

PART VII

RANDOM THOUGHTS

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Ad for a ski resort: “If swimming is so healthful, why are whales so fat?”

Scientists are now putting jellyfish genes in monkeys. I don’t know what they are trying to produce, but they could end up producing academic administrators.

The first big Washington scandal of the 20th century was the Teapot Dome scandal of 1921, which led three members of the Harding administration to commit suicide. Today, they would just consult their lawyers and spinmeisters, and then start making the rounds of the talk shows in order to confuse the issues.

We call too many people “sick” who are in fact sickening. And we call too many young criminals “troubled youths,” when in fact they are trouble to other people, while enjoying themselves.

If Yogi Berra actually said all the things that have been attributed to him, when did he ever have any time left to play baseball?

In a democracy, why should one group of citizens carry more

weight than a similar number of other citizens, just because they are willing to take to the streets and block traffic?

Someone said that human beings are the only creatures that blush—and the only ones that need to.

It is bad enough that so many of our public schools offer nothing to challenge smart students. What adds insult to injury is that, when these students become bored and restless, this boredom is given the fancy name “attention deficit hyperactivity disorder” and the students are drugged with Ritalin.

There are too many mush heads around these days for the law to continue to require unanimous jury verdicts.

Because of the neglect of history in our educational system, most people have no idea how many of the great American fortunes were created by people who were born and raised in worse poverty than the average welfare-recipient today.

The problem with trying to restore every group to its own historic “homeland” is that so many parts of the earth have been homelands to different groups at different periods of history. New Orleans, for example, has belonged to four different nations that we know about, not counting how often it may have changed hands before Europeans arrived in the hemisphere and began keeping written records.

The media continue to take seriously, and provide free publicity for, people who call themselves “consumer advocates” or “environmentalists,” even though there are no qualifications required for these roles. All it takes are a big mouth, a big ego, a disdain for inconvenient facts and an ignorance of economics.

It is amazing how many of the horrors of the 20th century were a result of charismatic quacks misleading millions of people to their own doom. What is even more amazing is that, after a century that saw the likes of Hitler, Lenin and Mao, we still see no need to distrust charisma as a basis for choosing leaders, either in politics or in numerous organizations and movements.

When Japan sells us enough cars to buy Rockefeller Center, that is just another even exchange. But accounting rules call it an international trade “deficit” because the cars crossed international borders, while Rockefeller Center stayed put. Yet the media, politicians and the intelligentsia spread alarms because they pay more attention to the word than to the reality.

It used to be said that it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness. Today, we admire those who curse the candle—because it is not perfect, not free, not whatever the complainers want it to be.

When it comes to the future of this country, what is scarier than any bad policies or bad leaders is the sheep-like willingness of so many Americans to repeat slogans, follow demagogues and even allow their own children to be dosed with Ritalin or sent to serve food to bums in the name of “community service,” without questioning the right of other people to do these things.

Beware of people who discuss foreign policy in terms of “relieving international tensions.” You can always relieve tensions by surrendering. We have done it on issue after issue.

The average black family has been in America longer than the average white family. Why then should blacks be hyphenated

as African-Americans when they are more centuries removed from Africa than most Europeans are from Europe? Does anyone speak of European-Americans? How long should a hyphen persist?

Taxpayers have a right to complain about the runaway cost of the welfare state, but its worst damage has been done by promoting counterproductive lifestyles and creating a whole class of hustlers who know how to game the system, as well as an army of loudmouths who know how to intimidate politicians into giving them more of the same.

Why is it that people who are against the cigarette companies for selling a product with the potential to kill raise no similar objections to those who make equipment for sky-diving, white-water rafting, mountain climbing and other activities that also involve people risking their lives for the sake of the enjoyment they get?

Why is it that some people who are opposed to the government's giving money to faith-based organizations are also in favor of the government's providing money for "mental health," when much of what shrinks do is based on faith, rather than on empirical evidence?

There has been so much gushing about the supposed benefits of "diversity" that we have become conditioned to respond automatically to the word, much as Pavlov's dog was conditioned to respond to the ringing of a bell. But evidence is neither asked nor given.

Those who disdain wealth as a worthy goal for an individual or a society seem not to realize that wealth is the only thing that can prevent poverty.

Have you ever known a time when there was so much talk about ethics—or so little practice of it?

The great ideological divide is between those who believe that theories should be adjusted to reality and those who believe that reality must be adjusted to fit their theories. Many of the horrors of the 20th century were created by the latter. And such people are still with us, in many movements.

Some people go to desperate lengths to avoid making an estimate. They say that it all depends, that there are many factors, that there are no guarantees, that unforeseen things could happen. Don't we already know all that? Isn't that why we call it an estimate, rather than a guaranteed certainty?

Why does everything that the government does become so complicated? Because there are more than 500 members of Congress, each one of them with his or her own pet notions. Many of these notions have to be incorporated into legislation to get a majority in favor of any bill. The result is a complicated monstrosity.

Everyone is supposed to be “non-judgmental” these days. But how can it be wrong to judge, when such a statement is itself a judgment?

We have all heard about the “mid-life crisis” but did you know that there is now a book out titled *QuarterLife Crisis*? It is about how tough it is to turn 25. Apparently everybody has to whine about something.

Any politician who can be elected only by turning Americans against other Americans is too dangerous to be elected.

Too many people fail to see the fatal difference between hav-

ing a government create rules that apply to all—"a government of laws and not of men"—and having government officials choose the destinies of individuals and groups, whether through affirmative action, "targeted tax cuts," or special subsidies or special taxes for those who happen to be in or out of favor in Washington.

No individual and no generation has had enough personal experience to ignore the vast experience of the human race that is called history. Yet most of our schools and colleges today pay little attention to history. And many of our current policies repeat mistakes that were made, time and again, in the past with disastrous results.

Some people seem to think that the answer to all of life's imperfections is to create a government agency to correct them. If that is your approach, then go straight to totalitarianism. Do not pass "Go." Do not collect \$200.

Just what part of "Congress shall make no law" don't politicians understand? The First Amendment forbids Congress from passing any law that will even "abridge" the freedom of speech. Yet campaign finance reform laws would flat-out forbid certain speech by certain organizations on the eve of elections.

If you want to see the poor remain poor, generation after generation, just keep the standards low in their schools and make excuses for their academic shortcomings and personal misbehavior. But please don't congratulate yourself on your compassion.

The very same people who say that the government has no right to interfere with sexual activity between consenting

adults believe that the government has every right to interfere with economic activity between consenting adults.

The welfare state is the greatest confidence racket of all time. The government takes your money in taxes and then turns around and spends some of it to give you things. For this, you feel dependent on them, when in fact they are dependent on you.

Those who consider themselves deep thinkers like to point out that other societies have different values than those found in American society, as if that proves that values are arbitrary and unnecessary. But some other societies eat very different foods than those that Americans eat. Yet does anyone imagine that this proves food to be something arbitrary and unnecessary?

People who pride themselves on having ideas often fail to understand that only after ideas have been filtered through real-world experience do we know whether they are right or wrong. Most turn out to be wrong.

When my wife dragged me to a department store to buy myself some new clothes, the salesman there said: "Some men would wear their clothes until they were rags if they didn't have wives."

No matter what you say, some people will hear only what they want to hear.

Old age at least gives me an excuse for not being very good at things that I was not very good at when I was young.

It is amazing how many people consider it an answer to criticism to call it "bashing."

Apologizing for sins committed by other people in the past seems to have become a political vogue. Considering all the wrongs committed around the world for centuries—against people of every race, color, creed, national origin, and sexual orientation—if we are going to apologize for all that, we are not going to have any time left to get anything else done.

The promotion of “self-esteem” in our schools has been so successful that people feel free to spout off about all sorts of things—and see no reason why their opinions should not be taken as seriously as the views of people who actually know what they are talking about.

Being in the right place at the right time plays a bigger role in our lives than many are ready to admit. Earle Combs played center field for the New York Yankees for more than a decade and had the same lifetime batting average as Joe DiMaggio (.325). Yet Combs is virtually forgotten, because he played in the shadow of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig.

Ours may become the first civilization destroyed, not by the power of our enemies, but by the ignorance of our teachers and the dangerous nonsense they are teaching our children. In an age of artificial intelligence, they are creating artificial stupidity.

One of the great meaningless phrases of our times is: “I take full responsibility.” This does not mean that you are prepared to pay the consequences for what you have done. On the contrary, this statement is usually offered instead of taking the consequences.

The political left loves to refer disdainfully to people who have “faith in the free market.” Mountains of empirical evidence

from countries around the world on the superior performances of free markets are thus dismissed as mere faith. Meanwhile, the repeated failures of government-run economies are attributed to personal mistakes by Stalin, Mao or others—thereby preserving the left’s faith in political control of economic decisions, if only the right people were in charge.

Real teaching is real work. That is why schools go in for so many “activities” and “projects” instead.

The heaviest Miss America was supposed to have weighed 143 pounds. That was back in the days when women were women.

A recent poll shows that a majority of blacks, whites, Asians and Hispanics do not think the Census should be classifying people as black, white, Asian and Hispanic.

Advocates of rent control and tenants’ rights laws often complain about dishonest and unscrupulous landlords. It never seems to occur to them that, when laws make it impossible for honest and decent landlords to make a living, it is virtually inevitable that many rent-controlled buildings will end up in the hands of people who are neither honest nor decent, since they are the only ones who can make any money out of them.

The dogma that no culture is superior to any other is contradicted by facts at every turn. Virtually every culture is superior to some other cultures at something. How many cultures can brew beer like the Germans, create wine like the French or make Sake like the Japanese?

Virtually every education guru of the 20th century, from John Dewey in the past to Howard Gardner today, has written in a vague, lofty and slippery style. Whether this has been due to confusion, camouflage or cowardice, what has been avoided

at all costs have been straightforward statements that could be checked against the facts.

Big-spending, big-government liberals know that they will have a hard time being elected as what they are, so they pretend to be something else. Then, when their opponents expose their phoniness, that is greeted with horror in the media as “negative campaigning.” Have we become so squeamish that we would rather elect someone to high office on false pretenses than hear an unpleasant truth?

Bumper sticker: “Gun Control: Use both hands.”

In the American legal system, the accused is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty. To some on the political left, he is presumed to be innocent even after being proven guilty.

Among the many dishonest polls whose results are reported solemnly in the media is one that said there were “4,000 dead children” as a result of gun violence and then asked: “Should gun laws be seriously tightened?” Most of the “children” referred to in such statistics are teenage gang members, not toddlers who find a loaded gun in the closet. These teenage criminals are not about to be deterred by gun laws.

Our national problems usually do not cause nearly as much harm as the solutions.

How can “hate crimes” laws be constitutional, when the 14th Amendment specifies “equal protection of the laws” for all, not special protection for special groups?

Government officials have a lot of nerve to be sounding off about the “greed” of oil companies. The federal government alone gets several times as much in taxes from every gallon of

gasoline as oil companies get in profit. But government is never considered greedy, not even when it takes over half the money of some people who have died, instead of letting it go to their children.

While American students go to school almost as many days as students in other countries, the number of hours they spend on core subjects like history, math and science in high school is less than half the hours spent on these subjects in Japan, Germany or France.

There is nothing egalitarian about lower intellectual standards in our schools. Children from more fortunate homes will get higher standards in those homes. It is the other children who most need some outside source of the things necessary to realize their potential.

World War II films on the History Channel show the desperate courage of the men who fought then. What a painful contrast with the cheap cowardice of the politicians who got them into such a mess in the first place.

We used to have day care centers back in my time. We called them homes.

When the history of grossness is written, our times may well be called its golden age.

If a politician had a coat of arms, it would probably be a weasel on a background of waffles and mush.

Sometimes the hardest thing about paying the monthly bills is finding them in the first place, under all the junk mail.

Nobody would put as little thought and effort into buying an

automobile as they put into deciding who to elect as President of the United States.

A friend from India told me that a countryman of his said: "I want to go to America. I want to see a country where poor people are fat."

Our foreign aid may not have helped many Third World countries, but it has probably helped the economy of Switzerland, where many Third World despots keep their own bank accounts.

It has long been said that the President of the United States—whoever he is—is president of all the people. But he is not president of all the fish, reptiles and other supposedly endangered species that are constantly taking precedence over human needs.

It is amazing how many of the intelligentsia call it "greed" to want to keep what you have earned, but not greed to want to take away what somebody else has earned, and let politicians use it to buy votes.

We have tears for when we have nothing else.

An American flag is more likely to fly on a mobile home than on a mansion.

Someone said that the light at the end of the tunnel could be a freight train heading your way.

As someone who has worked both in private industry and in academia, whenever I hear about academics wanting to teach ethics to people in business, I want to puke.

Big differences that can be worked out are less dangerous than small differences that can't be.

Too many people in the media seem to think that being objective means criticizing "both sides," when in fact it means an unbiased search for the truth. You can do objective research on the Nazis and then conclude that they were pretty rotten people.

The strongest argument for socialism is that it sounds good. The strongest argument against socialism is that it doesn't work. But those who live by words will always have a soft spot in their hearts for socialism because it sounds so good.

Whatever you may think about the death penalty, it has the lowest recidivism rate of any of the ways of fighting crime.

Some things are so obvious that, if you have to explain them, you can't explain them.

Guess who said this: "Yes, the president should resign. He has lied to the American people, time and time again, and betrayed their trust." It was said by Bill Clinton—about Richard Nixon.

Few skills are so well rewarded as the ability to convince parasites that they are victims.

The grand fallacy of the political left is that decisions are better made by third parties who pay no price for being wrong. Much of the 20th century has been taken up proving how tragically mistaken that theory is, all around the world. But those who want to be the third-party decision-makers still remain undaunted.

Proposals for reform are often dismissed because they have no “realistic” chance of being adopted. But none of the major reforms of the past had any realistic chance of being adopted when they were first proposed.

Sign in a store window: “Free ride in a police car for shoplifters.”

Bumper sticker on a van in Berkeley: “Thank you for not breeding.”

The kinds of people we need in government are precisely the kinds of people who are most reluctant to go into government—people who understand the inherent dangers of power and feel a distaste for using it, but who may do so for a few years as a civic duty. The worst kind of people to have in government are those who see it as a golden opportunity to impose their own superior wisdom and virtue on others.

Jack Dempsey once said that nobody who had any other way of making a living would become a professional boxer and Joe DiMaggio said that no boy from a rich family ever made the big leagues.

While waiting for my wife to get ready so that we could go out, I told her that I was pacing back and forth. “That’s good exercise,” she said.

When will people in the media realize that government is not about the careers of politicians or the maneuvers of special interest groups—which is all that many of them seem to want to talk about? Is it so hard for media people to inform themselves on the substance of the issues themselves and the impact of policies on a quarter of a billion Americans who live outside the Beltway?

One of the scariest things about our times is how easy it is to scare people and start a political stampede. There are people who could be upset if they were told that half of all Americans earn less than the median income—though of course that is the way median income is defined.

Ethnic identity movements are ways of getting rid of minor discomforts by creating major catastrophes.

One of the reasons for conspiracy theories is an assumption that people in high places always know what they are doing. When they do something that makes no sense, devious reasons are imagined by conspiracy theorists, when in fact it may be due to plain old ignorance and incompetence.

So many parents today are so permissive that they can hardly be called parents. Perhaps “adult hosts” might be a more accurate term.

Do you know of any other written agreement that can be ended by one side as easily as a marriage?

The right to die all too readily becomes the right to kill—especially since those who are dead cannot dispute the story told by those who are still living.

Social Security forces individuals to save for their old age. But it also enables the government to spend those savings immediately, so that the country as a whole is not saving anything this way. That is why old-age pensions will have to be paid from money taken from others in the future.

There was a time when we honored those who created the prosperity and the freedom that we enjoy. Today we honor the complainers and sue the creators. Perhaps that is inevita-

ble in an era when we no longer count our blessings, but instead count all our unfulfilled wishes.

Will Rogers said that the way to end highway congestion is to have the government build the cars and private industry build the highways.

If we could take our great grandparents around on a tour of America as it is today, they would not only be astonished by all the things we have, they would be even more astonished by all the whining because we don't have more.

By being too squeamish to punish "first offenders," we are being cruel in the long-run. Instead of nipping some criminal careers in the bud, we let young people think the law is a joke—which can then lead them into more crimes and eventually hard time in prison.

According to *Sports Illustrated*, nearly half the high school sports injuries that lead to paralysis or death occur among cheerleaders.

You seldom see the word "risque" any more. We have gotten so gross that the word would have no meaning now.

All too often, we do smart things only after exhausting every conceivable dumb thing we could have done.

My favorite diet drink has zero calories. But it makes me so hungry that I eat like a horse.

Has anyone ever asked what a full professor is full of? In some trendy new fields, the title "empty professor" would be more appropriate.

Do you sometimes feel that you are necessary but not sufficient?

Few things are more disgusting than seeing squeamish people giving themselves airs of moral superiority because they lack the guts to do what needs to be done to preserve the institutions and the society from which they benefit.

If we can't get rid of so-called "vocational education" in our public schools, then at least we can have the honesty to stop calling it vocational education and call it what it is—non-academic courses. These courses are often of no use in any vocation.

The welfare state is the oldest con game in the world. First you take the people's money quietly and then you give some of it back to them flamboyantly.

If politicians were serious about day care for children, instead of just sloganizing about it, nothing they could do would improve the quality of child care more than by lifting the heavy burden of taxation that forces so many families to have both parents working.

If there is one common denominator among public school teachers and administrators, it is that the very idea of testing their beliefs against evidence never seems to occur to them. The educational dogmas of the day simply reign supreme until new dogmas come along.

The least productive people are usually the ones who are most in favor of holding meetings.

Many vices are just virtues that have been carried too far.

The only thing better than “hands-on” experience is hands-off experience—enough experience to understand that some things will turn out better if left alone.

Teachers who think that they have a right to use other people’s children as guinea pigs for social experiments should be fired.

When someone defined “baroque” as “not having enough Monet,” I said that I thought Monet was the root of all evil. To this a reader replied: “There you Gogh again. It’s the ‘love’ of Monet that’s the root of all evil.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt called December 7th, 1941 “a date that will live in infamy.” Not at Harvard, Stanford or Princeton, where less than half of all students interviewed knew the date of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The political left always wants to equalize expenditures per school or school districts. But they show no interest in equalizing expenditures per child, regardless of what school that child attends, including private schools that accept vouchers.

Karl Spence of the *Chattanooga Free Press* aptly characterizes the views of the liberal intelligentsia as: “Let my conscience be your guide.”

One of the common failings among honorable people is a failure to appreciate how thoroughly dishonorable some other people can be and how dangerous it is to trust them.

The next time some academics tell you how important “diversity” is, ask how many Republicans there are in their sociology department.

Sign on a San Francisco automobile dealer's wall: "We cheat the other guy and pass the savings on to you."

They say cream rises to the top. However, among government employees, the cream tends to leave after a few years, allowing mediocrity to rise to the top.

"Entitlement" is not only the opposite of achievement, it undermines incentives to do all the hard work that leads to achievement.

One of the most fashionable notions of our times is that social problems like poverty and oppression breed wars. Most wars, however, are started by well-fed people with time on their hands to dream up half-baked ideologies or grandiose ambitions, and to nurse real or imagined grievances.

Any philanthropist who is in doubt as to the best place to put his money to help others should invest in the private economy, where it will serve purposes determined by the consuming public, rather than by coteries of self-righteous and self-important people spending other people's money.

A politician once declared: "Even if I said that, I was misquoted."

Some husbands are insanely jealous—and some are sanely jealous.

Someone has claimed that men think about sex every 8 seconds. The way some women dress suggests that they want to make it more frequent than that.

If you have always believed that everyone should play by the same rules and be judged by the same standards, that would

have gotten you labeled a radical 60 years ago, a liberal 30 years ago and a racist today.

People who oppose school vouchers say that we should improve the public schools instead—but they never specify any time limit. Are we to continue through all eternity to pour more and more billions of dollars down a bottomless pit, without regard to whether or not any improvement results and without ever considering any alternatives?

Liberalism is totalitarianism with a human face.

Many of the people who are called “the homeless” could more accurately be called “the rentless.” Often they have a roof over their head, but someone else is paying for it, usually the taxpayers. Similarly, many of those who are called “the hungry” are in fact being fed every day, but at someone else’s expense.

One of the most ridiculous causes of automobile accidents is that some people are very eager to save very small amounts of time.

Letter from a working mother whose children are now grown: “Today we have our payoff. We live in a beautiful home and I drive a new Cadillac. I have literally everything I want. My husband buys me enormous gifts. People say we are rich. I would burn my house to the ground if I could go back to that day at the day care when I pulled away from clinging hands and cried all the way to work.”

There are many things that are much easier to maintain than to repair—ranging from automobiles to people’s confidence in you.

For those who like to learn from other people’s mistakes, here

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is a recent experience of mine: Having decided that I wasn't getting enough exercise, I went out and got too much exercise. The net result was a week on crutches and no exercise at all.

If you don't believe in the innate unreasonableness of human beings, just try raising children.

War makes me respect soldiers and despise politicians.

The kind of people who talk about the "root causes" of crime never include leniency.

Deception is one of the quickest ways to gain little things and lose big things.