Facts and ideas from anywhere

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MOST TRUSTED PROFESSION IN THE USA

The annual Gallup survey on honesty and ethics indicated that 84% of respondents trusted nurses, which placed nurses ahead of 20 other highly regarded professions, including pharmacists (70%), physicians (64%), and police (56%) (1). Nurses have been the most trusted profession since first appearing on the list in

1999, with one exception: in 2001, firefighters topped the list. Nurses not only inspire confidence among their patients and families, they also inspire each other.

Nurses did not always receive such respect. Early nursing practices consisted of women of little education and low social status performing lowly tasks. Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) in the 1800s changed that. Nursing became a profession. Through her work the first nursing school was established. During Nightingale's day, those hoping to become a nurse needed to be punctual, honest, patient, and sober. Today, nurses need to possess an aptitude for math and science and be able to work long hours in an intense environment. And of course they must have a desire to help people.

During the next decade, job opportunities for nurses are expected to grow much faster than for all other occupations, according to the US Department of Labor. There are more than 2.7 million nurses in the USA, and three of every five work in hospitals, according to the Census Bureau.

When Florence Nightingale (named after the city in which she was born) returned home from being superintendent at Scutari Hospital (near Constantinople) in the Crimean War—where 14,000 soldiers died in the hospitals, primarily because of neglected sanitary precautions—she was the most popular figure in England (2). She had made nursing a profession. She was 45 years old, but not long thereafter, she took to bed and stayed there for 10 years, and for the rest of her life remained a reclusive invalid. The reason for the invalid state was never precisely determined, but Hugh Small, author of *Florence Nightingale: Avenging Angel*, believed that she had brucellosis (3).

Her father had inherited great wealth, and Florence loved studying with him in his library. Florence, like her father, found society activities trivial and meaningless. Her father educated both her and her older sister, Parthenope, at home. Her father trained Florence in French, German, Italian, Latin, Greek, history, and philosophy. He took her and her sister on educational trips to France, Italy, and Switzerland. When Florence was 20 she discussed studying mathematics with her father and made him uneasy by her desire to accomplish something in the world. At the time (1840), there was no useful role for highly educated ladies in Victorian society. After much argument she was allowed to study mathematics under a tutor.

Her father owned two estates in England and alternated time at each, except the month of March when the family stayed at the Burlington Hotel in London. The family's energetic socializing brought Florence into contact with many of the ruling class, in particular with Lord Palmerston, the future prime minister. The Palmerstons and the Nightingales often dined together. Florence's erudition made her conversation equal to that of most distinguished men. Another close family friend in the world of politics was Sidney Herbert. He belonged to a different party than Lord Palmerston, but one or both of them were almost constantly a cabinet member from 1830 to 1865. Herbert was eventually responsible for overcoming the resistance of Florence's family to her leaving home to take up hospital work.

By age 17, Florence knew that she wanted to serve in a hospital. In a different society almost certainly she would have entered a convent. In England at the time women were not encouraged to find outlets for their humanitarian and managerial urges, and Nightingale spent most of her youth dreaming up imaginary scenarios under which she could achieve her goal. By the time she reached age 30 she was desperate for an outlet for her ambitions. The only time she felt satisfied was when she visited the sick and poor and taught their children in the humble village schools near their home in Derbyshire. She longed to work in a hospital but whenever the word was even mentioned, her mother and older sister fainted and had to be revived with smelling salts. There was actually no provision in England at the time for training women to do anything at all. She railed against the poor quality of a woman's life as compared to a man's. In an autobiographical tract called *Cassandra*, she described a middle-class unmarried woman as being a slave to her relatives. A woman

was always expected to be available to entertain parents or their guest and could not even retire to her room for study as a man had the right to do.

The break finally came when she was 32 years old. Herbert's wife, Liz, was on the committee of a charitable institution on Harley Street which looked after sick governesses, and she arranged for Nightingale to become the superintendent. Nightingale stayed 12 months (1854). Her work consisted largely of organizing supplies of goods and services after the recent move from other premises. She altered operations enormously. She instituted the buying of supplies in bulk. She brought the dispensary in house and reduced the staffing costs. She assisted surgeons. After a year she left and looked for a position where she could set up a nursing school in a large London teaching hospital. She and Sidney Herbert had already conducted several surveys of hospitals, examining the defects in the pay, organization, and accommodations of nurses. They believed that the obstacle to improving the opportunities for women in nursing was a perception that nurses in hospitals were exposed to grave dangers of immorality (sexual harassment) and drunkenness. It was these fears more than medical suffering that had made Nightingale's mother oppose her daughter's initial attempts to work in a hospital. Overcoming them would enable other women with less powerful friends to escape from the trap that Nightingale found herself in.

Her experience with supplies and her knowledge of best practice in managing female staff in hospitals made Nightingale an obvious choice to lead a party of nurses to the Crimean War. So did her mental outlook. She had a towering optimism and confidence, based not just on self-esteem but on a deep religious belief that the universe is fundamentally on the side of human kindness.

In October 1854, one month after Nightingale gave her notice at Harley Street, a crisis erupted in the new general hospital that the British Army had established at a safe distance from the war zone in the Crimea. The first important battle was in early September, and when the wounded arrived at the hospital they found it bare of supplies. The male orderlies that were supposed to look after the patients had been badly recruited and proved incapable. It was inevitable that Sidney Herbert and his wife should conceive the idea of sending Florence Nightingale to the East. Thus, Nightingale went to the war hospital, not only to serve the sick but also to promote the idea of female hospital nursing. On October 21, 1854, at age 34, and as head of the group of 38 nurses, Florence Nightingale set off for Constantinople. It was as if one of the fantastic heroic daydreams of her youth had come true.

DECENCY, PROPRIETY, AND INTEGRITY—"THE FUNDAMENTALS OF GOOD BEHAVIOR"—AND EMILY POST

Good doctors have good manners! Good bedside manners are appreciated and a bit soothing to those lying in bed and a bit at the mercy of those standing. The late Dr. Lloyd Kitchens wrote eloquently on medical etiquette in an article published in July 1995 in this journal (4). Recently, a new biography about Emily Price Post (1872–1960) has appeared (5).

Emily was deeply in love with her husband, Edwin Post, whom she married in 1891, and early recreated in her own home the happiness she observed between her parents. By 1905 she found herself in the middle of a scandalous divorce, its humiliating details splashed across the front pages of New York newspapers for months. Traumatic though it was, the end of her marriage forced Emily Post to become her own person. She spent the next 15 years writing and attending high-powered literary events alongside the likes of Mark Twain and Edith Wharton.

She was far more than the aggrieved wife in a public scandal. She was initially the adored only child of a wealthy socialite and architect Bruce Price, among whose legacies are Tuxedo Park and chateausque Canadian railroad hotels (now part of the Fairmont chain). Although born in Baltimore, she grew up in New York City. She emerged from a privileged childhood with a love of the spotlight, a creative streak, and perfect posture—a straight-spine monument to the marriage of Southern gentility and Northern industry.

She moved easily amid what she termed "best society." She got the familial lecture from her parents: "Real quality had nothing to do with money or birth." She married well if unwisely. Her husband, Edwin Post, liked Long Island; she liked Tuxedo Park. She liked the Knickerbocker Club; he preferred boating. Even before she became the arbiter of etiquette it was abundantly clear to Mrs. Edwin Post that one spouse does not buy a 129-foot scooter without consulting the other. She by no means was perfect. When she finished a jigsaw puzzle, she wrote the date on the box. The restaurant tab could not arrive fast enough. She spent 6 months in an Albany hotel room so as to be on hand while her son finished flight school.

In the course of their 13-year marriage, Emily produced two sons and published a novel. The divorce was devastating to her. Naturally, she did not let on: a lady shares detail of such matters only with her nearest and wisest relatives. But she also said: "No matter whom he may be, whether rich or poor, in high life or low, the man who publicly besmirches his wife's name, besmirches his own and proves that he is not, was not, and never will be, a gentleman." After the divorce, Emily Post, a beautiful woman, never pronounced her husband's name again. She also set an extra place at the table for the rest of her life.

During the 6 years following her divorce, she produced five novels. She discovered that she quite liked offering advice and proposed a column to her agent to be called "Letters of a Worldly Godmother." He passed. At a dinner in 1920, a well-connected friend asked, "Why don't you compose a book on how to behave?" Eighteen months later, at 50, she had the book that would make her and her ex-husband's name. With humor and compassion she discoursed on such subjects as bores, social climbers, and betrayed wives. A true architect's daughter, she had an eye for design and a passion for order. She was convinced that morals and manners occupy adjacent lots. She was convinced that good manners get people places that big money will not.

The next years presented challenges to stay on top of the field she did not create but would long dominate. Revisions of the "Blue Bible of Etiquette" followed regularly (every 5 years) as did product endorsements (watches, rayon, and cigarettes),

a flood of journalism, and volumes on design and architecture. From a woman who never set foot in her kitchen came a cookbook. As she said, "I would rather broadcast than eat." Ten-hour working days were her routine. Her book evolved with time. It came to include sections on how to greet a returning veteran and the rules of etiquette for truck drivers! It was the most requested book among GIs during the war, the second most stolen at home. Radio shows and syndicated columns cemented her hold. Repeatedly she was named one of the most influential women in America. She held the etiquette crown until 1952, when Amy Vanderbilt or Simone de Beauvoir came to the forefront. At the end, she turned out 5 million words on etiquette in 15 years. Strangely, Post's closest company was "the help." Although time was an issue, neither the need nor the capacity for friendship seems to have manifested itself.

A society of 306 million people needs some social rules, and it's a pleasure to witness good manners and a displeasure to witness bad ones. Emily Post was one of the most influential Americans in the 20th century.

PANDEMICS

In 1967, the US surgeon general, Dr. William Stewart, stated: "The time has come to close the book on infectious diseases. We have basically wiped out infection in the United States." No one yet knows if the 2009 swine flu will behave like the 1918 Spanish flu that killed 50 to 100 million worldwide, or like the 1957 Asian flu, or the 1968 Hong Kong flu that killed far fewer (6). This 2009 flu may weaken and lose its virulence or strengthen and gain virulence.

Despite some World Health Organization member states having agreed to a set of regulations that require the reporting of diseases of global significance within their borders and despite the availability of two effective antiviral drugs and some effective vaccines, the USA, according to Dr. Larry Brilliant, remains underprepared for any pandemic or major outbreak, whether it comes from newly emerging infectious diseases, bioterror attacks, or laboratory accidents (6). Brilliant opines that the 2009 swine (H1N1) flu will not be the last and may not be the worst pandemic that we will face in the coming years.

According to Dr. Brilliant, in our lifetimes, or our children's lifetimes, we will face a broad array of dangerous emerging 21st-century diseases, manmade or natural, brand new or old, and newly resistant to our current vaccines and antiviral drugs. Most pathogenic viruses that affect humans have originated in nonhuman animals. For that reason, they are called "zoonoses." They account for 60% of all infectious diseases and 75% of all emerging infections, according to Brilliant. Some of these diseases are well known: bird flu, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), HIV/AIDS, West Nile, monkeypox, and Ebola. Some are brand new, like the arenavirus that was first found only a few months ago when it caused a few deaths in Africa. That virus was genetically sequenced and identified by Ian Lipkin at Columbia University. He believes there may be as many as 1 million viruses that remain to be discovered.

More new viruses with pandemic potential are jumping from their traditional animal host to human hosts for several reasons,

according to Brilliant (6) and Miller (7): humans now occupy more land than ever before that was historically the providence of nonhuman animals; more humans come into contact with nonhuman animals and their viruses because there is less rain forest, jungle, and wild lands separating them; and relative prosperity has led to increased raising of cattle and chickens and increased meat consumption. As climate change causes sea levels to rise and aquifers to dip into salty water, agricultural lands yield fewer calories of food per acre. That leads farmers to cut down jungle, creating deforested areas which once served as barriers to the zoonotic viruses that each day have more opportunities to jump from bats and rodents and monkeys and civet cats to humans. As temperatures rise and seashores change, animals head inland into higher ground, moving into heavily populated human areas. Likewise, human climate refugees also move into lands once thought inhabitable. All these changes increase the potential for humans and nonhuman animals to exchange new viruses. Dr. Brilliant concludes that we must invest more in public health and prevention, increase training programs, and fund more research that leads to better vaccines and improved antiviral drugs.

HEALTH CARE REFORM IN RURAL CHINA

The USA is not the only country attempting to alter health care. According to Calum MacLeod, the Chinese government announced in April 2009 a \$124 billion (US dollars) 3-year overhaul of its health care system that calls for building a clinic in each of the country's 700,000 villages, expanding medical insurance, and capping the cost of hundreds of prescription drugs (8). The ambitious plan will provide "safe, effective, convenient and affordable health services" to all of China's 1.3 billion people by 2020, their government announced. The health plan also is a way to stimulate the economy. People living in the countryside—the bulk of China's population—have saved to cover the cost of a physician's visit or hospital stay. The new health care system could free the Chinese to spend more on goods instead of saving for future medical care.

These health care changes are aimed at making coverage affordable, not free. More than 200 million Chinese now lack any health insurance, and the new plan could cover by 2011 90% of the population with some sort of basic medical insurance. The insurance coverage will reimburse a significant percentage of patient costs, but not all. In 2010, the government will increase its health insurance subsidy for farmers and unemployed urban residents from \$11.73 to \$17.59 a person. The central government will pay 40% of the promised \$124 billion program, while local governments must come up with the rest. There is some doubt that the local provinces will be able to come up with their share of that money. About 5000 general practitioners will be trained, and hospitals will be built or renovated in all 129 counties. Good luck!

GATES' RESEARCH GRANTS

In May 2009, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced that it had awarded 81 \$100,000 grants to support innovative, unconventional global health research (9). The 5-year health research grants are designed to encourage scientists

to pursue bold ideas that could lead to breakthroughs, focusing primarily on ways to prevent and treat infectious diseases. Among the projects was a grant to explore tomatoes as an antiviral drug delivery system; another was to seek to build an inexpensive instrument to diagnose malaria by using magnets to detect waste products of malaria parasites in human blood; another was to see if shooting a laser at a person's skin before administering a vaccine could enhance the immune response; another was to see if malaria-carrying mosquitoes could be infected with a fungus that would act like a cold, suppressing the sense of smell that they use to find human blood sources.

MULTIPLE DRUGS IN ONE PILL

My blood pressure is mildly elevated, and I take a single pill containing valsartan and amlodipine. Novartis Pharmaceuticals will soon add to that pill hydrochlorothiazide such that there will be three antihypertensive drugs in one pill. Vytorin includes both simvastatin and ezetimibe in one pill. Simcor includes simvastatin and niacin in one pill, and there are many other combinations. These hitherto mentioned pills are antihypertensive or anti-lipid lowering.

Cadila Pharmaceuticals of Ahmedabad, India, has been testing the Polycap, which contains three blood pressure medicines (atenolol, ramipril, and thiazide) plus a lipid-lowering drug (simvastatin) and one clot-altering medicine, a baby aspirin (100 mg) (10). According to the investigators, the five-drug combination reduced systolic blood pressure by about 7 mm/Hg, low-density lipoprotein cholesterol by 27 mg/dL, and heart rate by 7 beats a minute. The polypill will eventually come in my view, but it will be some time before the Food and Drug Administration approves a single pill containing five or six drugs to treat two or more conditions.

WILLEM JOHAN KOLFF, MD

Dr. Kolff (February 14, 1911–February 11, 2009) invented an artificial heart-lung machine, the artificial kidney, the artificial ear, and the artificial arm (11). His work led to the development of the Jarvik 7 artificial heart. The modern version of the Jarvik 7 is the CardioWest temporary total artificial heart (SynCardia). Kolff left his home in the Netherlands in 1950 to work at the Cleveland Clinic. He implanted his first artificial heart machine in a dog that lived 90 minutes on the device's support. In 1967 he left the clinic and founded the division of artificial organs at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. His artificial heart was finally implanted in a human in 1982. The recipient, a dentist, Barney Clark, lived 112 days on the artificial heart. Kolff's artificial heart has been

Figure. (a) The French spend longer periods sleeping. The figure shows sleep time on an average day in minutes. (b) The French spend the most time eating and drinking. The figure shows eating time on an average day in minutes. Reprinted with permission from pp. 28-29, *Society at a Glance 2009: OECD Social Indicators*, www.oecd.org/els/social/indicators/SAG (14). Source: Secretariat estimates based on national and multinational time-use surveys (2006 where available).

approved as a bridge to transplantation for patients with end-stage heart failure. Kolff, along with William Murphy, developed the first kidney dialysis machine in the late 1940s. This device saved thousands and led to the first successful kidney transplant at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston in 1954. His greatest triumph was probably the kidney dialysis machine.

GAINING WEIGHT

The average American adult gains 1 fat pound a year from the age of 25 on (12). And, if we weigh the same at 55 as at 25, 15 pounds of once lean muscle have turned to 15 pounds of fat. This means that by 55, the average gainer has put on 30 pounds of fat! Ed Koch said, "The best way to lose weight is to close your mouth . . . or watch your food—just watch it, don't eat it." Thomas Jefferson said, "We never repent having eaten too little." Eileen Ford said, "Slender people bury the dead." William Powell said, "Worrying is much more effective than dieting to lose weight."

TIME SPENT SLEEPING AND EATING

The average hours and minutes a day spent sleeping and eating in 18 countries, collected by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), is summarized in the *Figure* (13). The French spend more time at table (>2 hours) and in bed (9 hours) than the people in the other

Table 1. Watching television is the preferred leisure activity across all surveyed OECD countries*

Country	Prevalence of different types of leisure activities (percentile shares of total leisure time)				
	TV or radio at home	Other leisure activities	Visiting or entertaining friends	Participating/ attending events	Sports
Australia	41	47	3	2	6
Belgium	36	42	8	8	5
Canada	34	34	21	2	8
Finland	37	40	7	8	8
France	34	45	6	7	8
Germany	28	46	4	15	7
Italy	28	48	6	10	8
Japan	47	42	4	0	6
Korea	35	41	16	1	7
Mexico	48	33	10	4	5
New Zealand	25	45	24	2	5
Norway	31	33	14	15	8
Poland	41	38	6	8	6
Spain	31	41	4	12	12
Sweden	31	42	7	11	8
Turkey	40	25	34	0	2
United Kingdom	41	39	7	10	4
United States	44	32	16	2	5

*Reprinted with permission from p. 35, *Society at a Glance 2009: OECD Social Indicators*, www.oecd.org/els/social/indicators/SAG (14). Source: Secretariat estimates based on national and multinational time-use surveys (2006 where available). It is important to point out that conclusions derived from these figures should be tentative: national time-use surveys' methodologies differ in the way they choose to include or exclude the measure of secondary activities.

17 nations. Despite the moderate amount of time Americans spend eating each day—about 75 minutes—US obesity rates are the highest of the 30-member OECD countries. Nearly 35% of the American population has a body mass index (BMI) >30 kg/m². The lowest obesity rates are in South Korea, with <4% of the population with a BMI >30 kg/m². The Koreans get the least sleep, 7.8 hours a day. The data on the use of “broader leisure” time (daily levels of personal care) were constructed by the OECD using 2006 data from the 18-member countries for which up-to-date surveys on use of leisure time were available (*Table 1*) (14). Norwegians spend the most time (25%) at leisure; Mexicans, the least (16%). Watching television is the preferred leisure activity in all surveyed OECD countries.

EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PROGRAMS

According to Robert Pear, Congress is planning to give employers new authority to reward employees for healthy behavior, including better diet, more exercise, weight loss, and smoking cessation (15). Several federal laws now limit what employers and insurers can do. Congress apparently is considering proposals to provide tax credits or other subsidies to employers

who offer wellness programs that meet federal criteria. Lawmakers would make it easier for employers to use financial rewards or penalties to promote healthy behavior among employees. Growing numbers of employers already have adopted wellness programs after finding that they can lower health costs and increase the productivity of workers. Financial incentives include gift certificates and premium discounts or surcharges. Of course, these programs have critics who argue that it is unfair to hold people financially responsible for their health behavior and that employers have no business prying into the employees’ “private lives.” Federal officials insist that the rewards and penalties can be used in an ethical way. This government program is one I could readily support.

DIGITAL MEDICINE

Under the \$787 billion economic stimulus program enacted in February 2009, hospitals can seek several million dollars apiece for technology purchases over the next 5 years (16). Individual physicians can receive up to \$44,000. These carrots are to encourage the proliferation of technology that will computerize physician orders, automate dispensing of drugs, and digitally store patient records. If providers participate broadly, those files are supposed to be accessible no matter where a patient goes for treatment. The intent of these technological innovations is to improve care, eliminate errors, and eventually save billions of dollars a year. There is a stimulus to provide

these technological innovations. The federal government will cut Medicare reimbursement for hospitals and medical practices that do not go electronic by 2015.

The stimulus package has, of course, energized the tech titans like General Electric, Intel, and IBM, all of which are challenging Cerner and other traditional medical suppliers. According to Terhune and colleagues (16), Microsoft and Google aim to put medical records in the hands of patients via the web. Wal-Mart is teaming with computer maker Dell and digital vendor eClinicalWorks to sell information technology to physicians through Sam’s Club stores. Whether technology will solve all or most of our medical problems remains to be seen.

PERSONAL GENOME PROJECT

It was started by Harvard geneticist George Church, who is enrolling 10,000 people who will have their genes sequenced and put online, with their medical records and pictures of their faces (17). After that is completed, another 90,000 will follow. The end result will be to create a giant database of people that scientists can easily surf to find links between medical conditions and genetic traits. Church believes his personal genome project

would be something impossible for government or industry, where data are walled off to protect privacy and preserve intellectual property. As Matthew Herper writes, most genetic traits are not good or bad but both (17). Tall people can see better at ballgames but knock their heads into door frames; people who like the cold cannot handle the heat.

Dr. Church grew up dyslexic, developed narcolepsy in his teens, and survived a heart attack. Being narcoleptic meant that he fell asleep several times a day in meetings, even as he ran one of the largest labs at Harvard and served on advisory boards for numerous companies.

Church grew up in Clearwater, Florida, and was a constant tinkerer. In 1964, he built an analog computer when he was 10 years old out of parts he got from the truck of an electrical contractor. He became interested in medicine because his stepfather was a physician. When at Duke University he fell in with a group of biologists who used computers to create three-dimensional pictures of biological molecules. His obsession with the work caused him to ignore his graduate classes at Duke, from which he was expelled. A year later he talked his way into Harvard's graduate school, from which he got a doctorate in 1984. That led to his work in DNA sequencing and then a job at Biogen. In 1984, Church was the only scientist to attend all three of the meetings where scientists laid the groundwork for the Human Genome Project.

Despite his open source bent, Church is far from anticorporate. He works with 15 companies, many of which he co-founded. Some focus on commercializing his sequencing work, and others are involved in synthetic biology, which is genetic engineering revved up. One of his startups can make gasoline from bacteria (not quite cheaply enough yet); he foresees using bacteria in algae to suck the carbon dioxide, which causes global warming, out of the air to create fuel, plastic, and asphalt. Keep it up, Dr. Church!

GUN VIOLENCE IN THE USA

According to Bob Herbert, roughly 17,000 Americans are murdered every year (18). As Herbert says, "This is an insanely violent society and the worst of that violence is made insanely easy by the widespread availability of guns." He goes on: "We are confiscating shampoo from carry-on luggage at airports while at the same time handing out high-powered weaponry to criminals and psychotics at gun shows."

While >12,000 people are murdered with guns annually, >30,000 are killed in a typical year in the USA by guns. That includes 17,000 who commit suicide, almost 800 who are killed in accidental shootings, and >300 killed by the police. In many of the law enforcement shootings, the police officers are reacting to people armed with guns. Additionally, nearly 70,000 nonfatal gun shootings occur annually in the USA: 48,000 who are criminally attacked, 4200 who survive a suicide attempt, >15,000 who are shot accidentally, and >1000 who are shot by the police. According to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, >3000 kids are fatally shot in the USA in a typical year, >1900 are murdered, >800 commit suicide, about 170 are killed accidentally, and about 20 are killed by the police; another

17,000 are shot but survive. The medical cost of treating gunshot wounds in the USA is estimated to be >\$2 billion annually, and nonfatal gunshot wounds are the leading cause of uninsured hospital stays, according to the Violence Policy Center.

I'm against guns, have never owned one, and regret that so many others do. When the Constitution was written >200 years ago to permit the carrying of firearms, the USA had a population of 5 million people, and there was plenty of space for all of them. Today—with 306 million in the USA, the smaller amount of space per person, the great heterogeneity of our society, and the large gap between the rich and the poor—things are different.

MOTORCYCLES AND MARINES

William M. Welch (19) reported that 25 Marines died stateside on motorcycles in 2008—more than the 22 killed in hostile action in Iraq and the 21 killed in Afghanistan. Nearly 300 military men and women died on motorcycles stateside during the 3 years from 2006 through 2008, and an additional 75 had to quit the service because of motorcycle-related injuries.

The military has responded to the sharp rise in off-duty motorcycle deaths over the past 5 years, even as service member deaths in automobile accidents have declined, by pushing training courses on troops who ride rather than trying to curtail motorcycle riding. The Pentagon directives require service members who ride motorcycles to undergo training that goes far beyond the basics, including a course on advanced sport bike techniques adapted from racetrack riding. The training also includes psychological self-assessments aimed at identifying and stopping high-risk practices. Marines cannot register their motorcycles on base and are subject to discipline if they ride without training. So far, 700 of the estimated 18,000 motorcycle-riding Marines have taken the course. Troops without families to support typically return from combat with a load of money. They can buy a fast motorcycle—capable of speeds of ≥ 150 miles per hour—for under \$10,000.

It appears that the adrenaline that sustains soldiers through combat can get them into trouble when they climb on a motorcycle. The "Superman Complex" can lead to dangerous activities.

LEFT-HANDEDNESS

Five of the last seven US presidents have been left-handed: Ford, Reagan, Bush Sr., Clinton, and now Obama. This occurs in a world where only 1 of every 10 people is a lefty (20). What left-handedness has to do with political skill, intelligence, popularity, family connections, wealth, and luck is unclear. What is clear is that "handedness" runs all through the animal world. Once thought to be uniquely human, some version of this attribute has been seen in chimpanzees, marmosets, cats, chickens, toads, mice, rats, and other species. According to David Brown, it is present in animals that do not have hands (fish) and in some that do not have backbones (honey bees).

In biology, this phenomenon is known as "lateralization," which is the preference for doing or perceiving things more

with one side of the body than the other. It appears to be an important consequence of having a brain. The brain, of course, is bilaterally symmetrical, divided by a plane that makes one the mirror image of the other. Lateralization saves space and working capacity by not requiring both hemispheres to do the same thing. The ability to produce and comprehend language emanates from the left side of the brain in more than 95% of right-handed people and in about 70% of left-handed ones. For most voluntary movements, each side of the brain controls the opposite side of the body. According to David Brown, 27% of sons of left-handed parents are left-handed compared with 10% of sons of right-handed parents. About 20% of identical twins have different handedness.

THE TEN BIGGEST PAY PACKAGES

Physicians through the years have been accused of “making too much money.” I don’t think so. A look at the 10 most highly compensated chief executive officers in 2008 from 387 of America’s largest companies gives room for pause (21). Here they are in millions: Chesapeake Energy, \$112; Motorola, \$104; Walt Disney, \$51; Goldman Sachs, \$43; American Express, \$43; Citigroup, \$38; Apache, \$37; Philip Morris, \$37; Juniper Networks, \$36; and JP Morgan Chase, \$36.

AUTHORSHIP OF SHAKESPEARE’S PLAYS

My son Charles called my attention to a piece providing opinion of our Supreme Court justices as to who was the “real” Shakespeare (22). Justice John Paul Stevens believes the real Shakespeare was the 17th Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere. Several of Stevens’ Supreme Court justice colleagues say he may be right. This view puts much of the court outside mainstream academic opinion, which equates denial of Shakespeare’s authorship with the “Flat Earth Society.” Nonetheless, accordingly to Jess Bravin (22), since the 19th century, some have argued that only a nobleman could have produced writings so replete with intimate depictions of courtly life and exotic settings far beyond England. Dabbling in entertainment was considered undignified at the time, so the author laundered his works through Shakespeare, a member of the Globe Theater’s acting troupe. Others argue (23) that the real Shakespeare was Sir Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson, Walter Raleigh, Christopher Marlowe, the Earl of Derby, the Earl of Rutland, the Earl of Southampton, the Earl of Essex—and now, the Earl of Oxford.

CONSENSUAL INCEST

All 50 US states and the District of Columbia prohibit consensual incest, although a few states impose no criminal penalties (24). Three European countries—France, Spain, and Portugal—do not prosecute close adult relatives for having consensual sex with one another, and Romania is considering following suit. The case of Josef Fritzl, found guilty in March 2009 of holding his daughter captive for 24 years in Austria and fathering her seven children, has focused new attention on incest. In Romania, decriminalizing among consenting adults is being considered as part of a range of reforms to the country’s

criminal code. This information reported by the Associated Press is surprising to me.

HITLER’S LIBRARY

Although he may never have completed any formal education, according to Timothy W. Ryback (25), Hitler owned >16,000 books at his residences in Berlin and Munich and at his alpine retreat on the Obersalzberg. In the early 1920s, Hitler plowed through hundreds of historical and racist books, and the ideas generated from them produced the ideological backing of the fledgling Nazi Party. He furnished a list of recommended readings stamped on party membership cards that stated in boldface, “Books that every National Socialist must know.” It included such books as Henry Ford’s *International Jew* and Alfred Rosenberg’s *Zionism as an Enemy of the State*.

After Hitler’s failed 1923 beer hall putsch in Munich, a sympathetic court sentenced him to the minimum 5 years for high treason, with likely early clemency—actually a slap on the wrist administered on April Fool’s Day. While in jail, Hitler wrote his first book, *Mein Kampf*. According to Ryback, the one book among Hitler’s extant prison readings that left a noticeable intellectual footprint in *Mein Kampf* is a well-thumbed copy of *Racial Typology of the German People* by Hans F. K. Günther, known as “Racial Günther” for his fanatical views on racial purity. Hitler also received weekly tutorials in Landsberg from Karl Hauschofer, a University of Munich professor of politics and a proponent of Lebensraum. Ryback singled out the Munich publisher Julius Friedrich Lehmann as possessing “the dubious double claim to being both the single most generous contributor to Hitler’s private book collection and the public architect for the Nazi pseudo-science of biological racism.” These books were the primary building blocks not only for Hitler’s intellectual world but for the ideological foundation of his Third Reich.

As early as 1919, Hitler attended propaganda sessions at the University of Munich and lectured to soldiers about Bolshevik peril. In September 1919, in response to a soldier’s written inquiry about the “Jewish question,” Hitler declared that rational anti-Semitism’s “final aim must unshakably be the removal of the Jews altogether.” Thus, Hitler adhered unswervingly from the end of World War I until his final days in the Berlin bunker to nationalism and radical anti-Semitism.

Earlier, it was in Vienna where Hitler first imbibed anti-Semitism. Hitler’s Vienna was a cauldron of Jew hatred. Hitler admired the city’s anti-Semitic mayor, Karl Lueger, and steeped himself in racist newspapers and pamphlets. He also fell under the spell of German Romanticism, in the form of Wagner’s operas, which nourished the illusion that he was a new Rienzi, with a mission to resurrect the old German Reich.

While being a bookworm may not be a precondition for becoming a mass murderer, it is certainly no impediment. Joseph Stalin, too, was an avid reader, boasting a library of 20,000 volumes. “If you want to know the people around you,” Stalin said, “find out what they read.”

When Ryback began exploring Hitler’s collection, he discovered a copy of the writings of the Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz nestled beside a French vegetarian cookbook

inscribed to “Monsieur Hitler végétarien.” Yes, Hitler was a vegetarian. At his end when Hitler had been abandoned by most of his retinue, the only personal effects the invading Soviet soldiers found in his Berlin bunker were several dozen books.

NUCLEAR NONSENSE

According to an unsigned editorial in *USA Today*, the USA and Russia together possess 96% of the >20,000 nuclear weapons in existence (26). This number, of course, could destroy both countries and the rest of the world many times over. The weapons pose a constant threat of misuse; they’re a lure for terrorists and a goad for countries such as Iran, North Korea, and other would-be nuclear nations to develop their own stockpiles. The sheer number is mind-boggling. Although President Obama would like to work toward the eradication of nuclear weapons, that desire appears to be only a dream. For all the threats that nuclear weapons pose, not a one has been dropped on a country since World War II, which ended nearly 65 years ago. Assured annihilation makes even the most aggressive warrior culture think twice.

The 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty expires in December 2009. Nevertheless, recently Obama and Medvedev (the Russian leader) agreed to seek cuts below the 2012 level of 1700 to 2200 deployed weapons called for in the 2002 agreement. That does not count a larger number not deployed. Russia, less adept than the USA at refreshing its weapons, risks falling behind numerically if it cannot negotiate a reduction. The USA needs Russia’s help to contain Iran and North Korea, and both would benefit from cost savings and reduced risk of a weapon’s falling into terrorists’ hands. The 1967 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty provided that countries without weapons would forego them if countries that had them (USA, UK, France, China, Israel, India, and Pakistan) would work to eliminate them. It certainly makes sense to maintain a reasonable deterrent while simultaneously working to make the deterrent as small as possible.

SIMPLICITY VS COMPLEXITY

Paul Johnson (27), the eminent British historian and author, writes:

The lesson we must learn from the 2008-09 crisis is the vital importance in business, not least in banking, of simplicity. Next to honesty it is the most important virtue, and the two are usually connected. Unfortunately, many people—whose brains and ingenuity are not matched by judgment—have a passion for complexity, and electronic technology makes it easy for them to indulge that passion. The clouds of almost impenetrable complexity they create conceal bad judgment, incompetence, unconscionable risk-taking and sheer dishonesty. For instance, a mortgage, a form of borrowing that goes back to the 12th century, ought to be simple. You buy a house and pay for part of it by borrowing money from a professional mortgage lender against the security of the property. You pay interest on the

Table 2. World’s 10 worst dictators*

No.	Name	Country	Age (year) in 2009	In power since
1	Robert Mugabe	Zimbabwe	85	1980
2	Omar al-Bashir	Sudan	65	1989
3	Kim Jong-Il	North Korea	67	1994
4	Than Shwe	Burma	76	1992
5	King Abdullah	Saudi Arabia	85	1995
6	Hu Jintao	China	66	2002
7	Sayyid Ali Khamenei	Iran	69	1989
8	Isayas Afewerki	Eritrea	63	1991
9	Gurbanguly Berdymuhammedov	Turkmenistan	51	2006
10	Muammar al-Qaddafi	Libya	66	1969

*From *Parade* (28).

loan and a portion of the capital annually. There are only two parties in the transaction—you and the mortgage provider, who assesses your creditworthiness and sets the terms of the deal.

Technology has made it easy to complicate such deals to an almost infinite extent. The undisclosed object is to enable people who can’t really afford to buy a house to acquire one. The net result is twofold: a violent inflation in property prices, which is visible; and a huge increase in the total volume of debt, which is often concealed.

Worse, instead of the transaction being a clear business between two parties, it becomes an impenetrable one between dozens, even hundreds, especially banks. This increases the cost, and thus the debt, by allowing a lot of parties to get a slice of the profits. It is an incitement to greed, and since the original borrower is uncreditworthy, a sure road to disaster. The subprime crisis is a classic example of what happens when pristine simplicity is transformed into needless complexity by the driving force of greed abetted by technology. . . .

The complexities introduced into banking in recent years have produced such a fog of ignorance that what was once the world’s largest bank, Citibank, became impenetrable, not only to outsiders but also to the officials nominally in charge of it. They simply didn’t know the full extent of the debt acquired—not to mention what proportion of it was bad debt and irrecoverable.

Johnson goes on as follows: “I have always been highly suspicious of things that ought to be simple but have become too intricate for me to grasp. And I am doubly suspicious of those who make them so.” He finishes with some pointers:

Trust what is simple and can be understood at a glance. Anything more elaborate, investigate carefully and thoroughly; if it’s too convoluted for you to grasp, pull back. Remember, in financial matters the object of complexity is all too often to conceal the truth, to deceive. . . . Meanwhile, the wealth of the world has been halved.

THE WORLD'S TEN WORST DICTATORS

The world's worst dictators are listed in *Table 2* (28).

—WILLIAM CLIFFORD ROBERTS, MD
18 May 2009

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