

THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

WHAT'S NEWS?

Some years ago, in October 1991, we published C. John Sommerville's "How the News Makes Us Dumb," and I still think it one of the most winsomely wise pieces we have run. Sommerville, professor of history at the University of Florida, has now expanded that essay into a book by the same title, with the subtitle *The Death of Wisdom in an Information Society* (InterVarsity, 168 pp., \$10.99).

A problem with newspapers and the TV news, says Sommerville, is "periodicity," the need to package the "news product" in order to fit the schedule of a news industry whose purpose is to attract a crowd for its advertisers. Another problem is our laziness. "We take in only what we can get in periodical form—in small, predigested, daily bites. There are plenty of books out there that would enlighten us, but we are satisfied to read only the reviews by journalists who may be more interested in seeing the ideas dismissed. Can you imagine what a review of this book would look like?"

This is not so much a review of *How the News Makes Us Dumb* as a few representative pickings, offered in the hope of whetting your appetite for a little book much worth reading. Sommerville allows that there are from time to time really big developments—Watergate, for example—that we probably should know about. "But all that this proves is that we might want to buy a newspaper when there is an important story—every twenty years or so." He cites novelist George Eliot, who was

already in the nineteenth century skeptical about the claim that labor-saving devices create more leisure. Eliot didn't care much for this new leisure that "only creates a vacuum for eager thought to rush in." "Even idleness is eager now," she wrote, "eager for amusement; prone to excursion-trains, art museums, periodical literature, and exciting novels; prone even to scientific theorizing and cursory peeps through microscopes. Old Leisure was quite a different personage. He only read one newspaper, innocent of leaders [editorials], and was free from that periodicity of sensations which we call post-time [when the papers arrived]. He was a contemplative, rather stout gentleman, of excellent digestion; of quiet perceptions, undiseased by hypothesis; happy in his inability to know the causes of things, preferring the things themselves." The periodicity of sensations—an excellent phrase denoting that to which news junkies are addicted.

Real power, says Sommerville, shuns publicity. "If you only know what is in the newspapers, you are an outsider." People who make a point of keeping up with the news think they are in the know. "Actually it means just the opposite. People who are in the know watch news reports only to see what sense the reporters are making of things and what the 'peasants' will soon be thinking." The news is full of polling data, about which it is said that there is a margin of error of a few percentage points. "The real margin of error in most polls," Sommerville contends, "is about 100 percent. The error is to think that we have any *thoughts* on most subjects. Of course we will have a *response*. For we just know that this kind pollster, looking modestly down at her clipboard, is really testing us. She secretly knows the right answer to the question and is only pretending to be indifferent to our answer. Naturally those who read the most news are those who will be the least likely to have views of their own. They will try the hardest to recall the attitudes they think informed people will have."

The book concludes with a lovely vignette. Sommerville arrives at the university one morning and finds a colleague at the *New York Times* vending

machine who looks very unhappy. "He had put in his money and pulled out . . . yesterday's edition! Today's hadn't yet arrived. He expected sympathy. But I wondered what the matter was. Yesterday that edition would have been just fine—probably a high point in his routine day. Surely, I reasoned, if it was a good issue it would bear reading and savoring again. He told me that I reminded him of a rabbi he knew who used to say things like that."

How the News Makes Us Dumb is not averse to hyperbole, and the reader need not be terribly smart to catch the author in the occasional contradiction. (And where does he get all those examples of the fatuities of "the news product" if he is not spending a good deal of time with the news? I suppose he might answer that he, like the physician, attends to what he diagnoses, which does not mean he likes it.) But Sommerville says the real test of the value of his book is whether its reader can ever again view the newspaper or evening news in the same way. By that measure, this little book is a smashing success. (By the way, and in the event you were wondering, he thinks the reading of a serious monthly such as the one you have in hand is a very good thing, maybe even a way toward something like wisdom.)

 FT

AS THE LUTHERANS TURN

In the nineteenth century, Samuel Schmucker tried to get American Lutheranism to drop its doctrinal and sacramental "vestiges of Catholicism" and join up with the Anglo-Protestant mainline. That effort was turned back in what, up until about twenty-five years ago, historians of American religion called "the triumph of conservative Lutheranism." Now, according to Pastor Leonard Klein, a prominent Lutheran commentator, Schmucker's time has come around at last.

Reporting on the recent Denver convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA—by far the largest of the three Lutheran groups in the U.S.), he notes that full communion with the Episcopalians means that ELCA clergy will eventually be included in the Anglican line of apostolic succession, which, although not recognized by Rome, is a step in a "catholic" direction. At the same time, however, the ELCA has established full communion with Protestant

mainline groups, implicitly abandoning the Lutheran insistence on such fundamentals as baptismal regeneration and the Real Presence in the Eucharist. Klein notes that some claim this makes the ELCA a "bridge church," but he observes that the bridge does not extend to either of the two major sectors of Christianity—Roman Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism.

The ELCA, he says, is now firmly entrenched in a loose coalition of liberal Protestantism based upon doctrinal indifferentism. "Orthodoxy (of a couple different kinds) has its place too," he writes, "but in the mainline we have long seen Neuhaus' Law in operation—'where orthodoxy is optional, orthodoxy will sooner or later be proscribed.'" He concludes that the ELCA is now "further from reconciliation with Rome than ever, at least so far as human beings can see." The ELCA is not "a liturgically, doctrinally, morally sound Church of the Augsburg Confession, oriented by that very confession not to Protestantism but to the Catholic Church of the West." It may still be "the best mainline Protestant church to be in [but] for those like me who never imagined being in any such place, the 1999 journey in Denver is a wrenching disappointment."

Some of us who, as Lutherans, labored for years to heal the breach of the sixteenth century between Rome and the Reformation know well that wrenching disappointment. It is not simply that such reconciliation is not on the horizon "so far as we can see." Rather, such reconciliation may be impossible in principle; and that because Rome of the sixteenth century (and of the centuries before and after) is present and ready, while the Lutheran Reformation has gone AWOL. At least it is neither present nor ready in the ELCA, which has retreated—along with mainline Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, et al.—into a liberal enclave secured against the challenge of both Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism. The wrenching disappointment is joined to the wrenching irony that this separatism has been effected in the name of ecumenism.

Authentic ecumenism—as distinct from indifferentism to theological and moral truth—remains an urgent task. Achievements such as the Joint Declaration on justification by Catholics and Lutherans should not be minimized; and there can be no doubt that the Catholic commitment to Christian unity is relentless, irreversible, and open-ended. (Open-ended means that the unity that is sought will transcend all the present ecclesial configurations of our divided existence, including, as John Paul II anticipates in *Ut Unum Sint*, the

The Idea of Moral Progress

Richard John Neuhaus

Almost everybody agrees that progress is a good thing. But most self-evidently good things, when examined more closely, have a way of generating disagreements. And so it is with the idea of progress, of which the idea of moral progress is part.

Thinkers arguing from the most diverse perspectives have agreed that no one thing is so characteristic, indeed constitutive, of modernity as the idea of progress. To be modern is to believe that history is "getting somewhere" in overcoming the problems and limitations of the human condition. Although muted among the secular-minded, there is also the implicit belief that getting somewhere means that history is going somewhere. Progress is more than change; it is change with a purpose. Change is the undeniable experience; the idea of progress is a way of explaining that experience. Change, it is observed, is the only thing that doesn't change. It might almost be said that change is the component of continuity that makes it possible to speak of "history" at all, and to speak of it as one thing. Without this happening and then that happening and then the other thing happening—in other words, without change—there would be no history. At the same time, it is said that history is necessarily contingent, which means that what happens does not happen necessarily. Such are among the conceptual oddities caught up in the idea of progress.

We are routinely told that ours is an age of unprecedented rapidity of change. In ethics and almost every other field, it is said that new questions require new answers. The same was likely said at the time about every age. One imagines Adam remarking to Eve as they are leaving the garden, "My dear, we are living in an age of transition." The modern assump-

tion is that the transition is to something better. The modern sensibility unbounded is that of the neophilic, the lover of the new. I noticed on a New York City bus an advertisement for a telecommunications company that bluntly proclaims the neophilic creed: "Change is Good!" The unarticulated, and perhaps unconscious, assumption is that change is going somewhere; it has an end or what the Greeks called a *telos*. In the language of philosophers, change is teleological. Change is good because it is a move to the better on the way of history toward some unspecified, and perhaps unspecifiable, good. Such is the faith of modernity.

While sensible people have problems with the simplistic proposition that change is good, they have equal difficulty with the counter-proposition that change is bad. Leaning toward one proposition or the other marks the difference between dispositions usually called conservative and liberal—or, as some prefer, progressive. Even the most progressive, however, allow that there are setbacks in history, that time is not the vehicle of smoothly incremental progress. And the most determined conservative, while suspicious of change, will nonetheless allow that there are instances of undoubted progress. To the question of whether there is progress in history, a conservative friend, a distinguished social scientist, responds with what he thinks is a decisive answer: Up until about a hundred years ago, most people went through at least half of their lives with a toothache. In our society today, few people born after 1960 know what a toothache is.

Progress in medical care, while often exaggerated, is frequently cited as the most irrefutable evidence for faith in progress itself. Also cited, with considerable justice, is economic improvement. It is no little thing that the thirty million Americans who are today officially counted as living in "poverty" have, with relatively few exceptions, a standard of living

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that was considered "average" only twenty-five years ago. Moreover, there is hardly a product that we buy—from cars to razor blades to a bed mattress—that, controlling for inflation, is not cheaper and better today than twenty-five years ago. And that is not to mention the many products that were not available then. I was in Cuba a while back, and walking down one of the decaying streets of Havana I tried to place this puzzling sound—a persistent clacking noise coming from a government office. It was the sound of someone using a manual typewriter, an apt symbol of what progress has left behind.

Nor need we content ourselves with medical, economic, and technological evidence of historical advance. Is there not also a phenomenon that is rightly called moral progress? In the history of our own country, we have put slavery and legally imposed racial segregation behind us, and almost nobody doubts that this counts as moral progress. More ambiguously, there are the recent decades of changing sex roles and redefinitions of the family. The proponents of such changes express confidence that their recognition as progress is only a matter of time. Also in the realm of what we might call political morality, it would seem that we have learned from the catastrophes of the past. Outside the weekend militias, very few people today advocate a regime based upon the superiority of Aryan blood; and outside our universities, very few propose the state collectivization of private property. Moreover, it is surely great progress that, at least in the West, we do not kill one another in wars of religion. Whether this is because of a decline in religious commitment or because we have come to recognize that it is the will of God that we not kill one another over our disagreements about the will of God, it is undoubtedly a very good thing. I will be returning to the claim that all such instances of moral progress are a development or unfolding of received moral wisdom—wisdom that counts as knowledge.

But the immediate point is that those who adhere to the gospel of progress are not without considerable evidence to support their faith. Yet there is no denying that faith in progress is not so robust as it once was. Apart from corporate advertisers declaring that they are in various ways "making things better," full-throated boosterism of the gospel of progress is rare today. Perhaps the most quoted poem of our time is W. B. Yeats' 1921 reflection on "The Second Coming," in which he observes that "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold." The real or imagined prospect of impending ecological collapse and the all too real proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weaponry, among other things, cast a pall over the future, suggesting that, to paraphrase Eliot, the world may end with both a bang *and* a whimper.

The casting of the pall, in one telling of the story, goes back to the guns of August 1914, when it was said

that the lights were going out all over the world. As a college student reading the memoirs of British philosopher Bertrand Russell, I recall being deeply impressed by his assertion that nobody who was not a child before 1914 could know what real happiness is. In his privileged and enlightened world, all good things then seemed possible, indeed inevitable. It was only a matter of time. Of the French Revolution, more than a century earlier, Wordsworth could exclaim, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!" Humankind seems much older now.

To be sure, in recent decades we witnessed a counterculture that, in a spasm of historical amnesia, had flower children announcing the Age of Aquarius to the tune of "the times they are a-changing." Grownups knew better, even if many felt obliged to indulge the youthful trashing of the world that they had made and that their children held in contempt. Yet those same children, now the middle-aged establishment in charge of almost everything, seem not to believe that the doctrine of historical progress has been vindicated. The Woodstock Nation was a youthful high, but it is now nostalgically remembered as a "time out" from the real world.

How can one seriously believe in progress at the end of what is undeniably the bloodiest century in history—the century of the Battle of the Somme, of Auschwitz, of the Gulag Archipelago, of Maoism, of obliteration bombing, and of mass starvation as government policy? In this century, so many people have been deliberately killed by other people that the estimates of historians vary by the tens of millions, and they end up by agreeing to split the difference or to round off the victim count at the nearest ten million. One might conclude that it has not been a good century for the idea of progress in general, and of moral progress in particular.

Shortly after World War I turned out the lights all over the world, Oswald Spengler published his two-volume *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, known in English as *The Decline of the West*. Professional historians pilloried his scholarship, but many of the brightest and best of a generation suspected he was telling the truth, as they also succumbed to the mood of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, published in the same year as Spengler's second volume. A great depression and another world war later, after Henry Luce's "American Century" had been proclaimed and then debunked by Vietnam and all that, Robert Nisbet published, in 1980, his *History of the Idea of Progress*. Nisbet believed that, despite spasmodic eruptions of an ever more desperate optimism, the idea of progress was moribund or dead.

The idea of progress, Nisbet wrote, began with classical Greece and its fascination with knowledge, a fascination that was appropriated and put to intellectual and practical use by Christianity. From the

Empire of the Air
Tom Lewis

Marconi spark gap system ~ 1894

patents 1896

Marconi Wireless Telegraphy Company pp 36+

Marhater

Jan 1898 wireless link from Bournemouth to Isle of Wight
Luhig 2 hotels p 37

tuner invented by Oliver Lodge, taken up by Marconi p 37

de Forest invented device for hearing code rather than tuning it
35 wgs vs 12 wgs pp 39-40

1st simultaneous trial of de Forest & Marconi at same
site produced interference as neither would work 1901 p 40

Marconi & de F both sought fame p 40

de F wireless result of partnership w/ Shute White

1902 liquidated 1906 pp 41-44

1st transatlantic msg via Marconi "S" 1906 p 44

Flaming "oscillating valve" developed by John Flaming at ~~the~~ ^{Marconi}
Co in 1905 based on earlier work of Edison p 53 patent owned
by Marconi

de F got similar patent in 05

* de F patent for 3-element tube 1906 = "audion" a triode p 53
much more sensitive detector, used in telephone
left old co in Dec 06 p 54

physical mechanism of all of above poorly understood by all
< did de F call 2 element tube "audion" ? >

Howard Armstrong fascinated w/ "inventing" p 56

radio amateur p 61

Columbia Sch of Eng p 64

Early recognition of capability of transmitting sound pp 71+

Armstrong devel of audion to greatly improve reception sensitivity
1912 p 70

1st send broadcast (Alexander) p 73

Armstrong use of audion to generate CW signal p 74-77
patents pp 74-75

de F conceives & builds & operates 1st audio Xtra Feb 07 p 79.
very poor quality; few had eq'ing to hear
sold Xtra / new sets for 2-way comm w/ US Navy p 80
didn't work well & invent elsewhere

1912 de F sold audion ato to AT&T (though AT&T cutout) \$50k p 84

Fennenden sue de F over "spade detector" p 49

de F & Armstrong life - long rivals in tests & patents p 87
de F soft pane, Armstrong quat & methodical

Marcconi U.S. Patent Tel Co dominant player 1899 p 108

Navy directed by Congress to develop ~~new~~ wireless 1912? p 108

AT&T interest in wireless

Navy & AT&T collaborate

Smuff meets Armstrong 1913 p 112

pushes new "test", Marcconi declines p 113

Smuff pursues radio ~~business~~ ^{unity} business - "Radio Music Box" 1916 p 115

↳ word not yet in use p 117

de F begins unity ~~work~~ w/ audion death 1916 Brook 117

First time Xmas arrived at quidearline rather than parties never
until results of presidential election Nov 7, 1916.

declared Hughes winner & over Wilson before Calif returns winner p 118

* Pressure for govt to take over radio comm.

de F testifies before Cong for need for unification; govt competition
or competition w/ self ~~comp~~ ^{innovative}

Smuff becomes #2 at Marcconi 1917 - biggest & best wireless tel
co in US p 118

* UK cut German transatlantic cable at start of WWI 1914
forcing Germans to use wireless ~~p 120~~ p 120

1917 ~~US Navy~~ US Navy takes over all comm & amateur
wireless stations in US when US declares war on Germany p 121

US Navy main str for most US war comm to & from Eur
est 20K words/day p 122

Standardization & more push of ~~radio~~ ^{radio} tubes during WWI p 124

Study 1913 & more in WWI, US Navy used funding power
to standardize radio eq'ing, continental w/ amult case p 124

WWI week radio or industry

p 125

deF sells into the AT&T, finally becomes wealthy p 126

Painting volunteer for US Army → Paris 1917 p 127
" invents superhet rev. p 133-34

Founder had discovered best freq phenom p 132

Wilson speech re radio 9/6/19 Das Moires p 139

foreign control of Marconi an issue 1919 p 141-

Wilson wanted to break UK control of submarine & wireless
(Marconi US owned by the British Marconi) p 141-

USG (Wilson, Roosevelt, ...) persuade GE, mgr of best
circuit design not to sell to Marconi 1919 p 142

GE & Marconi ~~found~~ form RCA 10/17/19 p 146
Marconi US submarine; foreign ownership 40% to 20%
all GE & Marconi patents transferred.

Sarnoff 280 memo to Owen Young, chm RCA, 1/31/20
outlining features of wireless incl Radio Music Box idea

Under Navy pressure to consolidate patents & avoid sale to
foreign interests, RCA gives AT&T 10% of RCA in
return for X-ray patents & audio patent rights. RCA gets oral
right for ~~one-way~~ one-way ~~at~~ long 1920 p 150-151

Westinghouse bought patent right for Essenzen's invention +
Dunstony's regen & superhet test. RCA had int'l business
locked, but West set out to devel long p 151-152

Frank Conrad amateur long in Pittsburgh 1916
Joseph Home dept store of sold record for \$10.00 p 152

West begins KDKA, broadcast results of pres election 11/14/16.
" idea to provide & promote broadcasts to promote sale of sets
Began X-ray from stations on West plant roofs in ~~met~~ ~~city~~
= Sarnoff's idea p 153-155

West & RCA had reinforcing & complementary patent rights; West not
in position to devel business; gave RCA all patent rights in 1921 in
exchange for 20% of RCA & right to use 40% of RCA equip p 154

RCA buys United Fruit's patent on loop antennas = 4.1% of RCA p 155

Sarnoff made GM of RCA 1921 p 157

" big promotion of Dempsey fight got wide atten p 158

right to pur- intellectual-prop- applauded its legal victo- include last year's 9-0 ruling Grokster and the 2001 court-ordered down of Napster. But a business model based on suing your customers is probably not a viable long-term strategy, and the continued popularity of these so-called peer-to-peer networks is evidence that the litigation isn't having the intended effect. Hence, WB's decision to join with BitTorrent and embrace

something. In the early courts to ban Sony B racy. But the Supreme Court instead that they could be sold claims at the time that the ruling death of the movie industry, the studios adapted. They came to see the VCR not competing technology but as a complementary one. And soon the sales of video cassettes were outpacing box office returns.

Kevin Tsujihara, president of WB's home entertainment division, told reporters, "We've always known that peer-to-peer technology represents a huge opportunity for us." Kudos to Warner Brothers for seizing the opportunity.

More Spectrum, Please

Pols and regulators complain that broadband deployment in the U.S. lags other developed nations. At the same time, they conspire to devise policies that hamstring the domestic broadband marketplace. A good example is Washington's approach to allocating wireless electromagnetic spectrum.

This past week the Federal Communications Commission finally got around to an auction of spectrum licenses for in-flight Internet service, which is already offered by foreign carriers like Lufthansa and Japan Airlines. Later this summer, the FCC will accept bids for so-called third-generation, or 3G, spectrum that can be used for high-speed Web access and video. Europe auctioned off 3G licenses more than five years ago.

Allocating spectrum via auction is certainly the most efficient way to go, and no one is suggesting a return to lotteries and competitive hearings. Rather, the problem is the infrequency of the auctions themselves and the fact that the government is dragging its feet in getting more spectrum into private hands.

According to a recent report by the Progress & Freedom Foundation, a free-market telecom think tank, "only 7% of the most valuable spectrum—between 300 MHz and 3GHz—is currently subject to market allocation. Another 14% is slated for market allocation at some point in the future. Seventy-five percent remains under a command-and-control regime, much of it reserved for federal government use."

Policy makers reason that by pushing auctions off they can starve the sector for some period, which creates scarcity and artificially inflates the costs of the licenses. The Congress-

sional Budget Office expects the 3G spectrum auction scheduled for next month to raise about \$15 billion for the U.S. Treasury, reflecting uncertainty about future auctions.

But the government's role here shouldn't be to maximize its revenue; the main objective is efficient allocation of an important resource for economic growth. "Congress is spending too much time looking

at auction revenues and not enough time looking at the gains to the economy from having more productive use of spectrum," says Thomas Hazlett, a former FCC economist who now teaches law and economics at George Mason University.

Lack of spectrum has prevented T-Mobile from upgrading to high-speed Internet service. Nextel and Sprint opted to merge rather than continue waiting on Uncle Sam to auction off more frequencies. Ultimately, it's the U.S. consumer who loses out. The dearth of spectrum available for commercial use means less choice and price competition with respect to wireless broadband. More spectrum would mean more services and lower prices.

Regulators have tried to compensate for this stinginess by allowing some 2G license holders to offer 3G services, but this is at best a temporary fix. The better course is to stop distorting the market by pretending that spectrum is a scarce resource. Put as much spectrum as possible—as quickly as possible—on the market and remove unnecessary government controls for how it's used. Some incumbent wireless carriers will complain because they don't want any new competition. But the government has no more business protecting these incumbents than it has hoarding frequencies that the market could put to better use.

What's the frequency, Congress?

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These new guidelines, students will have a broad
range of lower-calorie, nutritious, smaller-portion
beverage choices—ranging from 100% juice, low-fat milk
and water in elementary and middle schools to diet sodas,
energy drinks and low-calorie teas in high schools.

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Causing close elections?

In his column in these pages yesterday ("Close-shave electoral cuts"), Michael Barone commented on the closeness of recent elections and wondered what may be behind it. He concluded it is a trend resulting from technology, which has made it easier to target un-

By Bruce Bartlett

decided voters and those with soft allegiance to the other side. Yet he notes close elections were the norm in the 19th century, long before computers and sophisticated polling came along.

I think a more important thing that has changed is the flow of information. In the 19th century, there were thousands and thousands of newspapers in this country and people often read several a day. Many newspapers were openly partisan and may have been formally aligned with a political party. People could easily find the facts and information that suited their philosophy.

But beginning around the turn of the century, this sort of openly-partisan journalism fell out of favor. Journalism schools were established and reporters were taught to report the facts objectively. At the same time, economics compelled a long process of consolidation in the newspaper industry to the point where just a handful of Ameri-

can cities have more than one paper today.

In this new atmosphere of professional journalism, with most reporters having college degrees in the subject, liberalism steadily became dominant. As a consequence, certain facts damaging to Democrats that once were easily available could no longer be found anywhere. Certain notions about truth and what was good and right in society that paralleled liberal political thinking became universal in every newsroom. In effect, the entire mass media became a de facto arm of the Democratic Party.

I believe this restriction of information was behind the long era of Democratic success. Republican challengers to the Democratic worldview had enormous difficulty getting their message out and obtaining the facts and information needed to mount an effective challenge.

This was especially a problem at the congressional level, where it is prohibitively costly to use advertising to break through the liberal media filter. At the presidential level, it was much easier. Newspapers had to cover what the Republican candidate said, and he could get his message out. Also, political advertising was more effective and it was easier to raise the money for it. This explains why Republicans could take the White

House from time to time, but had enormous difficulty getting control of Congress.

In the 1980s, the liberal media monopoly, which sustained the Democrats in power for 50 years, began breaking down. First, Ronald Reagan got rid of the "fairness doctrine." This rule required radio and television stations to offer equal time for contrary political viewpoints. The result was they presented no political viewpoints at all rather than waste valuable airtime providing equal time. This had no effect on liberals, who controlled the allegedly objective news departments, and mainly stifled conservatives.

Abolition of the fairness doctrine created talk radio, which quickly became dominated by conservative voices. To many conservatives, hearing someone like Rush Limbaugh for the first time was like water in the desert to a man dying of thirst. Though Mr. Limbaugh presents a lot of opinions, of course, he also presents a lot of news — something liberals have never understood about his success.

Air America, the liberal radio network, is not Mr. Limbaugh's competitor; ABC, CBS, NBC, the New York Times, The Washington Post, Time and Newsweek are. Whatever else one thinks about these institutions, they are as one in liberal political philosophy. If you see

one, you really don't need to see the others; they are all pretty much the same.

With an untapped conservative market just sitting there for the taking and the advent of cable and satellite television, Rupert Murdoch created Fox News and finally gave conservatives a news network where they weren't sneered at and denigrated, where conservative analysts and politicians shared airtime with the usual liberal talking heads, where facts and information could be found that the Dan Rathers of the major media would never allow on the air.

The last piece was the blossoming of the Internet, especially the blog phenomenon. As with talk radio, conservatives quickly dominated this new media outlet. In effect, they replaced newspapers for conservative readers. They could now find facts and views wherever they might appear, anywhere in the world, conveniently linked to by their favorite blogger.

There was finally a full blown conservative alternative to the decades-long liberal media domination. This, I believe, is behind the tightening of political races. Now both sides can get their message out with equal effectiveness, returning politics to the 19th century norm, before liberals took de facto control of all major media, creating an era of liberal political domination that was a historical aberration.

Bruce Bartlett is a nationally syndicated columnist.



What the long tail will do

Wag the dog

A new book about entertainment, technology and statistics predicts that popular culture—and the businesses associated with it—will be transformed by the internet

FOR the past two years in Silicon Valley, the centre of America's technology industry, conference-goers have entertained themselves playing a guessing game: how many times will a speaker mention the phrase "long tail"? It is usually a high number, thanks to the influence of the long-tail theory, which was first developed by Chris Anderson, the editor of *Wired* magazine, in an article in 2004. Though technologists and bloggers chuckle at how every business presentation now has to have its long-tail section, most are envious of Mr Anderson, whose brainwave quickly became the most fashionable business idea around.

Whether a blockbuster film, a bestselling novel, or a chart-topping rap song, popular culture idolises the hit. Companies devote themselves to creating them because the cost of distribution and the limits of shelf space in physical shops mean that profitability depends on a high volume of sales. But around the beginning of this century a group of internet companies realised that with endless shelves and a national or even international audience online they could offer a huge range of pro-

The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More. By Chris Anderson. Hyperion; 238 pages; \$24.95. Random House Business Books; £17.99

ducts—and make money at the same time.

The niche, the obscure and the specialist, Mr Anderson argues, will gain ground at the expense of the hit. As evidence, he points to a drop in the number of companies that traditionally calculate their revenue/sales ratio according to the 80/20 rule—where the top fifth of products contribute four-fifths of revenues. Ecast, a San Francisco digital jukebox company, found that 98% of its 10,000 albums sold at least one track every three months. Expressed in the language of statistics, the experiences of Ecast and other companies such as Amazon, an online bookseller, suggest that products down in the long tail of a statistical distribution, added together, can be highly profitable. The internet helps people find their way to relatively obscure material with recommendations and reviews by other people (and for those willing to have their artistic tastes predicted by a

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piece of software) computer programs which analyse past selections.

Long-tail enthusiasts argue that the whole of culture will benefit, not just commercial enterprises. Television, film and music are such bewitching media in their own right that many people are quite happy to watch and listen to what the mainstream provides. But if individuals have the opportunity to pick better, more ideally suited entertainment from a far wider selection, they will take it, according to the theory of the long tail. Some analysts reckon that entire populations might become happier and wiser once they have access to thousands of documentaries, independent films and sub-genres of every kind of music, instead of being subjected to what Mr Anderson calls the tyranny of lowest-common-denominator fare. That might be taking things a bit far. But the long tail is certainly one of the internet's better gifts to humanity.

Conglomerates, such as Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, on the other hand, regard the long tail as another swing at them from a dragon-like blogosphere which resents the "mainstream media" or MSM, as bloggers often call it. Lowest-common-denominator hits, after all, are an important part of their business. Like many people connected to the technology industry, Mr Anderson (formerly a journalist for *The Economist*) clearly relishes the way the internet is challenging traditional media companies. Perhaps because of this, he is a little too dismissive of hits. Some are indeed manufactured and cynical: the music ►►

▶ industry bribes radio stations to blitz people with tracks they have picked; book publishers pay retailers for the spot in the window; and Hollywood holds back films from honest reviewers lest a bad write-up spoil an opening. But most hits are popular because they are of high quality. As Mr Anderson's book acknowledges, there is an awful lot of dross in the tail. And the way in which the internet makes it easy for people to share likes and dislikes about entertainment will help hits as well as more obscure material.

Mr Anderson has backed away somewhat from his original article in *Wired* in which he suggested that the long tail would be a bigger market than the hits. His book says, more cautiously, that "all those niches can potentially add up to a market that is as big as (if not bigger than) the hits." Perhaps the true effect of unlimited digital distribution on individual media choices will be even more positive than he imagines. It may be that only the middling, manufactured sort of hit will fall by the wayside: the genuinely popular variety will remain just as powerful. Most hits start somewhere in the long tail and move up; so as content in the tail becomes easier to discover, the hits that emerge from it should also be of higher quality.

One weakness of this otherwise excellent book is that it tries to apply the theory of the long tail to fields far beyond entertainment and e-commerce. Offshoring, for instance, is the long tail of labour, says Mr Anderson, and there is also a long tail of national security, in which a "short head" of state violence has been challenged by niche producers such as gangs and terrorists. In trying to find long tails everywhere, Mr Anderson risks diluting some of his idea's meaning and novelty.

The cover of Mr Anderson's book promises to answer the question: "Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More". But his book may alarm as well as help businessmen. Karl Marx once described a communist society in which "nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes...to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner." Mr Anderson suggests that the long tail is bringing about something similar. The tools of media production—computers, desktop printers, video cameras—are now so widely and cheaply available that a generation of young people are becoming amateur journalists, commentators, film-makers and musicians in their spare time, rather as the philosopher imagined. Amateurs offering their work free of charge will contribute a significant portion of the long tail, so at the very end there will be a "non-monetary economy," says Mr Anderson. If true, that could prove to be the most fascinating long-tail effect of all. ■

The transport business

High rollers

Uncommon Carriers. By John McPhee. *Farrar, Straus & Giroux*; 256 pages; \$24

IF YOU choose lobster from a menu, then wherever you are in the world, the odds are that your dinner may have come from Arichat in Nova Scotia. The lobster, trapped off the Canadian coast, would have been driven to Louisville, Kentucky, where, cocooned in gel packs and styrofoam, it went for a wild ride on the carousels of the UPS superhub, where 17,000 high-speed conveyor belts, carrying more than 8m packages a week, whisk your living lobster to a plane and on onto tables across the globe.

John McPhee's new book is about supply lines: how a lobster shares a conveyor belt with Bentley spare parts and Jockey underwear. It is about boats, trains and trucks, but mostly it is about the people who drive, tend and love the machines. Don Ainsworth owns an 18-wheeler with "a tractor of such dark sapphire that only bright sunlight could bring forth its colour." To wash his truck Mr Ainsworth uses only water that has either been de-ionised or has undergone reverse-osmosis; anything else leaves spots. "This is as close as a man will ever know", he says, "what it feels like to be a truly gorgeous woman. People giving us looks, going thumbs up."

He carries chemicals all across North America where his enemies are 'gators, bears and four-wheelers. 'Gators are huge strips of shredded tyre littering the highways and just one of them "can rip off your fuel-crossover line". A bear is a policeman, while a four-wheeler is any vehicle that has fewer than 18 wheels. They buzz around like gnats, seemingly unaware that a real vehicle, one with 18 wheels or more, cannot stop on a dime.

Mr Ainsworth is a good man and it is plain that Mr McPhee, another good man, likes him, just as he likes the crew of the *Billy Joe Boling*, a towboat which, perversely, pushes 15 barges up the Illinois River. The barges carry 30,000 tons of pig-iron, steel coils, fertiliser and furnace coke. Lashed together with steel cables which are then tightened with cheater bars, the *Billy Joe Boling* shoves forward a metal raft that is longer than an aircraft carrier. Along the way, the captain copes with bridges, locks, currents, shoals, winter ice 18 inches thick and summer ladies flashing at him. "We brought 12,000 tons of coke up the Illinois River," the skipper tells the author, "and now we're pushing 14,000 tons of coke down the Illinois River. One day they'll figure it out and put us out of a job."



Darkly, deeply, beautifully blue

The bosses also want to put the drivers of the coal trains out of a job. They dream of automated trains running endlessly along the 1,800 miles (2,880km) between the strip-mines of the Powder River Basin and Georgia's Plant Scherer, the world's largest coal-fired power station. The train that Mr McPhee rides is a mile and a half long, and has 133 gondolas, each of which carries 115 tons of coal, and all of it, the whole trainload, will keep Plant Scherer burning for just eight hours. This book will keep you going much longer. It is Mr McPhee at his wise, wry best, writing in top gear which, as Mr Ainsworth will tell you, is the 18th: "the going home gear, the smoke hole". ■

Maritime history

The sailor's friend

The Plimsoll Sensation: The Great Campaign to Save Lives at Sea. By Nicolette Jones. *Little, Brown*; 416 pages; £20

PLIMSOLLS, the rubber-soled, canvas shoes worn by schoolchildren and celebrities alike are a familiar piece of footwear. But how many people know that they are named after Samuel Plimsoll, an Englishman whose tireless campaigning ended Victorian shipping malpractices and saved thousands of sailors' lives?

In her scholarly biography, Nicolette Jones lifts the lid on the life of an extraordinary man from an ordinary background. Plimsoll was born in 1824, the son of an excise man. After working for a decade as a brewery clerk, he made a disastrous foray into the coal trade that bankrupted him, ▶▶



K2TQN

OLD RADIO

Auction-Deeley: Disposing of your Radios

Every so often the subject of disposing a Silent Key's radios comes up on discussion groups. Frequently it starts with someone telling of a surviving spouse who was taken to the cleaners by some unscrupulous person. Good portions of the replies say they feel that a spouse should get "what it's worth." And I think we all would like that to happen. But doing this is not easy, and many times not possible.

Some clubs offer a disposition service. Sometimes a friend of the SK will do this. There are the "dealer" types who buy estates. And sometimes collectors will buy the entire estate. We've all heard the good and bad stories. One thing that is not always con-

sidered is people who resell want to make a profit and cannot offer exactly what it's worth. In their case it's "what it's worth to them." Removing an entire estate requires a lot of labor and (usually) a large truck and a storage location. All of this costs money.

Selling the estate through eBay seems to be the way many think will generate the most money for the widow. But most people find that selling a lot of items on eBay is a daunting task. Typically non-hams (the family) have little idea what most of the ham station accessories are, how they work, or whether they work or not. And if the family or spouse is unable to lift heavy items, then pack them for shipment and then transport

them to a shipper, they are in trouble.

One way of selling estates that is becoming popular is the auction — no, not your local auction house where almost nobody is interested in old radios (low prices), but an auction house that specializes in radios and radio-related items. In the last couple of years several radio auction houses have advertised their presence.

Estes Auctions in Ohio

A good example is Estes Auctions of Medina, Ohio. Starting in 1990, Estes was one of the earliest companies to specialize in radio auctions. The owner, Richard Estes, K8LRY, felt there was a need for a good auction to sell radios.

Richard had been involved with radios for over 50 years. His father ran a radio repair shop in the late 1940s. Richard spent all his spare time at the shop. His father was also an Amateur Radio operator. Fascinated by anything pertaining to radio, Richard received his ham radio license in 1958 and



Rows of collector radios offered.



Early previewer checks the ham radio offered.



This mint condition National HRO-500 with box sold for \$3000.



Auction crowd ready for the bidding to begin.



Early Grebe radios, top of the line sets from the early 1920s.



Well-known AWA members Lauren Peckham (left) and Bruce Rolosen, W2BDR, check out a receiver.

has been an active ham ever since.

Since starting his business he has conducted auctions for many collector estates, radio and TV shops as well as consignment auctions. His largest sale was for the Henry Ford Museum in October of 1995.

Watching his advertisements and reading auction reports in collector magazines for the last 10 years, I have seen him go from a couple auctions a year to almost one a month this past year. For more information, see the Estes Web page at www.estesauctions.com.

Dexter Deeley's Collection

Unable to resist going to Estes Auction any longer, on April 21 I drove to Ohio to attend the Dexter Deeley Collection auction. The reason? The Estes Web page showed photos of almost 200 radios that would be auctioned, any one of which I would be happy to bring home. And there was one radio in the auction that I really wanted.

A collector since he was a teenager, why was Dexter selling his collection now? He told me, "I decided to sell my collection [now], as no one in my family wants the collection or wants the trouble of selling it when I am gone."

Auction Report

Arriving at 3 PM, I entered the building to preview all the items offered. I found

Portrait of a Collector Extraordinaire

Dexter Deeley, N2XYS, was introduced to ham radio by Charles "Les" Raut, K2CYL, at the age of 15. As soon as Dexter learned how to repair old radios, he began collecting. After graduating college in 1963, he enlisted in the Air Force. He had a tour of duty in Thule, Greenland and worked for the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service as a disc jockey at one of their 1000 W AM radio stations.

In 1967 he joined Kodak in Rochester, New York, and met Antique Wireless Association founder Bruce Kelley, W2ICE (SK). Bruce helped him get his first license in 1969, WN2KQI. The AWA was looking for volunteers, so Dexter joined and was very active for 30 years. During this time he went to hamfests and radio meets all over the country and in the process built up a sizeable radio collection. After retiring from Kodak, Dexter relocated to North Carolina.

For a more detailed biography of Dexter, please visit my Web page, www.k2tqn.com.



Dexter Deeley, N2XYS

a museum of radios displayed on several rows of tables. There were early historic radios, a wide assortment of ham radios and other interesting items including tubes. Dexter took very good care of his collection and it showed. During the next four hours other buyers arrived and joined the preview. Everyone had a chance to touch and closely inspect the radios.

The next morning with about 100 buyers on hand the auction started exactly at 10 AM. After a short introduction and explaining the auction rules, the bidding began. Estes speaks clearly and is easy to understand. He has a large crew to keep the auction moving along at a fast pace, and once in a while two and three items per minute were auctioned. Most, however, took a little longer as some prices rose to very high amounts; a couple were breathtakingly high. One very rare radio went for \$25,000 and another went for \$10,000. Loud applause broke out after those sales. Most radios, however, went for expected amounts consistent with their values.

Upcoming auction items are picked at

random from all the tables, so you never knew what was coming next. You had to be alert and stay right there. There was no time to socialize during the sale. The auction ended at 6 PM. It was a fun day for everybody there. I only bought two items; one was a very early antenna switch and the other was the radio I had hoped to get. I'll tell you all about it in a future column.

Back to Selling your Estate

Having an auction house like Estes sell your estate could be a good way to go. Once your collection and related materials are at the auction house, you are done. All you have to do is wait for the check. Some auctions will pick up your items for you. Some, you must transport. There are several auction houses that sell radios around the country. Always check with the auctioneer for details before committing.

Check my Web page, www.k2tqn.com, to see a photo slide show of the auction and a list of selling prices for the ham radios. I'm going back again to buy; maybe I'll see you there. — K2TQN

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Mr. Kotkin, Irvine Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation, is the author of "The City: A Global History" (Modern Library, 2005).

Stop IP Theft

By Bob Wright

To most people, piracy invokes the music recording industry, which has been decimated by illegal peer-to-peer file sharing. And counterfeiting conjures up images of the street vendor with impossibly cheap Rolexes or hit movies on DVD. But in our digital age, anyone who has a new invention, a creative idea or a technological breakthrough is at risk of a rip-off, whether it be in the automotive, entertainment, pharmaceutical, software or any other intellectual-property-dependent business sector.

This is the dark side of our Internet age. Digital technology, which can be such a boon to consumers and businesses, makes all data and information easily replicable and able to be transmitted at the speed of light around the world. With theft rendered effortless, it is becoming more pervasive. Indeed, the weight of piracy and counterfeiting could be taking the global economy toward a tipping point.

The statistics are startling. The Business Software Alliance estimates that 35% of software deployed world-wide last year was pirated. In some countries, the figure exceeds 90%. Pharmaceuticals are harder to duplicate than computer files, but, even here, industry losses are in the billions, while individuals who unwittingly ingest counterfeit drugs do so at great risk. GM claims to have lost millions of dollars when designs and technology for two new cars were stolen by a foreign manufacturer. The overall cost? Piracy and counterfeiting is estimated to cost companies around the world more than \$600 billion a year, about equal to the GDP of Australia.

It's a global issue—but with a disproportionate effect on the U.S. Our economy is increasingly driven by high-value, innovative, technologically advanced businesses, with IP becoming an ever-larger part of the total. My colleagues and I at NBC Universal were interested in quantifying this, so we asked a leading economic-research firm to analyze the data. The findings indicate that IP-based industries account for nearly 20% of the total private-industry contribution to GDP. In addition, because these industries are growing faster than the overall economy, they account for 40% of our real economic growth; and because they depend on highly skilled workers, they pay, on average, 40% more than the average compensation paid to U.S. workers.

More to the point, when we measure the con-

tribution of the IP industries as a percentage of U.S. industries that produce exportable goods and services (excluding local service-based sectors and pure commodity producers, which don't have a role in driving U.S. productivity and export growth), the numbers are even more striking. By this measure, IP industries account for 40% of the total and nearly 60% of real growth. In other words, more than half of our growth derives from industries that are wholly or significantly dependent upon adequate protection of IP from theft.

The solutions to digital piracy are not easy, but there are glimmers of hope. President Bush recently created a new Office of International Intellectual Property Enforcement under Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, who has himself been outspoken on this issue. The Justice Department, with its Intellectual Property Task Force, has increased its focus on IP crime. The global business community is starting to act as well. A Coalition Against Counterfeiting and Piracy has formed in the U.S. And a new initiative of the International Chamber of Commerce called Bascap—the Business Action to Stop Counterfeiting and Piracy—has signed on more than 100 businesses from around the world.

Our Founding Fathers recognized the connection between IP rights and economic growth. This is why they authorized Congress to grant to "authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries." Congress has consistently enforced this for more than 200 years. But the threats to IP today are unprecedented. Congress and other legislative bodies around the world need to act quickly to strengthen criminal enforcement, and need to focus not just on the movement of physical goods across our borders but on digital information traversing cyberspace. At the same time, we urgently need the hi-tech sectors—Internet service providers, consumer electronics manufacturers, and tech companies—to push the technological solutions that will support the wide dissemination of digital technologies and at the same time erect barriers to theft.

As important as intellectual property is to the economy today, it will become even more crucial in the future. Business leaders around the world and their respective governments have no choice but to mobilize the resources necessary to protect our most precious economic goods.

Mr. Wright, vice chairman of GE and chairman and CEO of NBC Universal, is a founding member of Bascap's Global Leadership Group.



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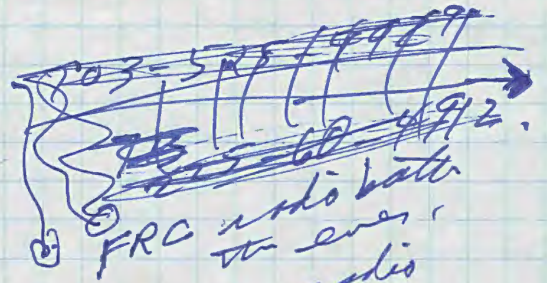
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