AUTUMN 1998

CONFERENCE

INSIDE:

WELFARE: THE PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE

SOKAL'S SWIFTIAN SATIRE

THE (IN)COMPATIBILITY OF ROUSSEAU & OLSON

KANT'S FIRST ANTINOMY

DOSTOEVSKI: LOVE & THE UNDERGROUND MAN

BOOK REVIEWS

HUMOR

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To the Reader:

In your hands is issue one of the eighth volume of Conference. No doubt regular readers will notice three major changes. First, gone are many of the previous editors, some to permanent positions in academia, others to itinerant-adjunct status, a poor, hard spot between a tenure-track position and a high-paying job outside the University. Call it the curse of Herzog.

Second, and more importantly, is the modest shift in content and the addition of structure. Previously, an issue would consist of one interview of some notable thinker...or maybe two, and four or five papers on assorted subjects in philosophy or literature. The best pieces submitted to Conference were those published. Laudable though this be, the result was issues lacking in balance. Aggregation does not a good journal make. One issue might be filled with essays on epistemology while the next might center on topics in post-structuralism. The upshot, obviously, was that a few readers were delighted because the topic *du issue* was their main interest, while all other readers were alienated.

To remedy this, Conference journal has adopted a structure. Each issue will have an interview, book reviews, and sections devoted to philosophy (Philosopher's Corner) and literature (Bard). There also will be a section devoted to current affairs.

Which brings me to the third problem. By focusing so intently on hot topics in philosophy and literature, Conference unnecessarily limited readership. Like so many other scholarly journals, Conference nearly became academic in the pejorative sense, of interest only to those who kept up on these complex, cutting-edge subjects. Worse, by addressing a small clique or two of thinkers, Conference fell in line with the current trend in American universities-specialization to the point of utter fragmentation and discipline-solipsism.

The answer, obviously, is not to dumb down the journal, but to carry these pieces and articles accessible to a broader readership. This will be achieved partly by publishing articles that ask more general questions (e.g., how to make sense of this text?'- See Dostoevski: Love & the Underground Man). Moreover, the addition of the Current Affairs section is designed to draw in those studying anthropology, politics, and the myriad other human sciences who are interested in matters beyond their department's walls. Fittingly, the first topics of Current Affairs, welfare reform and discourse between disciplines, are matters we all can ponder and discuss. Hopefully, in reaching out to others in the University on these topics, we can elicit their thoughts on our main subjects, philosophy and literature. Such seems the proper goal for a journal named Conference.

-Kevin R. Kosar

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Contents

Current Affairs

3 . . . . Interview with Lawrence M. Mead, Welfare: Past, Present, and Future

9 . . . . Sokal's Swiftian Satire: Scientific Language and Critical Discourse

Philosophers' Corner

23 . . . The (In)compatibility of Olson and Rousseau

30 . . . Kant's First Antinomy

Bard

42 . . . Dostoevski: Love and the Underground Man

Book Reviews

53 . . . A Matter of Interpretation by Antonin Scalia

57 . . . True Love: In Pursuit of Cultural Justice by Andrew Ross

Humor:

59 . . . Philosophical Chicken

61 . . . Your Tax Dollars At Work

Statement of Mission

Conference is an interdisciplinary journal of philosophy and theory produced by graduate students at the City University of New York Graduate Center, Columbia University, Fordham University, the New School for Social Research and New York University. We hold no particular theoretical or policy positions and accept submissions from any school of thought. We encourage submissions in all scholarly, theoretical areas, especially those which either strike new paths or encourage cross-disciplinary discussion. We welcome any students from the New York Consortium universities to join our effort to build a conference across the manifold fields of human inquiry.

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Submissions to Conference should be in triplicate, with a single cover sheet including the author's name, university, department of enrollment, home address and phone number. Submissions should be double-spaced, have endnotes, and ought not exceed twenty pages. Please send submissions or correspondence to: Conference, c/o Department of Politics, Kevin R. Kosar, 715 Broadway, Floor 4, New York, NY 10003.

Those desiring to submit visual art, fiction, or poetry should first submit a letter to the aforementioned address detailing the nature and value of the proposed submission. Anyone desiring to join Conference should also write the above address.

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Welfare: The Past, Present, and Future

By
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Jesus reportedly said, "The poor will always be with you." For two millennia authorities ecclesiastical and political have differed over how to contend with this brute fact. The way a society treats its poor is very much a function of its perceptions of the poor. If the poor are thought to be vicious and immoral, authorities will drive them from town, jail them, or let them suffer their lot. If the poor are perceived as victims of racial oppression or a downturn in the economy, authorities will offer them assistance.

Such, in a nutshell, is the range of perceptions and corresponding public policy that the United States has take toward the impoverished. The welfarism which reached its height under Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency has in the past decade fallen into discredit. Now America is vociferously debating a new paradigm for dealing with the presence of the poor. In light of this, Conference is pleased to present this interview with Professor Lawrence M. Mead of New York University's Department of Politics.

Professor Mead teaches public policy and American government. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard, Princeton, and the University of Wisconsin. Professor Mead's expertise is poverty and the politics surrounding the issue. Possessing a wealth of government service experience and the author of numerous articles on the poor, Professor Mead most recently edited, The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty, and From Welfare to Work: Lessons from America. Presently he is researching Wisconsin's much-touted workfare program. In 1986 his Beyond Entitlement: the Social Obligations of Citizenship was published and instantly set Washington D.C. politicians, policy analysts, and pundits buzzing over its sharp critique of the LBJ model of welfare and its call for a new "paternalistic" model. With over decade past since its splash, Kevin R. Kosar of NYU asks Professor Mead to reflect on Beyond Entitlement and assess the present debate on welfare.

Conference: Why did Beyond Entitlement cause such a stir?

Lawrence Mead: I think because it was the first social policy book which focused unambiguously upon the obligations and needs of the poor instead of their rights. The book managed to capture at the theoretical level a mindset that was coming to fruition at the time. The idea being that social policy should be based upon the idea of a social contract where the recipients of welfare do something in return for their benefits. That attitude is very prominent in American public opinion. The idea isn't an original one, but among policy experts I was the first take it seriously and provide a sustained meditation on it.

CF: Precisely what problem does Beyond Entitlement address and what is your remedy?

LM: The thesis is that the American poverty problem is due in large part to the moral character of government social policy. Federal social policy is permissive in character. It gives people benefits but does not expect that they function in ways people normally do in society. Specifically, the government gives money to many people who do not work though they are able to work. And we reward people for behavior that is contrary to their own interests let alone the interests of society. That includes all the behaviors that cause people to become dependent upon government- crime, drug addiction and all the other forms of failure to function.

CF: On what grounds had the debate previously been?

LM: The previous debate was always centered on the scale of the benefits, with the academics and left saying that the poor needed more government benefits and the right saying they needed less. I said the question is not the scale but the character of the benefits given. I wanted people to ask if benefits ought to be given with no strings attached or if they ought require something from the recipient. I asked that our thinking on these issues go beyond entitlement- entitlement being understood as a government assistance program based solely on income alone without any conditions on behavior.

CF: In The Dream & the Nightmare[1], Myron Magnet offers a different take on the poverty problem. His was a cultural thesis, that leftist, elite ideas unleashed during the liberation movements of the 1960's trickled into the minds of a great many of the poor. The libertine life of sex, drugs, and rock and roll results in rampant drug addiction, crime, teenage pregnancy, and fatherless children among the poor. So, Magnet declares, moral renewal is the answer to the problem of the poor.

LM: Yes, Myron believes that the permissive force which leads to the dissolution of inner-cities is popular culture, the ways of living and thinking popularized by Hollywood, the media, and counter-culture thinkers of the 1960's. This culture stresses immediate self-gratification and does not honor virtue. This is why the poor have disproportionately succumbed to crime, drug addiction, unwed pregnancies, and so forth...Now I differ with Myron in that I'm not so sure popular culture is permissive. I agree that Hollywood is permissive, but I've found that social attitudes are conservative about personal behavior.

CF: We hear much of a moral collapse amongst the poor, some like to cite as evidence the great drop in church membership amongst the poor.

LM: Yes, there is something to this thesis. But I also think it has very little to do with public policy. In public policy you need to find levers which government controls. The enforcement of moral values has broken down in the inner cities, but unlike Myron I don't find evidence that the values themselves have dissolved. I don't see people living Bohemian lives because they have taken up these new

permissive values. What I see is people who want to live straight, who don't want to live like Bohemians, but who nonetheless tolerate such behavior in themselves, their families, and others. They tolerate it because they don't feel that they can live the straight life in the situation they are in. So it is not the values that are permissive but the lifestyle which is permissive. It fails to conform to their beliefs. Public institutions have particularly failed in their duty to enforce values. We're not talking about controversial values like abortion or the right to life. We're talking about the work ethic, obedience to the law, staying in school, working for a living, things like this. Those values aren't controversial. Everyone supports them. But the breakdown of public authority has made living according to these values very difficult.

CF: Which institutions are at fault?

LM: Three institutions have failed. Law enforcement has failed to keep people safe, the schools have failed to enforce learning, and the federal government has failed to enforce the work ethic by allowing people to get paid without working.

CF: So there is much to James Q. Wilson's "broken-window theory"- that nobody wants broken windows or quality of life crimes to occur in their neighborhood. However, when they occur, if the criminals are not swiftly punished and the windows repaired, greater crimes follow. Many small transgressions unpunished make the mind receptive to large scale disorders. And so comes a collapse into barbarism.

LM: Yes, and I agree with cultural conservatives who think that enforcing values must also be done by social organizations- churches, civic groups, the family, and other non-public organizations. But I don't think they can do much if the public institutions fail. Some people say that private groups like churches and non-profits groups alone can bring a moral revival but I think that's a romantic fantasy. They can't do their part unless the public authorities restore order.
CF: Michael Tanner and Marvin Olasky[2] have blasted public efforts to do what they believe is the job of families, churches, and private groups- that is, minister to the needs of the poor. By usurping this responsibility government has replaced caring neighbors with an indifferent bureaucracy.

LM: I don't accept that government must be a corrupting force and that the private sector can take care of everything. Olasky's study is really about nineteenth-century poverty, when people suffered low wages and needed money to get them back on their feet. Otherwise these were folks with orderly lives. The poverty I'm researching is of a more desperate sort and today is more prevalent than what Olasky is talking about. I study people whose lives lack social order, the poverty we find in modern inner cities. Today the problem is more intense and of far greater magnitude. I do agree with Olasky that the character of outreach to the poor, be it the church or government, has to stress values. Those who seek to help the poor need confront people about their lifestyles and not just hand them checks.

CF: In Beyond Entitlement you wrote that government programs define which needs government will meet and which the people themselves must handle. The structure of benefits and obligations required of welfare recipients create an "operational definition of citizenship." Specifically, what obligations have they?

LM: These are very basic and common to all citizens. They include things like paying taxes, obeying the law, speaking English, serving in the military if drafted, serving on juries, and so forth. There are other ones that are not directly enforced but presumed by society. Most prominent is the work ethic. Adults who are not disabled need to be

employed. Public opinion does not demand utter self-reliance. The public is willing to help those who are working but fall short of earning enough to pay for their needs. What the public will not do is pay for those who can but don't work. This is an important point: when I say that certain behaviors should be required for the receipt of benefits, I am not offering my moral prescription for society. This is not personal politics being thrust on others or an attempt at micromanaging people's lives. Rather, these behaviors are the very behaviors most Americans expect. What is needed is governmental action to enforce what the people expect.

CF: Sociologist, William Julius Wilson[3] might say that your thesis is all good and fine but ignores a big problem - there are too few jobs for the poor to take.

LM: That's an important criticism that comes from the left. Rather than dispute that people must work for benefits, the Left now claims that the poor can't find work due to lack of jobs or training and education. My later book, The New Politics of Poverty, was written in part to answer this charge by William Julius Wilson, David Elwood, and other liberals. The evidence shows that jobs are available.

CF: What of the critique that says the size of the impoverished class is due in large part to their breeding. Specifically, they have far more children than they can support and their offspring do likewise, creating an ever-burgeoning class of the poor. Why not mandate birth control for those who want welfare benefits?

LM: The evidence doesn't support the claim that the poor have large families. Three-quarters of welfare mothers have only one or two children. The average family size amongst the poor might be slightly larger than that of the better off, but not much. Yes, there has been a growth in the numbers of poor in America, but most of that is driven by immigration, specifically from Latin American countries.

CF: How big a problem is unemployability amongst the poor? Some say that drug and alcohol addiction, decrepitude, functional illiteracy, and having to care for young children keep a large number of welfare recipients from being able to work.

LM: Perhaps one quarter of poor adults are unable to work at all. Most are able to work at least part time. This is not to say that this three-quarters can make themselves self-sufficient. No doubt some who take work will require supplemental income from government-which Americans support. But they must work.

> "Specifically, the government gives money to many people who do not work though they are able to work. And we reward people for behavior that is contrary to their own interests let alone the interests of society."

CF: Should the government create jobs for people? Say, paying them to clean up their communities, picking up garbage, painting over graffiti, acting as posse commitatus adjunct to their local police?

LM: Only if the private sector fails to create enough jobs. So far it hasn't.

CF: Philosophically, what is the American understanding of liberty? If it is, as some assert, Hobbesian, in Justice Brandeis' words, "the right to be left alone" (Olmstead v. United States, 277 U.S. 438, 1928), then asking

welfare recipients to work for their benefits seems an offense to liberty, a kind of moral mandate coming down from the government.

LM: I believe that liberty for Americans is essentially negative, but of course it is not unqualified. No Anglo-American theorist has ever argued that the citizen owes nothing to the state. Even in Hobbes and Locke the collectivity has the right to restrict individual liberty for the common good.

CF: True, both Hobbes and Locke agreed that the government is obliged to take personal property and redistribute it to those who might become lawless due to material desperation. Locke also advocated that vagrants be put to work and taught the rudiments of morality.

LM: The American mind is libertarian but also accepts that for there to be an economy and political action there needs to be trust. Individuals need to be able to believe that their fellow citizen will not rob them or kill them if they are to engage in common activity. Obligations come with citizenship.

CF: We agonized that nobody helped Kitty Genovese as she was being viciously murdered in the street. This would appear to show that Americans believe we are in some minimal sense our brother's keepers.

LM: Yes. The presence of government agencies which intervene in the lives of people who are being harmed or hurting themselves, like children's services and the agencies that provide assistance to the mentally ill and those addicted to drugs and alcohol, for example, shows that Americans believe they have obligations to tend to others.

CF: What of the American understanding of equality?

LM: Surveys show that Americans don't think of equality in economic terms. Equality to them means that everyone has the same rights and obligations. No matter who you are you should be punished for committing crimes. Everyone has to pay taxes, serve if drafted by the military, and so forth. Academics and intellectuals tend to think that equality should mean equality of income and status. But this isn't what American think. Americans are remarkably undisturbed by great disparities in wealth amongst them. What they are disturbed by is unequal treatment by government. For example, they would be deeply offended if rich people got to stand in a quicker line than the rest of us when renewing their driver's licenses. Equality is having the same essential rights and obligations- this unites Americans.

> " So it is not the values that are permissive but the lifestyle which is permissive. It fails to conform to their beliefs. "

CF: So, those who can work but don't are failing to participate in the common obligations of American life, thereby placing themselves outside citizenship.

LM: This is what Americans believe. Again, being one of us requires those who can work do so. Taking checks and refusing to work is very offensive to the American way of thinking. Those who do not partake in the obligations of citizenship ought not to partake in the benefits.

CF: In the last decade, how has the debate over welfare changed?

LM: Government has become much more serious about requiring welfare recipients to work. The debate has shifted from the amount recipients are to receive to how to make them full citizens.

CF: Are you in favor of the 'let 50 flowers bloom' approach to welfare, wherein the federal government gives block grants to states and lets them craft welfare policy as they like?

LM: No. My fear is that the money will be handed out as it always has been and nothing will change.

CF: What of the more radical notion that the federal government should get out of welfare altogether and let states handle the problem?

LM: I question whether states can handle the problem. Some states like Wisconsin have great people crafting their policy and are getting good results. Most don't. So I think for the time being the federal government needs to retain a role in creating policy.

CF: To close, what do you see happening to government welfare policy in the near future?

LM: I think things will continue to change in the direction I advocated in Beyond Entitlement. No counter evidence has arisen which refutes mine and public opinion is behind it. However, the magnitude of the problem of poverty and reworking the giant government apparatus that deals with it will take time. Progress will be slow and uneven and starting these workfare programs is not easy. **C**

Notes

1 Myron Magnet, The Dream & the Nightmare, The Sixties Legacy to the Underclass, (New York, William Morrow & Co., Inc. 1993).

2 Marvin Olasky, Renewing American Compassion, (Chicago, Regnery, 1992). Michael Tanner, The End of Welfare, (Washington, D.C., CATO Institute, 1996).

3 This argument was made most recently in William Julius Wilson's, When Work Disappears, (New York, Knopf, 1995).

Sokal's Swiftian Satire: Scientific Language & Critical Discourse

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Of the many debates raging in today's academy, one in particular has received a great deal of attention from the "real world" with articles about it appearing in such mainstream publications as The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. Alan D. Sokal's satiric article, planned as an elaborate hoax *cum* scientific experiment, was published in the Spring 1996 edition of Social Text, a leading journal of cultural criticism, in the special "Science Wars" edition. The article was carefully designed to incorporate the most up-to-date critical terminology and fashionable ideas; in Sokal's words, he wanted to see if it would be published if it "sounded good" and "flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions." It was also utter gibberish. As Sokal pointed out in a confession published in Lingua Franca shortly after the Social Text article appeared, he was "troubled by an apparent decline in the standards of rigor in certain precincts of the academic humanities."[2] His article was conceived as a test of the academic rigor, and, one is tempted to say, he discovered *rigor mortis*. What makes this incident so noteworthy are Sokal's credentials: he is a physicist at NYU and has published articles on important advances in the new physics. His article, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," plays with a number of post-modern concepts such as the impossibility of objectivity, the hegemony of Western dogma, and the application of quantum field theory to social critical discourse.[3] His argument proceeds haphazardly and by association, leaping from

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to quantum mechanics on the basis of some shared metaphors; his rhetoric is carefully constructed to elide key points which would render his article obviously false or to take as fact the wildest theories on which are built new and wilder theories. The crucial importance for scholars in the humanities is not so much that Sokal managed to fool a journal edited by respected critics like Fredric Jameson, but what the hoax reveals about our own culpability in fostering a milieu where language is antagonistic to meaning.

Sokal's position as a physicist at a prestigious university places him in an unusual position of being both within the academy and without the humanities. His political persuasion as a self-proclaimed Leftist ostensibly places him in the same camp as those he lampoons. In light of these facts, he can be viewed as a sort of post-modern Swift, using scathing satire for its original intention- creating change. Interestingly, both writers appeared in roughly analogous historical periods: Swift lived and wrote in the midst of the new Newtonian science's assault on the older worldview; Sokal writes as a member of the post-atomic new physics academy. Both are concerned with the direction learning is taking human endeavor. Although Swift's conservatism may contradict Sokal's leftist intentions, both are essentially arguing against the same thing: opacity or misuse of language. The experiments Gulliver encounters on Laputa are egregious. So too is Sokal's claim that physical "reality" is a "social and linguistic construct."[4] Both satires can be distilled (to use a scientific term) to their basic critiques: the language of science and the language of literature are not the same.

The connections between Swift's language and plot devices in the Travels and the scientific advances of his time have been chronicled with sufficient clarity that we need not reiterate all of the points of similarity here.[5] However, it will be useful to review some of the points that are pertinent to the later argument. Foremost among these is the language borrowed from the scientific community which appears in the pseudo-scientific experiences Gulliver faces in his travels, and, more specifically, the apparent attitude Swift displays toward this scientific language. Because Gulliver, as a ship's surgeon, is ostensibly a rational man with some scientific learning, he should be remarkably well-equipped to furnish the type of observations demanded by the travelogue and by readers of such a genre, who are interested in factual, understandable data about unknown and unusual places. One of the major tensions in the Travels exerts its force through the expectations created by the scientifically-inclined travelogue and the literarily leaning satire. As Aldous Huxley (an author skilled in combining science and satire) points out, "[t]he purity of scientific language is not the same as the purity of literary language."[6] Swift's work, then, is informed by the antinomies of the disparate linguistic tropes demanded by the different genres.

However, this tension between genres does not create unresolvable dilemmas in the text. It does create a textual milieu, though, where the simple, jargonized, carefully delineated language of science[7] exists separately from its objective referents. In the phenomenological space of the text, the scientific language effectively claims a privileged position in the narrative's impetus, only to be undercut by the satirical impact of the meaning. In other words, the language of science establishes the certain tone of an objective report that is rendered impotent by the ridiculous nature of the things being reported.

Gulliver's description of one experiment in the Laputan academy is worth looking at closely to illustrate the comic and satiric effects of scientific language being undermined by the absurd. As he is touring the academy, Gulliver is seized by a small fit of cholick, so

his hosts take him to the room of a "great Physician" who has developed a new method of treatment that, in the final analysis, is no more appealing than it is effective. The doctor, Gulliver dispassionately tells us, takes a large pair of bellows with a "long slender Muzzle of Ivory" which is "conveyed eight Inches up the Anus," allowing the wind to be removed from the patient's bowels.[8] The careful, point-by-point description of the mechanism and the procedure follows the Baconian lexicon and utilizes simple analogy in order to clarify things for the uninitiated. Moreover, we, after a perusal of the paragraph, would have little trouble following the procedure ourselves, were we so inclined. We know the procedure as well as the average college freshman of today knows the procedures described in a chemistry lab book, and Gulliver's example does, in fact, read like a lab book, in some ways.

"Although Swift's conservatism may contradict Sokal's leftist intentions, both are essentially arguing against the same thing: opacity or misuse of language."

The scientific rhetoric deflates near the end of the paragraph describing the procedure. For particularly difficult and stubborn cases, we are told, the doctor, rather than simply drawing off the illness-inducing wind, first fills the patient full by pumping air into the anus, causing the "adventitious Wind" to rush out, "bringing the noxious along with it (like Water put into a Pump)." A dog finds itself in the uncomfortable role of helping the scientist prove his theories with the bellows; the first, less intrusive procedure has no noticeable effect. In trying the second procedure, the doctor pumped until "the Animal was ready to burst, and made so violent a Discharge, as was very offensive to me and my Companions."[9] The poor dog subsequently dies, giving human patients little confidence in the doctor's new cure. With the deflation and death of the dog comes the deflation of the scientific rhetoric. Instead of the objective language of science, we have Gulliver's opinion both implicit and explicit. He states that the discharge was so offensive that he had to leave, implying that the scene was repulsive on more than one level. The last sight Gulliver sees of the doctor further emphasizes the absurdity and non-scientific impetus driving the satire- the doctor is attempting to revive a dead dog using the same method he used to kill it.

Swift's critique of the uses of language can also be seen in the textual manipulations and corrupt hermeneutics of Biblical exegesis in A Tale of a Tub. When the three brothers feel impelled to adorn their inherited coats with all manner of finery not allowed explicitly or even prohibited by their father's will, they indulge in a number of interpretive sleights that either manipulate the text beyond any recognizable meaning or ignore the text entirely. Although Swift carefully constructed this satire to reflect the Protestant-perceived follies of the Church of Rome, the absurd lengths the brothers go to in order to justify their extravagance may also be applied to much literary criticism.

The first reading of the will shows the brothers vainly attempting to find textual justification for wearing shoulder knots on their coats. After trying two methods unsuccessfully, they light upon the "totidem literis" as the method most likely to fulfill their needs. They eventually find all of the letters in "shoulder knots" except for the K, which prompts them to elaborate intellectual doublethink. They eventually arrive at the conclusion that K was not a legitimate letter in the old text, so a C, which the text apparently has in abundance, will suffice. Because they are able to manipulate the text to their advantage in this instance, they are encouraged to try again and again, each time their evaluative methods becoming more egregious. Later, when they need to justify gold lace, they rely on rumor and innuendo to prove their point; they "remembered" hearing

someone say that he heard their father's man say that he heard their father say that gold lace was not only acceptable but advisable.

Both of these methods illustrate the corruption of the original text by the interference of personal goals. In the former example, the critic, represented by the brothers, utterly destroys the context of the text, taking language apart, divorcing it from meaning, and reintegrating the language units into a more congenial (for the critic) form. The critic justifies this extreme textual violation by relying upon a rarefied and specialized jargon- Latin terms abound in the argument- and obscure intellectual assertions of dubious authenticity. In the latter example, the critic also relies on a legalistic-sounding Latin argument to make an extra-textual and highly suspect support for the claims. If we extend this analogy slightly further, the critic in the first instance looks at the linguistic structure of the text completely removed from any meaning the language itself expresses, while in the second, the critic goes so far afield from the text that the "evidence" loses all value. In both, tenuous, dubious theories are accepted as fact because the facts are convenient, and further meaning is built upon the rickety framework of these theories.

The Travels and A Tale of a Tub present critiques of scientific language and critical interpretive methods, respectively. However, the Bickerstaff papers have perhaps the most direct bearing on the current investigation because of the manner in which they illustrate Swift's criticism of pseudo-science, and, more significantly, the author's perpetration of an elaborate and cruelly funny hoax. John Partridge was an Almanac-maker with little education who published the astrological Merlinus Liberatus and many "violently Protestant" books and leaflets known more for their anti-High Church stance than for their literary value.[10] When Swift returned to London in 1708, one of the most compelling pastimes for the *literati* was so-called "Partridge shooting" or writing almanacs parodying Partridge's style; Swift, of course, had to join in, especially in his position as a defender of High Church values, and in his position as one who detested poorly written works.

He assumed the persona of Isaac Bickerstaff, a fictional rival to Partridge, who despises the shoddy predictions of the other astrologers and sets out to correct this problem with his own set of predictions. Bickerstaff chastises the other astrologers for their intentionally vague prognostications, claiming that most of the predictions seem to come true because the wording allows virtually any event to seem to fulfill the prediction. Swift's creation vows to fight this trend by presenting some very specific predictions, beginning with his prophecy of the death of John Partridge. Other more specific and outlandish predictions follow. When the day after that which was forecast for Partridge's death arrives, Swift had an Elegy prepared and printed proclaiming the accuracy of the prediction. Partridge quickly, and rather stupidly, insisted that he was actually alive, which only prompted Swift, through Bickerstaff, to claim that Partridge really was dead. The hoax went so far that the Stationer's Register removed Partridge's name from the rolls of publishers, and, when the undead man sued to regain his listing, lost his suit.[11]

As a social history of the almanac printing wars, the Bickerstaff papers are fascinating; as parody they are hilarious; as satire they are penetrating and scathing; as farce they are the epitome of sublime absurdity. Because of this, it is worth looking at key sections of the papers in some detail to see Swift's rhetoric at work. The language Swift uses and the logical structure the papers follow are particularly relevant to this discussion.

The first paper, Predictions for the Year 1708, begins with a justification of Bickerstaff's project and stresses the author's apparent sincerity. He denounces the "gross impostors" who degrade the art of astrology with their false claims and sham prognostication, while offering his own authority to counter those who might be inclined to disbelieve in astrology because of the impostors. His defense of the "noble art" is impassioned and consists largely of exposing the "stock of nonsense, lies, folly, and impertinence" practiced by the impostors like Partridge, whose predictions "descend from no greater a height than their own brains."[12] The only positive defense he offers is to promise a future publication which will justify astrology from the point of view of "many learned men," including Socrates. But, like all good slippery arguments, this one is only intended- not actually written- and readers must take Bickerstaff's word. The remainder of the *apologia* consists of statements criticizing those who hold all astrologers in contempt because of the Partridges, or those who consult such unworthy prophets when they could have the real thing in Bickerstaff. In this way, Bickerstaff slyly undercuts the criticisms of astrology by shifting the terms of the argument: yes, he seems to be saying, there are false astrologers, but do not let these impostors besmirch the name of real scientists.[13]

The next element in the introduction of Bickerstaff's predictions is perhaps the most important in the terms of this investigation: he launches a two-pronged attack on the language of the rival almanacs. Bickerstaff admits his willingness to call these rivals astrologers or even conjurers if he is not able to point out "a hundred instances" of their poor control of language, and claims that they "do not so much as understand common grammar and syntax; they are not able to spell any word . . . [or] correct common sense or intelligible English."[14] The grammatical problems are compounded by the lazy vagueness of their predictions, which will "equally suit any age or country in the world." One must feel that Swift is at least as outraged by Partridge's bad writing as he is by Partridge's political leanings, or perhaps by the rich men who purchase and read such poorly written literature. Swift, then, announces early on that his satiric mission is not simply to undercut a radical Protestant, but that it serves a higher aesthetic purpose. Bickerstaff expresses his indignation at being grouped with untalented hacks and charlatans like Partridge, and Swift must feel similar indignation that the same readers of trite, ill-written prose also read his more carefully constructed and erudite works without making any distinction between the two.

Bickerstaff continues his careful exposition of the project by putting his own reputation as an astrologer on the line in order to credit the truth of his claims and the claims of his science. The irony here, of course, is that Bickerstaff does not exist and he has no reputation to put on the line. For Swift the benefits of this line of attack are multiple. First, he can make a claim that is unique among writers of almanacs: Bickerstaff is going to make specific predictions and stand answerable to these predictions. This makes Swift's satire more powerful by elevating the stakes of his persona, creating a sense of urgency and importance for readers who initially take Bickerstaff at face value and do not recognize the parody. Furthermore, by making a promise that the prognosticator will stand behind his words and answer them after the date of his predictions, Swift builds a willing audience for the later pamphlet, assuring interest in the sequel publications. By manipulating the reading audience in this way, Swift can exercise his satiric intentions more fully.

Bickerstaff's final qualification before announcing his predictions presents an intriguing epistemological argument. He brings up a possible objection to the claims of

astrology; the influence of the stars may be real, but they cannot force men to commit actions, but can only incline them. Because of this, though the stars may indicate that something will happen, the astrologer cannot confidently assure that the events will happen as foretold. He answers this possible objection by conceding that men may evade their natural inclinations, but only if they have the wisdom of Socrates. Moreover, he goes on, most events in the world happen under the impetus of many men, and it is not logical to assume that all of the men involved will be able to resist the inclination of the stars. By again shifting the terms of the argument, Swift has taken a wise rhetorical position. His red herring has ignored other, possibly more important objections to astrology in favor of points that may be more easily proven. By shifting to an easier argument, Bickerstaff may then build upon one shaky area of agreement to advance more logically unsound points later. If we take his position now as truth, we are allowing him to proceed to greater assaults on our credulity.

> "The hoax went so far that the Stationer's Register removed Partridge's name from the rolls of publishers, and, when the undead man sued to regain his listing, lost his suit."

Bickerstaff is now ready to make his predictions, and his first two fulfill all of his promises of specificity. The first is, as he puts it, "but a trifle" and claims that Partridge the Almanack-maker will die of a fever on the 29th of March at "about eleven at night." He then quite compassionately advises poor Partridge to settle his affairs ahead of time. His next prediction is equally bold- Cardinal de Noailles, the Archbishop of Paris will die on the fourth of April.

Let us first consider the prediction of Partridge's death. Bickerstaff condescendingly claims that this event is a trifle, in direct contradiction to what we know about Swift's motives for writing the satire. He goes on to claim that he mentions such a trivial concern to show how the ignorant sham astrologers fail to take care of their own concerns. Bickerstaff's diction in this passage is notable for its scientific objectivity and absolute assurance. He has not made up this information, he tells us, but has consulted the "star of [Partridge's] nativity" by a set of established rules which are, presumably, inviolate and immutable as the rules governing the motions of all heavenly bodies, a conscious echo of the new Newtonian science. Partridge's death will "infallibly" occur at "about" eleven. Here Bickerstaff carefully chooses the language calculated to sound most appropriate. When a person dies, the day of death is "infallibly" remarked, but the exact hour is usually an approximation, since few think to look at a clock when a loved one draws his terminal breath. The mixture of specificity with a hint of vagueness illustrates the audacity of Bickerstaff's predictions, which is reinforced when he goes so far as to attribute the cause of death to a raging fever.

The second prediction, though lacking in some of the specific details is even more audacious. By choosing a very important and well-known personage, Bickerstaff expansively illustrate his willingness to deal with issues too large for the lesser astrologers. Because the "victim" this time is French, Bickerstaff may cull additional benefits. This time the person dying is a papist and enemy of England who is going to die far from London, which will allow for some extra time before the prediction may be proven false as a result of the speed of message transmission and the confusion arising over the Old and New Style calendars, England at the time still being on the old Julian (not Gregorian) calendar.[15] The wisdom of choosing such a target is revealed in one of the later Bickerstaff papers, A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff. He points out

that a Frenchman objected to his prophecy concerning the Cardinal's death by saying that the ecclesiast was still alive. Bickerstaff ponders how far a "Frenchman, a Papist, and an enemy" is to be trusted in an accusation against an "English Protestant" who is, furthermore, a loyal subject.[16]

Not all of Bickerstaff's predictions exert such gravity or specificity. His entry for May fifteenth claims that "news will arrive of a very surprising event, than which nothing could be more unexpected." The circular logic and utter ambiguity of this prediction render it absurd, and serves to highlight by contrast the earlier predictions. Likewise, when Bickerstaff predicts military or highly charged political events, he desists from giving too much information for fear of jeopardizing the concerns of the kingdom. His vagueness here underscores his patriotism, an important point in relation to the prediction of the Cardinal's death, as we have already seen. This prudence also exhibits Bickerstaff's wisdom, for, although he is willing to put his own reputation on the line to urge the veracity of astrology, he will not harm the kingdom simply to make a point. Thus, though some of his predictions suffer from the same vagueness he laments in other astrologers, Bickerstaff's lack of detail serves a higher purpose and advances his rhetorical strategy.

Three of his last predictions are noteworthy. In August, Bickerstaff sees a "particular incident"; a booth at Bartholomew Fair will fall, creating "much mischief."[17] The utter triviality of this is juxtaposed very humorously with the almost offhand manner in which the death of the Pope is foretold. Surprisingly, little is made of this unusual prediction, either in papers at the time or in the critical literature that has grown up around Swift. Instead of dwelling on the ramifications of the Pope's death, aside from briefly mentioning a "mighty contest" of succession, Bickerstaff goes on to his final prediction. He puts this last message in "mystical terms" and quotes Virgil in Latin, concluding that, on the 25th of the month, "the fulfilling of this prediction will be manifest to everybody."[18] Swift here is alluding to the point he touched upon earlier that many unsophisticated are drawn to the shoddy writing of astrologers like Partridge. By cloaking his final prediction in Virgilian Latin, Bickerstaff is making a statement about those who buy and read his almanac; they must be intelligent enough to read Latin and then to interpret the "mystical" meaning of the poetry. In essence, Bickerstaff is saying, I will give you a clue; those worthy of reading my work will understand my point. Bickerstaff's implied audience is therefore more than merely the hordes on Grub Street, but encompasses higher classes as well.

John Partridge's response to Bickerstaff's prediction was, as we have already seen, indignant and more than a little foolish. He found himself arguing from the untenable position of attempting to prove that he was not dead.[19] Bickerstaff responded to the absurdity of Partridge's response with an argument so filled with fallacies and dubious claims that few would not recognize it for what it was. The result of this was to make Partridge look even more foolish than he already looked. In this case, Swift's satire was marvelously successful; the foolishness of a bad writer was famously exposed. The fame, too, of the Bickerstaff papers spread, inspiring many Bickerstaff imitators, including Steele, who capitalized on the phenomenon by entitling a periodical The Lucubrations of Isaac Bickerstaff.

Alan Sokal's article in the Spring 1996 edition of Social Text, whether we call it a parody, hoax, or satire,[20] is important in the discussion of how language is used by scientists and by non-scientists, and, because of this, is closely related to Swift's works. Before delving into the essay itself, however, we should consider a brief but very revealing point that arose during the latest stages of the