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Hush Slimbaugh and the Economics of Darkness: A Parable for Our Times

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Hush Slimbaugh and the Economics of Darkness: A Parable for Our Times

Keywords

Rush Limbaugh, economic policy, political satire

On Rush Limbaugh: "Hush Slimbaugh and the Economics of
Darkness: A Parable for Our Times"

February 29, 2008

Dear Web Surfer/Gentle Reader:

About a dozen years ago I wrote the following novella poking fun of the clever yet quite nasty "entertainer" Rush Limbaugh, and put it on the Internet. With Rush Limbaugh back in the news, I reread a hard copy of it for the first time in years (the original web copy having apparently vanished into the world wide void). On the one hand, much of the material in it is dated. Moreover, many of my attempts at humour now make me wince; some of these attempts are certainly unduly politically incorrect. Nonetheless, I stand by my basic interpretation that

a) Limbaugh then had a reasonably coherent social theory that basically called for a return to a romanticized, idealized 19th century America;
b) and the socio-economic story told in the second half of the novella by "my friend Eddie" is still basically correct. I hope to substantiate some of these interpretations/claims in a forthcoming academic book.

In any case, I have not kept up with the perhaps surprisingly sophisticated rantings of Mr. Limbaugh: so I do not know how (or if) his views have evolved on various issues. Nonetheless, in light of the fact that he is back in the news, spinning his views on the airways in a Presidential election year, I think some 21st century readers may be interested in what I wrote about him those dozen or so years ago.

Respectfully submitted,

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January, 1996

Hush Slimbaugh and the Economics of Darkness:

A Parable For Our Times

DEDICATION

To all the dittoheads of the world:

May you learn true justice and compassion on this side
of the land of the living.

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Author's Preface

This little book records a series of conversations which took place at my favorite watering hole with my friends Hush Slimbaugh and Eddie Barth.

Chapter one introduces the story. Chapters two and three give Slimbaugh's social theory and philosophy. Chapter four presents his economic theory.

These chapters may be painful for liberals and other nondittoheads to read (a dittohead is an ardent follower of Hush Slimbaugh). I have tried to record these conversations as diligently as possible. Hush has a relatively coherent political/social/economic philosophy which I urge all concerned Americans to read if not revere.

Chapter five records Hush's rantings and ravings against various enemies, real and imagined. Again, for some, this harangue may be difficult, jarring, or painful to read. Yet, in the interests of honesty, I felt I had to include it. Moreover, it does demonstrate some insights into Hush's character and rhetorical style.

Chapters six, seven, and eight record Eddie Barth's responses to Hush. Eddie is a professor at a prestigious university. I am afraid his conversational style has been

corrupted by years of lecturing to captive student audiences.

Nonetheless, in spite of his didacticism, I believe the contents of his lectures are important; they can be understood and should be read by all concerned denizens. They may be viewed as a possible antidote to the malady of dittoheadness.

Chapters six and seven basically deal with economic theory and the economic background to Slimbaugh's position. Chapter six largely deals with domestic economic issues. Eddie attributes America's slow economic growth, stagnating wages, and increased economic uncertainty to various anti-liberal "scams": the supply side economics scam; the Volcker/monetarist scam; and the budget crisis scam.

Chapter seven deals largely with international economic issues. Eddie discusses the international capitalist system. He outlines the various international linkages which led to the decline of the western world's relatively successful post WWII Keynesian economic regime. According to Eddie, the major international causes of this continuing decline in Keynesian-based liberal economic policies are what he calls tax, regulation, and wage rate arbitration.

Eddie's economic theories are perhaps a little unorthodox. Yet, I believe they are basically quite sound

and plausible. He seems to have some kind of convergence theory, where there are currently economic forces at work which tend to make advanced economic countries such as the U.S. look more like poor economic countries such as the Dominican Republic. I hope to fully mathematize these provocative theories sometime in the future.

Chapter eight contains Eddie's answers to Hush's social theory. Eddie argues that economic stagnation in the U.S. has given rise to the social conditions which promote acceptance of Slimbaugh's theories by significant sectors of the U.S. population. The economic stagnation has promoted both what he calls severe austere forms of religion, as well as economic arguments for the rich and powerful; i.e. arguments which promote the economic interests of the well-to-do at the expense of much of the rest of society.

Hush's beliefs are then seen as a combination of economics for the well-to-do and the morals of a large part of the hard-working underlying populace. Hush is then exposed as a clever demagogue promoting and attempting to cement an unholy alliance uniting the narrow self-serving economic interests of the well-to-do with the sincere religious beliefs of hard working common people.

Chapter nine details some of Hush's unfortunate experiences caused by a brief lack of prudence. The last

chapter tells of Hush's subsequent regeneration.

I have taken the liberty of adding a few endnotes to our conversations.

Steve Normal, Ph.D.

Middleford, CT.

December 24, 1995

P.S. Merry Christmas

Part I: Naples Pizzeria, Wall Street, Ivy League

City Chapter One Slimbaugh Prologue

"Sex", said the big man who called himself HUSH SLIMBAUGH (although he was neither quiet nor slim). "There should be no pre marital sex. People need to control themselves. There should be no extramarital sex. And there should be no post marital sex".

"You mean sex after people are married?" I queried.

"I mean no sex after a marriage has ended for any reason, divorce, death, whatever."

With that, he took another big gulp of beer, and resumed: "I am for fidelity, chastity, self-reliance, self-discipline, sobriety, and self-restraint". Then, with that pronouncement completed, the big guy jammed another slice of semi-liquid pepperoni pizza down his gullet.

Yes, I believe it was at that moment that a woman from the next table leaned over and said "Oh, I love how you say the word sex."

"Thanks; I've been practicing all my life".

"Practicing what? Sex, or how to talk?" asked my friend Eddie.

Hush ignored the question, smirked, and turned to the young lady, "Nice to meet you. Say, do you know what is a feminist's best method of birth control? Her personality! Ha, ha, ha", he chortled. "It could also be the hairy armpits. Gosh I'm funny. I am talent on loan from God. Hey, I'll have another adult beverage."

It was, I'm afraid, vintage Slimbaugh. But to my surprise, the young lady from the next table was laughing too. I saw that she had long auburn hair. It was worn like Ivana Trump, swept up and off her forehead and then it swooped down over her ears. Her dress was low cut, revealing ample cleavage. Frankly, it looked more like a negligee or piece of provocative sleeping apparel than something one would wear in public. She oozed voluptuousness.

She certainly did not fit in with the rest of the casual, rather sloppily dressed crowd. I remember at the time thinking that she was perhaps laughing a bit too hard and a bit too long. Moreover, she seemed to be unduly over-friendly towards Hush, the self-proclaimed "harmless little fuzzi-ball".

That moment marked a change in the tenor of the evening. (Eventually it would also lead to quite a change in Hush's life as well.) Before being interrupted by our attractive, Cosmopolitan-looking acquaintance from the next

table, the evening had been crisp, clear. Hush had managed to articulate what I believe was the most lucid, the most coherent, the most complete exposition of his world views ever! Afterwards, things went downhill; events became cloudy, smoky, a bit, shall we say, boozy? Yet, I am afraid I am rushing things a bit, getting ahead of myself. Let me back up for a moment and briefly introduce the characters and the locale.

I, Steve Normal, am a struggling professor of economics, trying to secure tenure at a semi-prestigious liberal arts college in New England. I wear baggy pants two or three sizes too big (they are more comfortable that way), and corduroy sports jackets with factory-produced patches on the elbows. As far as I am aware, my brown shoes have never been polished.

I like to work on arcane mathematical problems; that keeps me out of political trouble with the powers that be. (Currently I am working on the solution to infinite horizon nonstochastic economic growth models with representative agents and instantaneous rational expectations. This is a work in pure theory with little or no applications to any known real worlds.) However, in my younger years I used to work in the history of economic thought, and in social theory.

About once a month I meet with my old high school friend Eddie Barth, at Naples Pizzeria. Naples is a college hangout in downtown, downtrodden Ivyleague City. Naples serves excellent greasy pizza and cold beer at prices students and modestly paid college professors can afford. On weekends they have a deejay and dancing.

Eddie used to be a minister at the First United Methodist Congregationist Evangelical Lutheran Church. Now he is a professor at the nearby prestigious institute of theological, ethical, social, political, and economic thought (also known as the school of TESPET). Eddie likes to dress in black: black jeans, black leather jacket, black reebok running shoes - I think it's the New York City influence. Eddie used to also have a black goatee too, but he shaved that off a few years ago; he said it made him look too much like Charles Manson. I suspect he must be a dynamic university lecturer.

Every month or so, we eat pizza, he drinks beer, I drink water (I prefer Perrier) and we let off steam.

Last spring we were joined in our monthly meetings by our old friend Hush Slimbaugh. Hush also went to high school with us. We all grew up together in a state close to, but not quite part of the old south - it was a border state. Hush never graduated from college; he dropped out in his sophomore year. Eddie and I lost track of him for years. Then, recently, Hush moved back to the area, and began meeting with us at Naples.

Hush, by this time, of course, was a well known radio celebrity, with his own radio show. He and Eddie did not get along as well as they used to when we all went to high school together, and had the same home room teacher, Coach Fascist. Coach Fascist was the high school gym teacher as well as renowned coach of the highly successful football team called the J.E. B. Stuart Raiders. (This, I believe, was before the whole city of Oakland, California, became raiders). I heard that Coach Fascist later died from sadisticitis, a common though generally not fatal disease, which tended to afflict high school football coaches of that generation (and possibly every generation).

Hush got along pretty well with Coach Fascist. At one time, Coach Fascist said that Hush was the best third string center he ever had. Neither Eddie nor I played any football under Coach Fascist. I never played much sports; Eddie played soccer and baseball. In high school on Friday nights when we had nothing better to do, we used to hang out, drink beer, and make teenage nuisances of ourselves. I don't exactly remember how we used to acquire the beer; I think Hush used a fake I.D. that Eddie made. Yet, that was a long, long time ago. Now, in spite of our differences, there was still something oddly soothing, comforting, in occasionally meeting with Hush, our old cohort from the past.

In any event, the evening in question was in the early spring of 1995. It was a cold, raw, wet New England

night, but Naples Pizzeria was warm (if not quite dry). I was nursing a Perrier. Eddie and Hush were drinking Budweisers. We were all eating pepperoni pizzas.

Chapter Two Slimbaugh the Lucid

"So, Hush, how are things at your radio station, what's it called?" I asked.

"That's WCON, the greatest radio station in the history of the world, which I happen to own. And I am the greatest radio personality in the history of the world; talent on loan from God. WCON: the con is for conservative; remember that!"

"Oh" said Eddie. "I thought it was for con job".

"You know Eddie" Hush replied. "Since we grew up together you've become a liberal, socialist, environmental wacko, feminazi sympathizer."

"Whoa", said I. "Hush, let's stop with the name calling". "I never call people names" said Hush. "I just speak the truth. And I'm right 99.9999999 percent of the time".

Eddie had that pained look on his face. Logic, and, if truth be known, the ability to get the facts straight, were never Hush's strong points. But Hush had a cohesive world-view which he articulated that night. He was at the top of his elocutionary powers.

"Slimbaugh" Eddie said, "could we elevate this discussion a bit? For example, could you please tell me about your theological views, since you are such an authority on theological as well as all other matters. Yes,

theology would be a good place to start."

"Yea, Hush", I said. "Let's hear your whole social theory - your whole view on the world. We have time."

"Gladly", said Hush; "it would be my pleasure."

The discourse commenced.

"I believe in God" said Hush. "A Judeo-Christian God. A strong, powerful, just God who created man in His image. And He created man to have dominion over this great earth; and to lord over women, and all the other lower animals of the earth as well."

"And I believe in the Bible" he continued.
"Literally, every word of it"

"Have you read the Bible?" asked Eddie.

"I refuse to answer that question", replied Hush.
"But, I believe in the Bible. Moreover, I encourage all my devoted listeners to read it and follow it to the letter. After all, it is the Good Book. Moreover, people should go to Church and pray regularly to the Almighty."

"Do you go to Church?" asked Eddie.

"Of course".

"Oh, what Church? What congregation do you belong to?"

"Well, replied Hush, "I don't actually belong to any particular congregation. And I don't really go to Church regularly. I'm much too busy and important a guy to go to Church. I work all weekend, Sunday included. But I think my listeners and all other true Americans should go to Church. In fact, I may start going to Church sometime

myself.

"Anyway", he continued, "God is just and good. He made this world so that people who work hard and obey the rules: get rich. That's why I love, respect, and admire the rich. They are God's chosen people. The scum, the other people who do not work hard, the vermin, the lazy, the neer-do-wells, they become poor. That's why I have no compassion for the poor. They deserve to be poor. The rich deserve to be rich because they work hard as God planned it. And the poor deserve to be poor: they harvest their just rewards for indolence, immorality, and depravity.

"And I have spoken simultaneously from my heart and from my brain with my typical profundity and wisdom. I am indeed talent on loan from God."

With that, Hush downed his beer. Then he reached over, grabbed a piece of pepperoni pizza and aimed it for his mouth. Unfortunately, his aim was a little low. The pizza hit his chin. From there it bounced onto his paisley tie, where the red tomato sauce easily blended into the rest of the colors of his splashy cravat. The pizza came to rest on Hush's munificent lap.

As Hush cleaned up the mess, Eddie asked, "Have you ever heard of the `belief', `It has been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee: Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

"No I haven't" replied Hush. "Who said that, some kind of long-haired, maggot infested, pacifist, liberal, socialist wacko?"

"I think his name was Micah", said Eddie, "and come to think of it, I've heard reports that he did indeed have long hair. I believe he came from a rural background, so he may have also had problems with animals in his scalp."

"Listen", said Hush. "Nobody loves justice more than me. In fact, I believe all crooks, criminals, and perverts should go directly to jail. Pronto. Now! But this stuff about loving mercy, and walking humbly is liberal gibberish. The poor deserve what they get and they get what they deserve. I have no mercy or compassion for them. None. As far as humbleness goes, if you've got it, flaunt it. Admittedly, when you are as great as me it is hard to be humble; but why even try. Humbleness is for weak-kneed liberals."

After quenching his thirst, Hush continued: "Hey, did you see where Moses put the 10 Commandments. on two tablets of stone? That's nothing. I have my 287 Slimbaugh's "Undeniable Truths of Life" engraved on two stone tablets. Now that is awesome. I kid you not. They are all in my monthly newsletter. How about the Slimbaugh truth `Women should not be allowed on juries where the accused is a stud'? Or the truth engraved in stone `Feminism was established so that unattractive women could have easier access to the mainstream of society.'".

Hush guffawed. "Am I not simultaneously funny, profound, wise, and humane or what!? Hey, Steve, pass me the adult beverage and pizza please."

There was an awkward moment of sad silence. Then Eddie said, "You know Slimbaugh, I believe to love mercy means kindness to the lowly, needy and miserable, as shown in all charitable acts. Love is an essential accompaniment of every deed of mercy. To bestow loving kindnesses means to cloth the naked, nurse the sick ..."

"Hey" Hush interrupted. "What mush. Don't tell me about the naked. They can put their own clothes on. If they are naked its because they choose to be naked. And don't tell me to nurse the sick. If they don't have health insurance to hire someone to nurse them, then that is their tough luck. And the only one sick around here is you Eddie: you've become a sicko liberal. Hey, pass me another adult beverage."

"I've heard it said", pressed Eddie, "that `Holiness leads to humility, humility leads to the fear of sin; fear of sin leads to saintliness; saintliness leads to the Holy Spirit.'"

"Well, my God", said Hush, "the true God of Judeo-Christianity, of the Bible does not believe in humility. Certainly not humility for profound people as myself. Humility is for losers; losers and liberals. My God is the God of truth, justice, and the American way."

"Wasn't that Superman's motto?" I ventured. "You

know, the superman of the 1950s television series?"

"It may have been" said Hush confidently. "Superman and God have a lot in common. Hey, who's going to go up and buy some more beer and pizza?"

"If a man were to go about uttering windy, baseless falsehoods" muttered Eddie, "I'll preach to you in favor of wine and liquor - he would be a preacher acceptable to that people".

"What's that you're saying" asked Hush, returning with another pitcher of beer. He also, bless his soul, was carrying another Perrier for me.

"Oh nothing", said Eddie. "Please tell me more about your theological beliefs.

"Ah, yes", harrumphed Hush. "Well, there's not too much else. The Bible is absolutely correct. People should go to Church. Oh yes, Man is incapable of destroying the environment. And if man can't do it, that goes double for women. The world is much too great and wonderful and powerful a place, made by God for man's exquisite enjoyment, for us to just suck up and consume, like a giant Pac-man, that humans simply cannot destroy or harm it. Hey did you know that there are more trees in America now than when Columbus discovered it in 1496? Just thought you would want another Slimbaugh fact. Another indisputable, absolutely correct fact."

"Slimbaugh", asked Eddie, "have you ever heard of atomic weapons?"

"Of course I have" replied Hush. "What has that to do with my personal dogma which I am sharing with the world, if you listen to my radio program, or my television program, or dial me on e mail, or on the internet, or on intergalactic wavelengths?" Down went another beer.

"Well" said Eddie, "if we have a nuclear war, that could certainly destroy the environment and the world as we know it, and make it impossible for humans to live here."

"Bah, Humbug" replied Hush. "If we had a nuclear war, presumably it would be against the Commies, if there are any Commies left in the world - perhaps the ones in China, or Cuba, or Russia if they dare to make a comeback there. Nuclear war would indisputably totally wipe out the Commies, and we true Americans would live happily ever after. Case, proved, case closed. Humans cannot destroy the environment. The world is too beautiful for that to be possible.

"Now, where was I. Oh, yes. There is a God. Morality is not defined by individual choice. Hence there must be laws against perverts, feminazil and drug users."

"But Hush" I interjected, "remember when we used to do drugs all the time senior year in high-school?"

"Shut your mouth, Normal. What you said was a lie - a liberal lie."

"Oh, sorry Hush", I hastily replied. "I guess I must have misspoke - er... misremembered" (Far be it for me to contradict the great Slimbaugh. It's easier

to go along with his stories).

"I", he continued, "the great I, am the epitome of morality and virtue. I do not swear, speak sacrilegiously, demean any ethnic group, or tolerate smutty remarks on my shows or in my presence. I am pro-God, pro-America, and pro-man. God made men and women different. They have different natures. God made men to lead and women to follow. Men were made to be aggressive, dominant, the money-makers, the bread winners. Women were made to be passive, to follow men, and to emotionally support them. Men need the support and nurturing of women to keep them from going off the deep end, to civilize them, if you will."

"Slimbaugh" said Eddie. "I think we are starting to move away from your theological beliefs, such as they are. How someone with your casual lifestyle, your past sordid history of marriages and divorces, your affinity with sex and drugs and rock and roll, your filthy, disgusting eating and drinking habits, could now come out as a spokesperson, an exemplar for a severe, harsh, disciplined form of religion, is a wonder of modern America."

"Eddie", said Hush, "I disagree with everything you just said except the last phrase: I am indeed a wonder of modern America. As for my devout religiousity, and my thorough, complex and deep understanding of theological matters ..."

"Hush", I interrupted, "you started to talk about the basic natural differences between men and women. Differences

which you believe . . . er, perhaps I should say, know . . . are grounded in their different ontological natures. Could you elaborate on that after I get you some more beer and pizza, and we move away from these theological disputations? "

"Gladly."

"You see", said Hush, after I returned with the nourishment, "modern day liberalism is repugnant to human nature. Now, listen carefully, because here is where things get slightly complicated. There are basically two types of human nature: man nature and woman nature. Let me pause here to make a frank admission: I owe much of my knowledge of the basic differences between man nature and woman nature to the work of that profound intellectual Mr. Tiffany Guilder." Hush drank some beer.

"Wait", Eddie interjected. "I think I have heard of this guy. Isn't Mr. Guilder one of those spoiled rich denizens who inherit piles of money from their parents? Then they lead dissolute, debauched lives through their adolescent and young years. Then they 'see the light', change their lifestyles, and go to work for so-called 'think tanks' owned by their dad and backed by corporate money. There they use their subsidized leisure to write books celebrating what a great country America is, where with intense, dedicated hard work anybody can get rich in America. Then they claim that all the rich in America got that way by hard work and self-discipline?"

"That may be", said I.

"Sounds like an unduly brazen hypocrite to me," continued Eddie. "Where did his family get its money from anyway? Was it the taffy business, the Turkish salt water taffy business?"

"I don't know" said I, "but say, isn't Tiffany a girl's name? Tiffany Guilder?"

"Guilder reminds me", said Eddie, "about that boy named Sue discussed by Johnny Cash. You remember, in response to being named Sue, Sue became the toughest, most "\'macho' \'manly' guy around. Sue's dad said that with a name like Sue, he would have to get tough or die. Well, I think the same thing might have happened to hard-boiled Mr. Guilder. Too bad his parents couldn't have named him Bill or George, anything but Tiffany."

"Listen clowns", interrupted Hush, "according to Mr. Guilder, second greatest genius in America behind yours truly, men, real men, are indeed tough. They are by nature aggressive. Women, on the other hand, are by nature nurturing, caring, passive, feminine. Ideally, they naturally look much like Ken's old girlfriend, Barbie. Civilization, according to Mr. Guilder, would not/could not have developed unless the natural aggressive tendencies of men were subordinated to the natural passive and nurturing tendencies of women. Men, if left to their own raunchy predisposition, are prone to roam, and to avoid taking responsibilities for their actions. Men desperately need to

marry women; matrimony is what channels the normal masculinity and aggressive nature of the male. Men either become responsible husbands, emotionally nurtured and supported at home by dutiful women; or they become leaders of marauding gangs, raping and pillaging the cityside. That is basically the choice: marital bliss or masculine mayhem.

"Women's natural role is to stay at home, raise a family, and provide emotional support to the male. Women must, I repeat, must not economically compete with the male. That would unduly damage the fragile, delicate male ego."

"Oh, is that why you've been married six times?" interjected Eddie.

Hush ignored Eddie. "Men need a little woman at home, one they can financially support and who will in turn emotionally support them and make their bed (heh, heh, hey). All this is a law of nature; we're talking ontology, essence, being.

"Moreover", continued Hush, "those men who do not fit the above description, they are not real men. They are not natural; they are unnatural and most likely liberal perverts. And, those women who do not fit the above description are not real women. They are not natural; they are unnatural. Quite frankly, the basic nature of man and woman is as simple as that." Hush drank some more beer, and slurped some more pizza.

"So, what you are saying", said Eddie, "is one

size fits all."

"What I am saying", replied Hush, "what I am saying is two sizes fit all. There is one size for men, one way they naturally act; and another size for women. Those who don't act the way they are supposed to act, are unnatural. It's all in Guilder's masterpiece elegantly entitled, Men and Marriage, Sexual Suicide, Naked Nomads, Unmarried Men in America, and Mom. The welfare state, I might add, emasculates the man. Women get welfare and don't need a man. Hence ..."

"Hush" I interrupted. "I think we are starting to stray onto politics. If that is all you have to say about human nature, could you talk a bit about human understanding and epistemology, the study of the nature of knowledge."

"Gladly, Steve. As you seem to be aware, I am an

Authority on approximately everything. Could you get me some more beer first? I am parched."

Upon my return, Hush continued: "There is an absolute truth. Humans have access to that truth. One can find the truth in the Bible: the Bible is verily the literal truth."

"But Hush", said Eddie, "didn't you imply before that you never read the Bible?"

"Please don't interrupt me with irrelevant details.

"Now, the absolute truth can also be acquired by human reason. I know, because I have, I possess, I speak the truth. Or to be more precise, I am absolutely correct approximately 99.99999 percent of the time. Basically, conservatives have the truth; liberals lie.

"Moreover, words have meaning. Conservatives know this; liberals don't. As a firm believer that words have meaning, I'm very careful to use mine precisely. So, for example, I don't just call people nazis; I say they are feminazis. I don't just call people wacko; I say they are environmentalist wackos. Or another example; I say that my position is pro "the American way of life". Furthermore, those people who disagree with me have "poisonous agendas". Notice, how I've appropriated `the American way of life' with my position? That is both profoundly clever and absolutely truthful.

"Notice how those who disagree with me I characterize as having `poisonous agendas'? Obviously, these people are also against `the American way of life' since they are against my position, the American position. Notice how I am simultaneously mastering `spin', being clever, and being brilliant. I am rhetorically correct to frame the issues in this manner since I am soooooooooo persuasive and soooooooooo popular. Moreover, I am basically correct to frame the issues this way since I speak the absolute truth."

In a puff of self-admiration, Hush asked rhetorically: "Hey all you feminazis and environmental wackos in the

world: am I a harmless little fuzball or what?" Down the hatch went more liquid sustenance.

"What kind of nazis did you say?" asked Eddie.

"A feminazi, a feminist (whom I hate) who is really a nazi. The worst kind of nazi."

"What kind of wacko" did you say? asked Eddie.

"An environmental wacko, an environmentalist (whom I hate) who is really a wacko, a twisted eccentric, and that includes the Vice President of the United States", replied Hush.

Eddie started to bristle and get upset. "I don't think you are very funny when you use those words."

Hush, on the other hand, was beaming, impressed by his own cleverness. As he began to speak again, I interjected, "Gee Hush, that's a great theory of epistemology. Could you tell me something about sociology?"

"Gladly Steve. Could you first get me some more pizza?"

After I returned, Hush continued. "Gosh, I'm on a roll tonight. But then, I'm on a roll most every night; and day too. This is my life. What a wonderful, fulfilling life.

"Sociology, let me see. Well, as with most

things, sociology is really very simple.

"You have various social groups here in America, yet basically we are all Americans (with the possible exception of those who have the misfortune to disagree with me. They are unAmerican. Oh yes; and the immigrants: they are alien Americans.)

"In America you have the rich, the poor and the in-between. The rich are ingenious, talented, and industrious: that is how they got rich."

"Is that how all people got rich?" asked Eddie.
"None through inheritance, luck, fraud, gambling or whatever?"

"Anyone can make it here" said Hush. "Look at me. I'm nothing special. But I work hard; and now I'm rich; richer than, even, my father, may he rest in peace. It is one's attitude, one's desire to work hard that shapes one's destiny."

"That is simply not always true", muttered Eddie.

"Hey" said Hush. "I love, adore, admire, and cherish rich Americans. In fact, my shows, newsletters, books and life are a paean to rich, successful Americans."

"I'd say they are a pain to the buttock" complained Eddie.

"I am pro competition, pro achievement, pro excellence" continued Hush, ignoring Eddie. "Those that are rich are, by definition, successful and excellent. Those that are not, are failures."

"We are fortunate to live in such a great, just society; the rich deserve to be rich. The poor deserve to be poor.

"Liberals", Hush continued, "need to stop preaching class and racial hatred."

"But Hush", I interjected, "aren't you now preaching that the rich are great and wonderful, and the poor are basically scum?"

"That may be fundamentally true; but, I don't hate anyone, and I don't preach hate against the poor. Also, remember, what I say is, by definition, true. And I don't contradict myself. However, I am saying that the poor should emulate the rich.

"Democrats and liberals", he continued, "attempt to pit one group of society against another with their politics of class envy."

"Which is what you are doing", said Eddie. "You are trying to pit the bulk of society against the poor, the less well off."

"Poor, schmoor" said Hush. "Listen to me instead of talking so much, Herr Professor! Liberals just throw other people's money at problems. Liberals deny this fundamental fact of life so they can make the rest of us feel guilty. But, I say, we will always have poor people. We need to learn to live with the poor without feeling guilty about poor people, or compassionate towards them. This takes courage, valor, and raw guts.

"Remember this, and remember this well", he continued: "America is by far the greatest nation in the history of the world. Never, ever forgot that."

"Oh", said Eddie. "And I suppose you are intimately familiar with all the nations in the history of the world so that you can make such a powerful, sweeping, grandiose statement. What about El Dorado?" Eddie smirked.

"I've been there" said Hush. "And it is not near as great a place as America."

(Here I think Hush may have been overstepping the bounds of strict veracity. Yet, I couldn't help but to admire his enthusiasm, his loquacity, and his professed patriotism.)

"America is the greatest nation in the history of the world", Hush repeated, "and not just for white males such as myself." The big man paused, and took a dramatic quaff of beer. "But for people of all races, genders and religions".

"Oh", said Eddie, "and I suppose there is no racial discrimination in the U.S., or that young black men are not having a particularly difficult time ..."
"America is the great melting pot of the world" intoned Hush, ignoring Eddie. "And we must encourage all our citizens to truly melt into species Americanus."

"Ohhhh", groaned Eddie, "I hope they don't end up melting to look like you. A giant cheeseburger."

"You mentioned racial discrimination" resumed Hush.

"Frankly, I'm getting sick and tired of the "d" word. In the first place, there is very little if any discrimination against blacks or other minorities in this country. In the second place, about the only discrimination taking place is in the affirmative action programs, where white males are being discriminated against. In the third place liberals don't really give a rat's tail about ending discrimination. It's just another idea that pits one group of people against another." Hush grabbed some more beer and pizza.

"Hush", said Eddie. "You are so lucky you are white; because a big, fat, loud-mouthed, obnoxious, smart-aleck college drop-out such as yourself who happened to be black would have been dead a long time ago. Dead, or in jail."

Hush began to look a little angry. That patented smile of his, that smile he wears even when he says the meanest or most outrageous things about people, (perhaps especially when he is mean or outrageous) was beginning to look a bit frayed.

"Hey guys", I interjected. "Maybe its time we left this topic. Hush, could you tell us a bit about your views on culture?"

"Gladly" he replied. "After you get us some more sustenance."

Chapter Three: Slimbaugh the Lucid, Continued

Upon my return, Hush resumed his pontifications." There

is a culture WAR going on in America today", said Hush.

"Isn't that a little strong, Slimbaugh", replied Eddie. "War? Just by saying such hyperbole, aren't you needlessly dividing Americans, stirring them up? Breeding trouble; encouraging a less tolerant, more hostile, violent environment?"

"America needs the truth, my friends", said Hush; "not healing. We are indeed talking about war.

"America has become a land of permissiveness, due to a decline in values. The cause of this decline, of course, as with everything else in America, is liberals and liberalism.

"A vicious, vacuous, virulent liberalism has become entrenched in our major cultural institutions: the entertainment and news media; the schools. Some of the so-called 'mainline' churches. The arts.

"These cultural institutions are led by highly educated individuals with a sneering condescension to the common man. Liberals monopolize the marketplace of opinion because of their domination of these institutions.

"Liberals want no limits on any behavior whatsoever. For

liberals, freedom means no responsibility."

"In the first place", replied Eddie, "that's not true. But, for you, freedom means the freedom to make money any way possible; whether that means wrecking the environment, promoting falsehoods, duping consumers, dealing duplicitly with ..."

"Oh contraire", interrupted Hush. "It's liberals who do too much excusing and rationalizing of aberrant behavior. Crime, drug abuse, AIDS, teenage pregnancy, child abuse . . . All these and more result from a breakdown in values; they result from liberals' overpermissiveness."

"Society can, and indeed it is morally imperative that it legislate morality."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Eddie. "Do you mean, for example, that you want to go back to the days when it was illegal to have non-heterosexual sex, when sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex was illegal? Do you want people to be fired from their jobs because they are gay or lesbian? Do you want ..."

"Listen Eddie" said Hush. "Here's the real deal. America is now reaping a bitter harvest from the seeds planted by the sixties kids. They have no morals. I don't just mean the President. The sixties kids are now controlling the key cultural institutions in America. I'm talking the arts, the press, the entertainment industry, the universities, the libraries, the foundations. Eddie, do you know who Antonio Gramsci was?"

"Yes".

"I thought you would. Gramsci was a nasty little dwarf who was the leader of the Italian Communist Party in the first part of the twentieth century. Mussolini came along and slapped him into jail. There he wrote those convoluted Prison Notebooks where he spewed out his venomous Marxist ideology."

"Hush", I said. "I'm amazed that you know so much about Gramsci."

"I know practically everything", Hush replied. "Anyway, Gramsci wrote that the Communists needed to infiltrate and ultimately control the leading cultural institutions in society. That was the way for the Communist revolution to occur in an advanced capitalist society. The Communists were not to try to make a frontal assault upon the capitalist state, as Lenin did in backward Russia. Rather they would bore themselves into the leading cultural institutions of society. That way, they would influence the way society thinks, they would advance the cause of Communism, and the Communist Revolution."

"Well", continued Hush, "conservatives in the U.S. need to fight to reclaim and redeem our cultural institutions. We need to bore ourselves into the leading cultural institutions of America. We need to do this with all the intensity and enthusiasm that we use to fight to redeem our political institutions. We must do this to promote the conservative revolution."

"Conservative revolution? Isn't that a bit of an oxymoron?" asked Eddie.

"Not at all" replied Hush. "We need a revolution to restore traditional conservative American values which liberals have subverted."

"Gosh", I said. "I hope it won't be a bloody conservative revolution."

"So", said Eddie, "let me get this straight. You see yourself as sort of a right wing conservative Gramsci?"

"Precisely", said Hush. "Except where Antonio Gramsci was this little guy, this little dwarf of a man, I'm a great big strong bear of a man."

Hush drank some beer and continued. "I am promoting conservative cultural hegemony, conservative cultural values and ways of thinking, to further the conservative cultural revolution. I'm a real man."

"I thought you said you were a harmless little fuzball?" I asked.

"I'm that too," replied Hush. "Or rather, I should say, I present that side of myself when liberals give me a hard time, when they try to say that I am a political person as well. But I am also part of a movement. In fact, I am a nerve center, a focal point, a one man cultural institution. Myself, Tiffany Guilder, Eft Gingrich, and others are part of a movement. It's a movement to reshape America. And that is where culture comes in. Culture frames

the debate and influences the way people think about problems."

"I don't believe I ever met a right wing Gramscian Marxist before", I said.

"Oh, there are more of us than you realize. Myself, brother William Bennett are part of the movement; so many others. But remember, we are using Gramsci's ideas to further the cause of the conservative, not the Communist revolution.

"We are suffering from the cultural excesses of the 1960s."

"Slimbaugh", said Eddie, "All this talk about a movement. You sound like you are still in the 60's and fighting the wars of the 60's. The last cultural revolution I heard about took place in China under Chairman Mao. A lot of people were traumatized and a lot of blood was spilled in that cultural war. And where did you get this movement talk from: Arlo Guthrie's song Alice's Restaurant? Didn't you hear that the Vietnam War is over?"

"Listen Eddie: lots of us lived through the '60's", replied Hush. "But only a segment of us allowed ourselves to be defined by it. I was not swallowed up by the 1960's utopian idealism."

"Oh", said Eddie. "That's why you dropped out of college to become a rock and roll disc jockey?"

Hush began to turn red in the face.

"What kind of records were you spinning when you

became a deejay? Church hymns? Classical? Hardly. Rock and roll. You were madly into sex and drugs and rock and roll. That's why you dropped out of college. And that's why your old man was mad at you: not because he didn't understand your chosen `career' in radio.

"Your mind was formed in the '60's, your thinking comes from the '60's, and you are still fighting the battles of the '60's. And Hush, you don't know it, but you are a utopian: a right wing utopian who believes that the economic market and the pursuit of self interest can solve all. You are an Eric Hoffer true believer, an..

"I never took drugs", interrupted Hush.

"I suppose you never had sex (with another human) either", laughed Eddie. "Well, come to think of it, maybe you didn't. But that wasn't for want of trying."

"I never took drugs" insisted Hush, "especially acid. I would never take anything that even sounded like acid." "You've never taken asssssspirin?"

"No, just Tylenol doggone it".

"Oh bull" said Eddie. Then they both smiled. After all, Hush and Eddie were old friends, and they did know each other well. "Hey", said Eddie, "I'll get us another beer. I must say, for someone who is always preaching about `the truth', you sure are touchy about the truth when it hits home. You may look like a pachyderm, and you may have the character of a pachyderm: thick-skinned and insensitive. But you don't have the hide of a pachyderm.

You can dish it out, but you sure can't take it. No, I'd say you have the thin delicate skin of a baby's bottom."

Eddie tweaked Hush's ample cheek. Hush smiled sheepishly.

When Eddie came back with another pitcher of Budweiser, Hush continued his disquisition on culture: "You know, Eddie, even you, being a college professor, have to admit that our universities are run by aggrieved weirdos."

"Weirdos, maybe", said Eddie; "but not necessarily aggrieved."

"The left", continued Hush, "through their educational arm, the NEA, is constantly trying to indoctrinate our nation's young with mush."

"Oh", replied Eddie, "you mean by trying to teach them such values as tolerance, respect for others' opinions, independent thinking? Values necessary for living in a dynamic, changing multicultural society where..."

"Precisely", said Hush. "Teaching liberal gobbledygook instead of reading, writing and arithmetic."

"What you call liberal gobbledygook I call liberal values", said Eddie.

"Liberal values is an oxymoron. And you, Eddie, are a liberal moron. And you, Steve, are a dull moron.

"And while I'm on this educational subject", continued

Hush, "I can't stand the blatherings of academicians. Academicians think differently from normal people, they speak differently."

"So now you are saying that academicians are not normal people?" asked Eddie.

"No they aren't", replied Hush. "Furthermore, let me tell you: the education establishment on the average college or university campus is so incredibly, intensely hostile to America. Why, you ask? Because a small angry group of anti-American radicals have bullied their way into power ..."

"Come on", replied Eddie. "Let me see if I have this straight. We already know that people who think differently from you are by definition `anti-American' or `unAmerican'. People who act in ways you don't approve of are designated unnatural - as if you are qualified to differentiate between what is and what is not natural. Now you are also saying that when people who think differently from you are in positions of power, it is because they have bullied their way in, rather than, say, through hard work and discipline."

"Precisely" countered Hush. "You are a good learner Eddie. Bully for you, but you talk too much. And another thing about these people at the colleges and universities. They don't even know how to teach history. History should be an unbiased celebration of everything great about America. And while I am pontificating eloquently on

history, let me set the record straight on a controversial point: Columbus really did discover America in 1493. That's a fact."

With that, Hush drank some more beer. Eddie and I looked at each other.

"Brilliant, Slimbaugh", replied Eddie. "For someone who dropped out of college, you certainly have a lot to say about how colleges ought to be run, and what ought to be taught there."

"Yes I do. I am blessed with a silver tongue. Yet, don't forget" replied Hush, "its all part of my right-wing Gramscian-Marxism. Nothing escapes my acerbic wit and huggable charm."

An embarrassed silence came over the table.

"Well, I have to admit", continued Hush after a moment of what for him was deep reflection. "My illustrious experience as a student was not exactly a happy one. And once I dropped out of college, I did have to slug myself in the face (I am a tough guy -I could take it) and say, gosh, I really blew it."

"Nonetheless, having admitted that, I must go on to insist that schools don't do enough to promote competition or excellence. The liberals are in charge of schools and they are lowering standards."

Eddie said: "I don't think the liberals were in charge of that school you dropped out of - what was it, Podunk U.

of the South? Oh, I guess that proves your point. The conservatives in charge of that school had set standards that were too high for you."

"Eddie", I said, "I don't think you should give Hush such a hard time just because he dropped out of a second rate two bit conservative school."

"Thanks Steve; and another thing", continued Hush. "I hate this multiculturalism stuff. I say, don't encourage aliens to dwell on their native cultures. Aliens and neoAmericans need to blend into our harmonious society. We need to de-emphasize our cultural differences and emphasize my culture."

"Whatever that is", said Eddie. "Big Macs And cheeseburgers."

"Who concocted multiculturalism anyway", continued Hush. "Basically miserable people who blame society for their problems."

"Heh, who's making personal attacks, and ad hominem arguments now?" asked Eddie.

"Multiculturalism is the tool of revenge of those who have failed to assimilate and fit into mainstream American life", said Hush.

"Aren't you really just preaching conformism?" asked Eddie. "Anti-intellectualism, anti-scholarship, anti-anything different from you. Don't forget that some of the greatest people in history did not fit into their society:

Socrates in ancient Greece, Galileo, Jesus..."

"That was then, this is now" countered Hush. "America is the greatest country in the world, and everybody should be more like me." Hush drank some more beer.

"Oh, My Fair Lady", muttered Eddie.

"And another thing", said Hush, "before we leave the area of culture. Let's talk about crime, and the criminal culture. Did you ever notice that the liberal's sympathy is always reserved for the criminal, rather than for the victim of the crime? I think its just sickening that ..."

"Well" interrupted Eddie. "I don't think that it is a matter of sympathy. The liberal realizes that the criminal may indeed not be guilty. There is the lovely, quaint liberal notion in the United States that the accused are assumed innocent until proven guilty. Then also, liberals tend to think for themselves, and be aware that they too could be accused of criminal behavior. Some of the greatest people in the world were put to death by the criminal justice system of the day for daring to think and speak for themselves. Again, think of Socrates; or Jesus. Galileo had trouble with his legal authorities. Also, entire liberal movements were at one time arrayed against the law of the land. Think of the abolitionist movement, the civil rights movement, the..."

"All this liberalism" groaned Hush, "I think I'm going to throw up."

"Slimbaugh" Eddie said, "you blame liberalism for

everything. Your current problem isn't too much liberalism: its too much beer and pizza."

Now Hush was really affronted. "I've just begun to drink and eat for the night. I can outdrink..."

"Heh", I said. "Lets change the subject. Hush, your disquisition on culture was superb. What would you like to talk about now? How about the environment?"

"Gladly", said Hush.

After I returned with some more nourishment, Hush continued. "As with most issues, my views about the environment are relatively simple, yet profound; nay, brilliant

"The earth is a remarkable creation; it is truly by far the most magnificent creation of the entire universe."

"How do you know that?" asked Eddie. "Have you been to the entire universe?"

Hush ignored Eddie and continued. "The environment is not fragile. The environment can fix itself. The fact is, humans could not destroy the environment if we wanted too. Moreover, the environment is now cleaner that it has ever been: thanks to human endeavors and ingenuity."

"That's absurd. What makes you think that?" asked Eddie. "Oh, leave him alone, Eddie," I said. "Can't you

see the big guy is on a roll?"

"Thanks Steve" said Hush. "Now, unfortunately, there are environmental wackos, who have foisted stupid, burdensome regulations on business in their race to punish the American way of life. Among the worst of the environmental wackos is Gore, who wrote a stupid book full of unAmerican ideas."

"You've saying that the Vice President of the U.S. is unAmerician?" asked Eddie, again slightly incredulously.

"That's not what I said," said Hush, "but that is what I implied. The Vice President of the United States is indeed a bona fide tree-hugging, spotted owl-living, snail-darterprotecting, Gaia-worshipping, radical doomsday prophet. It is his ideas which are unAmerican."

"Because you disagree with him?" asked Eddie.

"It's more than just that", said Hush. "For example, that the Earth is heating up and that the ozone layer is disappearing are perhaps the biggest frauds perpetuated on the American people in recent years."

"I can't believe you are saying this", said Eddie. "The scientific global warming experts say humans are most likely causing the warming of the earth. The same with the ozone hole."

"Scientific, schmientific" replied Hush. "Most of those scientists are just liberals. I told you, the

liberals are running most all of our cultural institutions, including the scientific community."

"So you are saying because you believe (perhaps erroneously) that most scientists are liberal, that you do not believe the scientists?" asked Eddie.

"I hold that there is little truth in any of the environmental doomsday scenarios: ozone depletion, pesticide contamination, global warming, hurricane proliferation, you name it. Oh, there's an ozone hole all right. But it's a hole in the theory, not in the sky", he harumphed.

"So you think the environmental crisis is just a joke?" asked Eddie.

"No, it's not just a joke", replied Hush. "It's a fraud, a hoax."

Hush drank some more beer; then continued. "I say there is no reason to believe in global warming. Mankind is not responsible for depleting the ozone layer. Acid rain is a minor and correctable problem. And if the spotted owl cannot adapt to the superiority of humans, screw it." Down went some more beer.

"Gee Slimbaugh", said Eddie, "I know you have needs, but I think you should leave the owls alone."

"Why should I?" growled Hush. "Those owls don't leave us alone."

"And I'll tell you another thing. Liberals don't really care about saving the planet. They don't really

believe that there is any impending environmental holocaust. This whole environmental movement is just another way to panic people into giving up their own personal freedom and wealth and to allow liberals a chance to grab even more power and control over the lives of individuals."

"I say, let the marketplace rule! Have no rules to protect the environment." With that, Hush drank another glass of beer.

"Slimbaugh", said Eddie. "More than you realize, you are an idealist, a utopian. You think the market by itself, with no rules or regulations by the governmental authorities, will always work. That is where you are Utopian: a blind, passionate, utopian faith in the unregulated economic market. And that is where you are wrong. The economic market does not always give socially beneficent results if left alone. The destruction of our environment by private production demonstrates this truth."

"You will see", said Hush. "I will be proven right about the ozone hole, global warming, and all the other un-American hoaxes which are being used to try to destroy the American way of life."

The table became quiet.

"Well Hush", I ventured. "Now that we have heard your theological views, your philosophical views, your views on sociology, culture, and the environment, could you outline your views on political science, on government?"

"Gladly Steve. Hey, don't we need another pepperoni pizza? No, let's make it an anchovy. Can you get us an anchovy pizza Steve?"

"Sure".

After I returned, Hush continued his pronouncements.

"My views on government are basically quite simple. Yes, very simple. We should dismantle the welfare state. The best thing government can do is get out of people's lives. Privatize everything possible. Except for the military. We have to look at the military as a separate and unique institution."

"Heck", interrupted Eddie sarcastically. "Why not privatize that too? Get some competition; may the best warlord win. But why stop there; how about the justice system? Why don't we have private judges and let the market decide who is the most 'productive' judge? The judge who

makes the most money collecting `voluntary' fees from the litigants would win the award for greatest productivity and greatest service to the community."

"Gee Eddie", replied Hush, "that's the first smart thing you've said all night. I'll have to think about your proposals. It's nice to see you finally getting aboard the competitive, strive for excellence bandwagon.

"Anyway", continued Hush, "let's get rid of all government social programs. These programs grievously damage the character of the recipients. The damage they do to people's character far outweighs any pitifully small good they do."

"That's absurd" said Eddie. "I suppose the Apollo Astronauts have a crummy character? They were in a government program. I suppose General Schwartzwhat'shisname has a crummy character?"

"Schwarzkopf" I gently interjected.

"Exactly. Smokey the Bear has a crummy character?" Eddie queried.

"Smokey the Bear?" replied Hush.

"Certainly", said Eddie. "Wasn't he a firefighter for the government? And what about Paul Bunyan? You think Paul Bunyan had a bad character? Didn't the government hire him to clear state lands?"

"Listen wise guy", said Hush. "Government programs breed dependence. That's a fact.

"The problem with this country is there are too many arrogant theoretical little bureaucrats in Washington D.C. who think they know the real world. They're nothing but a self-appointed intellectual aristocracy."

"Gosh Hush", I ventured. "I think the vast majority of them are dedicated, hard-working, underappreciated civil servants. Many of them are very bright and could probably be making a lot more money if they chose to work in the private sector."

"Oh Normal" replied Hush. "You are so naive. I say let the marketplace work. Let's fire them and let them find work in the private sector. Listen to me: the government cannot create wealth."

"And why not?" asked Eddie. "The government can build schools, roads, spaceships, dams. They can provide for the education of our children, supply energy ..."

Hush interrupted: "Baloney. The government cannot create wealth by definition; and repetition. If I and the other brothers in the movement repeat that line often enough, then it will be true; it must become true."

"Listen: Washington has tons of our money, and they did nothing, nada, zip to earn that money. The people earned it. The people created that wealth with their hard work, discipline, time, innovation, energy, efforts. And for the government to take so much of the people's money is theft."

"So now you are accusing the government of robbery", said Eddie. "You brazenly, irresponsibly make all these wild accusations about the government, call the Vice President a wacko, say the government is robbing us; you are stirring up the people against the government."

"Precisely" said Hush. "That's what I want."

"The government provides the social framework which protects private property and enables the economic system to work", said Eddie. "The well-to-do, the rich, whom you praise so highly, are the very ones who inordinately benefit from this society and from our government. They are the ones who have the easy, the `good' life."

"The ones who benefit from our government and have the easy life", said Hush, "are the poor: sucking at the breast of the government pig."

"Nay Eddie, I say, the government has become a behemoth over us. The real issue, as far as Democrats are concerned, is the number of people receiving something from the government. This is exactly what FDR had in mind when he created the social security monster. He wanted to create dependency upon the government. To preserve, or rather, reinstate, America's hardy, rugged, individualistic character, we must dismantle all these social programs."

"How does one become rugged?" asked Eddie. "Use sandpaper?"

Hush drank some more beer, ignored Eddie, and continued. "The current Clinton administration is made up

of fuzzy-headed academicians, sandal-clad theoreticians and nearsighted pointy-heads."

"Hey", said Eddie, "what's wrong with sandals?"

"And why are you down on people who need glasses?" I said as I adjusted my specs.

Hush replied: "Because they don't understand how the world really works. They are theoreticians, eggheads, pseudo-intellectuals, and policy wonks."

"Gee" said Eddie. "The invectives just flow out of your mouth like oil from a ruptured pipeline. What is the difference for you between an intellectual and a pseudo-intellectual? What is the difference for you between a policy wonk and one who diligently works on public policy analysis? What is the difference between an egghead and a brilliant scholar? I'll tell you the difference: one person agrees with you and you shower with positive accolades. The other disagrees with you and you hurl abusive epithets!" Now it was Eddie who took a big chug of beer.

"Listen" said Hush. "The Clinton administration is about the worst one in the history of America. That is a fact! And the Reagan administration was about the best. God bless Ronald Reagan. A toast to Ronald Reagan!"

I noticed some people from a neighboring table edge away from us; after a moment, they went to another table in the back room.

After draining his glass, Hush continued. "America

needs a cheerleader: someone who can make us feel good about ourselves. And that's what Reagan did. And that's what I do.

"I think you are stirring up people to commit acts of violence against the government: the government you deride so vehemently", said Eddie.

"Bah, humbug", said Hush. "Nobody loves this great land, America, more than I do. I don't stir people to violence against the government. The government does by its own imbecilic, outrageous actions.

"But another thing. I will share another secret with you: another secret of my incredible success. The great Ronald Reagan would not have won his elections in 1980 and 1984 without his upbeat demeanor - without that smile on his face. Which is also what I do. I smile like a Cheshire cat. See me smile."

Hush, who had been smiling most of the night anyway, now put on a smile that stretched from one ear to another. But to me, he looked more like Jimmy Carter than Ronald Reagan.

"So", said Eddie, "you see yourself as sort of a Ronald Reagan, but with brains? I suppose you think you ought to be President."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea" said Hush.

"You would be like Reagan" said Eddie; "but without the pretense of compassion."

The table grew silent. All of us were thinking, each

in our own way, what it would be like if Hush Slimbaugh were President.

Chapter Four Slimbaugh the Economist

Finally I spoke. "Well Hush. If you were President, what would your economic policies be? Tell me about your economic theories."

"Gladly Steve, after you get me some more beer and pizza. Also, you should get yourself another Perrier. You've been nursing that bottle for hours. But, hey buddy, don't you know that real men don't drink water? Come on, Normal, be a man. Have a beer."

I smiled wanly at him. "Hush acts like a know-it-all", I thought. "But how little he really knows."

After I returned with the supplies, Hush resumed his spiel. "Economics, economics, let me see. Well, basically, economics is really very simple. Very simple."

"I believe devoutly, resolutely, spiritually, in supply side economics. That is a true theory popularized by the editorial writers of The Wall Street Journal, one of the greatest newspapers in America, nay, the world."

"A key voice for the rich and powerful in America", said Eddie; "the business elite and business elite wannabees. Their editorial pages in particular are full of simple-minded, wrong-headed economics; articulate purveyors of misinformation."

Hush ignored Eddie. "As they and others have shown, the Way you help society, and I am speaking of all members of

society, is to give more money and resources to the rich.

"The key to economic growth is savings. The people who save the most are the well-to-do. They are the ones with the discipline, the moral fortitude, the faith, the guts, to save.

"When they save more, that savings automatically gets invested, which leads to more people being hired, which leads to more being produced, which leads to a higher standard of living for all people. What could be simpler or more understandable? You don't need a Ph.D. in Economics to understand that Normal."

"No you don't", I agreed.

"When people try to save more" said Eddie, "that means that less will be bought. When stuff is not bought, employers may cut back on production, driving up unemployment."

"Oh don't give me that outdated liberal balderdash", said Hush. "Listen. What we need to do is cut taxes, especially for the wealthy. We need to cut their income taxes. We need to eliminate the corporate income tax. We need to eliminate the capital gains tax. We need to eliminate inheritance taxes.

"Americans are being taxed to death; especially the wealthy, successful Americans - the cream of the earth. Haven't you heard of the Laffer curve? The Laffer curve proves that people are not working very hard because their taxes are too high. When you cut taxes people work harder,

they produce more. They end up actually paying more in taxes because they work so much harder and make so much more money.

"The wealthy in America are not working hard enough because their taxes are too high. America is too tough on the well-to-do. And the poor are not working hard enough in America because they have it too easy, living on welfare and the government largesse. Life is much, much too difficult in America for the wealthy, and much, much too easy for the poor."

Hush drank some more beer. I had to admire his gall for lecturing me, a Professor of Economics, and Eddie Barth, a Professor of Everything at a prestigious university, on economic theory.

Hush continued. "The Laffer curve is absolutely correct. Unfortunately, if you are a liberal you simply don't have the capacity to comprehend such concepts.

"We must tax the rich less. Actually, we should scrap the whole income tax and replace it with a consumption tax, a tax on spending. People who save money should not pay any taxes on it."

Eddie replied. "What you are calling for Slimbaugh, is a regressive tax system. A regressive tax system is where the poor pay a greater share of their income in taxes than the rich. Generally, the less your income, the more percentage-wise you spend on consumption goods, and the less you are able to save. A sales tax, a tax on

consumption, will mean that the less well-off will spend a disproportionate amount of their income on taxes, compared to the rich."

"Listen, Herr Professors" said Hush; "here is the real deal. It's not just the rich: all people abhor taxes. Supply side economic policy should be the rallying point of the conservative movement. Conservatives need to convince people that cutting tax rates worked in the 1980s. Tax cuts were not responsible for the exploding federal debt."

"Come on" said Eddie, "get real. The tax cuts instituted by the Reagan administration combined with increases in military spending are what made the federal deficit get so large."

"Bah, humbug" said Hush; "I have friends at conservative think tanks who have carefully made up data to show that that is wrong."

"Now, here is the conservative game plan: by talking about growth and opportunity, conservatives can cut across all cultural, economic, social and racial lines to reach all people."

"But", said Eddie, "tell the truth. You are really basically talking about cutting taxes for the wealthy. In fact, with increases in social security taxes and other taxes that fall disproportionately on the less affluent sectors of society, they are really paying more ..."

"Listen" interrupted Hush, "cuts in marginal tax rates spur economic growth and help everyone. That is a fact; a

scientific fact. It is an application of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'."

"Actually, Hush" said I, "if I remember my Adam Smith right, he called for an increase in taxes in 'America'."

"Whoa! How can that be?" bellowed Hush. "You're nuts, Normal."

"Possibly", I said. "But let's stick to Adam Smith. Smith is generally held to be the first great economist. His masterpiece, The Wealth of Nations, was published in 1776, an eventful year. Smith was from Scotland. He ..."

"Stop talking boy, you're boring me", interrupted Hush.

I ignored him: "Adam Smith felt that there were certain things the government needed to do. Government services needed to be paid for through taxes. Smith felt that the American colonies were not paying their fair share for the defense of the British Empire."

"The colonists said 'no taxation without representation'" said Hush.

"Right", I replied. "But Adam Smith wanted both more taxation and representation. He wanted the American colonists to pay more in taxes and to be represented in the British Parliament. Also, Smith was against regressive taxes; where the poor pay a larger percentage of their income than the non-poor. Smith was for proportional, or perhaps mildly progressive , taxes ' For example, Smith was in favor of luxury taxes. Smith did not think that the

wealthy in his time were not working hard enough because of high taxes. Indeed, he felt the wealthy property owners were not working very hard (if they worked at all) because they were so very wealthy."

"Normal" replied Hush. "Your problem is you read too much. It sounds to me as if you have actually read Adam Smith. Basically, you've become another run-of-the-mill pointy-headed intellectual. Listen to me Normal: it is a well known dogma that supply creates its own demand. If stuff gets made it will get sold. If people save their money, that money will get invested and generate economic growth. If people really want to work, they can find a job. Let the marketplace work."

"Raising taxes here in America would not get rid of the government deficit. It would only give Congress more money to spend. Tax cuts did not cause the deficit to increase. And Ronald Reagan should be carved into Mount Rushmore." Hush drank some more beer; then continued.

"Basically, the liberals believe that it's unfair that some have so much money and others have so little by comparison. I say, so what! God and the government should help those who help themselves. The liberals only stir up envy and bitterness by talking about helping the poor."

"Let the magic of the marketplace work. Get rid of all government rules and regulations. Get rid of minimum wage laws. Minimum wage laws only cause untold numbers of lower-income workers to lose their jobs. They are another case of

misplaced liberal so-called compassion."

"Actually" said Eddie, "I have seen recent studies which show that increases in minimum wages actually lowers unemployment."

"How can that be?" cried Hush. "Those studies must be wrong."

"Apparently", said Eddie, "increases in minimum wage lead to increases in the consumption of goods and services. That increases the demand for products, which increases the demand for workers which reduces the rate of unemployment.

So, for example, suppose McDonalds had to pay their workers a little more. If McDonalds and all other employers of low income workers had to pay more to their workers, there would be a transference of income, of resources to the working poor. Their consumption would go up. They would then go out to eat at places like McDonalds more often. Sales at McDonalds would go up as people would have more Big Mac attacks. McDonalds would then have to hire more workers to produce more Big Macs and other McDonalds culinary delights. Thus, a raise in workers' wages would decrease unemployment."

"It could also lead to technological change", I said. "The increase in workers' pay could encourage employers to substitute machinery for the workers. In the long run, that would increase worker productivity and the standard of living."

"Listen Professors," said Hush. "You are speaking

old, discredited, liberal economics. I am speaking common sense conservative doctrine. Unemployment is caused by minimum wage laws and people's laziness.

"Furthermore, by getting rid of all government rules and regulations we free up entrepreneurship. America needs more entrepreneurship, especially in the urban areas."

"Gee", said Eddie, who lived in the city. "There is plenty of entrepreneurship in my neighborhood. There are people dealing drugs, soliciting customers, watching out for the police, eliminating competitors, all up and down my block. All these people are involved in the drug trade. That business is not lacking for entrepreneurs. Come to think of it, the drug trade is one of the most unregulated industries imaginable. It's technically illegal, but there are no government rules or regulations. It's every entrepreneur for himself. Justice frequently comes from the barrel of a gun in that business. Yessir, the retail side of the drug trade is a laissez faire free enterprise entrepreneurial industry if I ever saw one."

"This great country sometimes makes me sick", said Hush, ignoring Eddie's entrepreneurial insights. "Americans have it too easy. So many people today have so much free time on their hands that all they can do is complain about their unhappiness. We don't work hard enough."

"Golly" said Eddie, "you're off the mark again,

Slimbaugh. There has been another important recent study by a Harvard Professor who has studied the decline of leisure in the U.S. I think according to her calculations, the average Americans work about a month longer per year than they did a generation ago. In the last generation, America's leisure time has been drastically curtailed."

"There are two things wrong with what you just said Eddie", replied Hush. "First, you quoted a study from a Harvard Professor, therefore no doubt a liberal professor, therefore, no doubt, a wrong professor. Furthermore, you said she. A female professor from Harvard; I say, two strikes she's out. Why isn't she at home raising kids anyway? Ah, the pampered intellectual elite: I despise them. Talk about people who don't work hard enough.

"Speaking of despise, I also despise the poor. I say there has been a generation-long decline in respect for the traditional American values of hard work, self-reliance, and respect for the law, causing vast poverty.

"Which brings me back to liberals, the proximate cause of all that is wrong and crummy in America. Liberals are just poverty pimps. They want to build up a giant network of government programs so they can employ their friends. Yet, I assure you, the more entitlement programs that are created by the liberals, the poorer this country is going to get.

"The poor and the lower classes of this country have gotten a free ride since the Great Depression when it became noble to be poor. We have the wealthiest poor in the world.

We encourage poverty by giving them money. The poor in this country have an average of thirteen television sets in their houses."

"Really?" said Eddie.

"Indubitably", said Hush. "And we should go and get twelve of them."

"The poor are the biggest piglets of the government mother pig. The poor feed off the largesse of this government and they give nothing back. Nothing. They're the ones who get all the benefits in this country." Hush drank some more beer.

"So, according to you", said Eddie, "the enemy of most people in America is the poor; the poor and the government who you claim is giving so much money to the poor."

"Correct" said Hush. "And because of this, the American middle class is just plain tired and worn out. They are taxed more than ever. The poor are the takers. I say, 'those who do not work, do not eat'. Actually, I think it was Stalin who said that."

"Now you are quoting Stalin?" I asked.

"Hey" Hush replied. "Stalin wasn't all wrong. At least he wasn't a liberal."

"And another thing: I am sick and tired of the liberals and the Democrats and their politics of class envy and class warfare, promoting one class against another, the poor and middle class against the rich."

"But" said Eddie, "you are pitting Americans against the poor and against the government. It is you who is fomenting, inciting class warfare, but instead of pitting most Americans against the wealthy, you try to pit most Americans against the lower classes."

"Listen Eddie" said Hush. "Get this through your liberal, mushy head. Liberalism is out. The conservative revolution is in. America is currently witnessing the dismantling of the welfare state; and I say hurray and hurry up."

"The welfare state destroyed the work ethic (and I don't care what your female Harvard Professor says). The welfare state has failed; liberal policies have failed. To replace those failed policies, we in the communications business need to convince people of the bounty of entrepreneurial capitalism."

"The socialist nations of Western Europe - France, Germany, Norway - are all discovering that they simply cannot afford cradle-to-grave social benefits. And we in America don't have the money to sustain the dreams and experiments of liberalism any longer either."

"If we don't appear to have the money" said Eddie, "then it is largely because we have cut the taxes so much on those who could afford it. The United States has witnessed the revolt of the wealthy against the rest of society. The well-to-do's taxes in particular went down; and, now the funding of the liberal welfare state is in

jeopardy."

"Listen Eddie" said Hush. "Liberal economies do not work. And don't tell me about the putative success of Japan, and their MITI and their government helping that economy. Japan's best companies have succeeded despite MITI, not because of it. The entire world is coming to understand that the government is unable to provide services as efficiently as private business. Laissez faire. Lower taxes. End welfare. Free enterprise. Entrepreneurship. Truth. God. Justice. Love. And the American way."

"Which brings me back to women and the economy."

Hush sighed, drank some more beer and continued. "Women need to go back home where they belong."

"Before feminism infested American life, there were clear rules between the sexes. Men had to honor and respect women."

"Slimbaugh", said Eddie, "in general what you advocate is a return to the 19th century -a romanticized, idealized, fictionalized 19th century. But then women could not vote; they frequently could not own property in their own name, or hold political office, or get a decent job or profession, or go to college or ..."

"Listen" interrupted Hush. "I know when I talk about women I am dealing with a sensitive and touchy

subject. And I love to be behind a women's movement. Hey, hey, hey. But seriously guys: I deeply, deeply, sincerely resent the politicization of social relations, of the relationship between the sexes in America."

"Slimbaugh" said Eddie, "there isn't a sincere bone in your body. And you have a big, big body."

Ignoring Eddie, Hush continued. "For example, this sexual harassment issue has poisoned the relations between the sexes."

"Poisoned the relations between the sexes or poisoned sexual relations?" queried Eddie.

"Both!", replied Hush. "Think about this for a moment: men who work in a predominantly male workplace are more loyal and more likely to stay on the job than if they work with a lot of prissy women. That is a fact. Men are more comfortable around other men at the workplace. Men cannot enjoy themselves or tell funny jokes with a lot of silly women around." Hush drank some more beer, then continued.

"Basically, I for one have had it with this modern creeping philosophy which says that men, in their natural state, are all rapists molesters, and reprobates."

"That's not such a new, creeping philosophy", said Eddie. "After all, it was hundreds of years ago that Thomas Hobbes held that life in the state of nature. is short, nasty and brutish: Calvin held that all humans after the

fall are absolutely sinful. In the early twentieth century Freud ..."

"Oh don't talk to me of Freud" cried Hush. "When I think of Freud I think of sex. And when I think of sex I get so agitated, so hot under the collar."

"Which collar?" asked Eddie.

Hush continued: "Sex. Do you realize that not that long ago, society tried to protect the girls from the natural and instinctive aggressive pursuit of young men?"

"Society would still need to protect girls from you" said: Eddie, "if you weren't so fat that you look like a wall."

"Oh, sex, sex, sex" cried Hush. And he drank another beer. "I tell you: there are those who steadfastly oppose the teaching of sexual abstinence. I think those people should be removed from any position of authority where educating children is concerned. Fired. Pronto."

It was then that Hush stood up. He grabbed the half-full pitcher of beer in his beefy, mushy hand and proclaimed: "Sex. Sex. Sex. There should be no pre-marital sex. .. There should be no extramarital sex. ...there should be no post martial sex." Hush then drank from the pitcher. He emptied it: most of the bubbly brew went into his mouth. Yet, a significant amount also came back out of his mouth. Some missed his mouth completely. Down the excess beer went; down his chin, his shirt, his tie, onto his pants, down to the waiting floor.

I'm afraid the evening, and Hush's lucidity, also went pretty much downhill from there.

Chapter 5 Tyrannosaurus Slimbaugh

Then the tirade began.

I believe I previously mentioned that it was at this time that we met our ravishing neighbor from the next table. She would soon have a large influence over Hush's fate. At this point, she seemed to be quite taken in by our dear friend Hush. Unfortunately, her attentions seemed to just egg Hush on. "Oh, tell me more", she would coo. "Oh, Mr. Slimbaugh, you're so intelligent; and good-looking too; what a man!"

The voluminous quantities of beer Hush had consumed probably did not help the situation much either. In any case, Hush went on a venomous harangue against liberals. Granted, Hush didn't say anything that I had not already heard on his radio show. But to hear it now in one steady stream, was difficult.

"People worried about depletion of the ozone are dunderhead alarmists and prophets of doom.

"Liberals survive and thrive on a fundamental belief that the average American is an idiot: stupid, ignorant, uninformed, unintelligent. Liberals are arrogant and condescending.

"At the heart of the liberal philosophy is the belief that man lacks the intelligence to solve his own problems.

"Liberals can't afford to have history accurately

recorded and interpreted, because it would constitute a total repudiation of everything they have stood for.

"Liberalism is a failed ideology. Liberals have no common sense.

"I explode the hypocrisy, fraud, and deceit of the liberalism that is holding this nation hostage.

"It doesn't take any guts to become a liberal. Liberals just want to be thought of as good people, caring, compassionate, and sensitive. But they are really gutless.

"Liberalism poisons our nation's soul."

"Very few people could possibly make a rational choice to follow the liberal agenda. People have to be coerced into liberalism, tricked into it, or bullied into it."

At one point I remember Eddie interjected, "Hey, let's try to tone the rhetoric down a bit, excrementhead"; but it didn't help. Really, Eddie just poured fuel on the fire.

"I hate feminazis, environmental wackos, liberals. They all need to quit promoting the politics of hatred and alienation.

"Liberals punish achievement; they discourage self-improvement and stifle economic growth.

"Liberalism makes empty promises to the world, but only offers a dead end.

"I despise liberalism and its utter philosophical bankruptcy. Liberals are the last desperate gasps of a dying philosophy.

"Dementia: people who suffer from this illness represent a solid voting block for liberalism.

"The impartial observer would be hard pressed to deny the relative intolerance and venom of the left as compared to the right.

"Clinton and his boys lie every chance they get."

"OH, why do liberals have such an `us versus them' mentality?"

I believe at that point Eddie said "if the shoe fits wear it". Yet the diatribes continued.

"The greatest threat to the human spirit is liberalism. It wrecks the soul.

"The entire population is in virtual thrall to the lunatic ideology of a pitifully small number of contemptuous liberal intellectuals. They are an intellectually dishonest, morally bankrupt elite.

"Remember one of my undeniable truths of life: evidence refutes liberalism.

"Liberalism and wrong-headedness are the same thing.

"I only want an open and honest debate on the issues. Why, oh why, can't liberals address the issues? Why must they call people names?"

Hush continued his monologue.

"Liberals have made it clear that they have no intention of fighting fairly or playing by the rules. So I won't.

"My goal is the destruction of liberalism as a dominant force in this ecosystem.

"Every sector of society in breakdown today has been under the domination of liberalism for a generation.

"Liberalism is a deceit.

"Liberal Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders lost her marbles a long time ago.

"Democratic leader Ann Richards' natural calling would have been to hawk Ruffles ... with Ridges. You know, the wrinkled potato chips. Think about it. She was born needing her face ironed. Chortle, chortle.

"Secretary of State Warren Christopher is a prune face.

"Amy Carter and Chelsea Clinton ..."; well I'm not going to repeat the calumnies Hush said about those innocent children. Innocent children whose only offense in life to Slimbaugh is that their father was or is the President of these great United States of America; and a Democrat.

"I don't insult people and try never to be cruel.

"Words mean things. That's why I'm so careful about the words I use. But words are meaningless when they come out of the mouths of liberals.

"Perhaps the weirdest, most deviant liberal behavior

of all is the kind taking place in our universities under the guise of learned research.

"Liberals deceive, lie, attack, undercut, obstruct, sabotage. They don't give a damn about what is good, bad, right, or wrong.

"Oh why, oh why, do liberals so often resort to ad hominen arguments and name calling? Because they are unable to win the arguments on the merits.

"I abhor liberals, environmentalist wackos, and other fringe groups."

Eddie interjected at that point, "Oh, and now liberals are a fringe group?"

Slimbaugh did not answer the question but continued his onslaught.

"Liberals - whose ugly sewage the country has been wallowing in for thirty years now.

"Liberals undermine the will of the people.

"Liberalism is easy; conservatism is hard."

"Conservatism understands what actually is true: about the economy, about history, about human nature, about society."

"No", countered Eddie at this point, "conservatism is based just upon the affluent following their own narrow short run economic interests."

But still Hush went on.

"Liberalism is based on feeling, on what liberals wish were true. Conservatism is based on fact.

"Liberalism is not cool. Wherever liberalism has been tried, it has failed.

"Liberalism is dead, but liberals are not. They still control the educational institutions. We must weed them out.

"Liberals are wolves in sheep's clothing. They are nothing but a bunch of trick-or-treaters.

"Its always the most vulnerable who are hurt most by so-called compassionate liberals."

And on and on it went. At one point Eddie did concede that Hush was one of the most popular buffoons in America.

"Don't call me a bassoon" said Hush angrily.

"I did not call you a bassoon" replied Eddie; "nor an oboe either".

Thereupon, Hush got really mad. He stood up and drew his fleshy arm backwards: "You call me a homo again, and I'll bust your chops."

We finally, with great difficulty, settled Hush down. But the diatribes, the vitriol, the venom which came forth from Hush's mouth continued long into the night.

Oh, I almost forgot the imitations. Hush gave imitations of Senator Ted Kennedy drunk. (Hush was quite good at that one.) He gave imitations of Barbara Streisand speaking with a "Jewish" accent. He made fun of Jesse Jackson's name. He said the President of the United States had psychosomatic disorders, no shame, and no conscience;

that the President surrounded himself with obscene, lying, dishonest thieves for advisors. Hush made fun of what he called the National Association of Nags; of "wacko" left wing clergy; of the Attorney General's appearance; of pointy headed academic elites; and many other opponents too numerous to recall.

Finally Hush wore himself out. He collapsed back into his seat and muttered, "Well, I just don't know why people don't like me; I'm simply a harmless little ballfuzz, errr fuzzfball." It was time for Hush to go home.

Hush by this time was having trouble with his gross motor skills. I offered to drive him home, but he refused.

His new admirer offered to walk him out to the car. Hush said something about her having the good sense to want to hear more of his "wisdom for the ages." I vaguely remember him saying, "Hey, you're pretty smart for a girl."

On his leaving I called to him, "Now, Hush, don't forget about your devoted wife 'Chastity' waiting for you back home". Hush turned, smiled, smirked, winked, tripped, fell down, got up, fell down again, got up, stumbled into a few tables, and then ambled out the door.

After they left I turned to Eddie: "You know, Hush is full of bombast. His logic is not too good; in fact it is frequently, perhaps generally faulty. He makes up `facts'. He is full of misinformation. Nonetheless, he does have a relatively coherent theory, vision, ideology of the way the world works. You need to confront him at that level Eddie, and not just make wisecracks and jokes about his personal appearance."

"Steve, I know I shouldn't make jokes about his weight" said Eddie, "but I can't help it. He opens himself up to such ridicule as he ridicules others less fortunate than he. Besides, for someone who is always ranting about the need for discipline, he has absolutely no discipline in his eating and drinking habits. He is a fatso. Would you pass me the beer and pizza please, Steve?"

I looked at Eddie: "Don't say fatso; Hush is

just horizontally challenged."

As we were talking, I thought I heard an accident out on the street. There was a squealing of tires and a dull `thud'. Sometime later, I noticed the sound of an ambulance out in front of Naples, on Wall Street. I remember wondering if there was an accident involving someone I knew; perhaps Hush even, or his new admirer. For a brief nanosecond an electronic message of concern for Hush dashed from one side of my brain to another.

But it was warm in Naples. There was a pleasing hubbub in the air. In the next room people were singing Celtic folk songs. My mind was perhaps a little besotted from the beer fumes. The topic of conversation shifted.

Eddie and I talked about our own lives, liberty, and personal pursuits of happiness long into the night.

We left Naples sometime after "last call". Eddie walked home to his nearby modest apartment. I drove home to the quiet suburbs, to my lovely wife and two sleeping children.

The suburbs; the now silent suburbs, away from the bright lights of the city. A place where people go to escape from the dirt, crime, poverty, squalor, despair, excitement of the urban milieu. A place where people tend to be born or to become stolid Republicans: supposedly safe

from the volatile underclass; separate from the teeming new immigrants from Latin America. My Toyota sped away from the bright lights of the city; over the bridge, down the interstate, past McDonalds, off the exit ramp. There were no street lights in suburbia. The moon was not out; the stars were not out. I drove home; through a land of darkness.

Part II Naples Pizzeria: 5 Weeks Later

Chapter Six: Slimbaugh Subdued Part I

I did not see Hush or Eddie again for five weeks, when we met at our usual spot at Naples. During that interim I was engrossed in my work in mathematical economics. I had become obsessed with reworking Paretian optimality theory using neochaosian mathematics. For society, this was a more or less totally useless exercise, I know. Yet, it occupied my brain. I felt that if I found a solution to the mathematical exercise then my academic tenure would be virtually assured. In John Kenneth Galbraith's book The Tenured Professor, he suggested that the quickest route to tenure is to study in detail an obscure, arcane, totally useless topic. As an example, he suggested that one study prices in the refrigerator industry as a fine route to academic security. In my own way, I was trying to follow Mr. Galbraith's sage advice.

Certainly, I would be among the first to admit that Hush could make some telling points about the educational establishment. Nonetheless, I believe the United States has the finest system of higher education in the world. We see that because many, many more students from around the world

come to study here in the United States, than American students go abroad. If foreign countries had better universities than exist in the U.S., we would see more U.S. students going abroad to study science, medicine, economics, etc. - and that just is not happening.

On the radio I heard Hush say that we should privatize our system of higher education. I cannot see how putting universities under the control of corporations - converting them into profit maximizing institutions - as Hush would want - would necessarily improve the system. Indeed, it would surely make the schools worse, and stifle creative, critical thinking.

Hush and Eddie were already arguing when I entered the pizzeria. Hush did not look so good. I believe I mentioned that Hush is a big man. I would say he is about five foot ten and when I last saw him he weighed about 280 pounds. Well, now Hush must have put on another 100 pounds. His body looked like a giant meatball with another smaller meatball squished on top to form his head. His cheeks and forehead tissue were overgrown so that they almost obscured his eyes; there was a deep sadness in those eyes. In due time, Eddie and I would learn the source of that sadness.

Hush was sluggish that night. He was perspiring heavily, and his face was flushed. I wondered if he had a fever. But his appetite was keen. I don't think Hush drank any more that night than he had during our previous encounter: that would have been difficult to do. But he ate

virtually nonstop. It was hard to keep the pizzas flowing fast enough to our table. I payed for the bill that night and I kept the receipt (for tax purposes). We ordered 11 large pizzas; at twelve dollars a pizza, I spent \$132 on pizzas alone (plus tax). I would say at least nine of those pizzas were consumed by our friend Hush.

Oh, there was another peculiarity about Hush's behavior that night: he kept scratching his gonads. As the night wore on, the more he ate and the more he scratched. It was embarrassing.

Eddie on the other hand looked fit and trim, crisp and sharp. That night Eddie reminded me of the young Mohammed Ali - the pre brain-damaged Ali - who could float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. Hush must had goaded Eddie into getting into shape, into preparing for these verbal fisticuffs. That night Eddie was a verbal pugilist.

"Giving money to the rich will not increase savings" said Eddie, as I walked in. "In fact, it could decrease savings." "How could that be?" asked Hush.

"If you give money to the rich, by lowering their taxes, or whatever it takes to further enrich them, that will encourage the wealthy to consume more and lead a more profligate, grandiose lifestyle. The rest of the people look up to the rich, and frequently emulate the rich. They will increase their consumption and lower their savings.

"It's very hard to directly increase a people's savings", continued Eddie. "But the government really

doesn't have to directly. Generally, every one tries try to save money. If the standard of living goes up, then savings will go up.

"In fact, governmental efforts to increase savings directly are misguided and counterproductive. They generally help the wealthy, but they can also hurt the whole economy. Here's how.

"Suppose we were at more or less full employment, so that most people who wanted to work were indeed working. Suppose then that everybody tried to save more. What would happen? They would consume less. Unless exports went up, or the government bought more, then goods produced would not get sold. Excess inventories would build up. Employers would not be able to sell what they produce, so they would lay off workers. As unemployment went up, workers' income would go down. As their income went down, their savings would go down. You can't save much money when you are unemployed. Hence, the effort to save more money would lead to a decrease in actual savings. All this is simple Keynesian economics."

"Oh Keynes" groused Hush. "He was a socialist. He said that freedom caused the Great Depression and that government planning ended it."

"No he did not", replied Eddie. "Once again you are misstating your opponent's position. Whether you do this willfully or out of ignorance is difficult to say. I

suspect it is some of both.

"Keynes was one of the most important people of the twentieth century. He was not a socialist. His goal was to save capitalism - and I believe he did. For reasons which I hope to make clear shortly, the world is in dire need of another Keynes right now. The future may indeed look back on this century as the century of Keynes - or the lack thereof. It depends on what happens in the next few years."

"Give me a break", sighed Hush.

Eddie continued. "For Keynes, lack of savings is more the symptom than the cause of our problems. If people's income goes up, then they will save more. If people's income goes down they will save less. The trick is to get people's income to go up.

"Much of contemporary so-called supply side economics consists in reducing taxes on property income and increasing taxes on wage income through increases in payroll and social security taxes. Of course, property income is not necessarily "saved". Property income is interest, dividends, profits and capital gains, among others. Property income can be spent on consumer goods just as easily as wage income can. The emphasis on lowering taxes on "savings" is frequently just a verbal dodge by the moneyed class to reduce taxes on income generated by property. It is a way to enable the wealthy to shelter their property income from taxation.

"Supply side economics at heart is based upon Say's Law: that supply creates its own demand. Any businessperson

knows that this is not always true. There are times when businesses cannot sell what they make. Similarly, there are times when an unemployed person, a person trying to supply labor, cannot get a job. And there are times when an increase in savings, a potential increase in the supply of capital and investment, will not necessarily generate an increase in investment.

"There are basically two types of people who believe in supply side economics: the dumb and the greedy."

"Eddie" I said, "aren't we being a little strong here?" "You're becoming an economicowhacko", said Hush.

"No, I don't think so" replied Eddie. "Even George Bush, before he became President, and before he became Ronald Reagan's Vice President, called it voodoo economics. Although perhaps unduly racist, that is a pretty accurate description of supply side economics. It's a sham, designed to get the government to help the well-to-do. That is why it is so hard to wipe the smirk off the faces of people such as William F. Buckley when he talks supply side economics. He knows its an economic sham designed to help him and his rich cohorts.

"That is one reason why Ronald Reagan was so effective a president. He was so stupid he believed in supply side economics. That stupidity is what enabled him to be such an effective supply side salesman. He would have had more difficulty selling it if he realized

it was a sham.

"That is why you wouldn't be so effective a president as Reagan, Hush. You are too smart. You smirk too much. You know it is basically jive. But you promote it to suck up to the well to do."

"Heh, watch your mouth", said Hush.

"Let's think about capitalism", continued Eddie. "We know, that with private property, with a relatively extensive free and open market, you can indeed frequently get economic growth. Capitalism needs stable laws, a fair government administering those laws, protection of private property, reasonable taxes, and the absence of wars, particularly wars on domestic soil. Taxes should be certain, not arbitrary; they should be as efficient to collect as possible; they should obstruct the work of the people as little as possible; and they should give as little vexation and oppression as possible.

"In these circumstances, capitalism can indeed generate economic growth. But what kind of economic growth? It can lead to great poverty on one hand and great wealth on the other. It can despoil the environment. It can generate economic insecurity as people become dependent upon their jobs for their livelihood.

"One problem with capitalism, which Keynes sought to address, was the business cycle. There is a tendency in the capitalist system where if things go bad, they can get worse. For example, if unemployment goes up, people may

worry about keeping their jobs; so they cut back on their spending. Employers may worry that they won't be able to sell what they make at a price which covers their prime production costs, so they may cut back production. People not spending, employers not producing; this increases unemployment, making the situation worse.

"On the other hand, according to Keynes, there is a tendency for economic expansions to turn into booms. If the economy is going well, people increase their spending. Firms expand their investments. Increases in consumption and business investment fuel the economy to economic growth. An expanding economy will have a tendency to continue to expand: the better business is, the more people spend and the more firms invest. This sets the stage for inflation and an eventual bust, because as people and firms spend more, output cannot keep up with the increased spending, and prices must rise. Eventually people stop spending and the bust arrives.

"We can see this sort of cyclical behavior in the financial and housing markets too. If people are feeling optimistic about the future, they will buy stocks in the financial markets, or they will buy a new home. This will increase the price of stocks, or of houses. People owning stocks and houses will feel richer, thus spending even more money, further increasing the price of stocks, houses, and other goods and services, thus fueling the rest of the economy.

Of course, eventually you will get a financial bust. Lack of spending could cause a fall in the stock market and in the housing market. People will feel less wealthy, curtailing further purchases or perhaps prompting them to sell their stocks or houses. The stock and housing markets will further decline in price. People could also buy fewer goods and services, thus also increasing unemployment. The bust in the financial or housing markets could bring about an economic recession.

"Keynes felt that the key to the economy was investment in producing real goods and services. He felt that to encourage this so-called real investment, people needed to have faith in the future, and to be optimistic about the future. Keynes felt the government needed to smooth out the business cycle, to fight the busts (depressions, recessions, financial panics, etc.) and to dampen the booms.

"The government should attempt to encourage people to have confidence that the future will be relatively predictable and rosy. The government should also try to dampen wild swings in interest rates, and in the international value of the currency. This would help to create an environment conducive to the encouragement of investment in real plant and equipment.

"Keynesian policies were largely put into place after World War II. The government used these policies to try to smooth out the business cycle. The government encouraged

low, stable interest rates so that people would want to borrow and invest. Exchange rates were kept relatively stable and fixed through the so-called Breton Woods system. In addition, the government supported education. Also, the United States lent and gave money to Europe and Japan to rebuild their war-shattered economies: which they invested in real plant and equipment. The United States government set up programs to help World War II veterans to go back to college, and to buy homes. This increased our supply of so-called human capital and housing. Agricultural price supports put in place during the depression years helped the farmers and stabilized the prices of farm goods. The system worked. There was a Post World War II economic boom which lasted until 1973.

"Why do you think it ended?" I asked. "I'm good at math, but heck, these larger economic issues just escape me."

Hush said nothing, but issued an occasional grunt as he continued to feed his face and scratch his private parts.

"Several reasons", said Eddie. "First of all, the oil crisis of the 1970's hurt the Keynesian-based world capitalist system. As then President Nixon said sometime around that time, "we are all Keynesians now". Indeed, to a large extent that was true. All of the advanced capitalist countries pursued a more or less Keynesian approach.

"The price of oil quadrupled in 1973 and again in

1979. Oil was such an important input in all the advanced capitalist economies that its dramatic price increase was a major shock to the whole economy. Money and real resources went to the oil producing countries. As the price of oil rose, firms raised their prices to try to recoup their costs. At the same time, with the transference of wealth to the oil producing countries, real income declined. Workers tried to keep up with the price increases by demanding higher wages. Some firms went out of business, unable to sell their output at prices sufficient to cover their costs. Unemployment went up.

"It was not clear what the government should do. Were we in a boom - what with rising prices? In that case we should fight inflation. Or, were we in a bust, or recession, with rising unemployment? In that case we should fight the recession.

"It was at this junction that in the U.S. supply side economics entered the political scene with the election of Reagan.

"But, remember, all along Keynesian economics had some important enemies."

"I'm not surprised. How so, motor-mouth?" asked Hush. "In the first place", replied Eddie, "people felt it was rather immoral."

"Immoral?" I asked.

"I think so", said Eddie. "Consider the issue of unemployment. There were two basic ways Keynesians could

fight unemployment. One was by increasing the government debt, thus having the government borrow money. Some people felt that this was immoral. Yet, the government could indeed use borrowed money to hire people to work.

"Basically, this is how World War II got us out of the Great Depression: some called it War Keynesianism. Formerly unemployed people went into the army or went to work in the munition plants. With their new jobs, they saved more money. Much of their savings went to purchase U.S. savings bonds - thus funding the government debt. The government borrowed money by selling U.S. savings bonds. With that borrowed money they got the economy moving again.

"The Cold War in general, and the little hot wars in Korea and Vietnam, were also largely financed through government debt. This helped to keep unemployment low throughout the prosperous Post War era."

"I thought you said war was bad for capitalism?" asked Hush. "I think I smell a contradiction: a liberal, Keynesian contradiction."

"Well, war frequently is bad for capitalism", said Eddie. "It creates economic insecurity, and if it is fought in your country it creates chaos, and destroys the economic infrastructure. It can lead to revolutions. But wars fought on foreign soil, especially smaller controlled wars such as the Vietnam and Korean Wars (I'm speaking here from a U.S. perspective of course) can help the economy. It puts people

to work. All throughout the 1960's, while the Vietnam War promoted social discord and unrest in the U.S., the economy was humming.

"Anyway, I don't think most people ever did really approve of deficit spending. A few years later the supply siders would massively increase peacetime deficit spending (i.e. spending financed by government debt). An irony is that they increased the peacetime debt much more than the Keynesians ever did. More on that in a moment.

"Another way to fight unemployment would be to lower interest rates. This could generally be done by printing money. Again, this, along with deficit spending, was held to be rather immoral."

"Immoral?" asked Hush. "So you admit that deficit spending and printing money are immoral?"

"No", said Eddie. "I said people felt that expansionary Keynesian economics was slightly immoral since it called for deficit spending and expanding the money supply (or printing more money). I also suspect that some people felt Keynes was rather immoral himself. Recent biographers of Keynes suggest that he had a rather large sexual appetite and was a bisexual. He seems to have led a rather hedonistic lifestyle."

"I knew it," said Hush; "Keynes was another liberal pervert."

"Keynesian economics also made some other powerful enemies", Eddie continued. "Not only did the economy expand

more quickly than ever under Keynesian policies (until 1973), but Keynesianism arguably disproportionately helped the workers. The degree of income and wealth inequality declined in the advanced capitalist countries. The Keynesian policy of low real interest rates increased real investments, but it also had a tendency to keep the profit rates low too. Government policies which encouraged consumption tended to help the young and the poor, since they were the ones who had the highest propensity to consume. Of course, during this time period savings went up. But savings went up because more was being made, the standard of living was increasing, income was going up.

"From the point of view of the well-to-do, a problem came into being with this system: how to control the workers? There were two sides to this question. One was simply cost. Without the boom/bust cycle, without the threat of mass unemployment, with people feeling that "the business cycle was obsolete", there was constant pressure by the workers for higher wages. When wage increases exceeded the increases in worker productivity, this generated inflation.

"Now, this high wage economy to some extent helped the entire economy. High wages promoted technological change, as firms tried to substitute cheaper machines for the workers. For the economy as a whole, the introduction of machines increased worker productivity and helped generate more economic growth. Workers laid off by the technological changes tended to be reabsorbed into the high wage economy.

"But workers unafraid of mass layoffs, tended to become aggressive and demanded higher wages. These high and constantly rising wages did generate inflation.

"Another problem was the workers' attitudes. This was, as you have talked about Hush, a sixties phenomenon. Young people in general, and young workers in the 1960's did not make great workers (or so it was felt). Without the threat of unemployment, they were poor at doing what they were told to do in the workplace. In terms of the parlance of the day, they were 'alienated'. Workers came to want not just a job, but a 'good', 'fulfilling' job.

"I knew the sixties were key", grumbled Hush. "But then, everyone knows that."

"In a way, that is true Hush", continued Eddie. "Keynes had to try to save capitalism in the 1930's because of the mass unemployment. In that era the capitalist system threatened to break down due to lack of jobs, thus generating a revolution. The situation in the 1960's seemed to be just the opposite. All throughout the capitalist world there was dissatisfaction with the capitalist system: and this at a time of low unemployment. Some people, enemies of Keynesian economics, felt that we needed more discipline in society, more unemployment to make the workers work harder and more diligently, to make the system function better. It was felt that the 1930's were a time of too much unemployment; but the 1960's were a time of too little unemployment.

"In the United States this harsher, tougher attitude became operative with Reagan coming into power. Reagan's administration brought in supply side economics. This entailed, among other things, lower taxes for the wealthy, an attack on labor unions, and an attack on the social welfare system; an attempt at a return to the pre-Keynesian days of capitalism."

"So you think that supply side economics is a scam?" I asked.

"Basically yes", said Eddie. "The idea that you could cure the deficit by cutting taxes, the so-called Laffer curve, was a scam. The idea that you help the economy by directly encouraging savings, especially by giving money to the well-to-do, was a scam. The idea that people were unemployed because of the social welfare net, was largely a scam. The idea that supply creates its own demand was a scam. The idea that all unemployment is voluntary, was a scam. This is all pretty well known.

"Where do the monetarists fit in?" I asked. "After all, Paul Volcker, who was head of the Federal Reserve Board during the Reagan era, was a monetarist."

"Not quite", said Eddie. "Among economists, the monetarists were historically the main opponents to the Keynesians. In the 1970s the monetarists were mainly concerned about the inflation. The inflation was most likely largely caused by the oil crises and the previous low rates of unemployment, allowing workers to increase

their wages: as I discussed earlier. But the monetarists held that the inflation was caused by too much money being printed. So they wanted the Federal Reserve Board, America's central bank, to reduce the supply of money. This, of course, would raise interest rates and cause a recession, lower real investment and increase unemployment. In a way, you could say it would discipline the workers.

"Volcker, as he makes clear in his perhaps tragic memoirs, Changing Fortunes, adopted the guise of monetarism. He pretended to be only following the monetarist policy of reducing the rate of increase of the money supply. In reality, he increased interest rates to over 20 per cent. People could not afford to borrow money to invest, start businesses, or buy houses or cars. The high interest rates choked the economy, created the greatest recession in the early 1980s that the U.S. had seen since the depression, increased unemployment, and eventually reduced inflation. This happened during the first years of the Reagan administration - something Republicans now like to forget.

"But why did Volcker pretend to be a monetarist?" I asked.

"He knew that if he said he planned to raise interest rates to over 200, that he planned to raise unemployment to the highest level since the Great Depression, then he would probably never have gotten enough political and social support for his program to make it stick. So Volcker pretended to have become a monetarist so that he could just

say, 'what interest rates? what unemployment? I'm just controlling the money supply'".

"So you say there was a double scam going on during the Reagan years?" I asked.

"Yes" said Eddie. "One was the scam of supply side economics, getting the government to change the distribution of income in favor of the well-to-do and to the detriment of most Americans. The other was Volcker's monetarist scam. He pretended to be a monetarist. But it was not a total scam. Volcker did succeed in eventually bringing down the rate of inflation, but at the cost of high interest rates, high unemployment, lost output, and a decrease in real investment in plant and equipment. To some degree, this combination of supply side economics and monetarist thought still haunts us today."

"How so?" I asked.

"Well, in the first place, the supply side strain, by trying to directly increase savings by giving more money to the wealthy, hurts the economy in several ways: much of the money is not saved by the wealthy anyway. It does not get invested. The wealthy get wealthier; they increase their profligate ways, and the rest of the country attempts to emulate them.

"The monetarist strain continued in a manner of fashion in the Federal Reserve Bank in the U.S. and the other major central banks around the world. They argue that their main job is to fight inflation. They do this by

keeping the supply of money down, and the interest rates high. They have been relatively successful in keeping down the rate of inflation, but at a high cost. These costs include a decrease in real investment due to the high interest rates; and high unemployment as a result of these tight, restrictive monetary policies."

"Eddie", said Hush, "I think your economic analysis, such as it **is**, suffers from an over-febrile imagination. But tell me more about your version of Reaganomics. Any more imagined shams?"

"In a way, yes. The Reagan administration brought in the monetarists and the supply siders. The monetarists basically just wanted smaller government, less taxes, and control over the money supply and the Federal Reserve Board (since the Federal Reserve Board controls the supply of money). People such as the great monetarist Milton Friedman never believed in Say's Law, the Laffer Curve, or supply side economics. But when Reagan lowered taxes and the deficit ballooned, they realized they had stumbled onto a wonderful club."

"What was that?" asked Hush.

"They realized they could use the deficit as a club to smash government spending. The monetarists had never been able to get the populace to agree to cut government spending and taxes simultaneously, which is what the monetarists wanted. So first they went along with the supply side tax cut. This increased the deficit; they then

used the deficit as a reason to cut government non-defense spending.

"Hence, the question never was the size of the deficit per se. Or rather, the size of the deficit was just a smoke screen. The question was and still is: how big should the government be? How should the government be financed? Who should pay the taxes"

"Here, again, we see that supply side economics was partly a revolt of the wealthy and well-to-do against the rest of society. It was a revolt based upon greed; a revolt by those most benefiting from the society we live in against the others; a revolt into darkness.

"Eddie, aren't we getting a little histrionic here?" I asked.

"Yes, don't forget you are a pinko liberal bereft of morals" said Hush.

"Oh, we're talking morals here; greed; darkness; perhaps even sin", replied Eddie. "The wealthy wanted to cut their taxes, and government services that go to the less well-to-do. Government services which support the wealthy's activities tended to be viewed more benignly. The well-to-do pursued their policies sequentially. First they got the government to cut their taxes. Now they are trying to cut more and more government services. In the interregnum, you have huge government deficits. That is the situation we are now in, even today. We are living in the shadow of the supply side/monetarist framework. It was the

supply siders who instituted the tax cuts in the name of the Laffer curve. (Remember, the Laffer Curve held that when you cut taxes, government revenue would go up because people, particularly the wealthy, would work so much harder and increase output.) It was the monetarists who knew the Laffer Curve was a joke. The monetarists knew a cut in taxes would increase the government deficit. But the monetarists went along with the tax cuts to cut down the size of the government. It may have been bad economics, but, from a monetarist point of view, it was good politics.

"So you are saying that for the monetarists the key to reducing the size of the government was to cut off its tax base?" I asked.

"I believe so", said Eddie.

"Gee, Eddie", I said. "This sounds mighty conspiratorial. I don't think people are that clever."

"I don't think it is conspiratorial so much" said Eddie. "Frankly, I view it as rather Adam Smithian; or, almost an application of the invisible hand, so to speak. It's not that the supply siders and monetarists or Volcker had all this stuff figured out in advance. They all sort of muddled about, fell into these situations, and took advantage of them. Or, as a corrupt pol once said, they saw their opportunities and took them.

"In my opinion", continued Eddie, "some of them may have also read their Schumpeter."

"Oh, Joseph Schumpeter, one of my favorite

economists!" piped up Hush.

"My, you've read him?" I asked.

"Well, no of course not", he replied. "But I have read all about him."

"Schumpeter", said Eddie, "was probably the second most important economist of the 20th century - after Keynes. He is most noted for emphasizing the role of the entrepreneur as both a force for innovation, and in legitimizing the system of capitalism. He wrote an important article "The Crisis of the Tax State" which emphasized the dependence of the modern capitalist state upon taxation. I suspect this piece may have been a heavy influence upon some modern supply side economists. They want to weaken the modern liberal state by depriving it of its tax base. Schumpeter is part of their inspiration.

"Schumpeter liked and admired the system of capitalism, but he felt that in time it would be replaced by socialism. Here, Schumpeter was perhaps unduly pessimistic regarding the ability of capitalism to survive. But Schumpeter is interesting in that by reading why Schumpeter thinks capitalism cannot "survive", one can see how capitalism could be consciously promoted as a socioeconomic system. So, for example, Schumpeter felt that the entrepreneur was being squeezed out by big business and bureaucracies. He thought that people felt capitalism was not heroic; rather, it was boring. According to Schumpeter, people in capitalist societies tended to have small

families, fail to plan, or save, and have little faith in the future. People in capitalist societies tend to drift towards desiring some form of bureaucratic socialism.

"I suspect that some influential modern supply side economists have studied their Schumpeter. They are consciously trying to use the government and cultural institutions to urge and create antidotes to each of the problems Schumpeter saw. They try to attack the tendencies cited by Schumpeter within capitalism which lead to a drift towards socialism. So, for example, supply siders tend to promote the entrepreneur. They tend to consciously paint capitalists as heroic. They tend to be "pro-family" i.e. they tend to want a nuclear family with the mother staying home and raising children. They want people to have faith in the future and not become too rationalistic. They want to create a cultural environment where people like, accept and want to live under a capitalist economy."

"I'll buy all that", said Hush as he scratched himself.

Eddie continued: "I believe modern supply side economists are heavily influenced by Schumpeter; they use Schumpeter to provide them with a vision of how the capitalist system ought to operate."

"Hear, hear, all right; a toast to Schumpeter!" said Hush.

"Yet", Eddie continued, "let us move away from the economists for a moment, and consider modern U.S. Republicans in general.

"Basically, Republicans at the national level do not believe in government. Or, rather, they believe in a very limited role for government. To secure public office in the government, they tend to say they want to cut the fat, the waste in government spending. That is partly hogwash. Certainly, there is some waste in government - as with everything. But Republicans deliberately cut out muscle and bone as well. Then they complain about the results. After they cut into the core of the government, they complain that the government cannot and is not functioning very well.

"Thus, to have a Republican in federal office is like having the wolf guard the sheep. They don't believe in the government, so they try to run it down. They use their positions of power in the government to wreck the government.

"So, for example, they are letting the U.S. air traffic control centers deteriorate. Public hospitals around the country are cutting back basic services. They have made cuts so that the Internal Revenue Service is having trouble collecting taxes. Their cuts threaten the Bureau of Economic Analysis' ability to function to collect the economic data that many private sector decisions are based on.

"Hush", Eddie continued, "you like to say that liberals think the only cure to something is by throwing money at it.

"But your rhetoric is misleading. If you take away money from the government, you are taking away resources. You are using this line as a smokescreen to take money,

real resources, away from the government, to deprive it of its base by lowering taxes, so that you can wreck the government. The part of the government you and your ilk particularly want to wreck is that which provides services to non-wealthy Americans."

The table grew quiet, save for Hush scratching himself. Hush opened his mouth to speak, then closed it. I interjected: "Eddie, you said you thought that the 20th century would be remembered as the century of Keynes; or the lack thereof. What did you mean by that?"

"Yes, here is the deal."

Chapter Seven: Slimbaugh Subdued Part II

Eddie continued. "The twentieth century has seen three major world wars: World War I, World War II, and the Cold War.

"After the slaughter of World War I, there was very little or no long run planning. The peace was marked by vindictiveness on the part of the victors. Keynes was at the peace treaty at Versailles. He was a young man at the time, and what he saw disgusted him. Keynes left Versailles and wrote The Economic Consequences of the Peace. That book made Keynes's international reputation as an economist. In it Keynes castigated the Versailles peace process; he predicted it would lead to disaster. Events seemed to have proved Keynes right. It wasn't long before the world was plunged into a Great Depression and then another world war.

"The end of World War II was different. By this time Keynes was a big-shot. He helped plan the post World War II order. He helped to create the Breton Woods system; a system of relatively stable foreign exchange rates was organized; and the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations were set up. The Marshall Plan was put forth to help rebuild war-torn Europe. Planning; cooperation; a system; magnanimity; these were some of the qualities evinced in preparing for the Post World War II order. This is a system Keynes helped to construct.

"In recent years we have witnessed the end of the

third major war in the 20th century: the Cold War. We won! Hurray! But where are the victory parades? Where is the planning for peace?

"There is none. We did not even get a measly parade! I want a parade. There is no planning for peace. There is no Marshall plan for Russia. There is no magnanimity. There is no generosity.

"Instead we have new pettiness, disarray, and new little wars, as in Bosnia. The other two major wars in the 20th century showed us the potential ways, the potential paths. There was the post WWII path, marked by Keynes, and a Keynesian vision of the future. That path led to a quarter century of unprecedented prosperity for capitalism.

"And then there was the post WWI path: the path of greed, lack of planning, narrow self interest. That path led to depression and another world war. This is the path our world leaders are now choosing. They are choosing the path away from peace and prosperity and towards war and destruction. I do not believe it is too late for our leaders to change their ways. But so far, they have chosen the path of shame, greed and darkness: no planning, no magnanimity; not even a victory parade. I want my parade."

"Eddie, aren't you getting a little maudlin?" I asked. "What's the big deal about a parade?"

"We need a victory parade. It is symbolism; yet, it is also all too real. Don't you see? The Cold War is over. Now we need planning for peace. We are not prepared for peace. On the contrary, we have been plunged virtually without

warning into peace.

"We now have no external menace. America is more divided than ever. Why? One explanation is that our economic and political elites have forgotten the social functions of war. The war system helps to make the stable government of societies possible by providing an external enemy, an external necessity for a society to accept political rule. The United States needs to find palatable alternative enemies now that we have had a rash outbreak of peace."

Eddie's sarcasm was clear. "You're joking", I said.

"Only partly", he replied. "Here is the situation: during the Cold War, our elites had to make the capitalist system palatable to the have-nots. We were in economic competition with the Communists for the minds of the world. So our elites could not let the American populace down. So, for example, I believe this is why some of the elites helped the desegregation project in the south in the 1950s to aid America's blacks. They saw it as part of a project to keep Africa from turning to Communism.

"Now, with the apparent defeat of Communism, our economic and political elites care less about helping the non-elites, to allow them to benefit from our economic system. Now, more and more of our leaders don't care. They are basically just fronts, shells, for the narrow economic interests of the wealthy. Humanity and helping others are out, passe; greed and self interest are in."

Hush finally chimed in: "Listen, the end of the Cold

War and the defeat of communism in the Soviet Union was a clear victory for American values, for the American way of life, for the free-market ideals of the USA. It was brought about by Reagan's threats of SDI and bombing them into the stone age."

"Not necessarily", replied Eddie. "The Soviet system also ended from internal exhaustion. Their system was not working. They wanted to join the other European states in a European Common Market and Union. They wanted to introduce more economic markets into their system.

"What has happened though is they are now swinging to a form of extreme laissez faire robber capitalism. In reality, you have massive looting of state property there. They have no system of justice set up to provide the legalistic framework for capitalism. It is not clear who owns what property, and what the rights and obligations of property owners are.

"They also do not have a shared moral code which legitimates the extensive pursuit of self interest. Their old system has fallen apart. No new system is now in place. They are in deep, deep trouble. And that eventually, no doubt, will spell trouble for the rest of the world as well. Germany, defeated at the end of WWI became our enemy again a few short decades later in WWII. Will history repeat itself? Will some new form of aggressive non-democratic government emerge in the former Soviet Union?

Will the U.S. soon be fighting Russia again in a new world war? If so, it will be largely our own fault. We are not providing a suitable framework for future world peace."

"Eddie" I said, "enough about the Communists. I never understood their economy anyway. But, I enjoyed your story about the rise of the supply siders and monetarists in the U.S., and how they terminated the Keynesian economic regime which had successfully led the Post World War II system. Yet, it seems to me that you are neglecting the international linkages in your story. You are neglecting the international linkages in the world economy and the effects of the increasing globalization of the world economy."

"Yes, you are quite right", Eddie said. "There is an international side to the story. Indeed, in a way, the end of the liberal Keynesian regime can be largely attributable to the international bankers and financiers."

"Oh, the international financial conspiracy. I love it", said Hush. "Most international financial types are liberals - or communists. No wonder they are conspiring."

"Wrong on all accounts, Hush," replied Eddie. "Most international financial types are neither communists nor liberals; though, of course, there are exceptions. George Soros, the so-called man who broke the Bank of England a few years ago strikes me as quite a liberal: but he is more the exception than the rule. Also, I am not talking about a conspiracy; it is more the way the system works. Systems have a tendency to take on a life of their own."

"The Post World War II Keynesian system was brought down and is still being roiled by international events. Consider the international financiers, people who move billions of dollars around the world on their computers. Their currency speculations helped to bring down the so-called Breton Woods System in the early 1970s. That system had fairly stable, fixed exchange rates between currencies.

"The contemporary system is one of flexible, floating exchange rates. The major currencies such as the U.S. dollar and the Japanese yen change in value with each other: day by day, minute by minute, second by second. These fluctuations in the exchange rate disrupt international trade. But perhaps more important, these fluctuations also create more economic uncertainty, make people more uneasy, and lead to decreases in the total amount of investment in real plant and equipment.

"Recall, according to Keynes, people need a certain amount of stability, and confidence in the future to invest in real plant and equipment. Changes in currency rates increase risk. Real investment goes down. However, more money gets 'invested' in the financial markets themselves. As the value of currencies go up and down, there is big money to be made in betting which way the currency will go.

"So", I said, "you think there is an inverse relationship between the amount of money flowing between different currencies, international financial speculation,

or international financial 'investment', and so-called real investment?"

"Indubitably", he replied. "The more the exchange rates change, the more money there is to be made there, and the greater the risks involved in real investments. People can make quick fortunes by correctly betting which way the value of a currency will move. So naturally this will draw people and resources to the speculative side of the system."

Eddie continued: "The increase in insecurity, due to the shift from relatively stable to flexible exchange rates occurred in the early 1970's. That is when the Breton Woods system of exchange rates, largely designed under Keynesian ideas, came undone. This shift away from Keynesian ideas, and to flexible international exchange rates, decreased investment in real plant and equipment, reducing economic growth.

"The increase in insecurity due to flexible domestic interest rates happened in the late 1970's. The Keynesians wanted stable low interest rates, so that people could plan for the future and make long run real investments. The conservative opponents to the Keynesians, the Monetarists, said no, let the interest rates vary. The Monetarists said not to control interest rates; just control the supply of money.

"The major monetarist 'experiment' occurred in the U.S. from approximately 1979 to 1982 when Volcker adopted

the mask of monetarism to plunge the U.S. into a great recession to lower inflation. But even since then, interest rates have tended to be more flexible than they were previously. Changes in the interest rates lead to changes in the bond markets. That gives another source of speculation for financiers.

"Financiers can speculate in the bond markets. As interest rates fall and rise, the value of bonds tend to rise and fall as well. Fortunes can be made and lost by speculating in the bond markets.

"The other side of the coin to the relatively large changes in the interest rate and the price of bonds is that economic uncertainty increases for those who need to borrow money. With the increase in economic uncertainty comes another decrease in real investment. People are reluctant to undertake the kind of long term commitment needed for new real investment when the cost of borrowing money (that is, the interest rate) tends to vary so much.

"When the price of key inputs vary so much: the price of foreign exchange, or the cost of borrowing money, or the price of energy, investment will go down. This is one of the major reasons for the slowdown in economic growth since the 1970's. The gyrations in the interest rates and in the international currency markets have hampered real investment.

"But", continued Eddie, "there are even more problems associated with the rise of international finance. Do you

know what arbitrage is?"

"Certainly", said Hush. "That is when the price of the same thing has different costs in different markets. Hey, with modern computers, if the price of a security (a stock or a bond) costs a bit more in Japan than in New York, international financiers can buy that security in the New York market and practically instantaneously sell it in Japan for a little profit. This will tend to drive up the price of the security in New York and drive down the price of the security in Japan. Eventually, the price of the security should be basically identical in both Japan and New York. I would say arbitrageurs are doing society a service by unifying world prices."

"That may be", replied Eddie, "but they are also engaged in what they charmingly call tax and regulation arbitrage. Let's consider tax arbitrage first.

"Large corporations have subsidiaries located throughout the world. To some extent, they can cook their books (especially through creative accounting of the 'internal prices' of goods and services which they buy and sell between their subsidiaries) so that most of the profits will 'appear' in low tax countries. The financial incentive is obvious. If, according to their statements, most of their profits are "produced" in a low (or no) tax country, their world wide after-tax profits will be increased.

"To some extent, the same thing is happening with wealthy individuals. If they can move their own private

financial investments around so that most of their returns to their property arise in low (or no) tax countries, they will have a greater ability to avoid taxes in their home country.

"We are even seeing cases now where wealthy individuals Move away from their home country just for tax reasons - to find places with lower taxes. You see this with sports stars, tennis players; also often with the retired."

"I say good" said Hush.

"Well", said Eddie, "it does deprive the government of tax revenues. There are also tax incentives for firms to move their production facilities to countries or areas with low taxes.

"Thus, the international linkages provide various ways for the well-to-do to avoid paying taxes. Also, notice how this form of so-called arbitrage, tax arbitrage, differs from the traditional financial arbitrage you mentioned Hush. With financial arbitrage, the tendency was for the price of one security to go up and the price of the other one to go down. In the case you mentioned Hush, the price of a financial security went up in New York, and down in Tokyo. The working of financial arbitrage led to a convergence of one world wide price for the financial security, whether that security was sold in New York or Tokyo.

"With international tax arbitrage, there is basically only a tendency for taxes to go one way: down. Revenue is

lost from the high tax area. Hence, there is pressure for the authorities there to lower taxes: especially for the well-to-do who can afford to engage in these international maneuvers. The pressure is for high tax jurisdictions to lower their taxes so property, capital, and high wealth people will not migrate to low tax locales. The low tax jurisdictions have little or no incentive to raise their taxes. Thus, the international implications of this is that there is a general drift to lower world-wide taxes.

"A similar thing is taking place with so-called regulation arbitrage. All the major capitalist countries in the world have rules and regulations to manage the economy. Many, perhaps most, of these regulations inhibit the rich and powerful: they are regulations imposed upon property. So, for example, in the advanced capitalist countries, there are regulations to protect workers; there are regulations to protect the environment; there are regulations to protect consumers. As I previously mentioned, there used to be other regulations and mechanisms in place to try to make the economy more stable: e.g. managing a stable exchange rate, stabilizing interest rates and hence the bond markets, stabilizing the price of farm goods.

"Multinational firms can now produce most anywhere in the world. From the firms' point of view, many of these regulations are costly hindrances. Hence, there is a financial incentive for them to produce where there are the fewest regulations, where they have the most 'freedoms',

where their costs are the lowest. There is an incentive for them to locate their production plants where they have the greatest freedom to employ child laborers, to endanger their workers, or to despoil the environment; and through competition they will, no, they may be forced to do that. Because if it is cheaper, less costly, to produce using dangerous, environmentally destructive production methods, then that is where capital will flow (in the absence of government regulations).

"Hence, there are financial pressures for countries to reduce their regulations. They do this to keep their industries from emigrating. There are much fewer pressures for low or unregulated countries to increase their regulations. Again, we see then that the pressures are not for some jurisdictions to increase their regulations, and others to reduce them. The pressure is mostly one way: for countries to reduce their economic regulations to compete with the less regulated countries. Again, there is a drift to the bottom: a drift to fewer regulations, and to lower taxes.

"The drive to less regulations, or to deregulation, can perhaps be most clearly seen in the financial services industry. Financial services, financial capital, is possibly the most internationally mobile form of capital. The financial services industry is leading the way in the so-called globalization of the world economy. They can frequently instantaneously move massive amounts of their

financial assets and liabilities most anywhere in the world with the push of a computer button (or mouse). Yet, the financial services industry is just the most extreme form of the internationalization of capital. We can also see the same sorts of pressures in most all industries, albeit to a greater or lesser degree.

"Hence, the globalization of the world economy is leading, or generates forces, which point to less regulation, to more laissez faire systems, to lower taxes; in short, to more Slimbaughian ideas. Slimbaugh, you have powerful international economic movements on your side.

"But, of course", continued Eddie, "through economic competition, firms are not only forced to go where it is least costly to comply with regulations. They are forced also to go where labor is cheapest. Here is where we see the greatest potential attack on the average American's standard of living.

"Eddie", I said. "I hope you are not now going to attack free trade. There is nothing that we Ph.D. professional certified economists hold more sacred than free trade between countries. Free trade is theoretically beneficial to all. It allows countries to specialize in what they produce best and then to trade the surplus abroad. With free trade, each country will produce and specialize in what it does most efficiently. Free trade increases world productivity; and everybody benefits from free trade."

"Hear, hear", said Hush.

I was glad to hear Hush finally say something. I wasn't sure he was following all of Eddie's economic talk. I was also starting to worry about Hush. His voluminous body seemed to swell as he shoveled the pizzas into his mouth; and the sadness in his eyes was starting to get unnerving.

Eddie continued. "I know that the putative benefits of free trade is a theoretical fact. Of course, standard economic free trade theory is usually based upon the assumption of full employment in all economies participating in free trade. Without that absurdly unrealistic assumption, much of the logic and hence strength of the argument falls apart. Granted, I do agree that free trade between countries can be beneficial. Besides the reason you gave, free trade increases the size of markets, thus leading to more economies of scale, greater labor specialization, and hence greater labor productivity. There are indeed reasons to believe that in the long run, the increased globalization of the world economy, thus the increased size of many economic markets, can lead to worldwide economic growth. Also leading to economic growth, I might add, is technological change. These are both forces which would tend to raise Americans' standard of living over time.

"Nonetheless, in the current milieu, free trade is undermining the average American's standard of living.

And we are not just talking about free trade, of course. We are also talking about the free international investment of productive capital: of real investment in real plants and equipment.

"Recall that the economic growth (in the non Communist countries) which occurred in the Post World War II boom years was largely confined to Western Europe, North America above the Rio Grande, and Japan. Those are areas which had a regulated form of capitalism, which generally pursued Keynesian policies, and which saw real wages for their workers climb steadily. Each country had its own unique set of regulations and tax policies. It is these regulations and tax policies which are now under attack through so called regulation and tax arbitrage.

"The wages in the other non-Communist countries, the so called Third World, for the most part did not climb, or they climbed relatively slowly. Currently, with the globalization of the world economy, with declining transportation and communication costs, more and more first world firms can move their shops, their factories, their plant and equipment, their real investment, to third world countries. Moreover, here is the bottom line: it is hard for workers in Pennsylvania to compete with workers in the Dominican Republic who work for sixty cents an hour.

"Thus, there are economic forces at work to lower the wages of the average U.S. worker - or certainly the average U.S. unskilled worker. With mobility of real capital,

capital leaves this country and goes abroad where labor can be hired more cheaply."

"That should raise the wages of workers in third world countries", I said.

"Oh yes" said Eddie. "There will be some upward pressure on wages in third world countries: you are already seeing this in some areas. But there are so many unemployed and underemployed workers in third world countries, that it will be a long time before real wages there actually rise for the great mass of workers. For real wages there to rise significantly due solely to market forces, most of their unemployed and underemployed workers would have to be fully employed. That is not going to happen for a long, long time.

"So", I asked, "you see the flow of international investment to third world countries as basically hitting unskilled U.S. workers and causing their wages to fall?"

"For the most part", said Eddie. "It will first hit whatever workers are directly in competition with third world workers. Right now it is hitting our manufacturing sector pretty hard. Firms that can set up shops and employ cheaper labor in third world countries are doing so. To some extent this process is also beginning to hit skilled workers too. Many skilled workers are now watching their jobs migrate overseas. This is a blow to the U.S. middle class. College-educated foreigners in third world countries are doing high-technology tasks for far less pay than U.S. workers. Often they are working for U.S. owned firms which

have set up sophisticated advanced plants abroad.

"The Post World War II economic order was based on relatively high pay for the workers in the economically advanced capitalist countries; you had stagnating, low wages in most third world countries. That was a disequilibrium situation. You are now seeing a flow of technology and real capital to the third world."

"Yet, I can't believe that you are not in favor of free international investment Eddie", I said. "You, an educated person."

"Don't expect a liberal to be consistent", mumbled Hush. "I'm not necessarily against all free trade and international investment at all times", said Eddie. "I'm just saying it is not an unmitigated good. You professional economists tend to be unduly, almost uncritically for free trade and investment. Ditto for most of our political leaders in the U.S. Yet, I notice almost no one is calling for unlimited free mobility for workers, for laborers. Now, isn't that a bit peculiar? The calls for freedom of mobility for capital, for freedom to use private property, are deafening. The calls for free mobility of workers are practically nil in the advanced capitalist countries. Why is that?"

"I'll tell you why", continued Eddie. "If we opened our borders millions of people would come to us. The same is true for Western Europe and Japan. The same revolutions in transportation which are making it cheaper to transport

goods and services, also make it cheaper to transport humans. Free open borders in Japan, Western Europe and the U.S. would lead to a massive movement of poor people into those countries from the third world: from Latin America, from Africa, from South Asia. The increase in workers would tend to lower wages. I think that is obvious: totally free open borders to labor mobility would dramatically reduce the wages in first world countries. New immigrants would bid down wages. No-one denies that.

"What people close their eyes to is that in the current milieu international free trade and international capital investment tends to do the same thing. Our real capital goes abroad and hires third world workers at subsistence pay. The goods they produce then get imported back into the United States, undercutting the price of goods made by U.S. workers. This decreases the demand for U.S. workers and tends to drive down their wages. Real wages for U.S. workers tend to be depressed. This process just takes a little longer to happen than if millions and millions of immigrants simply moved into the U.S.; but the final effects are quite similar.

"So", Eddie continued, "now we see the larger economic background to Hush's rantings. The income of the average American worker has been stagnating or declining for a generation. Its been due to the replacement of a Keynesian economic regime with a more supply side/monetarist regime. Flexible international exchange rates introduced in the

early 1970s, and flexible interest rates introduced in the late 1970s, have increased economic uncertainty and decreased real investment in first world countries. Investment in third world countries and competition from them has held down real U.S. wages. The monetarist policy of keeping interest rates high to check inflation, has also hindered real investment in the U.S. The supply side policies to give more money to the well-to-do, to deregulate the economy, and to reduce the government's source of revenue, has also been destabilizing, reduced real investment, increased frivolous consumption, and hampered the provision of needed government goods and services. The supply side policies have also been aided by the international tax and regulation arbitrage, which is providing international pressure to reduce taxes and deregulate the economy.

“On the one hand, the domestic supply side and monetarist policies can be viewed as the domestic application, the enforcer of, and the response to the tax and regulation arbitrage of the international financiers and multinational corporations. On the other hand, their policies also further the ability of the international financiers and multinational corporations to pursue their activities. These are the main reasons why there has been a relative lack of economic growth in the past twenty some years. Here is the source of stagnating wages. Moreover, the stagnating wages and economic uncertainty for the average

American is a major source of the economic resentment which feeds into Hush's popular support. You hear me Hush?"

"Huh, say what snortface?" asked Hush, jerking his head up. The combination of heavy economics, heavy pizza, and heavy adult beverages had put Hush to sleep.

Chapter Eight Slimbaugh Subdued Part III

"Slimbaugh", said Eddie, "your spewings are a combination of pro-rich economic doctrine and a severe, harsh moral system; a moral system which demands strict adherence to rigorous standards and high principles; rigorous standards and high principles which you, indeed, do not possess. There is the hypocrisy. You and others are advocating a severe moral and social system while putting forth economic policies to help the voluptuous, profligate rich. Someday people will wake up and see your fraud; the fraud of you and others like you."

"What do you mean?" asked Hush. "I am a conservative. I favor traditional views and values. I tend to oppose change."

"No, said Eddie. "You want change all right: change to help the rich and powerful.

"You are an anti-liberal. What is a liberal? Look it up in the dictionary. Liberals try not to be limited to or by established, traditional, orthodox or authoritarian attitudes, views, or dogmas. Liberals strive to be free from bigotry. Liberals are tolerant of the ideas and behavior of others. Liberals are broad-minded; they try to think for themselves. In this sense, the United States is ideally a liberal country.

"Liberals tend to give freely and generously.

Synonyms for the word liberal are bounteous, bountiful, freehanded, generous, munificent. An antonym is stingy.

"America's history can be seen as a fight between liberalism and anti-liberalism; between largesse and stinginess. You are on the side of stinginess."

Hush stirred himself up, trying to work up his passionate juices. "The world has never seen anything like the United States of America. In higher education, economics, lifestyle, prosperity, form of government, and personal freedom, we are blessed with more and better than any other country."

"That may be", said Eddie. "And America is based on liberalism. Our great educational system is largely provided by the government. Our land grant institutions of higher learning were put forth by Liberal Republicans. Heck, if Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, had been an anti-liberal, we might still have slavery today."

"Our economic policies are based on liberalism. Our personal freedoms are based upon liberalism. Our form of government is liberal. The idea of separation of church and state is liberal."

"But", protested Hush, "I have a conservative predisposition. I'm just a harmless..."

"On the contrary", said Eddie. "You are a rebel. You have a loud mouth. Even your ties are ridiculous. You..."

"What's wrong with my ties?" asked Hush. "They show individuality and taste."

"Individuality, no; taste, yes, but what kind of taste?"

asked Eddie. "I see the tie you are wearing is so loud that unless someone smelled it, they wouldn't know that last month's pepperoni pizza is splattered all over it."

Said Hush, "I am not a rebel. My economics is conservative. It is based upon Adam Smith, the first great 18th century British economist who was a conservative."

"Oh no," said Eddie. "Your economics is stingy. It is based not on Adam Smith, but on the tightfisted Thomas Malthus. It was Malthus who wrote in response to the French Revolution that it is utterly hopeless to change social institutions to help the poor. He is the cold hearted soul who blithely wrote 'It has appeared, that from the inevitable laws of our nature some human beings must suffer from want. These are the unhappy persons, who, in the great lottery of life, have drawn a blank.' A blank! Someone should have given Malthus a blank - in the face. Malthus was a great source of comfort to the rich and powerful of his day.

"On the other hand, the learned Adam Smith was a liberal. He used reason to try to change social institutions to help the people at large. Nothing could be farther from the spirit of Adam Smith than your spoutings.

"Most of the rules and regulations in Smith's time were made by and for the rich and powerful against the rest of society. Smith was against those rules. For example, Smith argued against the use of maximum wage laws; today's anti-liberals argue against the use of minimum wage laws. Smith argued against monopolies created by and for the rich

and powerful. Today's anti-liberals argue on behalf of contemporary global monopolies owned and managed by the rich and powerful.

"Adam Smith wrote in the 18th century as a liberal against the rules and regulations which were put in place by and for the rich and powerful. Today, many of the rules and regulations in the 20th century were put in place by modern liberals. Modern liberals created these rules and regulations to limit the power of the rich and powerful, to limit the power of people with property to run roughshod over the needs of the rest of society. These are now the rules and regulations which the rich and powerful are currently so eager to repeal. Their disposition is indeed radical: radical stinginess; radical greediness; radical darkness. They are rebelling against the rest of society."

"It sounds to me", said Hush, "like you are pushing more of your class conflict jargon."

"Well", said Eddie, "to some extent the class war never does end. To some extent it is the rich against the poor, the wealthy against the non-wealthy, the haves versus the have nots. Some of the class conflict is conscious. Witness the revolt of the haves against the have nots, their attempts to rape the public lands, to lower their own taxes, to reduce government services to those who need them.

"Yet, some of the conflict is not really conscious. Firms compete against each other. If one firm is able to secure workers for lower wages, by hiring

nonunion workers, or by going to the Dominican Republic, then they will eventually put the high wage firm out of business.

"Right now the gap in wealth in the U.S. between the wealthy and the non-wealthy is the widest in the West. The wealth gap is real and growing. So is the income gap. The distribution of income is more unequally divided in the U.S. than at any time in the 20th century. People in the U.S. who rely on paychecks for their income are losing ground to people who receive their income in the form of dividends and profits. We have superrich and superpoor in this country. And what do many of the superrich want? More money and lower taxes for themselves; more misery for the poor. We are witnessing the economics of anti-liberalism; the economics of stinginess."

"Eddie", said Hush, "I fervently believe we have the poor and poverty in this country precisely because of the liberal approach. The more money you give to the poor, the more you encourage them to be poor."

"The role of the social welfare net", said Eddie, "is to provide social insurance; insurance to help people in need. Now, as with any form of insurance, there will always be a problem with what the insurance and banking people call moral hazard. Moral hazard is where what you are insuring against is to some extent promoted by the insurance itself.

"For example, the provision of fire insurance

encourages more fires. Why? Maybe with insurance people get careless. Some people deliberately set fires to collect the insurance. Moral hazard is a problem with all forms of insurance. But just because moral hazard exists, that does not mean that we should do away with, say, fire insurance or all other forms of insurance. Similarly, we should not get rid of social insurance, of the social welfare net.

"People", continued Eddie, "are both social and individual beings. Some of the poor may indeed overemphasize the social nature of their existence. No doubt, occasionally they use that to excuse their personal difficulties, or to run away from individual responsibility. They say, 'social forces, society, made me do it' or something to that effect.

"But the rich, the well-to-do, oh my, how many of them like to emphasize the personal side of the equation. Few things are more sickening than to see people with inherited wealth boast that their good fortune is due solely to their individual initiative and responsibility. These individuals enjoy taking personal credit for their fine position in life, ignoring the social basis of their existence.

"If some of the poor enjoy overemphasizing the social causes of their plight, far too many of the well-to-do overemphasize their individual responsibility for their privileged existence in our society."

Hush replied earnestly: "Eddie, don't you see? You just don't get it. We as a nation just cannot any longer afford the liberal welfare state."

"Why is that?" asked Eddie. "Why could we afford it at one time, but not now? Have we become dumber? Are we losing the ability to produce things? No, not at all. There is technological change, and we should be able to maintain and improve our standard of living now and in the future.

"Of course", Eddie continued, "it is true that we can no longer afford a liberal state if we insist on cutting taxes for those who can afford to pay them; if we use high interest rates as a way to reduce real investment and create a permanent sector of unemployed people to keep down inflation; if we export high paying jobs to third world countries and force people in the U.S. to accept third world living standards in the name of competition.

"But these are all social reasons, not natural or necessary reasons why we could not be able to afford a liberal welfare state. If we wanted to, if we stopped following this policy of the economics of darkness, of the economics of greed, then of course we can afford a liberal welfare state. Tax cuts for the well-to-do; the deliberate reduction of investment and the creation of unemployment to fight inflation; the importation of third world living standards to the U.S.; these are the real reasons we could

not longer afford a decent social welfare net. Yet, I don't think those are very good reasons."

"Oh, come one, Eddie", said Hush, trying to generate his old enthusiasms. "The federal government has simply become too large and bloated. That is our problem." But even as he spoke, Hush seemed tired.

"Hah", said Eddie. "The number of people working for the federal government as a percentage of all workers has been shrinking since the 1950's and 1960's. Then it was 3-4% of the workforce; now it is around 2%."

"Oh, Eddie. We need to decentralize the welfare system", said Hush. "We need to give welfare programs back to the individual states."

"If you do that", said Eddie, "you will create a beggar thy neighbor policy. That is, each state will have an incentive to reduce its social welfare net, in the hopes that their poor will move to another state. They will try to export their poor. On the other hand, those states which are liberal, not stingy, will see more poor people move into their jurisdictions. Giving the social welfare net over to the states is a recipe for disaster. It is a way to wreck, to destroy the social welfare programs, as each state will have an incentive to reduce its social welfare insurance for the needy."

"Do you know", said Hush, "that in many cities the federal government has replaced the wage-earning husband and father with a welfare check? It's not right."

"Look", said Eddie. "There is a decline in the stability of the nuclear family around the world. Divorces and out of wedlock children are up worldwide. You should be able to relate to that Hush - what are you, on wife number six?"

Hush winced; Eddie continued. "With equal or decent jobs for women and available day care options - women have more choices than they used to. The economic incentive for women to stay in marriages is declining. These forces are affecting all social classes in society - not just the poor.

"However, the link between welfare and minimum wage jobs is decisive. People do make a decision about accepting a low paying job or accepting public assistance. We could indeed reduce welfare by having better paying entry jobs. That would encourage people to take jobs. The recent decline in the U.S. in the real wages of lower income people has made the option of going on public assistance look more attractive. Higher wages would pull more people into the workforce. But you and the forces you represent are too anti-liberal, too stingy, to support higher wages for the working poor. What you want are lower wages, higher profits."

Eddie continued. "The truly sad thing is how someone with your rhetoric can be embraced by a large segment of our society. Certainly, you are funny on your shows; but you are also mean and cruel. And when you say things such as the

President is the most dangerous man in American; that is not just a joke. You could encourage someone to kill the President."

"Or your advocacy of gutting the environmental protection laws. Basically what you are promoting is the rape of the environment. Here is an area where laissez faire capitalism clearly does not work. In the absence of adequate safeguards, firms will pollute. They will create social costs as they go about their production for private profits. These social costs will be born by the rest of society: and by our children.

"The earth does seem to be heating up. There are problems with ozone depletion and environmental degradation. These problems will not be solved by everyone pursuing their own perceived self interest and doing their own thing. You are promoting short run private gains at the expense of our children. Rules and regulations are needed to protect our children's birthright: our Mother Earth.

"You want basically no rules or regulations on the use of property. Yet, you want more rules on personal rights. You want to regulate people's reproductive rights; you seem to want to have more regulations on sexual relations between consenting adults. I think you have it basically backwards. We should have more freedom in our personal relations. At the same time, we need to have more regulations on our use of property, on how our property is used. Naturally, those people who own massive amounts of

property will be among those who will most oppose limitations on the use of private property. Yet, obviously, we need limits on our freedom to pollute, on our freedom to foul waterways, to throw soot in the air, to bury toxic wastes.

"Frankly though, Hush, I think you go beyond the limits of civil discourse. When you call the U.S. Vice President a wacko because of his views on the environment: that is dehumanizing your political opponent. When you say the President's wife is a Lady MacBeth: you are encouraging hate. You are helping to rip apart the social fabric of the country.

"One of the keys to your worldly success is you say the most hateful, spiteful things with a smile on your mouth. It must have taken you years to perfect that schtick, Hush. It does not come easily or naturally to most people. So, for example, when you talk of the impending culture wars: you are encouraging it. You are promoting domestic, civil war. This is easy enough to do, especially now that there is no clearly defined outside enemy, such as the putative Red Menace. It is easy enough to do, now that the country is full of economic resentment after a quarter of a century of economic stagnation and a redistribution of wealth and income towards the well-to-do.

"I've got some news for you Hush. America already is a multicultural society. We do not have one homogeneous culture. We cannot go back to the days of whole white Dick

and Jane readers, and pretending that everyone eats white bread with ketchup on it.

"Hush, your basic theory is that virtue is always rewarded in this world. This is obviously fallacious.

"You try to appropriate `truth' and the `American position'; as if you have a monopoly on truth, or that only your views are American. You deny or ignore the fact that no one in the United States, or any mortal on this side of the living, has absolute possession of the absolute truth. That is one reason why our political system is set up as one of checks and balances. It's partly why we have a representative government instead of a Lord or King.

"Each American has his/her own ideas; no one has absolute truth. We do not need Philosopher Kings to tell us what to do or to impose their idea of truth upon us. Neither do we need dittoheads to follow blindly the teachings of those who claim direct access to the absolute truth. We do not need a state imposed religion to order, to tell us how to worship the Holy One, Blessed be Her.

"Your inflammatory rhetoric is couched as jokes. You use sarcasm, traditionally the tool of the weak against the strong. But you use sarcasm against the poor. That is what is so heinous. You say that liberals don't believe words mean things, and then you promiscuously call people nazis and wackos."

"Aw come on Eddie", said Hush. "I'm not the only one

who is nasty on the radio using humor. Howard Stern does the same type of thing. He says what is really on his mind with dirty jokes. At least I don't do dirty jokes."

"Compared to you, Hush", said Eddie, "Stern has a heart of gold. Filth comes out of Stern because we all have a filthy side to us. In Stern's case the filth comes out of someone who basically has a good heart. That is why he is so funny.

"But you, Hush, you have a heart of darkness. You are sucking up to the rich and powerful. Your only goals are to be popular and famous."

Hush was looking rather down. I interjected. "Gee Eddie, since when were you an expert on Howard Stern too? You are getting to be an expert on everything yourself here. Aren't you being a bit harsh on our big teddy bear?" I tried to put my arms around Hush's shoulders, but it wasn't possible: they were too wide.

"Oh, I don't think so", continued Eddie. "Consider Hush's sociology of the rich and poor. Hush deliberately ignores all inherited wealth. He assumes that all income is "earned"; this is not so.

"Hush ignores the working poor. He ignores people locked into crummy dead end jobs. He ignores the fact that people without much education, and without his massive apparent self esteem and self-promotional abilities have a difficult time of it in this society.

"He pretends that racial and other pernicious forms

of discrimination are things of the past, not the present. Here, let me read you this letter which just came to me in the mail:

`I am a black person living in a small rural community, and I work as a guard at a state prison. I wanted to advance myself and asked my supervisor for permission to take the sergeant's examination. No black man had ever been a sergeant of the prison guard.

`I did not know at the time that one of the white guards was a Klansman. That night, a Klan cross was burned in the dirt road in front of my house. My wife and children were terrified. A few nights later, several Klansmen wearing sheets and paramilitary uniforms and carrying guns, drove up in front of my home and threatened to kill me. My children were so frightened that they did not sleep well for months. Later, shots were fired at the guard tower at night from cars passing on the road.

`The lawyers from the Southern Poverty Law Center filed suit against three Klansmen suspected of this harassment. They also filed suit to stop the Knights of the KKK from operating their paramilitary army. After a few months, they received a court order stopping the Klan paramilitary training. The three Klansmen who harassed me and my family also stood trial and were ordered to stop.

`Since the center came to my aid, I am proud to tell you that I won the promotion to sergeant.'"

Eddie threw the letter on the table: "So much for your dogma that there is no longer racial discrimination Hush".

The table was quiet for a few minutes. Finally, I asked Eddie, "what do you think about the problem of drugs in the black community? Is this a big problem or not?"

"In the first place, Steve", Eddie answered, "there are illegal drugs consumed in most all communities in the United States today, not just the black community. In the second place, I would just legalize most drugs."

"I can't believe you are saying that Eddie", I said. "Think of the havoc that would wreck on society."

"Think of the havoc it is already wrecking on society. We should declare the war on drugs over, and we lost. We can't ban them; we need to regulate them. Regulate them; tax them. Legalize them. Get rid of the illegal entrepreneurs. That would eliminate the need for guns for drug businessmen to enforce their contracts. That would go a long way to curbing the culture of guns and violence which is emanating from the drug business into the larger community, and swallowing up large swaths of our urban (as well as nonurban) communities. It would close down a large part of the illegal underground economy. It would free up the jails;

empty the jails and save tax money. It would end the short run exorbitant profits which young risk takers temporarily snatch and brazenly exhibit on their way to an early death or time in the pen; it would stop the glamorization of this violent business. It would go a long way towards stopping the havoc wrecking the country. We should take to heart the lesson of our attempt at Prohibition of liquor: that did not work either. We need to recognize the limits of the government to legislate human behavior.

"Laws which cannot be enforced engender disrespect for laws in general. This is an especial problem for the black community. Large sectors of the black community feel alienated, estranged from most of the rest of the United States. They feel they are victims of what can be called white cultural hegemony. They feel that they are entrapped in a white racist society and they want to rebel against it. Especially for adolescent youth, one of the easiest ways to rebel is to break the laws concerning drugs. People who do that get "high"; they're "bad"; they can "earn" quick money for accepting the "risk" of going into the drug business. Then they get shot up or put away, thus fulfilling everyone's pessimistic self-fulfilling prophecies. Let's cut the Gordian knot by legalizing drugs, making the drug industry not much more filthy or disgusting than the tobacco industry. The jails will empty. The need for guns to enforce illegal contracts will contract. Violence and guns will diminish as a force in our neighborhoods. Ambitious

alienated youths will have to turn to other ways to make money: such as becoming a lawyer or an accountant; getting an education.

"Eddie, there's swere I dishagree with you", said Hush, slurring his words.

"Oh", said Eddie, "you don't want poor people to get a good education as a means to making a lot of money?"

"No", said Hush. "It's that we need fidelity, chastity, self-reliance, self-discipline, shobriety, self-restraint, a drug free America. That is what we need."

"Oh, cut the cant curly" said Eddie. "I say the vices of luxury are not eternally damning. Some people will like drinking and whoring - especially when they are young. It's better society gives them some slack instead of the slammer. You cannot have a rich wealthy commercial society and total purity.

"Hush, you don't read the Bible. You don't go to Church. You have not always been faithful to your wives and significant others. You are not chaste, or totally self-reliant: you had a fine upbringing by wonderful parents whom you abused. Your father got you your first job at the radio station he owned. You had a privileged upbringing. You have led a life of recklessness. You are not sober, you are not full of self-restraint: you eat like a horse, and you have consumed drugs in your past. Just how hypocritical a life do you want to lead before you meet your Maker?

"Those who try to follow God's teachings do not always

do well in this world. That is why many people want to believe in a world beyond; a more just, better world.

"Your shows provide an eloquent defense of hate, evil and sin. You should love mercy now, partake of charity ..."

"Come on Eddie" I said; "lighten up".

"No, I won't" said Eddie. "This is important. In many societies, there are two different, distinct types of religion. There is a strict or austere form of religion, and a liberal or loose form. The strict or austere type of religion tends to be admired and revered by the hard-working common people. The two forms of religion differ over the degree of disapproval given to the vices of levity. The vices of levity are apt to arise from great prosperity and from the excess of gaiety and good humor.

"The loose system of religious morals tends to be associated with relative luxury and disorderly mirth and happiness; the pursuit of pleasure to a certain degree of intemperance; and, even breaches of chastity provided they are not accompanied with gross indecency and indulgence."

"Wait", I interjected. "Where have I heard this spiel before? Isn't this Adam Smith?"

"Correct" said Eddie. "The very one. Now the austere system of religious morals regards with the utmost abhorrence and detestation all these little vices. The vices of levity are frequently ruinous to the common

people. Adam Smith pointed out that a single week's thoughtlessness and dissipation can undo a poor workman for ever.

"According to Smith, the wiser and better sort of the common poor people will generally gravitate towards the austere system.

"New religious sects usually begin with the common people; they usually begin as an austere system.

"The trouble with the austere system of morals is it can become disagreeably rigorous and unsocial. I am still essentially quoting Adam Smith here. The austere system may appeal especially to the urban poor. In the urban milieu, no one may care about the poor. They may not even care about themselves and they may let themselves fall apart. But if they join a religious sect or group, then they have a community of people who care about them. They must watch their behavior, for their behavior is being observed by the members of their religious congregation. They emerge from obscurity.

"Among these little severe religious sects, the morals of the common people may be remarkably regular and orderly. I'm speaking of their habits with regards to punctuality, sobriety, chastity etc.

"But they can be disagreeably unsocial. This is becoming a major problem in the United States now as they attempt to export their interpretation of proper moral behavior to the rest of society. They accuse the rest of society of being lax in morals. They want to force all

other people to behave according to their precepts.

"With the decline in the standard of living for so many Americans, we have the economic basis for a resurgence of austere forms of religion. Economic stagnation and increased economic uncertainty create an environment suitable for their growth.

"Moreover, their values coalesce with the narrow economic interests of the wealthy. Both can say that other people are having a hard time of it because of their loose morals, their lack of values, etc. The austere form of religion feeds into the self interest of the wealthy to promote the illusion that each is totally responsible for his or her own position in society. The hypocrisy comes in because many of the well-to-do owe their position to their inheritance or their upbringing - and they know it. Many give lip service to the ideals of the austere religion; but in their own private lifestyles, in their own day to day lives, they follow the values of the looser form of morality.

"The economic stagnation generates the conditions which promote the austere form of religion. This form of religion then paradoxically plays into the hands of the greedy sector of the well-to-do by legitimizing the economic stagnation as a form of punishment for loose morals. Many of the well-to-do are complaining all the way to the bank as they go about their business of gutting the liberal welfare state, and sailing on their yachts."

"So Eddie", I said, "your position is that the economic stagnation in the U.S. is promoting the growth of the austere severe form of religions?"

"Precisely", he replied. "The dominant interpretation has the causality between values and the economy backwards. The standard interpretation, which feeds into both the austere, severe religious worldview, and the greedy side of the well-to-do, is that loose morals, a decline in values, has been leading to a decline in the economy. This is basically poppycock. The rise of monetarist and supply side economic policies, the decline of the progressive Keynesian framework, and international tax, regulation, and wage rate arbitrage have been wrecking the economy. These are trends promoted by our friend Hush here. The resulting economic stagnation and transfer of income and resources away from the bulk of the populace to the well-to-do, then encourages the severe form of religion. The severe form of religion is that which corresponds to the needs of the hard working people. But this form of religion tends to put too much onus on individual behavior, and to ignore or be ignorant of the workings of the larger socioeconomic system. The importance of clever demagogues like Hush here is that he is playing a seminal role in cementing this unholy alliance between the narrow economic interests of the well-to-do and the sincere religious beliefs of the hard working common people.

"We see some of the grossest contradictions in

Hush's position (and the forces he is shilling for) in his position on sex. I mean his theoretical position. Hush's position in practice is too disgusting and hypocritical to deal with seriously.

"Hush claims that there should be no sex before marriage. Moreover, according to Hush, people should not get married until the man can support a family. In this day and age, a high school diploma, or even a college degree is no longer a ticket to a decent middle class life. One generally needs a graduate degree, a masters degree, or some professional training.

"That means that someone aspiring to a middle class life, should probably go to graduate or professional school. Following Hush, they should not get married until they finish graduate school. Since for Hush, theoretically, no sex before marriage, we are asking young people not to have sexual relations until they are twenty four years old, at least. Hush holds this position even at a time when sexual images are rampant in all the media. Children are exposed to sexual images at a very young age, not least because businesspeople use sex as a way to sell their wares. In this world Hush's position is basically absurd: it is absurd to think that the vast majority of people will not have any sexual relations until their mid-twenties.

"Hush's view of the world is one where hard work is always rewarded; where people have sex only with their spouse; where people don't get married until the man can

support a family. Hush's vision is one that may tolerably fit some kind of pre-industrial, agrarian society; one which is minimally dependent upon the vagaries of the market, and where there is plenty of land available for hard working entrants into adulthood. There, perhaps a young man could go and grab some land in his late teens, grab a gal too, and start raising little urchins. But to think that this is an accurate vision of contemporary reality, of how the current system either works or ought to work, is a joke; a bad joke.

"Hush, why so dormant? All this talk of sex and holy matrimony got you down? Hey, what's the problem?"

Big drops of tears were dripping down Hush's face. The big guy was starting to fall apart.

Chapter Nine Slimbaugh Discombobulated

"Hush, Hush, what's wrong?" I asked.

"It's my wife Chastity", Hush said. "She threw me out." "Threw you out, why?" I asked.

"Yea, such a great guy as you, I can't believe it", said Eddie. "Then again, maybe there is justice in this world." "She was upset over Miss Voom", Hush said.

"Miss Voom? Miss Voom? Who is Miss Voom?" I asked.

"Miss Va Va Va Voom. She's the gal who walked me out of the restaurant last time I was here with you guys."

"Oh no, I can't believe you got mixed up with her", groaned Eddie.

"I didn't get mixed up with her", replied Hush, "she got mixed up with me. Last time I was here, when I left with Va, Va ..."

"Va, Va?", I asked. "You're on a first name basis?"

"Yea, Va, Va. We were walking out to my car and the next thing I know I'm flat on my back on the street. I guess I was hit by a car. I don't know if I stumbled or was pushed or what."

"What do you mean pushed?" I queried.

"I don't know what I mean. I mean I guess I fell into the road, or she pushed me or something. I remember her yanking on my shoulder and then crunch I'm on the road."

"How could a big tough guy like you get pushed around

by a little waif such as Miss what's-her-name?" asked Eddie.

"Anyhow", said Hush, "I'm lying in the road and the back of my head is killing me. Somehow the car hit me on the back of the head and I bounced onto the road."

"Sounds like you're lucky the car didn't run over and crush you", I said.

"If I was lucky, you guys would have come out and given me a hand. Some friends you are", said Hush.

"Gee, Hush" I replied. "Now that you mention it I think I do remember hearing an accident on the street."

"Well", said Hush. "An ambulance came and tried to take me away."

"Oh man" said I. "I did hear an ambulance. I had no idea it was you."

"Neither did I", said Eddie.

"Thanks guys. Friends in need, friends indeed", said Hush. "Anyway, Miss Voom wouldn't let me to go in the ambulance. She insisted on driving me home to her house, and she succored me all night."

Eddie said, "You mean she su..."

"Eddie", I interrupted. "Watch your mouth. Can't you see the big guy is hurting? Give him break; cut him some slack."

With that Hush let out a loud wail. Hideous beer-smelling tears flowed over his pudgy cheeks. "The next morning Chastity wouldn't let me back in the house. She

threw all my belongings onto the street. I've been staying at the Motel Six since then." He cried some more and buried his head into his arms on the table.

"Well, that sounds rotten of Chastity," I said. "She doesn't seem like a very forgiving person to me. One little slip up and you're out on the street. By the way, I've always wanted to ask you Hush: what kind of name is Chastity, anyhow?"

"That's not her real name", said Hush, regaining some of his composure. "Her real name is Seven Promises".

"What? Seven Promises?" I asked.

"Yea. She grew up on a commune outside of Ithaca, New York. Her parents were hippies from the sixties. She rebelled against them. When she met me, I urged her to change her name to something more urbane, such as Chastity. So she did, and then we got married. I was planning on living happily ever after. And now she has thrown me out and she says she is going to sue for all my money." More wails came from the big guy.

"Oh, Hush", I said. "She was too young for you anyway. Twenty years difference in age and..."

Hush's even louder crying interrupted my crude attempts at commiseration.

"Well, at least you have your health", said Eddie.

"No, no I don't" wailed Hush.

Other people in the bar were starting to look at us. "Come on, Hush", I whispered, "let's get a grip on

yourself. Buckle up. Be a man."

Hush tried to regain some composure. "I've had bad headaches. Somehow the car hit me on the back of my head and it wrecked my hypothalamus gland."

"Your what?" I asked.

"My hypothalamus gland. That's the gland that controls vital body functions, including body temperature and the body's perception of hunger.

"Because of my headaches, I went to a doctor who sent me to a specialist. The specialist told me she thought I had hypothalamic syndrome. Apparently, there is a disfunction of my hypothalamus causing an appetite disorder; my hunger satiety center is out of commission.

"According to the doctor, and based on her acute observations of my past eating patterns, I have always had some trouble with my hypothalamus gland."

"So you are suggesting that your undue fatness is genetic and not environmentally determined?" asked Eddie.

"I think he is saying" I said, "that his horizontal challenges are not all his fault, or that there are some things partly beyond his control, such as a defective hypofatpo gland. Am I correct Hush?"

"That's hypothalamus gland. Thanks, Steve," replied Hush. "The doctor said that apparently my hypothalamus gland never functioned properly. Maybe mom dropped me on my head when I was a kid."

"Don't you think you should leave your mother out of

this?" asked Eddie.

"Well", replied Hush, "the hit on the head by the car has apparently made it much worse. The hypothalamus gland is now completely out of whack."

"Hush", said Eddie. "It sounds to me that the internal environment regulating your eating has gone out of whack. So you have become a walking environmental whacko."

"That's not funny, Eddie", said Hush. "Anyway, I can't stop eating, and I am ballooning into a beachball."

"Oh, really", said I. "We hadn't noticed."

Hush ate some more, and eyed me dubiously.

"Well", I continued, "is there a cure, or an antidote for this hypofatso condition?"

"No, apparently not", said Hush. "Most people think that the way to cure this problem is to just not eat so much. They think it is only a matter of willpower."

"Sort of like Nancy Reagan," said Eddie. "Just say no".

"Right", replied Hush. "Only for me it's not so simple. With the hypothalamus gland not working, my hunger satiety center is out of control, out to lunch. I am constantly hungry and I can't stop eating. I just can't seem to control myself."

"Well, it is important to have self-discipline and self-restraint Hush," said Eddie.

Hush hung his head to hear his own words come back at him.

"Hey, cheer up", I said. "If the only problem you have

is a malfunctioning gland which generates a teeny weeny little bit of obesity, why, that's not the worst thing in the world. It's good you went to the doctor to get this diagnosed. And a lady doctor at that - I'm very impressed. I thought you did not approve of women working outside of the home?"

"I went to her because I was sent to her, and also I thought she would be sensitive to my special needs. Besides, there are not too many hypothalamus specialists around. But there is also something else." Hush scratched his gonads and sighed.

"I think there is something wrong with me - down there", he said pointing to his groin.

"Don't tell me you also got some kind of disease from this **Miss** Voom", said Eddie.

"It could be AIDS", I said.

"It sounds to me like she set you up Hush", said Eddie. "She dolled herself up, picked you up, pushed you in front of a car, took you home, wrecked your marriage and gave you some kind of disease. Are you sure Voom is her real name?"

"I don't know", said Hush. "But there is something dreadfully wrong down there." He looked at his privates and started to wail again.

"Well, have you seen a doctor about this?" I asked. "No."

"Afraid?" asked Eddie.

Hush didn't answer.

"Well, how long have you had this problem?" I asked. "A while", said Hush. "There seems to be some kind of a large growth on my penis. I don't think it is from Miss Voom. It has been itching really badly for about two weeks now."

"You could probably use an added large growth on your penis", said Eddie. "It might do you some good."

"Well, what do you think the problem is?" I persisted. "Obviously, I must have cancer: cancer of the penis", sobbed Hush.

"Oh come on", said Eddie. "It's probably just some rare form of venereal disease that your recent friend Va Va gave you. The least you could do is go to a doctor to check it out, instead of just crying in your beer. Hey, look over there. Isn't that someone studying the Sesame Street Illustrated Guide to General Pathology Textbook?"

In a flash, Eddie jumped up and went over to a booth three tables away. Apparently, some advanced med students were doing their work at the restaurant. Eddie returned with a heavy tome.

"Okay, here we go" said Eddie. "Let's see, penal, pencil, penile, penis; cancer of. Yep, here it is, right here."

"What's it say Eddie?" I asked.

"Hmmm. `Any growth on the penis is a good reason to see a urologist promptly'" read Eddie. "Well", he said,

"that makes sense."

"Read on", said I.

Hush moaned.

"`Treatment ", Eddie read. "`Removal of the malignant growth and possibly of adjacent portions of the penis will be required. If a large portion of the penis must be removed ... often a portion can be left.'"

"Well, that's hopeful", I said.

"Not really", said Eddie, "since Hush has such a singularly small penis to begin with. He's not playing with a large deck."

Hush just groaned. Then he began repeating, at first in a barely audible, mumble. "Oh, j'ai mal a le penis. J'ai mal a le penis."

"What's he saying?" I asked. "Is that Italian?"

"No, French", said Eddie. "He's saying he has a penisache."

"Come on, Hush", I said. "Get a grip on yourself."

But Hush just kept on mumbling, "Oh, j'ai mal a le penis."

"Well you know", I said to Eddie. "All this is partly our fault. We did hear the bump in the road. We heard the sirens of the ambulance. We should be our brother's keeper. But on that fateful night we did not bother to go outside to check out the commotion. We were too lazy and self-absorbed to lend Hush a hand. We are indeed partly responsible for Hush's loathsome situation."

Eddie replied. "Dumped by Chastity. Living in a motel. Sued for all his money. Bad headaches. Eating disorders.

Hypothalamic syndrome. Now fear of penis cancer, although I bet it's something he picked up from that Voom character. Hush, you've had a bad month."

With this Hush's groaning increased in volume. "J'ai mal a le penis. On, mon pauvre petit penis. Mon pauvre petit penis. Mon pauvre petit penis."

"What's he saying now" I asked Eddie.

"He's complaining about his poor little penis."

The beer, the pizza, the conversation, the stress - it all must have been too much for him. For Hush then stood up moaning, holding his groin, saying "oh, mon pauvre petit penis, mon pauvre petit penis", over and over again, louder and louder.

"Eddie, we gotta get this guy outta here", I yelled over Hush's mantra.

People all around the room were now staring at us. The manager started to come over to the table.

Eddie went to talk to the manager. I grabbed Hush and got him out the door. Hush was one big blubbery mass of tears and incoherent French sobs. We were out on the street, no doubt near where Hush had been hit by the car. "Good grief", I said to Eddie when he came outside. "I didn't even know Hush knew French."

"Come on Hush", Eddie said. "You can stay at my place. I'll take care of you. I'm sorry for all the teasing. Come on big guy."

"Oh, mon pauvre petit penis", groaned Hush.

Somehow we dragged Hush over to Eddie's condo. I bid

Eddie good luck and made a hasty retreat back to the somnolent suburbs. That was the last time I saw Hush.

Part III Naples Pizzeria: 5 Weeks

Chapter 10: Denouement

I met Eddie again about five weeks later back at Naples. It was now late spring; almost summer: a most beautiful time of year in southern New England. The trees were finally blossoming; the flowers were out. The days were warm and long. Sailors and wind surfers in wet suits were frolicking again on Long Island Sound. It was still light out when I entered the restaurant; the sun was just beginning to set over West Rock Park. The western . sky was a blazing orange. The American west, I thought: a place for second chances. Yet, then again: isn't the United States itself a land of second chances?

Eddie met me inside the restaurant. We talked a bit about Eddie's work and my family. Then Eddie gave me a letter he had just received from Hush. It was postmarked Rio Linda, California.

"Go ahead, Steve, read it", said Eddie. "I think you will be pleasantly surprised."

So I did.

"Dear Eddie,

"Thanks so much for all your help and support. You

nurtured me through some difficult times.

"Those were quite bad nights I had at your place. I kept dreaming about my father. He died Christmas Eve, five years ago. My dreams were nightmares. Dad would come and scold me. All night he would lecture me:

` In your younger and more vulnerable years I gave you some advice that you should have been turning over in your mind ever since.

`Whenever you feel like criticizing any one, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had. A sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth.

`Hush, your mother and I tried to instill decency in you. But you, Hush, have lost your fundamental decency. I am soooooooooo disappointed in you.

`Hush, compassion is not weakness; concern for the unfortunate is not socialism.

`I see very little which is funny about politics. You demean yourself and detract from your true abilities when you barrel into irreverence.

`You went into radio because you thought it would make you popular. You wanted to be noticed and liked. You were an unpopular little fat boy; different from the other children. But now you, of all people, are just preaching conformism.

`It was I who got you your first job in radio. I tried to help you out. But you have succumbed to greed. No, not the greed for money; but for fame, glory, popularity.

`I used to call you "my harmless little fuzzball". But you are no longer little, no longer a fuzzball, no longer harmless.

`You hurt the poor, the unfortunate, the needy, to help the powerful. You bear false witness; you are a hypocrite.'

"Oh, on and on dad would heap criticisms upon my head, all through the night.

"Night after night this happened. As you no doubt remember, finally, one morning I woke up screaming `the horror' `the horror'. I could take dad's criticisms no longer.

"That's when I became a born again Christian.

"The Bible says:

`I tell you most solemnly,
 unless a man is born from above,
 he cannot see the kingdom of God.
 Unless a man is born through water and the Spirit
 he cannot enter the kingdom of God:
 what is born of the flesh is flesh;
 what is born of the Spirit is spirit.
 Do not be surprised when I say:

You must be born from above' (John 3: 3-7)

"Oh, how blissfully true.

"At your suggestion Eddie, I did read Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is right. Today, to become a Christian is too easy, too `natural'. In Christian lands such as Western Europe and North America, one becomes a supposed Christian

as a matter of course. The idea of being or becoming a Christian is thereby emptied of the profound significance it originally had.

"When Christianity is made so attractive that pretty nearly everyone accepts it as a matter of course, then one can indeed be sure that it is not true Christianity that is being practiced.

"In the early ages of Christianity, to be a Christian meant to separate oneself from the crowd. To be a Christian meant to make an effort, to make sacrifices; it cost something. How different are these superficial days from those stirring times.

"I now see that to the Christian love is the works of love. To say that love is a mere feeling or anything of the kind is an unchristian conception of love. Rather, to the Christian, love is the works of love. Christ's love was not an inner feeling, a full heart and what not; it was the work of love which was his life.

"I look back on my life, and I now see that I did not really listen to my father, may he rest in peace. Rather, I was like the scoundrel in Proverbs:

`A scoundrel, an evil man [who]
lives by crooked speech,
Winking his eyes,
Shuffling his feet,
Pointing his finger.
Duplicity is in his heart;

He plots evil all the time;
He incites quarrels.

Therefore calamity will come upon him without
warning; Suddenly he will be broken beyond repair.
Six things the LORD hates;
Seven are an abomination to
Him: A haughty bearing,
A lying tongue,
Hands that shed innocent
blood, A mind that hatches
evil plots, Feet quick to run
to evil,
A false witness testifying lies,
And one who incites brothers to quarrel.'

[Proverbs 6:12-19]

"Oh, how fortunate I am that I was indeed not broken
beyond repair. A scoundrel I may have been; but I shall
change.

"I spend my days now working at the Rio Linda soup
kitchen. Rio Linda is a dusty little valley town just north
of Sacramento. Their leading industry appears to be car
repair and wreckage services. It gets hot here - already the
days are in the high nineties, and it's not even summer yet.
I used to make fun of Rio Linda; but no more. I'm just glad
I'm able to be here to help out those in need.

"I realize now how easy it is to become downtrodden in this life. How many people are not just a paycheck, a disease, a fall, a stumble, from the breadline? Now, whenever I see the wretched of the earth, I say to myself, 'there, but for the grace of God, go I'.

"Praise the Lord, my headaches have gone away. I am losing weight. Apparently, the hypothalamus gland seems to be correcting itself. The doctors are surprised and don't understand it. I say simply that I am blessed.

Eddie, you were correct: I did not have cancer of the penis. I did go to a urologist. I had genital warts, which are quite curable. They are going away, as is the itching and irritation.

"I work with Sister Mary Rose. We serve three hundred meals a day in the soup kitchen. This is a tragic, broken place. It is an abode of broken people; broken bodies; broken hearts; broken souls. The broken bits here are parts of a fragmented society which, I fear, is itself in danger of breaking up.

"Yet, frankly, I have never felt better in my life. I feel at long last that I am doing the right thing. I am at peace with myself. "The Lord is my shepherd; I do not want". Truly,

`Happy is the man who cares for the poor and the weak:

In bad times the Lord will come to his help.

May the Lord guard him and preserve him;

and may he be thought happy in the land.'

(Psalm 41)

"I am indeed happy in the land.

"Oh, sure, like Scrooge at the end of Dickens' A Christmas Carol, there are people who laugh to see the alteration in me. But as with Scrooge, I let them laugh and pay them little heed. It's true that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset. Those people would be blind anyway. They might as well wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as be surly and dour. My own heart laughs. No, it is not the petty, ill-humoured sneer or snicker of before. I now have a full, true, honest laugh. And that is good enough for me.

"I have had no more nightmares. The Spirit of my father haunts me no longer.

"Eddie, I will always remember you with deep and profound gratitude for your faithful and diligent help, aid and assistance in my time of need.

"Say hello to Steve for me.

"Peace and may God be With
You. Hush Slimbaugh XIII"

I finished reading the letter, wiped a tear from my eye, and stared out the window for several minutes. Finally I asked Eddie, "say, wasn't Hush's dad quoting someone from

Hemmingway?"

"I think it was Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby", he replied. "I believe there may have been a little Conrad thrown in too.

"You know", Eddie continued, "in a way, Hush was like Kurtz from Conrad's Heart of Darkness, or F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby. I think both Kurtz and Gatsby became consumed by an uncontrolled passion: by greed. Moreover, like Gatsby himself, Hush believed in the American dream. Hush believed in that green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. Hush was lucky though; he got out before the passion, the greed for fame, glory, and power completely overcame him.

"That's possible", I said, "but won't there will be new Hush's?"

"I'm afraid so", replied Eddie. "On the radio there is already Jollie North, and 'Dirty Hands' Liddy, itching to take Hush's place. There is Eft Gingrich, Tiffany Guilder, and countless other aspiring Darth Vaders who want to use their powers and cleverness to champion the side of greed and stinginess. They will pretend that that is the only American way. Full of dissimulation, they will attempt to comfort the comfortable, and to afflict the afflicted: that is where the money is.

"So we beat on", Eddie sighed, "boats against the current, born ceaselessly into the past."

"Maybe so" said I, and "maybe no. You have a flair

for the exaggeration Eddie; and the dramatic. But which is it? Are we born ceaselessly into the past, or can we make true transformations?"

"Well, in my opinion", replied Eddie, "we need to answer that question in approximately sixteen different ways. So you see First..."

"Oh no," I said. "I can't take it. I'm sorry I asked the question. Let's change the topic. Listen Eddie. I have some bad news for you."

"Now what?" he asked.

"I think its time for a change for us", I said. "I mean a real change. Look, I'm sick of this pizza and beer joint. Let's go get a cup of cappuccino."

"Cappuccino? Cappuccino?" asked Eddie, scrunching up his face.

"Certainly", I replied. "A new coffee bar from Seattle opened down the street. Don't you know that real men are now allowed to drink coffee? Get with it."

"Come to think of it, that's not a bad idea Steve. Let's go", said Eddie. "It is time for a change. I could use some caffeine; and I think I'll try to grab a tart too."

The end.

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