

by observing the grotesquely disfigured lives that Jerry Springer parades across our living-room screens is the wrong thing to do. Drawing a curtain across the naked shame of a drunken Noah was the right thing to do.

Media gurus retort that televisions come with an on-off switch. This advice is fine, as far as it goes, which is not far at all. Since most people won't know what to turn off if it's not first turned on, the advice is pretty frivolous and thoroughly self-serving. It leaves the producers with all the rights and the consumers with all the responsibilities. What is the socially redeeming value of this moral asymmetry?

This facile advice tells us more about media types than they realize. It depends upon a solipsistic view of individuals in an atomized society, for it assumes that encouragement of deviance by example will not rend the social fabric. It denies that evil communications corrupt good manners. It assumes the opposite of the ancient principle that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and the fourth generations (our connectedness through time) and imagines that individual actions are devoid of social consequences (our connectedness through space). It neglects any possibility that in the media world we are our brother's keeper. It reveals, in short, the moral vacuity of the advisers and the amoral character of the advice—what Solzhenitsyn calls a “smug secularism that cannot see beyond itself.”

Does the logic of these musings lead to a case for censorship? We are now on secular America's holiest ground: censorship is the greatest abomination. But of course we don't really abhor censorship. A politicized society hears “censorship” and thinks “government.” In practice, we all accept censorship of some sort. Parents engage in it daily. So do professors, and just about everyone else, media elites included. They know there are lines they cannot cross—the ire of the editor, the preoccupations of the publisher or producer, the desires of advertisers, the concerns of vocal media watchdog groups, the cautions of ombudspersons, the approval of professional peers. The heart's desire of media professionals may prompt them to keep testing the lines at any given moment, and they may—and do—try to shift the unspoken lines to encompass content hitherto forbidden. But they implicitly or explicitly self-censor daily. They just don't

talk about it. As communication scholars put it, the media are gatekeepers. This very image vitiates their proclamations of the people's untrammled right to know.

The issue, then, is not censorship *per se*. The issue is on what basis, and according to whose standard, censorship is conducted. Ask broadcasters this question, and a one-word answer returns: ratings. What unseemly traffic will the public bear? As the Romans learned long ago, even quite prurient appeals to people's base desires will generate quite a bit of traffic. What this answer fails to acknowledge, however, is that the media *create* an appetite for the unwholesome, the degrading, the illicit—for the next-generation Jerry Springer—as certainly as they satisfy it.

Whatever else this answer tells us, it bespeaks the amorality of the marketplace. (One useful function of the Democratic Party used to be to remind us of this.) If morality is to be imbued into the media marketplace, someone must do the imbuing. Who? The transmitters? Sure, but only according to the lights of their worldview, and these limited lights do not at the moment include the needs of human hearts. The transmitters can produce programs on the dangers of smoking and bad eating habits and on medical breakthroughs and on whatever else might nourish the unspoken impossible desire to keep our animal beings thinking and copulating in perpetuity. But a shrunken view of human beings curtails the range of their moral vision. So there's nothing to stop the mainstreaming of porn on TV or the ever racier lines by heavy-breathing women selling Levi's to men.

Short of the infiltration of high media offices by people with high moral sensibility, which would probably take a religious revival to achieve, receptors will have to do the main job of self-censorship. All hail to those who are trying. Some parents, considering the situation extreme, have taken the extreme measure of junking their TV sets, willing to do without C-SPAN's wonderful window on the world to avoid the ravaging of their children's souls, and their own, too. It is not impossible for discontented consumers to achieve the critical mass necessary to get morally subversive products canceled. Boycotts can override the moral somnolence of advertisers.

But how much better it would be if there were some moral symmetry be-

tween the two sides in the media exchange! Hark back to the advent of television. The talk then was of the social cohesion, the intellectual enrichment, the moral reinforcement that the new medium could provide. In our decayed cultural condition, the odds are against implementing that vision, for what once seemed pristinely possible now seems pitifully naive, if not downright intolerant. Solzhenitsyn observed of America, “Voluntary self-restraint is almost unheard of.” But there are Americans who believe in the principle, and nothing requires them to stay silent about it. Reticence and modesty are not un-American precepts.

Television exposes its bad conscience by staging navel-gazing talk shows in which commentators second-guess their own decisions. Imagine if every time someone invoked “the right to know” on one of these programs, someone else countered with the equally valid right *not* to know. It would be a rhetorical response only. But words have power, and repeating words is how we create common wisdom. Who knows? Maybe we'd start hearing conversations that moved beyond rights-talk. Maybe social responsibility would become more than an empty slogan. That would be a real countercultural revolution.

Edward E. Ericson, Jr., is a professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Progressive Review by Jesse Walker

The left-wing press is in an awful state. Take the *Nation* (please): there's little reason even to flip through it anymore. Oh, Alexander Cockburn is always a pleasure, and Stuart Klawans is a fine movie critic, and Christopher Hitchens is worth reading when he isn't issuing pretentious dispatches from Europe. But good feature stories are as rare there as in the *Weekly Standard*: where once one might have expected to find an essay by Gore Vidal or an investigative report by the late Penny Lernoux, one's much more likely to see a slavish defense of the President against the alleged vast

right-wing conspiracy to dethrone him, or a ridiculous article by Jay Walljasper, breathlessly declaring that one yuppie town or another should be the new social model for the left.

Similar ills bedevil *Mother Jones* and the *Progressive* and (worst of all) the *Utne Reader*. The average reader should be forgiven for assuming that there is no good leftist writing in this country at all. For alternatives, one must turn to publications that are either obscure (Warren Hinckle's *Argonaut*, Paul Piccone's *Telos*, Jason McQuinn's *Alternative Press Review*) or, more often, local. Oregonians, for example, can read the *Portland Free Press*, a sometimes amateurish but freethinking and lively bimonthly. Northern California is home to the best left-wing paper in the country, the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*. And here in Washington, D.C., there is the *Progressive Review*, edited by one of the few truly independent minds left in ideological journalism, Sam Smith.

The *Review* began as the *Capitol East Gazette*, a neighborhood paper Smith founded back in 1966. The original *Gazette* folded in the wake of the riots of 1968. "A certain number of our readers," Smith recalls, "had decided to burn down a certain number of our advertisers. This created a very difficult marketing situation." So the *Capitol East Gazette* became the *D.C. Gazette*, a paper for all the neighborhoods of the city.

Like other alternative papers of the time, the *D.C. Gazette* opposed the Vietnam War and endorsed civil rights. But its chief focus was local, a voice for people who didn't want the feds to force a freeway through their block. Nor was it "liberal," at least in the modern sense of the word. Its readers were more likely to be on the receiving end of the war on poverty than the dispensing side, a somewhat different vantage from which to view the federal edifice. ("Most people who are alive today have never seen a liberal do anything worthwhile," Smith comments. "I'm old enough to remember when leftists and liberals actually did something, which is why I would not describe myself as anti-liberal or anti-leftist. I just think the current crowd is pretty pathetic." More on that later.) And there was an interest in what at the time was called "building alternative community structures," such as the experiments in direct democracy and community technology then taking place in the Adams-Morgan neighborhood. (The

Adams-Morgan experience is described well in Karl Hess's 1979 book, *Community Technology*, though Hess neglects to mention how the most famous effort, an experiment in basement-based aquaculture, came to a sudden end. "They were trying to grow trout in the basement of a building," Smith recalls. "This was one of the great efforts in urban agriculture—which came to a crashing halt when we had our first post-trout brownout." All the fish died, and the stench wafted deep into the streets. After that, "we went back to eating trout from natural streams.")

By the mid-80's, the local beat was burning Smith out. Tired of repeating himself, he remade his paper yet again, turning his attention to the national and global scenes. But it's hard to rinse the sidewalks from your blood: the rechristened *Progressive Review* has not only continued to cover Washington issues, but even its national and international coverage often hinges on a concrete, local angle. This reflects the editor's distrust for abstraction, his firm belief that "it's very difficult to talk in any sensible way about any policy" if you have "stepped out from the real . . . into a totally theoretical world." The *Review* presently exists in two forms: as a monthly newsletter, usually consisting of one long essay by Smith and several smaller items, and as a constantly updated website (emporium.turnpike.net/P/ProRev), filled with short remarks about current events; items of interest to activists of greenish, localist, or civil libertarian hue; and investigative reports on the misdeeds of the high and mighty. (The Clinton administration does not fare well.) Unable to resist the pull of city politics, Smith has opened a second site, the D.C. News Service (emporium.turnpike.net/P/ProRev/freedc.htm), chiefly dedicated to overthrowing the federally appointed control board that now runs the city. The control board has a bias towards bureaucracy and little regard for democratic input; as such, it is Smith's perfect foil.

Smith is, as I've said, a man of the left, albeit one more likely to quote Chesterton than Marx. Forced to shove him onto the silly, constricting map called the political spectrum, I'd place him somewhere between Eugene McCarthy and Paul Goodman. Yet in recent years, he's found himself increasingly alienated from liberal and leftist elites. In this he is not alone: never before has the American left faced such a tremendous split be-

tween the real grassroots and the foundation-sucking spivs who claim to speak for them. Smith actually believes in decentralization and individual liberty, and while his interpretation of those phrases might not always jibe with, say, Murray Rothbard's, they're an even ungainlier fit with the views of the Pew Charitable Trusts. You will find no apologies for the Clintons in the *Progressive Review*, no politically correct jargon, no snooty condescension toward rural and suburban America, no defenses of federal departments that do more for their employees than for their clients.

Back in the 1980's, Smith made what he now calls "a rather naive effort" to work with Americans for Democratic Action. The stormy marriage finally fell apart over the War on Drugs. Smith and some others passed some resolutions suggesting that the nation should adopt a drug policy "that wasn't based on the premise that it's all right to send young black males to prison for preferring marijuana to daiquiris." The politicians who actually run the organization were not amused. Smith soon left, and today describes liberals as "AWOL."

Nor is Smith a conservative. ("I think the bind I find myself in is that too many conservatives want to ignore people who have problems, and too many liberals want to tell them what to do.") Nor is he a libertarian. ("I could never be an acceptable libertarian, although I clearly have libertarian streaks, because I believe in community too much.") He's the sort of fellow you'll hate if you're the type who judges a man by how closely each and every opinion he holds coincides with yours: like all those who think for themselves, he's sure to have some opinions you don't share. I can't, for example, see how he can oppose the war on narcotics yet want to expand government restrictions on tobacco, even if he insists it's the industry he wants to target, not the smokers. (That's like locking up the prostitutes and freeing the johns.) But that's irrelevant: what matters is the spirit that motivates his views, not every view itself. Smith's decentralist creed leaves plenty of room for diversity and debate. He recalls some early meetings of the Maine Greens, in which a fellow from the Reform Party and a couple of Libertarians turned up. The reformer stuck around, and

wrote a piece in which he said the difference between the Greens and

the Reform Party is largely centered over the issue of property. But then he said that we agree that we don't want this issue decided by the national media or by national politicians. And that, I thought, was a very profound comment. The things we disagree on do not necessarily have to be decided at the macro level. We can work out our own arrangements, we can have our own debates, and that's a lot healthier.

On his own micro level, Smith enjoys life in Washington, D.C.—not the official Washington of lobbyists and lawmakers, but the pleasant backwater below it: “this has been a wonderful city for me. It's been a wonderful place to raise kids. . . . It's got a nice pleasant pace to it, as long as you're not striving to get too much power or striving to make too much money.” And if you are? “One of the things I notice about people in power in Washington is how rootless many of them are. It's been said that they're the sort of people that when they're in a room by themselves, there's no one there.”

“One of the things I do these days,” he tells me,

is talk to groups of younger activists. And one of the things missing today is the idea that seemed normal to me, as a child of the existential period and a product of a Quaker education, that you have to make choices, whether the times are good or bad. . . . I was talking in a bookstore in Maine, and a guy who was about 30 came up to me afterwards. He said to me, “I came in late to your talk, and I heard you talking about choice. And I assumed you were talking about abortion. You know, you really ought to be careful using that word, because people might misunderstand you.”

I interject: “And you said, ‘No, I was talking about school vouchers.’”

He laughs, politely, then returns to his story. “But that really set me off thinking. And I realized, choice for young people is a choice of consumption, a choice of association; the idea that it is a constant moral activity is not very strong. . . . Matthew Arnold talked about living in two worlds, one dead and the other not

able to be born. That's the sort of sense you have of this time.”

Jesse Walker writes from Washington, D.C.

GOVERNMENT

Territorial Bliss

by Joseph E. Fallon

One consequence of the Cold War has gone unnoticed. Before the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States had already ceased to exist. To fight the Cold War and in the name of national security, Washington had destroyed the political structure created by the U.S. Constitution—the well-defined union of states, which regardless of territorial size, population, or date of admission, possessed equal powers—and replaced it with an ambiguous political system composed of 50 states and a hierarchy of eight ethnic/race-based territories.

Historically, a territory was a temporary political status granted to land administered by the federal government as long as the population was too small and scattered to govern as a state. Under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, states were to be carved out of existing territories and admitted to the union on the basis of political equality with the original 13 states. This occurred with the Northwest Territory, Southwest Territory, Louisiana Territory, Oregon Territory, and the Mexican Cession.

Since territorial status was temporary, those which did not become states became independent countries or were transferred, in whole or part, to a foreign power. Examples of the former are Cuba in 1903 and the Philippines in 1946. Examples of the latter are the northwest portion of the Louisiana Territory (1818), the northeast portion of Maine (1842), the northern half of the Oregon Territory (1846), and a third of the Alaskan panhandle (1903)—all of which were transferred to the United Kingdom; Okinawa, which was transferred to Japan (1972); and the Panama

Canal and Canal Zone Territory, which were transferred to Panama (1978, to be completed by 1999).

Beginning with the establishment of the “Commonwealth” of Puerto Rico in 1952, all this changed. Citing the “doctrine of incorporation” (a theory promulgated by the U.S. Supreme Court between 1901 and 1922, according to which the U.S. Constitution does not fully apply to a territory until it is “incorporated” into the union) and Article IV, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution (“Congress shall have all power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States”), Congress radically altered the political structure created by the Constitution. Unlike states, territories became *de facto* ethnic-based polities that exercise political powers denied to the states.

In descending order of official status, these territories consist of: three “free associations” (the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, both established in 1986, and Palau, established in 1993), two “commonwealths” (Puerto Rico, established in 1952, and the Northern Marianas, established in 1986), two “organized” territories whose structure of government was created by congressional legislation known as an organic act (Guam, established in 1950, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, established in 1936, revised in 1954), and one “unorganized” territory whose structure of government was created through local legislation (American Samoa, established in 1960).

“Free association” is officially recognized by the United Nations as an alternative to independence for a trust territory, and this status allows the local population the maximum degree of self-government while insuring that the former administrative power continues to finance and defend that territory. This status could only be conferred upon the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau because they are the successor states to the United Nations Strategic Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which the United States administered from 1947 to 1993.

The term “commonwealth” as applied to a U.S. territory, however, is devoid of any legal meaning. In the *Examining Board v. Flores de Otero* (1976), the U.S. Supreme Court acknowledged that the commonwealth status of Puerto Rico “occupies a relationship with the United