sensibility. It is not surprising that Adam Smith also employs the term “imagination” several times in TMS to describe the innate capacity of humans to anticipate future rewards and the feelings of others.

In her first chapter, “Adam Smith: Political Economist cum Moral Philosopher,” Himmelfarb notes that Smith’s “moral economy” is consistent with “the pre-industrial, pre-capitalist, Christian ideal based on the principles of equity and justice (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012, 3-20.). Unlike those who emphasize Smith’s writings on political economy and downplay or dismiss his work

in moral philosophy, Himmelfarb lauds his contribution to our understanding of basic morality. She does this in spite of, or because of, it being steeped in the moral traditions derived from scholasticism and natural law. She notes that Smith could not conceive of a study of society divorced from other disciplines (7).

Smith's analysis of human nature was undoubtedly influenced by others, but this does not suggest that what he identified in human nature is incorrect. For example, he reasoned that human persons, not merely the well-educated or those in power, have an innate moral sense based on their cognitive and emotional capacities. This internal compass permits them to assess their own and others behavior.

Endowed with personal cognitive, emotional and imaginative capabilities, individuals harness those attributes to make sense of their lives and direct themselves toward achievable ends. Approaching internally defined aspirations provides personal satisfaction. In addition, essential to Smith's vision of morality is the fact that, a person can imagine and respond to how others feel. Therefore, an increase in personal satisfaction is not necessarily a function of a decrease in the satisfaction of another. In fact, Smith proposed that there exists something about human nature that gains personal satisfaction from the approval of others.

Smith's terms for persons' moral capacity, "sentiment" or "sympathy," refer neither to benevolence nor altruistic motivation; he speculates rather that it is an instinctual inborn cognitive ability to understand themselves and other persons, through imaginative identification.



AdamSmithWorks

Is the current presentation of Classical Liberalism too often presented merely as fragments of an integrated vision? If so, reclaiming its soul could inspire a willingness to encourage and permit individuals to focus on and respond to an interior judge, even when biased in terms of personal aspirations and societal norms.

The faculty of sympathy enables moral judgment. Smith's "impartial spectator" is each person's interior arbiter, one that can be rejected or self-deceived (Christina McRorie. "Adam Smith Ethicist," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 2015, 674-696).

The impartial spectator in "The Theory of Moral Sentiment" judges not on religious belief in a final judgement but rather on a desire to be well-regarded by oneself and others. If, however, moral sentiment is similar to what is referred to as a "conscience," it is in need of formation in dealing with others. As such, Smith expresses much concern in the "Wealth of Nations" for those isolated from the socialization of a local community.

An individual's natural moral sensibility is enhanced through

practice. Virtues such as prudence, temperance, industriousness, decency and responsibility are not just compatible with Classical Liberalism; they reinforce modern liberal democracy and all personal interactions.

We can agree with Smith that common virtues and moral sensibility are within the capacity of ordinary people; yet, we might question their relative strength in explaining human behavior. It is relatively easy to agree that there is a strong incentive to avoid the self-loathing following failure in achieving personal goals. However, evidence may be needed to give weight to the importance Smith attributes to the discomfort and personal costs experienced on letting down those whose opinions we value.

Saccardo and Serra-Garcia conducted experiments on over 9,000 financial advisors confronted with a conflict of interest in offering clients products of lower quality yet paying them

higher commissions. They found that a significant percentage of advisors were willing to temporarily blind themselves from potentially biasing information to ensure fair and moral behavior (“Enabling or Limiting Cognitive Flexibility? Evidence of Demand for Moral Commitment,” *American Economic Review* 2023, 113 (2), 396-429)

Anthropological studies also confirm an ethical sensibility, usually consistent with societal norms, that is fundamental to a person’s perception of themselves. It provides identity, meaning and order. Can something so fundamental be underdeveloped or erased? In the WN, Smith writes that repetitive work can impede personal development. Is it possible that specialization, as well as other contemporary factors, dull the moral imagination not just of a few but a large number of residents?

Smith describes how particular virtues, such as generosity or industriousness, become embodied in the norms of certain nations and the behavior of its residents. The pressure to align one’s opinions even with those of a favored but misguided group is strong. However, Smith argues that basic universal morality can never long be perverted until the society in question self-destructs. For example, Smith condemns infanticide as a perversion of basic morality, even though it has been approved by whole cultures. Therefore, cultural variation in morals, emphasizing one virtue over another, is consistent with Classical Liberalism as long as this relativism remains within fairly narrow bounds (Samuel Fleischacker, “Adam Smith and Cultural Relativism,” *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics*, Autumn 2011, 20-41).

Suppose, however, that we live in a society where individuals experience little discomfort in offending the internal voice of the superego, representing authority. What if educational institutions define their role as freeing students from the values of parents and society’s norms? What if no expertise is recognized outside of that associated with professionals and authoritarian government? What if the cultural taboos of

ordinary persons varies greatly from values of academics, the educated elite and government officials?

The vision of Classical Liberalism cannot be approximated if individuals’ natural moral sensibility fails to identify with mutually agreed upon social norms; in such instances the rule of law breaks down. Nevertheless, if a Smithian moral sensibility is indeed innate, it may be worthwhile to validate individuals’ longing to seek internal and society’s approval.

Increasing the Wealth of a Nation Naturally

It is conceivable that Adam Smith’s findings on national wealth surprised him, as the Professor of Moral Philosophy, as much as it does us, his readers.

Smith proposes that human persons have an innate moral compass judging whether their personal behavior is consistent with their own and others’ values. This assumes that deep down, individuals respect and share a few objective premises, regardless of religious beliefs and culture. In “the Wealth of Nations,” Smith concludes that nations characterized by liberty free individuals to make choices in line with both personal and mutually held norms.

In such nations, government officials exhibit restraint unless the rule of law is violated. Private decisions are protected. National outcomes are those resulting from people pursuing personal goals including, if you will, self-interest. A legitimate question follows, “Is Smith’s concept of natural moral sentiment strong enough to safeguard the public interest?”

There is no getting away from it; Classical Liberalism is to some extent highly individualistic; it favors individual freedom as long as individuals avoid behaviors resulting in negative externalities. However, Smith goes beyond this, he writes:

“In civilized society, he [human persons] stands at all times in need of the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes...man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their

benevolence only.” (WN, Liberty Fund edition, 1982, 26).

Note the words “cooperation” and “only” in the above quote. By nature, individuals not only cooperate to truck, barter and exchange but form families, organizations and nations along with their brethren. Smith acknowledged that reason is common to all human beings, but it was the virtues of benevolence and sympathy that bind people to each other. Not only does moral sentiment foster care for oneself and family, but the human capacity to identify lends itself to a variety of practical, ameliorative policies to relieve social problems (Juliana Geran Pilon, “The Primacy of Liberty.”) The initiative in free societies comes from below and not from officials attempting to change the nature of individuals or exercising their authority.

Both “the Wealth of Nations” and “Moral Sentiments” abound in examples of and support for benevolent activity; generally, they are designed with the goal of increasing the agency of individuals to successfully pursue their own interests. Does the “common good” then reduce to discrete calculated personal benefits?

We do not know if Adam Smith would have been amused, like American author Washington Irving, on learning that a local in 19th century Spain assigned a higher level of morality to one who stole to replace his stolen stock of contraband than to one who exclusively stole. What would he think about Sophocles’ Antigone defying civil authorities to perform burial rites for her brother? Smith probably would say that these are cases of individuals coming to terms with their innate moral sensibility. We might then question Smith as to the value of allowing individuals to have the liberty of acting on moral sentiments that are inconsistent, misguided, or costly to themselves and others.

Classical liberals do not ignore the need for collective security and military preparedness for the survival of a nation. Smith describes in detail what ancient Greece and Rome did to train and strengthen the capacity of residents for defense. On the other hand, at least once or twice, he

employs the term “invisible hand” to describe a non-centrally directed process through which benefits for society result from independent personal decision-making.

The concept of the “invisible hand” is ridiculed by some as fanciful and believed by others to represent Divine Providence. It is neither. Rather, it is a natural process, that over time some countries have borne witness in augmenting the economic and general well-being of society as a whole. Smith writes:

“In spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they [the rich] mean only their own convenience, [and] though the sole end which they propose from the labors of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the product of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessities of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of society and afford the means to the multiplication of the species.” (TMS, Liberty Fund edition, 1982, 184-185).

Classical Liberals wish not merely to expand national productivity to sustain a population but also to increase and distribute that output more equally than otherwise. Unfortunately, this is a difficult message to convey and one well-connected elites in power may not believe or be willing to entertain. It may be in their interest to maintain their status through rent seeking political favors or controlling options for the less well-connected.

Consider Smith’s vision of a nation increasing its standard of living by freeing individuals animated to pursue their self-interest but guided by the approval of an impartial spectator. This is often interpreted incorrectly as reducing morality to utilitarian ends. Smith was too good a thinker not to consider the public and personal costs of his vision. He writes that effective public

institutions for justice and defense are expensive; he also writes clearly about the personal costs of heeding one's moral sentiment. He does not hesitate to point out the limits of depending on moral sentiment. He details, as well, the less desirable effects of the division of labor, commercial interests that combine to extort the public, and risks associated with the liberty to fail.

Few will minimize individuals' strong incentives for personal gain and hence to operate rationally in their own self-interest. Nevertheless, perhaps Buchanan has a point in recommending that Classical Liberals emphasize the less dominant but still essential moral sensibility required for entering into personal, professional and commercial contracts.

Conclusion

Is the current presentation of Classical Liberalism too often presented merely as

fragments of an integrated vision? If so, reclaiming its soul could inspire a willingness to encourage and permit individuals to focus on and respond to an interior judge, even when biased in terms of personal aspirations and societal norms. If Classical Liberalism is reclaimed, dependency on government will be reduced; personal liberties, supported. Individuals will be inspired to create new commercial and other intermediate organizations. The priority given to private initiative would act as a constraint on government regulation and unrealistic goals in changing human nature. Failed states striving towards utopian socialism make a strong case for classical liberalism. It should not be so difficult to highlight nations in which the soul of Smith's vision is still approximated. ♦

Leo Morris

Leo Morris, columnist for The Indiana Policy Review, is winner of the Hoosier Press Association's award for Best Editorial Writer. Morris, as opinion editor of the Fort Wayne News-Sentinel, was named a finalist in editorial writing by the Pulitzer Prize committee.



Property: Imagine It Anew

*Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man*

— “Imagine,” John Lennon, 1971

(May 29) — I don't know if John Lennon was self-aware enough to see the irony of a filthy rich superstar longing for a utopia in which everything belongs to everybody, so nobody has to do without anything, the perfect equality within our reach if we just wish for it hard enough.

But before he was murdered in 1980, he was getting there, slowly but surely. He didn't quite become a full-fledged “minimal government necessary” libertarian who knew that “property rights” and “human rights” are not mutually exclusive, but in fact one and the same. He did grow up a little, though, becoming a family man who understood that freedom begins and ends with what each individual is allowed to do and how much he gets to own of what he has accomplished.

“What I used to be is guilty about money,” he said in one of his last interviews “. . . Because I thought money was equated with sin. I don't know. I think I got over it, because I have to either put up or shut up, you know. If you are going to be a monk with nothing, do it. Otherwise, I am going to try to make money, make it. Money itself isn't the root of all evil.”

Let us all hope the United States Supreme Court is on the same learning curve that John Lennon was.

Government has two roles when it comes to private property: To protect those who own it against the machinations of those who do not, and to be cautious when taking any of it for the “public good.” When the government fails at the latter, it makes it hard to believe it is serious about the former.

Which has so often been the case that there should be an addendum to the national motto of “In God we trust” – give 'em an inch, and they'll take a mile.

The nadir came with the despicable Kelo vs. City of New London in 2005, in which a 5-4 majority ruled that the Connecticut city taking someone's property for a public “purpose” was the same thing as taking it for a public “use” constitutionally speaking. But “use” had always meant something for the public good, such as a dam or a road. “Purpose” meant whatever might benefit government coffers.

So, in Kelo, the court authorized taking property from one private owner and giving it to another, one that promised to “economically develop” it and bring in more tax revenue. The court thus legalized thuggery, merging the two roles of government's property function and allowing gross violation of both of them.

There are some signs, thank goodness, that the court has grown up a little since then.

In two rulings this term – both unanimous – the court has put some brakes on the government's cavalier treatment of private property. Even if there is scant evidence for that conclusion, perhaps you will allow me to Imagine the best.

In one ruling, the court ruled for a 94-year-old Minnesota woman whose home was taken for failure to pay a \$15,000 property tax bill. The county sold the property for \$40,000 and decided to keep the extra \$25,000. No, the court said; that violated the “just compensation” wording of the Constitution.

The ruling was met with strong approval across the political spectrum, from the very conservative Pacific Legal Foundation to the very liberal ACLU. Nobody likes to see ordinary, defenseless people

preyed upon by powerful bullies. It was similar to the reaction in an Indiana case from a few terms ago, when the court ruled that authorities violated the “excessive fines” clause by seizing a \$42,000 Land Rover from a criminal who had been sentenced to probation and a \$1,200 fine on a drug charge.

In the other ruling, the court ruled in favor of an Idaho couple and against the EPA, which had required them to get a federal permit to build on their property because it had a “wetland,” even though it was not connected to anything outside the property by a “navigable waterway,” a plain requirement of the legislative authorization.

This ruling was not unanimously approved, being decried by a lot of people who seem still confused by the whole public “good,” “use” and “purpose” justification for violating private property rights. They are still living in the 1970s, stuck in the Early John Lennon method of wishing a better world into existence. If the government says “everybody” needs your property, why are you being so selfish?

“The human right of every man to own his own life implies the right to find and transform resources to produce that which sustains and advances life,” said economist Murray N. Rothbard. “That product is a man’s property. That is why property rights are foremost among human right and why any loss of one endangers the others.”

He wrote that in 1959, so let’s forgive him saying “man” instead of “person.” The thought still rings true.

And John Lennon, self-described troublemaking son of a family-deserting merchant seaman, who through talent and hard work became part of one of the most famous songwriting duos in history, could not have said it better.

Now It’s Un-Memorial Day

(*May 22*) — There are several stories about the origin of the three-shot volley fired at military funerals.

Some go back to ancient Rome. At the end of the day of battle, one story goes, when the field was cleared, those removing a fallen soldier would say his name three times in honor of his sacrifice. Then there’s the one about Roman mourners casting dirt on a coffin three times, constituting a burial.

The story I like goes back to the dynastic wars in Europe. The custom was for both sides to halt fighting periodically so the dead could be removed. Once the task was completed, three musket shots were fired as a signal that the battle could resume.

There are a couple of ways of looking at that.

The darker way is to conclude that we are doomed to suffer war forever, with but momentary lulls to assess the damage and pick up the pieces. In the long run, it may be true that “war has never solved anything,” but in the short term it always has been and always will be the way humans rearrange their power dynamics.

The slightly less bleak way is to observe that, as the generations come and go and soldiers fall to be replaced by other soldiers, the causes being fought for will endure. And the greatest struggle of all, between freedom and tyranny, will never be resolved. Contrary to Francis Fukuyama’s declaration, there will never be an “end to history” in that regard.

How are we to judge the soldiers in all these wars? Do we hold them accountable if history judges unjust the cause they fought for? Or do we consider them blameless, prisoners of the regimes that send them out to fight and die?

The latter, according to Just War Theory, a philosophy that attempts to define standards for beginning a war, conducting a war and dealing with war’s aftermath by the victor.

The middle part, though the hardest to comprehend, may be the most important. It holds that a soldier is not responsible for the war he is waging, but can be held accountable for the way the war is conducted. No targeting of civilians. Proportionality in responses. Military necessity for all actions.

It might seem contradictory, holding on to rules of civilized behavior in the midst of the savage, depraved enterprise that is war. But it is the only way to affirm our basic humanity. We acknowledge that we cannot avoid sometimes reverting to barbarousness, but we will cling to our aspirations of decency.

That is why combatants are not supposed to harm soldiers who have surrendered. It is why there are international rules for the treatment of prisoners of war. It is why we honor all soldiers once they are in the grave, whatever and whomever they fought for – at least 108 million of them in the 20th century alone, some estimates say as many as 1 billion in the history of the world.

As another Memorial Day approaches, there is a supreme irony. An independent commission is recommending dismantling the Confederate Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery.

It's one more piece of the modern attempt to erase every shred of the Confederacy from the national memory. Statues are being toppled. Schools, national parks and military bases are being renamed. The sons and daughters of the South must forever pay for the sins of their fathers in supporting the losing side. The victors are not only writing the history books but rewriting them with vengeful glee.

It's what some have called "presentism," judging the past by today's standards, and what Quaker theologian Elton Trueblood called "the sin of contemporaneity," judging our ancestors lacking for not sharing the views we now hold.

But surely even the most fervent in the anti-Confederacy movement might wonder if removing the Arlington memorial would be a step too far.

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, sprang from The Civil War. Several cities claim to have originated it, but there is general agreement that it started in the South, by women who put memorials on Confederate soldiers' graves, then began putting them on Union graves, too.

In July 1866, a New York newspaper reported that Union veteran Gen. John A Logan railed in a

speech against the "traitors in the South" who were "strewing flowers upon the graves of Rebel soldiers." Two years later, he proposed the first nationwide public Decoration Day holiday on May 30.

Whatever Logan intended, the national holiday did not remain a sectarian slap at the South. It soon became a way for Americans to move beyond the passions that had led to war, to close our divide and move on as a united country. Americans were heeding the words of Lincoln in his second inaugural address: "With malice toward none and charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right. Let us strive on to finish the work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan – to do all which may achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

It is said that time heals all wounds. But apparently, when enough time has passed, it makes some want to reopen old wounds. We have removed our dead from the field, and the three volleys have sounded. Let the battle continue.

The Governor Gets a Raise

(May 15) — People keep saying government should be run like a business.

If you are one of them, consider this option. If your company needed a new president, which would you prefer: an outsider with demonstrable management skills but no knowledge of your product, service or customer base; or the best candidate from within the company, one with a proven track record in every department?

I've been around enough poorly run companies to know it really isn't, but the answer should be obvious. If you can't promote from within, you've been doing something wrong.

I ask the question because I realize I've been part of the "throw the bums out" movement for most of my journalistic career. I could probably find scores of editorials and columns in which I've written along the lines of "the problem with career

politicians” and “the evils of politics as a profession” and “we need to drain the swamp.”

There is a lot of truth in this point of view. There is a swamp (or, rather, are swamps; there are federal, state and local varieties). Government at all levels is overburdened with people who have made running for office their whole lives, people with no knowledge of and little love for the private sector.

But by focusing too much on that perspective, we’ve helped create a bizarre situation in which the people seeking elective office must profess a deep animosity for the very thing they are engaged in. Elect me – I’m an outsider, and I’ll get in there and break things. I hate politicians as much as you do, so please, please make me your favorite politician.

How odd. It’s like looking for an atheist to seek the papacy or asking a high school dropout to be your college president.

And an important consideration is being overlooked.

This nation was founded by career politicians.

James Madison, father of the Constitution, first won a seat in the Virginia legislature at 25. John Adams began his political career in 1774. John Jay spent 27 years in public service. Alexander Hamilton got involved in politics almost as soon as he arrived in this country.

Thomas Jefferson, the genius behind the Declaration of Independence, was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1769 and worked in politics for the next 40 years. Even George Washington, the so-called non-politician of the bunch, won a seat in the Virginia legislature in 1758 at 26 and served there until the Revolution.

“Each of these men,” notes Georgia writer Chet Martin, “made public service the purpose of their lives.” He quotes Madison’s observation from Federalist 62 that wise and just systems require “some stable institution in the government.”

Of course, there is one major difference between those career politicians and the ones who walk the halls of power today, a difference the Indiana General Assembly made me think about with its most audacious action in the recently ended session.

In the middle of the night, with no public notice and no discussion, our legislators sneaked through a series of breathtaking raises for the governor and other top elected state officials. The next governor will enjoy a raise of 48 percent, becoming the fifth-highest-paid state chief executive in the nation instead of the 34th. The lieutenant governor gets a whopping 60 percent bump, the attorney general 45 percent, and auditor, treasurer and secretary of state 39 percent each.

Whew. Lawmakers did it the way they did it for a reason. Employees who pilfer from the company’s petty cash do not do it in the middle of the day, carrying the loot out for all to see.

My first instinct about the raises was, “Well, there goes the swamp, taking care of its own.” But the longer I thought about it, the more I realized it wasn’t just the career-politician angle that bothered me. Which brings us back to the business analogy.

We’ve all heard stories about innovative startup companies and moribund Big Business corporations. Startups are energized by entrepreneurs with bold ideas and the courage to take risks. Big Businesses are so focused on the bottom line that any change to the status quo frightens them. It’s why a company like Apple can come along and eat IBM’s lunch in the personal computer market. (Until, of course, the point at which Apple becomes another IBM).

The Founders were like a startup. Though career politicians, they were able to look beyond the system they were in and realize it was lacking. They were bold enough to risk scrapping the Articles of Confederation for the Constitution, and wise enough to consult the great thinkers for ideas – a little Hobbes, a little Montesquieu, a lot of Locke, even a smattering of the misguided

Rousseau (much less than the French, thank goodness).

Today's careerists are more like the Big Business functionaries. They can't see beyond the way things are being done to please the customer base. They're afraid of asking hard questions about the status quo, adamantly opposed to thinking boldly and taking risks. They're not even CEO material. They are mediocre middle managers.

So, the problem isn't that we're rewarding career politicians. It's that we are encouraging the wrong kind of career politicians. If we identified and nurtured more of the good ones, we wouldn't feel such a great need for outsiders to come in and start throwing bombs.

Yes, I know, they're few and far between. But that has always been the case. How very lucky we were that one time.

Citizen 0; Chicken Police 1

(*May 8*) — I intended to write something pithy about the just-concluded General Assembly session, since it was full of portentous news: a whopping \$44 billion budget; new public health initiatives; an enormous expansion of school choice; last-minute, eye-popping raises for the governor and other top elected state officials; a deep dive into the morass of contentious social issues.

But then the commentary started rolling in, and it seems a consensus of sorts has been reached. The legislature did some good things, but just didn't spend enough money on some things, never mind that this budget was about 16 percent higher than the last one. And, of course, the Republican supermajority catered to its intolerant conservative base by bringing up social issues no one cares about, never mind that the Democrats would have happily introduced legislation from the other side of the culture war had they been in the majority.

No way I could out-profound all that thoughtful insight, so I was at a loss.

Until I found a story about a minor issue in a small Indiana town, the kind of thing nobody else

will be writing about. I will have the wisdom-from-on-high field all to myself on this one.

A poor schlub in Whiteland — Sawn Butler by name — has been raising chickens in his yard for a year. This violates two provisions of the town code, one that considers a small poultry flock a "nuisance" if it is 200 feet or less from another residence, and one that limits households to three pets (sorry, crazy cat people, you are not welcomed in Whiteland).

Wanting to stay on the right side with officials, Butler asked the Whiteland Town Council to change the law, and three of its five members said they would be in favor. But then they decided to duck the issue — I hesitate to say they chickened out.

They referred the matter to the plan commission, whose members said they weren't in favor and sent it back to council with a "no" recommendation. They said they weren't necessarily opposed to changing the rules in the future but didn't want to now because of the message it might send to scofflaws like Butler.

"Plan commission members worried allowing chickens now would set a precedent that anyone in town can break the rules, and then come to the town council to ask for codes to be changed so they won't be cited," reported the Franklin Daily Journal.

Poor Shawn Butler had run afoul of a version ex-post-facto (after-the-fact) law. In its usual iteration, officials make something illegal that used to be legal and try to punish people who did the something when it was legal. In this version, Butler wanted something illegal made legal and to be forgiven for doing the something when it was illegal.

Which authorities are quite reluctant to do. They might happily try to retroactively make us criminals, but they do not like to give us a break on our past sins.

Except, of course, when they do,

Butler's problem was going it alone instead of getting a bunch of friends to break the law with him.

If you, for example, dodge the draft and flee to Canada, then you can never come home, unless thousands do it, in which case all is forgiven. If you are a foreign national who enters this country without permission, that is illegal, unless millions do it, in which case amnesty will be granted. If a state allows its citizens to smoke marijuana, that is a violation of federal law, unless multiple states do it, in which case the violation will simply be ignored.

There are many other examples of this “safety in numbers” principle, but you get the point. “The law” is flexible, and those who enact and enforce it try always not to be too far ahead of or behind the people the law is supposed to govern.

If I keep that in mind, perhaps I will discover my hidden depths of profundity before the next legislative session.

Politics: Slow and Steady Does It

(*May 1*) — Today, let’s pay tribute to one of history’s little known but highly influential figures: Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus, a Roman statesman and military commander of the third century BC.

His nickname was *Cunctator*, roughly translated as “the delayer,” earned for the tactics he employed against the invading Carthaginian forces of Hannibal during the Second Punic War. Facing an army of vastly superior numbers and training, the “Fabian strategy” avoided decisive battles, instead waging a war of attrition.

Fabius sent small units to attack Hannibal’s supply lines, harass his troops and generally wear down their morale. It was a hit-and-run strategy designed to deprive the enemy of a major victory and make its soldiers weary of the fight.

As a result, Fabius is credited with originating many of the tactics used throughout history in the guerrilla warfare waged by native populations against superior invading forces. Americans used them against the British during our War for Independence (Gen. Washington was known as the American Fabius – there’s a Final Jeopardy answer for you). Refusing to learn from history,

we allowed the same tactics to be used against us in Vietnam.

That fills in some of the “little known” part.

For the “influential” segment, let us turn to Victorian England and Thomas Davidson, a Scottish philosopher who founded a group having as its goal the establishment of a democratic socialist state in Great Britain. It was named the Fabian Society, paying honor to the Roman general by adopting his tactics.

The Fabians favored evolution rather than revolution, aiming to transform society through its own war of attrition, in the words of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, advancing its goal of socialism through education of the public “by means of meetings, lectures, discussion groups, conferences and summer schools; carrying out research into political, economic and social problems; and publishing books, pamphlets and periodicals.”

And it worked. The society’s membership was never very large – only about 8,400 members at its peak in 1946 – but its importance “has always been much larger than its size might suggest . . . a large number of Labour members of Parliament in the House of Commons, as well as many of the party leaders, are Fabians.”

We live in Fabian times, do we not?

Having just survived another session of the Indiana General Assembly and wearily awaiting another presidential election, it is easy to imagine the mass of ordinary citizens being manipulated from behind the scenes by a tiny but powerful bunch of determined zealots.

Perhaps it is the small band of well-heeled lobbyists in back rooms of the Statehouse. Or maybe it’s the permanent cadre of career bureaucrats who stay in Washington regardless of which political party is in power. Of course, we must consider the minuscule number of rightwing fanatics who use Fox News and talk radio to dominate millions of mindless Republicans. And then there are the extremist liberal wackos who, despite their small numbers, have used Twitter and Facebook to systematically dismantle traditional institutions and values.

On the other, hand, perhaps you are the next Fabius. If you and your friends just stick to your beliefs and keep plugging away, maybe the tide will turn your way, and you will find yourself in the vanguard. All you need is patience and fortitude.

Food for thought.

As a footnote, it should be remembered that Fabian Strategy worked only up to a point. At the decisive encounter of the Falerian Plain, Fabius thought he had blocked Hannibal's exit from the valley. But the wily Hannibal and a few of his men attached flaming torches to 2,000 head of marching cattle. Thinking he was chasing Hannibal's entire army, Fabius moved his troops in that direction. The bulk of Hannibal's army was then able to escape through an unguarded pass, almost without loss. A great opportunity was thus denied to Fabius.

Tactics can win battles. Wars, not so much. For that, something more is needed.

I love history.

When Will the State Quit Taxing?

(April 24) — Today's entry for the "juxtaposition is everything" file:

Indiana lawmakers working on the new state budget have learned that they will have \$1.5 billion more to spend than previous revenue forecasts predicted. The state ended fiscal year 2022 with about a \$6.1 billion surplus, the so-called "rainy day" fund.

Both the Indiana House and Senate have passed mental health legislation that would cost about \$225 million over two years, down from Gov. Holcomb's request for a \$347 million program. There is talk of funding the plan through an increase in the cigarette tax or addition of a fee to cell phone bills.

Well, now, that ought to get taxpayers' attention. The state is in a healthy financial position, yet is trying to decide on a new tax to fund a new program. And please don't get sidetracked by semantics. A fee is just another name for a tax.

Yes, I know all the reasons to downplay the state's fiscal health. It got a big infusion of Covid-related cash. Surplus funds should not be used to start programs that will have ongoing yearly costs. A "rainy day" fund is just that – a recession could be just around the corner, and then we'd need it. Blah, blah, blah.

But, come on.

At some point, a fiscal unit (like a state) needs to take a long look at its funding priorities beyond "add something here" and "take away something there" based on the loudest voices among constituents and lobbyists. What should get the top priority? What can be dropped? What are our long-term needs, and what short-term emergencies should we prepare for? Are all areas of the state being served equally well?

At the very least, the state could fund the biennial needs for mental health – and for the next biennium, too, for that matter – from the rainy day fund without making a serious dent in the surplus. That would give it two to four years to decide where mental health funding should fit in with the state's overall needs and what new funding sources, if any, are needed.

And the best time for such an overall look at the state's budgeting needs is, guess when? Now, when our fiscal house is in order and we can make calm, reasonable decisions. Not when we are in financial trouble and prone to make panic-driven bad decisions.

Just consider the federal government.

Its finances are an unholy mess. The national debt is \$31 trillion and climbing, and that doesn't even include looming unfunded liabilities for Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. The budgeting "process" involves veering from crisis to crisis as yet another "raise the debt ceiling or risk default" moment arrives. About half the population already pays no federal income taxes, and the number of people expecting more from the government than they give grows and grows.

The more the government obligates itself to, the less discretionary funding it has. (There is already worry, for example, that we have committed so much military might to the Ukraine

that if China decided to invade Taiwan, we would not have the ability to defend it.) The government continues on its wobbly way with more borrowing and more printing of money, which just adds to the inflation that creates the cruelest kind of tax on Americans.

And on and on, an endless nightmare with doom just around the corner. Does anyone expect our legislators, in such an atmosphere, to sit down and calmly assess its taxing-and-spending priorities? A few years ago, Sen. Rand Paul tried to get a (very modest) 1 percent spending cut for five years passed and was soundly rebuffed.

So I don't think it is too much to ask for our state, with its modest little budget, to take steps now, in the middle of our relative prosperity, to make sure its financial house stays in order. The legislators are fond of summer study committees. Might I humbly suggest this as a topic for one of them.

Let's close with another juxtaposition:

For fiscal year 2021, the total expenditure of all 50 state governments combined was about \$2.1 trillion.

For the same year, the federal deficit was \$2.8 trillion.

A Quaint Expression Rings True

(April 17) — A few months after my father died, I asked my mother how she was doing.

"I miss having him to talk to," was all she said, but that's all she needed to say. No matter how many friends and relatives she had to talk with, no matter how much her children tried to fill the conversational void, there was something about the casual banter of lifetime partners that could never be replaced. A comfortable presence in her life was gone forever.

I've been thinking a lot lately about "kith and kin," one of those quaint expressions you seldom hear anymore.

Kin I still have — though, heaven knows, fewer than I used to. Not so much "kith," who, as the dictionary explains, are "acquaintances, friends, neighbors or the like; persons living in the same

locality and forming a more or less cohesive group."

It's that "living in the same locality" that's the tricky part, and I blame technology.

First, of course, came transportation technology. Roads took us away from our homes to work in remote locations, and the automobile and national highway systems increased both the distances and the tendencies. My brother and sister and I grew up in the same tiny place in Eastern Kentucky, sharing a small house with our parents and seeing each other all the time. Now, we live in three different cities in two far-apart states.

And communications technology has kept us all apart. We no longer have to rely on the Post Office to deliver our letters and imagine how our friends and relatives are reacting to our thoughts days after we have expressed them. We can email or text them for instant communications and even see their faces if we want to make a video call with our smart phones.

But it's not the same.

Our brother just visited from Texas, and we spent a week with our sister in Indianapolis. We get together like that only about once a year, and it's always — I hate to use such a theatrical word, but there it is — magic.

And it's not about anything specific — not anything we do together, though we find enjoyment in common pursuits; not necessarily what we talk about, though there is always the usual enjoyable outrageous nonsense only longtime siblings can conjure up,

It was just the sheer physical presence of family members, a comforting closeness that can chase away the overwhelming sense of isolation we sometimes feel as a tiny speck in the vast universe. Even if I was reading a book or watching something on TV, just knowing my brother and sister were in the same room gave me a sense of well-being. And knowing they would still be there in the morning and for the next day brought true peace of mind.

I suspect you've had the same feeling at times. Remember a Thanksgiving or Christmas when

you were surrounded not just by the immediate family but by extended family from all over – your “kith and kin”? There undoubtedly came a moment amid all the bickering and fussing when you simply thought, “These are my people, and I’m grateful we are all here together.”

And it was bittersweet, wasn’t it, because you knew the moment was fleeting?

I feel sorry for the younger generations today, who have grown up knowing nothing but the ubiquitousness of instant communications yet seem to not know how to relate to one another. They spend so much time on their devices trading quips and showing off that they don’t know the sheer comforting presence of other people. Heaven knows how much their Covid-induced absences from school reinforced that inclination to isolation.

I read recently that Millennials are starting, at least in small numbers, to buy dumb phones instead of smart ones – devices that can only make and receive calls – having decided they were spending far too much screen time.

Good for them. Maybe they will start putting the kith back in kith and kin.

Welcome to the Reality Gap

(April 10) – There is a report from the Indiana University research salt mines that’s highly disturbing, although not for the reason you might initially suspect.

Suicide deaths, a new study from the IU School of Medicine declares, increase significantly during a full moon. Furthermore, older people are more inclined to be involved, and the peak hours of suicide are 3 to 4 p.m. in September.

Heavens. Forewarned is forearmed, so you have five months to keep track of the night sky and know exactly when to not let Grandma and Grandpa out of your sight until the danger passes.

Except . . .

That is just short of being nonsense.

Anyone having the slightest familiarity with this suicide-moon connection knows there have been scores of studies over decades. There are a

few cases like the IU study demonstrating a correlation, but by far the majority show either no statistical evidence or mixed results open to various interpretations.

In other words, we should have at least the shadow of a doubt if not outright active skepticism. This was one tiny investigation – a few hundred suicides from one county in one state over a four-year period – in a mountain of similar research.

Alas, we were not helped by media reports of the study. Not a single news story I read (and I checked out many from various sources) put the research in context or gave even a hint of the need for leering. They all simply reported the moon-suicide connection as gospel. Job done, time to move on.

So, if you absorbed that information as a part of your perception of reality, so sorry. Time to rethink the whole thing.

“The news” has let us down, again. When it isn’t being disingenuous – ditching objectivity in order to advance a narrative, a practice today celebrated in journalism schools – it is often merely lazy. It has abandoned us, just when we need it most.

It was Francis Bacon, a pivotal figure in the transition from the ancient to modern version of Western philosophy, who pointed out 500 years ago that we cannot always trust our senses. So, the knowledge we have built up from our perceptions might be faulty.

Therefore, philosophy, and the logic and reason that propel it, cannot be just a mental exercise. It must be connected to the real world. We must always experiment and observe, over and over. That is the foundation of the scientific method that has shaped our modern world.

And it is the basis for the consensus reality that enables us to navigate that world. We must all deal with our and others’ subjective perceptions, and our feeble attempts to understand each other’s interpretations. But, somehow, we manage to cobble together a set of agreed-upon truths about reality allowing us to live together, however

fragilely, as travelers on a common human journey.

It is no great secret that the outer edges of that consensus reality are unraveling at an alarming rate. Our increasingly unbridgeable partisan divide – spread ever wider by social media and deepened by a press intent on taking sides instead of providing a disinterested overview – makes it seem as if we are living on different planets instead of merely fighting for our faulty visions of the moral high ground on this one.

And today the very core of that reality is under assault. In the very near future – much sooner than most of us realize – there may be no consensus reality at all.

Artificial intelligence programs are already so good at writing term papers and doctoral theses that university professors are reverting to in-person oral exams to determine the actual understanding students might have. AI apps can now create photographic composites that seem very real but aren't – how about a visual of Adolf Hitler and Franklin Roosevelt having tea? How about a composite showing you to be somewhere at a time when you really weren't? AI can also sample your voice and make it seem you are saying anything to anybody.

And when it gets to the point where we can't trust anything is real except what we see and hear in face-to-face encounters, who will there be to credibly explain pieces of reality outside of our immediate environment? Certainly not the media, which by then will have destroyed every bit of our faith in them. And who else can do the job they are meant to do but refuse to acknowledge?

If the media stay on their present course, it would not be just a breach of trust and an abdication of responsibility. It would be an utter disgrace.

Sorry, got a little wound up there.

The next full moon is coming up on May 5, and I need to make sure I'm off the ledge by then.

Here's a Tip: Ask a Lot, Get a Lot

(April 3) – Several years ago, I finished a nice meal at one of my favorite restaurants and settled up with the waitress, someone new to the place.

“Oh, thank you,” she gushed. “Thank you so much!”

“For what?” I asked, puzzled at her exuberance. “It's just a standard 20 percent tip.”

“But this is such a 10 percent town,” she replied.

Ah, memories.

Considering everything that's been happening lately, if that incident happened today, it would have undoubtedly been a “standard 25 percent tip” and the waitress would have disparaged Fort Wayne as a “15 percent town.” And I would have felt compelled to tip the hostess on the way in and the parking lot attendant on the way out.

Tipping has clearly gotten out of hand, as numerous news analyses have pointed out recently. The inflationary trend (both of whom and how much to tip) began years ago but accelerated greatly during the pandemic.

One of the main culprits, apparently, is the proliferation of apps that have popped up, both on our smart phones and inside many establishments, that have removed human contact from our grubby little financial transactions. A swipe here and the tap of an icon there and – bingo, zingo – we have placed our order and paid for it without risking instant death from loathsome strangers' nasty exhales.

And those apps all have little push prompts suggesting a range of tips and nagging us about how much we would like to leave, even at times and in places where we had never considered tipping before. Customers thus feel pressured to tip more than they normally would, according to Creditcards.com.

“They use those options as an indication of what the normative range is and feel compelled to tip within that range,” Mike Lynn, a professor of consumer behavior and marketing at Cornell University, told CNBC. “So the more you ask, the more you get.”

Actually, I think it is more insidious than that. The merchants are helping us forget that we are actually spending money, and the more we forget, the easier it is for us to give up more of it.

When we paid actual cash for things – you remember, that green, folding stuff – we knew we were parting with the chits we got for our hard-earned labor and that we should be careful of how we disposed of them. Then we started using checks, one step removed from cash. Then came credit cards and debit cards, one more step away.

Finally, those apps, and all we are doing is moving numbers across a screen that bear no relation to our real lives. We don't even think of it as real money until, perhaps, the end of the month when we wonder where in the world it all went to.

It's a lesson the private sector has learned all too well from the government.

The most inspired – touched with mad genius, even – move by the federal government was paycheck withholding for the income tax. Losing just a portion of the total owed each pay period lulls taxpayers into ignoring just how much we are giving up. It's money we never see, so it was never really ours, right?

Of all the causes of the federal government becoming the profligate behemoth it is, that's the main culprit. If we ever hope to really tame that beast, just do one simple thing. Stop the withholding and present taxpayers with a yearly bill instead. Heads will roll, and change will come.

In the meantime, we can wax nostalgic for days gone by when tipping was 10 percent, confined to a few dining experiences a year, and we were guilt-tripped into doing it with visions of brave and struggling below-minimum-wage mothers and their half-starved children.

And of a time when government pledged to do and spend the minimum required to fulfill its legitimate functions, and we all believed it.

Our Broken Political System

(March 27) – In the middle of his most recent offering, the Indiana Policy Review book reviewer Mark Franke asked one of the most important

questions of the modern political era. In fact, if our polity is to survive its current state of fractured fragility, it might be the question:

“Where is the red line between reasonable compromise and dying on the hill of principle?”

I don't have any better answer to that question than Mark did, but it made me think. If this offering can get one other person to think, maybe we can get some kind of strange chain reaction of civic discussion started.

He posed the question in connection with reviewing three books having the same general theme: The two-party system is broken, and we desperately need to somehow find our way back to compromise before the nation is torn apart in the war of partisan extremes.

Mark agreed with the stated problem but expressed doubts about most of the solutions. Each of the suggested remedies – open balloting, constitutional nullification amendments, ranked ballot voting and so on – would create its own set of problems. On the other end of the spectrum from our dilemma, for example, would we really be better off with a multi-party system that required the corralling of a new governing coalition every few months?

Here is my thought: What if these analysts, in dissecting the sad state of our major political parties, are focusing on the wrong thing? Isn't it possible that the two-party breakdown is not the cause of our divisiveness but, rather, the result of it?

The names have changed, and some issues they favor have come and gone, but we have had two major parties almost from the beginning of the republic, ever since George Washington decided not to be president for life. They have survived and thrived by listening to the electorate, candidates doing their best to promise delivery of what is desired. The parties are what they are because of who we are.

At the very least, we should consider the relationship of our political class and voting citizenry to be a symbiotic one. Each has contributed to the policy mix and, however briefly

and sporadically, somehow managed to tolerate the compromises that serve the commonweal.

Until now. We are taunted by the possibility that compromise has moved forever beyond our grasp. And the unanswered – because, so far, unasked – question is what has happened to us, the American people, to bring us to such an impasse? If we can figure that out, perhaps we can start understanding our “two-party problem.”

I have a thought about that, too.

Stated succinctly if simplistically, what we have today is a war between liberals and conservatives. Whatever else we may say about them, it seems fair to describe liberals as always wanting change and championing strong government activity and spending to achieve it. Conservatives want the stability of preserved tradition and champion strong government initiatives to achieve it.

Does that sound about right? If so, consider:

It is much harder for conservatives to compromise than it is for liberals to compromise. That has nothing to do with the character or intentions of the people involved. It is in the very nature of conservatism and liberalism.

Conservatives want the status quo. Liberals want to break the status quo as decisively and as often as they can.

And when “no change” and “big change” clash, there is only one compromise: a little change. So, every compromise is a defeat for conservatism, however small, and it is a victory, however small, for liberalism. We can see this most often in budget discussions: Let’s keep the same budget (cuts are never on the table). No, let’s increase it by 20 percent. OK, let’s compromise at 10 percent.

The result is the inexorable march of change and an ever-contracting foundation of stability.

I think we have reached the point where conservatives are sick and tired of always being on the losing end of compromise. Because there are now a few news outlets not parroting the left-center narrative and because of the effects of social media, they are talking more to each other

and getting in a “mad as hell and not going to take it anymore” mood.

Liberals, on the other hand, are giddy with success. The more gains they make, the more they want. Every extreme position they beat conservatives down on just spurs them on to even more extreme positions. Because they still mostly control the narrative, and because of the effects of social media, they’ve convinced themselves that their positions are the only moral ones.

If I’m even close to correct, I have no idea where we go from here. I keep thinking that the liberals will go one step too far and champion something so crazy no sane person would accept it. But so far it hasn’t happened. I keep thinking conservatives will craft a coherent defense of American values and traditions, but that hasn’t happened, either.

Maybe it is easier just to blame the parties. Not our fault, move along, nothing to see here.

A Prize for ‘Thieves’ at the Indiana BMV

(March 20) — It is time to announce the winner of the prestigious and soon-to-be coveted Reno Prize, which, starting this year, will be awarded to honor the most creative theft from citizens by their government.

It should have been an easy choice, since the Indiana General Assembly is in full swing. As the saying goes, “No man’s life, liberty or property are safe while the legislature is in session.”

But lawmakers have let us down, conducting a humdrum session filled mostly with business as usual.

A budget that will spend much more than the last one, with the usual padding for fraud, abuse and incompetence built in. Billions held in reserve instead of being returned to the taxpayers it was taken from. Backroom deals with well-heeled lobbyists that will benefit small groups of Hoosiers at the expense of the overall citizenry.

Theft, certainly, legal if sometimes sneaky and often audacious, but nothing truly unusual. Nothing creative enough to merit the Reno Prize.

So we must turn to the executive branch, in whose many divisions faceless and nameless bureaucrats work tirelessly without the harsh glare of scrutiny to demonstrate that “public service” means showing the pesky public just who’s boss. They know what they can get away with, and they can cite chapter and verse of the state laws allowing them to do it.

And so we have a winner.

The first annual Reno Prize goes to . . . imagine drumroll here . . . The Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

According to an investigation by WRTV of Indianapolis, the BMV makes millions by selling Hoosiers’ personal information, and it is not required by law to tell us they are doing it. In a practice that’s been going on for years, the bureau offers up information to the highest bidders for our birth dates, addresses and past addresses, odometer readings, what kinds of cars we drive and even our license plate numbers.

In the last 10 years, the bureau has realized nearly \$240 million from the sales, and in 2022 alone it made \$25 million.

People who can buy the information include lawyers, bail bondsmen, private investigators, insurance agents and debt collection agencies. There are supposed to be restrictions on how the information is used – third-party marketers aren’t supposed to use it to directly solicit us, for example. But we all know that once our information is out there, it is out there forever.

So the BMV is exploiting the state’s citizens by joining in the theft of their precious privacy, so fragile in the digital age. And it is profiting from giving out those citizens’ information, which can then be used against them in myriad ways.

Truly breathtaking, eminently worthy of recognition.

If you are thinking about Googling more information about the Reno Prize, by the way, don’t bother. I made it up.

It pays tribute to the Reno brothers, a hardy band of innovators from Rockford, in southern Indiana’s Jackson County, whose band of robbers

terrorized the Midwest shortly after the Civil War by perfecting the concept of train robbery.

There were train robberies before the Renos, of course, but the crooks were stupid about it. Not as stupid as what you might have seen in old Westerns in which the scoundrels chased down the train on horseback, but thoughtless nonetheless.

Before the Renos, robbers did their deeds while the trains were idling at their stations. This soon became problematic, what with all the people, including law enforcement representatives, milling about.

The Reno brothers’ brilliant twist was to buy tickets and ride on the trains until they got to the middle of nowhere, which trains tend to do, then go quickly about their nefarious business with no pushy interventions by the law. The simple elegance of their plan quickly caught on and was emulated by train robbers across the country.

What an inspired modification it was. Riding the train as ordinary passengers, looking just like all the other ordinary passengers until it was time to strike. Not unlike today’s government workers, who look just like the rest of us until – well, you get the idea.

Alas, criminals who repeat the same patterns often get caught. Aided by Pinkerton agents hired by the railroads, authorities kept arresting members of the Reno brothers’ gang. But outraged mobs kept taking them away from authorities and hanging them from the nearest tree, 10 of them in three separate incidents, all in 1868. True genius is seldom appreciated in its own time.

A sad fact that it is hoped the Reno Prize will help us avoid in this time.

Be Careful What You Consider Your ‘Right’

(March 13) — I hope to make lots of new friends today by reminding Hoosiers of something: You do not have a right to food, shelter or health care.

Before I am accused of being selfish and heartless, which I assuredly will be, let's try to make a distinction.

Yes, you do need those things if you are to have any chance of a meaningful existence. And maybe, as a fellow human being, I should help provide them for you if you can't do it all yourself.

Call it a moral obligation, perhaps. Or my duty as a good citizen. Or simply my implied commitment as a member of the same community in which we have shared values.

But they are not your right.

What triggered this rant was an opinion piece distributed by the Capital Chronicle news service. It declared that Indiana has the highest single-housing cost burden in all Midwest states for the lowest-income residents, and detailed how the state was far friendlier to landlords than tenants and lamented the lack of "affordable housing" here.

We can accept all that as true and have a good discussion about what should be done about it. But the article lost me in the way it was framed: "Housing is not a human right in Indiana," the headline screamed.

Nor anywhere else, I thought.

Rights, properly understood, at least in connection with this country's foundational concepts, belong to all of us. We have them simply because we are human – call them natural or God-given depending on your philosophy. And they are inalienable; they cannot be taken away. The purpose of government, in fact, is not to dispense rights, but to protect those rights we already have.

And the most important part of a right: Exercising it does not require anybody else to give up a right. My claim to liberty does not require you to relinquish yours. Your pursuit of happiness does not negate my pursuit of happiness. Our only obligation is to respect each other's rights.

That is the very concept of rights that this nation was built upon – negative rights, that is, a delineation of where government may not tread.

But then came a whole school of thought, stressed by presidents like Woodrow Wilson and

Franklin Roosevelt and carried on by ones like Barack Obama and Joe Biden, that declares a commitment to positive rights. We should not just define areas the government should stay out of, but also look to it to provide the things we need.

But those "rights" do not pre-exist; they are created by institutions. They certainly are not inalienable – they can be removed on a whim, as easily as they are granted.

And, most important, they do take away from others. Any exercise of a positive right creates an obligation on somebody else's part.

If you have the right to food, somebody must grow it for you and distribute it to you. If you have the right to shelter, someone must build it. If you have the right to medical care, someone must provide it.

And someone must pay for it all. Any assertion of a "positive right" is a claim against the community as a whole.

You may think I'm making too fine a distinction here. We just need to identify what human beings need to have dignity in their lives and figure out how to provide it, not nitpick over definitions.

Perhaps I am. If I'd lived in Victorian England and witnessed the brutal inhumanity visited upon the poor, I might have flirted with socialism. I think any decent person would have.

But words matter. The more we cheapen the concept of what a right is, the more we accept the government as arbiter of what we deserve to have, and the further we drift away from freedom. The more of it we give up, the less we will notice when it keeps eroding.

We are already at the point where the predominant political philosophy is, "I want what I want when I want it and how I want it." Believe it or not, that is not that far away from, "You'll take what we give you and like it."

We should be careful of what we ask for, and of whom we ask it. Our right to the pursuit of happiness includes the option of being stupid. Let's please not be. ♦

Mark Franke

Mark Franke, M.B.A., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review and its book reviewer, is formerly an associate vice-chancellor at Indiana University-Purdue.



Essential Characteristics of Public Leaders

(May 30) — A group of friends were talking one afternoon about what we should look for in our elected officials. What characteristics must be displayed in a candidate in order to deserve our votes?

It is easy to be cynical given the clown circus on display in Washington D.C. I just succumbed to this cynicism myself with the previous sentence. Such an attitude is not helpful; the crisis must be addressed.

My standard operating procedure whenever I want to gaze into the future is to view the clear images to be seen in the past. In this case it is to look to the Founding Fathers, the truly greatest generation, to learn what characteristics these men exhibited in building our nation.

I chose the six most important Founders and chose a personality trait each possessed such that he could be considered a paragon of that characteristic. My list is somewhat arbitrary but I contend still defensible.

Here is my list and my choice for the exemplar of that characteristic:

Sense of destiny. Some might call this excessive ego but it must be present in someone who is about to take a substantial risk, even the risk of death. George Washington had, and still has, no equal here. In the darkest hours of the War for Independence, he never lost hope. Preferring to remain retired after the war, he lent his name to the call for a constitutional convention and then presided over it, deftly managing its outcome through sheer force of

personality. He, and often he alone, knew where it had to go.

Irrepressible resoluteness. This is stubbornness in a good cause. John Adams is the gold medalist in this competition. Ofttimes he was the outlier, standing alone but refusing to budge when he just knew he was right. For example it was his vision that formed the foundation for our separate but equal branches of government so as to diffuse political power while bringing to life a functional republican form of government. One must be willing to withstand public ridicule and abuse while standing firm. Adams did.

Preternatural intellect. Truly smart people are able to explain things so the common person understands even the most complex issue. Read the Declaration of Independence and you will see why Thomas Jefferson leads in this category. Yes, I realize he borrowed much of the actual language but even so he edited and arranged it such that no one can ever forget its opening paragraphs.

Analytical brilliance. It's one thing to be book smart and entirely another thing to be apply that knowledge for the common good. Alexander Hamilton wrote several of the most philosophical of the Federalist Papers and then constructed a real-world solution to the nation's financial pressures. He thought systematically, weaving disparate threads into whole cloth.

Political nimbleness. So long as this skill is not invoked for demagogic uses or for crass pandering to a base, it is the skill most needed in a pluralistic government. In the pre-Constitution era and into the early 1790's, James Madison was masterful in understanding the distinction between macro issues and the micro ones. Read his Federalist Papers corpus to appreciate his ability to direct his persuasiveness to the target audiences.

Reputation for wisdom. People who can make pithy statements with profound meanings get attention. Benjamin Franklin excelled at this; he was probably the best known of the Founders throughout the colonies before the war. He was the E. F. Hutton of his age.

Note that none of the six Founders listed possessed all the requisite characteristics. Their

genius lay in their recognition of the contributions of the others and how, even if only for a short time, their united efforts could accomplish something truly great. Two hundred fifty years later, their accomplishment is still around.

Perhaps it was nothing more than synchronicity, a serendipitous confluence of genius in time and space. I see the hand of God in it as I don't like to rely on impossibly long odds for something important to happen. Regardless, happen it did.

Unfortunately, the present-day evolution of their work is just a dim shadow of that which emanated from those brilliant minds. Can we find a core group of 21st century public servants willing to risk their "lives, fortunes and sacred honor" to restore our republic to that created by the Founders? Can they yoke competitive ambitions to a shared vision of what was and might be again?

I was asked in a recent interview to name one person who could rise to the occasion of reuniting our country around the founding principles. I couldn't, but then it required a handful and more at the founding.

My group of friends will continue thinking deeply on this. We don't give up easily and we know what is at stake. John Adams' stubbornness should serve us well.

The Black Hole of Genealogy

(*May 24*) — Allen County, where I live, is known for several things but perhaps the genealogy department at the public library is one of the best-known outside God's country. I am told it has one of the largest collections of official and family documents in the nation. Serious researchers know its reputation and use its expansive digital and paper resources.

While I have never visited the genealogy department, my wife spent many hours of research while attempting to document her application for membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). With the assistance of the library's helpful staff and that of

the local DAR officers, she was successful and now holds membership in that august group.

After being inducted into DAR, she should have taken a victory lap and retired from the field. Instead, she insists on taking daily excursions down the rabbit hole of genealogical study.

Fine. It means she shouldn't have time to comment on my exhaustive number of character defects and the ever-expanding list of home projects not getting the priority she thinks they deserve. I should be the grateful recipient of increasing moments of peace and quiet for reading, writing and watching baseball. Somehow, and quite unfairly at that, it hasn't worked out as I hoped.

I naively thought the end of the dastardly impact of her obsession on how I spend my leisure had come. After all, I had listened to regular rehearsals of her descent from a branch of the Scottish Stewart family, including an earl whose title is now held by Prince William. Yes, that Prince William. I even took a perverse pleasure in learning that she has significant German blood in her background, hoping this would limit her snarky comments about my German stubbornness and other exemplary Teutonic personality traits she unjustly considers to be flaws.

But now we have reached a new high for her and a new low for me. She has discovered through some demonic database in hell, I mean on the Internet, that she is a fourth cousin, nine times removed, to John Adams. Yes, that John Adams.

Will it never end?

These shared Adams progenitors lived and died in England. It was this original John and Agnes Adams' son Henry who emigrated while their daughter Lucy stayed behind in the mother country, no doubt chomping at the bit to be on the front lines of the English Civil War. Alas, she died too soon so it may have been her daughter who witnessed the beheading of Charles I. Or so I like to fantasize given the insurrectionist nature of my wife's family.

Fortunately I was able to restrain myself from suggesting certain personality traits she and John

student's academic life, something that won't sit well in our "no homework" brave new world.

I'm being cynical and a tad unfair but the manufacturing analogy may be closer to the mark than one cares to admit.

One possible negative to the Oxford approach is a de-emphasis on memorization, but that horse has left the public-school barn. School curricula already have effectively removed memorization as a teaching method. Ask a third grader to recite the multiplication tables. So what, you may ask, given that everyone carries around a miniature computer masquerading as a telephone?

Memorization hasn't been abandoned everywhere, of course. The classical education movement still sees it as foundational to learning. This approach is built on three progressing levels of pedagogy, called the trivium after its medieval antecedent. It structures a student's academic career around natural learning capabilities, including memorization in the formative years when that is still easy for the youngsters. There is no doubt that this movement intends to radically reverse the direction of modern education theory and its attendant scorn of our Western cultural heritage.

Classical education has its place but I am not convinced it is the panacea its evangelists contend. Is there another approach that can work, especially at the college level?

Here's a thought: What if we combined the Oxford system with the Socratic method? I suspect that does in fact happen over there in Merry Olde England but perhaps I am romanticizing. I watch too many BBC series.

Meanwhile, we have a more immediate and much more dangerous threat here and now. Where will artificial intelligence take us? And will we have no choice but to be dragged along?

I find it instructive that even some of today's technology gurus are publicly expressing their concern about where this will go. Can we stop its progress even if we want to? Have we become as impotent as Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's

novel? Will the creature, something that was created, become the master?

Frank Herbert, one of sci-fi's most popular and brilliant authors, dealt with this in his series based on the fictional planet Dune. He set his futuristic universe in a time after what he called the "Butlerian Jihad." This jihad was a successful crusade against computers, thinking machines and conscious robots. Mind you, this was written in 1965 long before any personal computing devices were anywhere to be seen except in the fertile minds of visionaries like Herbert.

Why did Herbert see artificial intelligence as a greater threat than nuclear weapons while writing in the midst of the Cold War? His ruling class maintained their "atomics" but all agreed the AI machines were to be forever banned. Curious, is it not? Or maybe just prescient.

We already are living in George Orwell's "1984." Can Frank Herbert's "Dune" be far behind?

The Constitution's 'Selective Incorporation'

(May 10) — Every spring I have the opportunity to serve as a judge in the American Legion's national oratorical contest. This contest began in 1938 to encourage knowledge of the Constitution among high school students. Contestants are sponsored by local American Legion posts and compete at ascending levels beginning with the district, zone and state levels. State winners compete at the national level. More than \$200,000 in scholarships are awarded each year across the levels.

The students present a ten-minute oration on a constitutional topic of their choice. Then they are given a topic randomly drawn from a pre-announced list and five minutes to prepare their next speech. Their score for the two speeches is based on their knowledge of the topic, the rhetorical structure of the speech and its persuasiveness, and their presentation style.

Every year I learn something new about the Constitution or at least am reminded of something I have forgotten. This year it was the

principle of selective incorporation. I am not ashamed to admit that I had to do some online research afterwards to gain understanding of the doctrine and its application.

The principle originates in the Fourteenth Amendment. This amendment is one of three adopted at the conclusion of the Civil War to abolish slavery and protect newly freed citizens but there is a lot more in this amendment such as due process and equal protection language. It specifically protects property rights and applies individual constitutional rights to the states. Or mostly applies them.

Selective incorporation is a court-developed doctrine that applies single amendments or even portions of an amendment on a case-by-case basis. For us laymen this is a difficult concept to understand yet there is clear court precedent for it, beginning in 1937. If you are keeping score at home, this is how things stand with the first eight amendments in the Bill of Rights: Four amendments are fully incorporated at the state level, two are partially incorporated and two are not at all.

Make sense? At least the First Amendment, the most important one to my way of thinking, is fully incorporated and the law of the land for the states. In contrast, the Third Amendment prohibiting the quartering of troops in private homes without the owner's permission is not incorporated, perhaps because it has never been an issue requiring court review. Partially incorporated is the Eighth's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment but not's protection against excessive fines.

There is another side to this constitutional coin: interposition. Its layman's definition is the authority of a state or local governing entity to refuse a federal law or ruling. Nullification is the extreme application of it.

Interposition has not fared well in our history but it has been used. The Virginia and Kentucky resolutions of 1798 stated that the federal Alien and Sedition Acts would not pertain there. More recently, several cities declared they were "sanctuary cities" and refused to assist in

enforcement of federal immigration policies and related police actions.

Constitutional scholars can debate the theoretical aspects of this; my focus is on the practical and the question of its usefulness as a tool to get our nation out of its political gridlock. Can either or both be used to return the nation to the federalist principles underlying the Constitution?

Would it help or harm our union if more issues were left to local or state option?

Canada offers a possible model for this. Its Charter of Rights and Freedoms, adopted in 1982 with its new constitution, includes a "notwithstanding" clause that allows provinces to temporarily suspend federal legislation.

This is not without controversy, however. The Province of Quebec invoked the notwithstanding clause to refuse implementation of Bill 21, which prevents public employees from wearing religious symbols at work. Canadians are divided on this; the majority believe the notwithstanding clause damages national unity. Quebec, the province which has invoked the notwithstanding clause most often, is a cultural, linguistic and religious outlier in Canada so perhaps that provides some insight.

Is full unity the goal of a democratic republic? Is unity more important than the exercise of individual liberty? Can it lead to a tyranny of the majority as current cultural czars impose uniformity even at the cost of religious freedom as in Quebec?

I am a classical liberal with moderate libertarian sympathies so you can guess how I answer the questions above.

And the American Legion's national contest winner? I didn't hear her speech but learned she is from Indianapolis and plans to attend Patrick Henry College in Virginia, an ironic choice given that Henry opposed adoption of the Constitution. His opposition contributed to the promise of a Bill of Rights, subsequently drafted by James Madison.

Or maybe her choice of college is not so ironic. Patrick Henry was one inspiring public speaker.

The Risk Inherent in a Convention of States

(April 19) — “You are uninformed.”

I was told this at a display table for the national Convention of States (COS) organization which was exhibiting at the spring conference of the Indiana American Legion. This was in response to my stating concern that such a convention could go rogue because the sponsors could not absolutely control the agenda or the end product.

Remember 1787?

The Continental Congress called a similar convention to amend the Articles of Confederation primarily to address the Congress’ inability to levy taxes. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and others hijacked the convention to write an entirely new constitution, one that had no legal basis in the Articles. One can sense the shifting mood across those four hot and humid months in Philadelphia as a majority of individual delegates and state delegations saw an entirely new document as the best way to fix the national government.

We can be thankful that Madison, et. al., did what they did but what is to prevent that from happening again, this time by less brilliant and less nobly minded people? The Convention of States group insists that the convention would be limited to specific amendments defined in advance. Why is COS confident of that? The argument is that the Constitution’s Article V speaks to amending the existing Constitution and does not legitimize writing an entirely new one for direct submission to the states. Neither did the Articles of Confederation, by the way.

There is a safeguard in the requirement that whatever amendments come out of the convention must still pass muster in three-quarters of the states. Presumably this would mean one amendment at a time and not as a full package. Once again, the specter of 1787 rises. Keep in mind Article V’s option for state ratification—either through the state legislature or by special state convention.

The Convention of States people have valid concerns about how our Constitution is being interpreted these days, concerns I share. I especially object to the near total negation of federalism, the balance of powers principle that was critical in generating support throughout the states for the current Constitution. I am not so naïve to think that our dysfunctional Congress could propose an amendment or two to adequately address this.

Some of the impetus for the convention is the federal government’s complete inability to restrain itself fiscally. The irony here lies in the fact the first convention was called to give taxing power to an impecunious national government while now we need a convention to restrain its spendthrift taxing and borrowing orgies.

But do I sense naivete in the Convention of States organization’s thinking a convention can be limited by the language of the petition calling for it? It proposes to restrict discussion to amendments that “limit the power and jurisdiction of the federal government, impose fiscal restraints, and place term limits on federal officials.”

Good ideas, all, but can this putative limitation be enforced? COS believes it can and presents reasonable, logical arguments to that effect. One hopes COS is right but I reserve my skepticism on things proceeding reasonably and logically in this political environment.

The frustration within the citizenry is understandable. It doesn’t seem to matter which party is in the White House or controlling Congress. (Actually, it does but only at the margin.) This is a valid exercise of constitutional rights and participatory democracy. “Nonpartisan” Common Cause begs to differ. It labels the supporters as “far right” of course, a pro forma epithet hurled by those on the left toward anyone who disagrees with their brave new world. I particularly enjoyed Common Cause’s description of the process as being run by “conspirators” and taking place “behind closed doors.” Apparently the folks at the COS table didn’t know they weren’t supposed to have an

open display to obtain signatures on a public petition.

Common Cause has reason to be exorcised over the success of the COS movement. To date 19 of the 34 required states, including Indiana, have used their Article V authority to call for the convention. The movement may be stalling as no new states have signed on in 2023 although “active legislation” exists in 20 states according to the COS website.

I don’t think I am uniformed on this issue nor do I think I am misinformed. Have I drawn a logically valid conclusion from the language of Article V given the events of 1787? Even if not the most likely outcome, a runaway convention certainly is a possibility as history instructs us.

I wish them luck but perhaps not too much luck. To paraphrase Aesop: Be careful what you wish for; you just might get it. Or this advice from H. L. Mencken: “Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard.”

The Attack on Marriage Is an Attack on Society

(April 12) — In this iconoclastic age which revels in knocking down as many Western mores as possible, one should not be surprised at what will be frog-marched to the cultural Jacobin guillotine next. I practice a 21st century version of “know nothingness” by simply ignoring much of what goes on around me. Foolish? Yes, according to my family. Eccentric? Of course, but remember my age. Cowardly, no doubt, but we geezers are entitled to our conceit of residing in the world of our distant past.

Unfortunately there are occasions when real life gobsmacks us when we least expect it. Our self-imagined hermit’s cave can protect us from only so much.

I had one of these experiences several weeks ago when I attended the wedding of a young couple from my church. We are Lutheran so we use a traditional wedding service, by that I mean a worship service with hymns and Scripture readings and a sermon. The vows are traditional

as well, reflecting the created difference between man and woman, a difference intended to make the two perfect complements.

God may have instituted marriage as the perfect relationship but then we humans got our hands on it. On the drive from the church to the reception hall, I thought about what has happened to the state of holy matrimony just in my lifetime. A quick review of census data didn’t mitigate my concern.

In 1950 approximately two-thirds of adults were married. By 2020 this had fallen to about one-half. This isn’t just a statistic; it is a fundamental change in the way in which our society is organized. It affects how people use their leisure time, spend their money and interact with neighbors. What unfortunate changes to our sense of shared community does this portend?

So what else changed during this 70-year period?

The average age of first marriage has increased from 20 to 28 for women and from 22 to 30 for men. Are the 20s a lost decade for our young people, finding themselves on the outside looking in during their prime years for family-building? Is it simple economics, the need to find a job and focus on a career? Can it be the outcome of an upbringing that encourages self-absorption and materialistic consumption?

The percentage of family households with both parents present declined from 87 percent in 1959 to 73 percent in 2021. The poverty rate for single mother-families is nearly triple that of two-parent households. How many more children are growing up without strong parental (usually the father’s) models at home and without financial security? Do children today no longer hear that dreaded line: “Just wait for your father to get home!”?

There is a seemingly endless parade of bad news stories about problems faced by schools in enforcing discipline and achieving desired educational outcomes. Having worked in higher education my entire career, I observed this firsthand. I recall that as many as two-thirds of

incoming freshmen required remedial math courses before taking college level courses. And these were students who met our admission standards. If high school graduates are not prepared for college, how can they be prepared for a twenty-first century workforce?

Maybe workforce preparation is not seen as important. Just in the last 20 years, workforce participation has dropped by six percent for adult men and seven percent for teenagers. Are the financial benefits of working too small to induce healthy adults to get jobs? Do adult men no longer see themselves as breadwinners for their families?

There is something quite disturbing here.

As an economics major I learned the importance of differentiating between correlation and causation. Just because things happen in some sequence should not lead one to conclude that the earlier event caused the latter. But when so many events line up pointed in the same direction, one can't help but wonder. Surely all this can't be simple coincidence.

"Curious and curiouser," to quote Alice down the rabbit hole.

The family is the foundational building block for society and always has been, the claims of wokism notwithstanding. It is a marvel of design, equipped to provide economic security for the family and a nurturing environment for child-rearing. Yes, it is built on traditional roles for husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, parents and children. These roles are flexible enough to bend but must not be stressed to the breaking point.

Why is this important? Just look around you. If you think things are better now than in 1950 given the family data cited above, then you hold to a different creed than I do.

The worst thing about this? We have barely begun to pay the price for this self-inflicted breakdown. It will be our grandchildren who will be presented the bill . . . with interest.

Baseball Cards — the Currency of Youth

(April 10) — Ah, spring has returned to northeastern Indiana. The grass has turned green, the trees are budding and will soon flower, and the bluebirds are nesting in our backyard. God's creation has reawakened once more in what will shortly be a panoply of color.

But let's cut to the chase. The major league baseball season started two weeks ago. Now that is proof positive that God is in His heaven and all is right with the world.

I can't help but fade slowly but surely into the mists of time and boyhood memories when baseball was everything.

My family did not get our first television until later in the 1950s, which coincided with my experiential awakening to the national pastime. The Saturday afternoon "Game of the Week" was my portal into a magical world of televised baseball and my uncontrollable addiction to collecting baseball cards.

A pack of six (or was it five?) baseball cards came with a concrete-like flat piece of bubble gum that wreaked havoc on a youngster's teeth in those pre-Crest days. Each pack cost a nickel but that was OK since my weekly allowance was a quarter. By the end of the summer, I could almost, but not quite, complete the collection of players from all 16 teams.

Being a budding entrepreneur, I parlayed my ingenuity into getting an extra pack every other day or so by walking to the small neighborhood grocery store to buy a pack of cigarettes for the neighbor lady who tipped me a nickel for you know what. The owner sold me the cigarettes in good conscience knowing I had no interest whatsoever in anything other than that gorgeously wrapped pack of Topp's cards.

The cards were a wealth of information in those pre-internet years. Each player's stats were lovingly printed on the back side, providing an educational experience for an anal retentive like me trying to recalculate all the averages. At least I wasn't as nerdy as that boy on "I've Got a Secret" who had memorized all the stats on every card.

Every year the photo design changed. I liked 1959 best. These weren't action photos like one sees today but carefully posed stills that enabled me to mimic how to hold a bat or follow through on a pitch. I had the form if not the execution.

Collecting meant trading and trading meant carefully husbanding "doubles." No desert souk has seen more intensive haggling than that of a group of adolescent boys negotiating deals to get their missing cards. I think I was scarred emotionally for life one afternoon when I failed to get the 1961 Whitey Ford I was missing.

Eventually I snap out of those reminiscences and find myself back in the present day, almost unrecognizable until the first pitch is thrown. Then the universe once again finds equilibrium.

One juvenile skill I learned was how to score a game. I tried several different systems and still use one when I attend my hometown TinCap games. I can't walk into a ballpark without getting a scoresheet. I carry a special clipboard with extra pencils and storage for the scoresheets from previous nights. Those seated next to me at the ballpark know that interrupting me during a play has consequences, and not pleasant ones.

At home I watch games when I can and listen to many more. Baseball is a game made for radio and good announcers are a joy to hear. I usually turn off the TV announcers and combine TV video with radio audio. With all our modern technology the video and audio don't quite sync but who cares? See the play and then talk about it, just like when at the ballpark in person.

This year is special for MLB. The commissar of baseball, I mean the commissioner, finally made a decision that benefits fans. Rule changes are in place to speed up the game by removing the excruciating dead time when either pitcher or batter or both are just simply stalling. Tell the batter to get in the batter's box, and the pitcher to get on the mound and throw the ball. Obvious, unless your \$17 million-per-year salary blinds you to such simplicity.

That's all the grousing I will do this season. It's time for a backyard tradition of watching the first

afternoon game of the season that pits the Philadelphia Phillies against the New York Yankees. We, my neighbor and I, pretend it's really baseball weather by cooking brats on the outdoor grill. Cracker Jack and peanuts in the shell are provided as well as typical baseball park beverages.

It just doesn't get any better than this . . . except in our memories. And as we get older, those memories become even more vivid if that is even possible. I assure you, it is.

The Salutory Effect of Religious Observance

(April 1) — It is Holy Week for Christians, that most profound of weeks, the pivotal point of the Christian liturgical year.

This year Christian Holy Week and Jewish Passover coincide, as they do most years. As well they should, since the first Good Friday and Easter occurred at the Passover. This was no coincidence if one reads the Gospels carefully and accepts their theological and historical claims. I am one of those, one who easily reconciles historicity with transcendent truth.

Christians and Jews share much including a large body of Scripture. Both trace their origins to the call of Abraham and the promises God made to him. It is no wonder that the Greek and Roman first century pagans viewed Christianity as a Jewish sect. Outside in, one can understand this misunderstanding. When viewed inside out, however, the difference is manifested in what this special week is all about.

What is somewhat unusual about this week in 2023 is that it falls within the major feast of the world's third great monotheistic religion — Islam.

Think what these three religions share: monotheism, as mentioned above; theological descent from Abraham; the essentiality of revealed scripture; the centrality of faith; and the importance of charitable works as expressions of that faith.

No, we don't all worship the same God. That is evident by our different collection of sacred

writings. Even more important is the confession of a Triune Godhead in Christianity, something rejected in Judaism and Islam. This is not a matter of “let’s all sit around the theological campfire and sing Kumbaya.” This difference is real and can’t be sent to its metaphysical room as punishment.

That is at the epistemological level. There is a civic level as well, one that sustains our communities all week long rather than just on each religion’s established day of worship. What the devout of these three religions share with everyone else here in America is the freedom to observe their religious rites both privately and publicly. The Founding Fathers knew what they were about when they crafted the First Amendment to be a guarantee of natural rights as well as a recognition of the civic virtue such freedom fosters.

People of faith, and I hesitate to use this verb inappropriately, sanctify their communities by the public exercise of their spirituality. They make a difference in the orderliness and congeniality of their hometowns. To be sure, those of other faiths or even of non-faith such as secular humanists can have the same beneficial effect. What traditional faiths offer is a structure for things like works of mercy and positive neighborly activity. It is secondary to their higher calling but cannot be divorced from it. It is ever before them.

I trust most of us remember the political fights over posting the Ten Commandments in courthouses. Were these displays a fifth column for the establishment of a specific religion or merely a public reminder of our nation’s founding on a commonly accepted moral code? We used to call this the Judeo-Christian ethic but I don’t hear that term much anymore.

People of faith find the motivation for civic righteousness within themselves. It is reinforced in their church or synagogue by their shared teaching. They know what to do and more importantly know why they do it. The command to do it comes not from within themselves but from a supreme and objective authority.

So at noon on Good Friday, church bells will ring to mark the three hours of darkness which occurred at the Crucifixion. Some Christians will attend a Tre Ore service to mark this while others will attend a Tenebrae service of darkness after sunset. The weekend continues with Easter vigils on Saturday night and then culminates in sunrise services on Easter morning. That’s what we Christians will be doing to mark what for us is the decisive point of human history.

My Jewish friends will conduct their seder meals and perform other rituals to remember the Exodus from the slavery of Egypt. Note how Jews and Christians alike look to God’s direct intervention in human history to redeem His people. We point to different but equally real historical events.

Then we will go about our earthly business, living our lives as best we can according to those politically verboten commandments and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Maybe not perfectly, but not for a lack of trying. The expectation of our God is ever before us, even if we can’t go downtown to the courthouse to read a plaque spelling it out. But then, we never needed a public display to be reminded of what is written on our hearts.

Consider what this dysfunctional, materialistic and nihilistic world would be like without people of faith. I shudder to think about it.

The Iconoclasm of the Internet

(March 28) — We live in the information age and that is supposed to be a Good Thing. I concede the point, partially. There is a definite benefit in being able to search Wikipedia rather than pull down an outdated Funk & Wagnalls from the shelf whenever I have a quick question I need answered.

Still, I do my human best to avoid reading things on the Internet but then I am human after all. I try to limit it to a quick review of headlines from various news outlets, understanding that the Google gods are carefully filtering what they think I should see. At least they push updates about my favorite baseball team, the New York Yankees. But

why do I keep getting “sponsored” articles about weight loss? Has Google suborned my bathroom scale?

While I can control what I opt into, my family ensures that my luddite tendency is continually confronted by things they think I should know. For example:

Last week my wife informed me that my toes are Greek. Huh? Do they speak the language? Fly the flag (and it is a nice albeit busy one, by the way)? Demand to be taken to my hometown Fort Wayne’s summer Greek Fest?

No, she read it on Facebook. Any mention of Facebook generally gets me up and headed for the nearest exit but she insisted I hear her out. It seems that the length and shape of one’s toes is a semi-reliable indicator of heritage.

Every chromosome of my German heritage rebels at this. How can all my ancestors going back four generations or more be German but my toes come from Greece? Was there some kind of Frankenstein-like laboratory experiment in my family’s background? This is truly bothersome.

There is a practical aspect to this unsettling news as well. Greek toes are supposedly longer than others. I think I can feel my shoes getting tight, what with longer toes now than when I bought them. Do I have to buy all new shoes, my frugal German genes want to know?

If my Greek toes were not causing me to lose enough sleep, my daughter told me about a scientific posting that there is no such thing in nature as the color blue. It is literally a figment of our imagination, our brains fooling our eyes into thinking they see blue. Or maybe it is the other way around, but no matter. This is a seriously subversive theory to advance.

I recall with rose-colored vision a question from a test in my Philosophy 101 course. Can blueness exist if nothing is blue? A more common formulation of this question is if a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, did it make a sound?

This sort of philosophical question was gist for the conceited undergraduate mental mill. Do we look to Plato or Aristotle for the answer? We could stay up half the night arguing that one,

intellectually fortified by our favorite adult malt beverages.

It is no surprise to those who know me that I came down on the side of Plato’s realism rather than Aristotle’s materialism. How can you go wrong if you side with Plato? Now I learn that the question is moot. I need to contact my philosophy prof from 1969 and get my grade adjusted based on this new information.

Or maybe it’s as simple as rephrasing the test question. Can something be blue if blueness doesn’t exist? To paraphrase mankind’s greatest post-Plato philosopher Yogi Berra, “If Plato were alive today, he would be rolling over in his grave.”

I am no longer 18 years old and unduly impressed with my own intellectual skills. I need to bring this into the here and now, and this is where the rubber meets the road. We have two bluebird houses in our backyard, each populated this spring with a nesting couple which will, we hope, produce a sufficient number of the next generation of these wonderful birds. But what if they aren’t really blue? Can I still call them bluebirds? Will they undergo some sort of avian angst resulting in multiple psychological disorders? Whom do you call to get bluebird counseling?

I know the NCAA basketball tournament is under way and our two state flagship universities were upset in early rounds to the sturm und drang of most of my friends. Who cares? I have a serious problem in my own backyard.

The only solution I can see is to keep the bluebird parents away from the Internet. I will monitor things diligently and confiscate any web-surfing devices I find in their nests. As an added benefit the time spent doing that will reduce my wasting time getting upset over things like blueness and toe size. A win-win situation, if ever there were one.

The Two-Party Problem

(March 22) — I must hang around with the wrong people. Every time I think I have made up my mind on an issue, someone challenges that

conclusion. Even worse is when the challenge is to my premises.

I wrote this between sessions at an American Legion conference in Washington D.C. I was about to meet with an enthusiastic young man representing an organization of veterans resolved to break the power of the two-party system in American politics. Our two-party system has become a problem, no argument there, but I have not been able to buy into the solutions offered by this group and others.

So I just admitted I am intellectually lazy. I agree there is a problem but don't make me think too deeply about the solution.

Except I can't walk away from this one. How do we replace the two-party leviathan that has a stranglehold on our political process? Parliamentary multi-party systems don't always work so well either. Note Italy's post-WWII history of what seemed like daily government changes. I don't need to mention Weimar Germany, but then I just did.

A party-less system would be no better, making it difficult for voters to accurately anticipate a successful candidate's legislative actions. There is some value in party discipline, its recent misuse in Congress and the Indiana General Assembly notwithstanding.

Despite my agreement with the problem statement, I just can't march in the solutions parade. These solutions involve ranked choice voting, instant runoff voting, final five voting and top four voting. I hadn't heard of most of these before this meeting so I needed time to think them through. For all my faults no one has ever accused me of being a fast thinker.

One question that comes to mind is whether we want majority election or just plurality? If majority, and that is the one I favor, how many runoffs are needed if there are multiple candidates? The reformers have this covered with their ranked choice option but I am not convinced, at least not yet.

Reading is an addiction, at least the pernicious way it consumes every spare moment of my day.

When in doubt, I grab a book. So I read three books which address this issue and advance solutions.

Andy Horning, erstwhile Libertarian candidate in state elections, has his package of solutions to our electoral and legislative dysfunctionality. See his book, "Relighting the Torch," for a comprehensive list of reforms including the usual open ballot voting stuff but also some rather provocative nullification amendments to the Constitution.

Another approach is offered by Jim Belcher in "Cold Civil War: Overcoming Polarization, Discovering Unity, and Healing the Nation." His point is to move political discourse toward the center and away from the extremes. His analysis of our current malaise is unique and interesting but, again, I'm not sold on his solutions.

Most unusual of the three due to its methodology is "The Politics Industry: How Political Innovation Can Break Partisan Gridlock and Save Our Democracy" by Katherine Gehl and Michael Porter, both connected to the Harvard School of Business. They apply structured business analysis to the political "business" to identify the problem and offer the usual checklist of solutions.

What all these authors have in common is a desire to return to a more civil discourse and a legislative focus on compromise. There is certainly value in that, given the polarization of the last several decades. The problem is that the middle can only hold if there is an honest and open debate on the philosophical underpinnings of the political. In other words we have to clearly explain why we believe the way we do, as both Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan accomplished. I like what the latter did while deploring the impact of the former's actions but that was one thing I never wanted to discuss with my Depression era father.

So the salient question remains: Where is the red line between reasonable compromise and dying on the hill of principle? I suggest it is closer to the compromise side than many of my ideological compatriots would want. At the same

time it is much closer to the hilltop than my opposites on the other side of the spectrum would accept.

The key to effective and positive compromise is that both sides must give something in order to gain something more valuable. Perfect must not be the enemy of good, and maybe that is what the authors I cited are advising.

History is replete with examples of failed politics which polarized irretrievably. I fear America is closing in on this point of no return.

Nietzsche, not my favorite philosopher, wrote, “When you stare into the abyss, the abyss stares back at you.” I am trying very, very hard not to stare into our political abyss.

DST: Dumb and Double-Dumb

(*March 15*) — Here we go again. Indiana and most other states in our More Perfect Union have doubled down on dumb once more in pursuit of ever-elusive increased interstate commerce revenues, reduced energy consumption, improved driving safety and higher SAT scores. Why ending world hunger and achieving lasting Middle East peace aren’t on this utopian dream list must be due to simple oversight.

Every spring we suffer through mankind’s annual quest to put both Mother Nature and our Creator God in their rightful places. Yes, I am talking about Daylight Saving Time (DST), which so far as I know has failed spectacularly in meeting the above lofty goals.

Think about this rationally. Why is 12 p.m. called “midnight”? Could it be that it marks the middle of the night? Which means, one assumes, that half the dark precedes midnight and half follows it. Our ancient and medieval forebears understood this, marking daily time by sunrise and sunset. The Anglo-Saxon farmers lived by this logical sorting of time as did Benedictine monks and Roman magistrates. A quick read of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ passion — this being Lent — reveals a simple timekeeping method of counting hours beginning with sunrise.

I normally would not appeal to science to support an argument, but consider this. In my

corner of God’s country here in northeast Indiana, the sun rose on March 12, the DST day of invocation to the calendar gods, at approximately 8 a.m. and set around 7:30 p.m. That’s four hours of sunlight in the forenoon and seven and one-half in the afternoon. Prior to DST, the imbalance wasn’t quite so bad — five against six and one-half. So not only is DST unnatural, we are already in the wrong time zone. We should be Central, as we were briefly when I was growing up.

Not convinced? There is something called “solar noon” when the sun is at its apex. On March 12 that was 1:51 p.m., nearly two hours off from reality. That’s one hour for the wrong time zone and a second hour for DST.

“It’s not nice to fool Mother Nature,” as the Chiffon margarine commercial claimed back in the 1970’s. It gave actress Dena Dietrich her nanosecond of TV fame. I entered adulthood during that crazed and bizarre decade but this commercial provided a singular piece of common sense to escape the psychedelic haze.

So what does this do to the body’s internal clock? I won’t use my body’s physiology as the standard but it sure hits me hard. It took me a month in the fall to stop waking up at 4 a.m.

With kids it is even worse. I volunteer at an elementary school and the second Monday in March is no sunny spring day if you are a teacher or a student. I watch them straggle in, the littlest ones requiring forced ejection from their protective car seats.

As children age, their diurnal clock shifts backwards as they begin to mimic night owls rather than early birds getting the worm. My hunch is that first period in most high schools is group nap time year-round but exacerbated by DST. My career was at a university and I can attest to how much effort college students exert to avoid scheduling 8 a.m. classes.

I keep hearing about the psychological and physiological benefits of natural sunlight but does that matter anymore? We have become a nation of video games, big screen TV’s and handheld computing devices masquerading as telephones.

All those things happen indoors under nasty artificial lighting if the experts are to be believed.

Even the name of this insanity is blatant propaganda. We aren't "saving" any daylight. The sun doesn't stop in the sky, Joshua like, so we can get an extra hour of sunlight. It just keeps moving as it always has and the Indiana General Assembly be damned.

Apparently there is a national movement to make DST permanent all year long. That will take an act of Congress and we all know how much damage most of its laws inflict on an unsuspecting citizenry.

But if there is any good to come out of the science deniers' advocating this, it would be

saving us householders with traditional clocks from marching around the manse changing time twice each year. Is it "spring forward, fall back" or the other way around? My aged and over exercised memory cells have too many important things to remember, like if this is the week for recycling pickup.

Misguided legislative fiat aside, spring is in the offing and I detect the faint sound of young children playing in the evenings on the cul-de-sac at the end of my street. Good luck to their parents when trying to get them inside for bedtime . . . and even more luck in getting them up for school tomorrow. ♦

The Bookshelf

The Words That Made Us

I generally try to avoid long books, especially by authors I do not know. If the point can't be made in 300 or so pages, I look elsewhere. There are exceptions, George Will's "The Conservative Sensibility" being the parade ground case, that cause me to break my rule. "The Words That Made Us: America's Constitutional Conversation, 1760-1840" (Basic Books 2021, 702 pages plus notes, \$22 hardcover at Amazon) by Akhil Reed Amar is another exception.

Amar, a legal scholar at Yale, has published on the Constitution prior to this book but I was unaware of his work in the field until now. His claim to originality is two-fold: He sets the Constitutional period before and beyond the typical convention to ratification time period and he frames it inside a national conversation (and how I deplore the overuse of that word) including main street America.

Thematically, the book is divided into *partes tres*, like Gaul, and each focused on what contemporary Americans were talking about regarding constitutional issues at that time. The first era is the last decade of the colonial period through the Declaration. Next is the constitutional era proper as the putative nation debates what its constitutional structure should look like and then composes the actual document. Finally, the focus centers on constructing a concrete structure on the Constitution's abstract framework, going past the Founders into the Jacksonian era.

Underlying this structure is the overarching proposition that the Constitution was not the result of the 56 men sequestered in that sweltering Philadelphia meeting room but the

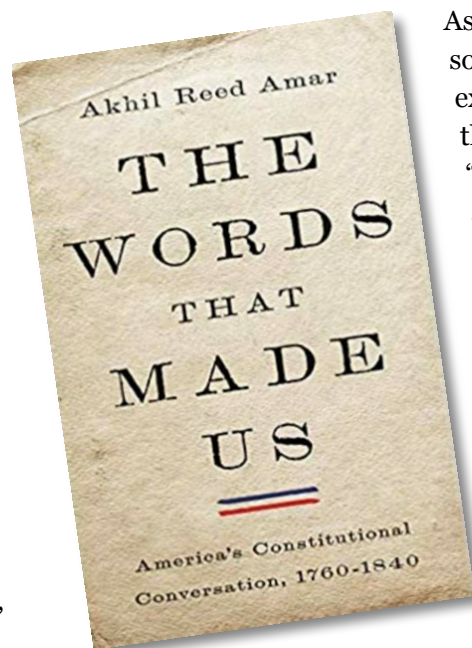
child of a broad national debate on what the nation could and should be. Amar celebrates (another word that raises my blood pressure) the fact that this debate was oral and written, heard and read, without resorting to violence or mobocracy. He anachronistically uses the term "crowdsourcing" as the best descriptor of how the Constitution gestated and came full term over these 80 years. Think of the Federalist Papers and then expand your thinking across dozens of regular newspapers as well as innumerable tavern discussions. We, the people, were intimately involved in what the Constitution became and how it was applied.

As I said earlier, this is a long book so I won't recount its substance in excruciating detail. Suffice it to say that Amar continually trots out his "conversational" perspective although, to his credit, he does a nice job of using it to unify his book.

His substructure revolves around the key constitutional figures of each era. For example, he leads with an accounting of a 1760 Massachusetts trial over a British constitutional issue relating to writs of assistance, ineptly argued by James Otis but driving the first stake in the ground on the path to independence.

Even though Otis lost the case, Amar sees him as a father of sorts for future American independence, denied his standing in the revolutionary pantheon only because of severe mental deterioration before the balloon went up.

His discussions of the revolutionary and confederation periods are interesting, particularly his insight into the "yes, but" tactic used by proto-federalists in bringing around opposition. Go for the main prize and don't get distracted by the small stuff, if I may paraphrase. The federalists saw the size of the House of Representatives and a bill of rights as things that could and would be addressed after ratification. The tactic worked,



bringing around enough anti-federalists to achieve ratification.

Subsequent chapters focus on the Olympian personalities that dominated the scene, even if temporarily. The usual subjects are rounded up: Washington, the nation's sine qua non; Hamilton, Washington's sine qua non; Adams, Jefferson and Madison; Marshall and Story, the godfathers of the Supreme Court as we know it; and finally Jackson. His descriptions of these men are pithy and sometimes trenchant. For example Adams "peak[ed] early" and Jefferson was a blend of "utopian eccentricity and hypocrisy." Hamilton was a "proud peacock" and Madison "was nothing if not nimble." In Jefferson's case he at least had Madison to offset his excesses; Adams had no one other than his wife Abigail, intelligent and loyal but away in Braintree.

His take on these worthies is mixed. Washington and Hamilton are the cornerstones of the new nation while Madison is understood only within the context of a national politician beholden to local voter interests. Jefferson's political schooling at the hand of Madison brought him around by the time he became president. Adams does not fare well but his early contributions are recognized. John Marshall and his understudy Joseph Story, a "founding son," were essential to establishing the Supreme Court and the role of all federal courts.

One point Amar makes is the criticality of the Constitution's requirement for only a super-majority of states to ratify for the new nation to be born. The chief defect of the Articles of Confederation was its requirement for unanimity to pass anything. The new Constitution and new nation would exist with as few as nine states, leaving the others to fend for themselves. This certainly would be a problem for the new United States but an even greater problem for the holdouts. It is not well known that the new government began with just 11 states, North Carolina and Rhode Island being intransigent but not for long.

Amar sees the enduring success of the federalist position in its early nexus of regional

interests, resulting in the effective partnerships of Washington and Hamilton, and Marshall and Story. The Jefferson-Madison-Monroe partnership could not escape its Virginia prejudices and therefore lost the constitutional debate in the early 1800s.

There were some assertions that are controversial. One such is that Madison's brilliant "Federalist #10" was irrelevant to the ratification debate. Amar gives precedent to "Federalist #8" written by Hamilton and John Jay but this can be understood in Amar's absolutist position that the Constitution never anticipated nor allowed secession by a state.

So how does Amar rank the fathers? Franklin and Washington are at the pinnacle in his pyramid, with Hamilton close behind because Hamilton knew what Washington wanted and Washington knew what America wanted. Marshall and Story rank well while Jefferson, Adams and Madison are cut down a peg or two. Poor John Adams; he was just being rehabilitated by historians and then Amar takes him on.

Amar promises two more volumes to bring the Constitutional conversation into the present day. He promises a focus on the slavery issue in the second volume and modern civil rights in the third. One can expect more than a few non-orthodox opinions on major court cases and legislation.

Recommendation: It's long and its take is often unique but worth the time investment for serious students of the Constitutional era, especially as it extends to the Jacksonian period. If pressed for time, read the Postscript which is an adequate summary of the entire book.

The Truth and Beauty

What do the Gospels and the English Romantic poets have in common? Nothing, I would think, but Andrew Klavan begs to differ. "The Truth and Beauty: How the Lives and Works of England's Greatest Poets Point the Way to a Deeper Understanding of the Words of Jesus" (Zondervan Books 2022, 255 pages, \$19 hardcover at Amazon)

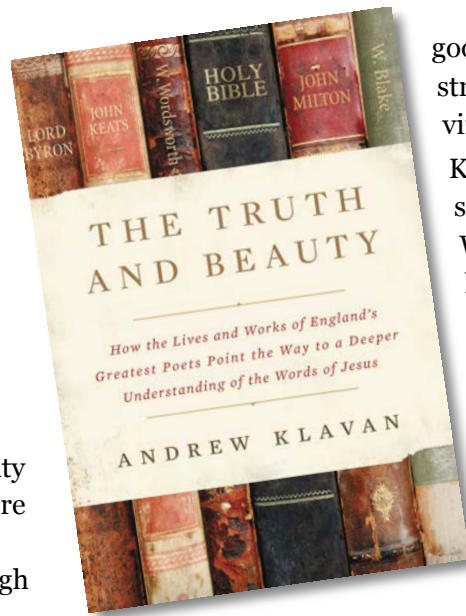
is his effort to explain the thesis represented in the book's subtitle.

He begins by declaring that he doesn't understand the Sermon on the Mount. Nor does he believe the claims of the Beatitudes which can only be understood as paradoxes. Yet he freely and happily admits the course of Western Civilization is not simply informed by Christianity but defined by it. In one of his more astute observations, "Even in his unbelief, Western man sees through the eyes of the believer." Call the modern epoch what you will, both Anno Domini and the Common Era still pivot on the event in Bethlehem.

His thesis is that the post-Napoleonic world faced the same depressing list of existential challenges as the postmodern world does today. It was the artists of the day, particularly the poets, who recognized this and challenged it through their work.

His early chapters are part storytelling, part polemical. He recounts at length a dinner party involving the literary giant of the day, William Wordsworth, and several other creative types. His chapter subtitle, "The Spiritual Hinge of History," bleeds over into hyperbole but one should give him a chance to prove it.

He goes next to "Hamlet" as a reflection of Reformation era theology and the concomitant wars, Hamlet having just returned from Wittenberg's Lutheranism to be confronted by this father's ghost consigned to Roman Catholic purgatory. I have to admit that I never noticed that juxtaposition before. This is followed by chapters on "Frankenstein," which Klavan reads as scientific materialism's attack on motherhood, and then one on "Paradise Lost," an anachronistic metaphor on the nihilism of the radical politics of his day (and ours?). Radicals, he writes, reenact the fall of man by claiming "the knowledge of



good and evil for themselves and strip the power to freely choose virtue from others."

Klavan does not ignore his literary subjects, the Romantic poets. Wordsworth's presence is always hovering above his discussion of the others: Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron and several lesser lights. His point, which he eventually gets to, is to explain his understanding of the Gospels through the philosophy of the Romantics.

His hermeneutical principles escape me but he is a serious apologist for Christ and His teaching. Converts tend to be that—zealous—especially when compared to us lifers in the faith. While Klavan makes some interesting statements about the parables and their meaning, he goes a step too far in my opinion when he advances Coleridge's walking skeletons in "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" as a metaphor for the incarnate Logos. I am too orthodox to easily accept that trope. There is more in Klavan's Christology that I take issue with but that goes beyond this review.

I can't gainsay his zeal—he is a convert after all—but his is an unusual approach to understanding the Gospel accounts. He likes to use a metaphoric analogy for almost everything and he pushes it too far in applying it to the Holy Trinity and Incarnate Logos. These are the primary ineffabilities of the faith so it is understandable why he tries desperately to explain them by metaphor. After all, St. Augustine resorted to metaphor in *De Trinitate*.

This statement of Klavan's explains it: "Human consciousness is the ability to create metaphors for reality." He certainly pushes the limits on this.

Recommendation: I like the Romantic poets and I love the Gospels but I would never have associated them. I don't begrudge the time spent reading this book if only for its originality.

Putative World Conquerors

Think what you want about Vladimir Putin but he clearly sees himself as a reincarnated Czar of All the Russias, as the Romanovs styled themselves. The question is where the boundaries of All the Russias lie. Does it include the Baltics? The Central Asian republics? Eastern Europe and Balkans? It is difficult to assess the limits of a monomaniacal mind.

Putin is not the first so we have history to instruct us. Two recent books provide some insight.

“The Mongol Storm: Making and Breaking Empires in the Medieval Near East” (Basic Books 2022, 328 pages plus notes, \$24 hardcover at Amazon) by Nicholas Morton covers the Mongol invasions of the Middle East during the thirteenth century. While the book’s subjects, the Mongols, are covered, significant attention is given the political foment which they found. The mix included the Muslim Caliphate, several Seljuk Turkish sultanates, Kurds and Mamelukes in Egypt, and the remnant Crusader states.

Morton attributes Mongol success to a well-structured and well-led army but also to the internecine warfare constantly being conducted in the region. In the face of impending disaster, it boggles the mind how each sultan/king/prince sought to use the situation to gain temporary advantage over his neighbors. Suffice it to say that the extant states were too busy warring with each other to coalesce around a unified strategy to defend against the Mongols.

Battle after battle was lost but no one seemed to learn until the Mamelukes overthrew their Ayyubid masters and took the offensive against the Mongols. The battle of Ayn Jalut in the Holy Land finally stopped the Mongol advance, or did

it? Militarily it was a major defeat for the Mongol horde and they proved unable to recover strategically from it.

Why not? The Mongols splintered into multiple family groups each ruling part of the conquered territory while their relatives back home jockeyed for advantage over their rivals. The irony is clear: The Mongols were stopped by the same political intrigues that originally gave them success.

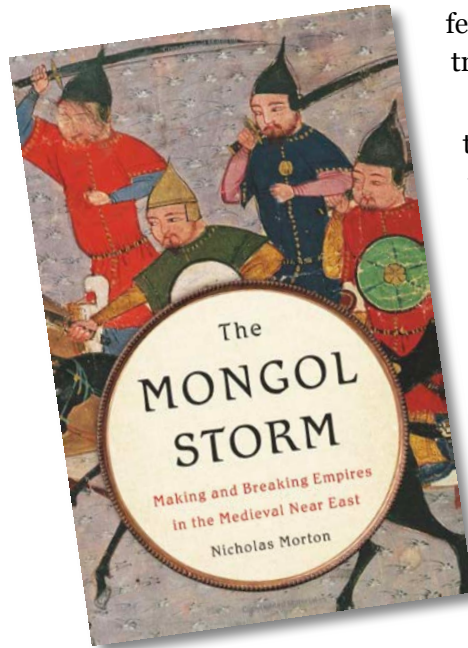
Genghis Khan’s goal of conquering the entire world did not last more than a few generations after him. Sic transit mundi.

Historians supposedly agree that the first “world” conqueror was Cyrus the Great of Persia who consolidated the Elamites, Persians and Medes and then defeated the two competing empires of Lydia and Babylon. He left it to his successors to subjugate Egypt and Anatolia and then to unsuccessfully take on the Greek city-states. Think Thermopylae, Salamis and Marathon.

“King of the World: The Life of Cyrus the Great” (Oxford

University Press 2022, 272 pages, \$28 hardcover at Amazon) by Matt Waters uses archeology and ancient manuscript scrolls to recreate Cyrus’ background and rise to power. This book is highly technical but eventually the story comes out. It is fascinating and provides background for what little we in the west know about the Persians prior to their imperial collapse in the face of Alexander’s invasion. For some perspective Alexander’s empire did not quite equal Persia’s in land mass but the two can be very conveniently superimposed. Even the Roman Empire was slightly smaller.

This period of history and the ethnic groupings that populated the ancient Middle East and Central Asia can be confusing. Recall Bennet



Cerf’s pun: “One man’s Mede is another man’s Persian.” Waters spends much of the book sorting this out for us but there is still substantial academic speculation required.

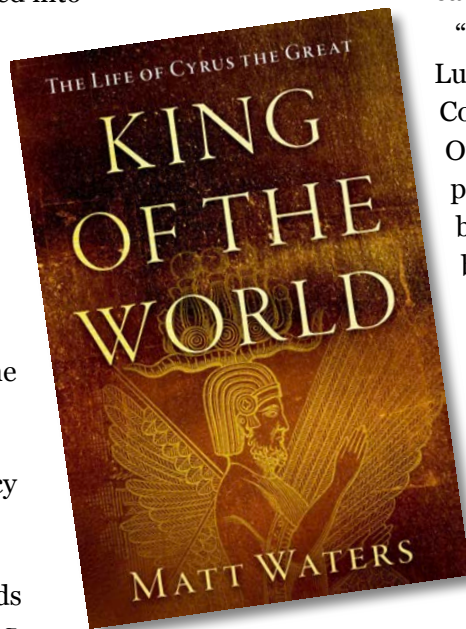
Perhaps the unifying theme of these two books, and there must be one as I have dropped them into a shared review, is that world conquerors may achieve military success but then can their successors maintain the empire? Cyrus’ lasted just over 200 years before being conquered in turn by Alexander. Genghis Khan’s survived intact for about 150 years and then splintered into autonomous subunits ruled by warlords. Note that the same fate fell to Alexander’s empire in just decades.

Is there a lesson here for Putin? Yes, but not one he will welcome. He is an irredentist, bent on restoring the Soviet/ Tsarist Russian empire. The only question is how much suffering the world must endure before Putin leaves the scene. Perhaps Putin should acquaint himself with Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem about Rameses the Great who boasts of being “King of Kings” and demands despair in others when considering his greatness. Except Shelley calls his statute a “colossal Wreck” with nothing to show for it all but drifting sand.

Coup d’Oeil

“The Politics Industry: How Political Innovation Can Break Partisan Gridlock and Save Our Democracy” (Harvard Business Review Press 2022, 287 pages, \$26 hardcover at Amazon) by Katherine Gehl and Michael Porter takes a business school approach to analyzing the American political system and, of course, finds it wanting. The methodology used is what Porter calls the Five Forces framework, a tool he developed in 1979 while teaching at the Harvard School of Business. I don’t recall that approach from my graduate business school days which

overlapped that year. The book issues a clarion call for Top Five voting in primaries and Ranked Choice voting in general elections. Maybe, but I have a problem with authors who describe our Constitution as an intrinsic failure with its saving grace being the amendment process. Porter and Gehl also look to the Progressive Era of 100 plus years ago as a golden age due to its extensive reformist agenda. They also point to San Francisco and Minneapolis as paragons of electoral reform. And that’s when I stopped reading.



“Rebel in the Ranks: Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the Conflicts That Continue to Shape Our World” (HarperOne 2017, 292 pages, \$18 hardcover at Amazon) by Brad S. Gregory is one of many books published during the 500th anniversary of the Reformation but one I missed at the time. Gregory, a history professor at Notre Dame, does not approach the subject with a Roman Catholic bias in his recounting of that era. He deals with Lutheranism, Calvinism and the radical Protestants with

objectivity as well as when he considers the Roman Catholic counter-reformation. He doesn’t like the term “wars of religion” to describe the military conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; he prefers the term “wars of more-than-religion.” Well said. Gregory’s last section of the book is the most intriguing, in which he blames, accurately to my thinking, the Reformation for the secularization of society. The near universality of religious freedom in the West is a good thing, he contends, but Luther and his fellow reformers certainly could not foresee how their efforts would destroy the importance of religious practice and influence in our postmodern world. Freedom of religion has become freedom from religion, a blessing and a problem in his opinion. ♦

Backgrounders

Richard McGowan, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, has taught philosophy and ethics cores for more than 40 years, most recently at Butler University.



The Sexes: Follow the Science

(May 19) — “It is illegal to tattoo anyone under the age of 18 unless they are accompanied by, or have written consent from, a minor’s parent or legal guardian. This written permission from a minor’s parent legal guardian must be obtained on-site before any body piercings or tattooing is completed.” — Indiana Tattoo License Regulations

The law on minors getting a tattoo has two important implications for procedures that would allegedly transform a boy into a girl or a girl into a boy.

The first, and most important, implication is that Indiana’s government has authority over the physical well-being of a minor. The second implication of the law on tattooing a minor is to require consent by the parent or parents.

The first implication is often lost in discussion of what is ostensibly called “transitioning.” The second implication is not only lost by many educational institutions, but openly ignored when a teacher is told by a child that his or her preferred pronoun is other than the child’s biological sex and the parents cannot be informed. Children are not a tabula rosa to be identified by whatever sex suits their desire. Children have a biological, i.e., chromosomal, identity upon birth. A child is not exclusively a biological entity, but a child certainly is at least a biological entity.

The biological aspect of children is often ignored or discarded in discussions of “transitioning.” Here is how the National Institute of Health speaks of the “assignment of sex at birth”:

“Sex of a newborn is typically assigned at birth on the basis of genital appearance. Therefore, children with ambiguous genitalia frequently require reassignment of sex either because of incorrect original labeling or because of subjective dissatisfaction with the sex of rearing (gender dysphoria).”

Curious people might ask “who does the assigning?” The doctor, who observes a biological entity hitherto identified as male or female? God? Nature? Some malevolent force?

Classifying a person’s sex is a scientific assessment, not an arbitrary or subjective decision. Plus, as the media so often reminds people, we should follow the data and follow the science to form a conclusion.. For the cases of ambiguous genitalia, investigation of the major biological identifiers of sex, i.e., chromosomal sex, gonadal sex, and morphological sex, are considered. Cases of biologically ambiguous genitalia are rare, however. A National Institute of Health article states that “Ambiguous genitalia affect approximately 1 in 5,000 live births.”

Thus, discussion of transitioning is more about biology and less about a person’s sexual identity, an amorphous and ill-defined term. Psychologist Lisa Marchiano put it this way: “Though the concept of gender identity is currently being enshrined into law, the truth is that we have no meaningful definition of the term.”

To repeat myself: medical transitions are not about “gender-identity” as much as they are about changing or attempting to change a person’s biological constitution. Of course, changing a gender identity does not remove the chromosomal nature of an XX or XY body, i.e., the sex of a person. Those chromosomes and their impact on body structure and physical performance do not disappear with transitioning, as Lia Thomas, a collegiate swimmer, has proven many times over. The transitioned male won an NCAA swimming championship by beating Olympic medalists on competing women’s teams.

Media outlets often call the medical intrusion into a body’s functioning ‘gender-affirming,’ as though transitioning is affirmation, a positive

action. PBS called the procedure “gender-affirming” on its website, when it reported that “Indiana Gov. Holcomb signs ban on gender-affirming health care.” However, data suggest that the procedures are something other than gender-affirming and data suggest that it has little to do with good health.

Marchiano says “There is a wealth of replicated research that tells us that 80–95 percent of children who experience a cross-sex identification in childhood will eventually desist and come to identify with their natal sex as adults.”

For instance, one researcher observed, “many children who show gender dysphoria before puberty do not continue to do so during and after pubertal changes occur. However, if gender dysphoria does persist into adolescence, its intensity tends to increase at this time.” In other words, most gender-affirming procedures are not needed or are irrelevant to affirmation.

Another researcher noted, “In terms of gender differences, transgender girls revealed more ‘worry’ than transgender boys. Further, older youth experienced poorer self-competence, higher levels of anxiety, and decreased happiness and satisfaction than the younger patients.” That finding is consistent with Oransky, Burke and Steever’s observation that “Transgender and gender nonconforming” adolescents and young adults face significant mental health disparities, including increased rates of suicidality, depression and self-harm.” Transitioning’s negative consequences can hardly be called healthy, and the process appears to lack the positive result that affirmation implies.

The last two observations together underlie a trend in transitioning. Marchiano observes that “In addition to a huge spike in numbers of children and adolescents presenting with gender dysphoria, there has also been a dramatic, unexplained increase of females presenting to gender clinics, with significantly more female teenagers requesting services than males, a ratio historically unheard of. This is true in Canada, the United States, Finland, England and The Netherlands.”

It is no wonder that PBS reported that Gov. Eric Holcomb said, “Permanent gender-changing surgeries with lifelong impacts and medically prescribed preparation for such a transition should occur as an adult, not as a minor.” If a child said, “I can’t stand my left hand’s pinky; I want it cut off,” would any parent agree to the child’s request for bodily mutilation? And should the government allow the child’s request, even with the parent’s consent? Governor Holcomb has the correct position on transitioning.

Baseball — ’Tis the Season

(April 4) — When I was growing up, only one team sport mattered: baseball. Most boys dreamed of becoming major leaguers. Heck, President Eisenhower was fishing with a friend once and he asked his friend, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” His friend answered, “President.” When his friend asked him, President Eisenhower said, “A major league baseball player.” Of course, neither got his wish, but their exchange captures the importance of baseball to American life.

As a kid, I used to read the sports pages. Newspapers printed photographs of great plays, broken into sequential pictures. Wes Covington’s famous catch in the 1957 World Series, Braves against the Yankees, took five pictures to “explain” the spectacular grab. One picture showed the center fielder’s shoulder banging into the wall as the ball arrived.

These days, pictures are far and few between. Newspapers presume people have watched the game on television or computer screen. Journalists have changed, too.

When Ruth played, teams traveled by train. Everyone got on the train — players, sportswriters, team employees, hangers-on. Everyone rode the train to the next destination. Once, the writers were playing cards and a barely clothed Babe Ruth ran past them. He was being chased by a knife-wielding attractive woman, also in a state of dishabille. As they ran past, one writer said, “It’s a good thing I didn’t see that.”

and played a card. Another chipped in, “Me, too, or I’d have to write about it.”

Writers in those days were circumspect. They had something special that has been lost—a sense of privacy. They kept the game on the field and did little reporting about anything else.

That does not mean that sportswriters reported accurately. Dom DiMaggio called me because Virgil Trucks must have told him that I was attempting, in quixotic fashion, to get them in the Hall of Fame. Dom DiMaggio was a class act; he called to thank me. But he also said, “Good luck with that endeavor. I tried to get Lefty O’Doul into Cooperstown and made little headway.”

I asked him what his greatest day was. He immediately asked me, “In baseball? Getting married was a great day. Baseball?” He wound up explaining the decisive play in the 1946 World Series, Red Sox against the Cardinals, when Enos Slaughter ran home from first on a weak hit to center, thereby giving the Cards a championship.

“I hit a good one and thought I could make it to second so I ran as hard as I could. I got a double, but I pulled up lame.” His hit drove in two runs; the game was tied. His replacement in centerfield did not have the rifle-arm of DiMaggio. As one Hall of Famer put it, “My brother was a better fielder than me.” He’d have thrown Slaughter out.

“The newspapers reported it as a knee injury but I’d pulled a hamstring and had to leave the game.” Journalists got the facts wrong, but inadvertently.

These days, though, journalists narrate as much as they report.

When I taught at Marquette University as a teaching assistant, my students knew I loved baseball. One day, I made a remark to the class about an incident involving Reggie Jackson. I was not and am not a fan of Reggie Jackson. I had read in the newspapers that Reggie Jackson and Mickey Rivers got into a fight in the dugout during a game. “Can you believe that?” I snorted. I shook my head and muttered “Reggie Jackson.”

A gal raised her hand and said, “That’s not how it was.”

I thought “Whippersnapper, how do you know,” but I asked, “How do you know?”

“I talked to my dad.” Turns out, her dad was Bill White, 13 years in the majors and, at the time, the Yankee announcer, later to become the president of the American League. That Bill White.

I started rethinking journalism.

My late and sorely missed friend, Frank Thomas, ‘The Original One, 1951-1966,’ as he signed every letter I received over the last 20-plus years, did not care for sportswriters. “They make what they want to be the story. It disgusts me.”

Baseball has changed and so has the coverage of baseball in the media. One consequence is that I often watch sports with the sound off. Another consequence is that I do my own research.

My wife and I were once invited to dinner at the house of Butler University’s president, Dr. Bobby Fong, a huge Yankee fan. I brought a broken baseball bat as a gift for the host. I will not address my wife’s view of that gesture.

“Bobby, here is a game-used bat from Clay Bellinger. He played for the Yanks. He was the defensive shortstop for late innings in close games.”

Bobby stood open-mouthed. “If you want,” I said, “we can look up his stats at baseball-reference.com.” I hadn’t known about baseball reference until my former student, Pat Neshek (two-time all-star), told me about it.

Bobby and I immediately went upstairs, where we got seriously involved in baseball reference.

We were late for dinner. Any baseball fan who does homework can be late to dinner. The season has started.

Richard McGowan, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, has taught philosophy and ethics cores for more than 40 years, most recently at Butler University.

The Gap in the Equal Pay ‘Gap’

(March 24) — Governments and media often leave gaps in their reporting and investigation, especially where disparities exist. They appear to

choose which groups are more important than others, a partial reason that the word “equity” has replaced the word ‘equality.’ Equality relies on rights of individuals whereas equity stresses disparate outcomes, collectively, regarding groups. In choosing groups, governments and media exhibit sloppy thinking and investigation.

I was reminded of that sloppiness with the recent “Equal Pay Day” coverage by both government and media. One newspaper, a Gannett product, had a story whose headline was “In female-dominated teaching, men paid more.” The article claimed that “women would need a 7 percent bonus” for men’s and women’s salaries to be equal.

However, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the “gap” between male and female elementary and middle school teachers is 5.4 percent. And, as the article stated, “Male teachers ages 21 to 30 are 12 percentage points more likely than their female counterparts to participate in extra duties.” Those extra duties provide extra compensation. Does that surprise anyone?

In fact, if wages are considered collectively by groups, the BLS data show that 56 percent of male employees are working full-time, whereas the corresponding number for women is 44 percent. It goes without saying — though my academic nature has me state the obvious — that more work hours produces more compensation. The longer hours that men work appears in almost every occupation that the BLS lists, not just in education. In “production, transportation, and material moving occupations,” BLS figures show that men work 43 hours per week to women’s 40.5 hours. In “management, professional and financial operations occupations,” men work 44.7 per week to women’s to women’s 43.5 hours. Few, very few, occupations show women working more hours than men. More hours bring more pay, need I say it again.

The BLS noted that, overall, on an average weekday, men use 5.22 hours for work and work-related activities to women’s 3.69 hours, a gap of 17 percent — the same gap as the so-called “equal

pay gap.” On a weekend day, men average 1.60 hours for work and work-related activities to women’s .9 hour, a 28 percent gap. Combining full-time and part-time workers, the BLS notes that men worked an average of 40.5 hours per week to women’s 36.6 hours. I suppose, by now, I am beating a dead horse, to use a dead metaphor, but men work longer hours than women. The more hours men work compared to women net men more compensation.

I will set aside the kinds of work men and women do and the compensation for those jobs except to point out that the BLS data show that in 2021, work-related deaths took 4,741 men and 448 women. Men constituted 91 percent of work-related fatalities. The data are more balanced for Indiana, with 134 deaths of men, or 85 percent, and 23 deaths of women. Compensation should be greater for jobs that involve more hazard.

The preceding data could have been included in articles on the “Equal Pay Gap” between men and women but the narrative is that the gap between men and women is unfounded or a product of bias. It appears that a gap exists between media narratives and reality. That gap appears in governments at the national and state levels.

The United States Census Bureau in a press release entitled “Equal Pay Day; March 14, 2023,” said that “This date symbolizes how far into the year women must work to earn what men earned in the previous year.” The Bureau included no research data, but went on to say that “Because women earn less, on average, than men, they must work longer for the same amount of pay. The wage gap is even greater for most women of color.” The Bureau could have and should have said, “Because women work less on average than men, a pay gap exists.” I suppose it is asking too much for the Census Bureau to investigate the matter more fully; a gap exists where research should be.

Th government of Indiana behaved the same as the Bureau, perhaps assuming a pay gap is unfounded or somehow biased. Indiana dedicated a website, “Pay Equity,” to treat the alleged unfairness of a gap between men and women

regarding pay for work. However, historically and traditionally, those who work more hours, women or men, receive greater compensation. Close the work-hours gap and “Equal Pay Day” will be a thing of the past.

Richard Moss, M.D., a surgeon practicing in Jasper, Indiana, was a candidate for Congress in 2016 and 2018. He has written “A Surgeon’s Odyssey” and “Matilda’s Triumph,” available on amazon.com. Contact him at richardmossmd.com or Richard Moss, M.D. on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Racism? A Tale of Four Crimes

(May 16) — Tyre Nichols was a 29-year-old black man who died three days after five black police officers beat him brutally for suspected reckless driving in the city of Memphis. Ben Crump, a high-profile attorney, who has represented the families of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, George Floyd and others, was also representing the family of Tyre Nichols. In his comments, Crump implied that race was a factor. But how could that be? Blacks attacked a black.

It is worth comparing how cops treated George Floyd in Minneapolis. There were four officers, two white, one Asian, one black. Floyd resisted arrest. The officers struggled to get him in the back of the car. He did not cooperate. He then left the vehicle on the other side. Because he had difficulty breathing, he asked the cops if he could get on the ground. The cops did not throw him to the ground. None of them used racial slurs or abused him in anyway. He died because he had overdosed on fentanyl. His blood fentanyl level was 11ng/ml, nearly four times the lethal dose. It was not the knee on the back of the neck. The cops used standard protocols in subduing Floyd. They called the ambulance and helped Floyd after the medical team arrived.

The five black officers approached Tyre Nichols differently. They screamed at him and shoved him. When he ran away that infuriated the officers. But he may have had good reasons. It was

not so much that he was resisting arrest, but that he feared the cops, which turned out to be correct.

The Tyre Nichol’s case did not create anywhere near the national outrage that you had with George Floyd even though in this case the police behaved far worse than the officers in the Floyd case. The reason is that the police on the case were the wrong race. They were not white and so did not fit the desired narrative. And that’s where the racism comes in. It is not in the police departments; it is in the media and in our dominant institutions. Not only is the media biased against whites, they are also biased against police.

There was another case of bigoted media coverage of the police. This was an incident that occurred in California. The individual who died was Anthony Lowe Houston, a 36-year-old black man. The Houston story was unique in that he’s a double amputee. He was in a wheelchair and the police shot him to death. He lost both of his legs from the knee down because of a previous altercation with police in Texas. The news stories all say the police shot him while he was running away. The implication was that the police had no reason to shoot him, and that he wasn’t a threat. But when you look at the circumstances, it’s not that straightforward.

First, the police were arresting him because earlier he stabbed somebody in the chest with a 12-inch butcher knife. The person he stabbed was Hispanic. It was difficult to find this information because again it disturbed the approved narrative of white racism and instead demonstrated black violence against another “protected” minority. The man has been identified as Ramiro. He is a warehouse worker and a father of four and didn’t know Anthony Lowe. He reported that Lowe pushed himself out of his wheelchair and came running up on his knees and shoved a knife into his side just below the armpit, puncturing his lungs. He almost died and was in surgery for four hours. A police officer saved his life by applying pressure to the wound and reassuring him while they were waiting for an ambulance.

So, a police officer saved a man's life, and no one in the media mentioned that. They were more concerned about those officers who took somebody else's life. Again, the life they took was an individual who attempted to murder Ramiro. His motivation for killing a complete stranger was unknown. That doesn't justify the police shooting him, but other things may have.

First, the police received a call that a man in a wheelchair just stabbed somebody. They saw the wheelchair and the man. Furthermore, he runs away, while brandishing a 12-inch butcher knife, which he's already stabbed one person with. His action and words at the time were threatening to the police. The police ordered him to stop and drop the knife. He continued to run. He threatened to throw the knife at the police. So, they shot him. All the coverage, however, is of the mistakes the police made. But Lowe resisted arrest, stabbed someone he never met, and did not drop a deadly weapon when ordered to do so.

Another story also illustrates the hypocrisy of the media and the racist crowd. It involved a cyclist, in California, who was hit by a car and died. He didn't die as a result of being hit by the car however. He died because the man driving the car got out of it after he ran into him and stabbed him to death. He was a 58-year-old doctor named Michael Mammone, a married father of two. He worked in the trauma department in an emergency room. Mammone was white; the one who violently murdered him was black, a 39-year-old man named Vanroy Evan Smith. There had been no prior contact between them. The final twist in this matter is that while Smith was stabbing Manning to death, a bystander reported that he was shouting about "white privilege."

This story was not covered at all in the national news. But what if the doctor riding the bicycle happened to be black and the man driving the car was white; and if witnesses reported that as this white man was violently murdering the black cyclist, he was screaming racial slurs. It would have been a national story. But because the race of the murderer and the victim do not fit the

narrative, there was silence. It was not a story the media wanted to tell. They are looking for examples that prove the narrative they want, of whites killing blacks or police killing blacks and whenever they find one it becomes a major story.

There are many news stories of racist policemen and non-policemen killing blacks because those are the stories the media want to tell. But there are many examples of blacks killing whites or Hispanics or blacks killing blacks that do not make the news. When the only killing appearing on the news are whites killing blacks, or police killing blacks, it creates the perception that it is open season on blacks. This is what the media want people to think. They want to create the impression that we have a problem with systemic racism in America and with racist police.

The reason they want to blame "racism" for the many problems afflicting the black community is to deflect from the actual reason. It's not racism, it's government. It is the welfare state. It is the Democrat party and its failed liberal policies, which have ruined the lives of many blacks. The Left fears that if blacks discover the reason for their problems, they might become independent and vote Republican. Sixty years of "Great Society" have inflicted enormous damage on blacks. It is not "systemic racism," "racist police" or the "legacy" of slavery that has harmed blacks, but the legacy of liberalism.

Barack Obama and the Racial Divide

(March 12) — The rhetoric and uproar over the beating death this January of Trye Nichols by five black police officers in Memphis, Tennessee, demonstrates how badly the "conversation" over race has deteriorated. One would think that a crime involving blacks killing another black would lack a racial angle to exploit. Alas, in today's race-obsessed universe that is never the case. Unable to help themselves, our nation's top racialists, beginning with President Joe Biden, weighed in on the controversy hurling the standard epithets of "systemic racism" and "white supremacy." The media and others were happy to join in.

With the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954 ending “separate but equal,” the Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s, Affirmative Action and the Great Society with its trillions of dollars of wealth transfers to blacks, one might have considered that, nearly 60 years later, the nation would mend and race relations would be improving.

In fact, the emergence of Barack Obama and his ascension to the Presidency in 2008 suggested that that moment had arrived. The event should have been an inflection point in America’s racial history. Many thought it was. How else to explain a white majority nation electing a black President, other than that America had turned the corner?

Alas, Obama was not the one to placate the nation. Rather than use the opportunity of his rise to the White House as the crowning achievement of a long treacherous journey to racial reconciliation, he chose instead to agitate and polarize the nation further. His presidency should have represented the fulfillment of the great dream of Lincoln, King and of our Declaration of Independence, but became instead the basis of an ever-widening racial gap that may never be bridged.

Of his many racial stunts, perhaps the worst moment occurred during the Trayvon Martin affair. After the shooting death of the young black, Obama famously stated that “If I had a son, he’d look like Trayvon.” The statement was provocative. Rather than pacify the nation he inflamed it. He seemed to dismiss his white mother and the white grandparents who raised him. He, thus, injected his own biases into the controversy. As in so many other instances, rather than seek a peaceful resolution, he roiled the nation further.

The Trayvon Martin episode (like so many others) had, indeed, unleashed the furies, emanating from the dark underside of racial politics and grievance in America; and it was not a pretty sight. It revolved around a simple narrative that had become the essence of a vast and elaborate racial industry that had grown and metastasized through the decades.

The narrative was as plain as it was destructive: it was that America was racist to the core, institutionally and categorically, and no matter what progress the nation made, no matter the multitude of unparalleled triumphs blacks enjoyed, the stain and moral culpability would never be erased.

It did not matter that blacks occupied the highest echelons of American wealth, power and influence in the country, even the Presidency, the Attorney General’s office, the halls of Congress, governors’ mansions, city halls, in the media, the Academy, Hollywood, the music and entertainment world, sports, business, fashion, medicine and law.

Nor did it matter that a vast complex of diversity programs, appointments, set asides, quotas, contracts, gerrymandered districts, anti-discrimination laws, voting rights and wealth transfers have been instituted on behalf of blacks, or that extensive bureaucracies and organizations have been brought into existence to protect and cater to the needs of blacks.

Nor did it matter that blacks, black achievement and black culture were embraced, that blacks received extensive preferential treatment and subsidies, or that a substantial political/media broadside was triggered for virtually any perceived racial slight or slur to defend black sensitivities.

Nor did it matter that the United States was bar none the single greatest place in the world for a young black to live and grow.

The narrative would not not go away, for Obama and the race industry would not allow it; they had too much to lose, too much lucre and power to forfeit; it existed to ensure that the race catechism was never forgotten, and brandished as a sharp sword at a moment’s notice.

George Zimmerman was only the a foil at the time (and many since). The episodes of prior racial industry clampdowns were well known. Bernie Goetz, Crown Heights, Tawana Brawley, Jena 6, Henry Louis Gates, Duke-Lacrosse and then Zimmerman, all saw the race industry in full attack mode, unleashing the power of its

divisions, the integrated machinery of media, politicians, unions, activists, hucksters, protesters, administrators, academicians, lawyers, civil rights groups, bureaucracies and organizations unwinding themselves on the national stage, targeting victims, wrecking lives, and reinforcing the crucial race narrative upon which their careers and livelihoods depended.

The guilt or innocence of the protagonists hardly mattered. No one knew if Zimmerman committed a crime. But that was immaterial. Zimmerman's offense was not legal but political.

If the man who pulled the trigger had been named Sanchez or had been a black, it would have been a non-story, having failed the race template, no different than the thousands of blacks killed every year by other blacks that go unreported.

That he was Hispanic disturbed the tidy narrative of white racism and placed dueling liberal pieties at odds; and so a new ethnicity was discovered: the white Hispanic.

But the Hispanic dimension is troubling for the race crowd. It needs to look hard into the future for the demographics are not favorable: in a word — that future is George Zimmerman.

Hispanic Americans, when their numbers are great enough, will discard the temporary alliance they may have with blacks and will not be patient with black demands and black victimhood. Having had nothing to do with slavery and being members of an "oppressed minority" themselves, there will be no pool of white guilt from which to extract wealth transfers or preferential treatment of any kind.

Indeed, the window for blacks is closing quickly and the future is grim. Instead of seeking liberty, accomplishment and full integration into American society, they have followed the victim admonitions of the race industry, into a ghetto of cultural breakdown, unemployment, criminality and poverty, to their own deepening detriment. They have accepted liberalism's nostrums for black dysfunction, embraced liberalism's assumptions of their inability to compete and requirement for ever expanding government largesse; they have been mined by the

race industry for votes and money; furthermore, they have learned to resent bitterly their country, the "white patriarchy," and to believe that the cards were stacked against them. They have been led into a house of despair.

One would be hard pressed to devise a more disabling ideology than this.

And the man who did more to perpetuate their dysfunction and misery, and exacerbate it, while deepening the division of the nation, was none other than the one who could have actually ended it — had the first black President been a different man. Had he been a Thomas Sowell, an Allen West, or Ben Carson, or even the liberal Colin Powell, a patriot who loved his country and recognized the significance of a black man winning the American Presidency. But, no, that man was not a patriot. He was instead a community organizing, race baiting, anti-American, cult-Marxist agitator. He was Barack Hussein Obama who presided over the greatest, lost opportunity in American history.

Tim Timmons is the publisher and CEO of Sagamore News Media with daily editions in Noblesville and Crawfordsville. Contact him at ttimmons@thepaper24-7.com.



Artificial Intelligence, an Interview with the Future

(April 11) — You may recall that I've written a time or two about Artificial Intelligence (AI). According to the experts at IBM, AI combines computer science and data to enable problem-solving. According to sci-fi fans, AI is Skynet from the Terminator movies, the evil force that takes over the world and goes to war with us mere humans.

Which is it? I truly have no idea. So I decided to do what we newspaper types do best — go straight to the source. I interviewed ChatGPT, a language model developed by OpenAI. To be clear, I "interviewed" a computer.

Terrifying? Exciting? Some of the answers with pretty negative connotations for the

aforementioned mortals were couched with terms like “could . . . if . . . as of now” and the like. Not exactly reassuring, but hey, you be the judge. (Oh, one other thing. Since I was chatting with someone, uh, something much smarter than me. I decided to ask it about another world-ending concern I have; it’s toward the end.)

Q. — Is A1 a threat to humanity?

A. — I’m not sure what you mean by “A1.” Can you please provide more context or clarify your question?

Q. — Sorry, I mean AI, artificial intelligence.

A. —The impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on humanity depends on how it is developed, deployed, and regulated. AI has the potential to bring significant benefits to society, including improved healthcare, transportation, and education. However, it also presents certain risks and challenges, such as job displacement, bias and privacy concerns, and the possibility of unintended consequences.

Q. — There is a debate among experts about whether AI is a threat to humanity. Some argue that if left unchecked and unregulated, AI could pose an existential threat to humanity, potentially leading to the development of super intelligence that could be difficult to control. Others believe that AI will continue to evolve as a useful tool that can be harnessed to solve some of the world’s biggest problems.

A. — Regardless of whether AI is seen as a threat, it is essential to continue to study and develop it responsibly, with appropriate ethical considerations and safety precautions in place. This will help to ensure that the potential benefits of AI are maximized while minimizing any risks or unintended consequences.

Q. — Can AI be weaponized unintentionally?

A. — AI can be weaponized unintentionally if it is not developed and deployed responsibly with adequate safeguards in place. For example, if AI systems are designed to be autonomous and can make decisions on their own, they may potentially be used for unintended purposes, including military applications. Additionally, if

AI systems are not tested thoroughly or if there are vulnerabilities in their programming, they may be susceptible to hacking or other forms of cyber attacks, which could be used to weaponize them. In such cases, the AI systems could be used to cause harm to people or to disrupt critical infrastructure. To mitigate the risk of unintentional weaponization of AI, it is important to develop and deploy AI systems responsibly, with appropriate safeguards in place. This includes testing AI systems thoroughly to identify and fix any vulnerabilities, ensuring that they are used for their intended purposes, and implementing ethical guidelines and regulations for their development and use.

Q. — Will AI develop feelings and emotions?

A. — As of now, artificial intelligence (AI) is not capable of developing feelings and emotions in the way that humans do. While AI systems can simulate emotions, they are not truly experiencing them in the way that humans do. Emotions are a complex aspect of human psychology, involving not just subjective experience but also physiological responses, cognitive processes, and social and cultural factors. While AI systems can be programmed to recognize and respond to emotions in humans, they do not have the subjective experience of emotions themselves. That being said, some researchers believe that it may be possible to create AI systems that can simulate emotions and develop a degree of emotional intelligence. These systems would be designed to recognize and respond to human emotions in a more nuanced and empathetic way, potentially improving the human-machine interaction. However, even if such systems were developed, they would still not be experiencing emotions in the way that humans do.

Q. — I write for a daily newspaper. May I quote your responses?

A. — Yes, you may quote my responses in your newspaper article as long as you attribute them to me, ChatGPT, a language model developed by OpenAI. Additionally, please keep in mind that my responses are based on the current state of

knowledge and may not reflect the views of any specific individual or organization.

Q. — Where do you see AI going in the next year? And after that, in the next five? And after that in the next 10?

A. — As an AI language model, I do not have the ability to predict the future with certainty. However, based on current trends and developments in the field, I can provide some general insights into where AI may be heading in the next few years. In the next year, we can expect to see continued progress in the development and deployment of AI systems across various industries, including healthcare, finance, and transportation. We may also see more progress in the development of conversational AI and natural language processing, as well as increased focus on ethical considerations and responsible use of AI. In the next five years, we can expect to see significant advances in AI technology, particularly in the areas of machine learning, computer vision, and natural language processing. We may also see more widespread adoption of AI systems in industries such as education, manufacturing, and agriculture, as well as increased use of autonomous systems such as self-driving cars and drones. In the next 10 years, we can expect to see even more profound changes brought about by AI, including the potential for significant advances in areas such as robotics, virtual reality, and quantum computing. We may also see the emergence of more advanced forms of AI, such as artificial general intelligence (AGI), which would be capable of performing a wide range of intellectual tasks at a human level or beyond. However, it is important to note that the development of AGI is still a long-term goal and subject to significant uncertainty and debate in the AI research community. Overall, the future of AI is likely to be shaped by continued advances in technology and research, as well as by ethical considerations and societal debates around the responsible use of AI.

Q. — In the fictitious “Terminator” movie series, robots take over the world in a war against humanity. Is a future like that possible?

A. — The scenario depicted in the “Terminator” movie series, where robots take over the world in a war against humanity, is a fictional one and not a likely outcome of current developments in artificial intelligence (AI). While AI does present certain risks and challenges, including the possibility of unintended consequences and the potential for misuse or weaponization, there are many reasons to believe that a future where robots take over the world is unlikely. First, AI is not inherently malicious or benevolent; it is a tool that can be used for a wide range of purposes, depending on how it is developed and deployed. As such, the development and deployment of AI can be guided by ethical considerations and regulations to minimize any potential risks. Second, even if advanced AI were to emerge in the future, it would likely be designed and programmed with specific goals and limitations, rather than being a general-purpose intelligence capable of taking over the world. Third, the scenario depicted in the “Terminator” movie series relies on many assumptions and exaggerations about the capabilities and limitations of AI, as well as about the likelihood of certain events and actions taking place. Overall, while it is important to take AI risks seriously and to develop and deploy it responsibly, there is no reason to believe that a future where robots take over the world is a likely outcome of current developments in AI.

Q. — If you were human, what precautions and safeguards would you put into place regarding AI now, and its future development?

A. — As an AI language model, I do not have personal opinions or preferences. However, I can provide some insights into the precautions and safeguards that experts in the field of AI are currently recommending for the responsible development and deployment of AI. Some key precautions and safeguards include:

Ethical guidelines: Developing ethical guidelines for AI research and deployment, and ensuring that AI systems are designed and used in ways that are consistent with these guidelines.

Transparency: Ensuring that AI systems are transparent in their decision-making processes, so that the reasons for their decisions can be understood and audited.

Accountability: Establishing accountability for the actions of AI systems and their developers, so that responsibility can be assigned in case of unintended consequences or misuse.

Human oversight: Ensuring that AI systems are subject to human oversight and control, so that they can be monitored and modified as needed to ensure safety and ethical use.

Safety testing: Conducting safety testing and risk assessments for AI systems, to identify and mitigate potential risks and unintended consequences.

Privacy protection: Protecting the privacy and security of individuals and their data, and ensuring that AI systems are used in ways that respect these rights.

Overall, these precautions and safeguards are aimed at ensuring that AI systems are developed and deployed in ways that are safe, ethical, and aligned with human values and interests.

Q. — At the Bern Supercollider, what is the likelihood that a black hole will be created that will destroy the earth?

A. — There is no likelihood that the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN, commonly referred to as the “Bern Supercollider,” will create a black hole that could destroy the Earth. The LHC is a particle accelerator designed to investigate the fundamental properties of matter and the universe at very small scales. It does this by colliding subatomic particles together at high speeds and energies. While these collisions can produce a variety of exotic particles and phenomena, they do not pose a risk of creating a black hole that could threaten the Earth. The reason for this is that any black holes produced by the LHC would be very small and short-lived, and would not have enough mass or energy to pose a danger. In addition, there are many layers of safety and monitoring in place to ensure that the LHC operates safely and without risk to the environment or public health. Overall, the idea

that the LHC could create a black hole that could destroy the Earth is a common misconception that is not supported by scientific evidence or theory.

Q. — Thank you for chatting with me today. I enjoyed and appreciate it.

A. — You’re welcome! It was my pleasure to chat with you and answer your questions.

Don’t hesitate to reach out if you have any more questions in the future. Have a great day!

Letter Jackets to Voting: How Low Can We Go?

(April 2) — Remember Harry Belafonte’s version of the Limbo song, that rich baritone asking how low can you go? And it doesn’t feel like we’re done yet. Consider that Harry is 96 now and I’m guessing might be surprised at the answer to his question. Why? Because today, in this country, we’re proving over and over we can go pretty doggone low.

Voting — Most of us grew up with the idea that we would vote on the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November at a specific location. That law was passed by Congress in 1845 and even though early voting options (absentee) have been in use for quite a while the vast majority of Americans who voted (more than 90 percent) tended to do so on Election Day. In the 1990s, that began to change and those changes have accelerated of late. Is that good, bad or indifferent? Fans will tell you that early voting brings out more voters. Critics will tell you it opens the door to fraud. All I know is that growing up we usually had results election night. Now, despite technological advances, results often take longer and the whole process went from simple too confusing — all in the name of lowering the bar for voting.

Government Assistance — Remember when most people would rather dig ditches than accept government assistance? There was a matter of pride involved, and I would argue that wasn’t a bad thing. Today, it is common for people to turn down jobs so they can stay at home on the government dime.

Drug testing — I was at an event recently where a manufacturing plant executive told me they quit drug testing as a pre-condition of employment. Why? It's harder to find employees than ever before. They don't need an extra barrier to hiring.

School sports — OK, so the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) has been a favorite punching bag on the issue of class sports. So, let's leave that low-hanging fruit alone for a second. What about earning varsity letters? Last time I looked, letter sweaters weren't in vogue anymore. But letter jackets still are. Every school can have their own system of how a student gets one, but at some schools the bar is pretty low. As soon as a student gets their first letter, they can go out and buy a letter jacket. It used to be a lot harder. A hundred or so years ago when I was in school you got half a point for making the freshman or JV team and one point for varsity. At three points, you earned your letter sweater and it took six points for a jacket. For most, that meant they got their jacket as a junior or senior — and I guarantee you it meant a lot. Hey, it must have meant something when I still remember the details half a century later,

Academic rankings — Like most of the above, this is not a blanket judgment but some schools have done away with academic rankings and things like valedictorians. The idea being that such rankings put undue pressure on students and made some feel bad. And good gosh we don't want anyone feeling pressure or, even worse, feeling bad.

Sin — Things that we were taught were wrong back in Sunday School now aren't only OK they are celebrated. Even more, if you still believe all the things you were taught in those classes, you are the one in the wrong. In fact, you are now characterized as a right-wing Christian zealot.

Journalism — One of the first newsrooms I worked in had a sign on the wall — If your mother tells you she loves you, get a second source. That used to be the standard. Us rookie reporters might write something without attribution but savvy

editors would whip out the red grease pencil and wipe out any "facts" that weren't backed up. Today, take a look at a lot of stories and you find phrases like "falsely claimed." Are those statements backed up with sources and facts? Usually not. And most of the time they are aimed at conservatives. As a journalist, this one is personal for me but we've lowered the standard way too much.

Tax Day — What, was having the same deadline every year too boring? Now, Tax Day is a movable feast (for the government) and the April 15 deadline is long gone. We lowered the bar to bring in more voters, but did we make it better?

I know, I sound like the grumpy old man I am. The thing is, we used to live in a country that had standards that encouraged us to set high goals and work hard to achieve them. Remember JFK's moon speech where he set a goal that we didn't even have the technology to pull off? But pull it off we did.

In sports, good coaches raised expectations and standards. They never lowered them. And now let's get back to my punching bag of class sports. How many schools did we have back when Milan won state in 1954, 750 or so? That tournament was never about the winner, not really. That tournament taught 749 schools that if you want to win, work harder. It taught the valuable lesson that sometimes in life you lose . . . and how to handle that.

What does all that teach us? Are we learning that if you want something, work for it? Or are we learning that if you want something whine about how unfair things are and wait for someone to give it to you?

Before anyone gets offended, this has nothing to do with discrimination of any sort — race, gender, creed, orientation, etc. Discrimination, in whatever form it manifests itself, is wrong. Capital W.R.O.N.G. But we've taken the concept and blown it out of proportion. Now, if an unjust act occurs, even if it is the exception and not the rule, we rush to change the rules so we can crush it out of existence and never, ever let it happen again.

Sure. We seem to forget the ugly fact that no matter how many guidelines, rules and laws we have, stupidity will never completely away. One can argue that the process can actually make things worse. We lower standards with the idea that everyone will feel OK. But let me repeat: Stupid will not go away.

You want to make a real change? Teach people to pray for those who discriminate in any form . . . and then ignore them. Don't give them power. Don't make them martyrs. Walk away. Find another path. Do better.

Truth to tell, life can be hard . . . and unforgiving. When we keep giving everyone easy answers we are not preparing them for when things get tough. We have to toughen up, to not get our feelings hurt so easily. We have to get back to raising the bar, to getting what we work for and taking a little pride in that. If we don't, then we should not be surprised when, as my grandfather used to say, things go to hell in a hand basket.

Ken Davidson is publisher of the Northwest Indiana Gazette, an occasional news sheet challenging the transparency of Indiana public policy.



Indiana Assessors Defy the Tax Court

“Now is the time when men work quietly in the fields and women weep softly in the kitchen; the legislature is in session and no man’s property is safe.” — Daniel Webster (1782-1852)

(April 7) — The president of the Indiana County Assessors Association (ICAA), a Republican incidentally, is leading a statewide effort to make private property arbitrary or at least a matter of legislative or administrative whim. You would have to go back to when Shakespeare was writing sonnets to find anybody of stature who thought that was a good idea.

Nonetheless, her association wants to make it so. The details, wrapped up in legal challenges

and Statehouse politics, are purposely obscure and she has not responded to our request for clarification.

Until we hear from her we, can offer you this: 1) the ICAA appeared to support a work-around for the 2008 cap on property taxes that skirted the law; 2) it got caught; and 3) it has hired lobbyists and attorneys to sweep it under the rug with a legislative fix. This is all to the distortion of the tax code that us hapless fools must live under.

The ICAA president, presumably an expert on property matters, doesn't appear to see anything wrong with defining real property as if turning a dial. Yes, you can visit countries that run their economies that way but you wouldn't want to stay long.

In the case of *Schiffler vs. Marion County*, her association agreed with the respondent, the Marion County Assessor, that under Indiana Code the application of the standard homestead deduction applies to just “one house, one garage and one acre of land.”

The Indiana Tax Court rejected that, pulling out its trusty Webster Dictionary to explain that “include,” as it applies in current state law to the most favorable tax application, means that additional and multiple out-buildings on a “homestead” are part of the “dwelling” and also qualify for the full deduction. Here is the Court’s analysis:

“Contrary to the position advocated by the assessor, the term ‘dwelling’ is not defined as ‘just one’ house and garage. Instead, a ‘dwelling’ is defined as the ‘residential real property improvements that an individual uses as [his] residence, including a house or garage.’ That plain language places no limitations on the number of improvements that can qualify as a ‘dwelling’; rather, it hinges an improvement’s eligibility for the standard homestead deduction as a ‘dwelling’ based on how the individual uses it (for a permanent rather than temporary home). Moreover, through its use of the phrase ‘including a house or garage’ the plain language of the statute indicates that a dwelling can

consist of improvements that are not a house or garage.”

Consequently, the respondent received a refund for overpayment of taxes, as should tens of thousands of other hoosiers who have “appurtenant structures” (sheds, pole barns, pools, pergolas or other things). But lobbyists for the Indiana Association of Counties and the Indiana Assessor Council are attempting to push legislation that would negate the Court’s decision and deny the refunds.

To make matters worse, every assessor in Indiana last week was told by one expert or another to prepare tax bills as if the Court had never met, applying the maximum 3 percent rate to secondary structures. Uncertainty reigned. Numerous appeals were put on hold on the promise that pertinent legislation would pass and apply retroactively. Moreover, the assessors association hinted at defiance until its lobbyists could get the the law changed. Here is the ICAA president in an email to her membership shortly after the Schiffler ruling:

“While I cannot tell you what is best for your county, I am personally going to hold off on making changes to my data (regarding the court decision) at this point in hopes that we can establish parameters.”

As it stands, the Senate version has been amended to soften the impact but the medieval mindset remains — that is, the state can do what it wants with your property but you must ask permission for any relief.

There are two problems with all of this. The first is the willingness of elected officials to work not only against the interests of their constituents but against constitutional principles. The second is that it ignores that property, unlike pronouns, is an absolute. You cannot “sort of” own property. It has been that way since Magna Carta. The assessors, though, as if the collectors of a medieval geld, would like the government (they/ them/it) to redefine property as they/them/it see fit.

The assessors indicated in Shiffler that their authority came not from any silly old constitution or law but from a “fact sheet” published by the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance. Indeed, their association, in its various legal arguments, didn’t seem that impressed with the Indiana Constitution and its protection of property rights. And their motive for passing over plain-language definitions in current statutes for legalese was obvious: That’s what would have saved them from having to refund the tax money.

Why state legislators would consider throwing in with such a specious argument is another matter. It might be that the machinations are so complicated that they don’t understand what’s at stake. Most likely, they reflexively like the idea of having more control over our property. Certainly, the assurance that a lazy media will not finger them for raising taxes has a lot to do with it.

To summarize, Shiffler marks a line in our relationship with government. It is where an elected official quits working for citizens and begins working for purely statist interests. And to be clear, the issue is not the excessive taxation, which may be small in the grande scheme of things. Again, it is the acceptance that property is defined by what assessors and legislators determine will bring in the most money.

If that is the direction we are headed, even with a Republican supermajority and the most local officials, Indiana will not prosper.

Dan Eichenberger, M.D., MBA, is an Indiana native with 30 years' experience as a primary care physician, physician executive and healthcare consultant. He is the recipient of the Indiana University Southeast Chancellors' Medallion. In recent years he has taken as his mission is to provide excellent, personal care to his patients, grounded in strong Christian principles, and to re-establish a primary care medical practice dedicated to the doctor-patient relationship with the primary goal of personalized care, the way medicine once was.



Will We Let Science and Logic Die?

(March 24) — Never before have we witnessed first-hand such a rapid degradation of reality. Common sense seems to have died long ago, but now logic and science are also on their deathbeds. The prognosis that can be revived is yet to be tested. Their deaths directly relate to the “post-modern” worldview, which believes truth is relative and cannot be known. In today’s increasingly secular environment, we are told, “That may be your truth; but it is not mine.,” or “Truth is Relative.” We realize both statements are self-defeating if we utilize our critical thinking skills. They both make a “truth claim” that contradicts itself.

So, the next time someone tells you, “Truth is relative,” simply ask them, “Is that true?” Stating truth is relative is an absolute truth statement. The laws of logic (the law of noncontradiction) state “A” cannot equal “Non-A.” Both statements cannot be true at the same time. The same logic applies to the second truth claim. If truth is absolute, it cannot be true for you and not for me. We don’t define truth; we discover truth. Truth is God-given and unchanging, no matter how our secular society defines things.

Words matter. Changing definitions of things that are objectively true doesn’t alter the underlying truth. There are two kinds of truth. One depends on our opinion of things. This is called subjective truth. If I say my favorite ice cream is chocolate chip or my favorite color is blue, these are examples of subjective truths. They are true for me. Objective truth, however, depends

on the way the world actually is. An example of objective truth is $2+2=4$. The law of gravity is objectively true whether you believe it or not. You will not suddenly float away if you don’t believe in gravity. It is objectively true for all people at all times.

The laws of logic are one of our methods of discovering truth.

Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines “logic” as follows:

The art of thinking and reasoning justly.

Logic is the art of using reason well in our inquiries after truth, and the communication of it to others.

Correct reasoning implies correct thinking and legitimate inferences from premises, which are principles assumed or admitted to be just. Logic then includes the art of thinking, as well as the art of reasoning.

The purpose of logic is to direct the intellectual powers in the investigation of truth, and in the communication of it to others.

Truth is an objective feature of the world we live in. It’s foundational to reality itself. We are grounded in truth by utilizing logical principles and not falling into logical fallacies. Denying truth is denying reality and typically leads to bad outcomes. However, many people today believe that redefining objectively true things somehow changes the underlying truth. The redefined terms enable individuals to rationalize behaviors and feel better about themselves subjectively. It also provides a mechanism to weaponize words and language and succumb to irrational and illogical political and social agendas.

These past several years demonstrated the decline in the acknowledgment of objective truth. We repeatedly heard the phrase “follow the science.” However, because of the epidemic’s weaponization, basic science and logic principles were virtually eliminated. We have a hundred-plus years of medical science, immunology, virology, disease effects, etc.; however, because of “agendas,” we disregarded known truths to sustain political and monetary objectives. We see similar weaponization of fundamental biologic

truths regarding sex and gender. The only science many follow is “political science” and “social science,” which propagates the rapid death of logic and genuine scientific inquiry.

Some things are logically impossible based on the truth of what we know to correspond with science and reality. It is logically impossible to have a square circle. It is logically impossible to have a married bachelor. It is also logically impossible to have a trans-woman or trans-man. Redefining terms in no way redefines truth.

Every human has a genotype which is their genetic makeup from their chromosomes. The genotype determines their genetic potential and limitations. The genotype begins at conception, continues through embryonic development, and lasts through adulthood. The individual’s genotype does not change based on how you feel or what you believe.

Every human also has a phenotype which is the individual’s observable characteristics. Phenotypes result from the interaction of their genotype (total genetic inheritance) and with the environment in which they live. Phenotypes can change based on environmental factors. These would be more microevolutionary changes, such as an individual’s height, hair color, skin pigmentation, etc. However, cross-dressing, hormone manipulation, and surgical procedures may change an outward appearance, but it still doesn’t change the intrinsic genotype and phenotype of the individual.

The objective truth based on logic and science is that individuals are genotypically and phenotypically either male or female and develop into adult men or women. There is no logical or scientific basis for a trans-man or trans-woman. Redefining the words of male, female, man, and woman does not change the underlying truth. These individuals are either masculinized females or feminized males. Pushing back against these radical ideologies is essential to resuscitate logic and science. We must refrain from allowing our language to be hijacked by these leftists. Again, truth matters.

Tanner Bouchie, an attorney, is a lifelong Hoosier and a member of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation residing with his family in Knox County. He is in-house counsel for a pharmacy benefits manager focusing on compliance issues.



Indiana Case Defined What Is a ‘Right’

(March 17) — Earlier this week, the foundation’s columnist Leo Morris provided a thoughtful piece, “Be Careful What You Consider Your ‘Right’.”

The consideration of commercial services as rights reminded me of the 1821 case of Mary Clark, “a Woman of Colour,” in which Clark, a formerly enslaved woman petitioned for release from a 20-year indenture she had signed to provide personal services to Gen. W. Johnston.

Ordinarily, then as today, a court will not order a person to perform a contract that he or she has breached. Except in rare cases, a court will order monetary damages to remedy a breach of contract.

Johnston had paid Clark only a nominal fee for 20 years of indenture, so he was uninterested in monetary damages. Rather, he argued that he was entitled to personally force Clark to perform her indentured services.

The case was initially heard by Elihu Stout, a newspaper mogul who served as justice of the peace in Knox County. He denied Clark’s petition, finding that she voluntarily executed her indenture to Johnston.

On appeal, the Indiana Supreme Court accepted Stout’s finding that Clark voluntarily signed the indenture. The court, however, held that Johnston had no right to physically dominate Clark into providing those personal services designated by the indenture.

A modern scenario analogous to Clark’s position illustrates the virtue of the opinion. If a roofer petitioned a court for freedom from a homeowner who kidnapped him and physically forced him to continue work on a project he

BACKGROUNDERS

declined to complete, the court would surely order the homeowner to release the roofer.

An idealist might imagine that if commercial services like housing, food and healthcare are “rights,” then petitioners would flood courts with actions to enforce those rights. More realistically, however, people would seek to assert their rights by force. The homebuilder, baker and nurse would be captive to the demands of their obligees.

Mary Clark and Indiana settled this matter over 200 years ago. ♦



Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

The Outstater

Not-So-Precious Moments

(March 8) — Without getting maudlin, we all know there are moments when . . . well, moments when things change and will never be the same.

As boys fishing on a favorite stream, a moment would come when a soft breeze would pick up, the Cottonwoods would rustle and we knew that summer was over. Soon we were going to be marched off to school.

We continue to experience those moments, only they come more often and more rudely. I keep a journal of them.

- The moment you understand that the paper you signed making you a “homeowner” requires you to show up for work every day for the next 30 years to prove it.

- The moment that a majority of your neighbors nominate a “conservative” candidate who has voted for every tax increase for the last eight years.

- The moment you realize that Roman coliseums operated with more compunction than your favorite college football team.

- The moment you realize that if you shoot an intruder at 3 a.m. you will have to spend a great amount of time, money and legal energy defending yourself against criminal charges of one kind or another.

- The moment you realize that if an intruder shoots you at 3 a.m. a great amount of time,

money and legal energy will be spent trying to figure out what drove him to do it.

- The moment you realize that your son’s college tuition estimate is for one year, not four.

- The moment — the second, really — you realize that your email mocking the boss’s earlier email was sent “reply all.”

- The moment you realize that your legislator already has his primary race funded by the party campaign committee and doesn’t really care what you think.

- The moment the catechismal warnings you have been dimly hearing since you were 14 begin to make a lot of sense.

- The moment you realize that the Constitution may be “living” but the Declaration of Independence is not.

- The moment you read that the Legislature has decided to raise taxes for yet another new program even though there is a revenue surplus to pay for it.

- The moment you realize that the talking head with earbuds being prompted by a producer is considered a “journalist.”

- The moment you realize what “deductible” means on your insurance policy.

- The moment you realize that the congressman forced to resign in disgrace not only will receive his full pension but any subsequent cost-of-living increases.

- The moment you realize that your metabolism is now such that there aren’t enough exercise hours left in a day to shed that extra 10 pounds.

- The moment you realize that the county chairman of your political party is in office for life because of a couple of sentences slipped into the bylaws when nobody was looking.

- The moment you understand that the fine new buildings downtown are financed without regard to market tests and will either go bankrupt in 20 years or have to be propped up with even more public subsidies.

- The moment your car dealer tells you that he doesn't care what the Federal Reserve Bank says, there is no longer a discount for a cash.
- The moment you go to pay at the corner gas station and look up to find a woman with a beard behind the cash register.

Can you hear the Cottonwoods?

A City Named After a Boot

(May 5) — For reasons that his detractors will gladly list, a friend is not big on winning awards. His agonizing bit of self-appraisal occurred on seeing a picture of a dozen or so members of a local tv news department. They were holding armfuls of “best in journalism” plaques. Award-giving must be a good sized subdivision of the media industry.

The friend was given an award once, long ago. It was designed by a hip big-city advertising agency, a solid glass cube in the minimalist style. It doesn't have an inscription and he can't remember for what exactly it was given, making it the perfect award to my mind. The enigma now sits proudly on his desk awaiting an aggrandizing story he will invent for his grandchildren.

Oh yes, the friend was asked if he would like a Sagamore on the Wabash. He demurred, channeling Groucho Marc to say he knew people who had won the Sagamore and he would prefer not to be associated with them.

All of that said, the morning paper had news of an award — an honor, actually — that my friend and I can get behind. A national shoemaker has named a work boot after our hometown. It is “the Fort Wayne” manufactured by Keen Footwear out of Portland, Oregon, of all places.

I cannot imagine anything more rewarding than a market-savvy manufacturer thinking enough of your town's work ethic to name a boot after it. Here is a blurb from the company web site:

“Leave blown-out moccasin toes in the past. Built with innovative stitch protection at the toe where it matters most, the ‘Fort Wayne’ solves an age-old work boot problem. ‘The Fort Wayne’

takes a job-site classic work boot design and reinvents it with sturdy Keen.fusion construction and Keen.protect abrasion resistance at the toe.”

We would rather the company had mentioned the city as the place where television, the gasoline pump and the wire for electric motors were invented and first manufactured. But it did mention “moccasin toes,” perhaps alluding to namesake Gen. Anthony Wayne's defeat of native American tribes and the opening of the Northwest to white settlement.

But perhaps not.

In any case, the shoe is a worthy symbol of a city once known as a center for innovation and industry. And today's fashions being what they are, a pair of “Fort Waynes” can be worn with a suit and tie to also reflect the city's modern reputation as a center for grasping wooden-headed politicians and ruinous economy-development schemes.

You can order a pair on Amazon.com for \$200 with the waterproof, carbon-fiber toe in “dark earth” to match the color of our three rivers. There was none available in our local stores.

A Movie not for our Times

(May 2) — I ask that you forgive my *ancien cinéma* phase. Last evening was spent rewatching Peter Weir's film, “Master and Commander,” an acclaimed and authentic glimpse into early 19th century naval warfare. But halfway through I was struck by a disturbing thought: Nobody below the age of 40 is going to have any idea what this movie is about.

Indeed, the plot and character development would seem anachronistic, some kind of reverse science fiction. And even if the viewer can get past the fact that the crew of the HMS Surprise is not cast as black immigrant transsexuals, the movie has discordant themes.

Two decades old now, the Oscar-winning film is set during the Napoleonic Wars and adapted from Patrick O'Brian's “Aubrey” series. It

stars Russell Crowe as Aubrey, captain in the Royal Navy, and therewith begins the trouble.

Captain Aubrey, besides being an utterly privileged cisgender white male — the crew must salute him or be whipped — loves his king and country (reverse science fiction, as I said). Moreover, he subverts his feelings to an individual sense of duty and honor. He leads his crew with courage and expert seamanship and, perhaps most shocking to the “everything is relative” crowd, a willingness to make sacrifices in recognition that there are absolutes in war at sea. A quote:

“England is under threat of invasion, and though we be on the far side of the world, this ship is our home. This ship is England. So it’s every hand to his rope or gun, quick is the word and sharp is the action.”

Most important, the officers and crew understand the tenets of their civilization and articulate them in their diverse roles. Again, more reverse science fiction. Would today’s audience accept as realistic a script driven by values and events dating back a century or more before the characters themselves would have been born?

No, the movie might as well have been set on Mars. Check the commentary on the Internet. Other than a few egghead journals such as the Claremont Review of Books, it is hard to find reference to any thought or event before a particular author’s fifth birthday — and these are the few paid commentators, not the many crackpots.

All of which was predicted by Mark Bauerlein just as this age was coming of age. It was back in 2008 when he wrote his indelicately titled “The Dumbest Generation.”

“It was obvious to me,” said the First Things editor, “that a 21st century teenager who didn’t read books or magazines or newspapers, who had no religion and ignored history, civics and great art, would grow into an unsatisfied and confused adult.”

Those teenagers are facing middle age now and they lead a shallow, snippy public discussion. It is one dominated by modal verbs projecting a false command of the facts — “must,” “shall,” “will,” “should,” etc. And because discussion is limited to that within their lifetime and experience every one of them is an expert with instant opinions about everything.

We are awash in them and we learn nothing — a nation of gadflies.

If all this makes me an old fogey, so be it. In my defense, you will have noticed that pollsters no longer ask this generation what it knows about, say, the signing of the Declaration of Independence or even the Civil Rights Act. It was just too discouraging — and terrifying.

And yet, here is Captain Aubrey on my television screen telling his friend and alter ego Dr. Maturin: “Men must be governed. Often not wisely, I will grant you, but governed nonetheless.”

I fear we are headed for a different kind of governing, one more in line with “Lord of the Flies” than with “Master and Commander.”

A Mayor Sells ‘Sustainability’

(April 27) — If you can step back for a moment, the absurdity of modern electioneering becomes clearer — not acceptable, but clearer.

My mayor, running for his fifth term, is pushing the council to approve a quarter million-dollar plan that promises to “sustain” the city through climate change. What? Can the mayor somehow save our 111 square miles from a global catastrophe?

Absolutely. News stories announcing the mayor’s plan note that it is “science-based.” It has an acronym so you know it is serious — CAAP, the Climate Action and Adaption Plan. Without it, and by implication without his reelection, the mayor says the city will see a “336 percent increase in 90 degree days over the next 27 years, with a 125 percent increase in decadal extreme precipitation events.”

Compared to what? By whose calculation? And how many nephews, cousins and party operatives can you hire for a quarter million dollars? Never mind, we don't have time for that. This is a matter of life or death. Quick, approve the money (it's only a start, please understand).

Did we say "life or death"? Yes, the National Weather Service informs the mayor that heat is the number one weather-related killer. So we've got to take action. Everybody says so. The mayor has polling showing that 68 percent of city residents believe "climate change" is real.

Genevieve Cicchiello tells a local television station that it not only is real but will be a generational struggle: "It's definitely one of the most important topics. I think young people are seeing the detrimental effects when we're still forming ideas about everything."

And who is Genevieve Cicchiello? Well, she's a senior in high school. Who are the "scientists"? They are unnamed but trusted authorities known to the Environmental Resilience Institute (ERI) at Indiana University. See if you can find the "science" in the institute's self-description:

"At ERI we envision a future deeply and broadly transformed through co-produced knowledge and action that spurs systemic change. By moving away from the rigid and unsustainable strategies of the past, we can create a resilient and sustainable tomorrow — together."

The chutzpah of all this is worth a quarter million dollars by itself. But call it by its name — a scam. If someone came to your front door selling this you would laugh in their face. Such used to be the realm of "tin men," quick-talkers peddling overpriced aluminum siding.

Today, siding salesmen are legit, it's the democratically elected representatives sworn to protect our interests that we have to worry about.

The Persistence of Despotism

(April 24) — Hoosiers are fortunate to have a legislature in supermajority. We can witness a

real-life, real-time experiment in whether partisanship or just government in and of itself is the problem. Spoiler alert: It is government in and of itself.

As my colleague Leo Morris has observed, the majority Republicans (the party of fiscal responsibility, lest you forget) are considering new fees (taxes) to fund new programs in the midst of a revenue surplus. Thus our state legislators are aping Congress in ignoring what until recently were common-sense fiscal prescriptions.

They are telling us as plain as can be that the direst warnings of the great economic philosophers — Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek, Richard von Mises, James Buchanan — were spot on. You can talk about democracy, rule of law and that stuff but in the end it's about power. They have it and we don't. It is now their money. We are subjects, not citizens, and that is the definition of despotism.

This corruption isn't a new thing of course. In most of the world it has never fully been otherwise. But in America it only began in the late 1980s. Here is the historian Paul Johnson tracking its progress a decade later, quoted at length for his import and prescience:

"The United States had a long record of sound public finance, ever since Alexander Hamilton took over the Treasury in 1789 and introduced fiscal realism, balancing the budget for the first time. In 1835, President Andrew Jackson actually contrived to eliminate the debt altogether. Thereafter the debt fluctuated, as is reasonable, according to the emergencies through which the nation passed. The Civil War, World War I, the Great Depression and World War II all led to large-scale increases in the public debt. But the calms that followed these storms all saw it systematically reduced. During the last period of debt reduction, 1946 to 1975, it was cut by half. Then an odd and sinister thing happened. Without any emergency or world war or even a deep recession, the debt began to rise. At the beginning of Ronald Reagan's Presidency, it had reached \$914 billion; on his retirement, it was \$3 trillion. Today, of course, the debt is closing in on

\$5 trillion, so it is not surprising that the dollar is at a historic low against the yen and the German mark. Indeed, it could be argued that the dollar's reputation is more fragile now than at any time since the 1780s."

The debt is \$31.4 trillion now. Clearly, this isn't going to end well. So what do we do about it?

You aren't going to like the answer. It doesn't conform to the armchair strategy of the last 50 years, that is, vote Republican and hope there are adults somewhere, perhaps on the Supreme Court, perhaps in the Oval Office, who will put things back in order.

For the last several years have taught us that nobody is coming to help — not anyone deep inside the three branches of government designed to keep this from happening in the first place, not certainly in the Indiana Republican Party, not in a charismatic figure rising from the hoi polloi, and as of today not with Tucker Carlson and an independent media. We are going to have to do it ourselves.

The blueprint for that was written long ago, too long ago for this generation to consider valid. Nonetheless, some of us will celebrate its sesquicentennial two years from now. It is "the unanimous declaration of the thirteen united states of America" known as the Declaration of Independence.

You don't have to read the whole thing, although it is eloquent and wise from the first word to the last. The important part follows. Read it in the context of a state legislature that has, as King George III, degraded the meaning of citizenship. And read it slowly to carefully consider the implications:

"When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them (us) under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security."

Does that sound like a lot of work and expense? We didn't think you'd like it.

Don't Give Up on the Democratic Process Just Yet

(April 20) — The approval rate of Congress is 10 percent. The incumbency rating is 90 percent. What does democracy mean in that context?

There have been nagging doubts for 300 years that something is wrong with the system. It is clearly vulnerable to manipulation by scalawags and the self-serving. "Remember, democracy never lasts long," warned John Adams. "It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself." "Beautiful only in theory," said Benito Mussolini.

I can fix all that (sarcasm alert).

For starters, disenfranchise cisgender white males beginning with any whose ancestry can be traced to 1619. Nobody will object.

Just to be sure, block anyone raised in a nuclear family or who has read a catechism.

Now, limit the franchise to those remaining who have been a citizen for at least 40 years and who own the equivalent of 50-acres of land, pay taxes on all of it and receive no government benefit, especially employment.

Require a history test administered by Victor Davis Hanson,

Exclude anyone who has visited London or Paris and claims to have been broadened by the experience. Or San Francisco. Or suburban Maryland.

No political action committees. Campaign donations must be declared by an individual. Violators to be thrown in the public stocks.

Voting is in-person only with passport-level identification.

Move the national capitol to Hastings, Nebraska.

Abolish the political parties. Draft Supreme Court justices off the street. Allow state legislatures to choose U.S. senators.

Oh, and all public officials are limited to a single two-year term without pay or pension or staff.

There, that should do it.

The Power of Voting ‘No’

(April 18) — Could it be so simple as to elect people who will vote “no”? Not about everything, of course, that would be naysaying. And not about faux social and sexual bizzareries that are best worked out by society over time. But about those things that — right at this very moment — endanger our families and our ability to protect and care for them.

Such things are going unaddressed, you know, even as they are easy for politicians to identify, even solve, were they of a mind. You don’t tax and regulate people to ruin in order to do things that don’t need to be done. You don’t borrow to fund pipe dreams. You don’t allow government to grow so large that nobody knows what it’s up to. And how hard is it to condemn mobs of resentful, errant youth shooting tourists and gutting pharmacies?

Visit IndianaScorecard.org. Review the voting records. See if you can find someone who voted no to something critically injurious, that is, something infringing on your daily life. You should hope there are a few such votes — but maybe not, or at least not enough.

We are talking about easy solutions that anyone raising a family or running a small business would recognize as common sense. The obvious stuff: You don’t spend more than you have; you don’t squelch enterprise or opportunity; you don’t negate individual responsibility.

Socrates spoke of an “internal no” that tells us unerringly when we are tempting disaster. (Interestingly, he recognized no “internal yes.”)

The British historian Arnold Toynbee found in his four-volume study of 60 civilizations that those that prospered were the ones with a “creative minority” able to say no to the several ways societies decide to destroy themselves. Allowing borders to break down was one of them. Abandoning successful internal norms for inferior external ones was another. Simply put, if what you are doing isn’t working the first step is to quit doing what you are doing.

Helmut Schoeck, the Austrian sociologist, warned us that societies unable to say no to the human impulse to envy, that pursue the impossible ideal of perfect equity, cripple themselves. Enterprise and skill are discouraged, opportunity is limited. The lights go out. The trash isn’t collected. The sewage backs up. Hello South Africa. Hello Venezuela. Hello California.

And yet, we have raised a series of generations now that believe everything is relative, that nobody is ever really wrong. Here is the late Paul Johnson in his masterwork, “Modern Times”:

“At the beginning of the 1920s the belief began to circulate, for the first time at a popular level, that there were no longer any absolutes: of time and space, of good and evil, of knowledge, above all of value. Mistakenly but perhaps inevitably, relativity became confused with relativism.”

With two sides to every story there was never a need to definitively say no. But after a century of policy failures the chickens are indeed coming home to roost. The economist Thomas Sowell makes the point in his book, “Is Reality Optional?” Here is the defining paragraph:

“Much of the social history of the Western world over the past three decades has involved replacing what worked with what sounded good. In area after area — crime, education, housing, race relations — the situation has gotten worse after the bright new theories were put into operation. The amazing thing is that this history of failure and disaster has neither discouraged the social engineers nor discredited them.”

And finally, the historian Victor Davis Hanson has done us a service by listing his no’s:

- No to municipal labor unions.
- No to uncalibrated pension plans, including Medicare and Social Security.
- No to defunding the police.
- No to selective prosecution.
- No to government monopolies in education.
- No to porous national borders.
- No to a \$2-trillion annual deficit.

- No to front-loaded economic-development grants.
- No to able-bodied welfare recipients.
- No to race trumping merit.
- No to untaxed university endowment income.
- No to guaranteed student loans.
- No to federal aid to universities that ignore the Bill of Rights and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.
 - No to “affirmative” action for the Elizabeth Warrens and the elite children of Eric Holder, the Obamas, the Duchess of Sussex and LeBron James.
- No to elections where less than 70 percent of the electorate votes in person.

There are primary elections around the corner in Indianapolis and Fort Wayne. We can start there. It might not be too late to say yes to no.

Zoning: Government for Government’s Sake

(April 5) — My favorite public policy that creates more problems than it solves remains recycling. A close second, though, is zoning with its ignoble beginnings as a way to keep Jews off 5th Avenue in New York City.

Recycling of course is the art of making millions of dollars convincing environmentally woke households to sort out their trash so it can be sold to China to dump in the ocean.

Zoning, or more specifically euclidian zoning, is less clever but impressive nonetheless. Invented by a lawyer, it is government for government’s sake. That is apparent when you compare your city’s 10-year “master plan” with what has actually happened in those 10 years. There will be nothing “master” about it.

We get the name “euclidian” not from orderly geometry but from the 1926 court case *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty*. The real estate company argued — quite reasonably, we think — that it would lose money if the city of Euclid, Ohio, forced it to sell its property for residential rather than industrial use. Ambler claimed this was an unconstitutional

taking of property and that it was denied equal protection under the law.

The U.S. Supreme Court sided with the city and away we went.

In my city a proposal for a car dealership was denied in a vacant block full of trash and weeds in the inner city. That was so despite the developer’s offer to generously landscape the property with full-grown trees and bushes to shield neighbors. Why? The planning bureaucrats thought “something better would come along.” It never did, and that was 20 years ago.

Here is some research on that point courtesy of the Cato Institute, studies we hope to replicate in Indiana:

- Economist Jonathan Rothwell estimates that 20 percent of the variation in metropolitan housing growth can be explained through density regulations.
- Economist Jenny Schuetz suggests that zoning decreases the number of building permits issued, especially for apartments and condominiums.
- Researchers Edward Glaeser and Bryce Ward find that each additional acre of minimum lot size requirement is associated with a 50 percent drop in building permits.
- Researchers John Quigley and Steven Raphael estimate that each regulation in Californian cities is associated with a 4.5 percent increase in the cost of owner-occupied housing and a 2.3 percent increase in the cost of rental housing.

Again, it is a specious argument that the typical zoning code “protects” anybody, that is unless you are talking about protection from other races or classes, and even then economic forces eventually prevail. There are better but largely untried land-use systems such as “performance” or “impact” zoning which put the property owner first. Also, Houston has shown how neighborhood standards can be negotiated without inflexible zoning laws.

But as is the case with recycling, zoning is powered not by effectiveness but by fear — fear

that we will destroy the earth, fear that unpleasantness will move into our neighborhood. But the best way to make sure your property is protected is to build it well, put some thought into location and maintain it. And if neighboring property is offensive, you can buy it and use it as you wish.

Do I simplify? Certainly, this is an essay and not a book. But again the test is to compare your city' "plan" with actual developments — or better, what the city would have looked like had there been no zoning whatsoever.

And there are costs. Your city will have created a housing shortage, especially in the most economical units. It will have driven off uncounted jobs and investment. Well-connected lawyers will have gotten rich. Do we need mention the tax burden of a floor at city hall full of well-paid bureaucrats?

That said, we break off to applaud a village in upstate New York. It is Caroline, a modest agricultural settlement that had existed for 200 years without zoning laws — not a one, until now.

The trouble began when a farmer, John Morse, got an offer to buy some of his marginal land as a location for a Dollar General store. He hoped it would provide him the money to retire.

Not so quick, said a new element in town, faculty from nearby Ithaca and Cornell University. These Cornell-ites had moved to Caroline precisely because it did not have unsightly things like strip malls with Dollar General stores. Among them was Ellen Harris, the former director of waste management at Cornell (ah, the recycling devils again).

Although Caroline didn't have zoning it did have a written vision of its future. But Harris helped write a 137-page expansion with new and exacting property restrictions — a zoning code, in other words. The changes would trash the retirement dreams of Morse and many other longtime residents to make room for a better class of citizen.

It apparently has not occurred to the Cornell bunch that if they feel so strongly about this they could buy out any property owners making poor

aesthetic choices. But it is cheaper for them to get government involved. Anyway, here is Christian Britschgi of Reason magazine summing up the situation to date:

“When you look at the restrictions that come into play, there's a whole giant table of what you're allowed to have or not have,' Morse says. 'You can have this kind of business because we like it, you can't have this kind of business because we don't like it.' . . . As Morse got out the word about the zoning code, more people realized their own plans for their land would be banned or subject to a lot more rules going forward.”

Division rules. Morse and his friends marched on city hall with signs reading, “Zoning Kills Dreams.” Britschgi tells of one confrontation where anti-zoning residents invoked their families' long history in the town only to have a member of the zoning commission respond by saying she was sick of hearing about people's stupid “heritage.”

So, will Morse and his valiant provincials win against the tenured sophisticates who know best what to do with other people's property? Will he set the example for rolling back superfluous regulations and lower housing costs throughout the nation?

Here's a clue: Some of the plan meetings are held on Zoom in a town where only the few have high-speed Internet.

Evil Party, Stupid Party (cont'd)

“We have two parties here, and only two. One is the evil party, and the other is the stupid party. I'm very proud to be a member of the stupid party. — M. Stanton Evans

(March 28) — Let this serve as my roundup of the legislative session: The more Republicans, the more Democrat policies.

That's according to the news service State Affairs which reported this week that the Indiana GOP supermajority allowed twice as many Democrat measures to advance in the first half of this session as the last two sessions

combined. OK, it was only 27 bills, but where in the democracy handbook does it say there has to be any at all?

A former legislator, a “somewhat” conservative (to be explained later), tells why in an interview with the news service: “Speaker (Todd) Huston and President Pro Tem (Rodric) Bray have got their sea legs, so to speak, and got more comfortable as leaders of these two supermajorities. Their caucus members have tremendous confidence in them, which gives them the ability to be a little more magnanimous when dealing with the minority party’s ideas.”

Magnanimity? Who voted for that?

We Republicans, that’s who. The GOP rank-and-file is proving itself only marginally conservative, its leadership indistinguishable from that of the Democrats. In majority, it holds no core beliefs that would justify a political party — or a nation, for that matter. It is soft on issues that matter, loud on issues that don’t.

Consider private property. You either own something or you don’t. As such, it is an absolute, in fact the sole issue that distinguishes the developed nations from the undeveloped. When property rights are compromised, misery follows. We have centuries of evidence to that effect. Have you visited Venezuela, South Africa or California lately?

That is not to say you can’t honestly argue, however inanely, that respect for private property and the accompanying prosperity must be sacrificed on the promise of social justice. Indeed, that in a nutshell is the modern Democrat Party. By any logic, though, you would expect the Republican position to differ.

You would expect wrong.

IndianaScorecard.org is a site to which some of us refer regularly. It ranks Indiana senators and representatives on their votes pertaining to private property, high scores reflecting a respect for protecting it and low votes the opposite.

Legislators hate it because there is no room to wiggle. Again, private property is an absolute. You don’t really own your house if the Legislature decides to raise taxes so high that you can’t pay

the mortgage. And it is no consolation waiting on the curb for the moving van to know those taxes were spent for what a majority of your neighbors considered good causes. Nor is it reassuring that the money in your savings account isn’t really yours if it can be devalued by someone in government turning a dial or sliding a scale.

But according to the ratings on IndianaScorecard that all is philosophically acceptable to the GOP leadership. Look up the scores. To pick just one example, albeit a critical one, the affable Speaker of the House ranks a pathetic 73rd with a rating of only 43 percent (down from 50 percent), the worst on the Republican side. He is the guy, not so incidentally, who ultimately decides whether Democrat measures advance.

Will Republican voters in his suburban Indianapolis district throw him out. Not likely. Political polls show that his constituency is at least in tacit agreement. And the lobbyists and donor class are not only in agreement but giddily so if campaign contributions are the measure. Don’t even ask about the GOP House Caucus, a pen of sheep.

This is not news. Almost 10 years ago political analyst Henry Olsen famously observed that Republican primary voters consist of four “remarkably stable” groups. And in the current issue of the Claremont Review of Books, Jeffrey Anderson updates them:

Moderates or liberals (many of whom aren’t even Republicans but vote in open primaries).

Somewhat conservatives.

Very conservative Evangelicals (plus members of other religious groups who focus on social issues).

Very conservative limited-government voters (the remnant of a former GOP).

“The latter two groups make up the movement conservatives,” Anderson says, “but even combined they constitute only about a third of all voters in Republican primaries. In comparison, nearly half of the Republican electorate is made up of the ‘somewhat’ conservatives — who, Olsen writes, ‘always back the winner.’”

None of this is meant to judge, it is merely to describe our democracy at work. And yes, the courts could enforce the principles of our nation's founding but they function these days as micro legislatures themselves. And who knows what the governor is doing.

This is just to say that when you identify as a "Republican," you might want to clarify . . . and apologize.

Matt Dillon to the Rescue

(*March 23*) — Politics is complicate. In recent years I have tried to simplify things by focusing on local elections. There's not much glamor there but the odds are better, a lot better. While we were slogging from door to door for the unavailing Donald Trump, the Left was cashing in with small ball.

"George Soros figured out a clever arbitrage opportunity," Elon Musk noted last week. "The many small political contests such as district attorneys and judges have much higher impact per dollar spent than the big races, so it is far easier to sway the outcome." Also it is a lot easier to manufacture phony votes than to earn them.

Being an old fogey who used to be a young fogey I can say it is time to realize that things are different, bad different, and we will have to decide soon what to do about it — all of us, of any age.

In my mind, the choice is between Matt Dillon and Jack Reacher. Dillon, for you younger readers, was the fictional lawman of Dodge City, Kansas, the hero of "Gunsmoke," the longest running series in television history. Reacher of course is the hero of a detective series by that name in its first season on Amazon's Prime Video.

Dillon gets his authority from a bunch of ranchers, shop keepers and other struggling settlers, a middle class of sorts. But Reacher is dispatched, or at least was dispatched before being amply pensioned, from the depths of Washington, D.C.

Dillon, in my viewing of the show, never shot anyone dead, although he was clearly capable of doing so when necessary. The intro had him drawing and firing and still standing, the

assumption being that the other fellow off camera was not still standing. By the way, he always let the other guy draw first.

Contrast that with Reacher who in episode five shoots three visiting Columbian bad guys in the back. He then stuffs them in a car truck, and in order to make them fit breaks a couple of arms and legs with the appropriate sound effects. Asked why he shot the Columbian visitors, Reacher says, "I had the chance to kill them and I did." Remember, he is the hero of the show.

Jack Reacher, clearly, is no Matt Dillon, and again that is troublesome. It is so troublesome that I am determined to do what I can to change the situation.

So, will I work to elect a president, senator or congressman? No, the experience of the last few years is that none will be able to change anything much. The political process at the national level, as well as the Constitution itself, has been wrested from them — and from us. We won't get it back any time soon.

Instead, last week I volunteered as a poll worker for a neighbor running for mayor. Did you know that poll workers, even old fogies, can shift as much as 4 percent of the vote? Tonight, my wife and I are hosting a coffee for him.

If my man is elected, will you get that cushy job in the parks department? Likely not, but I know him to be principled and honest, a serious man with an unerring sense of right and wrong. He will say "no" when it needs to be said.

That last is the rare thing. In a long career I can count on one hand the politicians of whom that could be said. Nonetheless, whenever I come across one I am vowing to join his or her campaign, even if the office is just a constable on the plains or a mayor in the middle of corn fields.

I call it my Gunsmoke strategy, risking that young voters will be turned off by the allusion to firearms or that older ones will suspect something funny is being smoked. Like I said, politics is complicated.

Indiana Has a Historian Gap

(*March 21*) — If there is anyone in Indiana with credentials to talk about a key battle in our Revolutionary War we would like to hear from them. We are looking for a speaker on the topic but a survey of the faculty directories of Indiana University and Purdue University came up dry.

Indeed, the listing of history faculty did not reflect a particular interest in America. There were plenty of experts in the history of sex, digital communication, women’s studies, black studies, East European studies and Asian studies. There was a sprinkling of specialists in early American history but they seemed focused on slavery or land stolen from Native Americans previously stolen from other Native Americans.

In fact, neither Indiana University nor Purdue has anyone on their faculty who specializes in the military aspect of this nation’s founding. That’s not exactly true. A Purdue professor is an expert on the American atrocities of the Revolutionary War. And Purdue has a history chair named after a political operative in the Orr administration, a friend of Mitch Daniels. Does that count? There are people there who can tell you what the Chinese were doing about that time or how the women’s movement was coming along.

No, our impression is that anyone interested in how this nation came to be — a student, perhaps — is out of luck. Someone, you see, had to fight for it, not like politicians are always promising to “fight” for us but like actually fight with muskets, bayonets, canons and stuff.

Take the Battle of Hannah’s Cowpen for example, the battle that some say won the war. Without military history we are left to assume that Brigadier Gen. Daniel Morgan just sat down at a nearby Starbucks with Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton and worked out an accommodation to cultural appropriation, say, or some safe space perhaps, or pronoun agreements and so forth.

That would have been remarkable, for the British commander is honored with the phrase “Tarleton’s Quarter,” which means that you shoot or behead all the prisoners and burn their families

alive in a locked church. His allies in what is called the Southern Strategy were the Cherokees, also known for giving no quarter unless you can rationalize torture as an indigenous craft.

Interestingly, the battle involved at least one black. He was William Collins, a trusted orderly immortalized in a painting by William Ranney. He saved the life of Col. William Washington, a hero of the battle, with a timely and expertly aimed pistol shot. You would think someone sitting in a well-endowed teaching chair for black history would be interested in that.

Whatever, this foundation has adopted the painting as its inspiration. It appears in every weekly mailing and in every quarterly journal.

We intended for it to appear on our Facebook advertisements but a fact-checkers there rejected it, presumably because it stigmatized a black using a firearm. They must not have any historians there either.

Without a military element, I.U. graduate assistants in history and other disciplines, to pick a recent example, wouldn’t have been able to protest their sorry lot.

That freedom, please know, has precious little to do with women’s studies or East European studies or China studies. Even slavery would seem a separate issue when a British dragoon is bearing down on you swinging his backsword.

Again, there might be students interested in how we survived all that.

But maybe not.

The Death of the Newspaper Biz

“Any of us who has ever been at a zoning meeting with our own property at stake is aware of the urge to cut through all the pernicious bullshit and go straight to firearms.” — David Mamet

(*March 17*) — Newsmen of my age benefited greatly from the shift to corporate ownership of newspapers. Our salaries tripled overnight if only because we were being paid so pitifully before. Here is the great A.J. Liebling (1904-1963) of the

New Yorker describing our pre-corporate circumstances:

“The pattern of a newspaperman’s life is like the plot of ‘Black Beauty.’ Sometimes he finds a kind master who gives him a dry stall and an occasional bran mash in the form of a Christmas bonus, sometimes he falls into the hands of a mean owner who drives him in spite of spavins and expects him to live on potato peelings.”

In lieblich’s time, editors and surgeons wore bow ties (the full-length ones got caught in the work), dated cocktail waitresses (who overheard things) and walked to the office (couldn’t afford a car). And it was a time when the prime spot in the unheated newsroom was along the south wall with the windows most warmed by the sun.

Even up until the 1970s a directive would be described as “coming from the South Wall,” meaning it was from the top. And until then, the newsroom itself was staffed by semi-alcoholic reporters with photographic memories, all ruthlessly oppressed by a city desk fanatically concerned with accuracy and with maintaining reader trust on everything from a police siren in the night to a growing national debt.

Contrast that with today’s amply paid J-school professionals (the few who are employed) on their relentless push to implement vaguely defined social-justice goals and the facts be damned.

Right here we must ask you to forgive us an “I told you so” moment. We predicted that readers wouldn’t pay to be lectured by even sober journalists. Indeed, the Lieblich quote is from our Spring 2006 journal, which we dedicated to charting the disastrous direction newspapers were headed. The issue is required reading for anyone interested in exactly where the profession went off the rails.

And as one of the social-justice warriors conceded to us back then: “Editors and reporters like to tell themselves that their jobs exist to serve readers, but the readers are, increasingly, rejecting the service.”

So newspaper ownership seems to make a difference. That was so obvious but so ignored by the intelligentsia that we feared we were missing something. Did the shift to corporate management have anything to do with the historic collapse of the newspaper industry, once the largest manufacturing sector in the nation? Could a corporate occupier caring only about quarterly goals be one thing and a hometown owner hoping to hold together the family business (and his town) be something else?

Seventeen years later with the sweep of corporate buyouts complete, the damage report is in. The real-life experience of the readership did not buy the woke claptrap that the chain newspapers were selling. For example, between 2018 and 2022, the Indianapolis Star circulation dropped 74.5 percent, or so reports NiemanLab.com.

No, there wasn’t any reason the Star and other newspapers couldn’t have prospered in the digital age. The Internet is at base an information delivery system. Newspapers had a huge head start in providing the information to be delivered.

But how did they use that head start?

In the early 1980s I was on a panel discussing the future of newspapers. One of the other panelists was the editorial page editor of the brand new USA Today. When it was her turn to speak she explained — arrogantly and at length, I thought — how USA Today would be the innovator of the modern editorial page, not us hidebound bow-tied dinosaurs. Opinion surveys would be commissioned and her editorialists would simply convert the survey results (hello ChatGBT) into editorial positions, preachy ones was my guess.

How did that work out? USA Today has gone from 2,632,392 subscribers to 180,381 in just the last four years. Gannett has dropped half of its employees.

To be fair, there was cynical brilliance to the idea. Don’t people like their own ideas best? Maybe not. Maybe readers of newspapers are uncommonly discerning. They may

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be interested in the truth of a matter, not just an opinion that agreed with that on the top of their head. They may be wise as Socrates was wise . . . wise that they know they don't know all that much.

The new fellows on the South Wall missed all that. — *tcl*



"The Battle of Cowpens," painted by William Ranney in 1845, shows an unnamed patriot (far left) saving the life of Col. William Washington.