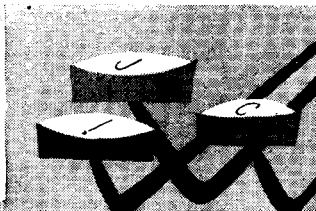


# Manner of Speaking



**Fantasy Life, the Human Condition, and Deep Thoughts (or, No Subject):** My fantasy life keeps sending me messages in a code to which I do not have the key. Is this state of things the human condition? I have to believe that it is. But I must also believe that there exist occasional flashes of a garbled lucidity: the illusion of understanding what we really know nothing about. I am, in fact, in the process of having such a flash.

The process is basically an act of faith. I have faith in the existence of an enduring principle of irony at the center of the human condition. It must be so because, by definition, the human condition is the condition of trying to find out what human beings have done, what they are doing, and what they are likely to do next.

By definition, too, this act of inquiry is exclusively the occupation of human beings. From the divinities of Ur to the propositions of Ethical Culture, human beings have been haunted by the idea

that Gods and Noumena are involved in the inquiry. Yet, there is no argument here for the religious: whatever Gods and/or Noumena one is haunted by, it is their nature to *know* what the human condition is. The Gods and Noumena know, the beasts seem to ask no pertinent questions, and we lack information on what the Martians, if any, may be thinking. We are forced to conclude that the human condition is a subject of exclusively human inquiry.

So it is that I can be sure the human condition (whatever it is) is centered on irony. It must be so centered because everyone involved in asking questions about it has a sense of irony as his own center. When irony is built into the inquirer, the inquiry cannot come to any but ironical conclusions.

These reflections, of course, are not direct transmissions from my fantasy life, but deductions from the nature of all receivers. Once we know our wave lengths, we can begin to know what sorts of messages we may hope to re-

ceive and what sorts of messages are beyond our reception.

The Air Force used to have something called Self-Evident Code. It was always, I believe, transmitted orally and on low frequencies. Since I have received from the fantasy transmitter nothing that could be classified either as a voice or as self-evident, I conclude, if only presumptively, that my receiver does not work within these low-frequency bands.

I am not sure what happens in the middle and high frequencies, nor do I know at what point middle becomes high, high becomes very high, and very high becomes ultra. I was not the radio man in the first place; I was just along for the ride. I do seem to recall that whenever I listened in on very high frequencies for curiosity's sake, I heard a series of high-pitched dits and dahs blipping their distorted way through a curtain of squees, squaws, and cosmic whines. The radio man usually managed to make some sort of sense of this ether-gibber, but it has remained forever beyond me, except as a metaphor for my fantasy life; it is at just such frequencies my fantasy seems to transmit, those dits and dahs will do well enough for the message it sends, and that high-frequency static does excellently for the screen of space-warped inanities through which my fantasy transmission is garbled.

I am, that is to say, receiving some sort of Morse, it is coming in faster than I could read it even if it were not being distorted by interference, it *is* being distorted on nothing less than a cosmic scale, and were I able to convert all the dits and dahs into the right letters, I am sure the message would turn out to be in a code to which I do not have the key.

It may, therefore, seem presumptuous of me to claim that I have a guess about the nature of the message, but I have one nonetheless. Grant me that it is only on these frequencies that we can receive (at least until the Freudian radio man teaches us how to search other bands), that it is in some sort of Morse (which that Freudian radio man can, possibly, teach us to convert into alphabetical characters), and that irony is a built-in principle of all receivers (whereby irony becomes a fixed principle of all messages received)—grant me these three grants, and I am ready to burst forth, like an arc lamp, with a dazzle of insight:

*All those coded messages, had we the key to them, would turn out to be instructions on how to use the key we do not have.*

That thought may seem to be a bit complicated but do not be put off by the

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involutions of the truth. Take Dante's warning instead:

O voi che avete gl'intelletti sani,  
Mirate la dottrina che s'asconde  
Sotto il velame degli versi strani!

Men of sound intellect and probity,  
weigh with good understanding  
what lies hidden  
behind the veil of my strange  
allegory!

As I have already confessed, this insight came to me with the lucidity and revelation of pure guess. It is, therefore, irrefutable. It exists as self-evidently as a Euclidean axiom. Let the non-Euclidean show their virtuosity by proving that Euclid's conclusions could be reached by beginning with a set of antipodal axioms: it is still to those conclusions we must come until we are moved to describe another fantasy as the reality we tune in to.

The true test of this revelation is not in debate, but in demonstration. Let any man switch on all his fantasy circuits and let him prepare himself with coffee, whisky, sobriety, or whatever other drug serves his metabolic receptivity. Then, while he is attuned to the ether flutters of his widest mind, let him proceed carefully through any newspaper, an issue of the *Congressional Record*, the minutes of the last meeting of anything, his child's last school composition, Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, the family photograph album, a transcript of last week's sermon as delivered at the church of his choice and/or convenience, a federal requisition order for materials with a value in excess of \$100, or through any other document of weight and moment that purports to describe this world, aforesaid documents to be perused in any combination, with any reasonable omissions, and in any order, or none.

Then, if such a perusal does not demonstrate that all is fantasy, that the fantasy is in an unknown code, and that the message—had we the key to the code—would turn out to contain instruction on how to use the key we do not have. . . .

If, I say, the demonstration is not conclusive, why then that man is suffering from doctrinaire overclarification of his stupidity, and there is no hope for him until he has learned to do enough thinking to become confused again, and has thereby reinstated himself as a member in good standing of the Society for Being Hopefully Uncertain about the Nature of the Human Condition.

—JOHN CIARDI.



SR/ March 5, 1966

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# Business and Government—Do They Speak the Same Language?

## AN EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC SURVEY

*The continuing national debate over the proper roles of business and government in the U.S. economy has been given fresh momentum recently by such events as the aluminum price increase and the settlement that finally ended New York City's bus and subway strike. What is the current state of the debate and where is it likely to lead? In these pages SR seeks to throw some light on the subject with a special report by Dexter M. Keezer, economic advisor to McGraw-Hill, Inc., and former director of its department of economics; an exclusive survey of executives and economists; and an analysis of the survey by Alfred Balk, a writer specializing in current economic and political issues.*

By DEXTER M. KEEZER

**I**T WILL BE many years before economists and historians have managed to assess accurately the manifold causes of the business boom of unprecedented duration (now five years). Such is the superlatively complex collection of forces that makes for business expansion or contraction, not the least of which surely is good luck.

But at this juncture it is possible to identify clearly enough some of the key elements that have contributed to the record-breaking stretch of expanding prosperity which, since February 1961, has added about \$200 billion, or 40 per cent, to the annual rate at which goods and services are produced in the United States—an increase from about \$500 billion to about \$700 billion. These key elements include:

► Bold and, as it turned out, brilliant use of massive federal tax cuts (in the face of a large federal deficit) to increase the demand for goods and services and hence ultimately, via an increased volume of business, federal tax receipts—a triumph of high-test Keynesian economic therapy.

► New federal tax incentives—an investment credit and increased depreciation allowances (deadly dull to discuss but of crucial economic importance)—for business firms to invest in new and

better capital equipment to meet increased demand for their products.

► Provision by the Federal Reserve money-manufacturing system of an abundant and relatively low-priced supply of money and credit.

► Restraint by labor leaders, reinforced by a relatively abundant supply of labor which, with some notable exceptions, has kept wage increases roughly in line with increases in output per man-hour, and thus kept labor costs relatively stable.

► Restraint by business managers in raising prices, reinforced by a relative abundance of producing capacity, which, among other things, has reduced the incentive to build up large inventories of goods, the ups and then downs of which have been a primary cause of postwar ups and downs of business generally.

► Business confidence, at least in the key decision-making centers, in the wisdom and integrity of a partnership between government and business proclaimed and very actively promoted in Washington.

The inclusion of business confidence as a key contributor to the record-breaking economic expansion is controversial. Indeed, there are many who think that such confidence is of incidental importance at most.

But to see how wrong they who feel this way could be, it is only necessary to

take a look at the early phases of the current expansion. It is true that the expansion officially started in February 1961, only a month after President John F. Kennedy took office. But it was a weak and halting expansion until 1963, so halting that some analysts, including Professor Paul W. McCracken of the Graduate School of Business of the University of Michigan, a former member of the Council of Economic Advisors, says it "is not even factually correct to claim that there has been an uninterrupted expansion since 1961. The present expansion . . . began two years later in early 1963." In 1962 the gross national product, roughly the total of goods and services produced, continued to rise, but after April industrial production flattened out for the balance of the year.

Significantly, it was in April 1962 that President Kennedy moved violently to force major steel companies to revoke a price increase they had announced. The President had great provocation to react violently to the steel price increase. It was announced to him as a *fait accompli* after a steel industry wage settlement that he had been assured was, and he had hailed as, one that would not require any broad price increases.

Even so, his action in forcing the steel companies to roll back the steel price increase, which was based entirely on executive discretion and had no founda-