

# THE *Ayn Rand* LETTER®

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Vol. II, No. 16

May 7, 1973

## THE MISSING LINK

I shall begin by giving you four examples and asking you to identify what psychological element they have in common.

1. I once knew a businessman in a large Midwestern city, who was an unusually hard-working, active, energetic person. He had built a small business of his own and risen from poverty to affluence. He was the adviser and protector of an enormous conglomeration of relatives, friends, and friends of friends, who ran to him, not merely for loans, but for help with problems of any kind. He was in his late thirties, but acted as a sort of tribal patriarch.

It was hard to tell whether he enjoyed or resented his role; he seemed to take it for granted, as a kind of metaphysical duty: he had probably never thought of questioning it. He did enjoy acting as a small big shot, however, and doing favors for people, about which he was very generous. He had, apparently, some marginal connections with his particular district's political machine and he loved obtaining for his friends the sort of favors that were unobtainable without special pull, such as extra ration coupons (in World War II) or the fixing of traffic tickets. The concept of "friends" had some peculiar significance to him. He watched their intentions like a hypochondriac watches his health - in a manner that projected a touchy suspiciousness and a fierce loyalty to some unwritten moral code.

Politically, he tended to be a conservative, and was usually complaining about this country's trends. One day, he launched into a passionate denunciation of the liberals, the government, the unfairness to businessmen, the arbitrary power of political machines. "Do you know how powerful they are?" he asked bitterly, and proceeded to tell me that he had tried to run for some minuscule city office, but "they" had ordered him to withdraw his candidacy "or else," and he had complied.

I said that such problems would always exist so long as government controls existed, and that the only solution was a system of full, laissez-faire capitalism, under which no groups could acquire economic privileges or special pull, so that everyone would have to stand on his own. "That's impossible!" he snapped; his voice was peculiarly tense, abrupt, defensive, as if he were slamming a mental door on some barely glimpsed fact; the voice conveyed fear. I did not pursue the subject: I had grasped a psychological issue that was new to me.

2. A well-known lady novelist once wrote an essay on the nature of fiction. Adopting an extreme Naturalist position, she declared: "The distinctive mark of

the novel is its concern with the actual world, the world of fact..." And by "fact," she meant the immediately available facts - "the empiric element in experience." "The novel does not permit occurrences outside the order of nature - miracles....You remember how in The Brothers Karamazov when Father Zossima dies, his faction (most of the sympathetic characters in the book) expects a miracle: that his body will stay sweet and fresh because he died 'in the odor of sanctity.' But instead he begins to stink. The stink of Father Zossima is the natural, generic smell of the novel. By the same law, a novel cannot be laid in the future, since the future, until it happens, is outside the order of nature..."

She declared that "the novel's characteristic tone is one of gossip and tittletattle....Here is another criterion: if the breath of scandal has not touched it, the book is not a novel....The scandals of a village or a province, the scandals of a nation or of the high seas feed on facts and breed speculation. But it is of the essence of a scandal that it be finite...It is impossible, except for theologians, to conceive of a world-wide scandal or a universe-wide scandal; the proof of this is the way people have settled down to living with nuclear fission, radiation poisoning, hydrogen bombs, satellites, and space rock-ets." Why facts of this kind should be regarded as the province of theology, she did not explain. "Yet these 'scandals,' in the theological sense, of the large world and the universe have dwarfed the finite scandals of the village and the province..."

She then proceeded to explain what she regards as "the dilemma of the novelist": we forget or ignore the events of the modern world, "because their special quality is to stagger belief." But if we think of them, "our daily life becomes incredible to us....The coexistence of the great world and us, when contemplated, appears impossible." From this, she drew a conclusion: since the novelist is motivated by his love of truth, "ordinary common truth recognizable to everyone," the novel is "of all forms the least adapted to encompass the modern world, whose leading characteristic is irreality. And that, so far as I can understand, is why the novel is dying."

3. The following story was told to me by an American businessman. In his youth, he took a job as efficiency-expert adviser to the manager of a factory in South America. The factory was using U.S. machines, but was getting only 45% of the machines' potential productivity. Observing the low wage scale, he concluded that the men were given no incentive to work - and suggested the introduction of pay by piecework. The elderly manager told him, with a skeptical smile, that this would be futile, but agreed to try it.

In the first three weeks of the new plan, productivity soared. In the fourth week, no one showed up for work: virtually the entire labor force vanished - and did not come back until a week later. Having earned a month's wages in three weeks, the workers saw no reason to work that extra week; they had no desire to earn more than they had been earning. No arguments could persuade them; the plan was discontinued.

4. A professor of philosophy once invited me to address his class on ethics; they were studying the subject of "justice," and he asked me to present the Objectivist view of justice. The format he proposed was a fifteen-minute presentation, followed by a question period. I pointed out to him that it would be very difficult to present, in fifteen minutes, the basis of the Objectivist ethics and thus give the reasons for my definition of justice. "Oh, you don't have

to give the reasons," he said, "just present your views." (I did not comply.)

The circumstances and the people in these four examples are different; the type of mentality they display is the same. This mentality is self-made, but many different factors can contribute to its formation. These factors may be social, as in the case of the South American workers - or personal, as in the case of the lady novelist - or both, as in the case of the Midwestern businessman. As to the professor of philosophy, the modern trend of his profession is the factor responsible for all the rest.

These cases are examples of the anti-conceptual mentality.

The main characteristic of this mentality is a special kind of passivity: not passivity as such and not across-the-board, but passivity beyond a certain limit. It is a mentality which decided, at a certain point of development, that it knows enough and does not care to look further. What does it accept as "enough"? The immediately given, directly perceivable concretes of its background - "the empiric element in experience."

To grasp and deal with such concretes, a human being needs a certain degree of conceptual development, a process which the brain of an animal cannot perform. But after the initial feat of learning to speak, a child can perform this process almost automatically, by memorization and imitation. The anti-conceptual mentality stops on this level of development - on the first levels of abstractions, which identify perceptual material consisting predominantly of physical objects - and does not choose to take the next, crucial, fully volitional step: the higher levels of abstraction from abstractions, which cannot be learned by imitation. (See my book Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology.) Such a mind can grasp the scandals of a village or a province or (at secondhand) a nation; it cannot grasp the concepts of "world" or "universe" - or the fact that their events are not "scandals."

The anti-conceptual mentality takes most things as irreducible primaries and regards them as "self-evident." It treats concepts as if they were (memorized) percepts; it treats abstractions as if they were perceptual concretes. To such a mentality, everything is the given: the passage of time, the four seasons, the institution of marriage, the weather, the breeding of children, a flood, a fire, an earthquake, a revolution, a book are phenomena of the same order. The distinction between the metaphysical and the man-made is not merely unknown to this mentality, it is incommunicable.

The two cardinal questions, the prime movers of a human mind - "Why?" and "What for?" - are alien to an anti-conceptual mentality. If asked, they elicit nothing beyond the conventionally accepted answers. The answers are usually some equivalent of "Such is life" or "One is supposed to." Whose life? Blank out. Supposed - by whom? Blank out.

The absence of concern with the "Why?" eliminates the concept of causality and cuts off the past. The absence of concern with the "What for?" eliminates long-range purpose and cuts off the future. Thus only the present is fully real to an anti-conceptual mentality. Something of the past remains with it, in the form of stagnant bits of a random chronicle, like a kind of small talk of memory, without goal or meaning. But the future is a blank; the future cannot be grasped perceptually.

In this respect, paradoxically enough, the hidebound traditionalist and the

modern college activist are two sides of the same psycho-epistemological coin. The first seeks to escape the terror of an unknowable future by seeking safety in the alleged wisdom of the past. ("What was good enough for my father, is good enough for me!") The second seeks to escape the terror of an unintelligible past by screaming his way into an indefinable future. ("If it's not good for my father, it's good enough for me!") And, paradoxically enough, neither of them is able to live in the present - because man's life span is a continuum whose only integrator is his conceptual faculty.

In the brain of an anti-conceptual person, the process of integration is largely replaced by a process of association. What his subconscious stores and automatizes is not ideas, but an indiscriminate accumulation of sundry concretes, random facts, and unidentified feelings, piled into unlabeled mental file folders. This works, up to a certain point - i.e., so long as such a person deals with other persons whose folders are stuffed similarly, and thus no search through the entire filing system is ever required. Within such limits, the person can be active and willing to work hard - like the Midwestern businessman, who exercised a great deal of initiative and ingenuity, within the limits set by his particular city district - like the lady novelist, who wrote many books, within the terms set by her college teachers - like the professor of philosophy, who spent his time analyzing results, without bothering about their causes.

A person of this mentality may uphold some abstract principles or profess some intellectual convictions (without remembering where or how he picked them up). But if one asks him what he means by a given idea, he will not be able to answer. If one asks him the reasons of his convictions, one will discover that they are a thin, fragile film floating over a vacuum, like an oil slick in empty space - and one will be shocked by the number of questions it had never occurred to him to ask.

This kind of psycho-epistemology works so long as no part of it is challenged. But all hell breaks loose when it is - because what is threatened then is not a particular idea, but that mind's whole structure. The hell ranges from fear to resentment to stubborn evasion to hostility to panic to malice to hatred.

The best illustration of an anti-conceptual mentality is a small incident in a novel published years ago, whose title, unfortunately, I do not remember. A commonplace kind of blonde goes out on a date with a college boy; when she is asked later whether she had a good time, she answers: "No. He was awfully boring. He never said anything I ever heard before."

(To be continued.)

Ayn Rand

# THE Ayn Rand LETTER®

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Vol. II, No. 17

May 21, 1973

## THE MISSING LINK

### Part II

The concrete-bound, anti-conceptual mentality can cope only with men who are bound by the same concretes - by the same kind of "finite" world. To this mentality, it means a world in which men do not have to deal with abstract principles: principles are replaced by memorized rules of behavior, which are accepted uncritically as the given. What is "finite" in such a world is not its extension, but the degree of mental effort required of its inhabitants. When they say "finite," they mean "perceptual."

Within the limits of their rules (which are usually called "traditions"), the inhabitants of such worlds are free to function - i.e., to deal with concretes without worrying about consequences, to deal with results without bothering about causes, to deal with "facts" as discrete phenomena, unhampered by the "intangibles" of theory - and to feel safe. Safe from what? Consciously, they would answer: "Safe from outsiders." Actually, the answer is: safe from the necessity of dealing with fundamental principles (and, consequently, safe from full responsibility for one's own life).

It is the fundamentals of philosophy (particularly, of ethics) that an anti-conceptual person dreads above all else. To understand and to apply them requires a long conceptual chain, which he has made his mind incapable of holding beyond the first, rudimentary links. If his professed beliefs - i.e., the rules and slogans of his group - are challenged, he feels his consciousness dissolving in fog. Hence, his fear of outsiders. The word "outsiders," to him, means the whole wide world beyond the confines of his village or town or gang - the world of all those people who do not live by his "rules." He does not know why he feels that outsiders are a deadly threat to him and why they fill him with helpless terror. The threat is not existential, but psycho-epistemological: to deal with them requires that he rise above his "rules" to the level of abstract principles. He would die rather than attempt it.

"Protection from outsiders" is the benefit he seeks in clinging to his group. What the group demands in return is obedience to its rules, which he is eager to obey: those rules are his protection - from the dreaded realm of abstract thought. By whom are those rules established? In theory, by tradition. In fact, by those who happen to be the leaders of his group; the way it stands in his mind is: by those who know the mysteries he does not have to know.

Thus, his survival depends on the substitution of men for ideas - and on the subordination of the metaphysical to the man-made. The metaphysical is beyond his grasp - laws of nature cannot be grasped perceptually - but man-made rules are absolutes that protect him from the unknowable, psychologically and existentially. The group comes to his rescue if he gets into trouble - and he does not have to earn their help, it is given to him automatically, it is not at the precarious mercy of his own virtues, flaws or errors, it is his by grace of the fact that he belongs to the group.

As an example of the principle that the rational is the moral, observe that the anti-conceptual is the profoundly anti-moral. The basic commandment of all such groups, which takes precedence over any other rules, is: loyalty to the group - not to ideas, but to people; not to the group's beliefs, which are minimal and chiefly ritualistic, but to the group's members and leaders. Whether a given member is right or wrong, the others must protect him from outsiders; whether he is innocent or guilty, the others must stand by him against outsiders; whether he is competent or not, the others must employ him or trade with him in preference to outsiders. Thus a physical qualification - the accident of birth in a given village or tribe - takes precedence over morality and justice. (But the physical is only the most frequently apparent and superficial qualification, since such groups reject the nonconforming children of their own members. The actual qualification is psycho-epistemological: men bound by the same concretes.)

Primitive tribes are an obvious example of the anti-conceptual mentality - perhaps, with some justification: savages, like children, are on the pre-conceptual level of development. Their later counterparts, however, demonstrate that this mentality is not the product of ignorance (nor is it caused by lack of intelligence): it is self-made, i.e., self-arrested. It has resisted the rise of civilization and has manifested itself in countless forms throughout history. Its symptom is always an attempt to circumvent reality, by substituting men for ideas, the man-made for the metaphysical, favors for rights, special pull for merit - i.e., an attempt to reduce man's life to a small backyard (or rat hole) exempt from the absolutism of reason. (The driving motive of these attempts is deeper than power-lust: the rulers of such groups seek protection from reality as anxiously as the followers.)

Racism is an obvious manifestation of the anti-conceptual mentality. So is xenophobia - the fear or hatred of foreigners ("outsiders"). So is any caste system, which prescribes a man's status (i.e., assigns him to a tribe) according to his birth; a caste system is perpetuated by a special kind of snobbishness (i.e., group loyalty) not merely among the aristocrats, but, perhaps more fiercely, among the commoners or even the serfs, who like to "know their place" and to guard it jealously against the outsiders from above or from below. So is guild socialism. So is any kind of ancestor worship or of family "solidarity" (the family including uncles, aunts and third cousins). So is any criminal gang.

Tribalism (which is the best name to give to all the group manifestations of the anti-conceptual mentality) is a dominant element in Europe, as a reciprocally reinforcing cause and result of Europe's long history of caste systems, of national and local (provincial) chauvinism, of rule by brute force and endless, bloody wars. As an example, observe the Balkan nations, which are perennially bent upon exterminating one another over minuscule differences

of tradition or language. Tribalism had no place in the United States - until recent decades. It could not take root here, its imported seedlings were withering away and turning to slag in the melting pot whose fire was fed by two inexhaustible sources of energy: individual rights and objective law; these two were the only protection man needed.

The remnants of European tribalism, imported by the more timid immigrants, took the innocuous form of "ethnic" neighborhoods in cities, each neighborhood offering its own customs, traditional festivals, old-country restaurants, and words in its native language on battered store-signs. Those signs were battered, because the men who clung to the tribal rule of giving trade priorities to fellow-tribesmen, remained in the backwaters of impoverished neighborhoods, while the torrent of productive energy that placed merit above tribe, swept past them, carrying away the best of their children.

There was no harm in such backwaters, so long as no one was forced to remain in them. The pressure of enlightenment by example was undercutting the group loyalty of the most stubbornly anti-conceptual mentalities, urging them to venture out into the great world where no man is an "outsider" (or all men are, as far as special privileges are concerned).

The disintegration of philosophy reversed this trend. Tribalism is a product of fear, and fear is the dominant emotion of any person, culture or society that rejects man's power of survival: reason. As philosophy slithered into the primitive swamp of irrationalism, men were driven - existentially and psychologically - into its primordial corollary: tribalism. Existentially, the rise of the Welfare State broke up the country into pressure groups, each fighting for special privileges at the expense of the others - so that an individual unaffiliated with any group became fair game for tribal predators. Psychologically, Pragmatism lobotomized the country's intellectuals: John Dewey's theory of "Progressive" education (which has dominated the schools for close to half a century), established a method of crippling a child's conceptual faculty and replacing cognition with "social adjustment." It was and is a systematic attempt to manufacture tribal mentalities. (See my article "The Comprachicos" in The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution.)

Observe that today's resurgence of tribalism is not a product of the lower classes - of the poor, the helpless, the ignorant - but of the intellectuals, the college-educated "elitists" (which is a purely tribalistic term). Observe the proliferation of grotesque herds or gangs - hippies, yippies, beatniks, peaceniks, Women's Libs, Gay Libs, Jesus Freaks, Earth Children - which are not tribes, but shifting aggregates of people desperately seeking tribal "protection."

The common denominator of all such gangs is the belief in motion (mass demonstrations), not action - in chanting, not arguing - in demanding, not achieving - in feeling, not thinking - in denouncing "outsiders," not in pursuing values - in focusing only on the "now," the "today" without a "tomorrow" - in seeking to return to "nature," to "the earth," to the mud, to physical labor, i.e., to all the things which a perceptual mentality is able to handle. You don't see advocates of reason and science clogging a street in the belief that using their bodies to stop traffic, will solve any problem.

Most of those embryonic tribal gangs are leftist or collectivist. But, as a demonstration of the fact that the cause of tribalism is deeper than politics, there are tribalists still further removed from reality, who claim to be rightists. They are champions of individualism, they claim, which they define as the right to form one's own gang and use physical force against others - and they intend to preserve capitalism, they claim, by replacing it with anarchism (establishing "private" or "competing" governments, i.e., tribal rule). The common denominator of such individualists is the desire to escape from objectivity (objectivity requires a very long conceptual chain and very abstract principles), to act on whim, and to deal with men rather than with ideas - i.e., with the men of their own gang bound by the same concretes.

These rightists' distance from reality may be gauged by the fact that they are unable to recognize the actual examples of their ideals in practice. One such example is the Mafia. The Mafia (or "family") is a "private government," with subjects who chose to join it voluntarily, with a rigid set of rules rigidly, efficiently and bloodily enforced, a "government" that undertakes to protect you from "outsiders" and to enforce your immediate interests - at the price of your selling your soul, i.e., of your total obedience to any "favor" it may demand. Another example of a "government" without territorial sovereignty is offered by the Palestinian guerrillas, who have no country of their own, but who engage in terroristic attacks and slaughter of "outsiders" anywhere on earth.

The activist manifestations of modern tribalism, of Left or "Right," are crude extremes. It is the subtler manifestations of the anti-conceptual mentality that are more tragic and harder to deal with. These are the "mixed economies" of the spirit - the men torn inwardly between tribal emotions and scattered fragments of thought - the products of modern education who do not like the nature of what they feel, but have never learned to think.

The Watergate affair offers an example, on both political sides. On the Left, there is the press, whose biased unanimity would be the envy of any dictator's censorship bureau. But that unanimity is voluntary and it is not the product of a conspiracy - it is the product of the notion that one must "belong," one must be "in," one must swim with the mainstream, one must take one's cue from "those who know." Occasionally, some newsman's voice cries out in protest, pleading for fairness, then vanishes. No man can be blind to reality all of the time; but modern men do not know how to maintain the continuity of their sight.

(In the intellectual professions, tribalism takes the form of cliques. Today, there is only one clique, because there is only one kind of philosophy in the educational establishment. The clashes and rivalries of factions scrambling for power within a clique are ferocious, as they are within any tribe, but the clique or the tribe presents a united front against "outsiders" - in this case, against the rightists.)

On the Right, there are the men involved in Watergate, who offer the pathetically horrible spectacle of what happens when men with basically tribal (pragmatist) premises find no tribe to join, yet attempt to practice tribal loyalty - i.e., to substitute a group for principles, or men for ideas.



With no ideology to guide them, those boys had to feel that fighting the "outsiders" by any kind of means was the proper and practical thing to do. Each of them acted as the others were acting, each assumed that the others knew what they were doing (or that some higher authorities knew it), none questioned anything. It was the desperate voice of tribalism that we heard when one of them confessed that he was willing to commit perjury rather than have his superiors think that he was not a "team player."

But there was no "team" or tribe. A tribe has firm rules, and it stands by those who observe them. This horde had firm rules of procedure (of who sends memos to whom), but no rules in regard to substance. As at a Progressive nursery school's fantasy-playing time, the boys were sent out into the arena with a single commandment: "Do something!" They did.

Then they found themselves alone, with no tribe to protect them, abandoned by those trusted leaders who knew the mysteries they did not have to know. They found their immediate superiors scrambling frantically to pass the buck to them and to one another, each struggling to frame the others and to save himself by the loudest "singing." What else was there for those pragmatists to do? Loyalty can be maintained in only one of two ways: by terrorism - or by dedication to ideas. But if those Republicans had been united by ideas, they would not have been a quasi-tribe - they would have been a rational human association.

This is the crucial difference between an association and a tribe. Just as a proper society is ruled by laws, not by men, so a proper association is united by ideas, not by men, and its members are loyal to the ideas, not to the group. It is eminently reasonable that men should seek to associate with those who share their convictions and values. It is impossible to deal or even to communicate with men whose ideas are fundamentally opposed to one's own (and one should be free not to deal with them). All proper associations are formed or joined by individual choice and on conscious, intellectual grounds (philosophical, political, professional, etc.) - not by the physiological or geographical accident of birth, and not on the ground of tradition. When men are united by ideas, i.e., by explicit principles, there is no room for favors, whims, or arbitrary power: the principles serve as an objective criterion for determining actions and for judging men, whether leaders or members.

This requires a high degree of conceptual development and independence, which the anti-conceptual mentality is desperately struggling to avoid. But this is the only way men can work together justly, benevolently - and safely. There is no way for men to survive on the perceptual level of consciousness.

I am not a student of the theory of evolution and, therefore, I am neither its supporter nor its opponent. But a certain hypothesis has haunted me for years; I want to stress that it is only a hypothesis. There is an enormous breach of continuity between man and all the other living species. The difference lies in the nature of man's consciousness, in its distinctive characteristic: his conceptual faculty. It is as if, after aeons of physiological development, the evolutionary process altered its course, and the higher stages of development focused primarily on the consciousness of living species, not their bodies. But the development of a

man's consciousness is volitional: no matter what the innate degree of his intelligence, he must develop it, he must learn how to use it, he must become a human being by choice. What if he does not choose to? Then he becomes a transitional phenomenon - a desperate creature that struggles frantically against his own nature, longing for the effortless "safety" of an animal's consciousness, which he cannot recapture, and rebelling against a human consciousness, which he is afraid to achieve.

For years, scientists have been looking for a "missing link" between man and animals. Perhaps that missing link is the anti-conceptual mentality.

Ayn Rand

# THE Ayn Rand LETTER®

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Vol. II, No. 18

June 4, 1973

## SELFISHNESS WITHOUT A SELF

In my last two Letters, I discussed the anti-conceptual mentality and its social (tribal) manifestations. All tribalists are anti-conceptual in various degrees, but not all anti-conceptual mentalities are tribalists. Some are lone wolves (stressing that species' most predatory characteristics).

The majority of such wolves are frustrated tribalists, i.e., persons rejected by the tribe (or by the people of their immediate environment): they are too unreliable to abide by conventional rules, and too crudely manipulative to compete for tribal power. Since a perceptual mentality cannot provide a man with a way of survival, such a person, left to his own devices, becomes a kind of intellectual hobo, roaming about as an eclectic second-hander or brainpicker, snatching bits of ideas at random, switching them at whim, with only one constant in his behavior: the drifting from group to group, the need to cling to people, any sort of people, and to manipulate them.

Whatever theoretical constructs he may be able to spin and juggle in various fields, it is the field of ethics that fills him with the deepest sense of terror and of his own impotence. Ethics is a conceptual discipline; loyalty to a code of values requires the ability to grasp abstract principles and to apply them to concrete situations and actions (even on the most primitive level of practicing some rudimentary moral commandments). The tribal lone wolf has no firsthand grasp of values. He senses that this is a lack he must conceal at any price - and that this issue, for him, is the hardest one to fake. The whims that guide him and switch from moment to moment or from year to year, cannot help him to conceive of an inner state of lifelong dedication to one's chosen values. His whims condition him to the opposite: they automatize his avoidance of any permanent commitment to anything or anyone. Without personal values, a man can have no sense of right or wrong. The tribal lone wolf is an amoralist all the way down.

The clearest symptom by which one can recognize this type of person, is his total inability to judge himself, his actions, or his work by any sort of standard. The normal pattern of self-appraisal requires a reference to some abstract value or virtue - e.g., "I am good because I am rational," "I am good because I am honest," even the second-hander's notion of "I am good because people like me." Regardless of whether the value-standards involved are true or false, these examples imply the recognition of an essential moral principle: that one's own value has to be earned.

The amoralist's implicit pattern of self-appraisal (which he seldom identifies or admits) is: "I am good because it's me."

Beyond the age of about three to five (i.e., beyond the perceptual level of mental development), this is not an expression of pride or self-esteem, but of the opposite: of a vacuum - of a stagnant, arrested mentality confessing its impotence to achieve any personal value or virtue.

Do not confuse this pattern with psychological subjectivism. A psychological subjectivist is unable fully to identify his values or to prove their objective validity, but he may be profoundly consistent and loyal to them in practice (though with terrible psycho-epistemological difficulty). The amoralist does not hold subjective values; he does not hold any values. The implicit pattern of all his estimates is: "It's good because I like it" - "It's right because I did it" - "It's true because I want it to be true." What is the "I" in these statements? A physical hulk driven by chronic anxiety.

The frequently encountered examples of this pattern are: the writer who rehashes some ancient bromides and feels that his work is new, because he wrote it - the non-objective artist who feels that his smears are superior to those made by a monkey's tail, because he made them - the businessman who hires mediocrities because he likes them - the political "idealist" who claims that racism is good if practiced by a minority (of his choice), but evil if practiced by a majority - and any advocate of any sort of double standard.

But even such shoddy substitutes for morality are only a pretense: the amoralist does not believe that "I am good because it's me." That implicit policy is his protection against his deepest, never-to-be-identified conviction: "I am no good through and through."

Love is a response to values. The amoralist's actual self-appraisal is revealed in his abnormal need to be loved (but not in the rational sense of the word) - to be "loved for himself," i.e., causelessly. James Taggart reveals the nature of such a need: "I don't want to be loved for anything. I want to be loved for myself - not for anything I do or have or say or think. For myself - not for my body or mind or words or works or actions." (Atlas Shrugged.) When his wife asks: "But then...what is yourself?" he has no answer.

As a real-life example: Years ago, I knew an older woman who was a writer and very intelligent, but inclined toward mysticism, embittered, hostile, lonely, and very unhappy. Her views of love and friendship were similar to James Taggart's. At the time of the publication of The Fountainhead, I told her that I was very grateful to Archibald Ogden, the editor who had threatened to resign if his employers did not publish it. She listened with a peculiar kind of skeptical or disapproving look, then said: "You don't have to feel grateful to him. He did not do it for you. He did it to further his own career, because he thought it was a good book." I was truly appalled. I asked: "Do you mean that his action would be better - and that I should prefer it - if he thought it was a worthless book, but fought for its publication out of charity to me?" She would not answer and changed the subject. I was unable to get any explanation out of her. It took me many years to begin to understand.

A similar phenomenon, which had puzzled me for a long time, can be observed in politics. Commentators often exhort some politician to place the interests of the country above his own (or his party's) and to compromise with his opponents - and such exhortations are not addressed to petty grafters, but to reputable men. What does this mean? If the politician is convinced that his ideas are right, it is the country that he would betray by compromising. If he is convinced that his opponents' ideas are wrong, it is the country that he would be harming. If he is not certain of either, then he should check his views for his own sake, not merely

the country's - because the truth or falsehood of his ideas should be of the utmost personal interest to him.

But these considerations presuppose a conceptual consciousness that takes ideas seriously - i.e., that derives its views from principles derived from reality. A perceptual consciousness is unable to believe that ideas can be of personal importance to anyone; it regards ideas as a matter of arbitrary choice, as means to some immediate ends. On this view, a man does not seek to be elected to a public office in order to carry out certain policies - he advocates certain policies in order to be elected. If so, then why on earth should he want to be elected? Perceptual mentalities never ask such a question: the concept of a long-range goal is outside their limits. (There are a great many politicians and a great many commentators of that type - and since that mentality is taken for granted as proper and normal, what does this indicate about the intellectual state of today's culture?)

If a man subordinates ideas and principles to his "personal interests," what are his personal interests and by what means does he determine them? Consider the senseless, selfless drudgery to which a politician condemns himself if the goal of his work - the proper administration of the country - is of no personal interest to him (or a lawyer, if justice is of no personal interest to him; or a writer, if the objective value of his books is of no personal interest to him, as the woman I quoted was suggesting). But a perceptual mentality is incapable of generating values or goals, and has to pick them secondhand, as the given, then go through the expected motions. (Not all such men are tribal lone wolves - some are faithful, bewildered tribalists out of their psycho-epistemological depth - but all are anti-conceptual mentalities.)

With all of his emphasis on "himself" (and on being "loved for himself"), the tribal lone wolf has no self and no personal interests, only momentary whims. He is aware of his own immediate sensations and of very little else. Observe that whenever he ventures to speak of spiritual (i.e., intellectual) values - of the things he personally loves or admires - one is shocked by the triteness, the vulgarity, the borrowed trashiness of what comes out of him.

A tribal lone wolf feels that his "self" is dissociated from his actions, his work, his pursuits, his ideas. All these, he feels, are things that some outside power - society or reality or the material universe - has somehow forced on him. His real "self," he feels, is some ineffable entity devoid of attributes. One thing is true: his "self" is ineffable, i.e., non-existent. A man's self is his mind - the faculty that perceives reality, forms judgments, chooses values. To a tribal lone wolf, "reality" is a meaningless term; his metaphysics consists in the chronic feeling that life, somehow, is a conspiracy of people and things against him, and he will walk over piles of corpses - in order to assert himself? no - in order to hide (or fill) the nagging inner vacuum left by his aborted self.

The grim joke on mankind is the fact that he is held up as a symbol of selfishness. This encourages him in his depredations: it gives him the hope of success in faking a stature he knows to be beyond his power. Selfishness is a profoundly philosophical, conceptual achievement. Anyone who holds a tribal lone wolf as an image of selfishness, is merely confessing the perceptual nature of his own mental functioning.

Yet the tribalists keep proclaiming that morality is an exclusively social phenomenon and that adherence to a tribe - any tribe - is the only way to keep men moral. But the docile members of a tribe are no better than their rejected wolfish brother and fully as amoral: their standard is "We're good because it's us."

The abdication and shriveling of the self is a salient characteristic of all perceptual mentalities, tribalist or lone-wolfish. All of them dread self-reliance; all of them dread the responsibilities which only a self (i.e., a conceptual consciousness) can perform, and they seek escape from the two activities which an actually selfish man would defend with his life: judgment and choice. They fear reason (which is exercised volitionally) and trust their emotions (which are automatic) - they prefer relatives (an accident of birth) to friends (a matter of choice) - they prefer the tribe (the given) to outsiders (the new) - they prefer commandments (the memorized) to principles (the understood) - they welcome every theory of determinism, every notion that permits them to cry: "I couldn't help it!"

It is obvious why the morality of altruism is a tribal phenomenon. Pre-historical men were physically unable to survive without clinging to a tribe for leadership and protection against other tribes. The cause of altruism's perpetuation into civilized eras is not physical, but psycho-epistemological: the men of self-arrested, perceptual mentality are unable to survive without tribal leadership and "protection" against reality. The doctrine of self-sacrifice does not offend them: they have no sense of self or of personal value - they do not know what it is that they are asked to sacrifice - they have no firsthand inkling of such things as intellectual integrity, love of truth, personally chosen values, or a passionate dedication to an idea. When they hear injunctions against "selfishness," they believe that what they must renounce is the brute, mindless whim-worship of a tribal lone wolf. But their leaders - the theoreticians of altruism - know better. Immanuel Kant knew it; John Dewey knew it; B.F. Skinner knows it; John Rawls knows it. Observe that it is not the mindless brute, but reason, intelligence, ability, merit, self-confidence, self-esteem that they are out to destroy.

Today, we are seeing a ghastly spectacle: a magnificent scientific civilization dominated by the morality of prehistorical savagery. The phenomenon that makes it possible is the split psycho-epistemology of "compartmentalized" minds. Its best example are men who escape into the physical sciences (or technology or industry or business), hoping to find protection from human irrationality, and abandoning the field of ideas to the enemies of reason. Such refugees include some of mankind's best brains. But no such refuge is possible. These men, who perform feats of conceptual integration and rational thinking in their work, become helplessly anti-conceptual in all the other aspects of their lives, particularly in human relationships and in social issues. (E.g., compare Einstein's scientific achievement to his political views.)

Man's progress requires specialization. But a division-of-labor society cannot survive without a rational philosophy - without a firm base of fundamental principles whose task is to train a human mind to be human, i.e., conceptual.



# THE Ayn Rand LETTER®

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Vol. II, No. 19

June 18, 1973

## THE PRINCIPALS...

Television has a peculiar power to reveal the essence of a man's character. One learns more from a televised image than from a face-to-face encounter; an act that may work in a drawing room is magnified and stripped away, leaving the man naked. The camera seems to photograph, not men's faces, but their souls. It is a wonderful invader of psychological privacy, more potent than a lie detector. Most politicians should run from a TV camera, invoking the Fifth Amendment.

Whatever other truth the televised Senate hearings on Watergate may disclose or obfuscate, there is one truth which they have resoundingly succeeded in disclosing: the characters of men representing a good cross section of both political parties. We had a chance to see, under the luminous microscope of a television camera, the kind of men who run this country's government. "Government," to most people, is a big, vague, floating abstraction; the hearings concretized it. The question I would like to ask the viewers who stuck it out to the end of the first phase, is: Do you feel respect for the men on either side of the long committee table?

The witnesses' side gave us a sample of the executive branch of the government. We were shown a hierarchical progression of the White House (and re-election committee) staff, which displayed an interesting paradox: with some exceptions, the progression went from lower to higher administratively, but in reverse psychologically.

First, we saw the hopeless little pragmatists of the lower echelons, who were climbers with no peak to reach, idealists with no ideals to uphold, and tribalists with no tribe to protect them. (See my Letter of May 21, 1973.) They had been willing blindly to trust their superiors, in the belief that those superiors knew the philosophical base and moral principles guiding their activities, which they, the underlings, did not have to know. Now observe what knowledge (and character) was revealed by their superiors.

Jeb Stuart Magruder, deputy director of the Committee to Re-elect the President, seemed to assume a soft, pleasant manner on the witness stand; but the TV camera revealed that his softness was genuine, inside and out. His act did not jell: he projected contriteness and brashness, pleading and glibness, remorse and resentment, and an incurably juvenile superficiality. He was a thoroughly conventional young man, molded - without any inner resistance - by modern conventions.

An old-fashioned code of honor demanded that a captain be last to leave a sinking ship. Magruder reversed that code: he leaped off the ship, with a life

belt of perjury - abandoning, not only the seven burglars who had acted under his authorization, but the rest of his staff as well, hoping that they would all go down in silence. Then, struck with bewildered indignation at the possibility that his superiors might abandon him, he decided to "sing."

Magruder had been in active command of a national election campaign, yet the startling aspect of his performance on the witness stand was the total absence of any ideological concerns - the crude inability to grasp political issues, principles or implications. He admitted that his activities had been illegal, but explained them by placing the blame on the fact that leftist demonstrators were getting away with illegal activities. A man of principle would be justified in feeling moral indignation at the demonstrators - so long as he did not sink to their level. But Magruder did - and he opposed them, not on principle, but on personal grounds. He described his motive as: "...there was that feeling of resentment and of frustration at being unable to deal with issues on a legal basis."

This gave Senator Ervin a springboard for one of his most vicious bursts of oratory. "I came up here during Joe McCarthy days when Joe McCarthy saw a communist hiding under every rose bush," he thundered, "and I have been here fighting the no-knock laws and preventive detention laws and indiscriminate bugging by people who've found subversives hiding under every bed. In this nation, we have had a very unfortunate fear. And this fear went to the extent of deploring the exercise of personal rights for those who wanted to assemble and petition the Government for redress of grievances....Now, I think that all grew out of this complement of fear, did it not, the whole Watergate incident?"

To ridicule the recognition of the clear and present danger posed by subversives, as paranoid "fear," is worse than demagoguery. When bombings, arson and murder are running loose on college campuses and city streets, it should be clear to anyone that the subversives have crawled out from under beds and rose bushes. But it was not clear to Magruder. "I think from my own personal standpoint, I did lose some respect for the legal process simply because I did not see it working as I had hoped it would when I came here," answered Magruder, blithely deaf to the horrendous implications of Ervin's speech.

Fred D. Thompson, the perceptive minority counsel (Republican), tried to bail Magruder out and counteract Ervin's unconscionable statement, by asking: "Were you concerned about legitimate demonstrations, or were there more serious things going on in the country at that time? Up until that time had there been bombings of public buildings, for example?" In an almost patronizing tone of voice, Magruder answered: "Well I think it goes much deeper than that, not only were there bombings of public buildings, we had death threats against Mr. Mitchell's life. We had continuous demonstrations in front of our headquarters." The tone of voice said, in effect: "Public bombings, hell! They threatened us!"

Mr. Thompson tried again, obviously struggling to impart some political stature to a sulking juvenile: "Had there been a series of break-ins of F.B.I. offices, for example?" "Yes, sir, many." "Was it your opinion at the time there were plans afoot to make some attempt to overthrow the Government by illegal and improper means?" "I would not go so far as to say overthrow the Government," Magruder answered scornfully, and went on in a tone of disclosing something much more important: "I think we had some concern about them overthrowing our convention as they did the Democratic party convention in 1968." Mr. Thompson gave up.



Former Secretary Maurice H. Stans, director of the campaign's finance committee, disclaimed any concern with ideological issues, as a matter of right. His job, he declared, was only to raise money for the campaign, not to know how the money was spent nor what was the content, policy or strategy of the campaigning. For these, he passed the buck to the director of the re-election committee, former Attorney General John N. Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell was an old pro; his calm, self-confident manner was a relief to see after a procession of cringing penitents; by contrast, he imparted some dignity to the proceedings. But ideological issues were not his specialty; he was, he implied, an executive, not a theoretician. The TV camera suggested - by some almost imperceptible shadings of his facial expressions - that he was, perhaps, more dedicated to his political convictions than any of his younger, sloppier predecessors on the witness stand. But what these convictions were, he firmly avoided saying. He named his devotion to Richard Nixon as his only political motive. Listening to him, one felt that some of the things he said were true and some were not, but which was which no one would ever be able to tell.

John W. Dean 3d., Counsel to the President, interrupted the progression of witnesses, with its inversely rising-falling lines: the psychological line crashed to the bottom and stayed there for the duration of his testimony. Dean's face, with its rodent-like jaw structure, was almost unbearable to watch. It is probable that he does not look quite so sordidly contemptible in person; but the television camera reveals too much.

Dean's testimony was based on the calculation that it would take years of effort to untangle all his evasions, contradictions, half-truths, and gaping holes - an effort no one would care to waste. In answering questions, he used the technique of giving an overabundance of unverifiable details, or repeating long, memorized passages in identical words, or launching into such a web of irrelevant side issues that the question was lost and remained unanswered.

Three things stood out in his testimony: 1. According to the facts of his own story, his role in the cover-up consisted, not in investigating or containing the scandal, but in deliberately involving as many prominent members and associates of the Nixon Administration as possible (for a purpose one can easily guess). 2. Only the pure malice of a defeated manipulator can explain his ultimatum that he would not resign unless Haldeman and Ehrlichman were also forced to resign. 3. As a general rule, whenever a man refuses to put his words in writing, one may be certain that he has been lying. When Dean was asked by Mr. Nixon to prepare a written report on Watergate, he would not comply; he ran to the prosecutor, instead (knowing, apparently, that the jig was up). This alone should be sufficient to impeach Dean's credibility.

But all these are merely details, of no importance compared to one overriding fact: John Dean is a lawyer who bargained for his own immunity in exchange for the confidential documents he stole from his former clients. Nothing else need be known - or considered - about him. That this should be accepted and passed over in silence by a Senate committee - a committee whose alleged purpose (and rhetorical theme) was to protect the right of privacy, to deplore this country's moral deterioration, to seek a rebirth of public morality - that Dean should be given a respectful, almost friendly treatment by such a committee, will contribute more to this country's demoralization than any grafters or wiretappers ever could. This - more than all the other manifestations of a cynical double standard - can destroy the last of people's confidence in anyone's appeals to decency,

morality and justice.

Neither the young witnesses nor the public could expect any ideological guidance from John Dean: the concept of "political ideas" is irrelevant in his case. But Ehrlichman and Haldeman were at the top of the executive pyramid; if anyone knew the philosophical base, the goals and the ideals of the political battle, these two would be expected to know and to give some indication - some defense of a party subjected to such an uncontested battering.

John D. Ehrlichman was regarded as the "issues" man, i.e., the ideologue of the White House. A tall, muscular, somewhat beefy figure, he lounged in the witness chair and answered questions by turn too placidly or too defiantly, in the arrogant manner of a man faking self-confidence. How can one tell it was faked? A self-confident man does not sneer; there was a chronic sneer in the corners of Ehrlichman's fleshy, petulant mouth.

His intellectual contribution consisted mainly in declaring that, in cases involving national security, the President has an inherent, unlimited power to use any means whatever, including break-ins and wiretapping, at his sole discretion. (This is a totally untenable position: even though a President should have wide powers in regard to national security, and particularly in regard to surveillance, no government official may hold unlimited power in this country, in any issue, and the exercise of any power he holds must be clearly, carefully defined and delimited.) Ehrlichman asserted his sweeping generalization as a principle - and got caught when one of the Senators asked him whether the President's power would include the right to murder. Ehrlichman answered that he did not know where to draw the line and shrugged it off by adding that he was not a constitutional lawyer. So much for the theoretician of the political party that claims to stand for freedom and individual rights.

But Ehrlichman showed a much greater interest, zeal and tenacity when he argued on another subject: he fought for the notion that exposing the private lives and personal weaknesses of candidates is a proper part of political campaigning. He confined his examples to alcoholism, but it was obvious that he meant sexual misbehavior as well. If the young pragmatists at the bottom of the pyramid had no idea of how to fight a battle of ideas, but hoped for leadership from the top, it was a dismal experience to see that the top was rocky, wind-swept and empty.

H.R. Haldeman completed the picture. He was regarded as a man of action, not of ideas - and he acted accordingly. He was a bit too cheery, he smiled a bit too often, he had the kind of face that used to be described as "wholesome and clean-cut," like a college cheerleader of the 1920s. His testimony was like his face: bland. He never referred to any ideological matters, in the carefree, almost righteous manner of a man who is said to have "his feet on the ground" and does not waste time on abstractions.

But one small incident made me wonder. Under the pressure of questioning about the campaign, Haldeman showed a touch of Magruder-like self-pity, complaining that the Democrats had indulged in many "dirty tricks," while the Republicans had been more restrained. And suddenly, sitting up, his eyes sparkling with authentic intensity, his voice acquiring the tone of a dedicated crusader, he declared that the Republicans had known some momentous secret - "the Fort Wayne incident" - but President Nixon had forbidden them ever to use it, and they never did. His manner suggested that the disclosure of the secret would have been dis-

astrous for the Democrats - and there was a note of pride in his voice, suggesting the sadness and nobility of renunciation. It made me think that there was, perhaps, some important issue about which he cared profoundly - and I wondered why no one questioned him about it.

Next day, I learned from the newspapers what the Fort Wayne incident was. A woman in Fort Wayne had an illegitimate child whose father's name was listed as "George McGovern"; no one even knew whether it was Senator George McGovern or not. This "big secret" was, for me, the end of the Nixon Administration - i.e., of the hope that it would ever be able to offer anything of value or to achieve any intellectual stature. (No, I do not regret that I voted for Nixon, because I would vote for almost anyone against Senator McGovern or Senator Kennedy, but this is not saying much.)

The best witness of the hearings was the last - Henry E. Petersen, Assistant Attorney General - who gave the best characterization of the men involved in Watergate: "None of them acted innocent." I would apply it to more than their behavior in the campaign.

(To be continued.)

Ayn Rand

P.S. This Letter was written later than the date that appears on its heading.

OBJECTIVIST CALENDAR

We have been asked to announce that Phillip J. Smith will offer an acting workshop, open to beginning and intermediate students. The workshop will begin in the third week of September and will run for 14 weeks. For further information, contact Mr. Smith at 315 West 91st Street, New York, N.Y. 10024. Telephone: (212) 724-1117.

B.W.



# THE Ayn Rand LETTER®

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Vol. II, No. 20

July 2, 1973

## THE PRINCIPALS...

### Part II

If the executive branch of the government presented a sorry picture at the Senate hearings, did the legislative branch do any better? If the Watergate affair was a national disgrace, was the antidote different in kind or only in degree? Let us take a look at the stature of the men on the other side of the committee table.

It is not wrong for a politician to seek to impress his audience: it is part of his profession. But in the midst of a solemn inquiry - with grandiloquent statements about this country's imperiled future, freedom, Constitution and rights, with lofty appeals to morality and pious invocations of justice - it is worse than wrong if the chief concern, superseding all others in the minds of the interrogators, is concern with their television close-ups.

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Democrat), the committee's Chairman, was the most obvious, but not the worst offender in this respect. He almost winked at the camera when it moved toward him; he did not purr - it was only the look on his face that suggested it. He acted like an old ham, worn out by the silence of years of touring the sticks, who suddenly hears himself applauded. He overdid it. He dragged in his entire repertoire, from Shakespeare to the Bible, he sputtered rustic jokes, he stammered thunderous maledictions, he basked, he rolled over, with one eye on the gallery and the other on the camera.

There were two embarrassing miscalculations in his performance. First, there is a type of humor which relies on a preposterous contrast, e.g., a beautiful woman referring to herself as "ugly"; it misfires when an ugly woman refers to herself as "ugly" - which is what happened whenever Senator Ervin referred to himself as "just a country lawyer." Second, jokes are appropriate on some occasions, but not when the occasion requires solemn dignity - and not over the body of a helpless victim subpoenaed to the rack, not even if the victim deserves it.

Senator Daniel K. Inouye (Democrat) appeared, at first, to be the most intelligent and dignified of the interrogators. He did not joke; he seldom smiled; he spoke briefly and to the point, in an unusually attractive voice that projected a kind of old-fashioned, patrician elegance. But when an aristocrat resorts to demagogic questions, the effect is sadder and worse than when a common rabble-rouser propounds them. For instance, Senator Inouye asked H.R. Haldeman whether he had erased any part of President Nixon's tapes. Since there was nothing in the evidence to indicate it, the only effect of the question was to plant in the minds of the audience (and of the press) a suspicion that could never be proved or disproved. Whatever the motives behind the question, a quest for truth was not one of them.

Senator Joseph M. Montoya (Democrat) was unable to focus long enough to remember the beginning of his question by the time he reached the end. He was unable to remember the testimony, and he kept holding the camera by means of long stretches of incoherent verbiage, delivering - in the aggressive tone of springing a bombshell - a question that had been asked and answered three or four times. Helplessness, as such, is not wicked; it becomes so when written all over a face in conjunction with belligerence, resentment, and a kind of pouting hostility. The grotesquely original part of Senator Montoya's performance was a question he repeated to witness after witness, to the effect that: How could anyone have been ignorant about the facts of Watergate when they had all been printed in the newspapers? - his tone of voice suggesting a kind of triumphantly self-righteous indignation, along with the belief that the truth of anything printed in the newspapers is beyond the realm of doubt. He asked it even of Assistant Attorney General Petersen - after Petersen had testified about the difficulties of establishing proof in criminal cases.

Senator Edward J. Gurney (Republican) seemed to be the lone dissenter on the committee. He did not lack courage, but he lacked ammunition - and hope - as if he had given up before he started. For instance, he tried to challenge Dean's testimony, but what did he pick on? He succeeded in proving that Dean had been inaccurate about the location of the Mayflower Coffee Shop.

Senator Herman E. Talmadge (Democrat) revealed nothing under the television camera, except a big grin and a heavy Southern accent. Perhaps, this was all he had to reveal.

Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (Republican) revealed a great deal. He acted like a hatchet man in the service of the lowest-grade editorials of the leftist-liberal press. He used his on-camera time to make speeches on every standard item of their line. He screamed - literally screamed - at the witnesses and shook his finger at them in the manner of a district attorney in a grade-B movie melodrama, with as authentic a tone of righteous indignation. He was heavy, slumped and sprawling, but he shook all over: finger, arm, shoulders, voice and flesh. His acting was inept, but when he raised his face, with pale, blurred eyes and quivering jowls, the camera caught something real: such a profound, venomous, festering hatred that one had to turn away, with the feeling that he ought to be prosecuted for indecent exposure.

The worst - or most skillful - manipulator of the camera was Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. (Republican), the committee's Vice Chairman. His was a professional performance: it consisted in ignoring the camera too pointedly and achieving well-calculated "spontaneous" effects. His every gesture, pause and intonation were timed to project - in discrete installments - the attributes of a Madison-Avenue image of a young lawmaker: ingenuous openness, boyish earnestness, idealism, impartiality and depth. It was a solid act, a studied act, and an act aimed at showing that he had no act. For instance, would you regard the following as an expression of ingenuous unselfconsciousness? The camera moved in on him at the start of his turn to question a witness, and found him with his head bowed in thought and a pencil scratching the back of his ear, which lasted just the right number of seconds, while the hapless witness waited offscreen and the camera registered the portentous silence.

Senator Baker's "impartiality" was expressed by an obsequious courting of Senator Ervin, whom he addressed as "My Chairman" (in the manner of a French soldier addressing Napoleon as "Mon Empereur"), and by an insistent me-too-ing of Ervin's most partisan rulings, with compliments to "My Chairman's" fairness. Senator Baker's "boyish charm" was expressed by joking and bantering in the casual manner of a host letting his hair down at a small, private party. His "earnestness" was expressed by a sudden pause in the midst of an interrogation and a somber, silent stare at the more frightened of the younger witnesses, a stare held long enough to register on

the witness and on the audience. His "idealism" was expressed by prying questions on the theme of morality, designed to elicit an abject concession of moral guilt, addressed to the younger, the more obviously vulnerable witnesses, but not addressed to men like Dean or Mitchell. His "depth" was expressed by the sudden introduction of an intense, personal plea, in some such words as: "Will you tell me, because I am really puzzled...because I really want to know..." - the tone of voice projecting a helpless groping for truth, followed by a question in the form of a remarkable flow of generalities suggesting some profound, philosophical concern, on some level above the mundane preoccupations of the moment, but actually saying nothing, like the gems of wisdom one finds in illustrated calendars.

Did the camera reveal anything beyond this act? Only the look in his eyes - which remained unchanged through theme and variations - the cold, shrewd, calculating look of a manipulator. Manipulator - to what end? The motive, the hidden power-lust, broke through once in a while, in the form of an unnecessary little speech drawn to many witnesses at the conclusion of his interrogation - seemingly, in the name of "fairness"; actually, as a threat, stressing his moment of power. The speech went something like this (I quote from memory): "Ah must tell you that Ah will take your testimony at face value until all the evidence is in, but then Ah will compare it to the testimony of other witnesses and then Ah will judge." It is unfortunate that none of the victims was in a position to answer: "That's your tough luck, brother, not mine. I know the truth."

Consider the fact that Senator Baker kept enunciating as leftist-liberal a line as Senator Ervin, yet that his, Baker's, voting record in the Senate is rightist-conservative; consider the fact that he has declared his (pragmatist) contempt for ideological consistency by stating, in an interview, that he disapproves of political "labels" - and you will realize that you are seeing a smoother, slyer, trickier Nixon.

Many commentators admit (and do not object to) the obvious fact that all these Senators are running their future campaigns from the green pasture of the committee table. Senator Baker is running - God help us! - for the office of President, or for the Presidential nomination on the Republican ticket. This means that he is after Mr. Nixon's job. And this raises the question: How does the ethical standard of "conflict of interest" apply to the Senate committee?

Suppose the president of a business corporation were in trouble, and the corporation appointed an investigating committee that included an ambitious young climber who had his eye on the president's job, while all the other members had special interests at stake, which took precedence over the task of discovering the truth. Would anyone regard such a committee as honorable, impartial and just? If not, then why are politicians judged by a different standard?

If all the members of the Nixon Administration are suspect because they have an interest in supporting Nixon, why should anyone trust men who have an interest in defeating him? What standard of objectivity decrees that the friends of the accused are prejudiced, but his enemies are not?

Many liberals defend the leftist demonstrators against complaints such as Magruder's, by declaring that the demonstrators broke the law openly, while the Watergate boys did it secretly. But it is an open question as to who is morally superior: those who practice an open, cynical, hooligan defiance of the law - or those who preserve some remnant of respect for morality, and practice their lawbreaking in secret. By the same token, who is more reprehensible: the men who are denounced for their hidden motives, such as authoritarian power-lust, unscrupulous ambition, "selfish" interests, partisan deceit, the sacrifice of moral principles for the sake

of winning an election - or the men who denounce them, while practicing the same offenses for the same goal, in the open glare of a national television hookup?

But cynical amoralities of that size can seldom be perpetrated without the sanction of the victim. Once Mr. Nixon had impeached the integrity of the entire executive branch, by agreeing to have an "outside" prosecutor on the case and by accepting a political enemy as impartial, he cut the ground from under any potential defender on the Senate committee and gave a signal to the worst of Sam Ervin's boys that they could go ahead with an uncontested orgy.

The orgy was as ugly and fully as sadistic as the circus spectacles of ancient Rome - except that there were no lions and no Christians in the arena, only a bunch of seedy gladiators who had never learned how to fight.

To add insult to injury, Senator Ervin kept repeating that the hearings were not a court of law and were not bound by the same rules of evidence, that their purpose was not to condemn anyone, only "to discover the truth." But the rules of evidence binding a court are the best means men were able to devise for the purpose of discovering the truth. By what means, then, does the committee propose to discover it? Apart from undermining respect for legal procedure, Senator Ervin's statement raises the question: What is the actual purpose of the Watergate hearings?

Observe a significant precedent: an earlier television spectacular from Washington was the Army-McCarthy hearings, which took place in 1954 - at a time when there was a strong political trend to the right in this country. That trend was sidetracked by the election of Eisenhower, and defeated for a generation by the McCarthy hearings. The hearings were as confusing, messy, boring, overdetailed, inconclusive and one-sided as the present ones; and precisely for these reasons, they created a package-deal which the public was unable to untangle or define: the tag "McCarthyism," which was used thereafter to smear all rightists - and to discredit any serious ideological opposition to communism.

The Nixon landslide was a thunderous demonstration of a trend to the right. Hence, the Watergate hearings - for the purpose of creating a new tag, "Watergate," as an instrument of smearing and intimidation. The ideological victim, to be made intellectually disreputable this time, is patriotism and concern with national security (it will be called "excessive concern"). Senator Weicker admitted as much when he screamed at one of the witnesses, in regard to the question of national security: "This is what these hearings are all about!" No one picked him up on it.

Is there anything we can learn from this sordid spectacle? Yes, there is - as I shall discuss in my next Letter.

Ayn Rand



# THE Ayn Rand LETTER®

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Vol. II, No. 21

July 16, 1973

## ...AND THE PRINCIPLES

In one of his philosophizing bits, during the Watergate hearings, Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. asked a very important question: What can we do to prevent the future occurrence of events such as Watergate?

It seems unlikely that he was looking for an answer, because he addressed the question to one of the youngest witnesses, who was least qualified to answer it. Groping for the safest, the most widely acceptable answer, the boy mumbled something about there being "too much money" in the re-election committee. Senator Baker let it go at that; apparently, the question had been merely rhetorical.

But there is an answer - and it was illustrated, dramatized, virtually screamed by the entire progression of the Senate inquiry - only I doubt that Senator Baker or his colleagues would want to hear it.

The solution to any problem is implicit in the nature, i.e., the fundamental characteristics, of the problem. Assume that that question was asked of you (because, in a certain sense, it was). Assume that you are the ultimate judge of events (because, in a certain sense, you are). Now ask yourself: Can you judge the issues in the Watergate hearings? Can you determine who was lying and who was telling the truth, and to what extent, and on what specific points? Can you hold the total of the testimony in mind, including every detail - since it is particularly in regard to details that the witnesses gave different accounts? If you cannot do it from memory, would you be able to do it by studying the transcript? How long would it take you? How many volumes of the transcript would you be able to hold in mind before your memory and integrating capacity broke down? Would you be able to determine the facts which the Senate committee is allegedly seeking: Who authorized the Watergate break-in and cover-up? What was done and by whom?

You would have to say that you cannot determine it, that you do not know, and worse: that the men involved in Watergate do not seem to know it, either. This gives you a clue to the nature of the problem.

The men involved in Watergate believed that they were carrying out a policy - but no one had set a policy and no one was able to define it. Most of them assumed that they were obeying orders - but no one had given them specific orders. Some of them thought that they had a free hand - but it was not free, and they found untraceable pressures countermanding their decisions. All of them seem responsible for everything in general - and no one seems responsible for anything in particular. All seem guilty collectively - and each claims innocence individually. But such a situation is, in fact, impossible. If men attempt to set it up and to function in such conditions, they can achieve nothing but self-destruction (which these men did). What was the nature of the setup? Undefined goals, undefined principles, undefined standards, unde-

finned responsibility, undefined (and unlimited) power, unearned (and unlimited) wealth.

Liberal commentators are saying that the Nixon Administration was autocratic. In form (though not in essence, since the essence is the same), the opposite was true of the Nixon re-election committee; its setup was "democratic" in the exact sense in which this word is used by the sloppier kinds of welfare statist, socialists, "humanists," or New-Left communes: no one had authority, and everyone - power was diffuse and unspecified, each man (or clique) was free to take the initiative, to push his own schemes, to do his own thing - different people had different ideas and they resolved them some-how, by "democratic consensus" or compromise (or by some of them choosing not to know what others were doing).

Secrecy, stealth, and cliques jockeying for power are intrinsic in any setup of this kind. On the one hand, if power belongs to all, men dare not speak openly for fear of antagonizing others; on the other hand, if power belongs to none, men feel that it is theirs for the taking. Consequently, the general policy is not to persuade, but to put something over on one another. The sneaky evasiveness of the Watergate witnesses was not a manner they assumed for the benefit of the Senate committee, it was their normal manner of functioning. It was not aimed primarily at hiding their scheme from the press or the public, but from one another.

Since a group of men cannot act by indeterminate rules, yet action is required, anyone can put anything over on it. It offers a field day for manipulators or for anyone adept at fishing in muddy waters. Whether the source of the group's power, its nominally ultimate authority, is the King (as in an absolute monarchy) or "the people" (as in an unlimited democracy), the principle is the same: unlimited power - and its practical consequences are always the same. Neither of those authorities can rule a country personally; both have to delegate that unlimited power - either to court favorites or to skillful demagogues. (In a mixed economy, both elements are involved: political manipulators have to keep one eye on their boss, and the other on their "public image.")

John W. Dean 3d gave a graphic example of how one manipulates an absentee authority. The clandestine communications from Dean to McCord (via Caulfield, Ulasewicz, code names, and public phone booths) did not state explicitly that President Nixon had promised to give McCord executive clemency in exchange for his silence, only that the promise came "from way up on top." The man way up on top turned out to be Dean - who testified that he had not discussed the matter with Mr. Nixon, but had taken it upon himself to make that promise (on the basis, he alleged, of a similar promise made to another Watergate defendant - an allegation denied by Mr. Nixon and a number of witnesses).

Many witnesses testified that they had obeyed Dean (or Magruder or Mitchell or Ehrlichman or Haldeman) because of his position in the White House or his "closeness to the President." What were all those victims or suckers to do - in a situation ruled by unspecified power? They had no way of checking Dean's authority or his standing with the President, no way of knowing when or whether Dean spoke for the President or just for himself. They were afraid to trust Dean fully and afraid to defy him. They had to gamble on his unsupported word (or rather, on his veiled hints), and the stakes were high: for some of them, obedience meant the commission of crimes, such as perjury, destruction of evidence, illegal money-raising - and, in the case of McCord, a possible thirty-five-year prison sentence. So they complied, or passed the buck, or provided themselves with scapegoats - while Dean's maneuvering consisted in never telling the same story twice and never letting any of them know what he had told the others (which is one obvious reason why he could not put a report on his activities in writing).

Dean was merely the grossest, but not the only, manipulator in that group: most

of them were playing the same game to various extents. No one initiated the cover-up, Dean testified, "it just happened." "It was fate," he said, in another passage of his testimony. This was true, as far as the manipulators' view of life was concerned. Cover-ups were their metaphysical necessity, to hide things was their automatized "instinct" - to hide from the world, from one another and, ultimately, from their distant boss, President Nixon, whose favor all of them were competing for, whose indeterminate views all of them were trying to guess, to satisfy, to anticipate, and to manipulate. (I have no opinion as to whether Mr. Nixon did or did not know anything about Watergate; it is a small matter compared to a much deeper default: his Pragmatism, the philosophy shared and exemplified by the re-election committee.)

Can you untangle this maze? Can you isolate individual ambitions, motives, influences, pressures, responsibilities, and con games? Can you judge anyone's guilt or innocence in a mess of this kind? Can you determine what ought to be corrected and what sort of law would correct it? Or do you turn away in disgust from the televised view of that complex chaos, feeling that a lifetime of study would not untangle it nor clean it up?

Now multiply the complexity of that chaos a thousandfold, then a thousandfold again - and you will have an approximate picture of the government of a mixed economy.

The Nixon re-election committee was a temporary organization, limited by a nominal goal (an election), supported by semi-voluntary financial contributions, and involving nothing but the personal ambitions and careers of a handful of men (who were unable to affect the outcome of the election). Try to project what is involved in the operations of a government that holds the power to control the economy of the whole country - which means: power to control the work, the career, the ambition, the achievement, the income, the property, the future of every citizen. What sort of pressures, schemes, intrigues, maneuvers and con games would this generate?

It is rumored that the Nixon re-election committee was torn by such clashes as the Haldeman-Ehrlichman faction versus the Mitchell faction, or Magruder versus Liddy, or Strachan versus Magruder, etc. - with future influence or promotion at stake. What is that compared to the clashes of business versus labor, or labor versus farmers, or producers versus consumers, or innovators versus ecologists - with survival at stake?

Whatever their motives, the men of the re-election committee were not moved by financial "greed." With millions of dollars in untraceable cash floating about, there is no evidence that anyone tried to line his own pockets (with the possible exception of Dean, who seems to have "borrowed" \$15,000). Try to project the nature of the motives and the ferocity of the greed generated in people by a government that holds an unlimited power of taxation, disposes of an unlimited wealth and distributes it according to the machinations of any plausible or implausible pressure group. Would you be able to untangle those motives or the validity of the pressure groups' demands?

You have seen, within the span of the last few years, that controls breed more controls, and that the proliferation of controls breeds the proliferation of pressure groups. Today, you see political manipulators setting up new conflicts, such as ethnic minorities against the majority, the young against the old, the old against the middle, women against men, even welfare-recipients against the self-supporting. Openly and cynically, these new groups clamor for "a bigger slice of the pie" (which you have to bake). If the Watergate affair is said to represent moral corruption, how would you describe the processes by which the government deals with all those claimants?

Would you be able to identify the motives and reasons behind any single piece of legislation? Could you determine what considerations moved every Congressman who voted for or against it? What lobbyists or fellow-Congressmen had approached him? What argu-

ments had they offered? What had he been promised? What deals had been made? Had the inducements been material, such as a bribe, or spiritual, such as a commitment to deliver the vote at his next election, or both, such as an offer to support his pet legislation in exchange for his support of this one? Which pressure groups did he favor, and/or which were powerful in his home state? Whose interests could he or could he not afford to sacrifice? What did he know about the specific subject of that legislation? Had he read the bill or did he rely on the summary provided by his staff and, if so, what were their views? What was the degree of his knowledge, of his intelligence, of his integrity, of his independence? What was the firmness of his convictions (if any)? To what extent had his decision been influenced by such emotions as fear, guilt, self-doubt, vanity, envy, hatred?

If a public hearing were held to trace the causes of that one piece of legislation, it would uncover a vaster, vaguer, more tangled, more corrupt, more pernicious, and less identifiable maze of subterranean burrowings than the one uncovered in the Watergate hearings - and no one would be able to discover its starting point, to apportion responsibility, or to find the answers to the questions asked above, including the participants.

It is not a matter of personalities, nor of anyone's honesty or dishonesty. The corruption is inherent in the system: it is inherent in any situation in which men have to act without any goals, principles or standards to guide them. "The good of the country" is not a goal (unless one has a clear, objective definition of what is the good). "The public interest" is not a principle. (Observe that all pressure groups claim to represent "the public interest.") Someone's wish or "aspiration" is not a standard. You have heard every politician in every election proclaim his allegiance to those empty generalities. You have been wise enough not to believe his public utterances. What makes you believe that he has better principles in the privacy of his own mind and that, once elected, he will act on them? He hasn't and he can't.

In a controlled (or mixed) economy, a legislator's job consists in sacrificing some men to others. No matter what choice he makes, no choice of this kind can be morally justified (and never has been). Proceeding from an immoral base, no decision of his can be honest or dishonest, just or unjust - these concepts are inapplicable. He becomes, therefore, an easy target for the promptings of any pressure group, any lobbyist, any influence-peddler, any manipulator - he has no standards by which to judge or to resist them. You do not know what hidden powers drive him or what he is doing. Neither does he.

Now observe the results of such policies and their effect on the country. You have seen that Nixon's wage-price controls, imposed two years ago for the purpose of slowing down inflation, have accelerated it. You have seen that a shortage of soybeans, which you probably do not buy, has led to the shortage of most of the food items which you do buy and need. You have seen a demonstration of the fact that a country's economy is an integrated (and self-integrating) whole - and that the biggest computer would not be able to predict all the consequences of an edict controlling the price of milk, let alone an edict controlling the price, the costs, the sales, the amounts of wheat or beef or steel or oil or electricity. Can you hold in mind the total of a country's economy, including every detail of the interrelationships of every group, every profession, every kind of goods and services? Can you determine which controls are proper or improper, practical or impractical, beneficent or disastrous? If you cannot do it, what makes you assume that a politician can? In fact, there is no such thing as proper, practical or beneficent controls.

Like the Nixon re-election committee, the government of a mixed economy is a setup ruled by undefined goals, undefined principles, undefined standards, undefined responsibility, undefined (and unlimited) power, unearned (and unlimited) wealth. A country

that accepts such conditions can achieve nothing but self-destruction, as the men of the re-election committee did. This is the lesson that comes loud and clear through the grimy mess of the Watergate hearings - a pictorial lesson that concretizes the senselessness, the pettiness, the futility, the chaos, and the depersonalized evil of a government swollen with a power no government can or should hold. (For a discussion of the proper functions of a government, I refer you to my book Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal.)

This is not, however, the lesson that the liberals are pounding and propounding today. The problem, they claim, does not lie in the system, but in men; the evil, they claim, is not arbitrary power, but those who exercise it; the power of the Presidency, they claim, is too great and should be switched to Congress. The crude double standard of the pragmatist-liberal doctrines is almost too obvious in this issue: it was the liberals who inflated the Presidency to its present, power-bloated, wholly unconstitutional size, during the decades of liberal Presidents; now, when the liberals have lost control of the White House, they demand the switching of power to Congress, which they hope to control by means of pressure groups. But a "redistribution" of power will not save a country ravaged by power - just as the switching of a cancer from one organ to another will not save the patient.

A "mixed" government is the only institution that grows not through its successes, but through its failures. Its advocates use every disaster to enlarge the power of the government that caused it. Today, the main circumstance that keeps politicians (more or less) in line is the fact that they still have to face the voters every few years. It is this restraint that the statists are now out to destroy. As a cure for the many abuses and corruptions of the electoral process (not all of them financial), the statists propose to give total power over elections to the abusers and the corrupters, i.e., the politicians. (It is not Big Business contributions that corrupt politicians, but the politicians' power to demand and extort such contributions, which works like a protection racket - as has been demonstrated recently in regard to both parties.)

The existence and rivalry of two parties, even such as they are, is the last protection of the (approximate) honesty of elections. It is obvious what sort of rigging would go on, if the government were given the power to finance elections. They call it "public financing," which means that you would be deprived of the right to decide which candidates you want to support, if any, and that the politicians would make that decision for you. But that power would be given to an "impartial, nonpartisan" commission, you are told? Impartial - like prosecutor Archibald Cox? Nonpartisan - like the Senate Watergate committee? In today's situation, you'd better pray for the survival of plain, old-fashioned grafters: when they vanish, you'll get a Robespierre or a Hitler, both of whom were anti-materialistic and incorruptible.

The solution, of course, is to eliminate both kinds of predators, material or spiritual, by eliminating their breeding ground: the government's power over the economy. No, it cannot be done overnight. But if you want to fight for that ultimate solution, Watergate provides you with intellectual ammunition: its lesson is the diametric opposite of the notions now being palmed off on the country by the statist-liberal establishment.

If you feel, as many people do, that such a battle would take too long and comes too late, there is one piece of advice I should like to give you: if you choose to resign yourself to the reign of an unchallenged evil, do so with your eyes open. Hold an image of the Watergate hearings in your mind and ask yourself what I asked you at the start of this discussion: Do you feel respect for the men on either side of the long committee table? To which of them would you care to surrender your freedom? To Senator Ervin? To Jeb Stuart Magruder? To John D. Ehrlichman? Whose judgment would you regard as superior to yours and competent to do a job which you can neither grasp

nor judge nor define nor undertake: the impossible job of controlling this country's economy? The judgment of H.R. Haldeman? Of Frederick C. LaRue? Of Senator Montoya? Which of them would you entrust with the power to dispose of your life, your work, your income, and your children's future? Senator Baker? Senator Weicker? John W. Dean 3d?

If you hold Richard Nixon responsible for Watergate, as the absentee authority in whose name the men of the re-election committee were acting and whose favor they were scrambling to win, then - in relation to all the politicians of this country - you are the absentee authority, it is in your name that they are issuing their edicts, it is your favor that they are scrambling to win (or wheedle or extort or manipulate) at election time. No, you cannot fight them by means of your one vote. But you can make yourself heard. It is your voice that they fear, when and if it is the voice of your mind, because their entire racket rests on the hope that you will not understand.

Do not hide behind the futile hope that the men you saw on television might be bigger in real life, that responsible government positions would raise their stature. In real life, they are smaller; today's government positions shrink them - for a reason stated by a great political thinker of the last century.

His statement was mentioned during the Watergate hearings, but no one paid much attention to it. Yet that statement is the real answer to Senator Baker's question: it indicates what must be eliminated in order to prevent the future occurrence of events such as Watergate (or such as the Watergate hearings).

That thinker was Lord Acton, who said: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Ayn Rand

#### OBJECTIVIST CALENDAR

On Sunday, October 21, Ayn Rand will give a talk on "Censorship: Local and Express," at The Ford Hall Forum in Boston. Time: 8 P.M. Place: Jordan Hall, 30 Gainsboro St. (Advance tickets are not available. On past occasions, the auditorium was filled to capacity, and many people had to be turned away. If you plan to attend, we suggest that you arrive at Jordan Hall far in advance of 7:30 P.M., when the doors open.)

The following starting dates have been scheduled for the tape lectures of Dr. Leonard Peikoff's courses. Modern Philosophy: Kant to the Present, Rockford, Ill., September 25, contact Dr. Fredrick Marler, (815) 397-4382 (days) or (815) 397-5083 (eves.). Founders of Western Philosophy: Thales to Hume, Rochester, N.Y., October 7, Harry Ladne, (716) 244-0873 (eves.).

B.W.

# THE Ayn Rand LETTER®

Vol. II, No. 22

July 30, 1973

## PERRY MASON FINALLY LOSES

I do not like to make predictions about the success or failure of particular shows, because the irrationality of short-range reactions is incalculable. But it is safe to say that television's new "Perry Mason" is not long for this world - even today's world.

In an essay on "Bootleg Romanticism" (in my book The Romantic Manifesto), I wrote: "Art (including literature) is the barometer of a culture....If you find political issues too complex to diagnose, take a look at today's art: it will leave you no doubt in regard to the health or disease of our culture." To speak of current television shows as "art," is to stretch this concept out of bounds; but since such shows have pre-empted the spots once occupied by art, they acquire "social" (and diagnostic) significance. It is not merely the fact that they are bad, it is the particular nature of their badness that reveals which characteristics men are losing (or are intended to lose).

The new "Perry Mason" is not Romanticism; it is not Naturalism; it is not anything. It is merely boring. It is too inept to be called evil - except in the sense in which any product of pretentious mediocrity is evil. But it carries, unintentionally, a great - though futile - moral message: "Imitation doesn't pay." The message is futile because it will not deter the perceptual mentalities who know no method of mental functioning other than imitation. But the rest of us can observe a valuable psycho-epistemological lesson.

The source of art - and of man's need of art - is man's conceptual faculty (see "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art" in The Romantic Manifesto). In practical action, the hallmark of conceptual functioning is the ability to ask "Why?" about value-judgments, and to find the answer - which can be found only by means of identifying the essentials of the object one is judging. But this is beyond the power of a perceptual mentality. If it were asked: "This automobile is good - why?" - it would answer: "Because it has beautiful upholstery." A perceptual mentality is unable to distinguish the essential from the non-essential.

Bearing this in mind, let us consider what the makers of the new "Perry Mason" were trying to imitate.

The old "Perry Mason" (which is now billed as the real "Perry Mason") was a habit-forming experience. I was an addict; I saw most of the episodes two or three times, in various reruns, and never felt bored. The soul of the show was Raymond Burr. He gave such an inspired performance that it lifted, illuminated and imparted meaning to all the rest. His Perry Mason had one dominant characteristic: intelligence - and, as a

consequence: firmness, self-confidence, moral certainty, and, as their consequence, dignity. These qualities are among the hardest to portray; they require esthetic absolutism - a single lapse makes them vanish. To appear authentic, they require the quiet steadiness of understatement; to appear natural, they require unself-consciousness. A hero is not conscious of being heroic: to him, it is just a matter of being himself. Raymond Burr achieved the unusual feat of faultlessly maintaining this kind of characterization through every episode, for nine years.

(The stress on intelligence was, apparently, the conscious intention behind the series, as indicated in the introductory shots: these show Perry Mason in a courtroom, studying a legal brief, frowning; then, suddenly, his face is hit by a "light-bulb" look - the look of grasping an idea.)

Burr's Perry Mason was a man of unusually active intelligence, a man whose mind never goes out of focus, whether he ponders a problem, or goes fishing, or jokes with Della Street, his charming, efficient secretary; a man of inexhaustible ingenuity, who risks his career on unconventional stunts - and wins, because he knows what he is doing; a man who does not solve problems by flashes of automatic omniscience, who works hard, who is often puzzled, but never helpless; a man who is passionately dedicated to justice (which he projects without ever saying a word about it); a man who keeps his head "when all about him are losing theirs" - and stands as an immovable rock of support for the fading strength and failing spirit of the helpless, the confused, the desperate victims of injustice.

It is obvious why such an image would have an overwhelming appeal today - and why people, millions of them, would cling to Perry Mason as desperately as the clients he saves on the TV screen. All of us today are victims of a gigantic injustice, which few can define or understand, all of us live under the pressure of an incomprehensible evil, which our public leaders seem to ignore and no one cares to explain, all of us feel that we need an indomitable defender - in a courtroom? no - in a much, much wider field.

This is the conceptual answer to the question: "'Perry Mason' was enormously popular - why?"

Before we switch channels, let me mention also that the old Perry Mason was shown, at times, attending his clients' parties, on which occasions his manner was the courteous, benevolent, but detached manner of an observer, as if he had much greater concerns on his mind.

Now let us take a look at the new "Perry Mason." (I missed the first episode, but saw the second and, as far as I am concerned, the last.) The show opens at a race track. A foolish, fluttering matron is prattling about horoscopes and fussing over some uncertainty as to whether her horse will be admitted to the race. The camera moves to a gangling, sloppy-postured, nondescript man entering the stands - escorting what looks like a mushroom with two stems, but turns out to be a girl in a mini-dress, crushed under a huge, hideous stovepipe hat. The man looks like a race-track tout; his face seems to blend with the background and is hard to remember: it is neither handsome nor ugly, neither grim nor friendly, neither young nor old; it does show some lines of age, but they seem premature because its expression suggests a perennial high-school - not college - student.

The matron rushes to meet him. "Perry Mason!" she cries. She adds, to the walking mushroom: "Hello, Miss Della Street" - then inquires about the fate of her horse. There was a bit of trouble, "but we fixed it!" he announces and practically winks at her, with a bashfully boastful grin. Whereupon the matron kisses him on the mouth.



Quite a bit later, we see him in his office. The potential client begging for his help, is a hysterical young woman who babbles incoherently and seems closer to psychosis than neurosis. He listens noncommittally and looks disturbed. "Excuse me a moment, please," is his first comment. Then he hurries to the anteroom, slumps, leaning for support with both hands on Miss Street's desk, and moans: "I don't know what to do!"

Then he mutters hesitantly: "Could you - " Miss Street completes his sentence: " - take her out to lunch?" in the maternal, patronizing tone of an adult wise to a child's tricks. The story goes on down from there.

In the courtroom, this alleged Perry Mason finds himself caught in some silly-sounding legalistic conflict, to the effect that he has to testify as a witness for the prosecution and, therefore, should not have undertaken this particular defendant's defense. He is told to approach the judge's bench - together with an incredible-looking creature that has a wizened, cadaverous face, a Hitler mustache, and no forehead, this being swallowed by the bangs of a hippie haircut, which creature turns out to be District Attorney Burger. Mason proceeds to explain, in a kind of part-pleading, part-apologetic, part-rancorous manner, that he accepted this case because he could not refuse the pleas of a sick, terrified, friendless woman who would not trust anyone else. He explained the legal situation to her, he states, but she insisted. "I don't know the answers," he declares. All this is delivered in the nasty tone of a small-time politician claiming altruism as his justification in a shady deal (a big-time politician would have done it more eloquently).

One has to see this mess in order fully to appreciate the skill, the ingenuity, the artistic achievement of the old "Perry Mason" scriptwriters. Some of their scripts were better than others, but here is what they were able to accomplish in the brief space of fifty minutes: clearly set up the conflicts of the future murder victim with a number of different characters - clearly convey his and their motivations - give a sharp characterization to each, in terms of essentials, so that each became a distinct personality, not to be confused with the others - lead events in a dramatic progression toward the murder - present the trial as an earnestly fought battle between Mason and Burger, involving a number of possible suspects - build a mounting suspense for the viewer, who is let in on the grounds for suspicion, and on the process by which Mason finally solves the case. Try to do it sometime - and you will realize what a feat those scriptwriters accomplished.

As to their dialogue, it was so simple and natural that I was inclined to take it for granted, until my husband said suddenly, one evening, as we were watching the old show: "Listen to how much they are saying how simply!" I focused specifically on the dialogue - and felt almost guilty for having overlooked its marvelously purposeful economy. This was art of a high order. Remember it next time you hear some pretentious mediocrity sounding off on the notion that plot is an artificial "contrivance" and that detective stories are not "art."

Well, one thing can be said for certain: the script of the new "Perry Mason" was not contrived. It was unintelligible. You could not tell what was happening or why, you could not tell one character from another, neither in action nor in appearance, and you could not care less. If I tell you that the motive of the murder turns out to be an astrologer's professional indignation at the fact that the villain had faked a horoscope, you might not believe that this was offered seriously. But it was - and this gives you the flavor of the whole thing.

The final episode of the old "Perry Mason" was aired in 1966. It is hard to believe that the esthetic standards of the television (and movie) industry could deteriorate to such an extent in the span of seven years. The speed of our cultural

disintegration is almost frightening. Since television or movie producers can hardly be regarded as original thinkers, their mental state is a good mirror of today's trends. By some ineffable osmosis of their own, the makers of the new "Perry Mason" sensed which human characteristics their masters - today's intellectuals - want men to lose: firmness, self-confidence, and any trace of a moral tone, as well as any touch of dignity. To say that the new Perry Mason is an anti-hero, would be to flatter the show: he is just a slob. It is the image of the real Perry Mason that today's cultural leaders want to eliminate from people's consciousness, as a vision, a hope, an inspiration, or even a possibility. So much for their view of man and for their concern with the education, the enlightenment, the happiness of "the people."

And so much for the claim that financial "greed" is the factor corrupting the producers of commercial entertainment. It is true that something like greed for the unearned would prompt imitators to pounce upon what they thought was a safe bet - a sensationally successful show - and to try to cash in on it. But their college-bred mentalities would render them incapable of equaling even the perceptiveness of a good forger: they would not know what they were imitating, nor why it had been successful. It is hard to say which is worse in this context: the fact that some men are capable of deliberately substituting trash for values, or the fact that their pupils - the graduates of today's schools and colleges, the products of Progressive education - would not know the difference and would not be able to produce, direct, write or act in anything resembling Romanticism, even on the popular level.

If you want to consider a broad integration, I would say that the new "Perry Mason" offers, unintentionally, its own refutation of Marxism: it demonstrates, in regard to art, what Atlas Shrugged demonstrated in regard to industry, specifically in the sequences dealing with the Twentieth Century Motor Company. One can expropriate the products of human intelligence; one will not be able to make them work.

To paraphrase a certain passage: "Ten years ago, the name 'Perry Mason' on a television series was as good as the karat mark on gold. I don't know what it was that the new producers thought, if they thought at all, but I suppose that like all social planners and like savages, they thought that this name was a magic stamp which did the trick by some sort of voodoo power and that it would make them rich, as it had made their predecessors. Well, when the viewers begin to see that everything Perry Mason stood for has been obliterated, the magic stamp will begin to work the other way around: people won't watch the show for free, if it is marked 'The New Perry Mason.'"



P.S. This Letter was written later than the date that appears on its heading.

OBJECTIVIST CALENDAR

Starting on October 28, the tape lectures of Leonard Peikoff's course, Founders of Western Philosophy: Thales to Hume, will be given in Providence, R.I. For further information, contact Bill Dawkins at (401) 943-0881 (eves.).

B.W.

# THE Ayn Rand LETTER®

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Vol. II, No. 23

August 13, 1973

## CENSORSHIP: LOCAL AND EXPRESS

I have been saying, for many years, that statism is winning by default - by the intellectual default of capitalism's alleged defenders; that freedom and capitalism have never had a firm, philosophical base; that today's conservatives share all the fundamental premises of today's liberals and thus have paved, and are still paving, the road to statism. I have also said repeatedly that the battle for freedom is primarily philosophical and cannot be won by any lesser means - because philosophy rules human existence, including politics.

But philosophy is a science that deals with the broadest abstractions and, therefore, many people do not know how to observe its influence in practice or how to grasp the process by which it affects the conditions of their daily life. A recent event, however, offers a clear, striking illustration of that process. It shows philosophy's influence in action, and reveals the essence (and the contradictions) of both the conservative and the liberal ideologies. This event is the decision of the Supreme Court in five recent "obscenity" cases.

In my Letter of November 20, 1972, I expressed hope in regard to the four men appointed to the Supreme Court by President Nixon, even though it was too early to tell the exact nature of their views. "But," I said, "if they live up to their enormous responsibility, we may forgive Mr. Nixon a great many of his defaults: the Supreme Court is the last remnant of a philosophical influence in this country." Today, less than a year later, the evidence is sufficient to indicate that there are no intellectual grounds left for forgiving Mr. Nixon.

Since inconsistent premises lead to inconsistent actions, it is not impossible that the present Supreme Court may make some liberating decisions. For instance, the Court made a great contribution to justice and to the protection of individual rights when it legalized abortion. I am not in agreement with all of the reasoning given in that decision, but I am in enthusiastic agreement with the result - i.e., with the recognition of a woman's right to her own body. But the Court's decision in regard to obscenity takes an opposite stand: it denies a man's (or a woman's) right to the exercise of his own mind - by establishing the legal and intellectual base of censorship.

Before proceeding to discuss that decision, I want to state, for the record, my own view of what is called "hard-core" pornography. I regard it as unspeakably disgusting. I have not read any of the books or seen any of the current movies belonging to that category, and I do not intend ever to read or see them. The descriptions provided in legal cases, as well as the "modern" touches in "soft-core" productions, are sufficient grounds on which to form an opinion. The reason of my

opinion is the opposite of the usual one: 'I do not regard sex as evil - I regard it as good, as one of the most important aspects of human life, too important to be made the subject of public anatomical display. But the issue here is not one's view of sex. The issue is freedom of speech and of the press - i.e., the right to hold any view and to express it.

It is not very inspiring to fight for the freedom of the purveyors of pornography or their customers. But in the transition to statism, every infringement of human rights has begun with the suppression of a given right's least attractive practitioners. In this case, the disgusting nature of the offenders makes it a good test of one's loyalty to a principle.

In the five "obscenity" cases decided on June 21, 1973, the Court was divided five to four. In each case, the majority opinion was written by Chief Justice Burger, joined by Justices Blackmun, Powell, Rehnquist (all four appointed by Nixon) and Justice White (appointed by Kennedy); in each case, the dissenting opinion was written by Justice Brennan, joined by Justices Stewart and Marshall; Justice Douglas, in each case, wrote a separate dissenting opinion. The two most important cases are Miller v. California and Paris Adult Theater I v. Slaton.

The Miller case involves a man who was convicted in California of mailing unsolicited, sexually explicit material, which advertised pornographic books. It is in the Miller decision that Chief Justice Burger promulgated the new criteria for judging whether a given work is obscene or not. They are as follows:

"The basic guidelines for the trier of fact must be: (a) whether 'the average person, applying contemporary community standards' would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest...(b) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and (c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."

These criteria are based on previous Supreme Court decisions, particularly on Roth v. United States, 1957. Nine years later, in the case of Memoirs v. Massachusetts, 1966, the Supreme Court introduced a new criterion: "A book cannot be proscribed unless it is found to be utterly without redeeming social value." This was bad enough, but the present decision emphatically rejects that particular notion and substitutes a horrendous criterion of its own: "whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."

Morally, this criterion, as well as the rest of Chief Justice Burger's decision, taken as a whole, is a proclamation of collectivism - not so much political as specifically moral collectivism. The intellectual standard which is here set up to rule an individual's mind - to prescribe what an individual may write, publish, read or see - is the judgment of an average person applying community standards. Why? No reason is given - which means that the will of the collective is here taken for granted as the source, justification and criterion of value judgments.

What is a community? No definition is given - it may, therefore, be a state, a city, a neighborhood, or just the block you live on. What are community standards? No definition is given. In fact, the standards of a community, when and if they can be observed as such, as distinguished from the standards of its individual citizens, are a product of chance, lethargy, hypocrisy, second-handedness, indifference, fear, the manipulations of local busybodies or small-time power-lusters - and, occasionally, the traditional acceptance of some decent values inherited from

some great mind of the past. But the great mind is now to be outlawed by the ruling of the Supreme Court.

Who is the average person? No definition is given. There is some indication that the term, in this context, means a person who is neither particularly susceptible or sensitive nor totally insensitive in regard to sex. But to find a sexually average person is a more preposterously impossible undertaking than to find the average representative of any other human characteristic - and, besides, this is not what the Court decision says. It says simply "average" - which, in an issue of judgment, means intellectually average: average in intelligence, in ability, in ideas, in feelings, in tastes, which means: a conformist or a nonentity. Any proposition concerned with establishing a human "average" necessarily eliminates the top and the bottom, i.e., the best and the worst. Thus the standards of a genius and the standards of a moron are automatically eliminated, suppressed or prohibited - and both are ordered to subordinate their own views to those of the average. Why is the average person to be granted so awesome a privilege? By reason of the fact that he possesses no special distinction. Nothing can justify such a notion, except the theory of collectivism, which is itself unjustifiable.

The Court's decision asserts repeatedly - just asserts - that this ruling applies only to hard-core pornography or obscenity, i.e., to certain ideas dealing with sex, not to any other kinds of ideas. Other kinds of ideas - it keeps asserting - are protected by the First Amendment, but ideas dealing with sex are not. Apart from the impossibility of drawing a line between these two categories (which we shall discuss later), this distinction is contradicted and invalidated right in the text of this same decision: the trial judges and juries are empowered to determine whether a work that contains sexual elements "lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."

This means - and can mean nothing else - that the government is empowered to judge literary, artistic, political, and scientific values, and to permit or suppress certain works accordingly.

The alleged limits on that power, the conditions of when, where and by whom it may be exercised, are of no significance - once the principle that the government holds such a power has been established. The rest is only a matter of details - and of time. The present Supreme Court may seek to suppress only sexual materials; on the same basis (the will of the community), a future Court may suppress "undesirable" scientific discussions; still another Court may suppress political discussions (and a year later all discussions in all fields would be suppressed). The law functions by a process of deriving logical consequences from established precedents.

The "average person's community standards" criterion, was set up in the Roth case. But the Roth criterion of "utterly without redeeming social value" was too vague to be immediately dangerous - anything may be claimed to have some sort of "social value." So, logically, on the basis of that precedent, the present Court took the next step toward censorship. It gave to the government the power of entry into four specific intellectual fields, with the power to judge whether the values of works in these fields are serious or not.

"Serious" is an unserious standard. Who is to determine what is serious, to whom, and by what criterion? Since no definition is given, one must assume that the criterion to apply is the only one promulgated in those guidelines: what the average person would find serious. Do you care to contemplate the spectacle of

the average person as the ultimate authority - the censor - in the field of literature? In the field of art? In the field of politics? In the field of science? An authority whose edict is to be imposed by force and is to determine what will be permitted or suppressed in all these fields? I submit that no pornographic movie can be as morally obscene as a prospect of this kind.

No first-rate talent in any of those fields will ever be willing to work by the intellectual standards and under the orders of any authority, even if it were an authority composed of the best brains in the world (who would not accept the job), let alone an authority consisting of "average persons." And the greater the talent, the less the willingness.

As to those who would be willing, observe the moral irony of the fact that they do exist today in large numbers and are generally despised: they are the hacks, the box-office chasers, who try to please what they think are the tastes - and the standards - of the public, for the sake of making money. Apparently, intellectual prostitution is evil, if done for a "selfish" motive - but noble, if accepted in selfless service to the "moral purity" of the community.

In another of the five "obscenity" cases (U.S. v. 12 200-Ft. Reels of Super 8mm. Film), but in a totally different context, Chief Justice Burger himself describes the danger created by the logical implications of a precedent: "The seductive plausibility of single steps in a chain of evolutionary development of a legal rule is often not perceived until a third, fourth or fifth 'logical' extension occurs. Each step, when taken, appeared a reasonable step in relation to that which preceded it, although the aggregate or end result is one that would never have been seriously considered in the first instance. This kind of gestative propensity calls for the 'line drawing' familiar in the judicial, as in the legislative process: 'thus far but not beyond.'"

I would argue that since a legal rule is a principle, the development of its logical consequences cannot be cut off, except by repealing the principle. But assuming that such a cutoff were possible, no line of any sort is drawn in the Miller decision: the community standards of average persons are explicitly declared to be a sovereign power over sexual matters and over the works that deal with sexual matters.

In the same Miller decision, Chief Justice Burger admits that no such line can be drawn. "Nothing in the First Amendment requires that a jury must consider hypothetical and unascertainable 'national standards' when attempting to determine whether certain materials are obscene as a matter of fact." He quotes Chief Justice Warren saying in an earlier case: "I believe that there is no provable 'national standard'....At all events, this Court has not been able to enunciate one, and it would be unreasonable to expect local courts to divine one."

By what means are local courts to divine a local one? Actually, the only provable standard of what constitutes obscenity would be an objective standard, philosophically proved and valid for all men. Such a standard cannot be defined or enforced in terms of law: it would require the formulation of an entire philosophic system; but even this would not grant anyone the right to enforce that standard on others. When the Court, however, speaks of a "provable national standard," it does not mean an objective standard; it substitutes the collective for the objective, and seeks to enunciate a standard held by all the average persons of the nation. Since even a guess at such a concept is patently impossible, the Court concludes that what is impossible (and improper) nationally, is permissible locally

- and, in effect, passes the buck to state legislatures, granting them the power to enforce arbitrary (unprovable) local standards.

Chief Justice Burger's arguments, in the Miller decision, are not very persuasive. "It is neither realistic nor constitutionally sound to read the First Amendment as requiring that the people of Maine or Mississippi accept public depiction of conduct found tolerable in Las Vegas, or New York City." I read the First Amendment as not requiring any person anywhere to accept any depiction he does not wish to read or see, but forbidding him to abridge the rights and freedom of those who do wish to read or see it.

In another argument against a national standard of what constitutes obscenity, the decision declares: "People in different States vary in their tastes and attitudes, and this diversity is not to be strangled by the absolutism of imposed uniformity." What about the absolutism of imposed uniformity within a state? What about the non-conformists in that state? What about communication between citizens of different states? What about the freedom of a national marketplace of ideas? No answers are given.

The following argument, offered in a footnote, is unworthy of a serious tribunal: "The mere fact juries may reach different conclusions as to the same material does not mean that constitutional rights are abridged. As this Court observed in *Roth v. United States*... 'It is common experience that different juries may reach different results under any criminal statute. That is one of the consequences we accept under our jury system....'" In a criminal case, the jury's duty is only to determine whether a particular defendant committed the crime which is clearly and specifically defined by the statute. Under the new "obscenity" ruling, a jury is expected to determine whether the defendant committed an undefined crime and, simultaneously, to determine what that crime is.

Thus the Nixon Court's notion of censorship-sharing by diffusing it at random over the entire country, is as illusory as Nixon's notion of returning power to the states by means of revenue-sharing. While the public rides on the creaking train of local censorship, with delays, derailments and chaos at every whistle stop - the express of statism is flying full speed on an unobstructed track.

Four of the Justices who handed down the Miller decision, are regarded as conservatives; the fifth, Justice White, is regarded as middle-of-the-road. On the other hand, Justice Douglas is the most liberal or the most leftward-leaning member of the Court. Yet his dissent in the Miller case is an impassioned cry of protest and indignation. He rejects the notion that the First Amendment allows an implied exception in the case of obscenity. "I do not think it does and my views on the issue have been stated over and again." He declares: "Obscenity - which even we cannot define with precision - is a hodge-podge. To send men to jail for violating standards they cannot understand, construe, and apply is a monstrous thing to do in a Nation dedicated to fair trials and due process."

What about the antitrust laws, which are responsible for precisely this kind of monstrous thing? Justice Douglas does not mention them - but antitrust, as we shall see later, is a chicken that comes home to roost on both sides of this issue.

On the subject of censorship, however, Justice Douglas is eloquently consistent: "The idea that the First Amendment permits punishment for ideas that are 'offensive' to the particular judge or jury sitting in judgment is astounding. No greater leveler of speech or literature has ever been designed. To give the power

to the censor, as we do today, is to make a sharp and radical break with the traditions of a free society. The First Amendment was not fashioned as a vehicle for dispensing tranquilizers to the people. Its prime function was to keep debate open to 'offensive' as well as to 'staid' people. The tendency throughout history has been to subdue the individual and to exalt the power of government. The use of the standard 'offensive' gives authority to government that cuts the very vitals out of the First Amendment. As is intimated by the Court's opinion, the materials before us may be garbage. But so is much of what is said in political campaigns, in the daily press, on TV or over the radio. By reason of the First Amendment - and solely because of it - speakers and publishers have not been threatened or subdued because their thoughts and ideas may be 'offensive' to some."

I can only say "Amen" to this statement.

Observe that such issues as the individual against the State are never mentioned in the Supreme Court's majority decision. It is Justice Douglas, the arch-liberal, who defends individual rights. It is the conservatives who speak as if the individual did not exist, as if the unit of social concern were the collective - the "community."

(To be continued.)

Ayn Rand

#### OBJECTIVIST CALENDAR

Ayn Rand's lecture on "Censorship: Local and Express" (to be given at The Ford Hall Forum in Boston on October 21), will be broadcast in New York City over radio station WNYC-AM (830 on the dial), on Friday, October 26, at 8:30 P.M. The lecture may also be broadcast in other cities; for further information, ask your local radio stations whether NPR (National Public Radio) has made the lecture available for broadcasting in your area.

Starting on November 3, the tape lectures of Leonard Peikoff's course, Modern Philosophy: Kant to the Present, will be given in West Lafayette, Ind. For further information, contact Dr. Richard Matula at (317) 463-3646 (eves.).

B.W.