

THE

October/November 2007

# PRINCETON TORY



## *SEX ON A SATURDAY NIGHT*

### **Also Inside:**

PAWS: Do they bite?

Stefan McDaniel on Thomas Sowell

South Park Conservatism

### **POINTS & PUNTS**

Assessing the USG  
Response to the Progressive Nation

# THE PRINCETON TORY

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## *From the Publisher*

### *The Princeton Conservatives*

On a liberal campus, Princeton conservatives form a feisty minority. The historic role the Tory has played as the main voice of that minority has been supplemented in recent years by groups like the Anscombe Society, the James Madison Program and a more active Princeton Pro-Life. Unlike other minorities, conservative's concerns continue to be ignored, dismissed or ridiculed by administrators. Part of this problem is that administrators misunderstand the type of minority that conservatives are and the nature of the arguments they make.

Illustrating this misunderstanding is the Anscombe



Society, which has largely been seen as the conservative version of the LGBT, a classic-style minority rights group that advocates for a certain sexual practice. Indeed abstinence is the new alternative sexual practice on a campus where a student faces less stigma for being openly gay than he does for being a self-proclaimed virgin. However, Anscombe is not, ultimately, the mouthpiece of an identity group, as is the Black Student Union or the LGBT. These groups function mainly by enforcing a politically correct concept of their identity. In the case of the LGBT, this leads to protests against anyone who questions the morality of homosexual acts. Like the LGBT, Anscombe also has a conception of what is good. But their conception is not based on the idea that one should be tolerant of a minority group of abstinent students, rather it is based on the public and universal principle that abstinence is good for all. In the case of *Sex on a Saturday Night*—lucidly discussed in this issue by Christine Bokman '11—Anscombe has pointed out that the University-funded play portrays and promotes a hookup culture that spreads STDs and creates the conditions for sexual assault. This is bad in their view not because it offends the principles of Anscombers, but instead because it puts the health of all students at risk. Anscombers may be a minority, but they appeal primarily to majority interests.

Along with a broad-based appeal Anscombe has decried the depiction of one abstinent student as an unfair representation of their position. This is the type of political complaint pioneered and perfected on campus by minority groups like the LGBT. Conservatives should remain careful that such objections, which can be valid, remain secondary. Administrators may cater to offended constituencies, but they are more likely to respect sound arguments that are not based on the narrow interests of a few but rather on the health and safety of all. If Anscombe avoids the temptation to merely fall into old-style accusations of unfairness, it will create the possibility for a more public-minded kind of minority action on campus.

So enjoy this issue of the *Tory*. We are a moderate to conservative magazine, but the arguments we offer—both for our fundamental principles and for practical solutions—should appeal to all.

Conservatively,

Matt Schmitz '08



# THE PRINCETON TORY

March 2007

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## *IN THIS ISSUE:*

### *RELIGION AT PRINCETON*

#### **POINTS AND PUNTS**

##### **3 The Left fumbles again**

#### **CAMPUS**

##### **6 PAWS: Do They Bite?**

The Tactic of Shock Persuasion

##### **9 Open Mindedness at Princeton**

Rethinking Tolerance and Political Correctness

##### **10 First Impressions**

A Freshman's Perspective of "Sex on a Saturday Night"

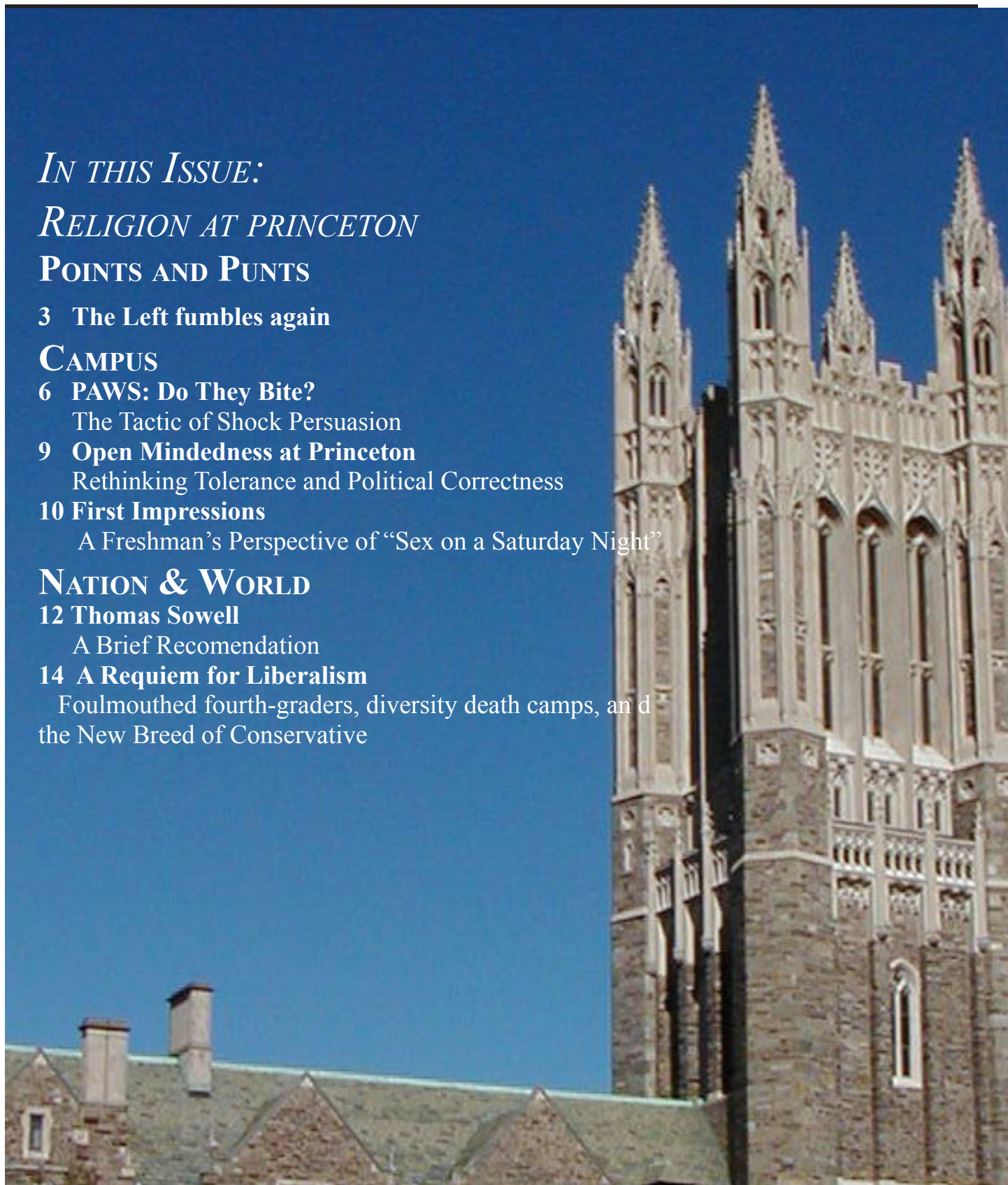
#### **NATION & WORLD**

##### **12 Thomas Sowell**

A Brief Recommendation

##### **14 A Requiem for Liberalism**

Foulmouthed fourth-graders, diversity death camps, and the New Breed of Conservative



# POINTS & PUNTS

## THE TORY TACKLES THE NEWS

It's apparently a little-known fact that William Buckley and Jack Kerouac were great friends, and that their friendship was based on a shared conservative outlook. In the latest issue of the *Progressive Nation*, Editor-in-Chief James Coan claims that the two men somehow held different views, just as *National Review* and the *New Yorker* do. Apparently Coan didn't 'dig' Kerouac's great moments on *Crossfire*.

Coan is also wrong in his claim that the *Progressive Nation* (PN) is the *Tory's* natural ideological foil while the *Nassau Weekly* is not. What Coan fails to realize is that while the *Tory* and the PN hold opposite principles they have never, oddly enough, disagreed. Despite having opposing views they have never crossed swords in partisan warfare. Because the PN does not write about the issues at hand on campus—issues like Sex on a Saturday Night or the Princeton Animal Welfare Society—but instead writes almost exclusively about na-

tional and international issues, it is no more the *Tory's* natural ideological foil than a national liberal magazine like the *Nation* or the *New Republic* would be. Currently the PN is a campus magazine only in the sense that it uses Princeton students to write. Too rarely, though, do they address actual campus issues, and their natural disagreement with the *Tory* has never resulted in argument. The *Nassau* has stepped into this vacuum, regularly providing a forum for liberal writers to criticize the *Tory*. Articles like Tim Nunan's piece on Anscombe or Chris Schlegel's defense of Princeton's arts program are good examples of the types of pieces the *Progressive Nation* would have to run if they were to become the *Tory's* sparring partner. When that does happen (and, in some 'meta' sense, it may have just happened) the *Tory* will be ready.

Nothing could be more welcome than the fact that Princeton stu-

dents have heard less about the USG than they have any time in the past several years. While previous presidents Leslie Bernard-Joseph '06 and Alex Lenahan '07 made headlines with, respectively, bizarre political crusades and a Pequod worth of long-winded emails, the USG under Rob Biederman '08 has been more effective than his predecessors in addressing the issues of grade deflation and social justice that defined their high-publicity tenures.

On Lenahan's signature issue of grade deflation, Biederman has overseen significant progress. Talks with Malkiel about implementation have made serious headway, including having unfair grades retroactively changed. Biederman has made similar progress on LBJ's pet issue of equality. This fall, the USG has been quietly working with University trustees and administrators to assess the socioeconomic inequalities that damage many students' Princeton experience. In addition to these

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achievements, the USG has launched an anonymous course comments site, created alternative social programs and launched USG DVD. These improvements in campus life, some large, some small, constitute an impressive record from a formerly controversial candidate. Rob Biederman deserves credit for promoting grading fairness, campus equality, and good old fashioned fun. That he's done so quietly without intrusive emails or referenda makes his accomplishment all the more impressive.

The end of the free market? In September, Steve Jobs announced that Apple, Inc. would provide a \$100 rebate to all customers who purchased a \$599 iPhone. The announcement came in the wake of hundreds of protest emails sent to the company after they lowered the price of the iPhone from \$599 to \$399 after only two months on the market. It seems the original purchasers were upset that they were forced to buy the new gadget before the 33% price reduction. It seems like we as a nation need a basic tutorial on capitalist economics. The correct price of an item is the highest that one is willing to pay for it. No one *must* buy the iPhone at \$600, they *choose* to. And as such, they have no right to complain about the price ex-post-facto. The fact remains that at the time of purchase the iPhone was worth \$600 (that is, according to these trendsters). What was Steve Jobs, businessman *par excellence*, thinking when he submitted to this mob of angry consumers? Maybe this is the compassionate conservatism we've heard so much about.

On October 8, the Princeton Animal Welfare Society (the cleverly named PAWS) began a week-long demonstration in front of Frist. The exhibits presented pictures of historical cases of human rights abuses, and placed similar photos of animals in food-processing farms. In the words of the PAWS president, the exhibit shows we should not tolerate any in-

justice Equality and justice should extend to all sentient beings, regardless of gender, race, age, nationality and species." Beyond the clear odious comparison between the horrors that man has inflicted on fellow man versus that done to another species for sustenance, the argument is ridiculous bordering on the absurd. Taken to its logical extreme, every animal should respect the rights that we must grant it. They must be able to provide for their own food and shelter. Should they trespass private property, humans would have the right to have these animals arrested or shoot them on sight (but not to eat them). Animals in the wild that kill another animal or human would be put on trial. Have we proven our point yet? PAWS would be well to recognize that Animal Farm was, in fact, an allegory, and one about communism no less.

### Letter to the Editor

To the editor:

The Tory's coverage in "Points and Punts" of the Princeton Animal Welfare Society's May 8<sup>th</sup> protest manages to trivialize an important issues while, in just a few sentences, committing several glaring errors which this letter seeks to rectify.

First, the cover of the Tory proclaims that the magazine is weighing in on the debate over the "Right to Eat Meat." The editors are clearly confused as to the point of the demonstration. PAWS never challenged that, as the dominant species on the planet, we have the power and the legal right to eat meat; we instead claimed that, nonetheless, it is the wrong thing to do. As a magazine that routinely derides individuals for exercising legal "rights" it finds offensive – such as that to an abortion, pornography, or homosexuality – the Tory ought to know better than to confuse what we can and have a "right" to do with what is the morally correct choice.

Secondly, the Tory states that the demonstrators were followers of Professor Peter Singer's philosophy. It is sad that the Tory would stereotype all demonstrators as disciples of a single philosopher they happen to dislike. Evidently, the Tory missed PAWS' very first lecture, where Professor Gary Francione vigorously criticized Singer. Diversity of opinion is a hallmark of animal liberation ideology.

The Tory further avoids serious consideration of the issue by declaring all the protesters "half-baked" fringe leftists. Yet participants in the demonstration represented a huge breadth of viewpoints from right, left, and center (something which the Tory could have discovered had it merely skimmed the Daily Princetonian's coverage of the event). After all, animal welfare is based on the universal principle that it is wrong to kill and cause suffering unnecessarily. While the Tory is free to ignore our concern for the suffering of sentient beings, to do so is a great hypocrisy for a magazine that – on the same page as it ridiculed the protester's aim of saving lives – mentioned the importance of "choosing life not death" in reference to both euthanasia and abortion.

I suggest the editors look for a better justification for carnivory than mere ignorance. They might start by reading "Dominion" by Matthew Scully, a former Bush speechwriter, who explains why ending cruelty to animals ought to be a natural extension of conservative philosophy. In the meantime, the editors should keep silent on issues about which they have not even made a cursory effort to become informed.

Sincerely,

Alex Barnard '09  
Vice President  
Princeton Animal Welfare Society



# PAWS: Do THEY BITE?

## THE TACTIC OF SHOCK PERSUASION

Leon Furchtgott '09

Last spring a dozen Princeton students stripped to their undergarments, covered themselves with fake blood, and packaged themselves like meat. They were participating in a “human meat tray” protest organized by the Princeton Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) and later profiled in *Newsweek* and on MSNBC. Since it was established a few years ago, PAWS has worked effectively to increase student awareness of cruelty to animals and to promote vegetarianism among students. This semester, it persuaded University Dining Services to switch to cage-free eggs in all dining halls. What is PAWS, and what does it represent for activism at Princeton?



PAWS enlightens Princeton students outside of Frist last May

PAWS is, in a sense, a liberal sister to the Anscombe Society. Both are new, marginal organizations aiming to change campus culture. PAWS is wakening Prince-

ton students to moral problems associated with modern global food distribution systems. For all that globalization has achieved to improve human lives, it has divorced consumption from any appreciation of how products are made. Eating food thousands of miles from where it was produced, we are more likely to forget

or to ignore—or never to have known—the path it took to get onto our plates. Much as the Anscombe Society reminds us that human reproduction is not

simply biology, PAWS reminds us that food has moral as well as physiological dimensions.

Some have objected to the incendiary tactics that PAWS occasionally employs to communicate its message—PAWS even organized a panel this fall to deal with these concerns. But some pro-life activists can sympathize with PAWS' situation: the only way to shake people out of their complacency, protestors find, is by confronting them with disturbing images. When the evangelical anti-abortion group Repent America put up disturbing pictures of aborted fetuses on Washington Road, Princeton Pro-Life distanced itself from the demonstration. Yet Jenny Palmer, the president of PAWS, wrote an op-ed in *The Daily Princetonian* praising the tactics.

Ms. Palmer realized that “I, as an animal rights activist, am as ‘crazy’ as [Repent America];” indeed, it is easy to hear echoes of pro-life arguments in discussions of animal rights. One needn't see animals as morally equivalent to humans—embryonic or otherwise—to be troubled when critics of animal rights brush aside concerns about the treatment of laboratory animals in the name of scientific progress. Most conservatives would agree that humans have some ethical responsibility towards animals. A moral ob-

ligation to treat animals with dignity reflects the superiority of human conscience and morality. Paradoxical as it may seem, social conservatives and animal-rights activists are in some ways fighting different fronts of the same battle. They are at odds mostly regarding the

ing animals. PETA president Ingrid Newkirk, for instance, famously declared that “a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy.” Peter Singer has argued for the principle of equality between species and accuses those who claim otherwise of being “speciesists” akin to sexists and

about PAWS is that so far it has avoided much of the ideological posturing that characterizes other animal-welfare groups. PAWS has been very careful not to advocate a philosophical agenda. It has refrained from giving precise reasons for pushing for vegetarianism, instead raising campus awareness of animal cruelty and working to increase vegetarian and vegan dining options. People should become vegetarian, PAWS proposes, regardless of their views on animal “rights” (much of PAWS doesn’t believe in rights anyway); everybody can agree to reduce animal suffering, and the most efficient way is by abstaining from meat.

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***But some pro-life activists can sympathize with PAWS’ situation: the only way to shake people out of their complacency, protestors find, is by confronting them with disturbing images.***

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justification for their activism.

Indeed, traditional morality shows concern for animals while placing humans above them. In Genesis, although humans are created “in the image of God,” they are created on the same day as the land animals. As sentient beings, animals share in some of the dignity that we recognize in humans. Noah is allowed to eat animals (before Noah, it seems, the world was vegetarian) but is prohibited from tearing limbs from living animals or eating their “life-blood.” Biblical law has numerous other commandments requiring kindness to animals. Traditional morality makes a strong case against animal cruelty without the need for PAWS demonstrations.

Many conservatives have doubts about animal-welfare organizations because of the radical agendas they often push. Groups such as the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), for example, declare perfect equality between animals and people as the rationale behind protect-

racists in the alleged arbitrariness of their recognition of rights and interests. It is easy to take these propositions to absurd conclusions, and conservatives have rightly avoided supporting their proponents.

Some animal-welfare activists such as Professor Singer deem it necessary, in order to argue for the dignity of animals, to blur the distinction between humans and other animals. But

arguing for animal equality is quite different from advocating kindness towards animals. There are many reasons to see animals and humans as morally different while recognizing certain obligations towards the former. After all, animals are not moral creatures, whatever sentient capacities they might have. Our very act of deliberating over the ethics of what we eat is impossible among animals and is testimony to human uniqueness.

What is most admirable

Of course, PAWS occasionally engages in more controversial demonstrations and uses more aggressive visual campaigns. When PAWS members protested meat-eating last year by presenting human bodies as fit for consumption, they were

almost explicitly equating meat-eating with cannibalism and animals with humans. But the event was just one of many organized by PAWS, and even then the goal was not to make a philosophical point but rather to generate publicity and attention for the group. (Incidentally, PAWS’ analogy could cut both ways. As Leon Kass notes in *The Hungry Soul*, cannibalism is much closer to vegetarianism than to meat-eating: both vegetarianism and cannibalism deny any difference between animals and humans.)





*Silence of the Lambs- Meat is Murder says People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)*

The Anscombe Society, on the other hand, has adopted a much more intellectual approach to activism compared to PAWS. Its web site has a list of “position statements” relating to such issues as “family and marriage” and “homosexuality.” It sends out a weekly email with an article by a prominent intellectual relating issues of marriage, courtship, and sexuality; it hosted a well-attended intercollegiate conference last year to equip students to start similar groups on campuses around the country. The Anscombe Society has been fairly successful in creating and nurturing an intellectual community in favor of chastity—but it has not tried actively to change students’ lifestyle choices.

Of these two approaches to activism, it is hard to say which is more effective. Certainly, by presenting itself as a

moderate advocate for vegetarian and vegan students, PAWS has been quite successful in changing the University’s eating choices. The University’s decision to switch completely to cage-free eggs is of great symbolic significance besides any possible benefit to hens.

PAWS can use the University to force students to eat (and pay for) cage-free eggs, but Anscombe does not have equivalent options. Instead it has developed into a more philosophically-minded group. It is perhaps less visible on campus, but it has the potential, especially if it spreads to other campuses, to change campus discourse on sexuality. There has been widespread consternation about the lack of intellectualism in campus activists. The Anscombe Society is a powerful counterexample and possible antidote.

While PAWS has been effective as a campus advocate, its brand of activism comes at the cost of completely ignoring the philosophical debates that surround animals. PAWS advocates vegetarianism because of the terrible conditions in factory farms, but if it leaves the argument at that, PAWS risks becoming just another trendy liberal cause, like the fair-trade coffee and anti-Nike protestors.

Rather than shrinking from theory,

PAWS needs to think seriously about the philosophical consequences of its activism. Of course, PAWS is composed of members with diverging views; it is understandable that it does not want to appear or become dogmatic and unyielding. But the philosophy of the relations between animals and humans is too important for PAWS to ignore. Conservatives especially should welcome PAWS to the debate and pay close attention to what it has to say.



*Leon Furchtgott is a sophomore from Bethesda, MD. He is a Physics major active with Chabad.*



# OPEN MINDEDNESS AT PRINCETON

## RETHINKING TOLERANCE AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

*Shivani Radhakrishna '11*

In hokey introductions and ramblings during precept, over free tea and cookies at Murray Dodge, and even amid adventures on the Street, one singular concept has permeated my first few weeks at Princeton: the value of “open-mindedness.”

The situations for which this concept is allegedly central generally arise

***But in so many contexts, the charge of closed-mindedness, far from facilitating an exchange of ideas, blocks a discussion that ought to be had***

harmlessly enough, with a spontaneous discussion about some controversial topic and the inevitable discord that follows. “I don’t agree with you, but I respect your opinion,” one person says resignedly, and the conversation ends.

What exactly are we to take from this? When I disagree with an idea, do I not judge it to be false? Can I hold an idea to be wrong but maintain that it is valuable for someone else to accept it—and end the argument there? If I respect an opinion, doesn’t it mean that I consider it true, and belief in it justified? If so, on what grounds could I yet disagree with it?

Certainly, there is some value to being open-minded. What I mean to say is that being open-minded is not *inherently* valuable. Instead, it is only of value

inasmuch as it helps us to gain access to the truth. Listening to other opinions in the context of academic discourse can cause a person to defend his view more clearly or realize and remedy its flaws.

What being open-minded has come to mean, however, is something quite different from this. We are expected to listen to views that are outlandish on questions that are already settled. For example, a month ago, Iranian President Ahmadinejad spoke at Columbia. His denial of the Holocaust and his tendency towards anti-Semitic remarks certainly don’t merit the “I disagree with you, but I respect your opinion” response. Are Ahmadinejad’s views valuable just because he holds them? Ought we to listen to his views and refrain from judgments merely for the sake of being “open-minded?” No: since open-mindedness is only instrumentally valuable, it is not necessary that we entertain ridiculous views, especially in situations where the truths of the matter are confirmed. We shouldn’t be open to Hitler, to Stalin, or in this case, to Ahmadinejad. Judging Ahmadinejad’s views and closing our minds to his opinions isn’t irrational; it is wholly reasonable.

But in so many contexts, the charge of closed-mindedness, far from facilitating an exchange of ideas, blocks a discussion that ought to be had. Instead of allowing both parties to engage in active debate and discussion or reach their opinions’ hidden point of divergence, this accusation ends the

conversation prematurely. Sure, we can’t debate infinitely, but this charge takes the focus off the issue at hand and shifts it onto the individual. The reason we ought to be open-minded is to be free to find the truth. Judgment, on the other hand, is valuable for *embracing* the truth. But by forbidding judgment on certain questions and openness to certain positions (usually, conservative ones), accusations of intolerance ironically destroy what they are meant to facilitate: knowledge. “Let’s agree to disagree,” is another popular phrase that graces the mouths of many, who would rather just accept the diverging opinions as they are, instead of trying to find and evaluate underlying differences. I can’t picture Socrates enjoining us to “agree to disagree,” and perhaps with reason; the very aim of inquiry is to question principles and analyze them, in the hope of finding truth.

It seems that the unreflective push for “tolerance” and “open-mindedness” on campus has harmed the intellectual community and weakened discussion. Instead of encouraging people to argue for the sake of getting a firmer grasp on the truth, we seem to embrace difference of opinion and end the debate before it has begun. Though listening to other views is critical to our ability to defend and correct what we believe, open-mindedness for its own sake is unnecessary and unreasonable. G.K. Chesterton put it perfectly: “The point of having an open mind, like an open mouth, is to close it on something solid.”

# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

## A FRESHMAN'S PERSPECTIVE OF "SEX ON A SATURDAY NIGHT"

Christine Bokman '11

Waves of laughter, gasps of astonishment, and the fires of controversy pervaded Richardson Auditorium when the cast of "Sex on a Saturday Night" (SoSN) put on its annual performance this September. As an incoming freshman, I had the privilege of a front-row seat not only at the performance, but also at the review by its toughest critics—the students.

Despite a quick skim through Christian Sahner

'07's *Wall Street Journal* editorial in the "Sexed-up Sex-Ed," where Sahner addresses the questionable morality of the play and suggests revisions that would take into consideration the "ethics and risks" of sex, I entered Richardson Auditorium for the first time with an open mind.

The play took its viewers through the preparations and aftermath of a party on campus: a stereotypical group of boys planning their potential hookups; a giggly group of girls debating over what to wear; and the scene where both groups mesh and one boy crowns the evening by getting drunk with his date and having sex with her. The reviews were mixed. While some, like Sahner, felt the play completely "crossed the line,"

and others complained about the amateur jokes mixed with crude word plays, some freshmen felt that addressing the ever-present subject of sexual assault on college campuses was given a good *try*. Did the University accomplish its goal of educating the incoming freshman class about sexual assault?

Vice President for Campus Life, Janet Dickerson, believes that SoSN did serve its purpose as a date-rape prevention program. In

a follow-up letter to Sahner's article, she declares that "[the] play [is not] about sexuality, but rather about crime, because it is vital to provide incoming student with information and resources regarding sexual information and programs." Ms. Dickerson adds that federal law requires universities to provide sexual awareness information and programs. So, mandatory attendance makes sense.

What is n't understandable, much less laudable, is why this student-run play resembles more a bawdy comedy act than an informative sex-crime prevention program.

The trite script and clichéd

characters of the sluggishly paced "Sex on a Saturday Night" served only to paint a flattering picture of Princeton's hookup culture, neglecting the "sexual information" that the University wished to impart to its newest students. That night I saw Princeton join the ranks of most American universities where sex and hookups are the norm. Though I attempted to learn something from the play, my focus constantly shifted toward the obtrusive distractions referencing Princeton's hook-up culture—the ten-minute onstage make-out session, the uncomfortable jokes and sexual references, and the homosexual kiss at center stage. What does any of this have to do with sex-crime prevention?

Having hoped to come away with new awareness of the problem of sexual assault, I left feeling a little overwhelmed by the play's constant and unabashed innuendo. A 2007 senior thesis for which 1,210 undergraduate Princeton students were surveyed found that on av-

erage Princetonians—men and women, from freshmen through seniors—vastly overestimate the hook-up frequency of their peers. Considering that "Sex on a Saturday

Night” is one of our first glimpses into campus life, it’s no wonder.

Not only does the play travel in circles around its central point, it also compromises the modesty of morally-sensitive students on campus, all of whom are forced to sit through a play that may be offensive to their religious beliefs or personal

values. Even if this is the case for only a few students on campus, the University needs to take their minority viewpoint into consid-

assault.” Of course not. But this does not mean that such beliefs should be overlooked or compromised in the presentation of

hookup culture SoSN glorifies.

Unfortunately, such information, as Kyle Smith ’09 revealed in his *Daily Princetonian* op-ed “Ivy

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***Though I attempted to learn something from the play, my focus constantly shifted toward the obtrusive distractions referencing Princeton’s hook-up culture—the ten-minute onstage make-out session, the uncomfortable jokes and sexual references, and the homosexual kiss at center stage. What does any of this have to do with sex-crime prevention?***

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League Sexcapades,” would be hard to find. As Smith writes, “McCosh does keep track of the number of cases of each STI... but it fails to provide this in-

formation to incoming students.” sexual-assault information. If the play won’t focus exclusively on the problems of assault, then it should give more attention to the moral

Although the University does not provide specific health statistics, Smith tells us of a discussion with a McCosh official who concludes that “Princeton should not be considered a ‘safer’ place in terms of the risk of contracting an STI.” This is exactly what SoSN seems to overlook and even contradict.

How the University chooses to inform future freshmen about sex-crime prevention remains, ultimately, its own decision. However, the program should not infringe upon many students’ moral sensibilities, and the focus should remain on date-rape and its dangers, not on provoking a few laughs. If the performance of SoSN remains unchanged, the eager minds and bright faces of the incoming students will again be greeted by a misrepresentation of life at Princeton, hookup scene included. In fact, the play’s trivialization of sex and glorification of casual hookups might very well undermine its proposed goal of, in Ms. Dickerson’s words, “pars[ing] the distinctions between consensual and non-consensual sex.”



*“Sex on a Saturday Night and the Pre-Rade. What more could a freshman want?”*

eration. Just as SoSN addresses homosexuality, so too should the viewpoints of the students on campus who choose to be abstinent be given consideration.

Sahner makes a similar argument in his article, to which Janet Dickerson replies that “religious and cultural beliefs alone are not protective factors against sexual

and physical risks of having sex.

SoSN so swiftly skims over date-rape that its underlying message seems to be, as Sahner puts it, that “college is [a] time to get busy.” Consequently, if the University continues to allow such a play to be performed, it should at the very least provide more information on the risks of the



# THOMAS SOWELL

## A BRIEF RECOMENDATION

Stefan McDaniel '08

The historian Paul Johnson once called Thomas Sowell “America’s premier philosopher.” This may seem like a stretch, since so few people have heard of him and he is an economist. But in our time, when so much philosophical discussion by trained philosophers is either sterile or insane, Sowell’s clear and helpful books on economics, politics and society are indeed the closest thing you are likely to get to Aristotelian illumination of the world in which you live.

***“Men have an all but incurable propensity to try to judge all the great questions that interest them by stamping their prejudices on their language.”***

than the great stock of fascinating facts, challenging arguments and compelling analyses of specific issues is the general effect of his writing on one’s thinking. He is helpful in three main ways: 1) He insists on the importance of presenting empirical evidence for arguments whenever available and relevant. 2) He demonstrates the great power of a few simple principles, whether of economics or of morality or of logic. 3) He draws attention to the hypnotic effect of meaningless or deceptive language and puts you on your guard against it.

1) Many of the views on politics, history and the way the world works more generally which are often repeated by the media, teachers and ordinary people are demonstrably false. Similarly, many programs and policies can be shown to be counterproductive by all or most relevant measures.

The false views are spread and the programs

and policies enjoy wide support because so few people check the relevant data. Much of Sowell’s work over the past several decades has been less that of an economist than that of a historian and statistician, collecting and evaluating hard data in order to correct egregious errors and challenge unsubstantiated claims. Perhaps the finest fruit of that labor is his recent (2006) book of essays, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*, in which he shows, among other things: that the economic and social ills of contemporary black Americans cannot, except in the most indirect and irrelevant way, be blamed on slavery; that imperial Western powers are far more remarkable for their systematic and dogged dismantling of the global slave trade than for having once taken part in it (see also *Conquests and Cultures: An International History* (1998)); that nothing in the Germans’ culture or history suggested that they would be particularly likely to perpetrate the Holocaust; that majority attitudes to and beliefs about minority groups are rarely unrelated to that minority’s actual patterns of behavior. In other publications, Sowell also shows the failure of affirmative action not only in the United States, but in India, Malaysia, Israel and elsewhere (see *Affirmative Action around the World: An Empirical Study* (2004) ).

***Almost all the beliefs and policies associated (perhaps unfairly) with the kinds of people commonly called “liberals” can be explained by this simple principle: “Third parties can make decisions for people better than people can make for themselves, especially when we are those third parties.”***

In his popular writings on economics (see *Basic Economics: A Common Sense Guide to the Economy* (2007) ) he patiently and repeatedly uses theo-

retical arguments and a variety of examples from history and current affairs to show the high folly, in almost any conceivable circumstance, of rent control, minimum-wage laws, protectionism, etc.

2) American political “debate” is frequently little but shrill cacophony, and it is easy to conclude that there are simply multiple, incommensurable discourses being used and that the most we can hope for as a society is that our views happen to overlap enough to avoid paralysis or violent chaos; the thing to

do is to try to ***Many of the views on politics, history and the way the world works more generally which are often repeated by the media, teachers and ordinary people are demonstrably false. Similarly, many programs and policies can be shown to be counterproductive by all or most relevant measures.***

But in Sowell’s view, this is wrong-headed. He thinks we need much more dogmatism, if this means having a firm grasp on the principles of a given field (such as morality or economics) and facility at applying them to specific cases. Principles initiate, guide and clarify all sound reasoning, saving much time in argument by unveiling merely superficial agreements or disagreements and by enabling that consistency without which the judgments and decisions of individuals and groups alike become random and foolish. Our political life in this country would be a good deal more productive if people took the time to understand, articulate and apply some basic principles on which all thinking people, after reflection, should be able to agree.

Sowell brilliantly elucidates these principles and their applications in all his books, but pre-eminently in *The Vision of the Anointed: Self-congratulation as a Basis for Public Policy* where he also reduces foolish political philosophies to their core principles and thus demolishes them with maximum efficiency. For instance, he shows how almost all the beliefs and policies associated (perhaps unfairly) with the kinds of people commonly called “liberals” can be explained by this simple principle: “Third parties can make decisions for people better than people can make for themselves, especially when

we are those third parties.” (See also *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Conflict* (2007).) This principle is disastrously false, as you will no doubt agree after reading the book.

3) James Fitzjames Stephens, whom Sowell quotes, puts it best: “Men have an all but incurable propensity to try to judge all the great questions that interest them by stamping their prejudices on their language.”

The abuses of language that Sowell tends to highlight fall into two general categories: i) The use of pre-emptive language. “Pre-emptive language,” as Sowell means it, either assumes what must be argued for (for example, describing oneself as in favor of “progress” when we are all by definition in

favor of progress but disagree about what it entails) or implicitly puts the speaker on a higher moral or intellectual plane (for example, referring to views shared by “thinking people” or “those concerned with social justice”). ii) The habitual use of words with no meaning, obscure meaning or no real relevance. For instance, people often speak at length and in public about “diversity,” “injustice,” “exploitation,” “greed,” etc., with at best vague and shifting meanings assigned to these terms, and they recommend policies and programs based on their intended goals (“compassionate” legislation, for example, to reject which is to be cold-hearted) without explaining the specific processes involved or the likelihood that they will be effective. Sowell devotes an entire chapter to this use of language in *The Vision of the Anointed*, which is, incidentally, my favorite book of his and the one everyone should read first.

For the rest, Sowell is also a highly respected economist who has been frequently published in the best journals of the discipline and has written several admired scholarly books. The non-specialist is likely to find *Knowledge and Decisions* the most interesting of his more academic works, and Sowell himself considers it his greatest intellectual achievement.

# A REQUIEM FOR LIBERALISM

## FOULMOUTHED FOURTH-GRADERS, DIVERSITY DEATH CAMPS AND THE NEW BREED OF CONSERVATIVE

Andrew Saraf '11

**G**roan-inducing multicultural events have joined death and taxes as immutable aspects of American life. To Princeton freshmen, for whom death and taxes are distant concerns, these events are perhaps the only certain thing. We have to go to them, we have to sit through them, and we have to have group discussions afterwards. Some of us manage to escape the last part, but the rest must endure the embarrassing infantilization of being given “race/disadvantaged group cards,” designed by people who either have never watched *The Office* or fail to make the connection. Yes, “Reflec-

tions on Diversity” is didactic, condescending and, for some, unbearably painful. But this year’s event should give conservatives some reason for hope. It

wasn’t that the diversity trainers have lightened up. Their video – “Sustained Dialogue” – left me longing for the silliness and humor of a Bergman film. It was the students, the objects of indoctrination, who showed the most encouraging signs. They were not moved, wowed or particularly enlightened by the propaganda piece. They laughed. And laughed. At least for that evening, “Sustained Dialogue” became our generation’s *Reefer Madness* (1936), an absurd and out-of-touch attempt to keep young people in line.

Something important is happening here. Significant segments of young America are, through a combination of indifference and de-

risation, rejecting virtually every tenet of politically-correct philosophy. Some have called this a temporary backlash, after which we prodigal sons will see the light and come crawling back to liberalism. Others see in it a fundamental realignment of the American political landscape; evidence, in the words of the *Atlantic Monthly*’s Andrew Sullivan, of the emergence of the “South Park Republican.” Whether directly influenced by the show or not, today’s high school and college students have, it is argued, increasingly embraced its fundamental attitude: an attitude of skepticism towards left-wing orthodoxy and vehement rejection of identity politics. If this is true, it is heartwarming news for the

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***This raises questions – too many to answer in this piece – about what lies at the heart of much of the backlash against political correctness. When we, out of disdain for liberal organizations, leap to the defense of any and all offensive statements conservatives make, no matter how uncouth and mindless, what are we really defending?***

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Right. What conservative wouldn’t be happy to see a mutiny on the Left’s hands? But this moment of joy, this bit of *Schadenfreude* at liberals’ expense, must be supplemented with careful thought – thought that casts a skeptical eye on our celebratory fervor.

Let me, before soberly and carefully thinking, set one thing straight: I love *South Park*. To be shocking, truly shocking, in this day and age is no easy task, and Trey Parker and Matt Stone do it magnificently. They do it, too, with a great deal of cleverness; no one can really say that *South Park* is mindlessly stupid at heart. And even when it is being mindlessly stupid (“don’t forget to bring a towel!”) it fully acknowledges its own vacuity. What I want to do here is not to critique *South Park* as a TV show. As a vessel for its creators’ beliefs, it is effective, as well as riotously funny; I can’t demand much more from a weekly comedy.



But the show's message – the content of Parker and Stone's worldview – deserves special and separate consideration. It is this message that lies at the heart of the South Park Republican/South Park Conservative (SPC) phenomenon, and this message that has been heralded as conservatism's second, chic coming. What, I propose to ask, does this message really mean?

*Against Liberal Media Bias* (2005). As examples of *South Park*'s conservative orientation, Anderson points to such memorable episodes as "Rainforest Schmainforest" and "The Death Camp of Tolerance." In the former, the four eight-year olds are taken on a rainforest tour by a sanctimonious neo-hippie. The neo-hippie's claims – that the rainforest is harmless, that



*Kenny, Kyle, Cartman, and Stan- incubators of conservatism, or just irreverent youngsters?*

What underlying assumptions, about morality and cultural norms, does it represent? My question, ultimately, is whether *South Park* is a show that conservatives should embrace.

To begin answering this question, it is useful to look at those conservatives who have done just that – endorsed

*South Park* and declared it conservative territory. Andrew Sullivan, a libertarian-minded conservative, is one. The Manhattan Institute's more socially conservative Brian Anderson is another, and has written a book called *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt*

Latin American rebels are noble freedom fighters, that native tribes are peace-loving innocents – are proven wrong one by one, until she renounces her old self-righteousness and, in a song-and-dance sequence, cheerily advises activists to "go \*\*\*\* [them]selves." In "The Death Camp of Tolerance," much of whose plot is hardly fit for print, the modern distortion of "tolerance" is devastatingly depicted as a form of left-wing fascism. To these examples can be added episodes on sex changes, Rob Reiner's anti-smoking crusade, and Hollywood's smug infatuation with hybrid cars, among many others. Anderson claims that

such episodes and their popularity reflect the emergence of "an iconoclastic right-of-center type ... who wants nothing to do with the dour, PC and elitist Left." To him, this new conservative grouping is not just another bloc sitting under the movement's "Big Tent"; as the ar-

***Whether conservatives can deal with these changes and articulate their own vision of decency and public morality in the face of them depends in part on the recognition that South Park and the larger anomic tendency in popular culture is part of the problem, not the solution.***

chetypal member of the right-wing media revolution, the SPC is in many ways a central part of conservatism's future. The notion that the stereotypically out-of-

touch right wing has had a hip makeover has an understandable appeal. But when we take a more critical view, one that does not cherry-pick ideologically agreeable moments and attitudes, a more complex picture emerges. Anderson, in passing, acknowledges that the average South Park Conservative “may not be traditionally

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conservative when it comes to things like censorship or popular culture or even ... some social issues.” For every *South Park* episode on Al Gore’s messianic self-conception, there is an episode on a menstruating statue of the Virgin Mary; for every depiction of liberals as effete pseudo-intellectuals, there is a depiction of God as a cat/monkey/hippopotamus and Catholic priests as incorrigible child molesters. To some commentators, this is, in itself, enough reason to dismiss the show

entirely. According to the Media Research Center’s Brent Bozell III, *South Park* is “cultural rubbish” and an “infantile cartoon.”

Blogger and Fox

News contributor Michelle Malkin condemns its “increasingly mainstream vulgarity” and declares she would “rather be a G-rated conservative” than the new, more foul-mouthed kind. Clearly, at least among those in their 30s and older, *South Park*’s induction into the conservative canon is far from a *fait accompli*.

Now I’m not usually one for Bloombergesque

middle-of-the-roadism, but it’s fair to say that both extremes are wrong here—not necessarily, in their conclusions, but in their fundamental approaches. Both Anderson and Bozell have a certain set of conservative principles that they hold dear; both Anderson and Bozell find particular episodes and aspects of the show that either affirm or contradict these principles. Anderson sees radical environmentalism as hopelessly disconnected from reality; he needs only point to “Rainforest Schmainforest” to prove that Parker, Stone and their legion of fans are closet Tories. Bozell believes that American culture is sinking under the weight of its crassness and vulgarity; he needs only point to *South Park*’s “scatological barrage” to blame it for our society’s decline. Yet, neither takes the time to pause before rushing to judgment, because both have a predetermined ideological agenda to promote.

There is, in other words, a bigger picture here that neither side of the *South Park* divide has taken the time to notice. We can get a glimpse of this picture by looking at how Anderson and Bozell respectively defend and malign the show’s reputation. To Anderson, *South Park* is admirable because it tears down liberal shibboleths. Nothing that “progressives” hold dear – social engineering, hate crimes legislation, boundless (yet somehow selective) tolerance, global warming – is left untouched. To Bozell, *South Park* is

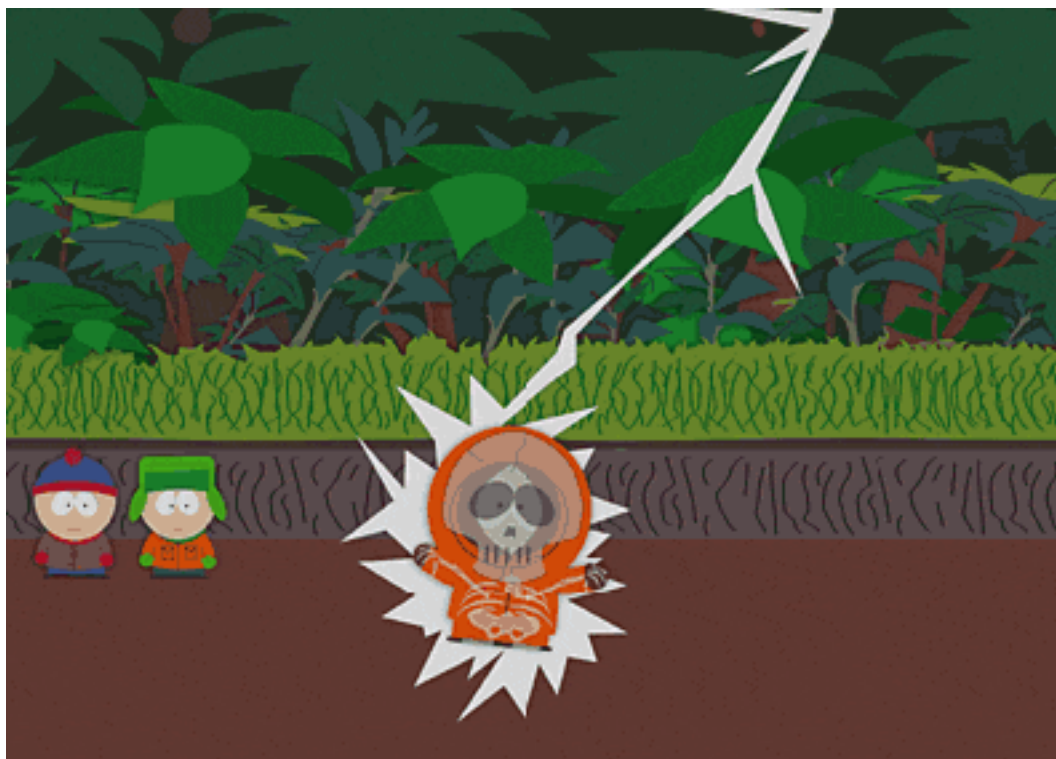
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***For every South Park episode on Al Gore’s messianic self-conception, there is an episode on a menstruating statue of the Virgin Mary; for every depiction of liberals as effete pseudo-intellectuals, there is a depiction of God as a cat/monkey/hippopotamus and Catholic priests as incorrigible child molesters.***

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detestable because it tears down everything traditional Americans care about and have

cared about for generations. While “its implicit hostility to political correctness is refreshing,” its explicit hostility to everything else is most certainly not. An objective observer would look at this and reach a very simple conclusion: *South Park*, like so many other cultural phenomena from the last few decades, tears things down. It defines itself by its opposition to every rule



*Oh my God! They killed Kenny! But did they also kill political correctness?*

imposed by tradition, elite opinion, and the law.

Thus, when Anderson celebrates the “rude anti-liberalism” he finds among many college students, he overlooks the centrality of the terms “rude” and “anti-” to the equation. If colleges are dominated by liberal administrations and faculty, then naturally an adversarial, abrasive attitude will lead to “anti-liberal” tendencies. Thus, this proclivity for the negation of every principle does not by any stretch of the imagination translate into a “new kind of conservatism.” What it does translate into is nihilism, a belief system that has been characterized as a central threat to a healthy society by conservative thinkers from Burke to Strauss to our own Robert George—a belief system whose watered-down form has led to what Pope Benedict XVI calls “a dictatorship of relativism.” What confuses conservatives is that, unlike liberals’ selective application of moral relativism (pro-choice on babies, anti-choice on transfats), the *South Park* generation chooses to apply it to all things; it is universally and consistently too cool to care.

This raises questions – too many to answer in this piece – about what lies at the heart of much of the backlash against political correctness. When we, out of disdain for liberal

organizations, leap to the defense of any and all offensive statements conservatives make, no matter how uncouth and mindless, what are we really defending? When does “telling it like it is” become simple obnoxiousness and anti-intellectualism? And what, finally, will we be left with when liberal orthodoxy is swept away – a conservative order, or a society in which nothing, be it the nuclear family or a distant rainforest, matters? When pondering these questions, we would do well

to consider the reflections

of the *National Review*’s Jonah Goldberg on the anti-P.C. backlash and one of its leading figures, Ann Coulter: “...calling John Edwards a ‘faggot’ is hardly a triumph of conservative principle. I’m all in favor of acid wit and barbed satire... [But] the reality is that most political correctness...is a necessary attempt to redefine good manners in a sexually and racially integrated society.” Whether conservatives can deal with these changes and articulate their own vision of decency and public morality in the face of them depends in part on the recognition that *South Park* and the larger anomic tendency in popular culture is part of the problem, not the solution.

A friend of mine once told me that I intellectualize everything to death, and maybe he’s right. But the *South Park* fan in me loves that a poorly animated cable comedy could have so many implications—that it could define, for better or worse, an entire generation. Whether I’ll be able to enjoy the show after declaring it the enemy of civilization is something I’ll have to find out for myself. Somehow I think I will – loving the sinner, perhaps, and hating the sin.





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