An "unholiday letter" from the desk of...

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Dear Friends, Acquaintances, and "Others:"

Happy un-holidays! Off-season's greetings!

"Not another long obnoxious diatribe from that eccentric, absentminded busybody! How can he possibly think that I care about 'integrative theories of autism spectrum conditions,' antitrust law, visual processing and efficiency, chicken-and-egg problems, differences in the amount of pain caused by broken hearts and broken hard drives, anecdotes of attempts to sell souls on eBay, the relative cost effectiveness of Democratic and Republican party affiliation,

'vestigial federalism,' the relative merits of Shakespearean sonnets and fourteen line java scripts, the demise of drugstore breakfast counters, psycholinguistics, and subtleties of song lyrics?

"Aren't his obnoxious web sites irritating enough? It's bad enough that he litters the Information Superhighway with his bizarre blog—which he has the audacity to call 'Delightful Reflections'—obsessing about Pluto's reclassification as a non-planet and absurd questions such as the meaning of the term 'web site.'

"What difference does it make that fortune cookies are not generally served after meals in the People's Republic China? Why should I care what songs he associates with various parts of his life? What did I do to deserve this 'opus' after ten—or even fifteen—years of relative peace and solitude? And that strange sense of humor? I feel for his students who have endure it—and weird exam questions about sorority sister surfers, "Traitor Joe," country

singers with broken hard drives, greedy girl scouts, nuclear families making decisions about new reactors, market research to determine if men fear being perceived as 'sissy' if they drink pink lemonade, and 'sad meals' for children who have disobeyed their parents.

"What's this garbage about 'using the free market to achieve ultra-liberal objectives?" Doesn't he know that Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush have decisively used their intellectual proves to prove that the New Deal was a rotten idea that should have been repealed years ago?

"If he spent just a fraction of all that energy trying to become just fifteen percent more normal, the world would be a much more functional place!"

Hopefully, many of y'all will have a more favorable response to receiving this "unholiday letter." In many past years, I have been meaning to send out a holiday letter—in briefer form—but the reality is that the end of the fall term that precedes the end of the year is one of the two or three busiest times in academia (depending on whether one is on a semester or quarter campus). Therefore, this project has been languishing for quite some time now, so I finally decided that it would make more sense to send out an "unholiday" letter during the summer this year when my schedule is a bit more flexible. (Normally, I am not one to encourage procrastination, but if the thought of an unholiday letter makes you uncomfortable, those of you in the U.S. might hold off reading it until the Fourth of July. Those of you abroad may have another local or national holiday—or you may be out of luck.)

Now, why should you bother reading this long "opus?" Perhaps I am about to sound a bit like the "junk-mail" letters that Reader's Digest sends out with its sweepstakes entry forms, but here are some useful things you may learn (if you don't already know):

- How ordinary vision exams are unlikely to catch certain serious vision impairments.
 These impairments can be reduced significantly with visual training exercises.
- Effective strategies for finding "legitimate" email messages in folders dominated by spam.
- Strategies² for finding lower cost hotels near convention hotels.
- Strategies for reducing the number of "false hits" and "false misses" in online searching.
- How to have news on key words of choice sent automatically to you by e-mail at no charge.
- How trying to target the largest number of customers who could possibly have a need for your product or service is usually not a good strategy. Focusing on a smaller segment is more likely to be effective.
- Effective font choices for headlines and extended text.³

In all honesty, however, the predominant purpose of this letter can probably only be considered practical under a broad interpretation of the term. In addition to practical stuff, I do plan to talk about a number of philosophical issues that some of you may or may not find interesting. **Those of you who find everything interesting will likely represent a rather "select"**group. There is no clear theme to this letter, perhaps other than the clear appearance that it was written by a "slightly" odd person. "Not," as Jerry Seinfeld would put it, "that there is anything wrong with that." Seriously, I do take this opportunity to try to catch up with those of y'all with whom I haven't kept in touch with for quite some time now.

¹ You should be careful using this term in the presence of those in the direct marketing industry. The preferred term there is "direct" mail. A colleague at the Direct Marketing Educational Foundation's Professors' Institute innocently used the term in asking an industry executive a question, resulting in a rather stern "chew-out!"

This letter will reflect both on ideas and on some of my experiences over the last two decades. Hopefully, y'all will find certain parallels (or, failing that, perhaps perpendiculars) in your own lives so that the elaborate coverage of my experiences will not be felt as too idiosyncratic. One option might be to think of this letter in part as a novel. Another option might be to try to "live" oneself into the story. As a parallel, on his album recorded live at Carnegie Hall, you can almost feel yourself in the church as Bill Withers—known for his songs "Lean on Me" and "Ain't No Sunshine") mentions that people "of all sorts of nationalities" come up to him and say "I dug my grandmother, too!" He talks about his first assigned job, taking care of his grandmother:

It was kind of a hip job because Grandma never went nowhere but to church. And it wudn't one of them sad churches that made you wish that you could just hurry up and die and get it over with. [He briefly utters a melancholic whine]. "Let me out! Let me out!" No, no, no! In Grandma's church they sang, "If you want to take me Jesus, it's all right; if you want to take me Jesus, it's all right!" ... And at the funerals, they used to have to tie the caskets down!

Now, how does one begin—and proceed with—a task of this nature? My inclination is to start out with relatively recent experiences and make my way backwards, with a lot of trips and allusions back and forth. And then there will, of course, be detours.⁸

² In case you are wondering, these strategies are effective, too—but I did not want to be too repetitive.

³ Hopefully, we can agree that teaching you ineffective choices would, on the balance, not be a good use of time.

⁴ Certain judgmental souls may, of course, think of somewhat less complimentary adjectives.

⁵Getting even is actually quite overrated.

⁶ At least this letter is arguably a bit more modest than the four volume autobiography that the late scholar of comparative religion Mircea Eliade produced.

⁷ The song "Grandma's Hands" is a very touching one.

Some of the lyrics go: "Grandma's hands/Clapped in church on Sunday morning /Grandma's hands/Played a tambourine so well/ ... Grandma's hands/ Soothed a local unwed mother/Grandma's hands/ Used to ache sometimes and swell/... Grandma's hands Used to hand me piece of candy/Grandma's hands/ Picked me up each time I fell." ⁸ The late Isaac Asimov, one of my heroes, would always count on the indulgence of "the gentle reader" tolerate his frequent digressions. He was also very open about the fact that he did not, among his virtues, have the patience for doing actual experimentation. "That's OK, Isaac," said one of his professors in graduate school. "If need be, we will have someone else do the experiments. You just keep coming up with the ideas." Another professor was less tolerant. Once Dr. Asimov went to discuss a paper with a professor who had assigned a very low mark. As Dr. Asimov went into a defense of his methods, the professor interrupted. "That's not it, Asimov!" he sternly admonished. "The problem is that you can't write!" Isaac Asimov took many of life's challenges in stride. For financial reasons, he had to go into the military to finance

2006-2007: COMING "HOME"

Background. Last fall, I had the opportunity to come "home" to my alma mater at USC as a "clinical" faculty member. This basically means that I am not tenure-track although, contingent on performance, the contract is likely to be renewed for the considerable future. Officially, my job is now two-thirds teaching and one third "service." This means that although I continue to do research, there is less pressure for immediate publications, freeing me to take on more novel and innovative projects. I am now also free to devote some of my time to conceptual work on autism spectrum conditions without having to worry about its perceived value for tenure-purposes in a business school. (More to come on this stream later in this letter).

Win-win deals. Over the last three years, I have developed a considerable interest in the marketing and fundraising of non-profit organizations. I am now working on the "win-win" approach of "sponsored fundraising" whereby firms would send out fundraising appeals on behalf of non-profit organizations. The firms could potentially receive a much greater promotional value from being associated with this support of the organization than they would from similar expenditures on traditional advertising. The non-profit organizations, in turn, win both by being able to devote more of their proceeds to the substantive objectives of the organization and by the increased likelihood that potential donors will select organizations that devote less of their resources to fundraising. The non-profit group, then, not only gets to keep most if not all of the pie, it also is likely to have a bigger one.

By the way, when I was hired and started thinking about my return to my alma mater, I wrote a really awful set of song lyrics entitled "Take Me Home, Urban Freeways." I will spare you this "earsore" by not reprinting the words here. Suffice it to say that John Denver might have turned over in his grave.

his college education despite his extreme distaste for the experience. Dr. Asimov got his revenge years later at a train station when a high ranking military officer accidentally stepped on his feet and began to apologize profusely. "That's OK, kid," Dr. Asimov said magnanimously. So, here we went—a digression on digressions!

9 But then again, I do have a bone to pick with John Denver—although he was not actually the author of the original song—since my own experience in West Virginia

How socially responsible is marketing? My perspective evolves. For some years, I had struggled a bit with whether I had actually chosen the right profession. I was not one to have planned to become a marketing professor for my entire life. In early childhood, I planned to become an "inventor." Later. my ambition was to own a large airline, but no strategy for this was ever finalized. In high school, my plan was to become an attorney, but I abandoned that idea my freshperson¹¹ year in college when I became concerned about the fit of my personality with what I saw as a very confrontational and spontaneous profession.¹² I then decided on going into academia. Initially I wavered between political science (the major I had chosen in preparation for law school) and psychology, which became my effective double

was far from heavenly. At a stop sign at a road that was rather rural, if not quite a country road, I was rear-ended by at least three cars from behind. Ironically, the absent minded professor who readily admits to being rather challenged as a driver was the only one of the four drivers not found to be at fault. To be fair, I should say that West Virginia does have some rather redeeming features, including the autism programs at Marshall University. By the way, my trip to Galveston many years ago went much more peacefully. Going in the shuttle from the airport in Houston to the island, however, I *knew* I was in Texas when a saw a Texas sized banner by a supermarket offering *triple* coupons. Mere double coupons that sufficed elsewhere apparently would not do in the Lone Star state.

¹⁰ Since I ultimately effectively became an *innovator*, maybe I wasn't that much off to begin with.

11 I try to be conscientious about using politically correct terms. Sometimes, these terms sound a bit odd until they become more familiar, but they have an opportunity to eventually catch on. The younger generation, for example, finds it natural to use the term "mail carrier" rather than the traditional gender biased term. Yes, the term "cow children" may take some time to get used to—and some mystique may be lost—but, in the long run, the result will be worthwhile. I have tried to impress the importance of political correctness on my nephew, emphasizing that his nieces should not be denied the opportunity to become "hit persons" based solely on gender.

¹² In the tradition of the legal profession, I will elaborate in a footnote. Thinking back at this decision, I now realize that I might have been able to go into appellate law instead of trial work. That might have been a bitter fit. It is only now that I write this that I realize that at the time, the idea of becoming a law school professor did not occur to me. Ultimately, the decision to become a marketing academic was probably a good one, so I am not complaining. Each year at graduation, I get to wear what might pass for judicial robes. Sometimes, I feel a bit like writing a court opinion—if not a controlling one, at least a concurring or dissenting one—or perhaps one "concurring in the judgment."

major. 13 Psychology won out, and I then searched among the various fields. I looked seriously at social psychology (which actually became my Ph.D. minor), cognitive psychology, and industrial organizational psychology. I chose the latter as something would lend itself to a substantive application. Naively, I figured that getting an M.B.A. on the way would help me get more "in touch" with the business world. It was only in the M.B.A. program that I was exposed to marketing and found that to be a better application of my interests in psychology. There will be more to come on this topic as we make our way back in time.

After completing the Ph.D. program in 1998—and probably, to a lesser extent while still in the program— I began to develop certain concerns about the contribution of my profession to the World. Some of the methods developed, after all, are used to influence consumers to buy food that is unhealthy, run up debt, choose deceptive financial arrangements, and buy products that have serious environmental consequences—not to mention the tremendous resources that are being used to print advertisements and undertake other marketing efforts. Gradually, it became more and more clear to me that there are actually ways that marketing can be used to promote social responsibility. My interest in nonprofit organizations was probably spurred by my increasing involvement in autism organizations, a development that can be traced back to the diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome I received back in 1996. (More to come on that topic).

A new way of thinking: Can we actually make it profitable for the tobacco industry to retrench? Combining my interests in antitrust and intellectual property law with economic ideas to which I had been exposed to over the years, I came up with a way that it might actually be made profitable for the tobacco industry to significantly retrench! For many years I, as many others, had seen the tobacco industry as the enemy, and my view had been that it should be treated as such. The zealous anti-smoking views I had held in my early youth certainly added passion to this view. Knowing that we are talking about a powerful industry that cannot readily be snuffed out, it ultimately occurred to me that a strategy of a "win-win" multiprong collection of incentives might be more effective. Here's the deal: (1) First, the tobacco industry would receive some measure of exemption—as certain other industries such as the soda bottling industry have

received—from anti-collusive provisions of antitrust laws. If the tobacco firms could legally cooperate in raising prices, the equilibrium price would become significantly higher, resulting in a significantly reduced equilibrium quantity supplied. This would be especially helpful since it has been found that price is a very influential factor determining the likelihood of teenage smoking. The second prong (2) would involve offering the industry a Faustian—but ultimately profitable—deal that, in return for relinquishing their trademarks thirty years from now, they would receive immediate tax breaks. Because of the discounting of future receipts, the stakes in giving up those trademarks thirty years in the future would be much less. Using a modest five percent "discounting" or "cost of capital" figure, a given amount of money received thirty years from now is worth only about 21% of what it would be worth at the moment. In practice, costs of capital for American firms tend to be much higher than that. A nice side benefit of this arrangement is that, (3) as the thirty year mark draws closer, advertising would become increasingly less attractive as an investment. The tobacco makers could still use their existing brand names, but so could anyone else—thus destroying any competitive advantage. The main problem that would be faced here, probably, would be the size of the immediate tax deductions that would have to be offered. There is also some question about foreign imports. I am not qualified to assess the potential constitutionality of a law that selectively made tobacco products ineligible for new trademarks for any treaty problems that might result from denying trademark protection to new foreign brands in the United States.

Encouraging banking services for low income families. Many low income families spend a great deal of their funds paying for check cashing. Frequently, banks are reluctant to open bank accounts for such customers. For checking accounts, there is a serious risk of checks that cannot be covered. Even if overdrafts can be prevented, the balances that these customers carry may not make the accounts cost effective. Is there anything that can be done to encourage banks to create special programs for these consumers? I discuss some ideas on the "Social Responsibility" section of my web site.

Back to coming "home." OK, so I returned to USC in the fall of 2006 after having been away for some eight years. Immediately prior to that, I had been at the Imperial Valley Campus of San Diego State University. At this time, I am still trying to sell my house there. It is rather frustrating that the mortgage on my 2,200 square foot house there is less than what I pay in rent for a one bedroom apartment near campus.

¹³ Cal Poly did not, at the time, have an official psychology major, but I took all the classes offered and kept my political science major. In retrospect, both came in very handy in preparing for my eventual profession.

I hope the house will sell soon so that I can look for a house in the Los Angeles area. On the positive side, although I did not anticipate this, it has actually been somewhat fun to live in a one bedroom apartment again.

My new job came about in part because the Provost at USC had decreed that from now on, no class offered should be larger than one hundred-fifty students. One faculty member had been teaching some eight hundred introductory marketing students per semester over three mega sections up to that point, with graduate teaching assistants handling grading and the weekly breakout sessions (known on some campuses as "recitations"). Three new faculty, of which I was (and still am) one, were hired to each tech two hundred students. Having us teach three sections with 65 students each was considered, but classroom availability constraints precluded this. We ended up with a hybrid structure where all two hundred students meet once a week as a mega section and once a week in one of five discussion sections with forty students each. This actually seems to work better since maintaining a class discussion in a course with sixtyfive students would be difficult.¹⁴

Last fall, my first semester back at USC, I may have gotten somewhat carried away, over-committing myself to read at least 1,000¹⁵ short papers from students. In the spring, I cut this down to 800. I plan to reduce this again to 600 for the coming fall term. I figure that providing individual feedback on several papers for each student is the most valuable thing I can offer. Students now turn in their papers online, and I click on their e-mail addresses in my spreadsheet so that I can efficiently send out comments by e-mail. Over the years, I have developed a reasonable typing speed. I started typing early for practical reasons. One

¹⁴ Some years ago, I was tremendously influenced by reading Scott Turow's book One L, which chronicled his own experiences going through the Harvard Law School. I actually adopted (and adapted) some of the ideas for my own classes. I use a "kindler, gentler" approach to the Socratic method (I do not call on people, but I am told that a law school professor may randomly select a student and ceaselessly question him or her about a case for a half-our or more. I have also used "issue spotter" questions on some of my exams. Anyway, one view among many law school faculty, apparently, is that large classes actually facilitate a class discussion because, under inductive reasoning, it is important to have a large number of individuals, one or a few of whom may come up with a solution to a problem. ¹⁵ Each student was asked to complete any four of six preliminary papers plus a final one. For those who completed more than four preliminary papers, I would count the best four, so some individuals turned in more than four.

of my teachers once told my mother that "Lars is a good student so long as he types his assignments." My late fraternal grandmother once wrote me, thanking me for a post-card I had sent her. "At first," she wrote, "I thought it was a prescription from a physician."

Historical background. Learning to type at an early age, realistically speaking, meant that I had to learn to type on an "old fashioned electric typewriter." Thinking about this should set those people straight who reminisce about the "good old days." This is an area where the vast majority of my students clearly cannot relate. In turn, when I tell some of my older colleagues about how I had to "type all my papers on an old fashioned electric typewriter until I was a sophomore in college," they reply with touching stories about how they had to type their entire dissertations on old fashioned manual typewriters. Well, at least they have been honest enough not to claim that they had to walk with their bare feet in the snow for ten miles to the library where they had to write their dissertations with quill pens.

It would be a bit misleading, but technically, I can truthfully say that I actually worked with computer punch cards. I did, but truth be told, I never punched any. I am, after all, not a great believer in violence—even to cards. Back in college, we had some old punch cards lying around by the mainframe terminal in the Psychology Department. These were handy, and I used them to check that my data columns on the screen were lined up properly.

Back in my sophomore year of high school, I was a bit of a pioneer to take a class in computer science in 1979. The school had acquired some computers through a Federal grant to set up programs with immediate feedback to remedial mathematics students. Since we had the computers around, a course in computer science was offered for the nerdier students. Back then, such courses were taken primarily by geeks. There is no sense in trying to deny that I was—and am—one. 16 Even back then, the nerdier element did include a number of ICWs. 17 One woman who would soon become co-valedictorian jumped up and down with excitement, excitedly screaming with relief "Really? Really?" when she learned that she would not receive an A- in physics. We stored our programs on cassette tapes, and most of the computers had 8K of memory. (In comparison, most new

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¹⁶ I am not actually sure if "geeky was cool" at the time. If it wasn't, I probably would not have noticed, and if I had, I am not sure how much I would have cared. I come from a family of proud eccentrics.

¹⁷ Incredibly cute women.

computers sold today feature at least one gigabyte of RAM. If my calculations are correct, that is 125,000 times as much memory as the ones we had. Even if a computer today only has a pathetic half gig, ¹⁸ that is still 62,500 times as much). We did, however, have a few extremely powerful computers. One had a whopping 16K of memory. We even had one computer with an amazingly fast device that allowed us to store a *huge* amount of data. This device was called a floppy disk.

It was not my intention to brag about my foresight in getting into computers so early. Some have been way ahead of me. In college, I took a course in computer graphics. ¹⁹ The first day of class, the professor related the story of how he became captivated by computers when first seeing one a few days after arriving on campus. He went to the bookstore and bought all the books they had about computers and programming. He then read all three of them.

Combating sloth. Over the years, I have fought a passionate battle to stamp out the intellectual sloth associated with the use of the reprehensible term "et cetera." Ugh!²⁰ Although writers may not deliberately set out to dishonestly represent that they have actually thought ideas out more than they have, I am, in most instances, far from certain that the writers actually know what the "so forth" actually entails. One time, when I had gone on an especially scathing diatribe against the term in class, one student timidly e-mailed me admitting to having used the term in her recently submitted paper and being worried about the consequences. I tried to sound understanding so long as she would avoid using the term in the future. It is, by the way, a matter of tremendous frustration to me to see the term being used with an alarming frequency by my favorite Supreme Court Justice.²¹

¹⁸ Please do not take it personally if I have inadvertently insulted your computer!

Good riddance! One nice thing about now being in a private university is that there is no more Prop 209²² for me! I am a reluctant—but now rather zealous—convert to affirmative action. When I was younger, I saw affirmative action as a form of discrimination that stood in the way of doing away with the shameful tradition of *de jure* discrimination in our nation's history. Eventually, I realized that the issue is somewhat more complex and that institutions can genuinely benefit from increased diversity. Quite aside from issues of cultural bias in many standardized exams and limited opportunities that many minority applicants may have faced, greater diversity in leadership positions that require a college or graduate education is needed for society to remain cohesive. I have been lobbying for a pre-doctoral fellowship program for minority students and have talked with Hispanic and Filipino student organizations about opportunities to increase recruitment.

I hope to find ways to, in one of my favorite sayings, find "ways to use the free market to achieve ultra-liberal objectives."

Marketing lessons. A major purpose of a college education is to confront one's beliefs. 23 A business education is no exception—especially when it comes to marketing. It is tempting for many firms to seek out the largest and most rapidly growing markets, for example. The problem is that these also tend to attract the most competition. Many firms have been much more successful in serving the more specialized needs of one particular customer group more effectively. It is also tempting to try to "tweak" one's offerings to appeal to a large number of customers. The flip side of this strategy, however, is the "dilution" that is done to the value of the product to the core customer group. Since so much choice is usually available to today's customers, this strategy presents a serious danger of eroding the traditional customer base.

One of the things I emphasize is that we need to be sensitive to the idea that the customer may have different wants, needs, values, and from ours. We cannot assume that a product that we would see as near "perfect" would please customers. We also have to

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¹⁹ This course satisfied a restricted elective requirement among "art, music, or theater."

²⁰ The first time I remember hearing that expression of disapproval was sometime after my family had come to the United States. I forget exactly what the object of my sister Pernille's contempt was, but she used the word with exceptional passion.

²¹ If you could see things from my point of view, you would have known that that is Stephen Breyer. To console myself a bit, I remind myself that I do not recall David Souter, who runs a close second, ever using the term. (Before Justice Breyer joined the court, I had hoped that Justice Souter would eventually be elevated to Chief Justice). I will admit that it would have been a matter of some satisfaction if a certain rather over-rated justice who frequently writes quite

unreasonable opinions—suggesting, for example, that "actual innocence" should not be ground for a new trial—used the term more frequently.

²² In 1996, California voters passed this ballot proposition which prohibited the use of ethnicity in admissions decision to public colleges and universities.

When I took my first philosophy course in college, this was a rather difficult idea for some to accept.

think about how messages are received. The first day of class, I mention the case of the laundry detergent commercials that show dirty clothes becoming squeaky clean after being washed with the laundry detergent featured.

Nowadays, these ads are bit more politically correct—a man is actually washing the clothes in spots seen in recent years. In the old days, the washing was invariably performed by women. This type of demonstration worked quite well in the U.S.— American consumers tend, to a greater extent than people of many other cultures, to be highly "benefit" oriented: We want a product that works, accomplishing a specific objective well. This approach also worked quite well in many other Western countries. The campaign, however, flopped miserably in the Middle East when first tried. Back in those days, television advertising missed a large number of potential customers due to factors such as limited TV ownership, limited programming, limited hours spent watching, and restrictions on TV advertising. Instead, then, large billboards were put up with three sequential frames: before, during, and after. Why would this be a problem? We still see the progression from disgustingly dirty to squeaky clean, don't we? Not if you read from left to right. Then the results are anything but impressive!

Seeing things from our own perspective is a habit that is difficult to shake, and I am the first to admit that I have succumbed several times. Let me illustrate by an example. One time, I saw a young woman standing behind the gun counter in a Wal-Mart store. I hesitate to make assumptions and I certainly cannot make any definitive conclusions based on the fact that this woman was not wearing a wedding ring. But, it is entirely possible that this woman had chosen this area of the store as a way to meet a lot of men. (I do not mean to be sexist and emphasize that I said "possible" but not necessarily probable.) In thinking back at the incident later, I realized that maybe the men who went shopping for guns might not, on the average, make good husbands. At the risk of being prejudiced, even if a much smaller number of men came to the book section, these would, on the average, almost certainly have a significantly better character.

That's what I concluded at the time. It was only later that I came to confront my societal conditioning. Empirical research would probably bear out my suspicion that men who shop for guns, on the average, are more likely to become violent and, on the average, have less education than those who shop for books. Yet, is it reasonable to believe that everyone aspires to a "decent and respectable" upper middle

class lifestyle? It might be that this woman thinks back fondly on her childhood when she went hunting with the whole family, including the grandparents. Perhaps this woman elected to go to a summer camp teaching "gun safety for girls" rather than the more traditional variety. Perhaps she longed for long, romantic discussions with her fiancé, eventually to become her husband and soulmate—about the relative merits of different types of ammunitions. OK, it does seem that I got a bit carried away in this discussion, but there is definitely a point—and possible more than one—that can be appreciated.

Speaking of perspective, I had an interesting experience back at a reception for new faculty at the University of Maryland. Several physicists were present. One of them, much to my dismay, was rather skeptical of Superstring Theory, suggesting that some of the assumptions made in the equations that supposedly "prove" that more than four time-space dimensions must exist may turn out to be untenable. He also informed me that antimatter actually does exist, explaining that physicists "create it in the lab all the time." Thankfully, my office—and the classrooms in which I taught—were far away from the Physics Department. I do hope that the geologists, whose building is across the walkway from mine, do not diversity their interests into issues of the ultimate nature of matter. Well, sadly, if a gram of antimatter somehow escaped in the physics building, there probably would not be much of Los Angeles left anyway.

To another physicist, I timidly confessed that although I would take physicists, chemists, and other cosmic scientists at their word that atoms and molecules really do exist, these things somehow did "not seem very real to me." He responded that to him, atoms and molecules felt real enough—it was those pesky subatomic particles he had difficulty relating to.

²⁴ Arguably, certain couples take great joy in what might, by others, be seen as "the strangest things." Temple Grandin recently mentioned the case of a rather geeky couple that loved to go out to eat at fancy restaurants. It wasn't so much that they were into gourmet food, it turned out. Rather, these restaurants served as an excellent setting for three hour conversations about computer server systems! Former Judge Robert Bork related the special bond he had felt with his late wife. Once, they stayed up all night discussing antitrust

²⁵ It had been a relief to me that my sister, Anette, who had taken many more physics and chemistry courses on her way to becoming a veterinarian than I had, seemed to share my feeling when we once discussed the issue.

Anyway, from the one physics course I took in high school, I will say that I am a bit envious of physicists who get to have squared seconds.²⁶ In marketing, I have never had the chance to discuss dollars—or for that matter euros or dinars squared. Maybe economists get to do that when they talk about monetary velocities. Still, although being a physicist or an economist might have its moments, I wouldn't want to trade. Marketing professors really do have more fun!

In college, I had the luxury of taking a large number of electives. I wasn't eager to spend my summers in "the real world, 27," and since the virtual world wasn't much of an option back then, I always took summer classes.²⁸ During the orientation before the start of my freshperson year, I asked one of the professors if there would be any problems taking additional classes beyond the twenty units of electives required. "No," he said, "we encourage that!" Encouraged I was!

In retrospect, it is interesting to see how many of the classes I took actually turned out to be useful in ways I had never imagined. In my course on Islamic religions, for example, I was exposed to the idea of the sharia, the foundation for Islamic law.²⁹ This became important as I started to prepare to teach international marketing. So did the course in cultural anthropology.

Each term, before the first test, I remind the class of an important lesson learned when my nutrition

professor worked with NASA on food choices for the astronauts. NASA learned early on that the astronauts had to be ordered to take a brief meal**break.** Otherwise, they would reason that their time up in space was too precious to "waste" on eating when important experiments were going on. A little discomfort could be endured momentarily, and there would be plenty of time to eat back on Earth. Unfortunately, NASA quickly discovered that the astronauts would end up making many careless errors while in a food deprived state. So, I tell the students that sacrificing breakfast, lunch, or dinner before an exam to squeeze in a little extra study time is not a good strategy.

The mathematics courses that I took—though usually barely passed—raised interesting issues. Some may not see much humor in mathematics, but where eccentrics congregate, one can usually find something funny—at least when one is an eccentric, too. One mathematics professor, for example, was very uncomfortable with the term "irrational" numbers numbers which cannot be "expressed as a ratio of two integers." A number such as the square root of two, for example, is said to go on in decimals without repetition. The professor strongly emphasized that there was certainly nothing "deficient" about these numbers, indignantly defending their worthiness. He also indicated that eventually we would face the supposedly rather profound insight that it was even possible to meaningfully interpret the a number raised to the power of an irrational number. I never made it that far in mathematics, however. So, as I have discussed in a different context in my blog, "I don't know what I'm missing!"³⁰ Later, however, another mathematics professor explained that, originally, the term "irrational," as applied to this category of numbers, was indeed meant to be quite derisive. When certain church officials in, I believe, the Middle Ages, were confronted with the existence of these numbers, the mathematicians were "strongly encouraged" to keep their existence a secret since such odd things would not be compatible with a proper Aristotelian view of the universe.

²⁶ Maybe it's not that big a deal. Another physicist recently told me that, at least at the elementary and secondary levels, the term "seconds per second" is now used. But that is just a matter of semantics! The seconds are still squared! (To paraphrase Millicent Min, "And some people think that's a bad thing.)

What's so "real" about that world out there, anyway? Even if you have a good answer to that question, what's so real about that "world" out there, anyway? By the way, Bill Clinton might have some comments about the definition of one of the words that might have been in the preceding questions. In these days of outsourcing, however, this word has been "contracted" out. (Note the proper pronunciation). ²⁸ Perhaps in part because of this lifestyle choice, I can relate to Sting's idea that there were certain "things they would not teach me of in college."

²⁹ Literally translated, *sharia* means "the way." Islamic law, generally, does not seem to condone the idea of finding "loop holes" in the law. Many believers will actually go to consult their attorneys not on what they can "get away with" or what will keep them out of legal trouble, but rather what will please God. By the way, if you ever want to tackle a challenging task, you might try to understand the differences between Sunni and Shia inheritance rules!

³⁰ Back in first grade, some students asked the teacher why we had to study the math we were taught. At the time, I had felt it was rather obvious that one needed to learn math, but that was not the approach the teacher took in explaining. She, instead, confided that we needed to learn these things so that we would, eventually, be able to "understand certain things" that would come up later. That left me with an expectation that sometime—say, the last day of the seventh grade—these points would be casually covered.

Another math professor used some interesting words to make introductory calculus endurable. Once, when a problem involved a rather lengthy term, he discussed how we could tackle "that sucker." Another time, we were reviewing the previous day's homework. In the context of derivatives, we were supposed to determine if a certain term represented a positive or negative quantity. If I remember correctly—which is not at all certain—the first derivative of the sine function is always positive—if that's not it, something else is. "Real positive!" he said in one case which involved the squared quantity of one of those functions.

Later, when I was in the Ph.D. program, my statistics professor related an interesting event that had taken place at a conference. One of the attendees wanted to play a trick on other delegates who were currently away during a break. He asked a hospitality services employee, "Young lady, when I ask you a question once the others return, can you say $x^2/2$?" She readily agreed. Once the session resumed, the statistician said, "You know, I don't think the math knowledge of our population is as deficient as we normally think. I can prove it! Young lady, what is the integral of x?" The statistician became a bit impatient as the woman hesitated. "Come on, what is the integral of x?" Finally, the woman said, " $x^2/2$ plus an arbitrary constant."

Perhaps the biggest surprise of all. So, if studying a number of other subjects came in handy in understanding marketing, does a foray into marketing elucidate one's thoughts on other subjects?

Yes. The boundaries between most academic disciplines are quite blurred. Many disciplines are based on others (e.g., I am told that advances in physics often follow developments in mathematics). Sometimes, we can also adapt thinking from one discipline to one that, at first glance, does not seem closely related.

Ironically, a number of issues raised in marketing are highly relevant in understanding autism. Now, is this just the ramblings of an eccentric marketing professor who insists of seeing parallel when it's obvious that none exist or is there any merit to the idea? You will have to make up your own mind (if you actually care about the answer, that is).³¹

About two years ago, it suddenly struck me that I had actually chosen a discipline that is largely built around the idea of theory of mind.³² In marketing, we frequently deal with the consumer's limitations in "executive function. 33" Messages—given many other demands for the consumers' attention—are often miscomprehended.

By far, however, the greatest implications of the marketing literature for the autism field seem to lie in the area of heterogeneity—that is, diversity within the affected population. It is a cliché that all people are different. Ironically, however, differences within the population of individuals on the autism spectrum are often larger than the average differences from the population as a whole. Some—like Temple Grandin have strong visual and spatial skills. Others like me are significantly impaired in that area.³⁴ Behaviorally, some become very confrontational while others tend to fall to the opposite side of the scale. Some are extremely sensitive to criticism while others are quite insensitive. Within individuals, there can be large differences in sensitivity in different modalities. One friend of mine, for example, would amuse her friends in childhood by sucking on the terminals of car batteries, 3536 completely insensitive to the sparks that flew. This same person, however, is extremely vulnerable to noise and visual over-stimulation.

know and I don't care!"

irritation, the potential constituent replied: "Son, I don't

³¹ One time when former Secretary of the Treasury Donald Regan was campaigning for elective office in Texas, he enthusiastically went around seeking the input of the voters. "Sir," he said, approaching an older gentleman, "what do you think we can do about apathy and ignorance." With

³² For those of you who may not be familiar with the autism literature, a persistent problem is that many people on the autism spectrum have difficulty relating to the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others. Not only is it frequently more difficult than for the general population to gauge what others appear to be thinking—sometimes even relating to the idea that they have thoughts different from one's own can be difficult.

^{33 &}quot;Executive function" involves the ability to practically coordinate a series of thoughts and events, often at the same time. Even "normal" people often have difficulty multitasking, but this often turns out to be an especially pronounced phenomenon for people on the autism spectrum. Some research actually suggests that theory of mind problems appear to result, in large part, from deficits in executive function.

³⁴ Even without the aid of a GPS, I could probably find the way to San Jose. Finding my way within that community, however, would be extremely difficult.

³⁵ I don't remember seeing this myself, but my mother says that we used to have a horse that was oblivious to the electric fence. He would happily suck on the electric wire for long periods.

³⁶ **Relatively important notice**: For a variety of reasons, I do not recommend this practice.

These large within-group differences have large implications for autism research. In research, if we average the results of two or more different types of individuals, the results will likely be meaningless. If an intervention is actually extremely helpful for one subgroup and counter-indicated for another, we might, on the average, see results of "no impact." This is misleading.

In marketing, we have considerable experience dealing with this type of heterogeneity. It has been known for a long time that consumers can be categorized into *segments*, or groups of consumers who respond differently to different types of "treatments." For example, early on, 7-Up® realized that it would be impossible to compete head-on with Coca Cola®. Thus, the slogan "the uncola" was born. Not to brag too much, but I and the members of a select group can out-spice *both* my Indian *and* Korean friends. Others prefer "sissier" food. To Some people are likely to switch brands when there is a price incentive; others are more resistant. My one sister prefers window seats in planes; I prefer aisle seats. I am not sure what my other sister—or other members of the family—prefer.

As the field of marketing advanced, it was learned that these segment differences had effects that are not readily anticipated. A very important question in marketing, for example, is whether frequent price promotions tend to "erode" the image of the brand, reducing consumer willingness to pay a premium over cheaper, and presumably less preferred, brands. A series of early studies clearly seemed to favor the "erosion" hypothesis. The "repurchase propensity" of a consumer for particular brand—the likelihood that a consumer would buy this brand again given that the brand was chosen on the last "purchase occasion" was much lower if the brand had been purchased on sale last time. For example, among those who had bought off sale last time, the probability of buying the same brand again might be 0.7; for those who bought that brand on sale last time, the re-purchase propensity might be just 0.3. That "clinches" the case—doesn't it?

No. Aggregation bias shows its disruptive³⁸ head! The people who bought the product on sale last time come from at least two behaviorally distinct groups: The brand "loyals" who tend not to switch in the presence of a sale of a competing brand and the "switchers" who, at each purchase occasion, are likely

³⁷ Again, as Jerry Seinfeld reminds us, "Not that there's anything wrong with that."

to choose the brand on sale. The switchers would have been very unlikely to buy the brand had there not been a discount. The loyals, on the other hand, turned out not to have significantly lower repurchase propensity after the sale. Those of you who are "into" statistics—and even some of you who remember this subject with less enthusiasm—recognize this as a case of conditional probability. In this case, the results are likely to be driven by the behavior of the larger switcher group which, in the unconditional setting, dominates the smaller "loyal" group.

Simpson's Paradox involves a case where the combined data of two disparate groups show the opposite of what both groups show when results are analyzed separately. At one time, there was some speculation that there gender biased existed in admissions decisions for certain graduate programs at U.C. Berkeley. Interestingly, when the admissions statistics for each program were analyzed individually, female applicants were admitted at higher rates than were male applicants in both of two programs examined. However, when the numbers were aggregated, the finding seemed to reverse: A smaller percentage of female applicants were admitted overall. This result turned out to be an artifact of the nature of the two programs considered. Women were more likely to apply to the more selective program. Therefore, although women were actually more likely to be admitted to the demanding program than were men, there was a larger absolute number of women who did not gain admission.

How is this relevant to autism? At the moment, although it is clearly understood that different clearly distinct subtypes almost certainly exist within the autism spectrum, little is known about these combinations of differences. Some of these variations are captured by the differential diagnostic categories of autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). Yet, many individuals within each diagnostic category may, in retrospect, actually turn out to be more similar to clusters of people within another category. With an improved understanding of genetics, we will hopefully gain a better understanding of subgroup structure and characteristics. However, real people are experiencing serious problems as we speak. We do not have time to wait until a genetic map may be revealed. That is why the autism field needs to import methods used in other disciplines to detect heterogeneity that cannot be explicitly hypothesized a priori.

Subgroup differences that are not identified and understood severely hamper the treatment of autism.

³⁸ I prefer not to get drawn into a discussion of aesthetics at this point.

Often, when medications are needed, finding an effective one is often a matter of trial and error. This frequently delays effective treatment and exposes the individual to a series of side effects that could be avoided if a better prediction of effectiveness could be based on individual information. In terms of behavioral interventions, it is well known that many people on the autism spectrum have great difficulty dealing with change. Initiating a series of interventions that each have a disruptive impact can contribute to tremendous family stress. In many instances, because of the strain that experimentation among methods imposes, the most effective method is never discovered.

Back to the Los Angeles move. A serious drawback in coming back to Los Angeles is, of course, traffic. Things have only gotten worse since I was last here in the 1990s. Even back then, things were quite bad. Before coming to USC, I had never lived in a city with more than forty thousand inhabitants. On my first day in Los Angeles, I awoke to my alarm clock radio. "Coming up in the news," it was announced, "there has been a coup in the Soviet Union and Gorbachev has been overthrown—but first, here's traffic!" Overall, however, I am comfortable. I have no way to assess Loggins and Messina's claim that there is no gold³⁹ in Los Angeles. Regardless, I take exception to their conclusion that "LA ain't [my] kind of town." It is true that there is nobody like me here, but then again, would there be elsewhere? Would that be a good thing or a bad thing anyway? Not to denigrate what may be home to some of you, but I think they may have been a bit more on target in their assessment of Boston (which shows a flagrant disregard for the idea of nice, neat city blocks, for example). Having been to Denver only once (other than during brief stops to change planes), I reserve judgment on that city. Since there is a Federal Reserve Bank in Denver, I am inclined to doubt the claim of gold deficiency. And, as Scrooge McDuck has astutely noted, "Gold isn't everything—there is also platinum."

Gratitude and the lack of it. Last Thanksgiving (and to this day), I clearly have a great deal to be grateful for. In the spirit of bipartisanship, I tried to think about what I could be grateful for with respect to George W. Bush. I came up with two things: (1) He did not veto the *Combating Autism Act*, and (2) he did not appoint Jesse Helms to the Supreme Court. Not

³⁹ For many years, I thought the world in the song was "goal"—that the people in the respective cities were, allegedly, lazy, but the reference turned out to be one to the local deficiency of the precious metal supply rather than work ethic.

to be too ungrateful, but it really does irk me that George W. Bush got to appoint a Supreme Court Chief Justice who will probably hold that position for many years to come.

Limits to my tolerance and goodwill. Normally, I try to be tolerant and understanding of opinions and perspectives that differ from my own. There are limits, however, to how far I am willing to go. Last summer. the disgusting psychopaths finally did it! Yes, I am talking about the reprehensible decision to demote Pluto from its rightful status as a planet to nonplanethood. You might argue that these bozos however incompetent they appear to be—were well intentioned, but as former President Dwight D. Eisenhower remarked, "Well, if the driver of your school bus runs into a truck, hits a lamppost, drives into a ditch, you don't say his intentions are good; you get a new bus driver." With Pluto being by far the most eccentric of all the planets, this outrage is clearly a thinly veiled attack on eccentrics. As an eccentric, I am deeply offended. As God puts it in a cartoon that sets the record straight, "I could have sworn that I made nine planets!"

As one of their justifications for their outrageous act, some of the bozos point out that a larger astronomical body—Eris, with an estimated mass of 1.27 times that of Pluto--has now been found ellipsing beyond the orbit of Pluto. So what? Why be so stingy? As I understand it, neither the Bible, the Koran, the Talmud, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Bhagavad Gita, or any other source of religious authority decrees that the number of planets orbiting the Sun most be in the single digits. According to my calculations, the surface area of Pluto is a whopping 17.95 times that of the State of Texas. Those who consider this "too puny" to be treated as a "serious" planet are now messing with both Pluto and Texas. By the way, Pluto's surface is also almost twice that of the entire U.S.!

I am a reasonable—or at least reasonably reasonable—guy. I don't think this would have been a particularly useful idea, but if the bozos had wanted to demote a pathetic planet such as Mercury—which has no moons—to non-planethood, I could have lived with that. Wouldn't that make more sense, especially since, in recent years, it has been determined that Pluto actually has at least *three* moons instead of just the first one discovered a few decades ago, to sacrifice the more pathetic planet?

If the bozos had come out with the idea that Uranus should be demoted because it spins at an untraditional angle, their unmitigated bigotry would have been immediately decried by righteous people around the World. Why have people been more tolerant of prejudice against an eccentric planet than one that is axially challenged? Discriminating this way is no more fair than punishing Jupiter for its "messy" red spot—or taunting Saturn for harboring an excessive number of moons. Would anyone accept as reasonable the argument that Saturn should be "deplaneted" because its messy rings make it look more like a waste dump for debris floating around in the solar system than a "dignified" planet? Are the psychos trying to punish their mothers for a bad childhood by forcefully destroying the mnemonic "My very excellent mother just sent us nine pies?",40 If we added Eris as a tenth planet, we could just append the word "earlier" to the sentence, which would still make sense!

The one thing I will say in defense of the psychopaths is that they at least waited until after the passing of Clyde Tombaugh, the astronomer who discovered Pluto in 1930. Implementing the demotion while he was still alive would have added injury to the insult that he was never awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor that he so richly deserved for his discovery. Professor Tombaugh's wife remarked after the announcement of the act of travesty that her late husband had come to peace with the situation, philosophically remarking "Whatever it is, it's out there." I have to say that is an exceptionally generous attitude toward those clowns.

Last year was not the first time that the lunatic idea came up. If it had been, an argument could have been made that the perpetrators acted hastily on a poorly thought out idea. I remember clearly back to the tremendous sorrow I experienced when the bozos first embarrassed the profession of astronomy by proposing to rob Pluto of its birthright back in the late 1990s. I did not realize how many righteous individuals actually shared my perspective and I was deeply touched to hear the righteous indignation that emanated from decent society. Even a large number of indecent people probably expressed their dismay, too. I thought the psychos had learned their lesson when the idea was abandoned in the face of the backlash that had resulted. I had been lulled into a false sense of security. I simply could not conceive the evil of which those psychos were capable.

The good news, at least, is that <u>the bozos do not</u> have the power to tyrannically impose their

⁴⁰ Not having gone to elementary school in an English speaking country, I only learned of this device after the controversy started.

misguided perspective on those of us who know better. Pluto will always be a planet to me, and presumably to the vast majority of good, decent people around the World.

Another disturbing astronomical **development—or was it?** As if the betrayal of Pluto was not bad enough, National Public Radio in December of 2006 reported that speakers at a gathering of theoretical physicists at the University of California, Santa Barbara, had proposed the rather unsettling idea that there may exist parallel universes to ours which lack a time dimension. How awful! I was actually not fully awake on the Sunday morning when the story was carried, and at fist I was under the impression that it had actually been suggested that the *majority* of parallel universes most likely lacked this seemingly critical dimension. It was a relief to me to read later that the suggestion was merely that *some* universes may lack this dimension. Still, the complete indifference with which most of the people I told about the report greeted this disturbing possibility really unnerved me. Had these people who normally viewed the world with considerably more compassion and generosity suddenly completely lost their sense of empathy?

In retrospect, I came to realize that I might possibly have been a bit too <u>earthnocentric</u> in my initial assessment. Who am I to insist that other universes *should* have a time dimension when that may be a low priority to both animate and inanimate objects that might exist in these universes?

Then an exciting thought occurred to me. As most of you hopefully know (if you don't, you really need to catch up), Superstring Theory asserts that, for certain mathematical reasons way beyond my comprehension, a universe must have at least ten dimensions. Some more demanding variants actually require eleven and twenty-six dimensions, respectively. What, then, if some universes actually had *more* than one time dimension? That could mean, then, that all universes together, ⁴¹ could *average* either exactly one space dimension a piece, or perhaps more than one? If I criticize others for being stingy in the number of

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⁴¹ As a layperson here, I don't have a good "read" on complications that might emerge in considering this idea. Once, during a boat trip on the Lijiang River in the Guilin Province of China, I spoke with a physicist who questioned whether "parallel" universes that cannot be detected from our universe "really exist." I will defer on whether this is a legitimate observation or the result—albeit unwilling—of a univercentric outlook on—for lack of more precise term— "the whole thing."

planets they are willing to acknowledge as circling the sun, I probably owe it to be supportive of the potential desire of other universes to have more than one time dimension. If the twenty-six dimension model ultimately triumphs, it is possible that there would be plenty of room for a dozen or so time dimensions, depending on what other demands exist. Even in a ten dimensional universe, as many as three—or possibly even more—time dimensions might be conceivably be affordable.

If you can stand more thoughts on related issues, my blog outlines my speculations in greater detail. I also raise the question of whether perpendicular universes exist as well. Just so you don't risk disappointment, I will be upfront about the fact that I do not offer even a tentative conclusion on that topic. In another entry, I comment on the seeming wastefulness of the universe—again admittedly from a rather earthnocentric point of view. Recently, in an entry entitled "How Could I Have Been So Wrong?" I admit to an error of literally astronomical **proportions** in my beliefs about certain stars in our galaxy. In the unfortunate event that some of you have little interest in astronomy, I also have entries on topics such as gossip⁴², "Qualities of a Good Student," "Possible Hypocrisy," nightmares, my grandfather's experiences as a bee keeper, the availability of *The* Ernst & Young Tax Guide 2007 for gift wrapping, salmon from different oceans, adoption, dress sizes, 43 attempts to fool the public, and pink beverages. In one entry, I am honest enough to admit that "I Don't Know What I'm Missing."

A brief historical flashback. Certain astronomical concerns have, for a long time, had a rather unsettling impact on me. I remember having—probably around age six or seven—a rather passionate discussion with my mother on the question of whether

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the universe had an end. I insisted that everything must have one. My mother challenged my induction, countering that although everything that I had experience with did, that did not mean that the universe did. What, after all, would happen after that end? She had a point. It was a frustrating dilemma, but life went on. Later in life, I would come to relish paradoxes. Still, the process of growing up can be painful.

Things to come. This year, I plan to resume the tradition that I had to suspend last summer, only one year after it was initiated. When the Autism Society of America was held in Nashville, TN, in 2005, I started what I thought would be a lasting tradition of taking one week to travel in the conference region after the conclusion of the conference. Because of the many good developments and the many challenges and problems that one observes a conference, I came to realize that during the week after the conference, I would inevitably be so emotionally exhausted that I would not accomplish much productive work that week anyway. It was during my trip after the 2005 conference that I realized how large an impact the vision training I had gone through during the preceding year had had. I will discuss this development more in detail as we go on, but for now, suffice it to say that after I returned my rental car, I realized that driving—even in a new environment was not nearly as stressful as I would have anticipated. Getting ready to move last summer did not allow a trip that year. This year, the tradition will be back. For emphasis, I could say that the tradition will be back with a vengeance, but realistically speaking, I really don't see this as a vengeful tradition. I don't see any object at which it would be motivated to exert retribution, either. As Robert Palmer puts it, "Honest [persons] know that revenge does nothing sweet."

This year marks the first ASA conference in recent history when I will not be speaking. Time did not permit me to submit any proposals last fall. By now, most of what I have to say about autism is readily available on the Internet, anyway, so contributing to further information overload at the conference may not be a responsible thing to do.

A possibly rather surprising fact. When thinking about examples of major social events, autism conferences most likely do not make it to the top ten list of exemplars that come to most people's minds—at least not to the minds of individuals who fall into the category of being "relatively normal." Ironically, however, autism conferences are actually major

⁴² In response to an entry I had made about statistics cited on the Oprah & Friends XM channel of the frequency of the occurrence of gossip, a mother told me that she had confronted her daughter, suggesting that she and her friends engage less in this exchange. The daughter, however, raised a compelling challenge: "What else would we have to talk about?"

⁴³ It will probably surprise many other men as much as it did me that height is *not* among the three dimensions used to specify dress sizes. I discovered this when I looked into the matter in preparation for one of the sessions in my consumer behavior course where we were scheduled to discuss clothes shopping. I remember two women who were best friends who once took my class and tended to "hang out" together. One was about a foot shorter than the other. If they shared the same measures on the three dimensions, would the same dress fit both?

⁴⁴ Of course, as one of my favorite sayings goes, being normal is not a badge of distinction.

social events—both for those actually on the autism spectrum and for those who work in the profession or care for family members affected. This is the one time of the year when we each get to meet each other and get to talk about a major topic of interest. Aside from utilitarian networking, we also get to "catch up" with each other. This is a chance to talk with people who have had many of the same experiences as we each have. We get a chance to discuss our growth and developments over time.

Back to teaching: Taking advantage of an opportunity for advertising exposure. As a marketer, it would pain me a great deal to pass up a perfectly good opportunity for advertising exposure. Therefore, I run a self-advancing "announcement" PowerPoint show as students walk in to both the auditorium meeting and the smaller discussion sections. No, this does not involve commercial advertisements, but I do point out upcoming events in the School and on campus. I also include "inspirational" messages such as "Missing classes is not just iffy-it could be Ffy!" I have been tempted to include messages to inspire good character development—e.g., "Do the right thing! Wait for your ring!" However, if this were to backfire and actually induce inappropriate behavior, I would be devastated to be responsible for the outcome.

Still, there are plenty of other inspirational messages to be given. For example, I admonish that "At the end of the day, it is not just how many dollars you have made that counts! 45" Another one of my favorites is my list of "destroyers of profitability: Prejudice, micro-management, penny wisdom and pound foolishness, business-as-usual, and lack of differentiation." "When in Rome," I encourage my students to "try to make a profit on the Romans!" To me, this all adds up to a very nice mix of appeals to greed and social responsibility. 46

The announcement show also includes a "thought for the week," a cartoon of the week, a book of the week, and several School clubs of the week. In the background, I play songs relating to a supposed "theme." At Thanksgiving, for example, I had the theme of "gratitude." This included the songs "Kind"

⁴⁵ You also have to include yen, yuan, pesos, franks, pounds, euros, marks, lire, kroner, bahts, bolivars, cruzeiros, dinars, guilder, kronas, rand, korunas, riyals, roubles, rupees, shekels, wons, and zloties.

and Generous" with Natalie Merchant, "Thank God I'm a Country Boy" with the late John Denver, and "I Could Not Ask for More" with Sara Evans. (Time did not permit me to include Roy Clark's song "Thank God and Greyhound You're Gone.") Another theme was "Extreme Country 1⁴⁷," featuring Tanya Tucker's "Texas When I Die⁴⁸" and David Allen Coe's "You Never Even Call Me By My Name.

Why country? At this point, one might reasonably ask why I, of all people, would play country music. The major themes of the genre emphasized—particularly marital infidelity and alcohol consumption—and its grammatical proclivities—are obviously grossly inconsistent with my value system. There might be several explanations why I, nevertheless, get some enjoyment out of country music. One might be that it helps me understand the perspectives of people who have lived a life less sheltered than my own. It could also be argued that the songs allow me to "vicariously" engage in the pursuit of "forbidden fruit." Or, as a friend of mine astutely observed, it could simply be that there really is a sense of humor expressed in much country music. I have never, for example, been able to tell whether Ed Bruce's song "Girls, Women, and Ladies" is a "serious" country song or a parody.

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⁴⁶ If you can stand one more, I also point out that "even if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, you should still think of how to make a greater profit than is normally made on a duck."

⁴⁷ To the probable relief of many students, "Extreme Country II" did not materialize since other compelling themes such as "Love" (around Valentine's Day), "Reflection," "Speculations," "Observations," "Childhood Memories," "Warnings and Admonitions," and "Transportation and Accommodations" were deemed more compelling.

⁴⁸ In this song, the singer is uncertain as to whether she will "go to Heaven" because she is not sure "if they let [cow children] in." "If they don't," she concludes, she would be satisfied to "go to Texas," which is "as close as [she's] been."

⁴⁹ Here, the singer is resigned to the fact that the woman in his life would not call him "Darling" or by the names of celebrities such as Charlie Pride. After all, she "never even called [him] by [his] name." David's friend, who had written the song, claimed to have written "the perfect country song." **David wrote back, praising the song but providing the reality check that this was** *not* "the **perfect country song**" since the lyrics failed to mention alcohol intoxication, motherhood, trains, pickup trucks, trains, and going to prison. Obligingly, the friend added a verse reporting that the singer "was drunk the day [his] mom got out of prison." He "went to pick her up in [his] pickup truck," but before he could get to her, "she was run over by a [expletive deleted] old train."

In this highly politically incorrect song, a man recounts a time when "There was only me and her and him. The bar was giving last calls so [he] thought [he] would move on in." He then went on to "put [his] arms around her barstool."

There may be others who are attracted to the myth rather than reality. It seems somewhat hypocritical of George Strait, who recorded the song "All My Exes Live Texas," to have the audacity to exhibit the rather uncontry-like behavior of still being happily married to his first wife. He claims in the song that the locations of his fictional ex-wives has prevented him from living in that state—"and Texas is a place [he] really [loves] to be." He claims, then, that he is forced to "hang [his] hat in Tennessee." My sister Anette (the veterinarian), who is not particularly into country, had her first job in a practice which featured both a city clinic emphasizing pets and a country clinic emphasizing horses and farm animals. She had to endure that song—and other country lyrics—when she staffed the country clinic.⁵¹

My own ventures into the business. When the Autism Society's conference took place in Nashville two years ago, we had a pre-conference event where we could submit lyrics that might be selected to have music composed by actual songwriters. I submitted two and both were taken. One was entitled "Tears on My Keyboard." As I remarked at the time, there was no need to feel sorry for me since, if there actually were to be tears on my keyboard, these might be tears of joy from the royalties I might make. In any event, this was about a male music industry executive in Nashville who falls in love with a woman from Texas whom he meets online. The sad conclusion is that she "belongs in Texas and [he is] stuck in Tennessee." As a reality check, one of my colleagues pointed out that this, perhaps, was a bit of a "white collar" country song. Unfortunately, I have **not yet found anyone to record the song.** It has, by the way, been a source of great disappoint that, because of a clearly evident lack of aptitude, I have not been able to become a country music star. I should probably be grateful for the abilities I have been

Although he could not remember what he said, it apparently "sounded cool" at the time. Either the woman did not agree, or otherwise she may have wanted to avoid getting involved for other reasons, so she left. The bartender then goes on to say, "There's [sic] girls, there's [sic] women, and there's [sic] ladies; there's [sic] yeses, there's [sic] nos, and there's [sic] maybes.

51 Anette does mention other more gratifying experiences.

One time, an elementary school class's hamster (or similar pet animal) had sustained an injury and needed a tail amputation. Anette—in a display of a pathetic lack of greed—only charged the class \$10, so the children each wrote a letter of appreciation to my sister. One letter was accompanied with an illustration. The caption read something like "If it hadn't been for you, this would have been Itchy!" A headstone featured the letters "RIP."

given, but high quality singing is not one of them. When I say that I really would have liked to do concerts in front of some eighty thousand people, you might accuse me of being on a bit of an ego trip. Nevertheless, had I had this ability I would, simply by doing some thirty benefit concerts a year, most likely have been able to double the budgets of every autism organization in the World.

Exam questions. If nothing else, I at least get to continue writing rather "unusual" exam questions. During the month of December, by the way, I am a firm believer in the saving that "It is better to give than to receive." As some of you know, I actually love giving exams any time of the year. Some of the exam questions do allow me a certain "vicarious experience." Although I was never in a fraternity when I was in college,⁵² I do get to write exam questions about such organizations. One involves a fraternity named Pi Iota Gamma which "features a pink farm animal as its mascot." The brothers are having serious problems in changing the perception of the campus community that their house is rather unclean. On this spring's final exam, I decided—perhaps because of my fondness for alliteration—that I wanted a final exam question about "sorority surfers." I therefore wrote an exam question—in the context of public relations strategy—about Sigma Sigma Sigma, whose members were "also known as the Sorority Sister Surfers." Once I wrote a question about a sorority that had the unusual characteristic of a four letter name: Nu Epsilon Roe Delta. The house, as the name suggests, had a rather "geeky" reputation.

A tradition is born—and evolves. The first time I taught at USC, I was writing my final exam while a really awful rap band was playing loudly outside. A tradition was started as I wrote a rather uncomplimentary question about a singer named Mediocre M to whom "the rap charts [had] not been kind." To add to his misfortune, he had recently been "hit with an infringement suit by Copyrighted ©." Gradually, I felt a need to be more balanced in my exam questions about this music genre, so some of the singers started to become more likable. While at the University of Maryland, for example, I invented the

Greek organizations were about. Having lived in a small town not known for its sophistication (and carrying a certain resemblance to Paul Simon's "little town"), I had difficulty understanding why there would be this interest in joining

something so "un-American."

⁵² I, like many of the of my friends whose profiles I was able to find on classmates.com, chose the option that I "never even thought about" the possibility of joining one. Having only been in the U.S. a few years when I got my acceptance notice from Cal Poly, I was perplexed what these strange

singer Terpy T⁵³ who got inducted into the Rap 'n' Roll Hall of Fame. Among other things, students were asked her to use their knowledge of attitudes and attitude change to suggest a strategy to help persuade the Dean to "add a minor in rap marketing to the curriculum." Unfortunately, the Dean was allegedly a country music fan who had "been overhead on the CB radio, while driving in his pickup truck, saying that 'rap music lacks artistic merit because it [failed] to address important cultural issues such as alcohol consumption, marital infidelity, and pickup trucks." Anyway, when I left the University of Maryland, I was distraught to realize that this singer might **effectively die out.** I therefore sent an e-mail message to those faculty members and doctoral students I thought would have enough of a sense of humor to understand my request for the "Preservation of [a] fictional exam character."54

For diversity, I also put in some questions about country singers. On my last final, one involved a country singer named Geek E. Bumpkin whose most recent hit was entitled "I Was Drunk When She Broke My Hard Drive." Other questions have involved:

- Mamarazzi SA, an Italian firm which offers "candid photography with a feminine touch;"
- The Greedy Girl Scout Group, which wants to maximize its profits on cookie sales;
- Traitor Joe, who violates several laws in buying Cuban cigars and North Korean ginseng, while selling "fissionable nuclear material" in return.
- Ronald Mac's, which offers a "sad meal"—
 consisting of a large serving of vegetables, no
 dessert, and a CD with a boring lecture on the
 need to obey one's parents—to children who
 have misbehaved:
- Killer Fashions, which produces "stylish clothing for serial murders;⁵⁶" and

⁵³ The mascot for the University of Maryland at College Park is the terrapin [some kind of turtle]; thus, UMCP is affectionately known as the "Terps."

 The most effective method of original market research to assess the extent to which men might be embarrassed to be seen publicly drinking pink lemonade.

The students have actually been amazingly tolerant of—if not quite persuaded—by my assertion that "A beautiful exam can be almost as beautiful as a beautiful woman." For the record, I did say *almost*.

Other opportunities. Although the first two semesters were rather busy with the steep learning curve and my blatant over-commitment to paper reading, I now get a chance to catch up a bit on other things since I am not teaching this summer. Things should also be more manageable this coming academic year as I am getting the "hang" of the course structure. That means that I now have a chance to catch up on things that have accumulated. This summer, I hope to finally finish my book *Orbiting the Autism Spectrum: Looking In, Looking Out.* I also get a chance to update my websites—something that I have neglected for quite some time, now.

Last summer, I was appointed Executive Director of the Autism Education Foundation. Before you become too impressed, let me hasten to clarify that this is an organization staffed by only one part time volunteer and that I was the only member of the "Selection Committee." Anyway, this idea came about when I asked myself how I could most effectively contribute, using my background, to the autism community. As a marketer, I realized that one way to increase public awareness of autism would be to attempt to get "more than our fair share" of coverage in a variety of courses at the junior high school through college level. The idea, basically, is to make teaching materials on autism readily available so that it will be easy for time-pressed instructors to incorporate autism into their courses. This summer, I will step up efforts to obtain more contributions of materials to our web site AutismLessons.org.

And that brings up another point: I really don't like it when people refer to the summer months as my "vacation."

⁵⁴ Yes, as many of you may be thinking, it is a good thing that academia tends to be rather tolerant of strange people. If it weren't, of course, staffing would become a rather serious challenge.

⁵⁵ As I have often remarked, "A broken hard drive can be almost as painful as a broken heart." I suspected that I might come from a rather geeky family when my mother suggested that the broken hard drive might actually be *more* painful. Surprisingly, however, a number of other individuals have been honest enough to confess to that viewpoint, too. One woman just asked that I "please not tell [her] husband." ⁵⁶ A recent tragic event in the news has caused me to reconsider the appropriateness of this type of question.

2003-2006: IN THE DESSERT

From the River⁵⁷ to the Dessert. In the fall of 2003, I started my first tenure track position at the Imperial Valley Campus of San Diego State University. This campus is locate in Calexico, about two thirds of the way from San Diego to the Arizona border. Some of you may be more familiar with El Centro, the slightly larger town off Interstate 8.

As I finished my visits at the University of Maryland and the George Washington University, a sort of vicious cycle at started in that I was spending so much time on job search that I was unable to devote much time to research. When I had arrived at U.C. Riverside in 2001, I was told that I could expect to be renewed for the next year, so that year I was able to avoid doing any job search, leaving more time to catch up on research. I was then able to get the position at San Diego State.

There were some tradeoffs to be made in deciding to take this position or not. One was the heat. Apparently, the heat is actually worse in the Imperial Valley than in the outlying desert areas because of the way that the heat is trapped. In these days of air conditioning, however, that was not an insurmountable obstacle. One does have to worry as an absent-minded professor, however. I learned to tell my students that they should not count on me to notice when things get too hot since I will get too caught up in the class to notice until, after the class ends, I will finally realize that I am drenched in sweat.

In an attempt at social responsibility, I tried, when home, to avoid using the air conditioning if the weather was not too hot. That strategy did not always work well, however. One day, shortly after I had moved into my house, I wasn't feeling particularly hot. Still, my shirt was getting wet, so I went to change it and took a brief bath in water at room temperature. It only took some twenty minutes after that until, again, the shirt was getting rather wet. It was then that I noticed the temperature and went to turn on the air conditioning before I again changed my shirt and washed myself off.

Real estate shopping. After accepting the job offer, my mother, my sister Pernille, my brother-in-law Morten, and my nephew Mathias came along to scout out the terrain. Since Morten is a contractor, we

planned to look at real estate opportunities. I had not expected to buy anything on that trip, but we actually found the house I ended up buying within four hours arriving in town. We did look at others after that, but upon the enthusiastic recommendation of the family, I ended up buying that house that week-end.

Delays and motel memories. The schedule called for the construction to be complete in time for me to be able to take over the house before the beginning of the Fall semester. That did not quite happen, so I ended up staying in hotels the first few weeks. I had had somewhat of a similar experience after I graduated from USC and was preparing to leave for Maryland. Since the apartment manager wanted to have the apartment vacated in time for someone to be able to rent it for the fall semester, I gave it up about two weeks before leaving. Trying to find reasonable cost accommodations, I got an exposure to some of the seeder establishments. There is no question that I come from a sheltered background, but I honestly believed—contrary to what I saw on some of the premises I visited—that it was only in the movies that hotel rooms were rented by the hour. One motel advertised a \$32 rate. When I went in to inquire, the manager told me that the overnight rate was \$40. He insisted—with a straight face—that he believed that people who rented the rooms for the four hour period did so to take a shower and change their clothes, perhaps resting a bit before going back to work.

Anyway, the motels I found in the Calexico area were, for the most part, not all that sleazy. One night I did, however, feel rather like Lincoln Duncan.⁵⁸ This, obviously, was not a particularly enjoyable experience for a serious prude "trying to catch some sleep."

Generation gaps. Speaking about Paul Simon, that reminds me of a rather starting experience I had. I always expected that, *sometime*, I would come to experience a generation gap⁵⁹ with my students. I

⁵⁷ My understanding is that there actually is a river that gives way to the name of Riverside, but it never appeared to be particularly prominent.

⁵⁸ For those of you who either are not Paul Simon fans or otherwise did not remember the lyrics off hand, this character reports that, sometime after he had migrated "down the coast toward New England," he was staying at a hotel featuring cheap walls which failed miserably in insulating from the activities of the "couple in the next room."

⁵⁹ Since I am a bit of a prude, we have, in my family, sometimes had a bit of a *reverse* generation gap. One tied, I patiently try to explain to my grandmother that the "art" we had seen at a museum was obscene. (Those who take the opposing view might, of course, say that I was trying to persuade my grandmother that the art we saw was "obscene.")

just had not realized that it would happen when I was still in the doctoral program—before I had turned thirty and before I had discovered any gray hairs ⁶⁰ on my head. For some reason that I no longer remember, we were talking about Kodak [®] film and I asked, off hand, how many Paul Simon fans there were in the class. The class did include one older returning student.

This year, I have had two rather demoralizing experiences. Once, when entering the campus, someone was about to hand me a flier, only to suddenly realize, "no, this is just for students!" OK, you can write off one experience like that. Maybe that person just had a tendency to see most people as older than they are. But then, yesterday as I passed a table at the new student orientation, a librarian asked me if I had "a son or a daughter" who was about to attend? Do these bozos not realize that to people with more accurate judgment, I still look like I'm in my twenties?

Attitudinal evaluation of the experience.

There were certainly enjoyable aspects of my time in the dessert.⁶¹ Traffic was, for the most part, not a major problem. The campus was also quite collegial. Although I was the only marketing person, there was a great deal of interdisciplinary work. One problem, however, was that since leaving high school, I had allowed both my Spanish and French to rust, so communication was sometimes a bit of a problem. The campus—and especially the international business program—was also experiencing a serious "chicken-and-egg" problem⁶²: In order to attract more students,

we needed to offer a larger number of courses that would be safe from cancellation, but to do so, we needed more students.

In a testament to the modest effectiveness of advertising in many circumstances, I tried to "advertise" extensively across campus, putting up posters on bulletin boards and on a "sandwich" board I constructed by nailing plywood boards to a wooden saw horse. I tried a lot of messages—including the possibility of taking my Internet Marketing course as a way to help discover "the meaning of life".63—but these efforts were largely ineffective. In my "giant" introductory marketing course, I would have at most twenty-five students, and I had several classes with fewer than five students. Another problem that I alluded to earlier was that preparing four or five different courses a year made it difficult to do justice to any of the courses and to make much progress on research.

My house, when I took it over, did include an irrigated front lawn but nothing in the back yard. I wanted to add some trees, especially fruit trees. Unfortunately, it turned out that the selection of trees that would bear fruit in this area were limited. Usually, the fruit that would be borne would be rather puny. Several fruit trees died over time. It went better with the traditional leaf trees. One actually started to grow quickly and now appears to be some twelve to fifteen feet tall.

2001-2003: DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE

In 2001, I got the chance to come back to California to take a visiting position at the A. Gary Anderson⁶⁴ Graduate School of Management at the University of California, Riverside (quite a mouthful!) The timing was apt since the George Washington University, where I had been for the last two years, had a two year limitation on visiting positions. I had been teaching in the International Business Department. Unfortunately, my research was not predominantly

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⁶⁰ On my thirtieth birthday, my grandmother pointed out some gray hairs that I had not, so far, noticed. Gray hairs, by the way, did not bother me since, in my profession, these are likely to be seen as a sign of wisdom, presumably adding credibility to what I have to say. By the way, in terms of other indicators, I can't complain. Few people show more signs of genius than someone who is absent-minded, has gray hairs, wears glasses, and speaks with a European accent.

⁶¹ Contrary to what the song suggests, by the way, I don't believe I ever failed to "remember [my] name" there, despite the fact that few if any people caused me any pain there. 62 At some point in your life, you may have experienced some frustration by the riddle of what came first—the chicken or the egg? Each, it would seem, would be necessary for the other to come about. Marketing is full of "chicken-and-egg" problems, so I ended up e-mailing my old biology professor from college in search of a definitive resolution. He did provide an answer which, in the immediate sense, settled the question, only to postpone the ultimate adjudication. The egg, apparently, came first since chickens apparently descend from amphibian reptiles. But what, then, came first—the reptile or the egg? Again, the egg probably did. Presumably, the egg came about long after the evolution from single-celled organism to multi-

celled ones. Perhaps the egg evolved as a way to protect an off-spring which, earlier on, had not enjoyed the advantage of a protective shell.

⁶³ One of my favorite cartoons shows a perplexed individual asking this question at an information window.

⁶⁴ This institution name would often cause problems when one attempted to edit a sheet of labels in Microsoft Word. The software would assume that the "A." indicated the beginning of a lettered outline. Thus, the next time, it would be the "B. Gary Anderson…"

focused on international issues, so a tenure-track position was not feasible in that department. At the time, there were no openings in the Marketing Department.

Actually, I had been in negotiations with another institution on the East Coast for a visiting position that might turn into a tenure-track one, but despite the fact that the institution was a modest size private one, the bureaucracy took to long to authorize a hiring. While standing in line at the airport to return to D.C. from a conference I attended in St. Louis, my cell phone went off and I was offered the visiting position at UCR. I jumped at the chance to come back to California. Actually, I did not immediately quite jump all the way to California since I still had some things to finish before I left.

Counterfactual simulation. ⁶⁵ Speaking of what almost happened, that brings up the intriguing subject of counterfactual simulation. Yes, I agree that only a psychologist⁶⁶ could come up with that this type of term, let alone the idea behind it. Some of v'all may remember the woman from Paul Simon's home town who said that "A good day ain't got no rain/A bad day's when I lie and think of things that might have

⁶⁵ Much of the research on counterfactual simulation involves rather morbid examples and scenarios, possibly because the death of an individual is a highly tragic event that may seriously motivate people to think about how the evident could be "undone" by a different course of events. Please do *not* conclude that I am getting a "kick" out of a vicarious "binge" of "offing" people. One rather eccentric botanist named weeds after people he disliked. If I get really ticked off, I will probably feature some country or rap musician on an exam question based on the individual in

question.

been." The latter is what counterfactual simulation is about. Now, what's the big deal, some of you might ask. We do that all the time and it really is no big deal. It really takes an obnoxious psychologist to turn something so simple into a weirdly named, ostensibly profound subject! We all know that hindsight is 20/20!

Those who have not thought further about the subject might be forgiven for thinking this, but if you feel into that category, I really hope you will do a better job in the future in suppressing your prejudice against psychologists!⁶⁷ Counterfactual simulation actually does have some very interesting and important implications. One of the more important ones is that the way in which an alternative to a particular outcome is visualized, or framed, perceived responsibility for an event may be changed. In a classic 1982 study reflective of the pre-9/11 days, , Daniel Kahneman and the late Amos Tversky⁶⁸ had subjects read descriptions of two men arriving late to the airport after their taxis were held up in traffic by thirty minutes. In one description, the man's flight was delayed by twentyfive minutes with the other passenger missing the flight by only five minutes. It was found, in a withinsubjects design, that the man who ended up missing his flight by a mere five minutes was thought to be **more upset.** The explanation given is that it might be easier to imagine a way in which five, rather than a full thirty minutes, could have "recovered" saved in an alternative scenario. Other interesting findings have been made in terms of fault and causality. Wells and Gavanski (1989) provided strong evidence that an individual is more likely to be seen as the cause of and being held responsible for—an outcome of his or her behavior when the "default" alternative would readily "undo" the outcome. In one of their studies, a supervisor familiar with the menu at a restaurant orders a meal for an employee. The meal turns out—unbeknown to both the supervisor and the employee—to contain an ingredient who which the employee was allergic, ultimately causing her demise. The supervisor is held to be more "responsible" for this outcome when the scenario does *not* mention that he had considered another meal which, ultimately, also turned out to contain the lethal ingredient. That is, it appears to be easier to "undo" the selection of a meal

⁶⁷ Yes, we are strange people, but is that something to complain about? Wouldn't it make more sense to admire such a heterogeneous and multi-faceted trait?

When I took my introductory during the first quarter of my freshman year, I was "hooked" after the textbook referred to "a question that only a psychologist could ask: Why does an infant love its mother?" I was fascinated by the evaluation although it came in reference to a rather unconscionable study. This was a reference to the infamous and unnecessarily cruel Harlowe experiments where monkeys in two conditions were separated from their mothers, with their utilitarian needs such as food being taken care of in both, but with condition featuring only a metal "mother." As a consumer psychologist who does not need to work with animals, it is, of course, easy for me to condemn those who feel that their studies justify mistreatment of animals. I also realize that there may be a need for certain rather inhumane animal studies in medicine. However, I fail to see how the resolution of theoretical issues such as the one raised here can justify this type of cruelty. When I attend the conventions of the American Psychological Association, it is very humbling to see the animals rights protesters who turn out, reminding us of the kind of cruelty that is done in the name of psychological science.

⁶⁸ These authors are better known for their work on *Prospect* Theory, the idea that asymmetry for gains and losses. Generally, the negative value of a "loss" is experienced as larger than the positive value of a "gain" of the same magnitude. Daniel Kahneman shared the 2002 Nobel Prize in economic science. Amos Tversky had passed away in

with the critical ingredient when no alternative is mentioned than it is when another one with the same problem is referenced.⁶⁹

A very interesting study by Miller, Visser, and Staub (2005) examined people's reactions to watching a ten year old boy taking a test, varying incentives to cheat and the likelihood of getting caught. It was found that under conditions of high incentives to cheat but a high likelihood of getting caught, the boy—who was observed not to cheat—was actually perceived as less honest than "average." The authors suggest that this finding was most likely driven by the ease with which the alternative—cheating and getting caught—could be imagined. This, then, made for a ready attribution of the danger of getting caught as a motivation for not cheating with the implication that the boy would have cheated if the chance of getting caught were lesser. This is a sad case of a no-win situation: Observed honesty is actually used to infer high levels of potential dishonesty!

Difficulties in assessing cause and effect have been succinctly illustrated by the Sufi sage Nasrudin, as Idres Shah relates in his book *The Way of the Sufi:*

"What is Fate?" Nasrudin was asked by a scholar. "An endless succession of intertwined events, each influencing the other."

"That is hardly a satisfactory answer. I believe in cause and effect."

"Very well," said Nasrudin. "Look at that." He pointed to a procession passing in the street. "That man is being taken to be hanged. Is that because someone gave him a silver piece and enabled him to buy the knife with which he committed the murder or because someone saw him do it or

Choices and their consequences have quite possibly been discussed most beautifully by Diana Ross in her song:

because nobody stopped him?"

Do you know where you're going to? Do you like the things that life is showing you? Where are you going to? Do you know? Do you get what you're hoping for? When you look behind you, there's no open doors What are you hoping for? Do you know?

Possibly advantageous timing. One might say that I was fortunate to return from D.C. a few months before September 11, 2001. Things certainly would have been very different there after the aftermath of the tragedy.

This marked the end of my three years on the East Coast where I had headed after completing my Ph.D. The D.C. area was, in any ways, an interesting experience. This had been the first time I had lived outside California since my family moved to the United States when I was fourteen.

1999-2001: FOG⁷⁰, RAIN, SNOW, AND THE PURSUIT OF POWER

Shortly before I was to depart, I was asked if there were things I would miss going back. It had certainly been a privilege to work in the nation's capital. I am rather embarrassed to say that I never actually took the time to go see a Supreme Court argument, but there were numerous other attractions, including the Smithsonian Institution.

Had this been in the dark old days, one thing I would definitely also have missed was C-SPAN radio. Nowadays, that station is readily available on the Internet, so there is no longer a problem. It was on C-SPAN radio that I started to hear actual Supreme Court oral arguments. Some are quite interesting. One of the first ones I heard raised the rather tricky issue of whether, if all members of a jury in a murder trial agree that at least one of several "special circumstances" were present, the jury would all have to agree one at least one specific one. (The majority of Court ultimately ruled in the negative. So long as each jury member found at least one, the specific special circumstance did not have to be consistent across members—at least under the facts of the case).⁷¹ The discussion somehow wandered into

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⁶⁹ There was considerable variability in the way in which the subjects chose to "undo" the outcome by changing the events of the story. Some were quite creative—e.g., "If only Karen [the employee] had not eaten the meal." Presumably, "mutating" the story so that Karen would not have had the metabolic problem would have been too "difficult" to accomplish. As the authors note, gravity, although strictly speaking the cause of death of a man who fell from a highrise, is not seen as "mutable."

⁷⁰ Those of you familiar with the Washington, D.C. area metro may recognize that the station for George Washington University is Foggy Bottom.

⁷¹ When I later discussed this with a judge who was teaching a course at SDSU-IVC, he pointed out that if an individual is accused of murdering several people, all members of the jury *do* have to agree on at least one person that the

the terrain of the potential constitutionality of a "generic felony," which later was clarified not to include murder. Sometimes, the discussion turns to genuinely perplexing issues that do not have a clear ideological tie. This, of course, is especially like to happen for cases involving business litigation.

Listening to Supreme Court oral arguments has arguably caused me to confront certain prejudices—at least to some limited extent—and show more tolerance for those whose views seem unreasonable. It has turned out that a certain somewhat obnoxious Justice known for his one liners⁷² and rather outrageous opinions did not consistently behave like the monster one might envision. Some of his questions have, under certain circumstances, actually been quite reasonable. Some, of course, have not been, but then David Souter and Stephen Breyer have often been quick to set the record straight by asking more appropriate questions.

I hope there will soon be a biography of the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist. Although I wish he had had different views and would have used his brilliance to create other precedents than the ones he did, he was a genius in the league of David Souter and Stephen Breyer. He also had some nice eccentric traits. Reportedly, as a murder mystery buff, he would occasionally insert allusions to obscure mystery stories into his opinions. The then Assistant Attorney General—or maybe it was White House staffer apparently made a rather poor impression the first time Richard Nixon saw him. The President inquired who was the clown who has wearing a pink shirt and psychedelic tie. Maybe this isn't saying much, but William Rehnquist is definitely the conservative I admire most.

Back to the D.C. experience. Several years earlier, while attending the national convention of the

defendant is concluded beyond reasonable doubt to have murdered. It is not enough that everyone agrees that the individual killed at least one out of a number of people. ⁷² Some of these one-liners are actually quite poignant. I have been tempted to quote the idea that "There are certain downsides to being a criminal" and that "There are only three answers to that question: 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'I'm not telling.'" In a recent address at the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg cited certain statistical evidence to support the conclusion that this Justice is "nineteen times funnier" than she is. Maybe, but if he is also fifty times more wrong, I am not sure that is a good tradeoff.

American Psychological Association which was held in D.C. that year, I had stayed at a hotel that turned out to be near George Washington. As I now became reacquainted with the area, I was somewhat disappointed to see that a small drugstore which had a featured a small breakfast and lunch counter—probably holding no more than ten seats at most—was apparently no longer around. I can't honestly articulate a good reason why I should object to this reality. The arrangement was, clearly, a quite inefficient use of what had become quite valuable real estate. Still, in many ways, I remain a rather nostalgic individual.

During my stay in the D.C. area, my alarm clock radio was set to WGMS, a classical music station which, on most weekday mornings, featured Dennis Owens, a gentleman with a rather devious sense of humor. He would often take shots at the younger generation. He was quite amused, for example, when a young woman, upon being questioned about the play she had gone to see, responded that it was entitled *Death of a Salesperson*. Another time, he mentioned that a young woman who had been severely bothered by the overpowering sunlight had gratefully accepted a baseball cap, only to put it on backwards.

It seems rather ill fitting to refer to this gentleman as a DJ, but regardless of the way in which the reference is made, he once read a quote lamenting the younger generation:

The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.

This sounded like something that certain people might say today, or perhaps as far back as the 1950s. The listeners were then informed that this quote was actually from Socrates. Haybe Mike and the Mechanics had a point—albeit perhaps not in the best form of grammatical elegance—in saying that Every generation blames the one before/When all of their frustrations come beating on your door."

⁷³ In case any of you are wondering, I am talking about the most senior of the remaining Reagan appointees on the Court.

⁷⁴ In checking out the quote again, it now appears that the attribution to Socrates is not without question. An unverified source claims to have "seen this quote attributed to Plato, to Socrates, to Aristotle, to Cicero, to Hesiod, to 'an old monk', to an Assyrian cuneiform tablet, and to an ancient Egyptian papyrus."

Last year, I checked the web site of WGMS. At the risk of again coming across as rather sentimental, 75 it was a matter of considerable disappointment to note that Dennis Owen had now retired, filling in only as a relief host on occasion. To make matters worse, perhaps some students return to their alma maters only to discover with disappointment that their "old" marketing professor is no longer there. Others, of course, might say "Good riddance!"

Integrative theories of autism spectrum conditions. It was while living in Maryland that—for reasons that will be detailed later in this letter—I became interested in the paradoxes associated with conditions on the autism spectrum.

It is frequently said that a common symptom of autism spectrum conditions is the inability to understand abstraction. ⁷⁶ Remember, as you were previously warned, that people on the autism spectrum are not supposed to have any sense of humor, so if vou have been laughing at anything contained in this letter so far, there probably no sense in denying it any longer: You are very likely a dangerously sick **person, too!** Unfortunately, there may not be a whole lot you can do about that, so maybe it isn't worth worrying about anyway.

Anyway, many people on the autism spectrum do take things literally. Metaphors must have some meaning to people before they can be readily understood in the manner intended. This is one reason why, when trying to communicate with people from

other cultures, we are warned to avoid terms that are based on American life. The term "in the ball park," for example, is less meaningful in countries that do not emphasize baseball or similar games.⁷⁷ Sometimes, taking things literally could happen to anyone who did not understand the context. A lot of "normal" people, for example, could have made the mistake that I made when I formed the impression that one of my acquaintances worked the night shift as a security guard in a grave yard.

Nevertheless, the tendency to take terms literally is common among people on the autism spectrum. One college educated woman, for example, expressed amazement at seeing the sign at one establishment. "Why would anyone want to store themselves?" she inquired. To me, the expression of "putting one's foot in one's mouth" has always seemed somewhat unwarranted. After all, if you are going to say something embarrassing, wouldn't it be better if you had a foot in your mouth to muffle what you were about to say?

Anyway, it turns out that many people on the autism spectrum actually have rather abstract interests—e.g., antitrust law, animals' rights, 1980s bands, Superstring Theory, and mathematics. What gives?

What I came up with was the idea of the "literal detour." This idea suggests that people in the "general population," when encountering a term with a socially established meaning, are likely to go immediately to that socially established meaning. Those of us on the autism spectrum, however, are more likely to first attempt to examine the phrase from a literal point of view. Generally, this is somewhat inefficient since, by the time we may figure out that the idea has another meaning, the speaker may be long past the point implicated. Sometimes, we may also expect metaphors to make intuitive since. Since a lot of people have said that I have a "dry" sense of humor, I struggled for many years to think of what kind of metaphor could be involved here. It finally dawned on me that any original metaphor has, by now, probably been lost in historical obscurity. Few people know that the term "red tape" dates back to the time when French attorneys would bind their stacks of documents with red ribbons. Before they would do anything with the documents, then, they had to "cut through the red tape."

⁷⁵ Actually, it would probably be pointless to try to argue

⁷⁶ The first time I remember being confronted with the meaning of the term "abstract" was while listening to the Danish comedian Dirch Passer "teaching" another comedian "how to tell a joke." He stressed the importance of building up to the *climax*. The apprentice comedian needed clarification of what the "climax" was. "A high point," was the answer given. "Like a mountain range?" the apprentice questioned. "No, it's something more abstract," was the answer. That raised the question of what the word "abstract" then actually meant. After a number of false starts and lots of hemming and having, the comedian finally said "Abstract is something which isn't there." (This last sentence, by the way, sounds considerably more profound in the original Danish than it does in translation.) Sometime later, my father explained to me his view that monkeys could not "think abstractly." Not quite having gotten the meaning of the term from the comedian, I asked my father for clarification, offering the definition given by the comedian. My father had to admit that "He is actually correct," but then went on to give a more meaningful explanation.

⁷⁷ Such metaphors may not make much sense to a sports ignoramus like me, either. I am not sure I would know how to tell a touchdown in a baseball game when one occurred.

The origins of some figures of speech can be quite ugly. The idea of a "grandfather clause" conjures up an image of a cuddly elderly man like Santa Claus or Dave Thomas. The origin, however, was quite different. After the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, many Southern states wanted to continue denying blacks the right to vote. The states were allowed to use literacy tests, ⁷⁸ but the problem here was that many whites would not be able to pass these. What they came up with, then, was some variation on the idea that men would be exempt from literacy testing if their grandfathers had been eligible to vote sometime around 1840. The term "rule of thumb" also has a repulsive origin in the British common law, condoning domestic violence by a man with a stick that was no thicker than his thumb. As an aside, the term "boss" derives from the Africans (South African Dutch) word baas, a term associated with the apartheid system.

Anyway, what the "literal detour" suggests is that individuals on the autism spectrum are more likely to be diverted to the literal meaning of a term until the apparent contradiction or infeasibility may **cause a "bounce-off."** For the most part, this is highly inefficient—at least when living in human prehistory—but, at other times, this allows certain "eccentric" individuals to come up with unique ideas. Temple Grandin has theorized that without people on the autism spectrum, few ideas idea and innovations that advanced civilization would have occurred. Strong evidence for this theory can be found in the book A Short History of Nearly Everything." This volume chronicles many of the great scientists of history, including Gregor Mendell and Isaac Newton. None of the people characterized could, even with the most generous standards, be considered anywhere near "normal." Currently, I am working on the flip side of the literal detour—the idea that many people not on the autism spectrum will experience "premature disengagement," that is, a return from the literal image—if one is ever experienced—much before unique and useful ideas can be found.

Many people, of course, end up using figures of speech with so little thought that they might miss out on certain ironies. My mother once got the chance to keep many of her horses on a vast amount of land on which cattle were also grazing. At the ranch was an old male cowchild who, to put it mildly, did not appear

⁷⁸ **Two important things happened in 1964. One was that I was born**. The other was the passage of the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964. This act prohibited literacy tests of anyone who had completed the sixth grade.

to be very conscientious in putting sunscreen on his neck. I remember him using the words "you son of a bitch" in addressing his male dog. I wonder whether he knew how much on target he was.

For further discussion of the literal detour, please see http://www.highfunctioningautism.com/.

Intellectual bankruptcy of the electoral

college. As my second year at GWU was progressing, the U.S. received a painful lesson—but one that was not readily absorbed—about the dangers of the bizarre institution of the Electoral College. As many of you know, under this system, each state receives a number of electoral votes equal to the sum of that state's number of members of the House and Senate. Technically, states do not have to go with the "winner takes all" system, and some states, in fact, award electoral votes proportionally. The idea of the Electoral College, in any event, is a merit-less vestige of a baser time in history. This highly undemocratic institution should be abolished by a Constitutional amendment to base the election of the President on the popular vote. I don't get why someone like Senator Tom Hawkin of Iowa—who makes a lot of sense on many other matters—could, with a straight face, utter the ridiculous idea that there might be "a lot of wisdom" in the Electoral College. All I see is undemocratic stupidity.

My understanding is that the Electoral College actually produced an outcome different from the popular vote one time before the 1990 election. It is rather disappointing that there have been few significant efforts to do away with this archaic, and blatantly undemocratic method of election. Obviously, we were stuck with the outcome in 2000, but I would think that any decent person would want to ensure that this outcome would not be repeated.

As I have mentioned, deciding against a career, in retrospect, meant that I lost a chance at the dream of serving on the U.S. Supreme Court. Sometimes, that dream is an even stronger draw than that of becoming a country music star. I will say, however, that I certainly did not envy the Justices in having to face this issue. Given the messy state of affairs, I do not see any "nice" and "clean" solution to the problem at hand. What does bother me intensely, however, is how several of the Justices seemed to come out on exactly the *opposite* side of the issue that their ideological predispositions should have warranted. Only my two favorite Justices—David Souter and Stephen Breyer recognized that the use of disparate standards within states seemed to raise serious problems but that these problems would not be resolved by using a seriously

deficient uniform standard within the states. It is rather disappointing to see two of the more liberal Justices take the position that this involved largely a state matter. They should be able to see and acknowledge that states cannot be relied upon to preserve civil rights—of which voting is a large component—absent vigilant oversight of the Federal courts.

Although it may seem to be a certain form of progress—albeit, perhaps, at an inopportune time—if the more conservative Justices realize that states need to face careful scrutiny in their handling of civil rights issues, this kind of "election disconfirmation" conversion seems to have been opportunistic and short lived. Why, then, all this garbage of Federal usurpation of state powers in passing laws to curb the possession of guns in school areas?

Vestigial federalism. This is where one of my pet peeves comes in. Maybe this stems, in some part, from "the inner business school professor" within me, but I have always felt that state level of business is, in most cases, very wasteful and unduly burdensome for businesses that operate across state lines. I can accept the idea that state laws in criminal areas could reasonably reflect significant average differences between regions. I doubt very seriously, however, that the people of Arkansas and New Jersey, on the average, seriously differ in their views on the legal measures that should be employed to deter deceptive advertising. I very much doubt that people in Michigan and Idaho have different views on insider trading or maximum rates of interest that should be allowed.

Hence the doctrine of *vestigial federalism*. The Founders could clearly not have anticipated how technology and other factors would take essentially all commerce to a national, and frequently even international, level. Thus, no meaningful inferences can be made of what would constitute the framers' view of "interstate" commerce. Because the Constitution clearly specifies that the Federal Government's power is confined to interstate commerce, this constraint must be recognized. However, in my view, only most minimal and nominal manifestation is required to comply with this vestigial—and meaningless—provision. No deference to a supposed original intent that a firm distinction should exist is needed.

Now, with that off my chest—or, perhaps precisely, off my fingers as they have traveled across the keyboard—let's move on to another great inequity. This time, we are talking about the **highly dysfunctional idea of equal voting power of all**

states in the Senate. Here, we seem to face an almost insurmountable obstacle. As many of you know, Article V of the U.S. Constitution sets forth ways that all aspects of the constitution—except the "equal Suffrage in the Senate"—can be changed by amendment. (There are two ways this can be done; those of you who are interested in, but do not remember the distinctions between, these two methods can consult the actual text for your edification). My understanding is that there is some controversy as to whether Article V itself can be changed. A reasonably point could be made for either position. The Constitution does not explicitly prohibit amending Article V, and doing way with equal state representation in the Senate would, then, effectively require the effort of two amendments, severely deterring this action. It could, on the other hand, be argued that the "clear intent" of the framers would be to make Senate representation immutable.

I do not suggest actually changing numerical representation in the Senate. What I do suggest, instead, is to dramatically curtail the power of the Senate, shifting powers to the more democratically elected House of Representatives. I would suggest transferring all confirmatory powers to the House. One option, then, would be for the Senate to become much what the even more undemocratic House of Lords has become in Britain. An alternative—and a reasonable compromise from my point of view—would to allow the Senate only to vote "up" or "down" on measure taken by the House. Once a bill had been passed, the Senate might have ten business days to hold a "yes" or "no" vote. If the Senate voted "no" within that period, the bill would fail to become law. Members of the Senate could, of course, informally discuss desired amendments with members of the House, but they would not have the prerogative to vote a different version which would trigger a relatively secret "reconciliation" in a "conference" committee of the two houses.

Let me briefly discuss a few more political views. I realize that some of you might disagree on some of the specifics, but I think my ideas are rather innovative.

First of all, as a pet peeve of mine, I would like to see foreign students who are found guilty of "academic dishonesty"—mostly plagiarism—deported. I don't mean to discriminate against foreign students and would welcome national sanctions against offending U.S. citizens and residents, but I suspect that we might have some serious constitutional problems trying to deport this latter category. I a sentence of 3,500 hours of community work would be imposed by

both resident and foreign students, I could live with sacrificing the opportunity to deport.

Another favorite idea of mine—likely to be quite effective in deterring drunk driving among some of the more marginal elements of society—would be to prohibit anyone convicted of drunk driving from owning a handgun. This wouldn't seem like a big sacrifice to most of us—who are unlikely to drink and drive—but at the risk of being prejudiced, I suspect that among those most likely to drink and drive, a rather disproportionate portion would feel the loss of "gun privileges" as a source of tremendous fear. By the way, I also believe that all gun owners should be entered into a national registry and should be required to carry mandatory liability insurance. Thus, the free market would ensure that gun owners would pay some of the societal cost of their gun ownership in proportion to the risk they represent.

1998-1999: NO IMMEDIATE NEED FOR PARKING IN COLLEGE PARK, MD

When I was about to start my first job after graduating from the Ph.D. program, I knew that my old car would not reliably get me from Los Angeles to College Park, Maryland. Besides, driving would have caused logistical problems since I was giving a final exam on Thursday evening with classes starting the following Monday. I literally had my suitcase with me in the classroom—much to the amusement of the students—and had friend take me to the airport immediately afterward. That meant that I did not have a car when I arrived. Buying one was not a high priority. It was only after several months that I bought one from a Dutch scientist who was returning home from a stint at the Goddard Space Center down the road in Greenbelt. Occasionally, I rented a car. I also started to order things online. During the second semester, I was teaching a class in a room that had a TV but no VCR, so I bought a VCR through Amazon.com.

I had wondered what it would be like to suddenly move cross the country. It had been only a few years earlier that I had found it almost unimaginable to move the 150 miles or so south to go to USC. Now I would be separated from my family by not only a long distance, but also by three time zones. It turned out not to be a problem. Long distance phone rates were low by then, and I got to go fly back several times. It was only the year after when I was sitting in my office at George Washington University that I had

a sudden realization that it might be a bit "odd"—but not a source of distress—that I was suddenly on the "wrong" side of the continent.

Although located close to Washington, D.C., with easy access on the Metro system, College Park is not particularly urban. It does not take long before you actually get into the country. The campus was a Land Grant institution, and it made me feel quite at home that we had a little farm on campus. I would often go there.

Adapting turned out not to be much of a problem. There were only a few minor issues. I soon learned that the supermarkets did not appear to carry sour dog bread. I could live with that. I really would not have felt comfortable giving the store managers a stern lecture,⁷⁹ and that probably would not have been effective anyway. The cold in the winter really wasn't that much of a problem, but I had forgotten from my experience in Denmark that ice is not always visible on streets and sidewalks. I got a rather starting reminder when I almost tripped on "black ice" on the sidewalk, managing at the last moment to grasp hold of a bush.

Owing to my lifestyle, there was one thing that—even as a marketing professor—I did not immediately notice. It took months before I noticed that the supermarkets did not carry alcoholic beverages. When, during the next summer, I went shopping for duty free goods to take to relatives in Denmark, I had to go to a specialized store that carried these "evil beverages." At that time, looking at the duty free allowances, I also had to ask how many cigarettes were in a carton.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Out of exasperation, I finally ended up giving one particularly "work ethic disadvantaged" student a stern lecture that year, saying that she "really [needed] to get [her] act together." The next year, I upped the ante and told a student—who did not seem to be particularly affected by this—that he "out to be ashamed of" himself. When I came back to California, I once **ended up doing something way out of character:** I actually <u>yelled at a crooked car salesperson!</u> Imagine that! I took some pleasure in the fact that a group of potential customers sitting nearby could clearly hear this. But, as I said, this was an act quite out of character. It was fun to try once, but I doubt I will be inclined to repeat the performance. (Yes, <u>my response to the merchants of filthy stuff discussed earlier was an unusual event, too!</u>)

event, too!)

80 Back when I was younger, I used to indignantly insist to everyone willing—and not willing—to hear this that "The world would be better off without communists, alcohol, and Republicans!"

⁸¹ Hopefully, it does not come across as too callous when I remind people that "smoking is a very inefficient method of

1991-1998: COUNTRY BOY, YOU'VE GOT YOUR FEET IN L.A.⁸²

Many things happened when I was in the doctoral program from 1991 through 1998. For the sake of conciseness, I will address only a few events although I have alluded to others elsewhere in this letter.

As many of you know, I am quite a bit of a prude despite the fact that I do have a sense of humor about it. Recently, I confronted my nephew, asking him if there was any real difference between sacred and profane excrement. When he hesitated, I asked him, "Well, why are you making a distinction, then?"

It was during my first stay at USC that I had an experience that tends to amuse a number of people who have heard the story. One day, I received a mass mailing from a sleazy, disgusting, and morally objectionable firm calling itself Adam & Eve. They offered to send me a catalog of filthy stuff. I quickly checked the box on the reply firm asking to be taken off their abominable mailing list. To make sure they got the point, I wrote in big letters, "I hope you burn in Hell for all eternity!" At the bottom of the form, they made a claim of having "Happy customers for 25 years." Indignantly, I wrote "I hope they burn, too!" Soon afterward, I received a very apologetic letter in the mail from the bozos, but that did not restrain them from sending a similar solicitation again later.

Now, what do eccentric graduate students do to goof off? At one point, I was living in a university owned apartment complex close to campus. One day, I found a sign saying "No hunting or fishing" in a 99¢ store. Although we did have a swimming pool—an empty one at that—opportunities for hunting or fishing on the property would have been quite minimal. Nevertheless, I posted the sign on the entry gate into the complex. The next day, I was rather

committing suicide." I no longer express my views on this topic as frequently or vehemently as I did before. The dangers of smoking are, by now, well known, so what's the point? Still, when asked, I certainly will suggest that for individuals who absolutely want to smoke, it would at least look a bit more dignified if they would smoke a cigar. ⁸² As you may have surmised from the previous discussion, things haven't—and didn't—quite work out as in the Glenn Campbell song. I still do not have a house in the Hills—the one I am trying to sell is actually in a valley. If I chose to sing publicly, I would almost certainly still have to this for free.

disappointed to see that it looked like some nosy custodian who was about to remove the sign. To my great relief, however, it turned out that he was merely being conscientious and, as a great forerunner of Adrian Monk, 83 attempting to straighten up the sign.

In case you wonder about other such pranks, back when I was in the MBA program, we all had mail boxes outside the MBA Program Office. This, after all, was back in the dark days before e-mail. A few days before graduation, I wrote a rather philosophical letter—but, at two pages, one much shorter than this one. I explained that I would keep the letter anonymous since anyone could have written the letter based on our shared experiences. I then encouraged others to share their thoughts, too. As you might I imagine, I was the only one who "replied." To make sure that no one would suspect that the same person had written both letters, I used different fonts in each document—something very innovative for the late 1980s. One rather sharp guy did catch on to the idea that both letters had been written by the same person and he was quite convinced who it was.

There is always a question of where to begin a story. Exactly where is the "beginning?" If we settle on one, isn't there likely to be something that happened before that is relevant? Many things here clearly are, but I will begin by looking back to what happened many years before the beginning of my USC days—by focusing on an event in the early 1970s, the significance I would only think of many years later.

When I was about seven years old, I would often visit my grandparents in their house in Denmark when they were there were in the country. 84

⁸³ Those of you not familiar with the series *Monk* should really check out this program on the *USA Network*. My favorite episode is the one where Adrian reluctantly, as favor to the Mayor of San Francisco, goes to Mexico to solve the murder of a local resident on vacation there. I also love the episode where, as part of an investigation, he goes to see a Zen master. Adrian can't help himself in "fixing" a crooked piece of wood that an apprentice is about to sever with his bare hand.

⁸⁴ They spent a lot of time in Switzerland and I occasionally visited them there, too. Switzerland was a fascinating country. Many of the more important house keys there were of a kind I had never seen before: There were small circular indentations on each flat side of the key rather than the jagged cuts we normally see on keys. (Locks and keys were a major fascination of mine back then. I will leave it to another time to tell the story of what happened when I had just received a new padlock while my family was at a horse camping area which featured an outhouse with a padlockable bracket. Let's just say that I feel guilty to this day!)

My grandfather employed a handyman—oops! —handy*person*!— to help him maintain the buildings on what had, once upon a time, been a small farm. There were a number of old buildings on the property where my grandfather would accumulate stuff that "might come in handy" some day. This handyman had a Danish name, but I will call him Bob. One day, my grandmother warned me that I ought to stay away from Bob. "He is sort of a weird guy," she said, leaving it at that. At the time, with so many things going on, I had no interest in pursuing the issue further; I really had no curiosity in this area. In only dawned on me many years later that Bob might have been someone behaved in a rather eccentric manner, frequently speaking to himself and not making good eye contact. I normally do not enthusiastically quote⁸⁵ Clarence Thomas, 86 and it was a relief to me to learn that the quote "There but for the grace of God go I" is actually from the British theologian John Brandford who lived in the sixteenth century. It is, of course, also something that is rather ironic for an agnostic to sav.87

In 1996, I had gone to see a psychiatrist who specialized in attention-deficit disorder (ADD) since I suspected that I might have that condition. It is normal for people occasionally to have to reply one's phone messages once or twice, but I would often have to replay my messages several times to get the sequence of a phone number to call back. I was also hopeless at doing matrix algebra—there were just too many numbers to remember at one time. We will get to the merits of my suspicion shortly, but for now, I will concede that I—and many other people, but in academia and on "the outside"—may have unrealistic expectations of the concentration abilities that we "should" have.

Anyway, I heard this psychiatrist speak at a Learning Annex seminar and made an appointment for an evaluation. To preserve a "reverse privilege," I will call her Dr. Swartz, but that is not her real name. ⁸⁹ Part of this evaluation included certain tests for "impulsivity"—the extent to which there was impairment of the ability to suppress a response when warranted. One test, for example, involved a task something like having to press the space bar on a computer keyboard when any letter—except the letter r— appeared on the screen. It turned out that I scored in the "normal" range of the test.

After one or two additional sessions, Dr. Swartz suddenly said, "You know, I don't think this is ADD—I think it is Asperger's Syndrome."

"Asverper's Syndrome?" I uttered questioningly.

"High functioning autism," Dr. Swartz clarified.

I knew she must be way off. I said something like, "But I'm nothing like Rainman! That doesn't make sense!"

But Dr. Swartz then got out the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) IV* and read off the diagnostic criteria involved. She rattled off "medicaleze" such as "encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus" and "apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals."

She might have a point, I had to conclude. As it turns out, I have a very mild case, barely meeting the diagnostic criteria. But "a case" nevertheless. ⁹⁰

To make a long preliminary story short, I continued to see both Dr. Swartz and a psychologist in the practice. Within a few months, Dr. Swartz and the psychologist had a rather nasty breakup, and I stopped coming to the clinic. I was getting close graduating from the Ph.D. program and was preoccupied with finding a position. Asperger's Syndrome was an interesting curiosity. It helped me understand myself

³⁵

⁸⁵ I will, occasionally, quote some of Antonin Scalia's oneliners. The one-liners are actually sometimes quite good; the problem is more with points they are used to make. There is something rather succinct to the idea that "There are certain downsides to being a criminal."

⁸⁶ In his Senate conformation hearings for the Supreme Court, then Judge Thomas recounted an experience had had looking out the window in his Court of Appeals office at the large number of African-American prisoners being brought into court, saying the famous words.

⁸⁷ Back in the MBA program, one of my classmates found it hilariously funny that I had replied, in response to a question when a group of us had a discussion about religion, that "I think I'm an agnostic." Still, I stand by my reply since I simply don't know one way or the other.

⁸⁸ Still, I can hardly blame this challenge for any problems I might have had in understanding my own identity matrix.

⁸⁹ Strictly speaking, this conclusion requires an assumption that the psychiatrist was not using an assumed name, but even if she were, the chances that her actual last name were Swartz would be minimal.

⁹⁰ Would there be any meaning to the phrase "Always the more?" If you have one, would you be willing to share?

somewhat better, but ultimately, I did not see much that could be done.

Shortly before I were to leave for the East Coast, I was at the national Book Expo in Chicago and happened to see a book by some author named Tony Attwood entitled *Asperger's Syndrome*. Unfortunately, copies were not available for sale at the expo.

Fast forward two years. By then, I was at George Washington University, having stayed in the D.C. area after my year at the University of Maryland. By then, I had gotten into Amazon.com. I now remembered this book I had seen and ordered a copy. Dr. Attwood suggested that he had never seen a case of Asperger's Syndrome which did not involve some degree of attentional problems, getting back to a previous issue raised. Subsequently, I came across another book entitled *Pretending to Be Normal* by Liane Holliday-Willey. Upon reading this book, things really started to make sense! And I knew that such beautiful writing could only have been done by a fellow "Aspie!"

Sensory vulnerabilities—extreme sensitivity, for example, to loud noises—and problems in spatial orientation are frequently part of Asperger's Syndrome. Here were some problems that I had always had—such as having extreme difficulty finding my locations "you can't miss."

It has now been more than ten years since my diagnosis. My experiences learning about myself have been discussed extensively elsewhere, so I will not go into as much detail as I could here. That, of course, is not saying much since we academics—especially those with Asperger's Syndrome—are known to be able to go on for hours and hours on a topic of interest.

Suffice it to say that, several years after my diagnosis, I thought back on my grandmother's warning to stay away from Bob. It dawned on me that had I not had the opportunities I had, this might be what would have happened to me. Hopefully, Bob was happy—or at least content—with the way life had turned out. I don't know what would have happened to me if I had come from a less privileged background. I shudder to think.

For someone on the autism spectrum, there is something comforting about coming from a family of

proud eccentrics. There are no normal people in my family. Again—to avoid giving the appearance of unintended prejudice—in the words of Jerry Seinfeld, "not that there is something wrong with" being normal.

Every now and then, it still amazes me what I was able to pull off. For someone who does is suspicious of change, there is something comforting about not having to leave college. **All I had to do, at one point, was to make a one hundred eighty degree turn in the classroom**, 93 now facing the class. On top of this, I am actually getting paid—albeit on an academic salary scale—to talk about my special interests in great detail!

Many "high functioning" individuals on the autism spectrum face a question of whether to "disclose" this condition up front. Often, people choose to keep the condition secret, fearing that disclosure may get in the way of one's career and other life opportunities. My decision to disclose came fairly early on. For one thing, I can "get away with it" fairly readily since it seems difficult to be more part of the "establishment" than by being a business school professor.

In one way, disclosure has been a rather "nice deal." Each week, I typically receive several messages from parents of children on the autism spectrum thanking me for my writings which they say have helped them understand their children. I can't begin to imagine what these parents—or even the parents of relatively "normal" children⁹⁴—go through. I like to think that by putting in just a fraction of effort that it would take to have children of my own—and without the constant tribulations this would entail—I am actually doing more good for the world. I am, of course, intensely grateful to those people who do have children. If they did not, I would be out of business some twenty years down the line!

PRACTICAL STUFF

At the beginning of this letter, I promised y'all some practical hints that would appear somewhere in this letter. Much as in the old *Reader's Digest* sweep-

⁹¹ Unfortunately, some rather tradition oriented English teachers have fail to appreciate the beauty of long, complex sentences and creative manifestations of arcanicity.

⁹² Oh yes, I can!

⁹³ If I had tried to get away with just 150 degrees, that might have compromised my effectiveness somewhat.

⁹⁴ As I like to say, one important difference between a baby and a handgun is that the baby does not come with a silencer. There are, of course, other differences as well. I would be rather uncomfortable meeting anyone who would derive greater comfort from a handgun than from a baby—even a relatively obnoxious one.

stakes letters, a great deal of this information will actually be revealed here toward the end of the letter. I hope the information I provide here will turn out to be worth having to go through the prior content.

Efficiency in eliminating "spam" e-mail.

Many of you dread having to go through the "spam" or "junk mail" folders of your e-mail. Some of you may have given up entirely, running the risk of missing out on potentially "valuable" messages. (For more on this point, you may want to check out my blog entry entitled "The Non-Spammer Who Cried 'Lamb!'").

Most e-mail programs show messages in chronological or reverse chronological order. Usually, however, it is possible to choose another order. I have found that many spam messages sent at different times either have the same return address or the same subject line. By sorting on those fields, it is much easier to simultaneously eliminate obvious duplicates. Messages whose return address and/or subject line appear in the Cyrillic or other non-Latin alphabet also appear next to each other.

Finding low cost hotels near official conference hotels. For some reason, conferences usually take place at outrageously expensive hotels. I tend to think of these as IROs. In part, this may be because only the more expensive hotels offer the conference facilities needed. Some people also have their lodging expenses reimbursed by employers, clients, or other "sponsors." Frequently, however, there are much less costly alternatives within walking distance of the conference hotel.

Online travel reservation services such as Expedia or Orbitz usually provide the option of searching for a hotel near a specified address. You can specify the headquarters hotel address there. Usually, immediately after the "featured" hotels that are usually outrageously expensive, the remaining hotels are listed in reverse order of distance. Note that, if you keep two browser windows open at the same time, you can often "cut" and "paste" this address from the hotel or organizational web site. You can often find a significantly less expensive one here. You may also want to check on Motel 6's web site (sometimes these will be listed on the major reservation services; sometimes, they will not). **IMPORTANT**: Speaking from painful experience, the distances listed are sometimes not completely accurate. This is especially the case for hotels located outside the U.S. You should check the distance by feeding the headquarters and

alternative hotel addresses into a map/directions service such as Mapquest.

Reducing false hits and misses in online searches. There are a few "tricks of the trade" that can be used to make returns from online searches more efficient. One involves the use of a *phrase* as opposed to key words being used independently. I often use this to find song lyrics. If I know a line from a song, I can put that in quotes. If the line is sufficiently distinctive, lyrics or discussions of the song are more likely to come up. If you know a Michael Robert Smith, you can search under "Michael R. Smith," "Smith, Michael R.," and other variations.

To eliminate hits that occur in the wrong context, you can also eliminate sites based on words that should *not* occur. In Google and in many other search engines, this is done by specifying a minus sign in front of a word where, if this word occurs, the document is less likely to be useful. For example, one of my research interests is pricing in the context of consumer price response. This term, however, is also used a great deal in the discussion of the pricing of stocks, bonds, options, and other financial instruments. Searching for relevant articles in the "news" section of Google, I can specify:

pricing –stock – bond –option

Having news of a topic of interest to you e-mailed as it happens. Google indexes stories in many of the larger newspapers. If you search for a particular term, you will be offered—along with the relevant articles found—the opportunity to have future articles meeting the respective key word specifications sent in the future. For the example above, on the bottom of each page of listed articles, you would click on the link entitled something like "Create an email alert for pricing -stock -bond -option."

Font selections. Many of us have our favorite fonts. These days, there are a lot available to choose from. Most fonts have advantages and disadvantages. Times Roman—the font used in most of this document—is a rather "boring" and somewhat unattractive font, but it is quite efficient. In writing this letter, I have opted to settle for this less elegant font in order to be able to squeeze in more words on each page, making a—probably not very successful—attempt at apparent conciseness. Members of a certain profession, would, of course, call a document of this length a "brief."

Fonts come in many shapes and forms. One of the more important distinctions is between *serif* and

⁹⁵ Incredible rip-offs.

sans serif fonts. "Serifs" are the sharp points and edges that are found on fonts such as Times Roman, Book Antiqua, and Century Schoolbook. Fonts without these sharp edges—thus the word sans, which is French for "without"—are often more elegant. Examples of sans serif fonts are Arial, Helvetica, and Century Gothic. Unfortunately, although sans serif fonts are more aesthetically pleasing, it is tiring to read large passages written without the serifs. The serifs appear to make it faster and easier to distinguish between the letters. It is often a good strategy to use sans serif fonts in headlines and titles for appearance while using serif fonts in the body of the text for easier readability.

My favorite font—Trebuchet—is a "compromise" font that does not fit neatly into either the serif or sans serif categories. This font features very "gentle" serifs and was developed for optimal display on computer screens. This, therefore, may be good to use on your web sites, blogs, and emails.

Free bonus tip—but useful only if you travel to China. If you do plan to ascend the Great Wall—at least at certain stretches—you should be sure to budget adequate time and strength. Sitting in a tourist bus, I thought a rather generous amount of time was allotted for us to reach a "local peak" at the Wall. (It goes up and down all the time, so there really is no clear absolute top). I had, however, not counted on the fact that, presumably to save on the amount of stones needed, each step was at least twice as high as that of a normal step. When I had made it two thirds of the way, I was not sure I would make it to the top. Eventually I did, but I was so exhausted from the trip that I ended up paying the equivalent of \$6 for a bottle of water without realizing this until I had had the chance to get re-hydrated and recover.

The trip had been arranged by the Inland Empire (East Los Angeles, San Bernadino, and Riverside Counties) Chambers of Commerce. As we rode back in the bus to our original point of departure, the Chamber of Commerce in Mont Clair, I noticed with some disdain that, along one stretch of the freeway ran **the Puny Wall of Pomona.**

CLOSING COMMENTS

The late Harry Chapin had some very clever ideas and expressions in his songs. Unfortunately, he had trouble getting his songs played on the radio

because they were "too long." (See any kind of parallel here?) Eventually, his song "Cats in the Cradle" made it to number one on the charts for one week. Other Harry Chapin songs you may know include "Taxi" and "I Wanna Learn a Love Song." His more obscure albums included songs like "The Mayor of Candor Lied" and an incredibly sad song entitled "Roses Are Red. "The Mayor of Candor Lied" and an incredibly sad song entitled "Roses Are Red. Song Point, however, Harry made what is probably the most apt (but slightly cynical) point in the song "Somebody Said:"

Somebody said,
"Has the man enlightened us?"
Somebody said,
"Who knows?"

I hope to hear from those of you with whom I have lost touch over the years. Please do send me your web site and blog addresses. Yes, I know that a few of you do not have either of the two—but it is never too late to start. My grandmother was in her eighties before she had her first web site. That is not to say, however, that it is too late to start if you are in your nineties or beyond, of course. I also hope that some of you will join my networks at Classmates.com and Linkedin.com and/or invite me to join yours. And, no, despite the socially accepted norm of reciprocity, I do not expect a message of equal length from you. (Even I am not naïve enough for such an expectation).

⁹⁶ The song "W*O*L*D" did make it to the charts—and stayed there for about eight minutes.

⁹⁷ A little boy starts out school being exposed to a rather dour and traditional teacher who critically examines boy's art work, questioning his creative use of colors. The boy responds: "There are so many colors in the rainbow, so many colors in the sea." The teacher sternly admonishes: "Flowers are red; green leaves are green. There's no reason to see flowers any other way than the way they always have been seen." She emphasizes that this expression of tough love is "for [his] own good." Eventually, the boy's family moves, and the boy begins a new school. Remarkably, "The teacher there was smiling" and suggests: "There are so many colors in the rainbow, so many colors in the sea ... So let's use every one." The boy's spirit has long since been crushed, however, and he objects: "Flowers are red; green leaves are green. There's no reason to see flowers any other way than the way they always have been seen."

⁹⁸Two years ago, when I turned forty, I had to "up" the cutoff for when one becomes "old" to fifty. That actually takes me back to where I started. When I was about five years old, I believed that one would suddenly get "old" at age fifty and die at age 100. I couldn't understand what the big deal was when my great grandfather turned eighty. Anyway, in eight years' time, I will probably add another ten years or so to the cutoff for being old. Maybe, while I am at it, I should add twenty to save an iteration.

The good—or maybe not so good—news is that I have now caught up on a considerable portion of the backlog of material I had wanted to cover in past holiday letters. This means that it may be possible for me—even with the pressures associated with the end of the semester—to send more regular yearly letters in December. Most will, unfortunately, have considerably shorter than this one—most probably running considerably less than ten pages—but then again, I imagine that most you probably have your plates full around that time of year, too.

I do travel a great deal for conferences and other events, so there may be opportunities if any of you are interested in an in-person reunion at some point.

Best wishes,

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APPENDIX: NEWS FROM THE REST OF THE FAMILY

Over the last several years, my mother has now effectively completed her retirement from the horse "retail" business. Her inventory is now down to two horses. In past years, some of y'all might have come across my mother's herd of Icelandics on the 101 freeway either right before Buellton—or, before that, Atascadero (some 15 miles north of San Luis Obispo.) My now spends most of her waking hours on horse photography. One possible reason why my mother apparently does not subscribe to *Photoshop Fanatic* is that a magazine by this title is not currently available. Some of my mother's photos can be seen at viewed at http://www.EHaug.com.

My father passed away in 1994. He is survived by my stepmother Jane in Denmark.

My maternal grandmother will be turning ninety-five in November. She is still active in photography but has switched to the digital form now. My grandmother, too, would be a potential subscriber to the previously alluded publication.

My maternal grandfather passed away on December 31, 1999. Some people might have theories about the genetic origins of a number of eccentricities shared among the family. Like me, my grandfather had a tremendous passion for bargain hunting.

My sister Anette graduated from the U.C. Davis Veterinary School in 1990. She now has her own practice in Ashland, Oregon, where she lives with her husband John. Contrary to a dream I had sometime ago, Anette has not yet been nominated to be Secretary of the Interior. That would probably be more likely to happen in 2009 when Republicans in the White House are hopefully sent packing.

My sister Pernille graduated with her business degree from Cal State San Marcos in 2001. She is now the webmaster at Legoland California. Pernille and my brother-in-law Morten now have two sons. Mathias was born in 1994 and spends a considerable amount of time online in Second Life and various other sites. Thomas was born in 2003. Morten's contracting business is keeping him and Pernille rather busy, but Pernille is now adding a sideline as a life coach.

Profit⁹⁹—my mother's wire-haired Fox terrier (the breed of dog that the French cartoon character Tin Tin had)—passed away in 1997. Big Bad Buck—the Welsh corgi my mother acquired afterward—is still going strong. He is actually a nice dog, but I am trying to build up his ego, and the alliteration of the description does have a nice ring to it. You can see Buck in the picture with me on the index page of my main web site.

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⁹⁹ One day many years ago, a some missionaries came knocking on the door. "That's a beautiful name!" they exclaimed as Pernille called the dog back after Profit had run out the door. Pernille did not have the heart to tell the missionaries how the name was spelled.