



# THE MIDWAY REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND CULTURE

JONATHAN WILLIAMS *on* **DEFINING TERRORISM**

GARETT ROSE *on* **QUESTIONS AND RIDDLES**

J. THOMAS BENNETT *on* **TONY BLAIR**

YESHA SUTARIA *on* **REAL ID AND REFUGEES**

MARK MEADOR *on* **THE LIBERTARIAN ILLUSION**

MORDECHAI LEVY-EICHEL *on* **THE JUDAISM PROBLEM**

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RITA KOGANZON *on* **READING FOR MEANING**

BOBBY ZACHARIAS *on* **A BEIJING CELEBRATION**

# THE MIDWAY REVIEW

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# THE MIDWAY REVIEW

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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I was impressed by the first issue of the *Midway Review*. The contributions were intelligent, respectful and adhered to the journal's statement of being "a nonpartisan...forum for civil debate...and for serious reflection." But David Kaye's review ("Here Comes Your Man," Spring 2006) of Harvey Mansfield's *Manliness*, was none of these things.

Superficially, he strays from polemic, but the review is little more than a thinly veiled homophobic, misogynist tract. While Mansfield's negative argument might tell us that there is not enough of this "manliness" anymore, he never really fleshes out what that means. Neither does Kaye. Why? Because "manliness" would certainly be a return to oppressive, queer-bashing times when women were at the will of their husbands, denied access to the public sphere and when sexual violence against them went unpunished. What Kaye might not understand (or perhaps he does) is that "manliness" and "misogyny/queer-bashing" are not mutually exclusive; they are practically synonymous. Today the problems of gender and sexual inequity are far from solved. But those against the idea that human beings—no matter their gender or sexual orientation—deserve equal rights and dignity are, Mansfield aside, deservedly less vocal and legitimate.

I find Kaye's obsequious "review" analogous to a white-supremacist defending David Duke or an Aryan praising David Irving. For hundreds of years, women and homosexuals have been oppressed by a patriarchy in the name of "manliness" and "a man's right." It is spurious for Mansfield or Kaye to give currency to their adolescent chauvinism (and insecure masculinity) by invoking Machiavelli or Nietzsche—or Plato, who wrote a very "unmanly" paean to homosexual love, "The Symposium". That such an article was accepted by a respectable publication shows how prevalent misogyny and homophobia remain among powerful, educated men. For publishing Kaye's despicable

piece, the editors deserve serious reprimand.  
—Aaron Greenberg, second-year in the College

*The force of this letter comes not from its argument but from its acrimony: the ugly expression of feckless, which is to say unmanly, moral indignation. Greenberg's critique is really a claim, easily made and easily refuted. Manliness transcends Greenberg's vulgar gloss; it is not nearly the same as "misogyny/queer-bashing," which is more fitting as a characterization of "insecure masculinity." That Greenberg cannot imagine positive—or, dare I say, noble—attributes among his male forerunners shows how stifling and restrictive the gender-neutral society has been to its inheritors' conception of human nature. Mansfield is blessed with a more colorful and inclusive vision. He differs from misogynists and homophobes in that he is a gentleman, and from white supremacists and Aryans in that he does not confuse truth with myth.*

*If Greenberg is uncomfortable with the word "manliness," he should replace it with the word "courage." This meets the argument halfway, and puts him in the company of that queer-bashing misogynist Aristotle, for whom manly virtue was bravery in battle. Women and homosexuals have been courageous in their struggle for equal rights long before Greenberg enlisted himself in the cause, although he is right to say that "the problems of gender and sexual inequity are far from solved." But that is the task of the state, not of society. The recovery of this distinction between state and society (or public and private) is the meaning or purpose of Mansfield's *Manliness*, which I indicated to those who read in a manner that is neither cursory nor narrow-minded.*

—David Kaye

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# WHAT IS TERRORISM? AN ANSWER

Jonathan Williams

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*'No law or ordinance is mightier  
than understanding.'* – Plato

It seems fashionable these days for essayists to ask, “What is terrorism?” and then to subvert this dangerous question by exposing the term as nothing more than a political convenience, a linguistic bogeyman. Such authors employ this rhetorical maneuver as the springboard for a variety of persuasive arguments on politics, international relations, or philosophy, eschewing the straight answer. By way of contrast, I offer a small, subjective, but concrete description of terrorism in today’s world, an explanation that I hope many readers will find surprising. Specifically, I hope to address a few misconceptions common to the American viewpoint, distill some generalities from the available data, and close with a minimum of speculation.

First we need to share a definition, and I suggest the following: *terrorism is the deliberate use of violence by non-state organizations to achieve their political goals through influence on a group distinct from the organization’s direct target.* There are over a hundred other, ‘official’ definitions, and even within our own government one can find radically different notions in the USA PATRIOT Act, the Department of Defense, and U.S. Federal Code. I choose the above definition for its freedom from anyone’s bias but my own, and for its relatively broad scope, but will not defend it against the many viable alternatives, as such an effort would require a separate essay altogether. Before proceeding, I would like to note that my definition excludes a few of the many grey areas of this debate:

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organized crime without political agenda, assassinations of politicians simply to remove them from office, government oppression (though not government-sanctioned oppression), and violence perpetrated by individuals not acting under the orders (or at least with the approval) of a larger group.

What have we left? Over the summer, I researched eighty-three terrorist organizations that fit these criteria, encompassing the overwhelming majority of extant terrorist groups as well as many others from the past forty years. The groups were largely selected from online databases, including the 2003 State Department list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, the MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, and the FAS Intelligence Resource Program’s list of ‘Para-States’). Although the focus of my research was to predict group radicalization, I collected a wide variety of data on each organization, such as nation of origin or ideological alignment. A simple look at these numbers gives an interesting characterization of terrorism today, and goes along way toward debunking three notions of terrorism that I wager are held by many Americans: namely, that terrorism is predominately a transnational phenomenon, that terrorism today is closely linked to the Jihadist movement, and that terrorism is an unsuccessful attempt to achieve unrealistic aims.

America lacks the domestic terrorism that its size and diversity might suggest. There are occasional individuals acting in isolation, such as Eric Rudolph, McVeigh and Nichols, or Ted Kaczynski, along with a few low-profile organizations such as The Order that struggle to muster the impact that the Symbionese Liberation Army or the Weather Underground held thirty years before. But by and large, and especially after 9/11, terrorism against the United States and its interests has been most

visibly the work of foreign nationals, notably those associated with the Al-Qaeda network. Such a perspective obscures the fact that transnational terrorist organizations are extreme rarities. Of the eighty-three groups I studied, over ninety percent picked targets only within their nations of origin or in neighboring states with which they pursued a border conflict. Ranked by deadliness (as measured in attributable deaths per year), only two transnational organizations can be found in the top twenty: the Armed Islamic Group (no. 5) and Al-Qaeda (no. 7). Instead of foreign saboteurs, nearly three quarters of terrorists are Communists, Nationalists, or Islamists fighting to effect change in the rule of their homeland.

As my last point might already suggest, few terrorist organizations espouse a radical interpretation of Islam or perpetrate their violence in the name of *jihad*. In classifying the motivations of each terrorist group in my study, I found only eight Jihadist groups within the sample of eighty-three terrorist organizations, and two within the twenty deadliest groups: Al-Qaeda and its sister organization, Al-Qaeda in Iraq. True, over 60% of all groups in my sample are based in states or provinces with a large Muslim population, but these numbers are deceptive. The overwhelming majority are nationalists with the secular goal of achieving autonomy from another state, or Islamists who are hoping to reshape their nation's government according to the laws of *sharia*. Jihadists have a very different goal: to wage war against a targeted populace—Muslims or nonbelievers—that has fallen away from the group's interpretation of Islamic precepts. The United States The last misconception I wish to address is that terrorism is simply a gesture of frustration, that terrorists enter into a no-win situation where at best they may martyr themselves to a hopeless cause. Admittedly, many groups stand little chance of accomplishing their goals, whether due to small membership, poor command and control, or capable adversaries within local law enforcement. But there are success stories. Republican forces in Northern Ireland, the ETA in Spain, and militants fighting for a Palestinian state have all been able to bring their respective

governments to the bargaining table and achieve important concessions. Even more successfully, terrorist organizations such as the LTTE (“Tamil Tigers”), Nepalese Maoist rebels, the FARC, The Lord's Resistance Army, and Hezbollah have achieved a great measure of autonomy from federal government, and run considerable portions of their host countries. In another form of success, the Japanese Red Army launched a string of plane hijackings in 1975, and used the resulting hostages to free all of their imprisoned compatriots. Shortly thereafter, the JRA began to fade away, though ringleader Fusako Shigenobu was found and arrested in 2000. However, for each of these ‘successes’ there are also many terrorist organizations that have forced their audiences (usually national governments) to listen, and to spend billions in response. Economies have been shattered by terrorist activity, and one group alone can be responsible for tens of thousands of deaths — both the Armed Islamic Group and the Kurdistan Worker's Party far eclipse the death tolls of Al-Qaeda.

A picture of terrorism gradually emerges: a largely domestic phenomenon in which organizations shape their nation's governance through violence, though rarely to the extent that they hope. To add depth to this sketch, allow me to directly illustrate two characteristics of terrorism, rather than continue to define what it is not.

First, terrorist groups emerge from a complex and largely unknown process. I do not refer here to the individual psychological drives which spur the creation of or affiliation with a terrorist organization, nor even the broad social forces which foster such attitudes. No, even the immediate, observable formation of terrorist groups are difficult to generalize. For example, twenty percent of the organizations in my sample were deliberately created by a state actor or an established, legitimate political party in order to carry out activities useful to the parent organization but condemned in normal political practice. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, various successors to the IRA, and several groups operating in Kashmir afford ready examples of this origin. But then again, many groups emerge from

nonviolent political organizations, as the Weather Underground emerged from SDS or Hamas from the Muslim Brotherhood. In these cases the terrorist group is a separate entity from their parent organization, but groups such as People Against Gangsterism and Drugs can take a nonviolent concept and internally radicalize toward terrorism. Nor are leaders easily typecast: the masterminds of terrorist groups are alternately scholars and chess champions, guerilla fighters, charismatic politicians, and even some outlandishly creative villains that would seem more at home in a Bond movie.

Second, terrorist groups do not exist in a vacuum. The interplay between terrorist organizations is a rich field of study itself, providing a detailed chronicle of splinter groups, rivals, allies, mother and daughter organizations. Some are pitted against each other because they are on opposite sides of a conflict, e.g. the JKLF and Hizbul Mujahidin (fighting over Kashmir), while others are rivals because they are on the same side, such as the PFLP and the DFLP within the Palestinian Liberation Organization. In a more curious example, twenty-seven separate Nepalese communist

parties emerged after World War II, a protoplasmic collective that covered every shade and nuance of communist theory, existing up to thirteen at a time. Only two actually died out, the others were engulfed by their peers or split apart — but one and only one radicalized toward terrorism (the Communist Party of Nepal Maoists) while others with near identical platforms did not. Terrorists remain very much aware of their peer groups, and to reduce one's focus to a particular group and its targets often oversimplifies the situation at hand.

At the risk of similar oversimplification, my answer to the titular question is now complete. Terrorism refers to a large set of militant political organizations that seek change through the indirect use of violence, organizations that are mutually aware and whose origins are poorly understood. Usually, these groups advocate radical changes to the government of their homeland, though a minority holds other goals. If all this seems anticlimactic, I encourage the reader to take this small expository essay as a starting point from which one can delve into deeper persuasive arguments; if instead some of this comes as a surprise, then so much the better.

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# QUESTIONS AND RIDDLES

Garett Rose

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We point to certain questions and call them philosophical, ‘what is justice?’ for example. However, I could create similar questions (‘what is gravity?’) and be on less sturdy ground when I refer to them as philosophical questions. Perhaps the difference is not in the questions themselves but rather in the approach one takes in responding to the question. In essence, this says that *all* questions can be taken in a philosophical way. However, there are clearly questions that cannot be taken in such a way (‘would you like fries with that?’ for example). In any case, that one can apply a philosophical method to a wide range of questions does not imply that there is not a type of question to which the method is best suited. All questions are not created equal. There is such a thing as a poor philosophical question and a good philosophical question. I could not outline all the attributes of a good philosophical question, or even a significant number of them. However, in this article I would like argue that a philosophical question is a kind of riddle. In order to support this contention, I will first explore the central structure of riddles. After that, I will compare philosophical questions and riddles, and analyze where they are similar and where they part ways.

Riddles are questions in which the way to the solution is not clear. Take the common riddle ‘Greater than God, and more evil than the devil. The rich need me and the poor have me. What am I?’ The answer is: ‘nothing.’ Contrast this with another question: ‘what are the opening lines of the Bible?’ One may not know the lines, but it is fairly clear how one can go about finding them. The question about the Bible is oriented towards

the answer; it assumes one is able to find the answer and challenges one to find it. In riddles the orientation is pointed towards how one gets to the answer. They challenge one to figure out how to get to the answer. Put differently, solving the riddle is not knowing the answer, *but knowing why the answer is the answer*. To connect this to the earlier example: if one knows that ‘nothing’ is the answer to the riddle but didn’t know why, one cannot claim to have solved the riddle. Riddles take the answer and obscure the path to it through the question. This obscuration can occur in many ways: some riddles play on words and some use odd associations (such as the example used above). Overall, though, the way to the answer is obscured by questions that are constructed to confuse our normal methods of problem solving.

Another key aspect of riddles is that they tantalize us with answers: one knows it is solvable, one can see the answer deep within the question, but one just doesn’t quite know how to get there. A possible solution is tried, but it does not quite fit and another is searched for. This continues until the solution that fits perfectly is found. In the riddle, the answer wants to be discovered and to let itself be seen as it is. Unfortunately, the question continues to hold it back and veil the way to it. In order to accomplish this obscuration, most riddles play with everyday language. They are dependent on how we define and utilize words. By appropriating these definitions and uses, and by putting them to use in entirely unfamiliar ways (for example, it is abnormal to define ‘nothing’ in terms such as ‘greater than God and more evil than the devil’), riddles cast a fog over our normal ways of dealing with language. They force us to consider language outside of the parameters with which we are normally comfortable.

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Before I begin my analysis of where riddles and philosophical questions are different and similar, it is necessary to enumerate what exactly I have in mind when I refer to ‘philosophical questions.’ Generally, I am referring to that special set of questions that has motivated philosophers throughout the ages. Despite great change and upheaval in everything from politics to waste management, these questions remain. Prime examples of these are ‘what is justice?’; ‘how does one live a good life?’; ‘what is the meaning of being?’; ‘can philosopher’s do anything practical?’ etc.

Simply put, these questions are riddles that have no answer. Given my statement that riddles require prior knowledge of the answer to work, this may seem odd. However, knowing the answer is required for a *solvable* riddle, not for a riddle. This means that philosophical questions are impossible to solve, but that is precisely the point: *philosophical questions are not solvable*. Philosophical questions can only be dealt with provisionally; they can only be responded to, not answered. They are slippery little fiends, and every time you think that you have a handle on one, you suddenly hear them taunting you from behind. Take any of the examples that were listed above; these questions have been explored and expounded upon since Plato, yet we are still asking them today and are apparently no closer to solving them.

The central commonality between riddles and philosophical questions is that both obscure the way to arrive at a solution or (in the case of philosophical questions) a response. However, riddles obscure by blocking certain paths, whereas philosophical questions obscure by opening many paths. They tantalize us with a world of responses. When we ask what justice is, for example, we are inundated with possible ways to respond. We could say that justice is what the courts dictate. Or, that justice is determined by God. Or, that justice is determined by natural laws. However, none of these responses satisfies the question entirely; none are able to put the question to rest completely. Even after finishing the *Republic*, certainly among the greatest works

on the nature of justice, we are still left wondering what justice is. Everyone can agree on the answer to a riddle, yet few can agree on a good response to a philosophical question (let alone an answer).

Even if I gave a response to the question of justice, it would not count for much if I did not explain myself. The particular response is not worth very much by itself. As with regular riddles, what counts is not the response itself, but the reason why that response is a response. Furthermore, the lack of set answers for philosophical questions compounds the importance of the reason over the response itself. In a straight riddle the reasons for the response can range from the stupid to the profound, but it hardly matters because the answer is unimpeachable. In a philosophical question, the reasons for a particular response have to be good reasons. They cannot be unsound, else they will be rejected. Indeed, the core value of a particular response to a philosophical question rises and falls with the soundness of the reasoning behind the response. Philosophical questions are impractical; they have no readily apparent utility. They can, by turns, be irritating, annoying, maddening, circuitous, abstruse, and perhaps even silly. However, they derive their value from other sources. As riddles, they challenge us to think differently from the way we normally would. As unanswerable riddles, they demand that we consider multiple methods of thinking. In essence, when approached seriously and with commitment, philosophical questions can illuminate the structure of our own thought and allow us to improve it.

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# REVIVING TONY BLAIR

J. Thomas Bennett

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Rumors of British Prime Minister Tony Blair's political death have been greatly exaggerated. The coverage of Blair's recent announcement that he will leave office has been deceptive. Explicitly or implicitly, too much of the coverage attributes pressure on Blair to the Iraq war. For example, the *New York Times* began their reporting on Blair's announcement, "Bending to pressure, Prime Minister Tony Blair announced today that he would leave office within the next 12 months." Cowell, Alan. "Blair Says He Plans to Resign in Next Year." *NYT*. 7 Sept. 2006. The choice of words immediately conveys a misleading impression of causation. Whether or not it is true, opponents of the war—on both sides of the Atlantic—incorrectly assume that the pressure on Blair is due to the Iraq war. They then wrongly infer that unpopularity itself proves a failed policy in Iraq.

Blair is not stepping down because he is "bending to pressure" arising from Iraq. That is a convenient and self-serving interpretation. It is old news that Blair will step down, and the reason has never been solely Iraq. Left out of the coverage is the significant fact that Blair said two years ago he would not seek a fourth term, and that even before the Iraq war the rigid left opposed him. There needs to be some balance in assessing his legacy and current position. Besides, the jury is still out on Iraq.

Among independent-minded people in America—especially younger people—Blair is considered a great political figure, very much like Bill Clinton, minus the baggage. Blair's place in history is actually secured, as only the second Prime Minister in British history to win three consecutive elections.

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Just as important, he is a thinking man, who popularized an intelligent and much-needed new way of viewing the world. He has been an inspiration during the Bush years, and changed the face of government in Western Europe. The domestic platform of France's two current presidential frontrunners attests to this: They are essentially Blairite, indicating that Europe is embracing a non-leftist form of social democracy. Almost none of the coverage of Blair's recent announcement mentions this, or the Prime Minister's overall influence. Thus, it would be unsound to reason that the British are turning completely against Blair and the war, and that this is why he is leaving office.

What Blair is doing that is new is to give a timetable for when he will step down, a timetable he hadn't offered before. Further on in their article, the *Times* states as much: "Two years ago Mr. Blair said he would not fight a fourth election, signaling a handover to Mr. Brown." To draw the implication from this that the war in Iraq is a failure is nonsense. War critics are far too eager to conclude from Blair's decrease in popularity that the war is lost. Remember that for the American left, popularity was never a standard for the justness or success of policy when Bush's popularity was at its peak. During Bush's halcyon days of 70% approval ratings, critics of the Iraq war rose to eloquence in denouncing the false connection between popularity and morality. Yet today, they evoke gross popularity in an argument that military involvement in Iraq cannot achieve its ends. Aside from inconsistency, the most convincing refutation of Blair's critics is the fact that neither of his likely followers opposes the war in Iraq. For his part, *after* Blair's announcement and the ensuing speculation, Gordon Brown said he will be "holding to the policy" of confronting terrorism in Iraq. Conservative

party leader David Cameron fully supports the Iraq war. In fact, Mr. Cameron is positioning himself to be seen as “Mr. Blair’s rightful heir.”

It is simply not true that supporting the war in Iraq is a recipe for political failure. Australia’s John Howard, a staunch supporter of the war, has just beaten a would-be successor and is seeking a record fifth term. And we should all keep in mind that the Democratic Party’s great hope will be hawkish Hillary Clinton.

Blair has faced criticism before, and his record silenced it. While he was running for PM, a typical criticism was that his tactic was to “propose a radical idea, listen to the criticism, retreat,” and that he was “slippery.” That certainly has not proven to be the case. Before he was elected, there was a question whether Blair could garner the “intellectual force, both to exorcise Labour’s socialist instincts, and to replace them with something new.” Before Blair, the Labour Party couldn’t bring itself to insist on efficiency in social spending or responsibility from aid recipients. In office, he made fairness and accountability real principles, applicable to all. This shouldn’t have upset anyone, but it did. Blair said, “I want to be remembered as the prime minister who reforms the welfare state,” and he did exactly that.

Since becoming Prime Minister, Blair has been able to do in equivalent in Britain what the left and Democrats here in America have not: defeat the ascendant conservatives who toppled the New Deal coalition. Britain’s conservative Tory party has endured its longest period out of office since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Blair has forced a rethinking of conservatism in England, while reenergizing social democracy. Indeed, David Cameron has had to call for a “real intellectual revival of conservatism.” Ultimately, Blair’s greatest accomplishment was to prove that the two opposing partisan ideologies were intellectually corrupted and flabby, and that they should be actively discarded. Herein lays the unfortunate aspect of the current situation: the left is scrambling to sink the man who saved liberalism from itself, and in the pro-

cess greatly improved government in Britain. Blair explains in eloquent terms that *transcending* left-right divisions requires the idealism and boldness so lacking in modern political culture. Americans recognize the similarity with President Clinton, particularly on the matter of welfare reform. As for the issue of Iraq, Blair represents the strongest proof available that taking a proactive—including military—position is sometimes required for a sophisticated, liberal internationalism. Most dangerous of all to the status quo is that communitarian and even neoconservative thinking now have currency as possible paths to the common good. Not only will his influence outlast the scandal over Iraq, but the war in Iraq could itself prove in the future to be Blair’s greatest vindication.

Given these successes, there is another possible interpretation of the Labour Party’s pressure on Blair. As the *Financial Times* reports, “Mr. Blair has never been loved or trusted by the party he has led since 1994 and he offers little affection in return.” There has always been a grudge towards Blair by some within the party, because he was an innovator willing to push sacred cows aside. Blairite education, health care, and welfare reforms have conflicted with entrenched interests, even though they have been effective and popular nationally. Together with Blair’s willingness to let Israel take an offensive stance in response to terrorism, this is enough to upset many Labour members.

There is some excuse for the belief that the war in Iraq is hurting Blair. Politicians running for parliamentary elections fear that those elections may turn in to a referendum on the “unpopular”—as the *Wall Street Journal* calls it—war in Iraq. However, recall that Blair’s two likely successors are on public record saying they will maintain Britain’s commitment in Iraq. If opposing Blair is such a winning strategy, Labour would not be trailing the conservatives by as many as nine points in some polls.

It is time to look at the big picture, which recent coverage seems incapable of or unwilling to do. In a *Financial Times* editorial, we learn “[T]his has been a successful government that has presided

over unbroken economic growth. It is not massively below popularity levels common for second- or third-term governments, yet it is wallowing in introspective factionalism that has lost sight of the public interest.” That factionalism deserves just as much blame for Blair’s position as the war in Iraq. The resentment towards Blair from parts of Europe comes from a related source. Before he became Prime Minister and well before the war, Blair made it clear that if it were in British interests, he’d accept being “isolated” in Europe. From the start, he’s been poised to split with the left, and the left has been looking for an excuse to oppose him.

Now, Blair is criticized for being too close to President Bush. This is where things become very interesting and relevant for politics here, and for Blair’s legacy. If Hillary Clinton were to come to office supporting the war, then critics will be set

back. Some will be silenced. The rest will be forced to produce an anti-war argument based strictly on the merits of American involvement, and on the benefits of their proposed alternatives, namely withdrawal and capitulation. The burden of proof will be on critics to convince the public that playing into the hands of anti-democratic, violent groups will make the world safer. Up to this point, criticisms of the war have consisted mostly of cheap ad hominem arguments against President Bush, in the form of belittling his intelligence, supposed religious fanaticism, and conspiratorial connections with big oil. Critics will have to do better than that with Hillary Clinton. She will embody the intelligent case in favor of prevailing in Iraq. In short, she will bring an agenda and mindset akin to Blair’s New Labour. Should Iraq stabilize, Blair’s vindication may be right around the corner, just after so many short-sighted accounts of his demise.

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§ *Financial Times*, “Editorial,” September 8, 2006.

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# 'REAL ID' CAPABLE OF ANYTHING BUT

Yesha Sutaria

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*"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*  
—Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus"

With the signing into law of the REAL ID Act, the light in that lamp was all but doused, casting a pall over that golden door and making it nearly impossible to distinguish friend from foe among those hopeful souls who wait at its threshold. The Act, authored by Jim Sensenbrenner, bears all the hallmarks of legislation supported by this Republican Representative from Wisconsin who, as Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, abruptly cut off a debate on the renewal of the USA PATRIOT Act (PATRIOT) and broke House parliamentary procedure by walking out on Democratic colleagues who wanted to address concerns regarding human rights violations at Guantanamo Bay and the status of the war in Iraq (his previous claims to fame include helping author PATRIOT and advocating criminal penalties for those who provide humanitarian aid to illegal immigrants).

REAL ID hinges on definitions and classifications that are so broad and sweeping that they widely clear the bar for dangerously ambiguous terminology that had been set by its progenitor, PATRIOT. This did not stop the House from passing the bill (261-161-11) on February 10, 2005; the House's willingness to pass any legislation even remotely aimed at combating terrorism is rivaled only by that of the Senate. To be fair, the Senators did go

through the motions of debating the bill on its merits, which allowed them to put off passing it for a couple of months. This seemingly unnecessary delay made Sensenbrenner nervous, however, so he pulled the legislative equivalent of a cheap parlor trick: he latched the Act onto a military spending bill as a rider, thereby ensuring its passage via unanimous Senate approval on May 10, 2005.

Since REAL ID's enactment, thousands of refugees have been denied asylum or the prospect of resettlement in the United States as a result of the grossly incompetent—or, at best, the inexcusably ignorant—structuring of its provisions. Section 103, "Inadmissibility Due to Terrorist and Terrorist-Related Activities," is the nexus of some of the most problematic clauses of the Act. Subsection A establishes the kinds of aliens who are inadmissible to the United States: those who have engaged in terrorist activity, those who are representatives of terrorist organizations, and those who are members of terrorist organizations.

So far, so good. It all seems very reasonable. And indeed, it is. We should certainly be barring aliens who have engaged in terrorist activity from entering this country—that is just common sense. It is also sound policy to keep out representatives or members of terrorist organizations, as they are likely to either engage in terrorist activity in the future, or incite others to do so. On its own, this subsection stands strong. However, this is only because the above stipulations have yet to be qualified; the complications with these criteria arise in the following two subsections, in which the authors proceed to define what they mean by "engage in terrorist activity" and "terrorist organization." Subsection B enumerates the myriad ways in which an individual can be considered to have "[engaged]

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in terrorist activity.” The following descriptions are tenable and necessary: committing or inciting to commit, with the intent of causing death or serious injury, a terrorist activity; preparing or planning a terrorist activity; soliciting funds for terrorist activities; and soliciting individuals to either engage in terrorist activity or become members of terrorist organizations. They are relatively clear-cut and obvious. The subsection gets messy, however, with the introduction of the “material support” clause:

*(VI) to commit an act that the actor knows, or reasonably should know, affords material support, including a safe house, transportation, communications, funds, transfer of funds or other material financial benefit, false documentation or identification, weapons (including chemical, biological, or radiological weapons), explosives, or training--*  
*(aa) for the commission of a terrorist activity;*

*(bb) to any individual who the actor knows, or reasonably should know, has committed or plans to commit a terrorist activity;*

*(cc) to a terrorist organization described in subclause (I) or (II) of clause (vi) or to any member of such an organization;’*

Now, the need for a “material support” clause in a subsection defining what it means to “engage in terrorist activity” is fairly self-evident; the logical connection is undeniable. The construction of this clause, however, is problematic. It is overly broad—“material support” in the context of this Act constitutes just about any activity that in some way affects individuals or groups REAL ID determines are of a terrorist nature (more on this later) in a manner that could be construed as, if not positive, then at least not negative. The clause casts such a wide net that it inadvertently captures individuals who either did not mean to provide “material support” to terrorists or had no choice but to do so. As the Washington Post stated regarding REAL ID: “The trouble is that, because of the new law and its interaction with existing provisions, the legal definitions of terrorism, terrorist organizations and material support are so broad that they include countless people who deserve the United

States’ protection, not exclusion.” Here are just a few examples of cases that have been thus affected:

During the war in Liberia, rebels came to a woman’s house, shot and killed her father, and then abducted her. Throughout the course of her captivity, she suffered repeated rapes and beatings, and was forced to cook and do laundry for the rebels. She managed to escape to a refugee camp, but her case was put on indefinite hold because the Department of Homeland Security determined that her performance of those menial tasks amounted to providing “material support.”

The resettlement case of mother and daughter from Sierra Leone who were raped, cut with machetes, and held captive in their home by rebels was placed on indefinite hold because it was determined that they had provided housing to terrorists.

A Colombian woman was barred from admission to the United States because she gave farm animals to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The guerrillas had demanded money, which she did not have, so they took the livestock instead. When they later returned and found nothing else of value they could take, they killed the woman’s husband and then raped her. A similar case involves a man who paid a ransom to the FARC for the release of his father, whom the guerrillas had kidnapped for refusing to make payments to their cause. He is being denied admission to the United States on account of his having provided “material support” to terrorists.

In the interest of full disclosure and intellectual honesty, it should be noted that these unintentional consequences were not entirely unforeseen by the authors of REAL ID. An effort, in the form of a waiver that immediately follows the “material support” clause, was made to protect against its misapplication:

*This clause shall not apply to any material support the alien afforded to an organization or individual that has committed terrorist activity, if the Secretary of State, after consultation with the*

*Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security, or the Attorney General, after consultation with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security, concludes in his sole unreviewable discretion, that this clause should not apply.*

Theoretically, the means exist to prevent situations like the ones listed above. In practice, however, the initiative to do so is rarely taken. In fact, in the four years since the provisions of REAL ID have been implemented, the waiver has been used a total of two times: on August 30, 2006, to protect a subset of Burmese refugees living in camps in Thailand who had provided contributions to the Karen National Union (KNU), and on October 16, 2006, to protect another subset of Burmese refugees living in camps in Malaysia, Thailand, and India, who had made donations to the Chin National Front (CNF). The KNU and the CNF are organizations that support armed opposition to the Burmese regime, a government that the United States has condemned on numerous occasions for its repressive actions against religious and ethnic minorities. Because the KNU and CNF technically fit the definition of “terrorist organizations,” however, the Karen and Chin Burmese had been denied admission to the United States on account of the “material support” provision of REAL ID. Of the hundreds of thousands of refugee cases the United States reviews every year, only these exceptions have been made, and those too only very recently. The waiver, though available, has never been used in cases of coercion or extreme duress.

That the Secretary of State’s discretionary exemption authority has been exercised so seldom should not be surprising, given the inherent bureaucratic structure of the waiver. The process is tedious and essentially set up to fail—it requires the coordinated efforts and agreement of the State Department, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Homeland Security. It took more than eight months of negotiations just to procure the above-mentioned “material support” exceptions. This fact inspires confidence neither in the government’s willingness to afford exemptions nor in its ability to do so

efficiently within the parameters of REAL ID.

There is a glimmer of hope in the distance, however. On July 27, 2006, Representative Joseph Pitts (R-PA) introduced a bill (H.R. 5918) in the House that aims to correct REAL ID’s glaring flaws, a cause that was adopted by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and presented to the Senate on September 27, 2006. H.R. 5918 offers two main amendments to the current law: an exemption for those who are coerced into providing “material support” to terrorists, and assurance that groups who are involved in legitimate resistance movements are not classified as terrorist organizations. This latter remedy is of great significance because, as it stands now, the definition is so broad that it essentially encompasses any group of two or more people who rebel against the established, ruling government. REAL ID provides the following delineation in Section 103, Subsection C: “As used in this section, the term ‘terrorist organization means an organization...that is a group of two or more individuals, whether organized or not, which engages in, or has a subgroup which engages in [terrorist activity].”

Under the parameters of the current definition, groups similar to the KNU and the CNF are still classified as terrorist organizations, and those associated with them are denied admission to the United States despite their legitimate claims to asylum and refugee status. The Washington Post reported, “According to the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and to officials and academics who have looked at the issue, here are some people who may be barred from entry to the United States: Colombians who were forced to help the leftist insurgency of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia; thousands of Karen and Chin nationals who suffered brutal repression at the hands of the Burmese military junta; Liberian, Somali and Vietnamese Montagnard victims of terrorism and repression; and some dissident Cubans who aided anti-Castro forces in the 1960s. The administration recently acknowledged in one asylum proceeding that those who fought with or aided the Northern Alliance against the Taliban or who supported the



African National Congress against South Africa's apartheid government would be excluded, too." Clearly, there is a serious disconnect between what REAL ID was meant to accomplish and what its shoddy construction has actually brought about. Changes must be made to the law, so that these tragic, unintended consequences can be avoided in the future.

The provisions provided in H.R. 5918 allow for a more sophisticated assessment of what constitutes "material support" to "terrorist organizations." While the new legislation falls short of offering the perfect solution to the problems caused by REAL ID—it is inevitable that some genuinely vulnerable refugees will fall through the cracks

in the well-intentioned and necessary attempt to combat terrorism—it is a step in the right direction. If passed, it will brighten the lamp that illuminates our golden gate, restoring the ability to distinguish friend from foe that has been diminished by REAL ID's overbearing shadow. As Senator Leahy put it in his opening statement for the Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship's Hearing on Refugee Admissions: "The legislation [H.R. 5918] will make us safer by ensuring that supporters of the United States, and those we support, are not inadvertently labeled terrorists. We cannot effectively combat terrorism if we cannot distinguish between our friends and enemies. It is time to bring our laws back in line with our values."

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# THE LIBERTARIAN ILLUSION

Mark Meador

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When the conservative “revolution” arose out of the ashes of the second World War during the 1950s and 60s, striving to fill the intellectual vacuum left with the death of liberalism, several key divides quickly emerged. Among the most important was and is that between conservatism proper and what is referred to as libertarianism. Among other forums, the debate raged on in the pages of *National Review*, with an exchange between Frank Meyer, a co-founding editor of the magazine, and Brent Bozell, nephew to William F. Buckley, highlighting the issue quite well.

Meyer’s argument centered on what his colleagues came to term “fusionism.” That is, that libertarian conservatism and traditional conservatism are a sort of “twisted tree,” both seeking the same end(s) in a fusion that is modern American conservatism. The undergirding support of his argument was the purported necessity of freedom for virtue: “[that fused position] maintains that the duty of men is to seek virtue; but it insists that men cannot in actuality do so unless they are free from the constraint of the physical coercion of an unlimited state.” Bozell’s response was to illuminate the absurdity at the end of this line of reasoning. Meyer’s position, he argued, leads one to assert that if men are truly interested in maximizing virtue they would not only abstain entirely from encouraging, but even actively discourage it so that those virtuous acts which were nonetheless carried out would most certainly be sincere and authentic. Overextending the metaphor though he may be, Bozell makes an important point, most strongly elucidated when he writes, “*the freedom that is necessary to virtue is presumably a freedom no man will ever be without.*”

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Morally significant freedom is merely an aspect of the human condition: it is indispensable, but it is also inalienable.” Aristotle would have much to say on this subject: the prudence which he deems essential to the virtuous life he calls “a true disposition” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b5-6). Virtue is a product of the mindset under which an action is taken, not the action itself. A lack of temptation, or an active discouragement of virtue, does not negate the possibility of a virtuous mindset, the prudent disposition. What those *do* accomplish is to filter out the “almosts”; it results in virtuous mindsets being the *only* ones who achieve the corresponding actions, whereas people often do virtuous things without doing so virtuously. Virtue education becomes next to impossible and we are left with a dearth of possibilities to reform.

That the central issue of contention is whether government should try to “legislate morality” is clear enough, but it invites yet further discussion. For a point of comparison, observe that the modern political liberal is committed in his heart and soul to the notion of the perfectibility of man and, as such, seeks this realization through political means. The libertarian, however, though he seeks to minimize government involvement, insofar as he is a student of prudence and an advocate of stability and virtue, is similarly committed to that same proposition. In fact, he is perhaps more so. If man is corrupted *despite* liberal political programs, the liberal may at least say, “I intended well.” The libertarian cannot, for he tried to intend as little as possible. If virtue is to flourish under a libertarian regime, it must find its locus in the only remaining recourse: man himself. Thus, a libertarian, especially a traditionalist one, might counter that private institutions would handle the burden, and in past eras this was true and is

largely preferable. But today's political climate, so polluted by the ripples of the enlightenment, industrialization and capitalism, and the New Deal, is hardly up to the task of providing the requisite institutional influence – legally or practically.

A final objection then may be heard from the libertarian corner that virtue and morality are not objective and cannot be enforced. But such arguments dodge the issue and ignore the greater harm done by abdicating responsibility. The pure libertarian position is, at root, a cowardly one. To be sure, the conservative would prefer that such responsibilities be shouldered by social institutions and would not deem it prudent for the government to take on the role of abstractly molding society. But at a certain point it becomes necessary for the *governing* bodies of society to enforce the boundaries of the inherited moral tradition of that society. Yet this is not to say that only the very extremes should be regarded. A society which constitutes institutions to govern it implicitly or explicitly does so in order to maintain its derivative sort of order. Claims that those institutions only exist to protect property can only be relevant in a context where property is the primary concern; once that issue is roughly settled, mankind quickly tires of such shallow pursuits and the mind becomes much more active. To say that government should not tread on the terrain of the latter is to claim the latter has no influence on or relation to the former. But even if that claim is true, it is not contentious to further claim that, having banded together to protect one sort of resource, a people might and do constitute themselves to protect a more ethereal one, namely virtue and order. And a government which does not maintain this order fails. This is the underlying justification for the traditionalist approach *and* the explication of the rejection of a purely rationalist, constructionist, abstractionist approach, three commonalities between libertarianism and liberalism. Prudence is not for-

mulaic; to try to make so is to fail it. Such was the balancing project of the American Founders and past the extent to which they systematized it we ought not go, though already have. And yet, objections to this position will always rest in particulars. That is to say, people will lament that such an approach denies them this or that; they want it to be formulaic. But is this not just the whine of those who have already strayed outside the aforementioned traditional moral heritage?

This phenomenon, then, requires us to ask why it is that people have shunned this heritage. The answer would seem to emanate from both psychological infirmities and benevolent ignorance. Infirmities belie a lack of personal responsibility and its symptoms often include demands upon others for personal benefit, commonly labeling these “rights” for the purposes of rhetorical, irrational argument. The equally common “good intentions” suffer primarily from a lack of caution in considering greater social structures and institutions and their importance. This is, of course, not to argue that simply reversing one or all of these trends would cure the ills of politics. Man is a blessed, but sickly, creature. This is the limit of democracy, *as well as libertarianism*: it is much easier to decapitate a monarch than quell a mob; it is far safer to be under the command of a captain on his ship than caught in the river of popular opinion. Such is the response to the fears of despotism, but our primary concern is virtue. With respect to that, it must be accepted that complete or even significant abdication on the part of the government of its responsibility to encourage virtue and aid society in maintaining (not in the sense of rigid permanence, but, of course, careful and reasoned adaptation to times and circumstances) its moral heritage will inevitably lead to the failure of government to achieve that one goal conservatives and libertarians do hold in common.

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# THE JUDAISM PROBLEM

Mordechai Levy-Eichel

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*How This Night Is Different: Stories*

By Elisa Albert. 208 pp.

Free Press. \$18.

*“It may be that the deepest difference between any two individuals lies in the degree and kind of religious impulses each is susceptible to.”*  
—William Barrett, “The Illusion of Technique.”

Emotional pain seems to be especially attractive to short story writers today. The distant spouse, the father who abandoned the family years ago, the all-too-successful sibling, the painful memory of an unfulfilled crush...these are all tropes short story writers today indulge in the way most of us breathe—as if it were a necessity. It needn't be, of course. As the literary critic James Woods has repeatedly pointed out, that gnarly, inexplicably persistent thing that is religion today is still, as ever, up for discussion and debate. We have not outgrown it yet, although goodness knows not for lack of trying. Religion is a permanent aspect of the human condition. Few novels today however, despite notable exceptions like the Pulitzer Prize winning *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson, seriously confront the nature of religious experience. Only in politics, it seems, is the religious imagination alive.

One would think that if this were different for any group of writers, it would be Jewish writers. The cliché that there is a Jewish culture and not simply a Jewish religion connecting the Jewish people is true, if by now a bit hackneyed, as well as too often simply an excuse to ignore religion. (Besides, for there to be a Jewish culture, there had to be a Jewish religion first.) With a history

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of writers like Cynthia Ozick and Saul Bellow who dealt with, who faced, who wrestled, who got bloody with (and maybe even bloodied) tradition and law, one would expect more authors who consciously express their Judaism, if not positively cultivate it as part of their image, to find religion, to find obligation and doubt and mystery, as central matters in their work. Or at least I did, especially when I picked up Elisa Albert's new book, *How This Night is Different*.

I was disappointed. Albert's stories are mostly variations on the theme of the shallowness of modern American Jewish life which she tackles less than remarkably. Her stories resemble laments. There is a thinness in the Judaism of the people whom she has created, even as it is the angle through which she presents them. Many of her characters are sad. Their Judaism seems to be an albatross. Their regrets define them, with their Judaism mostly serving as another arena for the eruption of family troubles. In the story “Everything But,” Alex insults his wife, Erin, for not remembering the *parsha* (weekly reading of the Bible) of her Bat Mitzvah, all the while repeatedly mentioning that his was *Toldot*. (“Alex offers a shadow of a shrug, thumbs-drumming in time with, Erin imagines, his self-satisfied internal repetition of *Jacob and Esau, Jacob and Esau, Jacob and Esau.*”) In the story “The Living,” a March of the Living pilgrimage to Auschwitz is another opportunity for Shayna to invidiously compare herself to her brother. This contrast so consumes her that she is unable to record anything at all about her trip to the concentration camp in her notebook. Shayna is powerless to write even one sentence down because it would be neither as poetic, nor as searing, nor as elevated as the journal entries her older brother composed

on his trip to Poland and Israel. In Albert's stories familial conflict sweeps away almost everything else. Life consists of a chronology of personal problems for the characters in these stories.

There is something strange in Albert's portrayal of Judaism. The Judaism of her characters is both central *and* incidental to them. Their Judaism is weak but persistent. It shapes their lives, but as it is so emaciated, indeed skeletal, it resembles a curse rather than a blessing. Judaism seems hardly more than an occasion for a family get-together, as in the story "The Mother is always upset" where the ritual *Brit Milah* (circumcision) is, for most of the attendants, an unwanted interruption, not a holy ceremony. In the title story "How This Night is Different," Joanna is emotionally and physically alienated from the Pesach Seder as she is in the midst of suffering from a yeast infection and therefore feels personally impure, almost proudly so. The Judaism of the characters is put front and center, but then done little with. Their Judaism is pasty, thin and crackly, like old paint. It is a covering, rarely something internal. With her collection of stories, Albert summons up a certain milieu, a certain lifestyle, certain habits, but seemingly only to show how trivial they are, how painful, how slight the Judaism of so many is today.

The Judaism of Albert's characters is to a large degree unexamined. The questions about law, or obligation, sincerity, or ignorance, don't stem from profound doubts, or seemingly serious challenges to one's lifestyle. The story "So Long" confronts the change in lifestyle of a *ba'al tshuva* now going by Ra-chel instead of Rachel, but not in a memorable way, not so we get a feel for why Rachel would ever make such a radical change to her lifestyle. (The most insightful words any of the characters voice in the story come from Ra-chel's childhood friend lamenting how disorienting *she* finds this radical change.) Most of the people in these tales drift through their lives without serious questioning, mostly simply with complaints.

To some degree, Albert must know how small most of her characters are. In the last piece in her

book—a love-letter to Philip Roth that is both extremely serious and sharply playful—Albert does confront, and disown (in the form of a traumatic breakup with her fiancé, "a self-obsessed infant of the highest order") the sort of life that so many of her characters live. The letter is the most engaging example of writing in the book. Gone for the most part are the obligatory motions that give certain scenes a prefabricated feel—a clever metaphor here, a reminiscence there—that her time at the Columbia MFA program must have imprinted on her. Her writing in the missive to Roth acquires a heretofore missing verve. Unlike the characters in the previous chapters, a woman with a sense of purpose, maturity, and self-assurance, not to mention a large dose of mischievousness, emerges from her portrait of herself. (She asks Philip Roth if she could please bear his child.)

Albert is scarred by the pain she caused herself and her family by breaking up with her former fiancé. Nonetheless, for once in this book, someone is proud of themselves. Whereas many of her characters appear small in their obsession with their problems, Albert is proud to struggle with her afflictions. Her former fiancé couldn't handle her writing. It's not that she was writing about him (she says she "always took significant pains to disguise both him and his bizarre-ass family"), but the sort of culture that he exemplified. Albert, as she demonstrates especially with the severe honesty of her last chapter, is much too sensitive and perceptive to prosper in the noxious world of her former fiancé. However, in the rest of her stories, it is as if she still lives with these folks. Although she has physically decided to leave these people, she still has yet to emotionally and imaginatively. At one point, in her letter-of-a-confession, she declares "I choose fiction over him [her former fiancé]." But she has not yet fully. Her fiction is *still* about the life she choose to leave. It is not yet about the life that she has apparently chosen to live. Hopefully that will be her next book.

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# DID A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION MAKE ME GO CRAZY? AN EXPLORATION

Alexandra Squitieri

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I spent this past summer working at an advertising agency in midtown Manhattan. More correctly, I spent this past summer whining about working at an advertising agency in midtown Manhattan. And while this summer was certainly one of the better experiences of my short life, I've come to terms with the fact that most of my excellent experiences are to be realized only in retrospect, and will involve copious amounts of mental anguish while they take place.

During the training session on the first day of work, all of the interns were asked what school we were attending and what we were studying. I was struck by the fact that I was one of the only interns who was not an advertising major. The vast majority of the 30 or 40 interns were studying advertising, marketing, public relations or some other variant of what universities conveniently group under "mass communications." Those who weren't majoring in how to communicate were largely studying business administration or "management." As an English major, I felt like an anomaly in an industry I expected to be populated by liberal arts majors. The other interns, failing to grasp the possibility that my school didn't offer an advertising major by design, consoled me about my unfortunate circumstances.

Three weeks into my internship, I felt I'd had enough real-world experience to know exactly how my University of Chicago education would factor into my working life. The critical thinking and analytical skills I had developed by dissect-

ing novels and building arguments were stronger than those of the advertising majors, who had spent their time thinking about why Axe body spray's promise to make its male users into sex magnets was successful. For a lot of my internship, I was comfortable and secure with my views on education. Then I started to lose my mind.

When I was applying for the internship, I wasn't really concerned with the particularities of educational philosophy. I knew there were advertising majors in the world, and that I wasn't one of them, and that was about it. As far as I could tell, advertising didn't really require a specific skill set, which made it perfect for me, as I have no skills. You didn't even need to be all that smart judging by most of the commercials I had seen. So what was there to study? Besides, advertising is excruciatingly specific, whereas I am so averse to making decisions that, if I could, I would have majored in "Stuff." I never understood the people who, in seventh grade, declared that they wanted to pulmonary oncologists or intellectual property lawyers and then dedicated their lives to the singular pursuit of that. Thanks to Facebook, I can see that all of them have since strayed from these plans, but I admire the confidence in decision-making skills that it takes to say these things out loud.

So, I wasn't particularly self-conscious about my major in the beginning, or with my decision to take the internship in the first place. This was, after all, just a summer job, equivalent to selling cones at the local ice cream shop, only with nicer clothes and occasional lunchtime margaritas at the company's expense. Because this was my reasoning, I bitterly hated the finality in the

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question, “So how did you decide to go into advertising?” Had I decided something? I hoped not, because I soon learned that advertising did require a specific skill set, which was to be able to make Excel and PowerPoint do amazing things. But I barely knew how to use Excel, and the only decent PowerPoint presentation I had made was about my cat, which I emailed to my roommates.

When I expressed my uncertainty about this “decision” to the other interns, they regarded me somewhat distastefully. People who have made career decisions so early in their college experiences are probably not fond of directionless people such as myself, who are using the crucial summer before graduation for “exploration.” To be unsure is to be unambitious. I couldn’t decide if these people were focused or narrow-minded, but I tried to be generous. After all, I was going to have to earn a living in a year, and now would be a good time to pick a career and start climbing the ladder of success. When I asked them how they “decided” on advertising, they said, “Well, it’s my passion. It’s my major.”

Your major. After hearing that self-righteous statement more than a few times, I began to cultivate a hatred for all advertising majors, and for pre-professional interests in general. I was not like them, and thus had to define myself in total opposition to them. I’m not a Psych major, but I’m pretty sure that is textbook. After a few weeks on the job, I decided that my education had prepared me to succeed brilliantly in all of my endeavors, while the advertising majors were doomed to fail at life. (It was during this time that I destroyed the budget for the quarter when my boss asked me to make some changes on the spreadsheet. I didn’t think that being a few thousand dollars off was a big deal when you’re dealing with millions, but apparently I was wrong.) All those nights spent in the library reading literary theory had been worth it. Right?

Maybe. Actually, I had no idea what I was talking about. I had been told that I could do “anything” with a liberal arts education, but it was the University that told me, and it’s in their best interest to propagate the philosophy that

my degree is going to be useful in the mythical real world. But I’d never actually worked or had a real job, so how would I know? That didn’t stop me from pontificating about the merits of a liberal education with an evangelical zeal. I shared an office with a recent Northwestern graduate, Priya, and the other intern on my account, Ashley, who was a business major. Priya and I discussed our respective colleges a lot because of their proximity, and one afternoon, she was telling me that the transition from college to professional life had been difficult for her.

“I wish they’d offered more practical classes,” she said. “Maybe on business etiquette or something. That would have been more useful than all of those papers I wrote. When I started working I didn’t even know how to write a proper business email.”

“No!” I declared passionately, seizing the opportunity to expound on what I’d been convincing myself of for the past couple weeks. “You didn’t need a class to teach you how to write office emails because you learned how to think. I’m sure you picked it up in no time. It would degrade the value of your degree if you got credit for classes like that.”

Priya, who clearly did not expect her statement to elicit such a reaction, vaguely conceded, but added that they at least could have offered workshops on it.

I was too delirious with self-righteousness to meet her halfway. “No,” I pressed on, “Don’t you see? College is the time where you can sit for four years and think about the meaning of life. Why would you waste your time learning about business etiquette? College isn’t the time to think about jobs or careers.”

It was that last remark that made Ashley, who had been listening the whole time with a frown on her face, turn to me incredulously. “College. Isn’t. The. Time. To. Think. About. Jobs? Or. Careers?” She spoke to me like she was seriously considering having me committed.

My delirium shattered in the sharpness of her expression. I had just belittled her entire educa-

tion with one sentence. “I mean...” I faltered.

“Then what are you doing here?” she asked me. I stayed quiet for a while, and then mumbled something as I turned back to my computer. Excellent question, Ashley. What was I doing there? I’m not exactly sure why I interned in advertising this summer. I certainly was never passionate about it, but I find the sociological research that advertising centers upon to be mildly interesting. Anyway, it seemed like a better use of my time than lying in bed and watching the Food Network all summer. (I actually did dedicate the month before school started to this, with frequent inspired breaks to the kitchen to bake banana muffins.) Plus, getting an internship seemed like the thing to do.

Without meaning to, Brittany sparked what I can only describe, in my pretentious, liberally educated vocabulary, as an existential crisis that plagued me for the rest of my internship. Perhaps once I am older I will understand how much more there is to life, but for now, I think that one’s profession is a defining part of who they are, especially among those who’ve had a choice. And I have a lot of choices. So what did it say about me that I was working in advertising? What did it say about me that I was spending my summer in New York? What was the point of researching competitors’ ads and going to endless meetings with clients? What was the point of advertising?

I wasn’t in a nihilistic depression, but I was confused. Far from being the breezy summer job I had hoped for, my internship was making me face some difficult questions. Surrounded by so many who seemed to have life figured out, I had to ask myself, what do I want to make of my life? What is the best way for me to live? And if there is a best way, is there even a remote chance that being an advertising executive is it? These questions swirled around in my head and threatened to drive me crazy. But the only conclusion I came to was that it’s really, really hard to get anything done when you have to take frequent breaks to ponder the reality and meaning of life. Maybe this is why employers don’t love U of C graduates?

I didn’t know if I liked advertising, I didn’t know if I liked corporate America in general, and I didn’t know what else to do other than wish I could crawl into the stacks in the Regenstein Library and wait for my head to stop spinning. After four years among the intellectual giants in my ivory tower, was I going to spend my subsequent years in “status” meetings and conference calls? I had never more appreciated the solitary nature of paper writing.

A few days before our final intern presentation, I had made myself so miserable that I wanted to call in sick for the rest of the summer. I had been at the office until 10:30 for the past few nights with the rest of my intern team, finishing and perfecting the campaign we had created. I was frustrated that I was spending so much time on a project I wasn’t sure I cared about, and I had a meeting with the Human Resources manager that afternoon, to discuss being hired after graduation. All the other interns I had talked to had decided, without a doubt, that if they were offered a job they would take it. What was the point of being an intern if not to get a full-time job?

What was the point? How was I supposed to know what the point was? How was I supposed to decide if I wanted to work in advertising over say, saving stray kittens? Staring at the production schedule on my computer wasn’t making it any better, so I left my office, went to the bathroom and tried, unsuccessfully, not to cry. Why did I feel like my entire life was dependent on these next few days, on whether I did well on my presentation, on what I said to the HR manager, on whether I was making a good impression on my bosses? I cried for those reasons, but mostly I cried because I was scared I was losing my mind. It didn’t seem like any of the other interns understood how many choices they had, how many ways there are to live in the world, and how terrifying it is to pick one. Why was I the only one crying in the bathroom over a potential job-offer?

Was it because their college education had been geared towards preparing them for this moment, whereas I had been read-



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ing Freud and Lacan? And if that was the reason, I had to face another difficult question. Had my liberal education made me anything other than utterly neurotic? I think it was a fair question, but one that I don't think I'm equipped to answer yet. I'm not sure I even know what it means to be liberally educated. By teasing out meaning from erudite and canonical texts, have I been moving steadily to the discovery of some sort of Truth? Or have I been selfishly indulgent in my education, lounging around with poetry and stories, instead of training to be a productive and useful member of the workforce? I'd like to think it's the former, and I do think it's the former, but when we look at the facts, I am not in possession of any sort of Truth, and the advertising majors are in possession of entry level jobs as Account Executives that they perform with gusto.

So they win this round. Perhaps though, the amount of intellectual thought I have been exposed to has been vast enough to allow me clarity on one issue. Standing in the middle of Times Square this summer—the epicenter of overweight and fanny-pack clad tourists who congregate in large groups outside tacky stores to point excitedly at the flashing lights—standing there, me and the advertising majors both had thoughts. They looked at the visual competition of brand names, the grandiose and excessive displays of American consumption and thought, “I do this.”

And I looked at the same scene and thought, “I don't have to do this.”

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# READING FOR VEGETABLE PATCH SOULS

Rita Koganzon

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*“Who knows what will come out of the soul of man?  
The soul of man is a dark vast forest, with wild life  
in it. Think of Benjamin fencing it off!”*

—D.H. Lawrence

I knew how to read until my freshman year of high school. Then I had a brief and antagonistic encounter with Homer, who told me in no uncertain terms that this literature thing was a lot harder than I had previously been led to believe. Before Homer, there was a spectrum of literary quality, to be sure. I’d read everything from *Goosebumps* books about homicidal houseplants to Roald Dahl’s sublime and ominous fantasies about the wickedness of adults, but they were all plot, all surface. Stories were built by repeated assertion—“Claudia was a funky dresser,” Ann M. Martin told me at the beginning of each *Babysitter’s Club* book, and I took her word for it. Whatever wasn’t explained—all the why-is-this-here and how-is-this-said—was simply immaterial. But Homer would have none of that, apparently.

“Homer is a genius!” my English teacher insisted. That’s not exactly what leapt out at me on first reading. No, my perception was something more like, “How many more monsters until we get back to Ithaca and start the next book?” But now that Homer was authoritatively a genius, if I persisted in this belief, I would, by process of elimination, become an idiot. Unprepared to accept this fate, I kept my opinion to myself and allowed my English teacher to continue to insist that the *Odyssey* had a profound and important meaning.

What was this meaning business anyway? Vast

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forests have probably been razed in the effort to pin it down, but I was too young to read literary theory at the time. For the first time, I noticed, content and meaning diverged and what the author said was less than what the author meant. The *Odyssey* was about Odysseus’ journey home to Ithaca, but it was about something more than that, something vaguely related to gods and love and home, something just out of the reach of my comprehension. I was indignant. Why was Homer playing games with me? What was the secret to interpreting a book? Was there a certain prerequisite knowledge? Did I just have to be “old enough” for the book? Did I have to read enough books first so that all successive books would fall like puzzle pieces into place within the boundaries established by everything I’d read before? Did it take a special and rare instinct? Was there a method?

If it took some sort of innate talent, I surely lacked it. Much as I tried to systematize reading, to bring the process of understanding under my control where I could carefully monitor its progress and predict its outcomes, meaning remained elusive. Lest I be taken for a neurotic, I should point out that mine was not an isolated effort. I had another English teacher who insisted that a poem’s meaning could be distilled by listing all its words, then grouping them by various common denominators (action verbs, words associated with sadness, etc.), then analyzing the resulting patterns, with or without reference to the original work. She had come to teaching from a successful career in business. I sympathized with her rationalizing impulse. There is a certain beauty and clarity to mathematical logic, in which each step towards an answer can be isolated and described; the whole process can be laid out and scrutinized. This was nothing like the messy practice to which I

regularly resorted when assigned term papers. The English paper essentially became an ambush on meaning. I would spend the two weeks between the date of its assignment and its due date futilely searching for a crack in the book's front lines. Unable to find it by the night before the paper was due, I had to wait until meaning was asleep, usually around 2 a.m. right before the deadline, and then I crept up to it and launched the attack. The pressure of the deadline was enough to allow me to force my way into meaning's camp and plunder it.

I could never be sure of what I came up with in those few inspired hours of the morning. How could I explain these A-ha! moments when they are by definition sudden insights or inexplicable syntheses of the stray, unarticulated thoughts floating around in my head? Ideas just came to me: while doing dishes, showering, staring at a blank computer screen, doing almost anything that was not thinking logically and straightforwardly about the book. And though they were not brilliant, in their high school English paper context, they seemed miraculously plausible given their questionable origin. The initial insight would immediately break apart into shards of evidence—things I had known all along but had never known at all. In the subsequent term paper, I would always tell the story backwards, careful to start with the evidence and proceed deductively to diminish any suspicion that my conclusion had been anything but rational. It worked, but it was an unfair tactic, I thought, and therefore an illegitimate one. A fair fight would require some sort of sustained, systematic effort out on an open battlefield. Conquering meaning would be a slow and gradual process, one thought building upon another, not this shameless guerrilla war. I remained a strict and untroubled believer in the power of reason to determine pretty much everything.

When I got to college, however, I was introduced to Plato. Plato has a complex relationship with the irrational, one that I almost certainly failed to grasp in my first-year humanities class, but one which gives it some legitimacy. Marveling that a poem's listeners were better able than its

author to discern its meaning, Socrates says in the *Apology* that “poets do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some inborn talent and inspiration.” If writers write through A-ha! moments, I didn't see why I should be less entitled to read through them. Moreover, if the inspiration poets draw on is some body of truth, some universal idea to which, in its purest form, access is obscured but which nonetheless registers with everyone as almost self-evidently correct when brought down from the heavens and embodied in language, then not only the inscrutable process of the A-ha! moment, but the result itself is quite legitimate. At first glance, Plato offered a justification to empower the inner irrational me. Why bother with method and justification? Maybe I was simply brilliant, a participant in a sacred irrational search for truth each time I wrote a paper.

It still seemed too easy to be legitimate, and my mediocre grades quickly deflated my pretensions to genius. If all meaning required was an opportune insight, then why are all these arguably quite smart people slaving away in the library all day? There had to be something in it that required the time and discipline that more virtuous men dedicate to such tasks. I continued to pursue the elusive A-ha! moment, but quietly and guiltily. If I couldn't systematize reading itself, I decided, I would at least try to systematize these insights so that I could trigger them at will. There was a plan that required time and discipline. If regulating unpredictability seems quixotic, it's actually a step behind the psychologists and neuroscientists who have created an entire field of study—insight phenomenology—around it. Like my word-associating English teacher, they suffer from a sympathetic desire to explain something that by all accounts seems to be a highly rational thought process that occurs just beyond our rational capacity to comprehend it.

I won't deny this is a noble desire. Benjamin Franklin tried it with virtue, enacting his “bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection” by tallying his shortcomings and adding them up at the end of a week's worth of practice at being good, and D.H. Lawrence lambasted him

for his outrageous presumption that he could fence in the “dark forest” of the soul with such a flimsy tool as *method*. But Franklin founded a nation, after all. I’m inclined to take the industrious and thrifty Philadelphian seriously on that account.

It’s not neurotic to try to control, to impose order on the unknown and unpredictable; it’s American. Faced with over two hundred million acres of unsettled frontier in the Midwest in the 1780s, America conveniently slipped a grid over the forests and prairies and swamps and rivers, divided it all into uniform square miles, combined square miles into townships, townships into counties, and rolled the whole thing into a state. With this feeble assurance of order, the settlers went out into the wilderness, and if some one of them happened to perish there, he at least had the privilege of knowing he was not in the middle of nowhere, but on section 24, six west of the range line, four south of the base line, in Unknown Township, Unnamed County, Michigan Territory, amen!

D.H. Lawrence is wrong on several counts, including in his assumption that tearing down the fence around Franklin’s vegetable patch of a soul would make anyone better off. The dark forest can easily grow out of control, and the twentieth century is thick with such overgrowth. Franklin advises us to control the irrational, not to deny its existence. “Use venery but for health and offspring,” warns the Franklin who gives young men advice, but the aging Parisian skirt-chaser Franklin knows how to have a good time as well as Lawrence. Franklin’s—America’s—rationalizing impulse is not a denial of the irrational, not a “fencing of a little tract” to the detriment of “a vast forest,” but an attempt to channel the irrational into something accessible and comprehensible and reasonably debatable. It is an effort to explore the dark forest without getting lost in it, always having recourse to the cultivated garden where society lives. The Land Ordinance grid, despite its awkward abstraction from the land onto which it was mapped, encouraged its settlement on an enormous scale. A little order was enough to make the wilderness desirable.

It is to validate the thing, to make sense of our irrational experiences with literature that we write about it in the first place. Imposing order and predictability on something irrational is a little demanding maybe, an attempt to have the best of each without the worst consequences of either. But there are ways to channel the A-ha! moments that preserves their staunchly irrational nature but renders them at least a little dependable in the face of deadlines and lifetimes. There is, for one, the appreciation of beauty in literature. Follow the beautiful—the meeting of Priam and Achilles at the end of the *Iliad*—and it may very well lead to meaning. Another method is talking—not necessarily the directed and managed discussion of a humanities class, which begins at the professor’s A-ha! moment and works backwards—but the kind of ceaseless talking that circles the A-ha! moment for so long that it eventually surrenders to articulation.

Reading without A-ha! moments, says a friend of mine, is like having sex without an orgasm—the point has merit. He adds that I am vindicated by European philosophy too—by Nietzsche’s observation that in the experience of thinking thoughts actually come to us, and Heidegger’s truth as uncovering. But I am not so completely sold on the idea. Even if literature cannot be forced into a mathematical straightjacket, there is a danger in accepting irrationality so whole-heartedly that one abandons the vegetable patch for the forest entirely. Out in the forest, there can be no test at all of the veracity of one’s A-ha! moment. It could be insanity just as easily as it could be truth, and, whatever it is, it is almost surely hubristic. Even Plato’s cautious foray into irrationality doesn’t advocate the renunciation of reason. So I will chase my A-ha! moments with some caution, some guilt, and a strong wish that I were a better reader by nature.

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# NATIONAL DAY IN BEIJING

Bobby Zacharias

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Those near the center of Beijing in the early morning hours of October 1st saw an annual pilgrimage underway. The night before, people had begun to congregate in the center of the city, in and around Tian'anmen Square. Fanning out from the square in all directions are legions of police and military units, some marching, some milling around, some sitting.

Food vendors selling sautéed vegetables, water bottles, and other standard roadside fare are positioned to intercept the throngs headed towards the Square. Small pockets of stationary people form around the vendors in the midst the flowing human river. A few vendors were selling miniature Chinese flags, small enough to put into a pocket but apparently big enough to demonstrate national pride; even though it is National Day, they seem to be having trouble selling them.

There is electricity in the air as people, approaching the area on foot, began to jockey for position. Very wide stairways followed by very wide tunnels lead under the boulevard that bounds the north side of Tian'anmen Square; emerging from the other side of the stairs, the crowd rushes towards the center of the square and abruptly stops. There is a line of soldiers, uniform in size, all wearing green and standing a foot apart from each other, preventing the crowd from moving to a more desirable position. The lines of soldiers form the edges of large cells; movement within any cell is free, but movement between them restricted. People are not happy about this and there is some pushing into the soldiers, who try to hold their positions but always concede a little before reacting back. Now a group

of young men, maybe five of them, runs through a hole in the line of soldiers. They yell as they pass through the line and quickly dissolve into the crowd. There is no attempt to retrieve the miscreants, though backup arrives very quickly, shoring up the original group. There is no longer any space between the soldiers. All of them stand shoulder to shoulder. Their line will not be broken again.

Orange mercury lights, mounted on large light poles interspersed through the square, light the entire area. Sharing space on these poles are banks of speakers and cameras. In this place, which is now to many a shrine to political demonstration gone catastrophically wrong, the Chinese government takes great pains to ensure the peaceable and uncontroversial nature of any gatherings. Here, there is no pretense of Big Brother not watching. The guy next to you may be working for the police; the camera on that pole may be zooming in on your face—by design, you're never sure.

Towards the northeast sits the famous portrait of Mao Zedong. Though it has banks of dedicated floodlights trained on it, they're not turned on and the portrait is only dimly visible in the general lighting. No reason is given; there are no public announcements made the entire morning except for the barked orders from the soldiers to an unruly crowd. An orange haze shrouds the entire scene, lit by the floodlights. The heavy smog is typical Beijing weather, but this day's murkiness seems even thicker than usual. People stand on their tiptoes to try to see further, but all that's visible are masses of people, buildings, soldiers. Nothing at any distance is clear in this weather, and people on the other side of Tian'anmen Square are indistinguishable.

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The crowd, 300,000 strong by estimates, has

come for a flag raising. Every day of the year, an honor guard marches through Tian'anmen Gate, which is the central door at the south end of the Forbidden City, across the wide Chang'an Jie boulevard, to the flagpole at the north end of Tian'anmen Square. They are said to time their marching and the subsequent flag raising so that the flag arrives at its peak exactly the same second that the sun rises at that spot. On National Day, the honor guard is bigger, but the flag ceremony is essentially the same. The main difference is that there are a few hundred thousand extra spectators, including the brass of Beijing.

There is nothing to do but wait for the sun to rise. The soldiers, who've been standing in the same place for hours, have given up on maintaining strict decorum, and many of them chat with each other, chuckling. For the time being, there's serenity between the enforcers and the crowd, and perhaps a bit of commiseration over a shared fate: everyone is, at this point, plainly standing and waiting for the main event. At about 6:05, loud drumming can be heard, and the crowd surges into the guards, who do their best to hold them back.

In the distance, a large red flag is being carried, upright but furled, across the boulevard by a soldier; behind him is a military band of perhaps 200 musicians. Hundreds of cameras and camcorders fly over the heads of the crowd, trying to capture the views that their owners themselves can't see. This is experience by proxy—those with the best view are the ones who look at the viewscreens of their zoomed-in camcorders. The crowd and the distance of the band conspire to make any actual music totally inaudible. All that's detectable is a faint drum beat.

The red flag has become attached to the central flagpole in the Square, and it can be seen to be very, very slowly traveling up the pole. People struggle to take zoomed-in pictures of the hazy and distant events. Finally, the culmination of hours of waiting: the flag is raised. There is no cheer, no clapping, no singing or chanting. Only a few people in the crowd wave Chinese flags. The sun may have just risen, but it's invisible

through the smog. People take some last pictures, and start leaving. Their job done, the military band marches in retreat. There's a strange swelling cloud visible from Tian'anmen Gate, and it soon becomes recognizable as a huge flock of doves that has been released there. The birds fly all around the Square. There are thousands and thousands of them, and they form great swelling masses, break up into smaller flocks, and regroup.

There is a mass exodus from the area. Trucks come in to reinstall traffic dividers that had been temporarily removed. Street sweepers with old-fashioned brooms start what will be a huge cleanup. People fill the streets flowing out in every direction, and policemen in cars drive around the empty boulevard, using their PA system to corral the crowd like sheep. Whole crowds claim their bikes, parked in droves on the sidewalk, and pedal away. The bus stops accumulate people, and taxis speed away, alongside the sleek black cars carrying officials. Doves far overhead in small groups are exploring their new environs. Another day starts in Beijing.