

## LETTERS

with texts; ethnography, or participant observation, requires initiation into the group under study; and social statistics, in such areas as geography, economics, or sociology, compiles and interprets numerical data.

In none of these areas are the number and nature of the interviews a valid criterion of rigor. Each has its own criteria.

And, of course, various composite or synthetic approaches are possible as well. In such cases, one must still be cautious in criticism since one may not completely understand the author's methodology and may therefore miss the point.

Journalism, in turn, can be savaged by the partisans of the alternative approaches.

A historian would dismiss a work merely consisting of interviews with: "How do you know that he actually said a year ago what he just told you he said then?"

An ethnographer would say: "How can you possibly know anything about these people when you spent such a short time with them? You have to get beyond the facade they put up for strangers."

A social statistician would say: "Gather some numbers to show that the people you interviewed are statistically typical, that they aren't just unimportant exceptions."

If Derian's book in fact lacks interviews, then it may not be journalism, or at any rate, journalism of the type Mr. Schrage is accustomed to. Do not confuse that with lack of intellectual rigor.

Andrew D. Todd  
Springfield, OR

### School Book

Regarding Martin Morse Wooster's review of *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* ("Poor Man's Choice," Nov.), did he and I read the same book? Judging from his assessment of John Chubb and Terry Moe's choice proposals, I would have to guess that we did not.

Wooster contends that the Chubb/Moe plan stops short of the kind of "education voucher" plan advocated by the Heritage

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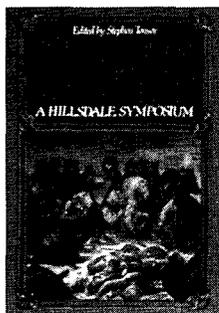
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Foundation and others. He also indicates that private schools would have to be "nationalized" in order to participate in the plan, thus "ensuring that few, if any, truly private schools would remain." Unfortunately, Wooster seems to have been fooled by a semantic trick Chubb and Moe have used in their writings to defend against attacks from the left.

What their plan does is change the official definition of "public school," so as to include those private schools that express an interest in receiving "scholarships" (a more politically acceptable term than *vouchers*) from the government. The authors state specifically that the criteria for being designated a public school should be exactly those standards—minimal health and safety standards, existence of an educational program, etc.—that most states *already* impose on private schools. Thus, the amount of state regulation imposed on private schools would not increase under the Chubb/Moe approach, except perhaps regarding racial balances (though it's unclear that the authors would require even that sort of restriction if political or legal considerations did not exist). Besides, private schools choosing to become "public" would know that going in.

I read Chubb and Moe as trying to formulate not a "liberal's" ideal choice plan, but instead one that has a realistic chance of being enacted by local or state governments across the country, including those with vivid histories of racial animosities surrounding public schooling. Wooster's claim that polls show tremendous public support for "vouchers" is simply untrue. In poll after poll, respondents support the concept of choice among public and private schools, to be sure—but throw in the word *voucher* and the numbers drop significantly. Politically speaking, advocating choice plans in some jurisdictions is fraught with peril, from the education establishment, civil rights groups, or a public wary of the notion of "destroying public education" or reintroducing segregation. If Chubb and Moe use definitional and semantic devices to shunt aside potential rhetorical salvos against market-oriented education reform, it is incumbent upon scholars and

journalists to recognize that.

For all intents and purposes, the Chubb/Moe approach is a voucher program, somewhat more regulated than might be optimal, but cleverly designed to include public, private, parochial, and proprietary schools without explosive political outcry. Even *its* passage into actual law is a lot to hope for.

John Hood  
Raleigh, NC

**Mr. Wooster replies:** Under voucher plans, parents receive checks from the state which they can then spend as they please. Under Chubb and Moe's plan, parents go to a "Parent Information Center," look over a list of schools, and then select from a state-approved list. No monies are given to parents. Therefore, the Chubb/Moe plan is not a voucher plan. Indeed, on pages 217 and 218 of their book, the authors attack "the stereotypical identification of choice with vouchers" because "vouchers are not even necessary."

Admittedly, neither Chubb nor Moe call for controls over the content of private schools who choose to become state-funded. But when private schools are bailed out by the state (a process of nationalization as certain as the takeover of private railroads by the U.S. government in the 1970s), history shows that the content of these schools' curricula is gradually restricted. Certainly this has been the case in the Netherlands and in Canada. Moreover, can Hood be certain that the courts would allow state funding of a school with *any* religious content?

As I noted in my review, certainly a public school system designed by John Chubb and Terry Moe would be far better than any public school system that now exists. But that does not mean that their plan is ideal.

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