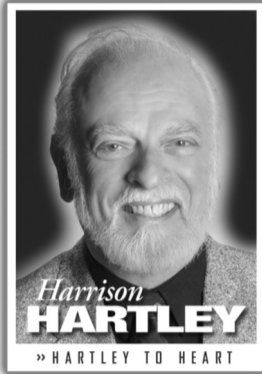


## A Brief Natural History of Cynics

Welcome to 2010, a cold transition from 2009, and a response to responses regarding a holiday wish made here last December: that we all enjoy a happy, healthy, prosperous, and much less cynical New Year. This seems clear, but apparently some confusion exists about the term "cynic," taken by some as positive but by others as negative. A brief "natural history" may help.

The first person called a cynic was Antisthenes of Athens (300 BCE) who taught that material things have no "real" value, that we ought to live in accord with nature, and that self-discipline is the path to excellence. Unfortunately, some Greeks believed (as many Americans do) that "anything worth doing is worth overdoing," and Antisthenes' follower Diogenes of Sinope leaped to extremes. He and other Cynics barked at people identified as hypocrites (the term cynic comes from the Greek for "dog") and performed all their private functions — ALL of them — in public (because "modesty" is unnatural). This knot-headed version of cynicism migrated into Stoicism (the "keep-a-stiff-upper-lip" school) and certain Christian practices (like wearing hair shirts and not bathing in order to mortify the flesh). It also became associated with and remains identified as a completely negative view of all



human character and motivation.

The great editorialist Sydney Harris summed it up well: "A cynic is not one who merely reads bitter lessons from the past, he is one who is prematurely disappointed in the future." Cynicism differs from skepticism by having a fixed negative expectation. A skeptic need not be cynical, but a cynic is always skeptical and so violates the prime tenet of practical skepticism by presupposing an outcome... a bad one. As H.L. Mencken said, "A cynic is a man who, when he smells flowers, looks around for a coffin."

Cynics live everywhere, but America is overrun with them. Their habitats are the bramble thickets of politics and the lily fields of religion, and their raucous calls may be heard non-stop on "talk" shows and studied in the "opinion" pages of newspapers. There are three species of cynics: greater, lesser, and common, the latter with two sub-species, Strident Cynics and Sullen Cynics. Common cynics are related to common idealists and often begin life with plumage and a song that mimics idealism perfectly. James Gould Cozzens describes the males this way: "A cynic is just a man who found out when he was about ten that there wasn't any Santa Claus and he's still upset." Strident Cynics register their disillusionment with a song rising to a crescendo of yowls

and screeches calculated to alert the universe to their opinion of it. This crescendo is repeated quickly to frighten away anybody who might interject a cheery note.

The closely related Sullen Cynics share the dark view of all cynics but have a tar-like way of making it stick to everything around them. All cynics, as Rev. Henry Ward Beecher remarked, "never see a good quality in a man and never fail to see a bad one," but Sullen Cynics are adept at altering the environment to match their own stygian mentality. If a Strident Cynic goes on a picnic to shout around and kill snakes, a Sullen Cynic won't go at all because it will surely rain, and if he or she can convince enough other people of that, there is no picnic.

Not quite as numerous are the Supercilious Cynics (sole members of the lesser cynic group). These creatures are neither as depressing as Sullen Cynics nor as raucous as Strident Cynics but are more persistent and so in love with their own noise they virtually never shut up. Their arguments are frequently based on discredited information, disguised as non-partisan though rigidly partisan; glib and grounded in a desire for attention and to be clever, and often a way to avoid problems or responsibilities they don't want to face. Supercilious Cynics can be of some use at parties (to keep things moving and encourage guests to leave in a timely manner), but are generally minor irritants at best. Of more concern are the Smug Cynics of the greater

cynic division.

Smug Cynics are invariably fundamentalist religious fanatics tainted by politics who express what Mark Twain called "...the serene confidence of a Christian, with four aces." They celebrate the pain and suffering of others as a sign that the Deity agrees with their bleak assessment of humanity (excepting themselves), and though they spew protestations of compassion, they deliver their sickly-sweet Jeremiads punctuated with "I-told-you-so" chuckles and "you-got-what-you-deserve-you-sinners" innuendos. Often, they wear an odd expression of suppressed jubilation that identifies the very self-satisfied: corners of the mouth pulled down and lips compressed hard in a big inverted smile. The House Hypocrite and the Senatorial Sandbagger are frequently mistaken for Smug Cynics, but these are birds of prey of a different (though similar) order. Hybrid Smug Cynics may be found in Islam, Judaism, or other religious habitats, but most of them seem to be located in America and may be observed regularly on television.

Cynics are ubiquitous; more to be pitied than censured, but never to be taken lightly. They are not as damaging as the House Hypocrite or the Senatorial Sandbagger, but they are invasive and though we will always have them with us, they bear watching and as much control as we can humanely devise. Certainly, if we can quiet them down a bit, the New Year will be better.

## Government Continues to Grow

It was twenty years ago when one of the world's leading examples of central planning finally collapsed. It collapsed because of inherent inefficiencies of such systems and the predictable misuse of power by the central planners in charge. The example of a failed system was the Soviet Union.

The anniversary of the decline of communism last year went mostly unnoticed in America. Partly because most of our self-proclaimed intellectuals were too busy urging our willing president to place more of our economy — and healthcare in particular — under the control of central planners.

No matter which direction you turn, government, (and government spending) continues to grow.

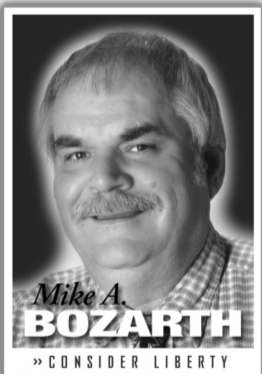
President Obama has been busy appointing central-planning "czars" over every segment of our society that he believes will gain him votes from some constituency, or pay back some constituency for votes already given.

From the bailouts of automakers and financial institutions to the so-called stimulus package, government keeps growing. Along with that growth comes dependency on government.

Government dependency has a "trickle down" effect like the tax cuts

did in the Reagan era.

Today we are not only seeing huge corporations seek whatever handouts they can get from government, but we can see the same thing right here in St. Joseph as people line up to get whatever federal largess they can.



As I have pointed out in more than one City Council meeting, those federal dollars come with regulations and restrictions in the fine print.

Not only that, but when we depend on someone else to ensure our financial well-being or survival, that dependency tends to keep growing.

Far too many people tend to look at the federal government as some sort of Santa Claus with gifts for us all. But that is not what it is.

The federal government is us, the people. It is the sum-total of what taxpayers provide. The Constitution and the Bill of rights were devised to limit government and protect us from government abuse.

So what happens when more people have their hands out getting benefits from the government than what is getting paid in?

It's called deficit spending, and that contributes to our over whelming national debt. And we see an erosion of our freedoms.

President Obama is following President Bush's path of deficit spending. Obama apparently also thinks the deficit doesn't matter when it is measured against the Gross National Product.

But buying on credit doesn't mean it is free. Sooner or later we have to pay back the money we spend that we don't have.

With many nations now shunning the government bonds that we have used to finance our deficit spending in the past, our government must find a way to finance its wild spending habits. Unfortunately, that will likely be by printing more money. That will devalue the money we already have in circulation and cause inflation. Ultimately, the American taxpayers will have to pay for the reckless actions of their government—with everything we buy.

Freedom-minded Democrats such as Senators Jim Webb of Virginia and Jon Tester of Montana, have caved in on issue after issue to President

Obama's wishes.

The Republican opposition "sounds great," except where were they when government and government spending were growing by leaps and bounds under President Bush?

Meanwhile, Libertarians and Constitutionalists still don't seem to have a clue on how to sell their message to the American people.

Apathy by most people to what is going on around them don't seem to get shaken unless something effects them personally. By then it often too late.

Central planners never know the needs of people as well as the people themselves. People show their needs through their voluntary actions in a free market. The czars and planners usually misuse the power they grasp at, and end ruining the very systems they claim they want to save.

More freedom from central planners is what we need, not more central planning.

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- CHOLESTEROL • BLOOD GLUCOSE
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MONDAY - FRIDAY | 8:30 - 6:00 PM  
SATURDAY | 8:30 - 2:00 PM

David R. Stevenson, R.Ph.  
Deanne Jungbluth, Pharm.D., R.Ph.