

### 9 PM - 1990s On a long march through the culture

“Election Night seems as good a reason as any to have a party so don’t complain.”

“Complain? I like parties. I admit, I am preoccupied with the election—and not the battle between the candidates, but on how others can willfully ignore the metaphorical spirits past, present, and future that hover around. Which is more fascinating, the ghosts themselves, or people ill-tuned to see them?”

“I’m just asking you to behave.”

“As if I ever misbehave. I tend to react, not instigate. Even then, I’ll question someone to understand them better.”

“Rubbish! You want them to understand themselves better; which they rarely dare.”

“Finding solid resistance, I usually back away, gracefully. In most instances it won’t make a difference and there is no need to hurt anyone. Even so, that limited discussion is worthwhile for me because I learn to reframe ideas to make them more accessible to others. While the ideas, themselves, aren’t difficult, it is tough to frame them in such a way to make them more obviously worth embracing as one’s own.”

“Why are you so interested in selling your ideas?”

“They aren’t my ideas, they are ideas others developed worth consideration because they have value.”

“A quibble.”

“But an important distinction. Take Dorothy Sayers, for instance.”

“Sayers, the mystery writer? I saw her *Nine Tailors* Lord Peter Wimsey series on public television.”

“Wonderful mysteries. Educated at Oxford, when it was unusual

for women to study there, she studied medieval education and religion.”

“What has she to do with ideas of value?”

“Can you list the handful of cataclysmic changes in information technology that have changed the world in the last thousand years?”

“Gutenberg’s moveable type printing press in the 1400s . . .”

“And one you might not guess—the introduction of coffee houses and public salons from 1650 to 1750.”

“Morse’s code and telegraph in the 1840s and the Linotype machine in the 1890s.”

“The Associated Press started because of Morse, and the Linotype made typesetting books and magazines affordable for the masses.”

“Radio and motion pictures in the 1920s, television in the 1950s caused dramatic changes in the access to information.”

“Certain ideas increased value because access to information changed.”

“Who knew you could sweep your arms across so many centuries!”

“Laugh if you want, but it’s useful to see threads of significance across time. In 1993 Tim Berners-Lee released a paper defining the Internet World Wide Web. Berners-Lee popularized hyperlinks earlier advocated by Ted Nelson in the 1970s for the Department of Defense military and academic ARPANET network.

“Each step accelerated social networking. Gutenberg’s printed books helped Sir Thomas More. Both technologies accelerated communications in unsettling and untrustworthy ways. Writing for the Internet of his age, More authored *Utopia*, a light-hearted romp across social conventions. Each succeeding innovation has brought us ‘closer’ to each other, figuratively—increased the bandwidth, speed, and facility of interaction. While the word ‘web’ like a spider’s web offers a striking visual image, the more

accurate mathematical term for inter-connected nodes is 'graph.' Each node in a graph represents a person and each line—called an edge—represents a possible connection to another person. A message from one node to another is part of a feedback loop. Feedback loops can be either constructive or destructive. Naturally slow interaction has insulated us from being overpowered by destructive information—from other people inserting themselves negatively into our lives.”

“And what of Dorothy Sayers?”

“She gave a lecture at Oxford in 1948 called *The Lost Tools of Learning*, before television became popular and well before the Internet. She warned how unprepared we were to defend against the onslaught of information: ‘For we let our young men and women go out unarmed, in a day when armor was never so necessary. By teaching them all to read, we have left them at the mercy of the printed word. By the invention of the film and the radio, we have made certain that no aversion to reading shall secure them from the incessant battery of words, words, words. They do not know what the words mean; they do not know how to ward them off or blunt their edge or fling them back; they are a prey to words in their emotions instead of being the masters of them in their intellects.’”

“I believe in literacy. Teaching literacy makes progress.”

“Literacy as a tool is a start. Tools demand you know how to use them wisely and well. It’s dangerous to learn to operate a car’s accelerator without learning to apply the brake. I’ll bet students in your class—all of them readers who score well on the English Language Standards tests required to graduate—can’t recognize a logical fallacy when they read one, can’t list any of the four dozen I know, and can’t even define logical fallacy like a bogus dilemma or *argumentum ad hominem*.”

“Probably not.”

“Students in the Middle Ages were practiced at it. Sayers wrote, ‘We who were scandalized in 1940 when men were sent to fight armored tanks with rifles, are not scandalized when young men and women are sent into the world to fight massed propaganda

with a smattering of ‘subjects’; and when whole classes and whole nations become hypnotized by the arts of the spell binder, we have the impudence to be astonished. We dole out lip-service to the importance of education—lip-service and, just occasionally, a little grant of money; we postpone the school-leaving age, and plan to build bigger and better schools; the teachers slave conscientiously in and out of school hours; and yet, as I believe, all this devoted effort is largely frustrated, because we have lost the tools of learning, and in their absence can only make a botched and piecemeal job of it.”

“She didn’t pull any punches.”

“She was blunt, like Napoleon who spoke of having an iron fist inside a velvet glove. She was right, and she was ignored both then and now. As the gravity of circumstance increases one needs to peel off as many layers of softness as is necessary to get someone’s attention. The Internet represented the complete penetration of media into culture with people unprepared to defend against it. That allowed rust to eat further into the politics of the day because journalism failed to hold people accountable.”

“Whoa, boy! You’re running a little too fast for me there.

“Okay, small bites. If there was one phrase in the 1990s that measured the decade it would be from Bill Clinton, during his sworn testimony, trying to avoid presidential impeachment, ‘It depends on what the meaning of “is” is.’ That’s waffling on the order of Richard Nixon’s press secretary, Ron Ziegler, who famously declared in 1972 that his previous statements to the press were ‘inoperative’. Ziegler meant, ‘I lied.’ Accuracy and precision matter in language because that’s what you depend on to plan your future.

“Long ago in college I clipped together a list of words in my college dorm that I called a ‘Graveyard of Misspent Words.’ On the list were liberal, conservative, gay, right, left. Today I’d add divisive, and neo- anything. Each word represents a loss to the language. Today they call it ‘nuance.’ It’s not evolution; it’s cheating the people of distinctions they deserve.

“Richard Mitchell explained the difference between the many words Eskimos use for ‘snow’ and the many words ghetto youth might use for ‘money’. A life many hang on distinguishing one kind of snow from another, but calling money ‘bread’ or some other pseudo-distinction only distinguishes class and family without contributing to clarity or understanding.”

“So language matters and it is in trouble.”

“Pronouncements that sound beguiling at first blush may have been crafted to sneak by you in an unguarded moment. Prof. John Bowers teaches that the first sentence in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* asserts, ‘It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.’ Dr. Samuel Johnson would have proposed such a dramatic statement at his chop house dinner, sweeping the air with his fork, and yet, the converse is more likely to be true—that a woman of Austen’s day was more likely to be in want of a single man in possession of a good fortune. Premises, warrants, evidence, and conclusions are tools that can be used to come to understanding but that are more often used to bludgeon you into submission. Language does matter. Author William Gass said we use words to club the living into food.”

“So we have to defend ourselves against misuse of language.”

“The game today is to assassinate people with words and confuse others along the way.

“If people knew how language limits thought they would respect it more. Socrates was chained to ancient Greek. It limited his brilliance. I can stand on Socrates shoulders because I can make more subtle distinctions than he could. For Socrates, *polis* meant ‘city’ and ‘culture’ and ‘society’. Absent different words to distinguish them, it was hard, if not impossible, for Socrates to distinguish between the three.

“Language is also a vehicle we use to convey trust. Remember the famous photograph near the end of World War II of Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Josef Stalin at Yalta?”

“I’ve seen it before.”

“In 1993, the New York *Times* ran the photograph but in place of Josef Stalin sitting at the right end of the couch the photograph had been digitally altered to show Groucho Marx in his place. Sylvester Stallone was inserted behind Sir Winston. That early equivalent of *photoshopping* was to make the point that because of technology, photos could no longer be trusted. The Times entirely missed the point. Words have always been able to be altered, and pictures more rudimentarily for more than a hundred years. Since the written word was first offered to others as news, the only thing newspapers have to sell is trust.”

“The 1990s were a piece of work.”

“In the 1990s, journalism was deteriorating by the day. And as the political class became more skilled at learning how to take advantage of the weaknesses, as they manipulated without being called to account for it, they became more brazenly willing to do it.

In 1992, Francis Fukuyama re-minted from old coin the phrase ‘History is dead’, drawing from a Karl Marx reference to Hegel. Fukuyama meant not that events wouldn’t continue, but that since liberal democracy was likely to prevail over other forms of government, the race was all but over. Fukuyama later reconsidered the observation, but too late—you cannot keep a profoundly meaningless cliché down.

“Pundits and prophets of incredible lightness in the 1990s, quickly pronounced the end of ideology, the end of differences, because, for them, history begins at dawn. Nor would they have reason to believe otherwise because national media seldom recall for the reader the substance of issues or their parallels. It would be nine long years before when 9/11 reality kicked their hubris in the teeth.”

“The politics of the time was absurd.”

“Yes, as if rhetoric became the enemy. Rhetoric is the enemy because rhetoric exposes rhetorical ploys, which reveal that rhetoric should not be trusted, which means, therefore, rhetoric is the enemy.”

“It’s the absence of rhetoric that becomes the enemy—an inability to parse that politicians promised what they could not deliver because they knew it was what you wanted to hear, and knew the press was compliant.”

“History requires vigilance by the press. Well-meaning do-gooders and villains are revisionist at heart. Similarly, great literature repeatedly has been stifled by the kind of political correctness that continues today and that dare not acknowledge the villainy of its methods.”

“Even politics gets revised.”

“Socrates believed of politics was the art of people coming to a collective understanding about what should be done. Politics has become, for the political class today, the selfish habit of trying to get their way by any means. Absent yesterday or tomorrow, political classes are stuck in time. Their horizons are so short, seeing only today. Bad choices lead to dreadful consequences and best efforts to change things for the short term too often complicate things tomorrow.”

“Why don’t people see what is happening?”

“Politically correctness is low intensity warfare. When progressives attempt to redefine the word conservative as a pejorative they are as venal as those who would corrupt the word marriage to mean civil union. Corrupting political language is an attempt to shape the battlefield before the battle. Networks proffer street soldiers in that battle like David Gergen and David Brooks whose positions often don’t match their label.

“Politically correct suppressionists try to police words. Restricting words to what they believe proper undercuts society. On the other side, subversionists undermine the freedom to say what one pleases by introducing noise to block out opposing messages. Both are anti-social. What is one to do? Suppressionists are difficult to stop without subverting the system and subversionists are hard to stop without suppression. The plausible alternative is to superimpose real education on top of current schooling so it nudges students to think, inoculating them to recognize the misbehavior of both.”

“Is it war?”

“Most definitely. Within hours after a political incident becomes public, trolls magically appear, commenting on blogs on the Internet, always with a specific agenda, often with a select string of words that appear uniformly and repeatedly. Always on schedule. It’s Astroturf. It’s noise. It’s planted. It’s meant to undermine democracy, not contribute to it. Those on the blog often wish the intruding noise makers spent their idle time trying to learn something.”

“What can you do about it?”

“We bring out the *pistolas* to figuratively shoot anyone who feeds the trolls. Blog regulars chew ‘em up and spit ‘em out. Trolls who appear repeatedly get added to our trollblocking software to scrub away the spew that interferes with constructive blog entries, but the plaque remains on the blog to obscure substance from any innocent that happens along, now or in the future.

“What should one think of anyone who makes it his business to insert plaque into the conversational stream of the Internet? What should one think of a candidate who embraces such tactics? They belong in the overcrowded tenth ditch of Danté’s eighth circle of hell, with the falsifiers of metals, persons, coins and words.”

“How gullible are people?”

“The naïve have been hijacked but are susceptible to it. A naïve will join any chain gain when promised his prison will have a new name.”

“Here . . . Let me open the door for you.

“Thanks.”

. . .

“ . . . Big business is the problem.”

“Tell me, what percentage of business is big business?”

“I don’t know exactly, but it has to be a lot.”

“Only two percent of businesses have more than 100 employees. Why tar all business for the perceived sins of so few.”

“Let me rephrase that, then. Faceless corporations are the problem.”

“Corporations have faces.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Yes, but you don’t know what you mean.”

“They are faceless. Impersonal.”

“I represent a corporation. You know my face. I care about every person who works for me, all my customers, and the community.”

“But the big ones . . .”

“. . . are the ones that the political classes invoke to push your buttons to steal your vote. Most businesses represent opportunity, initiative, and economy. Most corporations like ours, work to serve customers, employees, and shareholders, and struggle against political gamesmanship that would play you like a flute.”

“That’s unfair.”

“If it were not the case it would be unfair, but you are being played and either don’t recognize it or don’t care. If the political class wanted to raise corporate taxes, you’d support it, but the dollar to pay that tax keeps a dollar from being distributed to employees, to shareholders, or to customers through lower prices. You pay that tax, one way or another. Like a mosquito, the political class has stuck its proboscis into your wallet, injected some numbing words to keep you from noticing that it is busily sucking you dry.

“Government represents a bigger problem than big business. Government is usually the enabling partner in collusion. If you would criticize big business, criticize its enablers. The enablers extend regulatory tentacles into every corner of your life, all, they claim, for your own good. If private business has become public by virtue of its regulation, like childcare has, where you can’t care for your neighbors children until the school bus comes, how can everything that happens elsewhere be off limits?”

“Then I should oppose big government?”

“Actually, you should be wary of voters. When good people haven’t a clue, they become gullible enablers of contemporary over-government that shows little, if any, respect for citizens. The power class would rather control away jobs and then steal to pay people to be idle and, as a nanny state, keep the dependent under their power.”

“Nanny state?”

“The state becomes an enabler of misbehavior. When our business holds job interviews, the pool of potential workers is polluted with prima donnas, job-hoppers, victims, the conceited, liars, druggies, thieves, the self-infatuated, all looking for a free lunch. Damaged goods like that make up a pool of potential voters that venal politicians can manipulate, dangling that lunch before them.”

“You don’t trust voters?”

“Not all voters. I don’t trust those who don’t know how to think and don’t know how to behave. They get upset at lack of success. When an obstacle appears, blame others. That makes it difficult for one to develop talents. Undeveloped talents set one up for another failure. That leads one to get upset at lack of success.”

“That’s getting in your own way.”

“The dregs in the pool of unemployed have little incentive to improve if the state manages them like livestock. They have no reason to try when they have taxpayer pocketbooks to fall back on.”

“I hear it all the time, ‘Why should I try in school? I’ll always be able to fall back on you and get welfare.’ So why should I bust my buns at school and why should I try?”

“I have absolutely no reason for you to try . . .”

“I didn’t think so.”

“. . . you have to find that reason for yourself. Society is put at risk when victimhood seems profitable for those called victims and for those who would use them to enrich themselves with

power and wealth. But the long-term consequence of playing that game robs the economy of energy and cheats everyone of wealth.

“We shall not be rid of racism so long as one can use the history of it as a mantle of personal victimhood where none otherwise would apply. They are willing to misuse it for their own ends.”

“We still have racial inequalities in, education, in the economy, and in government.”

“Equality? You want delivered what enforced equality has never delivered. You want not just ‘a’ thumb on the scale of justice, you want *your* thumb on the scale of justice, and *your* thumb is the only true thumb. Shed the robe of victimhood you’ve wrapped yourself in, because I don’t buy it for an instant. You cheer for the Yankees, don’t you?”

“Damn straight.”

“And you gloat every time they win. You lord it over others?”

“And love every minute of it.”

“Well, I hate to break it to you, but you’re no athlete, the Yankees never drafted you, and you’re not on the team. That, my dear, represents the core flaw of the opportunistic racism you drape yourself in.”

“My ancestors were enslaved by your ancestors!”

“You and I live now. Not yesterday, not 1954, and not 1860. You don’t get a free ride because, in the lottery of life, your great, great grandfather was enslaved. Don’t pull victimhood on me because of your ancestor situation. My ancestors fought for you, and I still do. I don’t get a special ticket because my great, great grandfather was drafted to dodge musket balls at Gettysburg to free your ancestors.

“I will not be held hostage to a history I did not cause and cannot change. My responsibility to the past is to learn from it, and I see darned little learning on your part. Too lazy to work out the consequences, satisfied with platitudes instead of principles, you’d rather feel good for a short time and screw your children with unintended consequences.”

“What should voters understand, then?”

“Darned few today can recall President Dwight Eisenhower’s farewell address where he warned voters to beware of the military-industrial complex.”

“He was concerned that the military and business could pervert policy in our country.”

“That’s not a new problem. Adam Smith extracted a valuable wisdom from history: Do not to trust government, groups, or convenient associations of governments or groups. In the abstract, Eisenhower was concerned about collusion between elected officials, government bureaucracy, and outside organizations. In Eisenhower’s day, that was the military and business. Today, worse poisonous partnerships put us at risk. While claiming to be autonomous, voluntary organizations receive a substantial amount of funding from the taxpayer via grants and as a result, frequently take positions in terms of public policy that, unsurprisingly, fit in with the fashionable bromides of transnational progressivism, health fascism and too narrow environmentalism.”

“Bromides?”

“Bromides were sleeping drafts. A bromide was a cliché used and reused to put you to sleep. Cultural relativism is a bromide. If Jack the Ripper preyed on you, would you defend yourself?”

“Hell, yes.”

“I take that to mean you would defend your family, too. How about your neighbor down the street.”

“That’s what laws are for, and police.”

“Follow the laws of your culture. Suppose Jack comes from a culture that believes that males should take their mates by conquest.”

“That’s in their land, not mine.”

“So if Jack’s family and friends emigrate, behave, become citizens, and then change the law, Jack’s rules are okay with you?”

“Hell, no!”

“You are not behaving like the cultural relativist you say you are. Equality is another bromide. You believe in equality?”

“Yes”

“Which one: equality of opportunity or equality of result? The only equality you get is the equality to work 40 hours a week to produce goods or services others are willing to pay you for. There is no right to a free lunch, but you are gifted the opportunity for education that may lead to the opportunity for upward mobility. If one does not take to education, it reduces one’s opportunity. One has a right to what is earned by one’s own hand. No more. No less.

“You want to fight poverty. You see hungry people and demand that government feed them now . . . instead of understanding that your unthinking charitable impulses might be condemning them to handouts forever. A charitable impulse, when faced with hungry people, is to give them some of your money or ask others to give some of theirs. But it isn’t charity to compel your neighbor to give his money to your cause.”

“But they deserve to be fed.”

“I did not say they didn’t deserve to be fed. I am concerned about how. There are damned few instances where the world needs you to tell it what to do and a helluva lot more where you should simply behave. Protect yourself where you must, but mostly, teach by example. I am concerned that often your ends justify your means. Who are the new nobility?”

“Business leaders? Hollywood celebrities? The Washington elite?”

“Business leaders may be rich, but they aren’t idle. Neither are those in Hollywood. One may argue about the perks. Who doesn’t have to work? Who, simply by taking the trouble to be born, does not have to work to get benefits?”

“We are creating a new class of people who, by dint of having been born American, get entitlements.”

“They are a new nobility. They don’t have to do anything to earn anything. Playing a victim is quite enough.”

“Theirs is not a cushy life.”

“Food, healthcare. Education. Services. Remember what GDP means? Maximum GDP is when everyone—to the last person—is working to the best of their ability. Are those you are talking about working to the best of their ability? Are they obliged to do anything to the least of their ability? What is the next question?”

“Why are they not?”

“We’ll pry you away from the feel-good progressives yet. In 1789, when the French failed to recover from the political class that could not keep France’s finances in order, the Third Estate met on the tennis court at Versailles. These were not nobility or clergy, but representatives of commerce, manufacturing, banking, and agriculture—precisely the people who make increases in productivity possible. They created a new political class—a new nobility if you will—who bribed a still newer nobility—freeloaders—that forced working people to carry a greater burden than they should. Is it a bromide or a reasonable expectation that people should work to the best of their ability for the benefits they receive?”

“It’s a reasonable expectation.”

“People should work. No one should be idle. If there is no work and they are paid to transition, then work while in transition. There is no such thing as a free lunch. You can go all the way back to Socrates to discover why, but Adam Smith said the same thing in 1776. Division of labor can make everyone more productive. Division of labor does not mean that I get to work and you get to work, too. Nor does it mean that either one of us gets complete freedom to do the job we want to do, where we choose to do it. It means we get to apply for the jobs that are available, where they are available, for the pay that the market charges to fill it.”

“But that’s what we do.”

“If, by some chance, you get the job and I don’t then I should not get to sit around on the couch, watching soap operas on the

TV, munching bonbons. It means I get to work at the jobs of last resort, to earn welfare pay at the welfare level. That's not the system our elected representatives have set up."

"No. It's not."

"And that, my friend, puts us all at risk. As surely as people who have no liberty yearn for it, and people who have liberty handed to them yearn for a free lunch. Liberty can disappear in an instant when the stomachs that rumble for a free lunch drown out the lessons of those who struggled for liberty and won. The security of a free lunch comes wrapped in chains.

"We don't know much about liberty or freedom. Liberty and freedom are different concepts, as taken for granted and as undefined as gravity. Define gravity for me."

"It's the force that attracts."

"That says what it does, not what it is. We don't know what gravity is, but we take for granted that we do. Liberty used to be a grant from authority. 'You have the liberty to do thus-and-so.' In our case, our Declaration of Independence grants liberties seldom considered by nations before or since: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our Constitution turned government on its head, making it a creation of the governed. Individuals control government.

"Freedom is not a natural law. It's not even one concept. Is freedom individual? Does it allow unfettered political action? Is it the opportunity of a nation to do whatever it wants, unchallenged by other nations?

"Some award-winning literature of the 1990s meanders with similar drift."

"I'm not buying that without examples."

"Well, A. S. Byatt's 1990 novel *Possession* is quite taken with magic worlds that are . . . ah . . . realistic. It is still Post-modern in style, as if there is a need for more magic in the world we have. We have not sorted out the taxonomy of our own world and Byatt presumes her fantasy to be the means by which we can understand our world better. Rather her work seems like political

science, infatuated with small 't' truths at the expense of what matters.

"Post-colonial literature crept into the limelight in the 1980s and 1990s. Michael Ondaatje's 1992 novel *The English Patient*, was a non-linear narrative in which many cultures are represented, but no society. Things are not as they seem. Expediency is the lens for decision-making. Contact breeds community and events outside one's control change lives. Simplistic interpretations badly skew judgment which leads to unsubstantiated presumptions about western and eastern incompatibility that fall in line with Samuel Huntington's lecture of the same year called *Clash of Civilizations*."

"Huntington, put forward the notion of the clash of civilizations and the belief that cultural and religious identity prompts conflict in the post-Cold War period. Following on from the Greek versus Persian premise of Herodotus, he broadly proposed Western, Eastern or Sinic, Middle Eastern or Islamist (extending into North Africa and Pacific Oceania, Orthodox or Russian, Sub-Saharan African, Hindu, and Japanese. It was so Post-post-colonial an idea that, of course, pseudo-academics acclaimed it.

"One of the games the political class plays to stay in power is to presume conflict with other cultures. In reality, the cultures themselves represent less conflict than exists between the political classes wielding the reins of power *in* each culture.

"You have the skill, but not the will, to recognize both the tactics and what is at risk. You could see what is happening, if you dare. If those in political control respected you, they'd put what they say in context. Only in context can you improve the accuracy of your mental map of reality. But they don't. They want to confuse. They want to use. They want to win. They want to control. There is no morality to power."

" . . . That kind of remark about politics is patently racist, pure and simple."

"You don't do anything to single out genuine bigotry when you accuse everyone who offends you of racism. Samuel Johnson



called politics “the last refuge of scoundrels”, which must make ‘racism’ the next-to-last refuge.”

“There you go quoting the ‘DWEMs’—the dead white European males. Your background made you racist and you don’t even know it.”

“To accuse someone of racism for their reading must be twice as racist because each idea matters, not the make-up of the person who said it.

“Your criticism was racist!”

“Quite. Dissent must be racism. I know you think you mean it, but yours was a superficial observation quite out of context. First of all, if someone calls a candidate a ‘liar’, the basic need is to consider whether the adjective is properly applied. In a recent case, a candidate said that proposed legislation restricted access to health care to illegal immigrants. As a result of the challenge to the candidate’s statement, the Senate moved to close a loophole that would have allowed exactly what the candidate said would not happen. That makes the candidate’s statement wrong at the time he made it.”

“No one should interrupt a candidate’s speech like that.”

“That’s not what you challenged and is a different issue. If that’s your charge, why didn’t you bring it up when previous office holders were booed? If one is going to suggest one have respect for the office even if one doesn’t like the occupant, as Harry Truman corrected General Douglas MacArthur, then your outrage should have been expressed during the past administration.”

“I didn’t think of it.”

“That you didn’t think of it back then would suggest you might be a closet reverse-racist.”

“No!”

“Don’t dismiss that so quickly. Where were you when the last President was called ‘Chimpy’? If such a remark would be called ‘racist’ today—and politically-correct pundits have done so in this campaign—why the double standard before now?”

“I didn’t do it.”

“Worse than tolerate, you didn’t even notice it . . . and if you did, it was only to laugh. Obviously reverse-racism.”

“That’s bull!”

“‘Bull’ is a different subject, but thank you for bringing it up. Perhaps the candidate didn’t lie. There is an essay by philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt called *On Bullshit* in which he suggests that people who bullshit aren’t really lying because, in order to lie, one has to care whether or not what is said is untrue. If truth or falsity is irrelevant to the candidate, then the candidate may not be a liar. He may simply not care.”

“That’s bull *and* racist!”

“. . . and if untruths are said often enough with intent to convince the masses, what is the difference between that and the concept of the ‘Big Lie’ perfected by Joseph Goebbels, the German propaganda chief during World War II.”

“A comparison of the candidate to the Nazis is uncalled for.”

“Again, where were you when comparisons to Nazis were made for the previous administration? Now that’s bull *and* racist *and* a double standard.”

“I would hate to think of you contributing to the calls for the candidate’s assassination, but analogizing to the Nazis carries the clear implication that justified tyrannicide would be welcome.”

“You expend such energy so as not to have to think. To build straw men so you can leap one to the other to avoid dealing with the substance of a legitimate point. In your own head you have a manufactured this fantasy to avoid legitimate consideration of criticism, and you expect me to wear your fable?”

“If you would ‘hate to think’ of me contributing to calls for the candidate’s assassination, then do not suggest it, particularly absent evidence to support the accusation. It’s risible that a legitimate example of bad behavior necessarily implies support for extra-legal activity.”

“It’s not appropriate to compare behavior to the Nazis.”

“It is appropriate to consider like examples where the evidence supports it. Evidence of political technique used to gain power—the Big Lie repeated often enough to convince the masses—should not be confused with abuse of power after they reached power.”

“It’s still uncalled for.”

“The pattern of this discussion repeats itself uncomfortably. A considered and supported opinion is offered. In reply, a cliché that avoids the initial concern is adopted to oppose it—one that embraces one or another logical fallacy, and, as with most double standards, that is absent consideration of parallels in history.”

“What’s your point.”

“That your opposition is not racism, or your own big lie, or bullshit, but is, more ordinarily, intellectually lazy.”

“That’s rude!”

“Nonsense. I defended myself against a scurrilous, ill-founded attack. The weapon used was words. I parried the attack with the same weapon and a little more grace. But, I said what I said out of consideration for you. I have a favorite definition of a friend.”

“What’s that?”

“A friend is someone who, when you make an ass of yourself, realizes it’s not a permanent job.”

“I’m not sure how to respond to that.”

“Lovingly. It’s the way I meant it. My judgment in editorials may still prove wrong. I’m open to that. I need to know where. But challenges to editorials have to stand up to the same scrutiny that the editorials have to face, and the arguments you used strike instead at the very heart of society.

“Charges of racism work two ways. They are an appeal that somehow an argument need not be considered on its merits. Second, they are an *ad hominem* attack that claims victimhood deserves a free pass. Such political correctness attempts to shape the verbal battlefield before the fighting starts by defining some

thought out-of-bounds so one need not bother to address the substance of it.

“At the heart of society is the freedom to be able to say something someone else may not wish to hear. That said, the freedom to offend does not imply the necessity to do so. And where do we learn that in school?”