

## *Preface*

Many explanations are given for the events of our time and the events in history. One of the most common explanations is that various external circumstances led or forced people to do this or that, and one of the most overlooked explanations is that various *internal* drives led them to do the things they did, including things that made no sense in terms of the external circumstances. One of these internal drives—especially the desire “to feel important,” in T.S. Eliot’s words—fits many notions and actions that would be hard to explain otherwise.

The desire of individuals and groups to puff themselves up by imposing their vision on other people is a recurring theme in the culture wars discussed in the first section of the essays that follow. Such attempts at self-aggrandizement in the name of noble-sounding crusades are too often called “idealism” rather than the narrow ego trip that it is.

Right after the section containing essays on culture war issues comes the largest section in this book, on economic issues. The reason for so many essays on economics is not just the importance of the subject itself but also the utter confusion that reigns among the general public, and even among the intelligentsia, over very basic principles of economics—and even very basic words, like “wages,” “taxes,” or the “national debt.”

The great Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said that we need education in the obvious more than exploration of the obscure. It is especially important to

explain economics so plainly that it becomes obvious because so many in politics and the media have created so much confusion in the process of spinning issues to fit their own agendas. Those who want a complete introduction to the subject can read my *Basic Economics* but the essays here simply try to clarify particular misconceptions on particular issues.

A wide range of legal, social, racial, and educational issues are dealt with in the other sections of this book. All of these essays first appeared as syndicated columns carried in newspapers across the country. As such, they had to be readable and concise, and they often dealt with issues that were in the news. However, from the large number of these columns written over the past few years I have selected for publication here those columns which deal with issues of continuing relevance and interest.

While I take responsibility for all the conclusions reached in these essays, I must also acknowledge the work of others that made these writings possible. First of all, there is my research assistant, Na Liu, whose insights as well as diligence have enabled me to discuss the wide range of topics covered in these columns with a background of knowledge to draw on. She has been very ably assisted by the dedicated work of Elizabeth Costa. All this is made possible by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, where we are all employed and which has generously supported our research. Finally, I must acknowledge the contribution of Karen Duryea, my editor at Creators Syndicate, who has caught many a typographical or grammatical error in my columns, as well as inadvertent misstatements, saving me from public embarrassment.

While many serious issues are discussed in these pages,

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sometimes there is also a little humor, without which it would be hard to face many of life's realities.

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