

The Vision of the Anointed (1995)

by Thomas Sowell

Chapter 1: FLATTERING UNCTION:

“The great catastrophes of history have usually involved much more than [mistakes]. Typically, there has been an additional and crucial ingredient—some method by which feedback from reality has been prevented, so that a dangerous course of action could be blindly continued to a fatal conclusion.” (p.1)

“What all the [ideological crusades of the twentieth-century] have in common is their moral exaltation of the anointed above others, who are to have their very different views nullified and superseded by the views of the anointed, imposed via the power of government....[S]everal key elements have been common to most of them:

1. Assertions of a great danger to the whole of society, a danger to which the masses of people are oblivious.
2. An urgent need for action to avert impending catastrophe.
3. A need for government to drastically curtail the dangerous behavior of the many, in response to the prescient conclusions of the few.
4. A disdainful dismissal of arguments to the contrary as either uninformed, irresponsible, or motivated by unworthy purposes....

What is remarkable is how few arguments are really engaged in, and how many *substitutes* for arguments there are.” (p.5)

“Many of these ‘thinking people’ could more accurately be characterized as *articulate* people, as people whose verbal nimbleness can elude both evidence and logic. This can be a fatal talent, when it supplies the crucial insulation from reality behind many historic catastrophes.”(p.6)

Chapter 2: THE PATTERN

“Characteristic patterns have developed among the anointed for dealing with the repeated failures of policies based on their vision....This pattern typically has four stages:

Stage 1. The ‘Crisis’: Some situation exists, whose negative aspects the anointed propose to eliminate. Such a situation is routinely characterized as a ‘crisis’....Sometimes the situation...has in fact already been getting better for years.

Stage 2. The ‘Solution’: Policies to end the ‘crisis’ are advocated by the anointed, who say that these policies will lead to beneficial result *A*. Critics say that these policies will lead to detrimental result *Z*. The anointed dismiss these latter claims as absurd and ‘simplistic,’ if not dishonest.

Stage 3. The Results: The policies are instituted and lead to detrimental result Z.

Stage 4. The Response:

Those who attribute detrimental result Z to the policies instituted are dismissed as ‘simplistic’ for ignoring the ‘complexities’ involved, as ‘many factors’ went into determining the outcome. The burden of proof is put on the critics to demonstrate to a certainty that these policies alone were the only possible cause of the worsening that occurred. No burden of proof whatever is put on those who had so confidently[, but wrongly,] predicted improvement. Indeed, it is often asserted that things would have been even worse, were it not for the wonderful programs that mitigated the inevitable damage from other factors.”(pp.7-8)

[Later in the readings he adds other potential responses:

Goals are redefined after the fact to give the public the illusion of success regarding the policies put in place.

Bad motives are ascribed to the opposition or to society in general.

The good intentions of the anointed are highlighted.

They attack the accuracy of the data showing failure.]

“The ‘War on Poverty’

“...the stated purpose was a reduction of *dependency*....John F. Kennedy stated the purpose of the ‘war on poverty’ to be ‘to help our less fortunate citizens to help themselves.’ They said: ‘We must find ways of returning far more of our dependent people to independence’....long-run savings in government spending were expected from a subsequent decline in dependency. As President Kennedy put it: ‘Public welfare[‘s]....emphasis must be directed increasingly toward prevention and rehabilitation—on reducing not only the long-range cost in budgetary terms but the long-range cost in human terms as well.’”(pp.9-10)

“*New York Times* editorial:

‘President Kennedy’s welfare message to Congress yesterday stems from a recognition that no lasting solution to the problem can be bought with a relief check. Financial help to the needy must be supplemented by a vastly expanded range of professional and community services. Their aim: to keep men, women and children from having to rely on public assistance by making them useful, creative citizens. The President does not pretend it will be cheap to provide the needed build-up in staff, facilities and rehabilitation allowances. The initial cost will actually be greater than the mere continuation of handouts. The dividends will come in the restoration of individual dignity and in the long-run reduction of the need for government help.’* * *

“The same theme carried over into the Johnson administration, where the anti-poverty program was sold as a way to ‘break the cycle of poverty; and to make ‘taxpayers out of taxeaters.’ ‘Give a hand, not a handout’ was the slogan of the ‘war on poverty.’ In keeping with that theme, President Johnson said in August 1964, when the legislation was finally passed: ‘The days of the dole in our country are numbered.’ This initial thrust of the ‘war on poverty’ programs must be clearly recognized at the outset, for one of many responses to the failures of government programs has been to redefine their goals after the fact, to make the program look ‘successful.’

“A subsidiary theme of the ‘war on poverty’ was that social programs were a way of heading off urban violence. Lyndon Johnson spoke of ‘conditions that breed despair and violence.’ He said:

‘All of us know what those conditions are: ignorance, discrimination, slums, poverty, disease, not enough jobs.’

* * *

“Government agencies seeking to expand their budgets and extend their powers likewise encouraged the belief that social programs reduced the incidence of riots and other violence, while reduction of such programs would escalate civil disorder.

“A diametrically opposite set of beliefs and predictions came from critics of the ‘war on poverty’ proposals. Senator Barry Goldwater predicted that these programs would ‘encourage poverty’ by encouraging ‘more and more people to move into the ranks of those being taken care of by the government.’ Nor did he expect expanded social programs to lead to a more harmonious society, for he saw their underlying philosophy as an ‘attempt to divide Americans’ along class lines, to ‘pigeon-hole people and make hyphenated Americans.’...Henry Hazlitt...said ‘we can expect the price tag to increase geometrically as the years go on.’”(pp.9-12)

“Stage 1. The ‘Crisis’: [The ‘crisis’ was dependency on public assistance, so the question was:] How much dependency was there at the time and was it increasing or decreasing before the new policies were instituted?...As of the time the ‘war on poverty’ programs began, the number of people who lived below the official poverty line had been declining continuously since 1960, and was only about half of what it had been in 1950. On the more fundamental issue of *dependency*, the situation was even more clearly improving. The proportion of people whose earnings put them below the poverty level *without counting government benefits* declined by about one-third from 1950 to 1965.”(p.12)

“Stage 2. The ‘Solution’: The Economic Opportunity Act was passed in 1964, creating the Office of Economic Opportunity...”(p.12)

“Stage 3. The Results: The percentage of people dependent upon the federal government to keep above the poverty line *increased*. Although the number of such dependent people had been declining for more than a decade before the ‘war on poverty’ programs began, this downward trend now reversed itself and began rising within a few years after that program got under way. Official poverty continued its decline for some time, as massive

federal outlays lifted many people above the official poverty line, but not out of dependency—the original goal.”(p.13)

“Overall federal spending on programs for the poor escalated as eligibility rules for welfare and Social Security were loosened, the size of benefits was increased, and unemployment insurance was made more available to more people, and for longer periods of time....The number of people receiving public assistance more than doubled from 1960 to 1977. The dollar value of public housing rose nearly five-fold in a decade and the amount spent on food stamps rose more than ten-fold. All government-provided in-kind benefits increased about eight-fold from 1965 to 1969 and more than twenty-fold by 1974. Federal spending on such social welfare programs not only rose in dollar terms and in real terms, but also as a percentage of the nation’s gross national product, going from 8 percent of GNP in 1960 to 16 percent by 1974.

“As for urban ghetto riots, they raged across the country during this era. Later, they declined sharply after the beginning of the Nixon administration, which opposed the whole ‘war on poverty’ approach and eventually abolished the Office of Economic Opportunity, which had been the spearhead of this program. Still later, during the eight years of the Reagan presidency—supposedly the nadir of neglect—major urban riots became virtually extinct.”(pp.13-14)

“Stage 4. The Response:...no acknowledgment of failure....political and media proponents resolutely ignored the original goal of reducing dependency. The goal was instead redefined as reducing poverty by transferring resources. As former Johnson White House aide Hodding Carter III put it, ‘millions of people were lifted out of poverty during the period, or had their plight considerably alleviated, by government programs and public expenditures.’ A member of President Johnson’s Cabinet suggested yet another criterion for success: ‘Ask the 11 million students who have received loans for their college education whether the Higher Education Act failed’....In short, the test for whether a program was good for the country as a whole was whether those who personally benefitted from it found it beneficial.

[Consider this issue from your perspective as a student. Many, if not most of you, have access to low-interest student loans, non-repayable student grants, Medicaid to pay for the hospital and medical bills associated with the births of your babies, and/or WIC (Women & Infant Care) benefits to subsidize the food bills for your growing family. It is very easy for you to conclude that you just could not make it without all of these welfare benefits. In the process, you are being conditioned to believe in the government’s assumed role of generous benefactor in your lives. Liking the benefits you receive makes it all the more easy to be persuaded to believe that all government programs of redistribution of wealth are inherently good for society whether or not they actually are in the long run after all things are considered.]

Yet a third line of defense of failed policies has been to claim moral merit for their good intentions

“....Finally, it was asserted that things would have been even worse, were it not for

those programs. ‘The question is not what the bottom line is today—with poverty up—but where would we be if we didn’t have these programs in place?’ asked Professor Sheldon Danziger, director of the University of Wisconsin’s Institute for Research on Poverty. ‘I think we’d have poverty rates over 25 percent.’ Even though poverty and dependency were going down for years before the ‘war on poverty’ began, Professor Danziger chose to assert that poverty rates would have gone up. There is no possible reply to these heads-I-win-tails-you-lose assertions, except to note that they would justify any policy on any subject anywhere, regardless of its empirically observed consequences.

“In short, no matter what happens, the vision of the anointed always succeeds, if not by the original criteria, then by criteria extemporized later—and if not by empirical criteria, then by criteria sufficiently subjective to escape even the possibility of refutation. Evidence becomes irrelevant.” (pp.14-15)

[Big picture question: We have always had inner city slums and poverty in this country – but after our massive social efforts to cure this problem (>\$5 trillion spent on welfare programs since the 1960s, anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action laws, etc.), are the people residing in these areas more safe, more law-abiding, more prosperous, more capable of rising above their situation and moving out of the inner city than in former days? Would the people living there be better off staying in our own time or would their circumstances improve on whole by jumping into a time machine and going back 50 years? Is it possible that our massive social welfare programs were misguided; that their underlying assumptions and premises were ill-conceived and ill-formed; that the underlying causal connections were misunderstood regarding human progress and well-being? Is it possible that ignoring the moral and spiritual dimensions of humanity were fatal flaws in their calculations? Is it possible that these efforts have caused more human misery and societal mis-harmony than they have relieved?

[Those on the left seem to assume that external forces acting upon the individual are the most critical things to consider. In other words, they tend to believe that outside circumstances and the external environment cause social problems. If we can change and control that environment, it is believed that the good side of human nature will kick in and people will become happy, productive, law-abiding citizens. If we give them decent housing, food, clothing, medicine, medical treatment, education, legal protections against discrimination, etc., it is believed they will develop a synergism and positive momentum that will allow them to move up and out of the slums. So the prevailing approach seems to be to work from the outside inwards. This has been our policy approach for the last 35 years or so.

[By contrast, those on the right tend to believe that we should instead work from the inside out. As one religious leader put it, if we first work to take the slums out of people’s hearts and improve their morals and character, the poor will eventually take themselves out of the physical slums that surround them. Ignoring the

spiritual and moral dimensions of the problem will only cause the problem to worsen in their view despite whatever attempts are made to control the external environment. Milton Friedman succinctly expressed the perverse incentives associated with taking an outside-in approach when he said something to the effect that: “When you pay people to be poor, you’re going to have a lot of poor people!”

[My brother told me about a show he watched a few years back which looked at the moral dimensions of our welfare programs. When some little inner-city kids were asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, some gave the standard answers: a policeman, a doctor, a teacher, etc. But one young boy gave a very troubling answer to that question—he answered proudly “I want to be on welfare.” Now does that piece of anecdotal evidence represent the exception or does it accurately portray conditions in general? The fact that there was much inter-generational welfare dependency among welfare recipients indicates that the little boy’s comments cannot be passed off so lightly as merely representing exceptional conditions. If this represents general tendencies, then we should be very concerned about the possibility that our welfare system has inadvertently turned into a modern permutation of slavery. In fact, Alan Keyes, a black man who failed to win the most recent Republican nomination for President drew that exact connection. In effect he said that the welfare system breeds dependency and dependency is the hallmark of slavery. He associated the federal government in its role as welfare provider to the old slave owners of the past who happened to have kindly dispositions towards their slaves but their kindly temperaments and dispositions did not take away from the fact that their slaves were still slaves.

[The program my brother saw included a panel discussion with three black people—two relatively young and one old. In discussing the merits of our welfare program, the two younger discussants took a very contemporary view of things and basically argued that black people are rightfully entitled to all the various legal protections and government welfare benefits offered in order to compensate them for all of the disadvantages they face in being the descendants of slaves.

[The older gentleman made some very sobering observations in response. He said that before all of the various civil rights acts and welfare programs of the 1960s, racial bigotry and discrimination certainly existed but at least at that time, black families were largely intact and strong -- both fathers and mothers were generally in the home and committed to raising their children together in a strong moral environment. (By way of contrast, as of the last numbers I have heard in the press, today, around 65% of all newly born black babies will be born into homes in which their fathers are not present! Sowell cites some statistics later in this reading showing the dramatic disintegration of black families during our “Great Society” phase when compared to pre-1960s data.) The older black discussant

argued that this general break up of black families was caused by the perverse moral incentives associated with America's massive welfare program and that the black community is weaker and worse off, on whole, as a result. Now maybe he is wrong in his assessment—but what if he is correct? Wouldn't that represent a profound irony and tragedy that deserves serious attention?

[From this we should see that good intentions are not good enough by themselves – results rule.

[In my view, one of the good things President Clinton did as President was to sign into law a Republican-created welfare reform bill that gave welfare recipients a cumulative two-year limit on access to federal welfare benefits over the course of their lifetimes. This was designed to reverse the “Tragedy of the Commons” mentality exhibited by so many welfare recipients. Under this mentality, whatever is viewed as being free tends to be overused to the detriment of all. By imposing a two-year cumulative limit, recipients would naturally start to look at their welfare benefits as a scarce resource to be preserved and used only in real times of need and not to be squandered frivolously. It was designed to encourage people to seriously self-distinguish when they were in genuine need and when they were just freeloading off of taxpayers. It remains to be seen whether or not we will really have the backbone needed to refuse the payment of benefits when people's two-year cumulative limits eventually run out. Most certainly the press will publicize various hard-luck cases in hopes of getting the two-year cumulative period extended and anybody opposed to such extensions will be vilified by those on the left as being heartless, greedy, mean-spirited, uncaring, and uncompassionate. It is interesting to note that the number of people on the welfare rolls of the country has dropped by more than half since the 2-year cap law was passed.

[Conservatives tend to think there are very valuable moral lessons to be learned in failure and that artificially short-circuiting the process through open-ended social safety nets will tend to do more harm than good in the long run. Thomas Edison used to say: “Welcome to the school of hard knocks—that is where I got my education.” He was a great example of a person who could learn from failure and eventually find success.

[Liberals tend to focus on the getting of economic benefits (i.e. the end result) whereas conservatives tend to focus on the morals behind the method or means of getting (i.e. they think that the getting should generally be a product of honest and productive individual effort rather than legal entitlement which entitlement they believe tends to negatively affect productive attitudes causing dependence rather than independence and, in the process, shrinks human character, dignity and self-respect.)]

“Criminal Justice

“Like so many negative social trends, soaring crime rates began in the 1960s, amid glowing optimism about how much better things could be if the traditional beliefs of the many were replaced by the special new insights of the few. In the case of criminal justice, however, the policy changes did not originate so much in legislation as in judicial and administrative rulings and policies....Among the key people whose words and actions set the tone for the changes in the criminal justice system in the 1960s were the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, the attorney general of the United States, and the chief judge of the Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia...”(p.21)

Stage 1. The ‘Crisis’: crime....Since the most reliable long-term data are on murder, what was the murder rate at that point? The number of murders committed in the United States in 1960 was less than in 1950, 1940, or 1930—even though the population was growing over those decades and murders in the two new states of Hawaii and Alaska were counted in the national statistics for the first time in 1960. The murder *rate*, in proportion to population, was in 1960 just under half of what it had been in 1934.

“As Judge Bazelon saw the criminal justice system in 1960, the problem was not with ‘the so-called criminal population’ but with society, whose ‘need to punish’ was a ‘primitive urge’ that was ‘highly irrational’—indeed, a ‘deep childish fear that with any reduction of punishment, multitudes would run amuck.’ It was this ‘vindictiveness,’ this ‘irrationality’ of ‘notions and practices regarding punishment’ that had to be corrected....Society is indeed guilty of ‘creating this special class of human beings,’ by its ‘social failure’ for which ‘the criminal serves as a scapegoat.’ Punishment is itself a ‘dehumanizing process’ and a ‘social branding’ which only promotes more crime. Since criminals ‘have a special problem and need special help,’ Judge Bazelon argued for ‘psychiatric treatment’ with ‘new, more sophisticated techniques.’ * * *

“The therapeutic vision also permeated the writings and speeches of President Lyndon Johnson’s attorney general, Ramsey Clark:

‘Rehabilitation must be the goal of modern corrections. Every other consideration must be subordinated to it....Rehabilitation means the purpose of law is justice—and that as a generous people we wish to give every individual his chance for fulfillment.’

“With Attorney General Clark, as with Chief Judge Bazelon and others, the problem was with the benighted public and its outdated attitudes. Society imposes long prison sentences ‘because we are angry,’ according to Clark, but ‘this will not reduce crime’(pp.21-23)

Stage 2. The ‘Solution’: A series of landmark Supreme Court decisions in the 1960s changed the course of criminal justice in the United States. *Mapp v. Ohio* (1961), *Escobido v. Illinois* (1964), and *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) successively expanded the rights of criminals in the custody of the police by making their convictions invalid if the procedures specified by the courts were not followed in detail by the police. *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963) required states to provide free attorneys to criminal defendants,

subject to the threat that their convictions would be overturned, even if guilt was unquestioned, when such attorneys were not provided. In California, even when state-appointed attorneys were supplied, if these attorneys' defense strategies were second-guessed by appellate judges and considered inadequate, convictions could be overturned on grounds of denial of the constitutional right to counsel.

“Although the U.S. Supreme Court began this judicial revolution in criminal law in the 1960s, even earlier Chief Judge Bazelon had expanded the scope of the ‘insanity’ defense in the landmark case of *Durham v. United States* (1954) and he continued to lead the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals toward more expansive views of criminals’ rights. In addition, courts across the land involved themselves more and more in the administration of prisons, prescribing better living conditions and imposing on the prison system a duty to provide prisoners with access to law books, in order to prepare appeals of their convictions. Moreover, sentences were less often imposed and tended to be of shorter duration.

“In short, the vision of the anointed triumphed in the criminal justice system. The assumptions underlying its actions were the same as elsewhere. Sweeping presumptions about the irrationality and mean-spiritedness of the public were made without either evidence or a sense of need for evidence. Conversely, the validity and applicability of the beliefs of ‘experts’ were taken as axiomatic....the anointed and the benighted were on vastly different moral and intellectual planes and it justified taking decisions out of the hands of those who passed the existing laws, in response to the voting public, and put these decisions in the hands of judges responsive to those with ‘expertise.’ Moreover, it put the burden of proof on others.

“The *Miranda* decision of 1966 [requiring police to warn people in custody that what they say can be used against them in a court of law], which climaxed the judicial revolution in criminal law, led to this scene in the Supreme Court:

Justice Harlan...denounced the decision as ‘dangerous experimentation’....

Justice White said:

‘...the Court’s rule will return a killer, a rapist or other criminal to the streets and to the environment which produced him, to repeat his crime whenever it pleases him. As a consequence, there will not be a gain, but a loss, in human dignity.’

“Such dissents were brushed aside and outcries from the public and from law enforcement officials were dismissed. At a 1965 judicial conference, where a former police commissioner of New York City complained about the trend of the Supreme Court’s decisions on criminal law, his concerns were immediately met with sarcastic ridicule by a law professor who asked, ‘I wonder what rights we’d have left if we always yielded to the police hysteria.’ According to the *New York Times* account, Justice William J. Brennan and Chief Justice Earl Warren sat ‘stony-faced’ during the police commissioner’s statements, but then ‘frequently roared with laughter’ as the law professor poured scorn and derision on those statements, which were characterized as ‘simplistic, narrow-minded and politically expedient.’ The benighted were simply not to

be taken seriously by the anointed.* * *

“In the prevailing vision of the anointed, emphasis on punishment was mistaken when what was needed were therapeutic alternatives to punishment, social programs to get at the ‘root causes’ of crime, and more rights for those accused and convicted of crimes, so as to establish that the law was fair and worthy of respect, which respect would then be an ingredient in more law-abiding behavior by those otherwise alienated from society. By contrast, the traditional view would lead one to expect a rising crime rate after the changes of the 1960s. If punishment deters, as the traditionalists believed, then the reduction in imprisonment that occurred in the 1960s would tend to produce more crime. But if imprisonment itself exacerbated the crime problem, as Judge Bazelon, Ramsey Clark, and numerous others with the vision of the anointed claimed, then this reduction in imprisonment would tend to reduce crime. Similarly, if social programs for the poor, for minorities, and for the mentally disturbed were needed to get at the ‘root causes’ of crime, as the anointed claimed, then the vast and unprecedented expansion of such programs during the 1960s should have reduced the crime rate. The logical implications of each vision were quite clear. All that was needed was empirical evidence.”(pp.24-27)

Stage 3. The Results: Crime rates skyrocketed. Murder rates suddenly shot up until the murder rate in 1974 was more than twice as high as in 1961. Between 1960 and 1976, a citizen’s chances of becoming a victim of a major violent crime tripled. The number of policemen killed also tripled during the decade of the 1960s. Young criminals, who had been especially favored by the new solicitude, became especially violent. The arrest rate of juveniles for murder more than tripled between 1965 and 1990, even allowing for changes in population size.

“As in other areas, such evidence has made little or not difference in the vision of the anointed, except to spur them on to new feats of ingenuity in interpretation.”(p.27)

“Stage 4. The Response: Since neither criminal law changes nor any other social changes are likely to produce truly instantaneous effects, there was a brief period during which no change in the crime rate was discernible—and this momentary lull provided occasions for expressions of much disdain toward those who had predicted that the new criminal justice practices would lead to higher crime rates. Just two months after the *Miranda* decision in 1966, the *New York Times* declared that ‘the gloomy predictions of its critics have been happily unrealized.’ However, once the crime rates had clearly begun to rise in the wake of this and many other judicial changes designed to reduce them, the tactics of the proponents of those innovations shifted. Among the early responses to soaring crime rates...were denials that crimes were in fact more frequent. Increased reporting of crime or better collection of data was held responsible for the upsurge in the official statistics....[I]t was difficult to believe that soaring murder statistics reflected simple better record keeping, since it had always been hard to ignore a dead body.

“An alternative to denying rising crime rates was to make it socially unacceptable to talk about it, by equating discussions of ‘law and order’ with racism, since it was well

known that crime rates were higher among blacks. ‘Law and order’ was ‘an inflammatory statement,’ according to the well-known psychiatrist Karl Menninger. ‘What it really means, I’m afraid, is that we should all go out and find the niggers and beat them up.’ This was only one of many expressions of the prevailing vision of Dr. Menninger, whose book *The Crime of Punishment* was widely hailed as it blamed ‘society’ for crime, treated criminals as more wronged than wronging, and urged a substitution of psychiatric treatment for punishment. * * *

“[In Charles E. Silberman’s *Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice* he wrote:]
‘For all the talk about the decline in punishment and the hobbling effect of the Warren Court, moreover, what data are available indicate that contemporary criminal courts prosecute, convict, and incarcerate a larger population of those arrested for a felony today than did the courts in the 1920s.’

“What was not explained was why the 1920s were selected as a base period for determining the effect of the Warren Court, which began in 1953 and whose landmark criminal law decisions were made in the 1960s. If this desperate expedient of choosing an irrelevant base period suggests that Silberman’s conclusions could not have been supported if his before-and-after comparison had been based on the actual dates of the actual decisions...a look at a few readily available facts confirms that suspicion. First of all, the likelihood that someone who committed a serious crime would be arrested fell until it was only one-fifth as high by 1979 as it had been in 1962. As for going to prison, an earlier trend toward rising imprisonment rates was ended in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and imprisonment rates remained low as crime rates rose during the 1960s.

“In short, contrary to what Silberman suggests, criminals were no longer being apprehended, convicted, and incarcerated as they were before the Warren Court remade the criminal law. Moreover, the consequences were precisely what anyone without the vision of the anointed would have expected: When Earl Warren became chief justice in 1953, the homicide rate in the United States was 4.8 per 100,000 population—lower than it had been in four decades. But a sharp rise in homicides began in the 1960s, more than doubling from 1963 to 1973....Silberman’s selection of the 1920s as his base of comparison suggests a desperate evasion of the obvious. * * *

“Chief Justice Earl Warren brushed aside those whose ‘self-righteous indignation’ about rising crime rates was based on ‘oversimplification.’ According to the chief justice, ‘all of us must assume a share of the responsibility,’ for he attributed the rising crime rates to the fact that ‘for decades we have swept under the rug’ the slum conditions which breed crime. He ignored the fact that crime rates had been *declining* during all those decades when they should have been rising, according to his theory.”(pp.27-30)

Chapter 3: BY THE NUMBERS:

“AHA! STATISTICS

“Anyone who looks through enough statistics will eventually find numbers that seem to

confirm a given vision. Often, the same set of statistics contains other numbers that seem to confirm diametrically opposite conclusions. The same is true of anecdotal ‘facts.’ That is why *evidence* is different from mere data, whether numerical or verbal.

“Scientific evidence, for example, comes from systematically determining—in advance—what particular empirical observations would be seen if one theory were correct, compared to what would be seen if an alternative theory were correct. Only after this careful and painstaking analysis has been completed can the search begin for facts that will differentiate between the competing theories. Seldom is this approach used by those who believe in the vision of the anointed. More typically, they look through statistics until they find some numbers that fit their preconceptions, and then cry, ‘Aha!’ Others with different views can, of course, do the same thing. But only those with the prevailing views are likely to be taken seriously when using such shaky reasoning.”(p.32)

“Infant Mortality and Prenatal Care

“A widely reported study from the National Center for Health Statistics showed that (1) black pregnant women in the United States received prenatal care less often than white pregnant women and that (2) infant mortality rates among blacks were substantially higher than among whites. ‘Aha!’ reactions in the media were immediate, vehement, and widespread. It was automatically assume that the first fact was the cause of the second, that this showed American society’s ‘neglect’ of its minorities, if not outright racism, and that what was needed was more government spending on prenatal care.* * *

“In the very same report that showed racial disparities in infant mortality—indeed, on the very same page—statistics showed that (1) Mexican Americans received even less prenatal care than blacks, and that (2) infant mortality rates among Mexican Americans were no higher than among whites. Had anyone been seriously interested in testing an hypothesis, the conclusion would have been that something other than prenatal care must have been responsible for intergroup differences in infant mortality. That conclusion would have been further buttressed by data on infant mortality rates for Americans of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino ancestry—all of whom received less prenatal care than whites and yet had lower infant mortality rates than whites. But, of course, no one with the vision of the anointed was looking for any such data, so there was no ‘Aha!’”(pp.32-33)

[He adds more insights regarding the infant mortality figures when he later talks about “Correlation versus Causation.”]

“Intergroup Disparities

“Media and academic preoccupation with black-white comparisons permits many conclusions to be reached in consonance with the prevailing vision, but whose lack of validity would immediately become apparent if just one or two other groups were included in the comparison. For example, the fact that black applicants for mortgage loans are turned down at a higher rate than white applicants has been widely cited as proof of racism among lending institutions. The *Washington Post*, for example, reported that a ‘racially biased system of home

lending exists' and Jesse Jackson called it 'criminal activity' that banks 'routinely and systematically discriminate against African-Americans and Latinos in making mortgage loans.' But the very same data also showed that whites were turned down at a higher rate than Asian Americans. Was that proof of racism against whites, and in favor of Asians?

"Similarly, a statistical analysis of the racial impact of layoffs during the recession of 1990-91 turned up the fact that blacks were laid off at a higher rate than whites or others. Although this was a 'news' story, as distinguished from an editorial, the story was sufficiently larded with quotations alleging racism that it was clear what conclusion the reader was supposed to draw. However, here again, Asian American workers fared better than white workers.... Yet no one claimed that this showed discrimination against whites and in favor of Asians.

"Such Asian-white statistical comparisons cause no 'aha!' because their implications are not part of the prevailing vision. In short, numbers are accepted as evidence when they agree with preconceptions, but not when they don't.* * *

"...No one regards the gross disparity in 'representation' between blacks and whites in professional basketball as proving discrimination against whites in that sport. * * *

"Implicit in the equating of statistical disparity with discrimination is the assumption that gross disparities would not exist in the absence of unequal treatment. However, international studies have repeatedly shown gross intergroup disparities to be commonplace...[He then goes on to cite several examples like the fact that American men are struck by lightning six times as often as American women; the proportion of Asian American students who scored over 700 on the mathematics portion of the SAT was more than double the proportion among whites;; etc]....The point here is that inferences cannot be made *either way* from the bare fact of statistical differences. Most social phenomena are sufficiently complex—with data on many variables being either unavailable or inherently unquantifiable—that often such control is itself illusory. That illusion will be analyzed as a special phenomenon which can be called the residual fallacy."(pp.33-37)

"CHANGING ASSORTMENTS

"One common source of needless alarm about statistics is a failure to understand that a given series of numbers may represent a changing assortment of people.* * *

"Claims that major industries throughout the American economy are dominated by a few monopolistic corporations are often based on statistics showing that four or five companies produce three-quarters, four-fifths, or some other similar proportion of the industry's output—and that this condition has persisted for decades, suggesting tight control by this in-group. What is often overlooked is that the particular companies constituting this 'monopolistic' group are changing. In short, there is competition—and particular businesses are winning and losing in this competition at different times creating turnover. This simple fact, so damaging to the monopoly hypothesis, is evaded by statistical definition....[They make the mistake of]turning an *ex post* statistic into an *ex ante* condition."(p.43)

"Much the same implicit assumption of unchanging constituents underlies many

discussions of ‘the rich’ and ‘the poor.’ Yet studies that follow particular individuals over time have shown that most Americans do not remain in one income bracket for life, or even for as long as a decade. Both the top 20 percent who are often called ‘the rich’ and the bottom 20 percent who are called ‘the poor’ represent a constantly changing set of individuals. A study of income tax returns showed that more than four-fifths of the individuals in the bottom 20 percent of those who filed income tax returns in 1979 were no longer there by 1988. Slightly more had reached the top bracket by 1988 than remained at the bottom.(p.44)

“A University of Michigan study, for example, found that less than half of the families followed from 1971 to 1978 remained in the same quintile of the income distribution throughout those years. This turnover of individuals within each bracket may well explain some strange data on those people labeled ‘the poor.’ Nearly half of the statistically defined ‘poor’ have air conditioning, more than half own cars, and more than 20,000 ‘poor’ households have their own heated swimming pool or Jacuzzi. Perhaps most revealing, the statistically defined ‘poor’ spend an average of \$1.94 for every dollar of income they receive. Clearly, something strange is going on.

“Just as people from the lower income brackets move up, so people from higher income brackets move down, at least temporarily. Someone in business or the professions who is having an off year financially may receive an income for that year that falls in the lowest bracket. That does not make these individuals poor—except by statistical definition.”(p.44)

“In keeping with this vision, the media made much of Congressional Budget Office data that seemed to suggest that the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer during the years of the Reagan administration. This was clearly an ‘Aha!’ statistic, in keeping with what the anointed believed or wanted to believe. Even putting aside the very large question of whether the particular individuals in each of these categories were the same through out the eight Reagan years, the statistical definitions used systematically understated the economic level of those in the lower income brackets and overstated the economic level of those in the higher brackets. For example, well over \$150 billion in government benefits to lower-income people go uncounted in these statistics—more that \$11,000 per poor household. At the other end of the income scale, the official data count capital gains in a way virtually guaranteed to show a gain, even when there is a loss, and to exaggerate whatever gains occur.

“For example, if someone invests \$10,000 and the price level [inflation] doubles during the years while this investment is being held, then if it is sold for anything less than \$20,000 at the higher price level, it is in fact a loss in real terms. Yet if the original investment remains the same in real value by doubling in money value as the price level doubles, the official statistics will show it as a ‘gain’ of \$10,000—and will correct for inflation by dividing this by 2 to get a \$5,000 gain in real income. With such definitions as these, it is no wonder that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, at least on paper. *A* will always exceed *B*, if you leave out enough of *B* and exaggerate *A*.

[Another problem occurs in defining ‘rich’ and ‘poor.’ If we simply say that the bottom 20% are ‘poor,’ that ignores the fact that our collective standards of living have constantly increased over the years. People in the bottom 20% today enjoy far more

material things than people in the bottom 20% did fifty years ago. If we just focus on a static definition of the bottom 20% we mistakenly think that things aren't getting better in general when in fact they are; we mistakenly think that the plight of the poor is permanent and perhaps even getting worse.]

“One of the offshoots of the preoccupation with ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ has been another definitional catastrophe—‘hunger in America.’ Here many advocacy groups put out many kinds of statistics, designed to get media attention and spread enough alarm to produce public policy favoring whatever they are advocating. The definitions behind their statistics seldom get much scrutiny. One hunger activist, for example, determined how many people were hungry by determining how many were officially eligible for food stamps and then subtracting those who in fact received food stamps. Everyone else was ‘hungry,’ by definition. Using this method, he estimated that millions of Americans were hungry and produced documents showing the 150 ‘hungriest’ counties in the United States.

“Of these ‘hungry’ counties, the hungriest county of all turned out to be a ranching and farming community where most farmers and ranchers grew their own food, where farm and ranch hands were boarded by their employers, and where only two people in the entire county were on food stamps....When the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Centers for Disease Control examined people from a variety of income levels, they found no evidence of malnutrition among people with poverty-level income, nor even any significant difference in the intake of vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients from one income level to another. The only exception was that lower-income women were slightly more likely to be obese.

“Such facts have had remarkably little effect on the media’s desire to believe that the rich are getting richer, while the poor are getting poorer, and that hunger stalks the less fortunate. A CBS *Evening News* broadcast on March 27, 1991, proclaimed:

‘A startling number of American children are in danger of starving...one out of eight American children is going hungry tonight.’

“....Alarming claims that one out of every eight children in America goes to bed hungry each night are like catnip to the media. A professional statistician who looked at the definitions and methods used to generate such numbers might burst out laughing. But it is no laughing matter to the activists and politicians pushing their agenda, and it should be no laughing matter to a society being played for suckers.

“One of the common methods of getting alarming statistics is to list a whole string of adverse things, with the strong stuff up front to grab attention and the weak stuff at the end to supply the numbers. A hypothetical model of this kind of reasoning might run as follows: Did you know that 13 million American wives have suffered murder, torture, demoralization, or discomfort at the hands of left-handed husbands?...While this particular example is hypothetical, the pattern is all too real. Whether it is sexual harassment, child abuse, or innumerable other social ills, activists are able to generate alarming statistics by the simple process of listing attention-getting horrors at the beginning of a string of phenomena and listing last those marginal things which in fact supply the bulk of their statistics. A Louis Harris poll, for example, showed that 37 percent of married women are ‘emotionally abused’ and 4 million ‘physically abused.’ Both of these include some very serious things—but they also include among ‘emotional abuse’ a husband’s stomping out of the room and among ‘physical abuse’ his grabbing his wife....Studies

of truly serious violence find numbers less than one-tenth of those being thrown around in the media, in politics, and among radical feminists in academia.(pp45-47)

[Sowell cautions us about the use of ‘classes’ such as ‘rich’ and ‘poor.’ He makes the case that such distinctions may ignore transience within the classes and hide more relevant distinctions like age. Most people understand that our peak earning years are not when we just start out in the job market, but rather, occur much latter on after we have gained experience, skills, and competencies. It should come as no surprise then that older people predominate in both the higher income earning and wealth accumulation levels while younger people predominate in the lower levels. So ‘rich’ versus ‘poor’ may be more accurately be viewed as old versus young which is an inherently transient condition than changes as a function of time and does not scream out for any sort of governmental correction like the ‘rich’ versus ‘poor’ class approach might otherwise do. He then presents his thought exercise concerning a statistically perfect world which I discuss in more detail in the regular readings.](pp.48-49)

[Another factor which skews the results in ‘rich’ versus ‘poor’ comparisons is the idea of family or household income.] “There are more than twice as many income-earners in households earning \$75,000 and up as in households earning less than \$15,000. Families in the top 20 percent supply 29 percent of all people who work 50 weeks per year or more, while families in the bottom 20 percent supply just 7 percent of such workers.

“A declining size of both families and households over time means that intertemporal trends in household income can be very misleading, as are intergroup comparisons, since household size differs from group to group, as well as over time. Although Americans’ median household income was not appreciably higher in 1992 than in 1969, income *per person* rose from \$3,007 in 1969 to \$15,033 in 1992—approximately a five-fold increase in money income while the price index rose less than four-fold, indicating about a 40 percent increase in real income per capita. The fact that more individuals could afford to have their own households in 1992 than in 1969 was a sign of increased prosperity, not stagnation.

“For blacks, whose family and household size have been declining especially sharply, comparisons of family or household incomes are particularly misleading....

[In order to clarify what was just said, imagine a husband and wife that both work and make \$20,000 per year each. Their household income is \$40,000 per year. If they divorce, then each of them separately is probably considered to be a “family” or a “household” with each unit now making only \$20,000 per year. Statistically, this would look like terrible retrogression economically—what used to be one family making \$40,000 now turns into two families making only \$20,000 each. Divorce rates and the rates of people who live together outside of marriage and then break up have only gone up since 1969. The last figures I saw indicated that about a third of all white children are now born into single parent settings whereas this ratio doubles to two thirds regarding black children. Both of these ratios have exploded in the last few decades. If the mothers and fathers of these children are each treated as a separate “family” or a “household” one can quickly see how “family” or “household” income can appear stagnant while per capita

income can go up significantly between 1969 and 1992.

[But the per capita income figures might also be misleading since as family size (overall number of family members) goes down over time, per capita income figures tend to rise since there are fewer heads over which to divide the overall family income. Over time, the number of children born to American families has declined markedly. So some of the increase in per capita income is simply related to the fact that producing couples are producing fewer offspring than they used to, rather than strictly from the fact that real economic growth and expansion has taken place over time.]

“Needless to say, the anointed much prefer to quote family and household income statistics on income, claiming ‘economic stagnation,’ the ‘disappearance of the middle class,’ and miscellaneous other rhetorical catastrophes. ‘For all but the top 20 percent,’ an op-ed column in the *New York Times* said, ‘income has stagnated.’ Moreover, this alleged fact was ‘widely acknowledged’ by ‘politicians, economists and sociologists.’ That so many such people echoed the same refrain—without bothering to check readily available census data to the contrary—says more about them than about income. Moreover, not all such use of household or family income data can be attributed to statistical naivete. *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker knew how to use per-capita income statistics when he wished to depict success for the Johnson administration and family income statistics when he wished to depict failure for the Reagan and Bush administrations.

“As for the top 20 percent, so often referred to as ‘the rich,’ those using ‘income distributions’ statistics seldom say how much hard cash is involved when they talk about ‘the rich’ in either income or wealth terms. In income, a little over \$58,000 a year was enough to put a household in the top 20 percent in 1992 and a little under \$100,000 was enough to put it in the top 5 percent. Since a household may contain one individual or a large family, even the latter figure may reflect multiple paychecks of only modestly prosperous people. It is a little much for media pundits with six- and seven-figure incomes to be referring to top-20-percent households earning \$58,000 a year as ‘the rich.’

“Wealth statistics show equally modest sums possessed by the top 20 percent. As of 1988, a net worth of \$112,000 was enough to put an individual in the top 20 percent of wealth-holders.(pp.49-51)

“CORRELATION VERSUS CAUSATION

“One of the first things in introductory statistics textbooks is that correlation is not causation. It is also one of the first things forgotten. Where there is a substantial correlation between A and B, this might mean that:

1. A causes B.
2. B causes A.
3. Both A and B are results of C or some other combination of factors.
4. It is a coincidence.

Those with the vision of the anointed almost invariably choose one of the first two patterns of causation, the particular direction of causation depending on which is more consistent with that vision—not which is more consistent with empirical facts. As part of that vision, explanations which exempt the individual from personal responsibility for unhappy circumstances in his life are consistently favored over explanations in which the individual's own actions are a major ingredient in unfortunate outcomes. Thus, the correlation between lack of prenatal care and high infant mortality rates was blamed by the media on society's failure to provide enough prenatal care to poor women, rather than blaming those women's failure to behave responsibly....

“A study making comparisons within the black community in Washington found that there was indeed a correlation between prenatal care and low birth weight among infants—but the mothers who failed to get prenatal care were also smokers twice as often as the others and alcohol users six times as often. In other words, the same attitudes and behavior which jeopardized the infants' well-being in one way also jeopardized it in others. Failure to seek prenatal care was a symptom, rather than a cause. In terms of our little scheme above, C caused both A and B. However, this study going completely against the vision of the anointed was almost completely ignored in the national media.

“Similarly, the fact that crime and poverty are correlated is automatically taken to mean that poverty causes crime, not that similar attitudes or behavior patterns may contribute to both poverty and crime. For a long time it was automatically assumed among social reformers that slums were ‘nurseries of crime.’ In other words, the correlation between bad housing and high crime rates was taken to mean that the former caused the latter—not that both reflected similar attitudes and behavior patterns. But the vision of the anointed has survived even after massive programs of government-provided housing have led to these brand-new housing projects quickly degenerating into new slums and becoming centers of escalating crime. Likewise, massive increases in government spending on children during the 1960s were accompanied by falling test scores, a doubling of the teenage suicide and homicide rates, and a doubling of the share of births to unwed mothers.”* * * (pp.55-56)

[I have never heard of a successful government housing project – but this could be as invalid as the supposed uniqueness of the knife in *12 Angry Men*. Just because I have not heard of one does not necessarily mean that none exist. But recently, Chicago razed a whole government housing project that was infested with perpetual poverty and crime like so many others. It included several twenty-plus-story-high buildings. They are going to rebuild new ones but this time try to have half the occupants be employed people to try to set a good example for the others. It will be interesting over time to see who predominately rubs off on whom in this experiment.]

“In general, where a correlation goes directly counter to the vision of the anointed—drastically fewer urban riots during administrations which opposed the ‘war on poverty’ approach—it is simply ignored by those seeking ‘Aha!’ statistics. Likewise ignored is the continued escalation of venereal diseases, long after ‘sex education’ has become too pervasive for ignorance to be blamed, except by those for whom the vision of the anointed is an axiom, rather than a hypothesis.”(p.56)

“[After giving several examples where the implementation of policies of the anointed

were followed by worsening conditions,] it is not necessary here to claim that statistics prove that these various policies—the ‘war on poverty,’ sex education, changes in criminal justice procedures—caused the disasters which followed. It would be sufficient to show that the promised benefits never materialized. A consistent record of failure, is only highlighted by the additional fact that things got worse....Moreover, those with alternative views often predicted the very disasters that materialized.”(p.56)

[Even when the “benighted” accurately predict worsening results when the programs of the anointed are implemented, when things do in fact get worse, the anointed demand that the benighted prove beyond any doubt that they really understood the effective causes well enough to predict correctly. If they cannot provide adequate proof, then the anointed insist on continuing down their former path, since the real problem, in their view, is that we just have not yet gone far enough with the government mandate to get the desired results. Shouldn’t the burden of proof be on them and not on the ones who accurately predicted the outcome? What a great dodge! It may be that the benighted were correct in their predictions but wrong as to the correct causal connections behind the unfolding of events, but shouldn’t the burden of proof more reasonably reside with those who predicted incorrectly? Apparently not because we believe in the good intents of the anointed and the supposed bad intents of the benighted.]

“RACIAL DIFFERENCES

“In the past, those who believed in the genetic inferiority of some races were prone to see differential outcomes as evidence of differential natural endowments of ability. Today, the more common non sequitur is that such differences reflect biased perceptions and discriminatory treatment of others. A third possibility—that there are different proportions of people with certain attitudes and attributes in different groups—has received far less attention, though this is consistent with a substantial amount of data from countries around the world....[V]arious marital and other social conditions...have profound effects on everything from income to infant mortality to political opinions. As far back as 1969, black males who came from home where there were newspapers, magazines, and library cards had the same incomes as whites from similar homes and with the same number of years of schooling. In the 1970s, black husband-and-wife families outside the South earned as much as white husband-and-wife families outside the South. By 1981, for the country as a whole, black husband-and-wife families where both were college educated and both working earned slightly *more* than white families of the same description....The equality of income achieved within these subcategories of blacks suggests that racism is less of a factor in the overall differences than has been supposed—and that cultural values or behavioral differences are more of a factor.

“Other studies reinforce the conclusion that varying proportions of people with particular values and behavior from one group to another make substantial differences in economic and social outcomes. Although the poverty rate among blacks in general is higher than among whites in general, the poverty rate among families headed by black married couples has for years been consistently lower than the poverty rate among white, female-headed families, the latter living in poverty about twice as often as black intact families. With infant mortality as well, although

blacks in general have about twice the infant mortality rate of whites in general, black married women with only a high school education have lower infant mortality rates than white unwed mothers with a college education. In short, race makes less difference than whether or not there are two parents. The real-life Murphy Browns are worse off economically than if they were black married women with less education, and their children are more likely to die in infancy.* *

“Many of the ‘racial’ differences based on gross statistics are shown by a finer breakdown to be differences between people with different values and lifestyles, who are differing proportions of different racial populations. Where the values and lifestyles are comparable, the economic and social outcomes have tended to be comparable. But to admit this would be to destroy a whole framework of assumptions behind massive social programs—and destroy with it a whole social vision that is prevalent among political and intellectual elites. Such finer breakdowns receive very little attention in the media, in politics, or in academia, where gross statistics continue to be cited in support of the vision of the anointed.(pp.57-58)

Chapter 4: THE IRRELEVANCE OF EVIDENCE

“Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence....”John Adams

“Much that is said by the anointed in the outward form of an argument turns out not to be arguments at all. Often the logical structure of an argument is replaced by preemptive rhetoric or, where an argument is made, its validity remains unchecked against any evidence, even when such evidence is abundant....[T]he anointed have repeatedly been demonstrably wrong about the past as about the present or the future—and as supremely confident.”(p.64)

TEFLON PROPHETS

“One of the more remarkable feats of those with the vision of the anointed has been the maintenance of their reputations in the face of repeated predictions that proved to be wrong by miles.”(p.64)

MISCELLANEOUS MISTAKEN MESSIAHS

Ralph Nader

He said “‘the consumer must be protected at times from his own indiscretion and vanity.’ Once again, the role of the anointed was to preempt other people’s decisions, for their own good....The book that put Ralph Nader on the map – *Unsafe at Any Speed*...exhibited another

characteristic of the anointed, the ignoring of trade-offs.

“A moment’s reflection on the implications of trade-offs makes it clear that *inevitably*, beyond some point, safety will be sacrificed with *any* product....automobiles could of course be built to tank-like sturdiness at a sufficiently high price, which is to say, by making them unaffordable to many or most people. Carrying safety-first to such extremes on all the millions of products in the economy would raise costs in general and correspondingly lower the real income and living standard of the public.

“Sacrificing real income for the sake of reducing remote dangers is a trade-off that would have to be justified on its merits in each specific case—if one were thinking in terms of trade-offs. But Nader scorned what he called ‘abject worship of that bitch-goddess, cost reduction.’ The very notion of trade-offs was dismissed as ‘auto industry cant.’ [Nader’s book] is a classic of propaganda in its ability to use distracting or dismissive rhetoric to evade a need to confront opposing arguments with evidence or logic....Automobile company representatives who pointed out that the industry cannot produce features that the consumers do not want, or are unwilling to pay for, were scorned by Nader for treating the issue as ‘wholly one of personal consumer taste instead of objective scientific study.

“Like so many who invoke the name and the mystique of science in order to override other people’s choices, Nader offered remarkably little hard data to back up his claims....The whole issue was conceived in categorical rather than incremental or comparative terms.

“Despite Nader’s argument that automakers paid little attention to safety, motor vehicle death rates per million passenger miles fell over the years from 17.9 in 1925 to 5.5 in 1965, the year *Unsafe at Any Speed* was published, and this trend continued to a rate of 4.9 five years later....Moreover, the earlier reductions in automobile fatalities occurred while the average highway speed of cars was increasing. In short, the era of corporate greed and the presumably ignorant and helpless consumer saw dramatic improvements in safety, before the anointed came to the rescue.* * *

[I think Sowell makes a critical thinking error here by inferring that the foregoing improvements in the deaths-per-million-miles rate should be solely ascribed to safety enhancements developed by the automakers. What about the completion of the interstate highway system with its divided highways? I remember driving through Utah on two-lane roads and being terrified when passing people. I never knew for sure whether I had enough room to safely pass. Passing people today on divided highways is very safe by comparison.]

“[The main object of Nader’s scorn was the Corvair.] As for the Corvair, it did indeed have safety problems growing out of its rear-engine design. It also had safety advantages growing out of that same design, notably better traction on slippery surfaces. The salient question is whether *on net balance* it was any less safe than similar cars of its era. Extensive tests by the U.S. Department of Transportation showed that it was not....

“Whatever the outcome of the battle of the facts, Nader won the battle of the media and the battle of politics. The alarm spread about the Corvair caused sales to drop to the point where General Motors discontinued the car. This alarm also promoted more federal intervention in the design and manufacturing of automobiles....

“The technique of many ‘consumer advocates’ remained that pioneered by Ralph Nader in *Unsafe at Any Speed*: sweeping charges, selective examples, selective quotes, purple prose, dismissals of trade-offs, and an attribution of malign or irresponsible behavior to others....Nader’s book charged, and the answer was collectivized decisions by ‘society.’

“One of the problems faced by ‘consumer advocates’ in general is how to make the consumers’ own preferences disappear from the argument, since consumer sovereignty conflicts with moral surrogacy by the anointed....[Nader artfully showed the way by recharacterizing what really amounted to a consumer preference as a ‘car maker’s obsession.’] Arguing that the Corvair would be safer with higher pressure in the tires, Nader condemned the engineers for having ‘succumbed to the great imperative—a soft ride.’ Clearly this was only the consumer’s imperative....Displacing responsibility from the consumer to the producer has been a crucial part of consumer advocacy. ‘The American automobile is produced exclusively to the standards which the manufacturer decides to establish,’ according to Nader, though what the automaker actually decides, with millions of dollars at stake, is far less likely to reflect some personal caprice than what the consumers are apt to buy.(pp.70-75)

[You have all probably heard about some horrific accidents where gas tanks exploded killing and/or maiming people in the process. When it was discovered that the gas tanks could have been situated in a more safe position thus reducing the chances for explosion, GM was sued by the injured parties and/or their estates. In 1999, a jury awarded the plaintiffs \$4.9 billion in damages—\$107 million in compensatory damages (designed to compensate for actual harm done) and \$4.8 billion in punitive damages (designed to slap the hands of GM and discourage them and others from making similarly poor product design decisions in the future.) The judge later reduced the total award down to \$1.9 billion.

[Now we all can very easily put ourselves in the shoes of the injured parties and conclude that justice was done by such a verdict, but might there be other considerations to consider before drawing any final conclusions? Doesn’t this result smack of a categorical approach to things rather than approaching it from the standpoint of incremental trade-offs? If GM and others face the prospect of multi-billion dollar damage awards every time an accident occurs in one of their vehicles and the injured parties can convince the jury that things could have been better designed in such a way as to reduce their chances for injury, won’t the car companies be forced to take a “safety at all costs” approach to their car designs? At first this might seem to be a good thing, but what effect would such an approach have on the retail price of automobiles in the future? Will “sticker shock” require actual medical treatment? I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to pay \$50,000 for a Yugo.

[You might say to yourself: “that could never happen” but try to think like a lawyer about this for a moment. If the ruling principle of the GM case was that “you, GM, could have designed things more safely but you didn’t because of the additional manufacturing costs you were trying to avoid with the safer design and therefore we are going to punish you for making that decision,” why wouldn’t that same rationale apply to a whole product line of

a particular manufacturer, or even across a whole industry? In other words, suppose you were in an accident in a Geo Metro and suffered serious physical injuries as a result of the car being crushed during the crash. Suppose further that had you been driving a Cadillac instead of a Metro, you would have sustained only minor physical injuries since the body of a Cadillac is so much stronger and safer than the body of a Metro. Could you successfully sue GM for your damages since they obviously had the know-how to make a safer car than the Metro and didn't use the best available technology and design to make that Metro at least as safe as a Cadillac? If safety is now to be looked at as some sort of categorical imperative to be pursued at the expense of all other possible concerns (such as affordability, fuel efficiency, environmental preservation, etc.), then couldn't GM be held liable in this instance for the same reasons it was in the prior case? If a court did in fact extend that rationale and imposed a multi-billion dollar judgement against GM, what do you think would probably happen over night?--Every GM car other than the Cadillac would be taken off the showroom floors and you and I would have only two choices left open to us--either we could buy a top-end luxury car or not own any car whatsoever.

[Shouldn't I as a consumer be given the option of deciding how much risk I am willing to take when I buy a car. Shouldn't I be able to make whatever incremental tradeoffs suit my personal tastes? How much safety is enough? Why should some elitist bureaucrat or judge make that decision for me? If I want ultimate safety I can buy a Cadillac, Mercedes, etc., but if I would rather save \$40,000 on my next car purchase and apply those savings to achieve other goals and objectives that I personally value more (like enhancing my pension portfolio for retirement, buying more insurance, buying a summer home, sending the kids to college, or even something as frivolous as taking a vacation, etc.) shouldn't I have the right to make that trade-off decision for myself? If we want to look at safety issues in categorical terms, then maybe we should chain everybody to their beds each day in order to protect us from all the ordinary risks of life we face daily.]

Gasoline Price Control and Decontrol

“[T]he operation of a free market is suspect in their [the anointed's] eyes, no matter how often it works, and government control of economic activity appears rational, no matter how many times it fails. As bitterly resented as the gasoline lines of the 1970s were under government price controls, there were widespread predictions of skyrocketing gasoline prices if these controls were abolished....

“Airs of condescension pervaded criticisms of those who believed otherwise and who relied on a free market. For example, the *New York Times* commented on Ronald Reagan's views:

‘Ronald Reagan brushed aside energy issues during the campaign, insisting that shortages could be overcome by unleashing private enterprise. But not even his most fervent supporters in the energy business share that optimism. Virtually all private forecasts predict declining domestic oil production and liquid fuel shortages during the next decade.’(pp.75-76)

“President Carter blamed the benighted masses for not facing up to the situation as seen by the anointed. ‘The American people,’ he said, ‘have absolutely refused to accept a simple fact. We have an energy crisis.... We are going to have less oil to burn and we are going to have to pay more for it. *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker pronounced Carter’s statements to be ‘unquestioned truths.’

“Disregarding the anointed, in this as in other things, the newly elected President Ronald Reagan issued an Executive Order during the first month of his administration, ending oil price controls. Within four months, the average price of a gallon of unleaded gasoline fell from \$1.48 to 86 cents....the world’s known crude oil reserves were 41 percent higher at the end of the decade of the 1980s than at the beginning....The real cost of the gasoline itself—net of taxes and adjusted for inflation—reached an all-time low in 1993. [Interestingly, the price has since been reduced further—I personally heard a news report on T.V. in late December of 1998 indicating that the price of oil was the lowest it had ever been]

“[During those earlier days Senator Edward Kennedy said:] ‘We must adopt a system of gasoline rationing without delay,’ in ‘a way that demands a fair sacrifice from all Americans.’ Needless to say, the anointed would define what was ‘fair’ for others, while enhancing their own power, as distinguished from letting the marketplace reduce the sacrifice for everyone with lower prices.”(pp.76-77)

“The Club of Rome

“Perhaps the most famous mistaken prediction in recent times was the ‘Club of Rome’ prediction that economic growth would grind to a halt, around the world, during the latter part of the twentieth century. Both industrial output per capita and food per capita were to decline, along with a long-run decline in natural resources. In this model the ‘death rate rises abruptly from pollution and from lack of food.’ Like so many wrong economic predictions, it was buttressed with all sorts of graphs, tables, and mathematical models. It also relied on extrapolations—and on putting the burden of proof on others....

“Abstract ultimate limits are neither the theoretical nor the practical issue. What the Club of Rome report sought was collective coercive powers *now* to head off some impending catastrophe....[it was a] call for super-socialism on a global scale....The report warned: ‘A decision to do nothing is a decision to increase the risk of collapse’....[T]he vision of an anointed elite urgently needed to control the otherwise fatal defects of lesser human beings....[Their] promiscuous display of the symbols of ‘science’—aptly characterized by Gunnar Myrdal as ‘quasi-learnedness’—will remain as a classic pattern of orchestrated hysteria in service to the vision of the anointed.”(pp.77-78)

“FICTITIOUS HISTORY

“Anyone can be wrong about the future. Often the variables are so numerous, and the interactions so complex, that the only real mistake was to have predicted in the first place. Being wrong about the past is something else. Here the anointed’s pattern of being often wrong but never in doubt cannot be explained by the difficulties of interpreting numerous causal factors,

because the end results are already known and recorded. That the record was not checked is only another sign of the great confidence of those with the vision of the anointed—and the groundlessness of that confidence.

“The ‘Legacy of Slavery’

“[Just because there are some bitter legacies of slavery,] it does not follow that any particular bitter experience among blacks today can automatically be attributed to slavery....

“One of the key misfortunes within the contemporary black community, from which many other misfortunes flow, is the breakdown of the family, or the failure to form a family in the first place. As of 1992, more than half of all black adults had never been married, quite aside from an additional 16 percent who had been either divorced or widowed. By contrast, only 21 percent of white adults had never been married. More than half of all black children—57 percent—were living with only one parent and another 7.5 percent were not living with either parent. Thus, only a little more than a third of black children were living in traditional two-parent households....The all too common, and all too tragic, situation was the teenage mother—‘children having children.’ Of 190,000 black children whose parents were currently still teenagers, only 5,000 were living with both parents....

“...[There is an] inability or unwillingness of teenage mothers to raise those children with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for them to become productive and law-abiding adults. Since many of these teenage girls are high school dropouts and are otherwise lacking in the discipline, knowledge, and maturity necessary to raise a child, they can hardly be expected to give the child what they themselves do not have. The tragedy of the situation is too obvious to require elaboration.

“As in other areas where violations of societal norms have led to disasters, the first order of business for the anointed has been to turn the tables on society, which must itself be made to feel guilty for what it complains of....

“Going back a hundred years, when blacks were just one generation out of slavery, we find that the census data of that era showed that a slightly *higher* percentage of black adults had married than had white adults. This in fact remained true in every census from 1890 to 1940....As late as 1950, 72 percent of all black men and 81 percent of black women had been married. But the 1960 census showed the first signs of a decline that accelerated in later years—as so many other social declines began in the 1960s. This new trend, beginning a century after Emancipation, can hardly be explained as ‘a legacy of slavery’ and might more reasonably be explained as a legacy of the social policies promoted by the anointed, especially since similar social policies led to similarly high rates of unwed motherhood in Sweden, where neither race nor slavery could be held responsible.

“...The Irish went through a similar social history in nineteenth-century American cities. But the female-headed households of an earlier era, whether among blacks or whites, were seldom headed by teenage girls. As of 1940, among black females who headed their own households, 52 percent were 45 years old or older. Moreover, only 14 percent of all black children were born to unmarried women at that time. The whole situation was radically different from what it is today. Whatever factors caused the changes, these were clearly twentieth-century

factors, not ‘a legacy of slavery.’ (Underlined emphasis added)

[In marked contrast to the 14 percent figure for 1940, today, 65% of all black newborns are born to single mothers. Rather than show any shock at this very troubling trend, people on the left tend to minimize it by saying this simply represents an “alternative lifestyle” which cannot be criticized lest those doing the criticizing be called “judgmental” and “intolerant” or even worse, “racists.” In trying to determine why these trends have developed, one must seriously consider whether the social policies and moral relativism of the left which gained prominence from the 1960s onward had anything to do with them. It may just turn out to be a case of correlation without any causation (i.e. coincidence) but on the other hand, there may very well be some appropriate causal connections to be drawn.]

[Regarding the “legacy of slavery” he discusses here, I heard a very interesting radio program once where Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams were taking calls from various people when a black radio talk show host from San Diego called into the program to discuss this topic. His position was that blacks were entitled to all the special legal protections afforded them because they suffered from the legacy of slavery. They argued back and forth for a few moments and then the caller asked Mr. Sowell: “Don’t you believe that blacks today are in any way affected by America’s experience with slavery?” Mr. Sowell quickly answered: “Yes! You and I were born into a country with more economic opportunity than any country we would otherwise have been born into in Africa!”

[I would like to make two points regarding this statement. First, to again illustrate the power of race as a blockage mechanism and show the existence of double standards, can you imagine what would have happened if anybody other than a black person had made such a statement? Answer: his head would have been handed to him on a platter. As a white person, I may be tempting fate even quoting it. It illustrates the fallacy in our current political environment that *who* says something may be more important than the *content* of what is said—that truth is determined based upon who is speaking rather than the content of the speech itself.

[Second, it illustrates the powerful optimism and forward vision of Sowell. He illustrates the idea that silver linings can be found in most any dark clouds if one looks for them and people have much better chances for success if they get in the habit of looking for them. In a column of his published in the local newspaper (3/17/2000) he said:

“No one who encourages you to look backward when there are unparalleled opportunities in front of you is really a friend. Nor does a friend encourage paranoia or belligerence that is likely to make you worse off than if you put your energies into something more likely to improve your own wellbeing....it is hard to think of a single group anywhere that has realized its potential by denouncing other people’s sins....

“Racial hype has an unbroken record of tragedy around the world, whether it has been practiced by a majority or a minority.

“The island nation of Sri Lanka off the southeast coast of India, was once held up as a model to other nations because of its good intergroup relations when it became independent in 1948. At that time, relations between Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority were better than relations between blacks and whites in the United States have ever been at any time in our history. Yet, just a decade later, political leaders fanning the flames of ethnic and religious differences had polarized the society, leading to mob violence and then to outright civil war that continues on to this moment.

“Among the many atrocities that have occurred in Sri Lanka was the action of a Sinhalese mob which dragged a Tamil woman—chosen at random—off a bus, soaked her in gasoline, set her afire, and then danced around her in the streets, clapping their hands while she died in agony. We in the United States are still a long way from that level of hatred and animosity. But we need to understand that Sri Lanka was an even longer way away from that kind of atrocity before its politicians took them down the road of polarization.

“Currently, we are just at the point where race hustlers and mob inciters like Al Sharpton are being embraced by white ‘friends’ of blacks like Hilary Clinton and Al Gore. We are at the point where every leftist judge nominated by the Clinton administration who is rejected by the Senate brings charges of ‘racism,’ if that nomination happens to be a member of some minority group.

“We are at the point where Supreme Court decisions outlawing racial preferences and quotas are being disregarded by the Clinton administration, producing minor benefits for a few blacks and major benefits for white hate groups, who capitalize on the resentments created by double standards and double talk.

“In short, we have not yet reached the point of no return. But we need to be aware that there is such a point—and that we would be very wise to stop before we find out where it is.”

[To illustrate what Mr. Sowell said in the above quotation, there was a very interesting news week in the spring of 2000. Four white policemen were acquitted of alleged crimes surrounding their shooting of an unarmed black man in New York City. When this verdict was rendered, Al Sharpton lead a march of protesters in both N.Y. and Washington D.C. with hundreds, if not thousands of black marchers. During that same week two things happened in the other direction. First, a black man in Pennsylvania went on a shooting spree focusing solely on white people as his victims. While killing three people, he let black people go saying he was only after white people. Second, when a

white woman went into a convenience store just for a minute to buy something, she made the mistake of leaving her car running with her son strapped into his seat belt. A black man jumped in the car and started to drive off. The frantic mother tried to unbuckle her son and take him out of the car before it got stolen but the safety belt got hung up and she couldn't free her son. She begged the man to let her get her son out before he sped off but he just gunned the engine dragging the boy to his death. When people saw him dragging the boy they tried to signal him about the problem. His response was to speed up. Finally a group of motorists started chasing him and jumped on him after he had taken an off-ramp too fast and crashed the car. So there was no question that the police had captured the right man. When I saw the man's face as he was being taken to jail, he showed no sign of remorse but instead exhibited a chilling smug look of self satisfaction at what he had done.

[Now what would have happened if a group of white people had rushed to the streets like Al Sharpton and his group to protest these two crimes apparently motivated by racial hatred? They probably would have been castigated as racists. Does the apparent double standard tend to foment silent racial resentments that can be played upon by whites who want to push a racial hatred agenda as Sowell suggests? Probably so.

[What is my prescription for improvement? I think we need to stop the double standards that foment racial discord in either direction. The press needs to be more even handed in its handling of racially sensitive issues. They should not be afraid to criticize minorities when they exhibit racist tendencies just like they do whites who show those same tendencies. They should not continue to repeat over and over again coverage about white-on-minority racism stories when they allow minority-on-white racism stories to quickly drop out of the regular news cycle, if they are ever covered at all. Racism, wherever it is really found should be criticized and discouraged. But unsubstantiated accusations of racism should not be indiscriminately cast about when other legitimate motivations might really be at work. The left needs to avoid overheated rhetoric which tends to fan the flames of racial tensions and vilify their opposition. We need to return to our traditional notion of equal protection and equal application of law and dismantle those laws that grant special legal privileges to selected groups of people. Our laws must be color blind if our people are ever to become such. Racial issues should be returned to the sphere of moral persuasion and taken out of the sphere of legal mandate. People everywhere should follow their moral instincts and discourage racist remarks or tendencies found among their friends and associates. Moral pressure rather than legal pressure should be brought to bear in our quest to achieve a color blind society. We should be less willing to accept excuses for any type of uncivil behavior no matter who the actor is and no matter what his or her background is. We should focus on the future rather than agonize over the past. We should try to forgive and forget instead of remember and stew over past injustices.]

“All or Nothing

“Most differences that matter in real life are differences of degree....Yet a polemical tactic has developed which enables virtually any general statement, however true, to be flatly denied, simply because it is not 100 percent true in all circumstances. The simplest and most obvious statement—that the sky is blue, for example—can be denied, using this tactic, because the sky is not *always* blue...

“This trivializing tactic is widely, but selectively, used to deny whatever needs denying, however true it may be. Even in the days of Stalin, to make a distinction between the Communist world and the free world was to invite sarcastic dismissals of this distinction, based upon particular inadequacies, injustices, or restrictions found in ‘the so-called ‘free world,’ ‘as the intelligentsia often characterized it, which kept it from being 100 percent free, democratic and just....

“All-or-nothing reasoning allows the anointed to say that such things as crime, child abuse, and alcoholism occur in *all* classes, that *all* segments of society are susceptible to AIDS, and otherwise obfuscate the very large and very consequential differences in all these areas.* * *

“[A]ll-or-nothing rhetoric has been used to deny that any institution is nonpolitical, thereby justifying such things as turning classrooms into propaganda centers and judges disregarding the written law, in order to substitute their own social theories as a basis for judicial rulings.* * *

“All-or-nothing tactics are almost infinitely adaptable as substitutes for arguments and evidence on a wide range of issues. For example, any policy proposals to which the anointed object can be dismissed as ‘no panacea.’ Since nothing is a panacea, the characterization is always correct, regardless of the merits or demerits of the policy or its alternatives. This categorical phrase simply substitutes for logic or evidence as to those merits or demerits. Conversely, when a policy promoted by the anointed turns out to create more problems than it solves (if it solves any), attempts to show how the previous situation was far better are almost certain to be dismissed on grounds that opponents are nostalgic for a ‘golden age’ which never existed in reality. Golden ages being as rare as panaceas, this truism again serves to preempt any substantive argument about the merits or demerits of alternative policies.

“The all-or-nothing fallacy is also used to deal with analogies used for or against the vision of the anointed. Because all things are different, except for the similarities, and are the same except for the differences, any analogy (however apt) can be rejected by those who find it a sufficient objection that the things being analogized are not ‘really’ the same. By the same token, any analogies favored (however strained) can be defended on grounds that those things analogized involve the same ‘underlying’ or ‘essential’ principle....*everything* works by sufficiently low standards and everything fails by sufficiently high standards. Such statements are not arguments. They are *tactics* in lieu of arguments—and they are accepted only insofar as they are consonant with the prevailing vision.

“A special variant of the all-or-nothing principle is the view that either one knows *exactly* what particular statements mean or else one is free to engage in adventurous reinterpretations of the words. In literature this is called ‘deconstruction’ and in the law it is called ‘judicial activism.’ Proponents of judicial activism, for example, make much of the fact that the Constitution of the

United States in some places lacks ‘precision’ or is not ‘exact.’ Ultimately, nothing is exact—not even physical measurements, for the instruments themselves cannot be made 100 percent accurate. In the real world, however, this theoretical difficulty is resolved in practice by establishing tolerance limits, which vary with the purpose at hand. A precision optical instrument that is off by half an inch may be wholly unusable, while a nuclear missile that lands 5 miles off the target has virtually the same effect as if it had landed directly in the center of the target. However, in the vision of the anointed, the absence of precision becomes an authorization for substituting the imagination...

“All-or-nothing arguments are not mere intellectual errors. They are tactics which free the anointed from the constraints of opposing arguments, discordant evidence, or—in the case of judicial activism—from the constraints of the Constitution. Most important of all, they are freed from the feedback of uncooperative reality.

PENETRATING THE RHETORIC

[I believe it was Plato who defined rhetoric as “the art of making what is right look wrong and making what is wrong look right.” -- Sowell’s entire book illustrates this definition.]

“[Suggestions for seeing through much of the rhetoric. They] illustrate some general principles of common sense, which are nevertheless often widely ignored in the heat of polemics:

1. All statements are true, if you are free to redefine their terms.
2. Any statistics can be extrapolated to the point where they show disaster.
3. A can always exceed B if not all of B is counted and/or if A is exaggerated.
4. For every expert, there is an equal and opposite expert, but for every fact there is not necessarily an equal and opposite fact.
5. Every policy is a success by sufficiently low standards and a failure by sufficiently high standards.
6. All things are the same, except for the differences, and different except for the similarities.
7. The law of diminishing returns means that even the most beneficial principle will become harmful if carried far enough.
8. Most variables can show either an upward trend or a downward trend, depending on the base year chosen.
9. The same set of statistics can produce opposite conclusions at different levels of aggregation.

10. Improbable events are commonplace in a country with more than a quarter of a billion people.

[As a corollary, anecdotal evidence can be used to ‘prove’ anything. Anecdotal evidence is only valid when it represents general reality rather than just the exceptional circumstance]

11. You can always create a fraction by putting one variable upstairs and another variable downstairs, but that does not establish any causal relationship between them, nor does the resulting quotient have any necessary relationship to anything in the real world.

12. Many of the ‘abuses’ of today were the ‘reforms’ of yesterday. (pp.102-103)

Chapter 5: THE ANOINTED VERSUS THE BENIGHTED

“Every man, wherever he goes, is encompassed by a cloud of comforting convictions, which move with him like flies on a summer day.” Bertrand Russell

“[Now it is time to] come to grips with the specific underlying assumptions of the [anointed]...The question here is not about what kind of world they wish to create, but what kind of world they think exists already.

THE UNDERLYING VISION

“The vision of the anointed may stand out in sharper relief when it is contrasted with the opposing vision, a vision whose reasoning begins with the tragedy of the human condition. By tragedy here is not meant simply unhappiness, but tragedy in the ancient Greek sense, inescapable fate inherent in the nature of things, rather than unhappiness due simply to villainy or callousness. The two visions differ in their respective conceptions of the nature of man, the nature of the world, and the nature of causation, knowledge, power, and justice. These differences can be presented schematically, as below:

	THE TRAGIC VISION	THE VISION OF THE ANOINTED
Human capability	severely and inherently limited for all	vast for the anointed
Social possibilities	trade-offs that leave many ‘unmet needs’	solutions to problems
Social causation	systemic	deliberate
Freedom	exemption from the power of others	ability to achieve goals

Justice	process rules with just characteristics	just (equalized) chances or results
Knowledge	consists largely of the unarticulated experiences of the many	consists largely of the articulated intelligence of the more educated few
Specialization	highly desirable	highly questionable
Motivation	incentives	dispositions
Process costs	crucial	incidental
Decision-making mechanism preferred	systemic processes that convey the experiences and revealed preferences of the many	deliberate plans that utilize the special talents and more advanced views of the few
Kinds of decisions preferred	incremental	categorical

“It is not merely that the engineer cannot perform surgery, the judge in his decisions cannot venture very far beyond his narrow expertise in the law without precipitating disasters when he attempts to become a social philosopher who can make law the instrument of some grander vision of the world....

“...Those with the vision of the anointed are particularly prone to think of their own philosophy as new, and therefore as adapted to contemporary society, but their framework of assumptions goes back at least two centuries—as does the framework of those with the tragic vision.

“Both visions also have internal consistency. Those who follow the assumptions of a particular vision as regards law tend also to follow the vision as regards economics....[Adam Smith said:] ‘mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent.’....As a contemporary writer has noted:

‘Liberalism in America and worldwide has great faith in modifying human behavior by adjusting ‘underlying social conditions’ to make people desire the right thing instead of the wrong thing. In its clearest form, this is the response to crime control by liberals, who are not much interested in tougher sentences, improved security devices, better-armed and equipped police, more escape-proof prisons—they seek to change society or the malefactors, so that people will not want to commit crime.’

“[To show how the assumptions behind the vision of the anointed go back centuries and is not radically new thinking, he quotes from William Godwin’s 1793 treatise, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* as standing for the proposition that] it is the failure of ‘society’ that

causes crime, with the criminal being the victim of circumstances. Much the same story can be found in other eighteenth-century figures such as Condorcet and Holbach.

“Similarly with war. The way for a country to avoid war, according to Godwin, is to behave with ‘inoffensiveness and neutrality’ toward other countries and to avoid the kind of ‘misunderstanding’ that leads to war. Nearly a century and a half later, this same theory was being expounded and put into practice by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain....* * *

“The tragic vision, in which incentives matter more than disposition, has looked on foreign policy and war in a wholly different way. No document represents the tragic vision of man more starkly than *The Federalist Papers*, where John Jay said, ‘nations in general will make war whenever they have a prospect of getting anything by it.’ Within the context of this vision, it was not preventing ‘misunderstandings’ but maintaining military deterrence that was crucial.(pp.104-109)

“DIFFERENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

“One of the most important questions about any proposed course of action is whether we know how to do it. Policy A may be better than policy B, but that does not matter if we simply do not know how to do policy A. Perhaps it would be better to rehabilitate criminals, rather than punish them, *if we knew how to do it*.... Those with the vision of the anointed are seldom deterred by any question as to whether anyone has the knowledge required to do what they are attempting.

“With these and innumerable other issues, the question for the anointed is not knowledge but compassion, commitment, and other such subjective factors which supposedly differentiate themselves from other people. The refrain of the anointed is *we already know the answers, there’s no need for more studies*, and the kinds of questions raised by those with other views are just *stalling* and obstructing progress. ‘Solutions’ are out there waiting to be found, like eggs at an Easter egg hunt. Intractable problems with painful trade-offs are simply not part of the vision of the anointed....[who normally play the] classic role of disdain[ing] the benighted—and dismissing the very possibility that the unintended ramifications of morally inspired decisions might make matters worse on net balance.

“...[The anointed’s] omniscience is implicitly assumed....Inherent constraints of circumstances or people are brushed aside, as are alternative policy approaches which offer no special role for the anointed. The burden of proof is not put on their vision, but on existing institutions....

“...the only problem [in the anointed’s minds] is political mobilization and social imagination....Nor [is] any time wasted worrying about the presumption of some people in preempting the decisions of others, these others’ decisions being treated as mere ‘impulses’ for the anointed to ‘organize’ and direct toward what the anointed define as ‘the right strategic points’....[T]he whole process [is] analogized to engineering problems....In short, not only is the external world to be redesigned, so are the people who are to inhabit it....The idea of creating the kind of people needed for a new society goes at least as far back as William Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* in 1793, where he spoke of ‘men as they may hereafter be made’ through a process of ‘the improvement of mankind’ which he thought would be ‘in the utmost degree simple.’ Two centuries later, the task appears less simple and such expressions as

‘brainwashing’ and reeducation’ camps have chilling overtones in the light of history, though that has not stopped indoctrination efforts in American schools and colleges, led by those who still have the vision of the anointed today.

“By contrast, those with the tragic vision have long questioned whether anyone—themselves included—knows enough to engage in sweeping social and political experiments. ‘We cannot change the Nature of things and of men,’ Edmund Burke said, ‘but must act upon them the best we can.’

“...A succinct summary of the tragic vision was given by historians Will and Ariel Durant:

‘Out of every hundred new ideas ninety-nine or more will probably be inferior to the traditional responses which they propose to replace. No one man, however brilliant or well-informed, can come in one lifetime to such fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or institutions of his society, for these are the wisdom of generations after centuries of experiment in the laboratory of history.’

“Severe limitations on the effectiveness of well-intentional notions were likewise seen by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who said, ‘to improve conditions of life and the race is the main thing—but how the devil can I tell whether I am not pulling it down more in some other place?’ Doing good on some problem right under one’s nose is not enough in a world of constrained options and systemic interactions, where the overlooked costs of immediate benevolence take their toll elsewhere. Holmes exemplified the tragic vision of life, based on a tragic vision of human limitations. He spoke disdainfully of... ‘our legislation to make other people better, ‘ and of attempts to ‘legislate bliss.’

“In the tragic vision, individual sufferings and social evils are inherent in the innate deficiencies of all human beings, whether these deficiencies are in knowledge, wisdom, morality, or courage. Moreover, the available resources are always inadequate to fulfill all the desires of all the people. Thus there are no ‘solutions’ in the tragic vision, but only trade-offs that still leave many desires unfulfilled and much unhappiness in the world. What is needed in this vision is a prudent sense of how to make the best trade-offs from the limited options available, and a realization that ‘unmet needs’ will necessarily remain—that attempting to fully meet these needs *seriatim* only deprives other people of other things, so that a society pursuing such a policy is like a dog chasing its tail. Given this vision, particular solutions to particular problems are far less important than having and maintaining the right processes for making trade-offs and correcting inevitable mistakes. To those with the tragic vision, the integrity of the processes is crucial....

“The vision of the anointed begins with entirely different premises. Here it is not the innate limitations of human beings, or the inherent limitations of resources, which create unhappiness but the fact that social institutions and social policies are not as wisely crafted as the anointed would have crafted them....[what is lacking] is will and power, not knowledge. But to those with the tragic vision, what is dangerous are will and power without knowledge....

“In their haste...the anointed have misconceived two basic issues. They seem to assume (1) that they have more knowledge than the average member of the benighted and (2) that this is the relevant comparison. The real comparison, however, is not between the knowledge

possessed by the average member of the educated elite versus the average member of the general public, but rather the *total* direct knowledge brought to bear through social processes (the competition of the marketplace, social sorting, etc.), involving millions of people, versus the secondhand knowledge of generalities possessed by a smaller elite group. Moreover, the existing generation's traditions and values distill the experience of other millions in times past....(pp.109-114)

“Moral Surrogacy

“...For the anointed, traditions are likely to be seen as the dead hand of the past, relics of a less enlightened age, and not as the distilled experience of millions who faced similar human vicissitudes before. Moreover, the applicability of past experience is further discounted in the vision of the anointed, because of the great changes that have taken place since ‘earlier and simpler times.’ Here the two visions clash again, for those with the tragic vision see no great changes in the fundamental intellectual or moral capacities of human beings....* * *

“To those with the tragic vision, barbarism is not some distant stage of evolution, but an ever-present threat when the civilizing institutions are weakened or undermined:

‘Civilization is not inherited; it has to be learned and earned by each generation anew; if the transmission should be interrupted for one century, civilization would die, and we should be savages again.’(Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*, p.101)

“SOCIAL CAUSATION

“...[The holders of the two respective visions] also have very different conceptions of cause and effect as it operates in social processes.

“In the vision of the anointed, it is the dispositions, wisdom, intentions, talents, will, and commitment of social decision makers which are crucial. In the tragic vision, where human knowledge and foresight are very limited *for all*, causation more often operates in systemic ways, with innumerable interactions producing results controlled by no given individual or group, but falling into a pattern determined by the incentives and constraints inherent in the logic of the circumstances, rather than as a consequence of specifically articulated, syllogistic rationality.***

“*No wise individual or council sat down and designed language—either as a general concept or as specific languages....*The richness, complexity, and subtleties of language have arisen systemically, from the experiences and interactions of millions of ordinary human beings, not from a top-down ‘plan’ formulated by some elite. From time to time, linguistic practices are codified or modified by intellectuals, but this is an incidental part of a vast drama.

“Systemic causation creates an order which arises as a consequence of individual interactions directed toward various and conflicting ends, not toward the creation of this order itself....The eighteenth-century school of French economists called the Physiocrats coined the term *laissez-faire* to express their view that ‘the natural order’ that would emerge in a market

economy was both discernible and more beneficial than attempts to control such complex interactions from the top....

Systemic causation takes many forms. Legal traditions, family ties, social customs, and price fluctuations in an economy are all systemic ways in which the experiences and preferences of millions of people powerfully influence the decisions of millions of other people. Where the tragic vision and the vision of the anointed differ most fundamentally is on the reality and validity of such systemic processes, which utilize the experiences of the many, rather than the articulated rationality of a talented few. Related to this difference is a sharp difference in the role of dispositions, intentions, or goals in the two visions.

“The very terms of discourse among those with the vision of the anointed have historically reflected their preoccupation with dispositions, intentions, goals, whether these were ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’ in the eighteenth century or ‘social justice,’ ‘compassion,’ or ‘women’s liberation’ today. By contrast, those with the tragic vision have emphasized process characteristics, often treating the dispositions, intentions, or goals of those operating within these processes as incidental or irrelevant. For example, although Adam Smith regarded the intentions of businessmen as selfish and anti-social, he saw the systemic consequences of their competition as being far more beneficial to society than well-intentioned government regulation.

[To contrast the two conceptions of causation, Sowell considers the issue of raising the minimum wage. A survey asks employers whether or not they intend to lay off people if the minimum wage rate is raised. The employers largely say they do not intend to fire anybody as a result. Those with the vision of the anointed would just focus on these expressed intentions and consider them to be proof that raising the minimum wage will not have any negative economic impacts. Those with the tragic vision on the other hand, would ignore statements about what the employers intended to do, but rather, would focus logically on how the market would likely respond under real-life constraints to such an increase despite any contrary intentions expressed beforehand by the employers. Instead of focusing on intentions, they focus on likely systemic interactions and reactions without having to wait for painful social confirmation.] “...possible adjustment paths include the following:

1. Capital could be substituted by labor *intentionally* by individual employers buying machinery and laying off workers.
2. Capital could be substituted for labor systemically by a loss of profits and market share by the more labor-intensive firms, which are more hard hit by the minimum wage increase than the capital-intensive firms are.
3. Higher-skilled and higher-priced labor could be substituted for lower-priced labor *intentionally* by individual employers.
4. Higher-skilled and higher-priced labor could be substituted for lower-priced labor *systemically* by the greater loss of business by those firms more heavily dependent on the lower-skilled labor whose costs have been increased.
5. Marginally profitable firms could be forced out of existence, reducing industry

employment, even without any reduction in employment by any of the surviving employers.

“The specific path of adjustment in the industry is less important than the fact that *the adjustment must be made* to higher labor costs without a corresponding increase in revenue from product sales....However, situation 5 has its pitfalls for those researchers who survey employers before and after a minimum wage increase....The fatal pitfall in survey research is that one can only survey survivors. As a distinguished economist pointed out at the time of this controversy, by using such research methods one can prove that no soldier was killed in World War II. (Pp.124-128)

“Incentives versus Dispositions

“If systemic causation is the dominant social force, that leaves much less of a role for the anointed, much less importance to the difference between their knowledge, wisdom, and virtue, on the one hand, and the knowledge, wisdom, and virtue of ordinary people, on the other. A downgrading of the importance of the special wisdom and virtue of any elite has been a feature of the tragic vision for centuries....

“This conclusion reflected in part a belief that the incentives facing decision makers had much more to do with the quality of their decisions than differences in ability and virtue among them. It also suggested that these latter differences were exaggerated....

‘Compared with the totality of knowledge which is continually utilized in the evolution of a dynamic civilization, the difference between the knowledge that the wisest and that which the most ignorant individual can deliberately employ is comparatively insignificant.’ (F.A. Hayek)

“....The importance of the anointed’s ‘compassion’ or commitment to ‘social justice’ is similarly reduced in a world where intentions are incidental and results depend much more on the kinds of social processes at work—and the incentives generated by such processes.

“...the anointed seldom consider the nature of the *process* by which decisions are made. Often what they propose amounts to third-party decision making by people who pay no cost for being wrong—surely one of the least promising ways of reaching decisions satisfactory to those who must live with the consequences....Government actions to enforce these third-party preemptions are often advocated in the form of bureaucracies to replace the systemic processes of the marketplace. * * *

“‘Hard cases make bad law’ is another way the tragic vision has been expressed. To help some hard-pressed individual or group whose case is before them, judges may bend the law to arrive at a more benign verdict in that particular case—but at the cost of damaging the whole consistency and predictability of the law, on which millions of other people depend, and on which ultimately the freedom and safety of a whole society depend. There cannot be a law-abiding society if no one knows in advance what law they are to abide by, but must wait for judges to create *ex post facto* legal rulings based on ‘evolving standards’ rather than known rules. An expanding penumbra of uncertainty surrounding laws creates incentives for a growing volume of litigation, as well as for a blackmailing of law-abiding individuals and organizations

into out-of-court settlements because they cannot be sure how some speculative charge against them will be viewed by judges operating under ‘evolving standards.’

“In a system of human interactions, the incentives generated by those systems—whether economic systems or legal systems, for example—are crucial to those with the tragic vision....[By contrast, those with the vision of the anointed] tend to rely on creating favorable dispositions....[For example, they] often advocate the settlement of international differences through ‘diplomacy’ and ‘negotiations,’ rather than by ‘force’—as if diplomacy and negotiation were not dependent on a surrounding set of incentives, of which the credible threat of military force is crucial. Yet unilateral military cutbacks have often been advocated by those who favor diplomacy and negotiation. Indeed, such policies were not only advocated but followed by Western democracies for a dangerously long time during the period leading up to the outbreak of World War II.

“...personal ties within families, within communities, or among citizens of a given nation....have been treated as precious sources of motivation and cohesion by those with the tragic vision, who see such ties as countering the inherent selfishness of individuals. Yet these same ties have aroused less enthusiasm, often suspicion, and sometimes even disdain or hostility by those with the vision of the anointed, to whom such particularistic ties are seen as obstacles to broader social interests or to being a ‘citizen of the world.’ Once again, these different conclusions go back to underlying differences in the way the world is conceived and corresponding differences in what ranges of options are assumed to be available....

“...those with the vision of the anointed tend automatically to attribute statistical differences between groups to intentional reasons (discrimination) or to dispositional reasons (racism, sexism), with seldom a serious thought about systemic reasons, such as age differences, cultural differences, or differences associated with childbearing and homemaking....

“Nowhere does the difference between systemic causation and intentional causation show up more dramatically than in discussions of racial issues. With such negative phenomena as racism, as with such positive phenomena as compassion, *systemic* causation does not depend simply on whether these dispositions exist but on the situational incentives and constraints within which they exist. An owner of a professional basketball team and an owner of a symphony orchestra may be equally racist, but it would be financially suicidal for the former to refuse to hire black basketball players, while the relatively few black symphonic musicians could be denied jobs with much less effect on the overall quality of a symphony orchestra or its financial viability....

“In contrast to the vision of the anointed, systemic causation says that there are often underlying and quite rational reasons for decisions, even if the expression of those reasons are neither obvious nor well articulated. In short, *there is an underlying reality* reflected through systemic processes, however imperfectly. It is not simply a matter of subjective disposition. This reasoning can be taken a step further: A fundamental reality is not vitiated by the fact that different human beings see it differently, even if some respond irrationally.

“For example, in nineteenth-century Japan, the fundamental reality was that the Japanese were technologically far behind the Western industrial nations—and that this had enormous implications for [their own national security and way of life. One irrational response was to think of themselves as physically and mentally inferior to the people of the west. Some called

for intermarriage with western women in order to improve the Japanese stock. The more rational response was to believe there was no such natural inferiority and to change their economic, scientific and technological posture in order to catch up with the west. The later approach won out. Regardless of how rational or irrational the proposed responses, they did not change the fundamental reality that Japan was far behind the west technologically....]

“Systemic causation does not presuppose perfect rationality on the part of human beings....

“...The point is to illustrate the difference between seeking systemic explanations of social phenomena and presupposing that subjective dispositions provide a sufficient causal explanation. A spectrum of subjective responses to any situation is virtually inevitable and these responses will almost invariably include both wise and foolish reactions, as well as reactions well articulated and clumsily expressed. Nothing would be easier, *on any issue*, than to seize upon foolish, malign, or confused statements or actions, in order to present a social problem as due to subjective dispositions which differ from the superior dispositions of the anointed. But, if causation is seen as systemic rather than dispositional, then the task is to discover the underlying reality behind the varied subjective expressions. Perceptions are like mirrors which reflect the real world with varying degrees of distortion, but proving distortion does not disprove the existence of a reality which cannot be talked away. (pp.128-135)

“Trade-offs versus ‘Solutions’

“Perhaps the most fundamental difference between those with the tragic vision and those with the vision of the anointed is that the former see policy-making in terms of trade-offs and the latter in terms of ‘solutions.’ This is not merely a difference in words or in optimism, but a difference in procedures. To those with the vision of the anointed, the question is: What will remove particular negative features in the existing situation to create a solution? Those with the tragic vision ask: What must be sacrificed to achieve this particular improvement?...’The relevant question is whether there is a cure for the condition...which will not have consequences that are worse than the initial condition.’(economist, Herbert Stein)* * *

“No one denies the existence of constraints, though the vision of the anointed does not incorporate these constraints as a central feature and ever-present ingredient in its thinking while the tragic vision does. To those with the vision of the anointed, it is simply a question of choosing the best solution, while to those with the tragic vision the more fundamental question is: *Who* is to choose? And by what process, and with what consequences for being wrong?...it is easy to be wrong—and to persist in being wrong—when the costs of being wrong are paid by others.* * *

“A simple example may illustrate concretely the difference between seeking a solution and seeking a trade-off. When a baby was killed in a tragic airplane crash in 1989 by being ripped out of its mother’s arms by the force of the impact and being sent hurtling through the cabin, a political ‘solution’ was proposed by having a federal law requiring babies to be strapped into their own seats on airplanes. But a study by economists indicated that such a law, requiring parents to purchase [a ticket for] an extra seat, would divert a portion of the traffic to cheaper alternative modes of transportation on the ground—most of which have higher mortality rates than

airplanes. Over a period of a decade, there would be an estimated saving of one baby's life in airplane crashes, a loss of nine lives in alternative ground transportation, and an additional cost of \$3 billion.

"Few people would regard this as a reasonable trade-off. But it is only by analyzing the issue *as a trade-off* that we avoid the dangerous and deceptive appearances of a 'solution.'

"....Nothing is easier than to increase safety in some arbitrarily defined sector in some arbitrarily chosen way, in disregard of what this does to safety elsewhere and in other ways....

"More generally, political attempts to 'solve' various 'problems' *seriatim* ignore the costs created by each 'solution' and how that exacerbates other problems....

"Much of political rhetoric is concerned with presenting issues as isolated problems to be solved—not as trade-offs within an overall system constrained by inherent limitations of resources, knowledge, etc. The issue is posed as one of providing 'affordable housing,' 'decent jobs,' 'adequate health care,' and the like. The cost problem is often waved aside by some such general statement as, 'Surely a country that can put a man on the moon...' or fight a war in the Persian Gulf, or build a nationwide highway system, etc., can afford to do whatever is proposed. From a trade-off perspective, however, all these expensive activities of the past are reasons why we have *less* to spend on other things, not reasons why we can spend more....

"What can be afforded *seriatim* vastly exceeds what can be afforded simultaneously. Simple and obvious as this should be, it is often ignored in denunciations of government inaction on various festering social problems or 'unmet needs.' But even an ideal set of trade-offs must – and should – leave a whole spectrum of unmet needs, because the cost of wiping out the last vestige of any problem is leaving other problems in more dire condition. In short, trade-offs must be incremental rather than categorical, if limited resources are to produce optimal results in any social system as a whole.

"Despite the importance of incremental trade-offs, the language of politics is filled with categorical rhetoric about 'setting *priorities*,' 'providing basic *necessities*,' or 'assuring *safety*' in foods, medicines, or nuclear power. But incremental decisions differ as much from categorical decisions as trade-offs differ from solutions. If faced with a categorical choice between food and music, every sane person would choose food, since one can live without music but not without food. But if faced with an incremental choice, the decision could easily be just the opposite. If food were *categorically* more important than music, then we would never reach a point where we were prepared to sacrifice resources that could be used to produce food, in order to produce music. Given this premise, Beethoven, Brahms, and Back should all have been put to work growing potatoes, instead of writing music, if food were categorically more important.

"A world where food had a categorical priority over music would be a world of 300-pound people, whose brief lives would never be brightened by a song or a melody. The fact that no one would advocate such an absurd and disastrous outcome, in such an obvious case, does not mean that people will not advocate equally absurd and disastrous outcomes in more complicated cases, where the connections are harder to follow and where the categorical language...is set in the concrete of law or public policy—and where the consequences are either left unmonitored or are monitored by agencies with a vested interest in the continuation of the laws and policies which justify their own existence, money, and power.

"Put differently, many a sound and beneficial principle becomes a dangerous absurdity,

when it becomes a fetish....Laws tend to be categorical, as do court determinations of what is and is not ‘unconstitutional.’ That is fine when the law prohibits murder or kidnaping, for example, since virtually everyone is against these things in virtually all cases. But when laws and court decisions become the chosen instruments of social trade-offs, then it is not enough to examine the good intentions or even the sound principles behind the policies chosen, without examining also the effect of pursuing those policies through a categorical process....

“Looked at more broadly, the pursuit of safety in disregard of costs means a degree of sacrifice of economic prosperity—and economic prosperity is itself one of the key factors in longevity. More prosperous individuals, classes, and nations tend to have lower death rates around the world, simply because of their greater ability to guard against diseases and against such natural disasters as earthquakes and floods....Flood conditions can be detected sooner and evacuations begun and carried out more quickly where there are ample resources to produce all the cars, planes, and other vehicles needed to move huge numbers of people out of danger. All these things are made possible by the material wealth which is often treated so disdainfully by those promoting ‘safety.’ But to kill the goose that lays the golden egg is, in effect, to kill people.

“None of this means that safety laws and policies must be rejected categorically. On the contrary, it means that such laws and policies must be either accepted or rejected *incrementally*, in the light of what is being sacrificed in the specific instance. But that in turn means that the incremental trade-off must be made through institutions and processes capable of such incremental decision making, as courts of law or government bureaucracies seldom are. For example, if the costs of smokestack emissions must be paid in emissions fees or fines by those who own the smokestack, then their incentives will be to reduce those emissions in the most efficient way possible—to the point where the cost of further reductions would exceed the fees or fines. This is likewise the optimum trade-off for society, which gains nothing by further reductions at costs exceeding the damage done by the remaining emissions.

To eliminate another thousand dollars’ worth of emissions at a cost of a million dollars is to make the society \$999,000 worse off. Yet this can easily happen when laws, regulations, or court rulings categorically force cutbacks in emissions in some arbitrarily specified way to some arbitrarily specified level of ‘safety’....Were the same goal being pursued incrementally through market processes, not only would polluters have incentives to reduce their pollutions in the most efficient way, but others would also have an incentive to keep trying to find still better ways to do so. But, once official categorical edicts have specified a particular way of reducing emissions, there is less incentive for others to find alternative technologies for accomplishing the same purposes, when the costs and uncertainties of gaining official acceptance for the new technology reduce its prospective profitability.

“In many other ways as well, market economies often find it easier to decide issues incrementally. When an insurance company, for example, seeks additional customers for its fire insurance, it must determine incrementally how much risk it is prepared to accept in order to get the additional business and how much it must condition its insurance policies on certain actions by the customer, in order to reduce the risks of an outbreak of fire. Make the conditions too stringent and another insurance company gets the customer; make them too lenient and losses from fires will exceed the premiums paid by the additional customers. But when a government

agency attempts to insure against various disasters, either directly or by providing ‘disaster relief’ after the fact, it seldom weighs such considerations incrementally or imposes constraints on the creation of risks. Instead, dangerous locations or behavior are subsidized at taxpayer expense, and the media often applaud the ‘courage’ of those who choose to continue to live in harm’s way in areas prone to flooding, hurricanes, fire, or other natural hazards.

“...limitations of human knowledge are among the most severe constraints [–not only must we be able to foresee the various trade-offs involved, we must also weigh the varying probabilities involved]...To say that pesticides, nuclear power, medicines, automobiles, or other things must be ‘safe’—either absolutely (which is impossible) or within some specified level of risk—is to say that only one set of probabilities will be weighed. Put differently, to minimize the overall dangers to human life and health is to accept specific, preventable dangers, rather than follow policies which would create worse preventable dangers. The issue thus is not whether nuclear power is ‘safe’ but whether its dangers are greater or less than the dangers of supplying the same power from coal, oil, hydroelectric dams, or other ways of generating electricity, or the dangers in reducing the availability of electricity. Fewer or dimmer lights are almost certain to increase both accidents and crime, for example, and brownouts and blackouts create other dangers when people get trapped in elevators or fire alarm systems no longer function.

“To say that particular dangers on one end of a spectrum are intolerable, either absolutely or beyond some specified risk level, is to say that alternative dangers on the other end of the spectrum are acceptable in whatever open-ended ways they work out. People die when life-saving medicines are kept out of the United States because those medicines have not met the specified safety standards of the Food and Drug Administration. Laws to protect orphans from being adopted into unfit homes condemn more orphans to institutional care...Banning police use of certain forceful methods of subduing people resisting arrest will indeed lead to a reduction in the number of people injured or killed while being taken into custody—at the cost of an increase in the number of policemen injured or killed in those confrontations. There are no solutions; there are only trade-offs.

The language of politics, and especially of ideological politics, is often categorical language about ‘rights,’ about *eliminating* certain evils, *guaranteeing* certain benefits, or *protecting* certain habitats and species. In short, it is the language of solutions...Indirectly...this language says that the preferences of the anointed are to supersede the preferences of everyone else—that the particular dangers they fear are to be avoided at all costs and the particular benefits they seek are to be obtained at all costs....(pp.135-142)

Chapter 6: CRUSADES OF THE ANOINTED

“[Mascots for causes serve a symbolic function.] A mascot’s own well-being is not so crucial as its role in enabling others to ‘make a statement.’

“*Safety Crusades*

“...[Safety] issues lend themselves to the rhetoric of ‘solutions’ rather than trade-offs, and

to categorical statements, such as: ‘Not one human life should be sacrificed for the sake of profits,’ thereby establishing the moral superiority of the anointed over the benighted. On the surface, where most political battles are fought, those opposed to the policies or legislation for greater safety seem to have an impossible task. It is only when these issues are examined more closely, within a framework of constrained options, that the heedless proliferation of safety rules can be seen as counterproductive—which is to say, dangerous. People are dying from such ‘safety.’

[He uses the lengthy amount of time it takes to get drugs approved by our Food and Drug Administration as an example. People die waiting for approval.] “The underlying problem with this approach is that it seeks a categorical ‘solution’ in some arbitrarily specified level of drug safety, rather than a trade-off between the dangers of the drug and the dangers of not using the drug....beyond some point, the residual increment of safety...is outweighed by the lives that continue to be lost through delay. Safety can be fatal.

“...The banning of DDT was followed by a resurgence in malaria, a fatal disease to many. Even a small country like Ceylon had 2.8 million people infected with malaria in 1948, before DDT was used. This fell to less than a hundred cases by 1962, after large-scale DDT programs were instituted—and rose again to 2.5 million cases by 1969 after DDT was banned...More than 3 million Americans are vaccinated against whooping cough annually, preventing an estimated 300,000 cases of the disease, including an estimated 400 fatal cases. Yet this same vaccine is also responsible for an estimated 30 cases of brain damage annually. Clearly there is no ‘solution’ in such situations but only trade-offs....

“MASCOTS OF THE ANOINTED

“The ideals of ‘a government of laws and not of men’ and ‘equal protection of the law’ are at the heart of American constitutional law and the democratic process. Yet, increasingly, government has come to be seen as a way of benefiting particular groups adopted as mascots, often without much regard for what that does to other groups or to the integrity of the system as a whole....

“Even for judges, where impartiality has been the treasured ideal for centuries, this arbitrary singling out of beneficiaries has been held up as a new ideal. During Judge David H. Souter’s confirmation hearings to become a Supreme Court justice, a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee urged him to be a ‘champion’ of ‘the less fortunate,’ declaring this to be ‘the role assigned to the Court in our system’....An umpire cannot become a ‘champion’ of pitchers, except at the expense of batters and vice versa—and in either case at the expense of the integrity of the game....(pp.149-150)

“*Vagrants or ‘the Homeless’*”

“...During the 1980s, a number of homeless people began coming into [a] library in the small town of Morristown, New Jersey, disturbing both the other library users and the staff by their behavior and their body odors. Richard F. Kreimer in particular often exhibited offensive

and disruptive behavior, including talking loudly to himself and to others and, on at least one occasion, was so belligerent toward a librarian as to cause her to call the police. Some librarians resigned rather than put up with it.

“Theft of property, smoking, and using drugs and alcohol were just some of the homeless people’s activities complained of by the library officials. On May 16, 1989, a notice was posted, limiting the use of the library to persons ‘engaged in normal activities associated with the use of a public library’ and specifically banning people who ‘annoy others’ in various ways and whose ‘personal hygiene’ was not acceptable. This policy was challenged in court by Kreimer, with the aid of the American Civil Liberties Union and others who literally made this a federal case—one costing the town more than a quarter of a million dollars in legal fees.

“Federal District Court Judge H. Lee Sarokin ruled in favor of Kreimer. [He declared the library a public forum covered by the 1st Amendment]...Judge Sarokin declared the library policy ‘vague’ and brushed aside the claim that Kreimer and others were annoying other people;”Conduct that annoys some people does not annoy others.’ Moreover, a hygiene test has ‘a disparate impact on the poor’....

“In a classic expression of the vision of the anointed, Judge Sarokin lectured the community on its attitude toward the homeless: ‘If we wish to shield our eyes and noses from the homeless, we should revoke their conditions, not their library cards.’ In other words, it is society’s fault that people end up like Richard Kreimer—and it is within society’s capability to change their conditions. In reality, Kreimer was born into a middle-class family and inherited with his brother an estate worth \$340,000. What society was supposed to do to prevent Kreimer—an able-bodied white male—from becoming a bum was unspecified. Yet other people’s legal rights were to be disregarded or held hostage pending the carrying out of Judge Sarokin’s social vision.

“Just as Kreimer was treated as a mascot, so the other library users were treated as expendable, and the law-abiding and taxpaying citizens of the town were treated as targets. In addition to [the quarter million dollars in defense costs incurred, the town settled out with Kreimer for \$150,000.]....

“Here, as elsewhere, the anointed show what Jean-Francois Revel has called ‘a pitiless ferocity toward some’ and ‘a boundless indulgence toward others’....in order to engage in moral preening....The thesis that the homeless are ‘people just like us’ who happen to have fallen victim to misfortune has been repeated endlessly in the media and the television camera has often presented as typical what is most atypical among the homeless: normal, intact families forced into homelessness by some unexpected injury, plant shutdown, or other unavoidable catastrophe. Politicians promoting various programs to solve the homeless problem likewise have a vested interest in presenting the atypical as typical, in an effort to gather political support behind their programs....

“Despite such image-making, a substantial component of the homeless are mentally ill people, often either biologically so or made so by drugs and alcohol. An estimated one-third of the homeless fall into the mentally ill category and another third into the category of alcohol and drug abusers. All have been adopted as mascots of the anointed, though in different ways. For example, lawyer-activists have made it increasingly difficult and costly to confine the mentally ill to institutions, rather than let them roam the streets. Costly lawsuits and the threat of large

damage awards add to the incentives for local officials to discharge the mentally ill from hospitals.

“The premise behind all this is that ‘society’ is to blame for the things it chooses to call mental illness....* * *

“Incidentally, Judge H. Lee Sarokin was elevated to the Circuit Court of Appeals by President Clinton in 1994. (pp.150-153)

“Disease Carriers

[He discussed the *Arline* case concerning the school teacher with tuberculosis which was discussed in your earlier readings. Then he continues...]

“Homosexual activists greeted this Supreme Court decision with approval, because of its possible implications for those with AIDS....

“Judges, by and large, have adopted this same vision of the anointed in dealing with cases involving AIDS. While public health officials have for decades traced the sources of other infectious diseases to those individuals who were carrying such diseases and spreading them, tracing AIDS to its sources has been declared a violation of federal laws protecting the ‘handicapped.’ A jail inmate with AIDS who was kept separated from other prisoners was awarded \$155,000 in damages. A three-judge panel ruled that the Department of Health and Human Services could cut off \$107 million in federal funds to a medical center which merely restricted the duties of a pharmacist with AIDS. In courtrooms as elsewhere, AIDS carriers have become mascots of the anointed...[in fact, they] are treated as the most sacred of the mascots.

“In contrast to the identification, and sometimes even quarantine, of people infected with other deadly and contagious diseases, AIDS carriers have been guaranteed anonymity by both law and policy as they mingle with unsuspecting members of the general public. From the beginning, various medical and other public officials have been preoccupied with reassuring the public on how they *cannot* get AIDS. As late as 1983, people were being reassured that their chances of catching AIDS from transfusions of untested blood were ‘extremely remote.’ Secretary of Health and Human Services Margaret Heckler went on nationwide television on July 3, 1983, to ‘assure the American people that the blood supply is 100% safe’ ...but just two years after that....[m]ore than half of the nation’s 20,000 hemophiliacs were infected with the AIDS virus....

“The problem was not simply with what medical authorities did not know at the time but with what they presumed to know and to proclaim to the benighted—to those who, in Secretary Heckler’s words, had ‘irrational fears’ and ‘unwarranted panic.’ [According to U.S. News and World Report, it turns out that whereas the Red Cross and others] ‘put the risk of getting AIDS from a transfusion at about 1 in a million. In fact, it was at least 1 in 660—and up to 1 in 25 in high-exposure cities like San Francisco.’]

“....It was at one time triumphantly proclaimed that no health-care worker had ever contract AIDS from patients, but by September 1985 there were the first of many cases of nurses, lab workers, and others who caught the disease from AIDS patients and by 1991 there were cases of patients who caught AIDS from a dentist....

“Precautions to protect the public from AIDS carriers have repeatedly been *backed into* only after new revelations devastated previous reassurances....Instead of erring on the side of caution in defense of the public, as with previous deadly and infectious diseases, ‘responsible’ officials approached the spread of AIDS by making the protection of the AIDS carrier from the public paramount. One political reason has been fear of offending the organized, zealous, single-issue homosexual organizations and their allies in the media, in the American Civil Liberties Union, and in other liberal bastions. But this only raises the further question as to why the interest of carriers of a deadly, incurable, and contagious disease should be regarded in such circles as preemptive over the rights of hundreds of millions of other people....

“One of the arguments for maintaining the anonymity of AIDS carriers is that otherwise they will be ‘driven underground’ and become more dangerous. But anonymity laws make them ‘underground’ to begin with....One rationale has been that the ‘counseling’ received by AIDS carriers as part of their treatment will make these carriers more careful not to spread their disease to other people. This view, expressed by the *New York Times* among others, would certainly be in keeping with the vision of the anointed, as contrasted with relying on incentives, as in the tragic vision. Since the AIDS carriers are already fatally infected, the only incentives likely to be effective are those operating on the healthy population, who have every incentive to safeguard their own health—if the anointed do not prevent them from doing so.

“Some indication of how much havoc can be wreaked by just one person with AIDS who does not choose to respond to ‘counseling’ can be illustrated by the case of a homosexual airline steward who flew around the country infecting others with AIDS in gay bathhouses. As of 1982, at least 40 of the first 248 homosexual men found to have AIDS had either had sex with this steward or with someone else who had. He lived for two more years, with an active sex life, despite knowing that he was infected with AIDS and despite entreaties, warnings, and even threats. After having sex in the dim lights of a gay bathhouse, he would turn up the lights to show his partner the lesions on his skin and say: ‘I’ve got gay cancer. I’m going to die and so are you.’ Although medical authorities in both the United States and Canada knew who he was and what he was doing, they were legally prohibited from warning anyone.

“Other AIDS carriers also continued to have sex and some have deliberately bitten prison guards, or policemen trying to arrest them, in order to infect them. Once infected, the incentives to stop were zero, except for those with consciences....

“Many of the same people who spread alarm over remote possibilities of dangers from pesticides or nuclear energy are among those most willing to accept dangers from AIDS carriers. Mascots are treated differently from targets. (pp.162-67)

“TARGETS OF THE ANOINTED

“ Just as groups disdained by others become eligible to be mascots of the anointed, so groups respected by others are eligible to become targets. These include business people, physicians, and other professionals, members of religious communities, policemen, and others whose social roles or financial success engender respect or influence in the society at large. Just as the law is stretched and strained for the benefit of mascots, so it is stretched and strained to the detriment of targets. (p.168)

“Families

“The family is inherently an obstacle to schemes for central control of social processes. Therefore the anointed necessarily find themselves repeatedly on a collision course with the family....

“...[T]he incidence of various problems in families is overstated by artful definitions and half-truths. For example, alarmist stories in the media about domestic violence often lump together husbands and boyfriends as ‘partners’ who batter women, when in fact a woman who heads her own household is nearly three times as likely to be beaten as a wife is. Separated, divorced, and never-married women are all more likely to be beaten than a wife is. In other words, the traditional family is the safest setting for a woman—though that is, of course, not the message which the anointed seek to convey.

“Because neither the traditional family nor any other setting is *perfectly* safe, there will always be examples of ‘battered wives,’ just as there are battered husbands, battered bachelors, and battered women in lesbian relations, among others. But the rate of violence among lesbians living together—about the same as in heterosexual relationships—is of no interest to those seeking to depict male-female relationships as violence-prone. In fact, men tend to assault one another more often than they assault women.... Given that all categories of human beings are both victims and perpetrators of violence, the question is not whether anyone can be absolutely safe from assault but who is more likely or less likely to be victimized. The least likely of all victims is a wife. Men and single women are assaulted more often. Yet the impression spread by those with the vision of the anointed is just the opposite....

“...Empirical studies which distinguish serious violence from merely grabbing or pushing come up with figures less than a tenth of those widely quoted in the media. Not only is the total amount of family violence exaggerated, its sources and incidents are falsely attributed to the least violent social setting, the traditional family. It is the setting of unmarried sex partners—the ‘nontraditional family,’ as the anointed put it—that is especially violent....

“Among the family decisions which various political crusades are attempting to transfer to third parties are:

1. At what age, in what manner, and with what moral principles sex is to be taught to children.
2. What general moral and social philosophy shall be taught to children.
3. Whether adoption should include a pledge of confidentiality...
4. Whether a child of another race may be adopted.
5. Whether a child shall have an abortion.
6. Whether an agreement can be made for surrogate motherhood.
7. Whether... ‘palimony’ [should apply when non-marital unions break up.]

“...[V]arious so-called ‘children’s advocates’ in the United States have urged third-party intervention in families under the rubric of ‘children’s rights’....

“The pervasive preference of the anointed for collective and third-party decision making (‘solutions’ by ‘society’) takes the form of promotion of ‘day care’ for children. Enabling

families to take care of their own children at home by allowing the income tax exemption to keep pace with inflation and the real cost of raising children has no such support among the anointed....While the anointed are often ready to spend vast amounts of government money on families, especially in ways which allow outsiders to intrude into family decisions, they are by no means equally willing to let families keep money that they have earned and make their own independent decisions. In family matters, as in other matters, power and preemption are the touchstones of the vision of the anointed, however much that vision is described in terms of the beneficent goals it is seeking.

“Despite the faith of the anointed in ‘expertise’ and ‘professionals’ in the raising of children, the facts paint a grim picture of the actual results of transferring children from individual home care to collective day care. [Studies show a higher incidence of disease and psychological problems regarding children in day-care.]...

“Children may be removed from the parental home on the basis of anonymous accusations alone—even when both the children and the parents deny the accusations. Moreover, the protections afforded criminals are not afforded parents....

“A Virginia couple, for example, came home one Friday afternoon to find their 10-year-old son missing and a note ordering them to appear in court the next Monday morning....The son himself spent the weekend in a foster home, forbidden to phone his parents. All this was triggered by a phone call by a neighbor who did not think that a 10-year-old boy should have been left alone at home during the day while his parents worked. The problem, however was not the busybody neighbor but the fact that the law was armed with extraordinary powers—far beyond what could be exercised against criminals, who are mascots of the anointed, while families are targets.

“Within the general framework of such extraordinary powers, zealots ready to believe the worst of fathers can plant ideas in young children’s minds, with disastrous consequences. When an 8-year-old girl in San Diego was sexually assaulted and stated that it was done by a man who climbed into her bedroom window, the social workers dismissed her story, named her father as the primary suspect, and removed the child from her home. After more than a year in foster custody and in therapy, the girl changed her story and named her father as the attacker. Yet the DNA evidence indicated that it could not possibly have been her father and in fact the DNA matched that of a convicted child molester who entered the bedroom window of another child in the same neighborhood within days of the assault on this girl. But once the authorities had committed themselves to a different scenario, and had taken drastic action in response to their belief, admitting to being wrong was virtually out of the question. Only after a grand jury investigation was the child returned to her parents—after more than a year away and after the father had paid out more than a quarter of a million dollars in attorney’s fees during the legal struggle to regain custody of his daughter. Moreover, the grand jury noted in its report that this was *not* an isolated situation, either in San Diego or in the country at large, that social workers in such situations had ‘nearly unlimited power’ and that the social welfare agency involved seemed ‘incapable’ of policing itself.’ Studies on the suggestibility of small children indicate that they can be induced to change their stories, even in a laboratory setting, much less after they find themselves inexplicably snatched from their homes, helpless in the hands of strangers, and held incommunicado from their parents for months while various authorities obviously want them to

make accusations.

“Some have defended the unusual powers granted to police and social welfare agencies in child abuse cases by saying that if just one child’s life is saved, it is worth it. However, many of the anointed take no such position when an animal on the endangered species list kills a child. On the contrary, the first response is usually to denounce public ‘hysteria’ over the killing....(pp.172-77)

“FEASIBILITY

“Another common characteristic of the vocabulary of the anointed is that it puts off-limits the question as to whether what is proposed is in fact achievable: Result A may be preferable to result B, but the latter may be a better objective if result A cannot be reached....

“Paradoxically, while feasibility is seldom addressed when proposing public policy, severe limitations on what is feasible by others are often assumed by those with the vision of the anointed and pushed to the point of determinism, with a corresponding denial of personal responsibility. Since the bottom line of the prevailing vision is that the anointed are moral surrogates to make decisions for other people, those other people must be seen as incapable of making the right decisions for themselves. The concept of personal responsibility is thus anathema to this vision and the vocabulary of the anointed reflects this. For example, a story on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* was headlined ‘A Deck Stacked Against the Young’ even though the specifics of this supposedly stacked deck included:

Skills: Dubious

Education: Over, without a diploma

Job prospects: Nil, save for minimum wage

“In other words, this ‘stacked deck’ consisted of the fact that some youths had not chosen to learn in school or to acquire skills at work, and thought that they should be paid according to the needs of their egos rather than the productivity of their labor.

“Another feature of the prevailing vision is that the anointed must try to change the fundamental character of their fellow human beings, to make them more like themselves. Thus phrases about ‘raising the consciousness’ of others, making them ‘aware,’ or hoping that they will ‘grow’....

“...[T]o say that a particular plan or policy is contrary to human nature as we know it is only to say that human nature must be changed. Thus the vocabulary of the anointed is replete with such terms as ‘sensitizing,’ ‘enlightening,’ or ‘reeducating’ other people.

“Given the assumption of a vast intellectual and moral gulf between the anointed and the benighted, the role of ‘thinking people’ in general and ‘experts’ in particular is decisive. This requires many decisions to be collectivized and those collectivized decisions to be made by surrogates. All sorts of collective ‘planning,’ from a national energy policy to imposed school busing, national ‘public service’ requirements for young people, environmental regulations, and outright socialism fit this pattern. All have been viewed sympathetically by those with the vision of the anointed.

[The anointed talk in terms of goals they propose to achieve.] “One of the verbal contrasts

between the tragic vision and the vision of the anointed is that the former tends to describe its goals in terms of the processes involved—‘free markets,’ ‘judicial restraint,’ or ‘traditional values,’ for example—which seldom have the emotional impact of statements about ideals and goals.

“There is nothing obviously or intrinsically desirable about most of the things espoused by those with the tragic vision. It is only after understanding the reasoning which causes those particular processes to be favored over others that the merits and demerits of these systemic processes can be meaningfully discussed. But anyone can be in favor of ‘social justice’ without further ado. In short, the ideas of so-called ‘thinking people’ often require much less thinking. Indeed, the less thinking there is about definitions, means, and consequences, the more attractive ‘social justice’ seems.

“Advocacy in terms of goals rather than processes is only one of the verbal advantages of those with the vision of the anointed. Another is adoption of a cosmic viewpoint from which to discuss moral issues—a viewpoint which spawns a whole galaxy of buzzwords. Finally, there is simple verbal inflation, as useful as monetary inflation for defrauding people without their being fully aware of what is going on.(pp.189-191)

“THE COSMIC VIEWPOINT

“Many of the ideas and approaches of the anointed make sense only when looking at the world through the eyes of god or from the viewpoint of the cosmos....However, if one is nowhere close to being either God or the cosmos, the question becomes: Now that criminals are what they are, for whatever reasons, how are we to deal with them and protect all the other people?....What we would do if we were omniscient, or could turn back the clock, is irrelevant to choices confronting us within the unyielding constraints of the present and our constrained present knowledge of the past and future.

“We shoot mad dogs not only because they are dangerous but also because we do not know how to capture them safely and render them harmless. Surely it would be unconscionable to shoot them if we did. But we shoot them because of our own limitations, as much as because of their dangerousness. Such are the constrained options of the tragic vision. To assume the more sweeping options of the vision of the anointed is more humane only in intention, risking in practice the needless sacrifice of more human lives if our presumptions prove to be unfounded.

“The cosmic viewpoint affects all sorts of issues involving ‘fairness’....This emphasis on fairness as between criminals ignores the larger fairness as between criminals and their victims. It also assumes that someone has the omniscience to equalize preexisting advantages—and that making such adjustments of the cosmos is an activity to be imposed on an already overburdened and faltering legal system, unable to carry out its more modest function of protecting law-abiding citizens from criminals. Again, this was not the idiosyncrasy of one man. The Supreme Court in its landmark *Miranda* decision likewise argued that to fail to give everyone the same information already possessed by the more sophisticated would be to ‘take advantage of the poor, the ignorant, and the distracted. Note what this *taking advantage* consists of: a failure to provide greater means of escaping punishment for crimes committed by criminals who fall below the

state of the art in criminal evasions of the law.

“Once launched on this line of thinking, however, there is no real reason why the courts should not equalize other preexisting advantages, such as the fact that some criminals can run faster than others, think quicker, or possess other talents to help them evade capture or punishment. All of these things are equally unfair from a cosmic perspective. But for the law to be engaged in equalizing criminals’ ability to escape the law is to abandon the reason for criminal sanctions in the first place and substitute a cosmic crusade.

“The cosmic viewpoint takes many forms, whether in the law or elsewhere. One is the desire to equalize ‘life chances’ among individuals born into different classes, races, sexes, and other groups....[D]ifferences in life chances are among the many imperfections of life whose remedy is not even conceivable, short of the cosmic viewpoint.

“At a minimum, public policy to equalize life chances would have to either divorce reward from performance or create equality of performance by early and comprehensive intervention in the raising of children, for all practical purposes destroying the family as a decision-making unit. How long parents would continue to regard children who are creatures of the state as being their own is another question. Even so, it is problematical how far the state could eliminate the influence of parents on their children’s life chances, short of removing children from their homes.

“....It is hard even to imagine how the state could offset these differences short of, for example, having someone stationed in the home to turn off the television set until all the children from noneducationally inclined groups had done as much reading and homework as the children from groups whose commitment to education goes back generations or even centuries. Alternatively, they could station someone in the homes of the latter children to take away their books and computers, and force them to watch as much television as the other children watch. And yet, even if all this were done, and done successfully, only one source of differences in life chances would have been eliminated. An enormous amount of personal and social disruption might be necessary to accomplish a rather modest change in those life chances.

“An oft-quoted statement by President Lyndon Johnson on racial policy, espousing a need to go beyond formal equality before the law, likewise illustrates the cosmic viewpoint:

‘You do not take a man who, for years, has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, and bring him to the starting line of a race, saying, ‘You are free to compete with all others,’ and still justly believe you have been completely fair.’

“This reasoning presupposes that there is some identifiable group of decision makers—‘you’—who have such cosmic control that this question can be meaningfully addressed to them....The incidence of the ‘benefits and burdens’ of the world ‘would in many instances have to be regarded as very unjust if it were the result of a deliberate allocation to particular people,’ according to Freidrich Hayek. But the outcomes of a systemic process, or ‘spontaneous order’ in Hayek’s terms, ‘cannot be just or unjust.’

“....If law has any value in itself, then even the beneficiaries of a deviation from law lose something as members of the general society. Nor is it certain that they will gain more from the exceptions that they lose by losing the rule of law. In the case of American blacks, where life itself has often been lost as a general deterioration of law enforcement was accompanied by an escalating murder rate, it is particularly uncertain whether bending the law produced net benefits.

“Although cosmic notions of justice are often invoked in racial issues, the issue is much broader. Every individual inherits a particular culture or subculture which evolved over a period of generations and centuries before he was born—and there is little or nothing that ‘we,’ ‘you.’ or ‘society’ can do about this plain fact of history. Adopting a cosmic viewpoint only adds lofty presumptions and reckless gambles to the underlying futility.

“The notion that it is somehow ‘self-righteous’ to insist on social standards and rules that are easier for some people to conform to than for others is another expression of the cosmic viewpoint. People who complain about the ravages of teenage pregnancy and demand a return to traditional family values have been denounced by the anointed for being ‘self-righteous’ and for ‘lecturing’ the less fortunate....These are, after all, not zero-sum games. The community as a whole is better off or worse off according to whether or not the next generation is raised under circumstances that are more likely to produce productive citizens rather than parasites and criminals. Indeed, the less fortunate are the hardest hit by the consequences when social standards are compromised or jettisoned for the sake of cosmic concepts of equality.

“...[T]hird-party decision making by surrogates for ‘society’ offers no *a priori* reason to expect a closer approximation to omniscience. On the contrary, such surrogates not only lack the detailed and direct knowledge of the innumerable circumstances surrounding each of the millions of individuals whose decisions they are preempting, they lack the incentive of direct gain and loss from being right or wrong, and they have every incentive to persist in mistaken policies (from which they suffer little), rather than admit to being wrong (from which they could suffer much).* * *

“Another way of verbally masking elite preemption of other people’s decisions is to use the word ‘ask’—as in ‘We are just asking everyone to pay their fair share.’ But of course governments do not ask, they *tell*. The IRS does not ‘ask’ for contributions. It takes. It can confiscate bank accounts and other assets and it can put people behind bars for not paying. Yet the word ‘ask’ is used in all sorts of public policy contexts where elite preemption via government power is involved. For example, when some parents objected to having their children put at risk by attending public schools with other children stricken with AIDS, *New York Times* columnist Anna Quindlen said that we should ‘ask some parents to put their children at some risk, however small, for the sake of principle and fairness.’ But these parents were not being *asked* anything. They were being told that it was none of their business to know who or where there were AIDS carriers amidst their children. The anointed had already decided how much risk other people’s children should be exposed to—and official secrecy meant that those other people had nothing to say about it.

“...But it is easy to see why the cosmic viewpoint has such appeal to those with the vision of the anointed. It magnifies their influence and flatters their egos. While the anointed may assume that articulation, political activism, and moral fervor are sufficient, those with the tragic vision believe otherwise. As James Fitzjames Stephen said:

“The one talent which is worth all other talents put together in all human affairs is the talent of judging right upon imperfect materials, the talent if you please of guessing right. It is a talent which no rules will ever teach and which even experience does not always give. It often coexists with a good deal of slowness

and dulness and with a very slight power of expression.’

“Systemic processes tend to reward people for making decisions that turn out to be right—creating great resentments among the anointed, who feel themselves entitled to rewards for being articulate, politically active, and morally fervent.(pp.191-197)

“*Personal Responsibility*

“Many of the words and phrases used in the media and among academics suggest that things simply *happen* to people, rather than being caused by their own choices or behavior. Thus there is said to be an ‘epidemic’ of teenage pregnancy, or of drug usage, as if these things were like the flu that people catch just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In a similar vein, Chief Judge David Bazelon spoke of ‘forces that drive people to commit crimes.’ In the economy as well, both parents are often said to be ‘forced’ to work, in order to ‘make ends meet,’ even if the family owns luxury cars, a vacation home, designer clothes, and a swimming pool. Parents, of course, have every right to make whatever choices they wish, but suggesting that people had no choice is precisely what the vocabulary of the anointed does repeatedly, on the most disparate issues—which it reduces to nonissues with deterministic assertions.

“People are often said to lack ‘access’ to various jobs, educational institutions, or credit, when in fact they may not have behaved or performed in a way that would enable them to meet the same standards that others meet. ‘Access’ is just one of a number of *ex ante* expressions—‘opportunity,’ ‘bias,’ and ‘glass ceiling,’ for example—used to describe *ex post* results in such a way as to preempt the whole question as to why those results turned out the way they did. If a job ceiling is glass, for example, that says that it is invisible—that the assertion must be accepted without evidence....

“People who do not choose to spend their money on health insurance, but on other things, are not denied ‘access’ to health care by ‘society’....Choice, like behavior and performance, is often circumvented by the vocabulary of the anointed.

“Performance standards are often depicted as mere subjective barriers reflecting the biases of those who create them....[F]ormer Harvard president Derek Bok said that to apply the same admissions standards to minority students as to everyone else would be to ‘exclude them from the university.’ Among other things, this ignores the fact that blacks were receiving both college and postgraduate degrees from Harvard in the nineteenth century, when it was very unlikely that they were being admitted under lower standards. The more fundamental fallacy, however, is in using *ex ante* words like ‘exclude’ to describe *ex post* results.

Widespread personification of ‘society’ is another verbal tactic that evades issues of individual responsibility. Such use of the term ‘society’ is a more sophisticated version of the notion that ‘the devil made me do it.’ Like much of the rest of the special vocabulary of the anointed, it is used as a magic word to make choice, behavior, and performance vanish into thin air. With these three inconvenient complications out of the picture, results after the fact can then be equated with conditions existing before the fact. Success thus becomes ‘privilege’ and failure ‘disadvantage’—by definition.

“....Such concepts as achievement are precisely what the new vocabulary seeks to displace. By all-or-nothing reasoning, it is of course possible to show that not every individual

or group has had the same favorable or unfavorable conditions. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how anything short of omniscience and omnipotence could have made such blanket equality possible. But that is radically different from saying that outcomes *ex post* are simply results of circumstances *ex ante*. For example, voluminous evidence from countries around the world repeatedly shows particular immigrant groups beginning their lives destitute in a new country, taking low-level jobs disdained by the native population, and yet ultimately rising above the economic level of those around them.

“The ‘overseas Chinese’ have done this throughout Southeast Asia and in several Western Hemisphere nations. Jews have done the same in numerous countries. The history of the United States has seen this achievement repeated by a number of European immigrant groups and by the Japanese and the Cubans, among others. Such evidence is suggestive rather than decisive. There is room for debate, but substantive debate is wholly different from verbal preemption, the weapon of choice among the anointed.

“In the vision of the anointed, not only must other people be either intellectually or morally incapable of making the right decisions for themselves individually, the traditions they use to supplement their own thinking, and the systemic processes which coordinate their competing desires and complementary inputs—the marketplace, for example—must also be depicted as inadequate to the task, without the benign intervention of the anointed. Surrogate decision making is the common thread in the highly disparate crusades which have captured the imagination and sparked the fervor of the anointed at various times, whether this moral surrogacy was in the form of the eugenics movement, Keynesian economics, or environmentalism....

“Merit [inputs/efforts] versus Performance [outputs/results]

“Underlying much social criticism is the notion that individual merit cannot explain all differences in individual or group results. Professor Stanley Fish of Duke University, for example, condemns the SAT because it does not measure merit. Others condemn the income earned in the marketplace for the same reason. Whatever weight such considerations as merit might have if we were God on Judgment Day, making a retrospective assessment, the situation is radically different when we are attempting to establish *prospective* rules or policies in a society of human beings with necessarily limited knowledge and limited ability to monitor what is in anyone else’s heart of hearts.

The requirements for judging ‘merit’ vastly exceed the requirements for judging behavior or performance. We do not know how much innate ability anyone has, and therefore cannot assess how much of the observed performance was simply a windfall gain from nature, rather than being a result of exhausting, disciplined, or otherwise meritorious efforts. Moreover, individual behavior and performance depend on factors reaching well beyond the individual....[For example, would Einstein have been the genius he was had he been born to illiterate peasants? Can we tell which among the later group would have become Einsteins had they been born into better circumstances? Who can tell! He also uses a Ted Williams (famous home-run hitter) analogy to illustrate how outside influences affect performance. Why wasn’t he the all time home run king? – it may be because pitchers feared him the most and would walk him intentionally more than other contestants.]....

“In short, performance cannot be due solely to individual merit where the influence of other individuals and circumstances is at work. The case for rewarding performance is that we can do it, not that it is the same as rewarding merit. Likewise, holding individuals personally responsible for the consequences of their own actions is a social expedient for prospective control, not a cosmic retrospective moral judgment.

“....[T]he inability of ordinary people to make valid assessments...is likewise part of the vision of the anointed and finds expressions in such words as ‘stereotypes,’ bias,’ and ‘prejudice’—all widely used without any corroborating evidence being asked or given.

“One of the uses of the concept of merit is to claim that various rewards produced by the economic forces of the marketplace are unmerited. Again, this implicitly assumes that it is possible for a human being to determine merit—otherwise, all conceivable economic systems and policies will produce rewards whose merit is unsubstantiated. Moreover, applying the impossible standard of merit forfeits benefits attainable under the feasible standard of performance in satisfying consumer desires more fully. If, for example, a new product is introduced by five different producers—each in a somewhat different version—then it is possible that none of the five fully understands just exactly what the consumer wants, nor need any of the five be any wiser or more prescient than the others. Yet if one of these products happens to be far closer to the consumers’ desires than the others, its producer may become wealthy as his sales skyrocket, while some of his less fortunate competitors cannot sell enough to avoid bankruptcy. The unmerited gain of the lucky producer, however, serves the larger social purpose of enabling the consumers to receive the product nearest to their desires and stops the economy’s resources from being wasted on the production of other versions that are less satisfactory.

“....To insist on a closer approximation to merit would reduce the incentives and the benefits to society that flow from these incentives. And is it not equally an injustice to deprive innocent consumers of benefits they could have had, for the sake of an abstract notion important only to a relative handful of the intelligentsia—and little analyzed even by them?

“....To believe in personal responsibility would be to destroy the whole special role of the anointed, whose vision casts them in the role of rescuers of people treated unfairly by ‘society.’ Since no society has ever treated everyone fairly, there will always be real examples of what the anointed envision. The fatal step is to make those examples universal explanations of social ills—and to remain oblivious to evidence to the contrary.(pp.198-203)

“THE CATEGORICAL VERSUS THE INCREMENTAL

“The vocabulary of the anointed is filled with words reflecting their rejection of incremental trade-offs and advocacy of categorical ‘solutions.’ This is most clear in the law and in writings among the legal intelligentsia, where individual and social trade-offs are transformed into categorical legal ‘rights.’ Ronald Dworkin perhaps best expressed this view when he said: ‘Individual rights are political trumps held by individuals.’ Just as the smallest trump beats the highest card in any other suit, so these ‘rights’ take precedence over the weightiest other considerations which are not in the form of rights. Thus the ‘rights’ of criminals take precedence over crime control, the ‘right’ to various social ‘entitlements’ takes precedence over the interests of taxpayers, the ‘rights’ of those entitled to compensation for past injustices take precedence

over the interest of displaced contemporaries who complain of ‘reverse discrimination,’ and so on. Rights trumps interests in this vision.

“At its worst, this line of argument arbitrarily singles out some particular kind of individual or group to be made sacred and leaves others to be sacrificed on the altar to this sacredness....But, however reasonable the order of precedence may seem, making that order *categorical* is a fatal step....

“Among many objections to categorical thinking is that it is incompatible with a world of diminishing returns...[A] rule making anything categorically more important than other benefits risks reaching the point of making huge sacrifices of one thing for trivial benefits from another—or no benefits at all from another....

“The vision of categorical precedence is central to John Rawl’s celebrated book, *A theory of Justice*, where it was asserted that ‘the rights secured by justice’ are not subject to ‘the calculus of social interests.’ In short, let justice be done even if the skies must fall—regardless of what this does to those on whom the skies fall....(pp.209-211)

“INCOME ‘DISTRIBUTION’

“Despite the voluminous and often fervent literature on ‘income distribution,’ the cold fact is that most income is *not* distributed; It is *earned*. People paying each other for goods and services generate income....

“To say that ‘wealth is so unfairly distributed in America,’ as Ronald Dworkin does, is grossly misleading when most wealth in the United States is not distributed *at all*. People create it, earn it, save it, and spend it.

If one believes that income and wealth should not originate as they do now, but should instead be distributed as largess from some central point, then that argument should be made openly, plainly, and honestly. But to talk as if we currently have a certain distribution result A which should be changed to distribution result B is to misstate the issue and disguise a radical institutional change as simple adjustment of preferences. The word ‘distribution’ can of course be used in more than one sense....

“Those who criticize the existing ‘distribution’ of income in the United States are criticizing the statistical results of systemic processes....for the economic positions of given individuals vary greatly within a relatively few years. What is really being said is that numbers don’t look right to the anointed—and that this is what matters, that all the myriad purposes of the millions of human beings who are transacting with one another in the marketplace must be subordinated to the goal of presenting a certain statistical tableau to anointed observers.

“To question the ‘fairness’ or other index of validity of the existing statistics growing out of voluntary economic transactions is to question whether those who spent their own money to buy what they wanted from other people have a right to do so. To say that a shoe shine boy earns ‘too little’ or a surgeon ‘too much’ is to say that third parties should have the right to preempt the decisions of those who elected to spend their money on shoe shines or surgery. To say that ‘society’ should decide how much it values various goods and services is to say that individual decisions on these matters should be superseded by collective decisions made by political surrogates. But to say this openly would require some persuasive reasons why collective

decisions are better than individual decisions and why third parties are better judges than those who are making their own trade-offs at their own expense.

“Again, no one would seriously entertain such an arrogant and presumptuous goal, if presented openly, plainly, and honestly....(pp.211-213)

“VERBAL INFLATION

“...[T]he ordinary vicissitudes of life become ‘traumas.’ Any situation which they wish to change becomes a ‘crisis,’ regardless of whether it is any worse than usual or is already better on its own.

Verbal inflation, like monetary inflation, would have no effect if everyone understood what was happening and could adjust to it immediately....

“...[H]uman relations suffer when the verbal common currency of social interaction loses its meaning and predictability, so that people now protect themselves from new risks by various ways of withdrawing from one another and reducing their cooperation. For example, where mere statistics are enough to enmesh an employer in costly litigation over an inflated meaning of ‘discrimination,’ locations some distance from concentrations of minority workers become more attractive as sites for factories and offices. This works to the detriment of the very minority workers for whom this inflated meaning was created. It also works to the detriment of the economy as a whole, as resources are no longer used where they would be most productive in the absence of the vast new uncertainties created by inflated words.

“THE WORLD OF THE ANOINTED

“The world of the anointed is a very tidy place—or, put differently, every deviation of the real world from the tidiness of their vision is considered to be someone’s fault....

“...It is a world where reality itself is ‘socially constructed’ and can therefore be ‘deconstructed’ and reassembled to one’s heart’s desire.

“The perennial desire to make particular things ‘affordable’ through public policy or to have government provide an ever-expanding list of ‘basic needs’ suggests that the economic realities conveyed by prices are seen as mere arbitrary social conventions, rather than expressions of inherent constraints and inescapable costs,. Similarly, the desire to spare people ‘stigmas’ for their behavior treats such stigmas as representing mere arbitrary narrowness by others, rather than social retaliation for very real costs created by those who are being stigmatized—and deterrence to others who might create more such costs in the absence of stigmas.

“The vision of the anointed divorces effects from causes. The very possibility that many inequalities of result are due to inequalities of causes is often sweepingly dismissed by those with the vision of the anointed, so that statistics on unequal outcomes become automatic indictments of ‘society.’ There is much discussion of the haves and the have-nots, but very little discussion of the *doers* and the *do-nots*, those who contribute and those who merely take. Widespread use of the word ‘unacceptable’ for social circumstances suggests that reality depends upon our acceptance of it.

“This whole approach has the net effect of insulating people and policies from an awareness of how and why their own actions are bringing on unhappy consequences.....Instead of treating ourselves as inherently constrained by reality, it treats reality as constrained by our acceptance. Activist government feeds this illusion....

[Even though many of their policies cause polarization,]”It is only those who object [to their vision] who are said to be creating polarization.

“...[T]here is no logical stopping place [to their vision]....Fascistic ‘strong men’ have historically emerged with public support from those disgusted or alarmed by the breakdown of law and order and of traditional values....[They are constantly] seeking...‘exciting’ and ‘new’ things, and a ‘liberation’ from the constraints imposed by lesser beings....In social life, the more fundamental a truth is, the more likely it is to have been discovered long ago—and to have been repeated in a thousand ways to the point of utter boredom. In this context, to make excitement and novelty the touchstones of an idea is to run grave risks of abandoning the truth for ideological trinkets.

“...The constraints inherent in civilized living are frustrating in innumerable ways. Yet those with the vision of the anointed often see these constraints as only arbitrary impositions, things from which they—and we all—can be ‘liberated.’ The social disintegration which has followed in the wake of such liberation has seldom provoked any serious reconsideration of the whole set of assumptions—the vision—which led to such disasters. That vision is too well insulated from feedback. (pp.245-247)

“Insulation from Feedback

“...[Those with the vision of the anointed tend to] lack common sense. But the very commonness of common sense makes it unlikely to have any appeal to the anointed....A chorus of public outcry against what they are doing or advocating is not a reason to reconsider but music to their ears. To disdain ‘public clamor,’ as it is called when court decisions are protested, is a badge of distinction. All this, of course, contributes to the sealing off of the vision from feedback from reality.* * *

“...It is a world of victims, villains, and rescuers, with the anointed cast in the last and most heroic of these roles....

“Those with the vision of the anointed are especially reluctant to see human nature as a source of the evils they wish to eradicate....

“The dangers in a vision come not simply from the answers it gives, but from the very way it frames the questions. The concept of ‘income distributions,’ for example, causes statistics to be looked at with certain preconceptions, so that the transient positions of individuals are seen as the enduring relationships between classes....(pp.247-250)

“Solutions” and Preemptions

“...The language of ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’ often not only ignores the reality of trade-offs but also conceals the imposition of the anointed’s values on others.”(p.251)

“The Struggle to Control Memory

“Desperate evasions of discordant evidence, and the denigration and even demonizing of those presenting such evidence, are indicative of the high stakes in contemporary cultural wars, which are not about alternative policies but alternative worlds and of alternative roles of the anointed in these worlds....[O]pponents must be shown to be not merely mistaken but morally lacking....this approach ‘replaces the intellectual discussion of arguments by the moral extermination of persons.’ This denigration or demonizing of those opposed to their views not only has the desired effect of discrediting the opposition but also has the unintended effect of cutting off the path of retreat from positions which become progressively less tenable with the passage of time and the accumulation of discordant evidence. The very thought that those dismissed as simplistic or malign might have been right—even if only on a single issue—is at best galling and potentially devastating....Their last refuge in this situation are their good intentions.

“For the anointed, it is desperately important to win....because their whole sense of themselves is at stake. Given the high stakes, it is not hard to understand the all-out attacks of the anointed on those who differ from them and their attempts to stifle alternative sources of values and beliefs, with campus speech codes and ‘political correctness’ being prime examples of a spreading pattern of taboos. Here they are not content to squelch contemporary voices, they must also silence history and traditions—the national memory—as well. This too is a larger danger than the dangers flowing from particular policies.

“Memory is what makes us who we are. If we lost all our memory whenever we fell asleep at night, it would be the same as if we died and a new person woke up in our body the next morning. History is the memory of a nation—and that memory is being erased by historians enthralled by the vision of the anointed. Open disdain for mere facts has been accompanied by adventurous reinterpretations known as ‘revisionist’ history...[this is all] yet another expression of the notion that reality is optional.

“A very similar development in the law treats the Constitution as meaning not what those who wrote it meant, but what one small segment of the public today wants it to mean. This is the ‘living constitution’ of ‘evolving standards,’ reflecting what ‘thinking people’ believe....The law itself has been prostituted to the service of ideological crusades....The social cohesion that makes civilized life possible has been loosened by the systematic undermining of families and of commonly shared values and a common culture.

“DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

“....To the anointed, it seems to follow, as the night follows the day, that reality must be brought into line with their vision. Logically, one might just as readily conclude that it is the theory which needs to be brought into line with reality. But that possibility is seldom given much consideration....The discussion tends to be in terms of goals rather than incentives, and assumptions rather than evidence.

[To illustrate the point that a small group of elites have totally insufficient knowledge to successfully implement their program, Sowell points out that no single person even knows how

to make something as simple as a pencil from start to finish.]

“Even if the individual circles of knowledge possessed by members of the anointed are in fact larger than the average circle of knowledge possessed by those around them, these larger-than-average circles are still likely to be only a tiny fraction of the vast total....

“When one considers how small a defect in reasoning can utterly destroy a whole elaborate analysis, it is truly staggering to expect intellectuals to construct social policies which will compare with what emerges from the systemic interactions of millions of other human beings, continuously adjusting to consequences reflecting the revealed preferences of others and the changing opportunities and constraints of technology.

“One of the implications of the common observations that ‘hindsight is 20/20’ is that people who judge results, as in economic transactions in the marketplace, have a far less daunting task than people who project social plans which require them to be correct simultaneously on innumerable assumptions, flawless in the logic with which the complex implications of these assumptions are derived, and at the same time prescient about an ever-changing reality within which events are unfolding.

“Add to this the fact that publicly admitting fundamental mistakes can be fatal to a whole political career and the differences between the two decision-making processes become even wider when the need to admit and reverse mistakes is taken into account....

“...The more comprehensive such collectivized decisions and centralized control, the more comprehensive the failure—the economic debacle of Eastern Europe under Communism being the classic example....One of the reasons why such experience does not become part of the social memory used to guide subsequent political decision making is that experience is so often filtered through the media, and the nature of that filtering process itself has built-in biases, quite aside from the biases of those who operate the media. (pp.253-56)

“VISIONS, POLITICS, AND THE MEDIA

“...The prevailing vision of the anointed is particularly well adapted to politics and the tragic vision particularly ill-suited. Anyone can see a ‘problem’ before one’s eyes and wish to ‘solve’ it, or see an ‘unmet need’ and wish to supply it. What is more difficult is to understand the implications of systemic causation within constrained options. The easier and more emotionally satisfying vision is clearly the vision of the anointed. Politicians can more readily reduce it to slogans and images, and the media can more readily dramatize it. This is a bias inherent in the media, irrespective of the personal philosophies of print and broadcast journalists.

“Over the years, studies have repeatedly shown people in the mass media to be overwhelmingly of the political left but this kind of media bias may not be as important as a bias inherent in the way both broadcast and print media operate. Radio, television, and motion pictures can readily dramatize an individual situation, in a way in which the larger relationships and the implicit assumptions behind that situation cannot be dramatized. For example, the media cannot identify, much less dramatize, all those individuals who would have come down with some deadly disease if it were not for their being vaccinated. But nothing is easier to dramatize than the rare individual who caught the disease from the vaccine itself and is now devastated by illness, physically or mentally crippled, or dying. When the government creates some new

program, nothing is easier than to show whatever benefits that program produces. Indeed, those who run the program will be more than cooperative in bringing those benefits to the attention of the media. But it is virtually impossible to trace the taxes that paid for the program back to their sources and to show the alternative uses of that same money that could have been far more beneficial.

“In short, the built-in bias of the media is to show what happens right under our noses, with little or no regard to what that has cost elsewhere.....There is likewise no way the television camera can show which unemployed people would have had jobs, if the minimum wage laws had not made them too expensive to hire at their current levels of skill and experience—and thereby cut them off from acquiring the additional skills and experience they need. There is no way to identify and interview those people who would be living comfortably in New York City apartment buildings that are currently abandoned and boarded-up because rent-control laws have made them economically unviable. Regardless of the ideological bias of people in the media, there is no way for the camera to show all the businesses that would exist in the absence of government red tape and mandated costs.

Deceptive appearances have been with us long before the rise of the modern mass media. But never before have those appearances been able to reach so many people, with so much immediacy and so much seeming reality.

What makes the built-in bias of the mass media so dangerous is that it adds leverage to a similar bias in political decision making toward doing good right under our noses, without regard to wider and longer-run implications. Conversely, visible harm sustained immediately is easier to dramatize than the long-run benefits for which it is endured. Could slavery have been ended by the Civil War if television cameras had shown daily scenes of the horrors of Sherman’s march through Georgia or the appalling sufferings of civilians in besieged Vicksburg? The televised sufferings of the war in Indo-China helped bring it to an end—leading to even more suffering and even more deaths after the Communists took over that region, but these sufferings (including the killing fields of Kampuchea) were not televised. Not being able to televise the horrors under totalitarian regimes is another built-in bias of the media, which can only show suffering in a free society—thereby making such societies easier to undermine.

“The media can even build up sympathy for murderers by interviewing their mothers....Just the sight of a forlorn man on death row can be touching. The media cannot show that same man when he was exulting in the savagery of the crime that brought him there, cannot show his sadistic joy when he was raping and torturing a little girl who was tearfully pleading for her life. It they could show that on television, many of those people who gather outside prison to protest his execution might instead be inside volunteering to pull the switch.

“The dangerous dramatizing of half-truths is the fatal talent of the television or movie camera. Even with honest and balanced people, that danger would be ever present, and would need to be constantly guarded against. With the media being overwhelmingly of one ideological bent, human bias and media bias only reinforce one another.

Add to this the philosophy of advocacy journalism and the result can be what has been called ‘lying for justice’—which is to say, preempting other people’s decisions by telling them only what leads to the conclusion desired. By sheer repetition of images of ordinary families who have been rendered homeless by unforeseeable misfortunes, the media can create a wholly

distorted picture of the homeless population, in which such people are a very small fraction....Paul Weaver:

‘The media are less a window on reality than a stage on which officials and journalist perform self-scripted, self-serving fiction.’

“The ease with which the media can choose what images to contrive and spread across the land feeds the dangerous illusion that reality is optional.(pp.256-259)

“PAST CONSEQUENCES AND FUTURE DANGERS

“After the vision of the anointed was given increasing scope in the education and public policy of the United States and other Western societies during the decades beginning with the 1960s, the social degeneration became palpable, documented beyond issue, and immense across a wide spectrum of social phenomena—declining educational standards, rising crime rates, broken homes, soaring rates of teenage pregnancy, growing drug usage, and unprecedented levels of suicide among adolescents. This social devastation was not due to poverty, for the material standard of living was rising substantially during this time. It was not due to repression, for an unprecedented variety of new ‘rights’ emerged from the courts and legislatures to liberate people from the constraints of the law while they were being liberated from social constraints by the spread of ‘nonjudgmental’ attitudes. Neither was this social degeneration due to the disruptions of war or natural catastrophes, for it was an unusually long period of peace, and science conquered many diseases that had plagued the human race for centuries, as well as providing better ways of protecting people from earthquakes and other destructive acts of nature. It was instead an era of self-inflicted wounds.

“The full dangers of the vision of the anointed cannot reveal themselves immediately. Even the anointed themselves are currently under at least the residual influence of traditional philosophical, religious, and moral inhibitions. To the extent that their vision prevails and endures, however, successive generations of the anointed will be less and less under the influence of these eroding traditional constraints, and the pure logic of their vision can operate more fully. Conversely, among those not convinced of this vision’s virtues, the spirit of resistance may well erode and the sense of outrage at its consequences become dulled by the accumulation of precedents for policies and actions that might once have been considered intolerable.

“In the anointed we find a whole class of supposedly ‘thinking people’ who do remarkably little thinking about substance and a great deal of verbal expression....Seldom have so few cost so much to so many.’(pp.259-260)