

[LIBERTIES]

FREE SPEECH AT A PRICE

We think it best to confess that we didn't buy all of the books reviewed in this issue. Publishers desperate to wedge their wares into the declining number of pages that the declining number of magazines devote to books eagerly send stacks of free copies. Along with a dozen "future of conservatism" texts and multiple volumes with "meltdown" in the titles, last week we scored advances of David Baldacci's new thriller and a definitive cupcake cookbook.

We flatter ourselves that we're not easily bought, but there's always a chance that this largesse has compromised our objectivity. So in the interest of maintaining *TAC*'s impeccable standards of journalistic integrity, we're leveling with you—also, we don't have \$11,000 sitting around.

Under new Federal Trade Commission guidelines, that's what it will cost amateur critics who endorse products without disclosing their compensation. Because the Obama administration apparently doesn't have enough to meddle in, the FTC has decreed—in a modest 81 pages of regulation—that online reviewers must make clear whether they paid for a good or service, the length of their relationship with the provider, any previous loot and the odds of getting more in the future. So far media is exempt—we're not taking our chances—but bloggers, the grandest opinionators of all, must come clean. Ditto Twitter tastemakers, in 140 characters, review included.

The point, ostensibly, is to protect gullible consumers from bribed critics. But the regulations' real effect is to prove that no commerce is private and no citizen is adult enough to operate without federal supervision. So before you confess on Facebook this Thanksgiving that you aren't a fan of Aunt Mabel's mincemeat pie, prepare to dis-



NATE BEELER WWW.CAGECARTOONS.COM

disclose that she's sent you countless socks and the occasional scarf over the years and that you fully expect to receive a fruitcake for Christmas.

[FAITH]

SCRIPTING SCRIPTURE

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Andrew Schlafly? The website Conservapedia—a right-wing substitute for Wikipedia—has decided to rewrite the Bible, which means the day might come when Schlafly, the site's founder, is counted the new St. Jerome.

But probably not. The recently launched Conservative Bible Project, which intends to scrub Holy Writ of "liberal bias," mostly manages to mangle familiar verses. For "blessed are meek" Conservapedia suggests, "Blessed are those that are not full of themselves."

The project's homepage explains that a conservative translation of the Bible is necessary because liberal distortion has robbed Christ's parables of "their full free-market meaning" and cluttered the text with "compound negatives and unnecessary ambiguities." Hence Conservapedia's decision to replace "comrade" with "volunteer." Other edits pander to target demographics—Matthew's description of John the Baptist has been altered to "emphasize his character as an outdoorsman." In retelling the

story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Conservapedia's translators render the mob scene outside Lot's house thus: "The Sodomites said, 'Stand aside. You're new around here and you think you can tell us what to do?'" Yeah, pilgrim.

By bending a sacred text to crude political ends, Conservapedia commits the same blasphemy as feminists who claim the Trinity comprises Mother, Daughter, and Holy Womb. To put our objection to this in language Conservapedia's editors might understand: Render unto talk radio what is talk radio's, and leave what is God's out of it.

[NEOCONS]

ALL IN THE FAMILY

How Elizabeth Cheney must make Pop proud. As a college student in Colorado in 1988, the daughter of the future veep wrote her senior thesis on "The Evolution of Presidential War Powers," a subject that her father went on to make his own. Today, Liz, 49 and no longer able to use her surname to find work in the State Department, has formed a pressure group to keep the familial legacy aflame. It's called—don't laugh—"Keep America Safe."

Assisted by co-chairs Debra Burlingame—sister of the pilot whose plane crashed into the Pentagon on 9/11—and, of course, the ubiquitous

William Kristol, *la* Cheney's mission is to criticize the White House for having adopted policies that "appease our adversaries." By scrapping the missile shield in Eastern Europe, denouncing torture, and pausing before another troop surge in Afghanistan, Obama is "weakening our nation."

Instead, the new commander in chief should do exactly what Dick and Dubya did: menace (preferably invade) any country *The Weekly Standard* doesn't care for, dismantle the Constitution, spy on citizens, and pretend it's all for freedom's sake. "Keep America Safe" by pursuing the very policies that have wrecked U.S. power over the last eight years.

"The Left has dozens of organizations and tens of millions of dollars dedicated to undercutting the war on terror," warbled Kristol. "The good guys need some help, too." Happily, the group's expensive launch—complete with fear-peddling video about the perils of executive weakness—went largely unnoticed. Apart from a few hawking heads on TV, nobody seems too concerned with what the daughter of the worst vice president in American history has to say. But don't expect daddy's little girl to disappear: it's reported that Liz is angling for a Virginia congressional seat in 2012.

[ECONOMY]
MAD MONEY

The Federal Reserve, Treasury, and Congress have had one solution to the financial crisis: more money. Print it, redistribute it, spend it even before the greenbacks roll off the press. Keep interest rates low and get the banks to manufacture more money, which they do every time they take in and loan out deposits.

The result has been the plummeting of the dollar's value. Once again, it's near parity with the currency affectionately known as the "looney," the Canadian dollar. Even as the stock market bounds

past 10,000 again, causing Pollyanna pundits to hail recovery, our currency sinks. And off in the distance, the "BRIC" states—Brazil, Russia, India, and China, would-be financial titans of the future—rumble about replacing the dollar as the world's reserve currency.

What happens when U.S. banks, still cautious about making loans, start lending full throttle? What happens if the return of boom-time speculation coincides with falling confidence in the dollar and the creation of a new reserve currency? We might not feel exactly like Weimar or Venezuela, but we would not be able, as the divorce lawyers say, to live in the manner to which we have become accustomed.

But Uncle Sam's monopoly money might get a short-term reprieve. That's because the spendthrift ways of other governments remain competitive with those of our own. Consider what China has been doing to its money supply, as noted by analyst Mike Shedlock:

The Chinese central bank's printing and respective Chinese bank lending make us look like amateurs. Chinese central bank assets and the money supply are up 25-26% annualized YTD. But this growth rate of money supply and bank lending is what is required to make up for the 8-10% net contraction in output from the collapse in exports and export-related production.

Meanwhile, back in the US, total bank credit is contracting while M2 is up 5% annualized YTD.

It's hardly a comforting thought, but the U.S. might restore the appearance of prosperity not by generating more goods and actual wealth but simply by remaining a haven from the even more reckless policies of other nations' central banks. The end result, however, will be a crash not only of America's economy but the entire industrialized world's. ■

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[What Are Intellectuals Good For? by George Scialabba]

Untenured Radical

Clearing space for the utopian imagination

By Patrick Allitt

SPARE A THOUGHT, conservatives, for America's leftist intellectuals. The Right has had its ups and downs over the last 30 years, but the Left has had nothing but downs. What could be more painful than to see so many of your hopes hammered flat by history, so many good intentions turned to ashes? All the more reason then for readers from Left and Right alike to salute George Scialabba, whose new book teaches valuable lessons on how to look difficulties in the face and to accept defeat gracefully.

Scialabba is a rare bird among serious nonfiction writers in that he's not a professor or a foundation fellow. In some ways reminiscent of the longshoreman-philosopher Eric Hoffer, he comes to the work of Plato, David Hume, Matthew Arnold, and Karl Marx not on the basis of a life spent in university seminars but from his own experiences as a social worker and office clerk. He can always produce an appropriate insight from John Stuart Mill or a scintillating quip from George Bernard Shaw. He keeps alive the ideals of the Enlightenment, dares to think utopian thoughts, and still feels the romantic pull of the Left, but hardly ever succumbs to wishful thinking. This collection of his essays and reviews from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s makes surprising reading, not least because Scialabba, from a principled position on the Left, makes so many assertions with which conservatives will readily agree.

His heroes are the public intellectuals of the 20th century who spoke for a humane version of socialism, who

rebuked cruelty and malice wherever they found them (including on their own side), and who resisted the temptation of thinking in lockstep for political reasons. He singles out for high praise Randolph Bourne, Dwight Macdonald, George Orwell, and Irving Howe among the English speakers, Albert Camus, Nicola Chiaromonte, and Ignazio Silone among the Europeans. They all brought wide learning, moral subtlety, and a refined literary style to their work.

Why, Scialabba asks, are such writers no longer to be found? Part of the problem is the greater complexity of the world, many elements of which can be mastered only through years of technical training and specialization. A general familiarity with the humanities and a deep sense of common decency might have been sufficient for Orwell to denounce the Communists in the Spanish Civil War, but it's not enough when the issues are ICBM-targeting doctrine, biotechnological research, and the arcane lore of leveraged buyouts. Today's public intellectuals find it difficult to speak confidently on more than a few topics. Another part of the problem is the vastly increased sophistication of government and corporations, whose manipulation of the media and whose skillful, unrelenting propaganda have come almost to shape the reality in which we live. "When amateurs were in charge of deceiving the public about American foreign policy," Scialabba writes, "they did it badly; Henry Kissinger, Richard Perle, and Elliott Abrams are another matter entirely."

But must increasing complexity and the sinister reach of propaganda end the dream of a better world? In a meditation on utopianism, Scialabba says no. He understands the intellectual progress of recent centuries as a joint venture undertaken by skeptics and visionaries, who challenged ancient falsehoods and dreamed of a finer world: "The skeptics can be seen as clearing a space for the utopian imagination, for prophecies of a demystified community, of solidarity without illusions. The skeptics weed, the visionaries water." He is not ashamed to outline his own utopia, a world in which everyone will sing in harmony at least once a week, in which folks will know plenty of great poems and speeches by heart, have useful and stimulating work, enjoy civil arguments with one another, won't depend on consumerism for a feeling of self-worth, and will be able to hike in unspoiled wilderness. I would be glad to join him there.

Scialabba regrets that most leftist intellectuals have given up on utopia and retreated completely into academic life. They deceive themselves, he argues, when they claim that their esoteric work in critical theory has political significance. Their ventures in multiculturalism, he adds, are often mere academic empire building, which do little or nothing to aid the actual disadvantaged members of society. Worse, by asserting that their academic work is "political," they feel absolved from doing the hard and joyless work of organizing and agitating that their predecessors generally undertook.