
How Economists View Policy

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Economists have a method of dealing with policy questions that is unique: it is based on a commitment to individual choice, and on the conviction that individual choice and individual freedom are synonymous. Furthermore, since the ability of individuals to make choices has important implications for their welfare, providing an individual with the freedom to choose will enhance his well-being. As it turns out, the equation of freedom with choice has certain problematic features. In particular, it tends to overlook the importance of individual rights for the treatment of policy. As a result, the view of policy based upon the idea of choice runs into serious difficulties. In this article, we will concern ourselves with some of them.

Economists, at their best, can provide us with a careful analysis of the implications of particular policies. The results, however, can be discordant with expectations held by non-economists. In a recent article, Thomas Schelling rehearses numerous examples, some of which by now rank as old favorites among economists (probably the oldest being the critique of gasoline rationing).¹ Schelling provides persuasive arguments for a number of policies that would be disturbing to the non-economist. He shows, for example, that different safety measures for airports in rich and poor districts may, under certain circumstances, accord with the real policy goals of all parties, including the poor. He also outlines an argument for providing higher-income families larger tax deductions for their children than those allowed for lower-income families.

It needs to be emphasized that these arguments do not depend in any way upon a hidden commitment to enhancing the rich at the expense of the poor. On the contrary, supporters of this kind of argument contend that these policies could be endorsed by the poor on the basis of their self-interest, as long as they are made fully aware of the implications of the policies. Economists are often more than a little enamored of such "paradoxes of policy."

The underlying appeal is to the market as a means for providing individuals with the freedom to choose, since the ability of the market to support individual choice makes market solutions appear superior to alternatives based upon ethi-

¹ "Economic Reasoning and the Ethics of Policy," *The Public Interest* 63 (Spring 1981).

cal judgments. Economic reasoning provides a clarification of what markets do, and to this extent supplies a way of determining how the market can be used to achieve policy ends. Use of the market in this way can accomplish policy goals while allowing for the maximum exercise of individual choice.

The fact that economic reasoning often conflicts with judgments made by the public on other grounds may very well make us skeptical of the economist's claims. At the same time, we could have little respect for a science that did nothing more than verify the conclusions at which we had already, unscientifically, arrived—the question arises whether the development of a scientific argument is worth the effort.

If the policy positions that we adopt have no other basis than a prior commitment to a set of values, and if we do not understand the workings of the market sufficiently to understand the ways that our goals can be accomplished without obstructing the market processes, then our skepticism toward the economist's view is nothing more than a way of protecting ill-conceived, and probably contradictory, policy commitments. Our failure is one of understanding, and we need an economist to educate us in a more enlightened policy position.

Is this the case? Are those who resist economic reasoning simply ignorant? Or is more at stake in policy debates than the assurance of maximum freedom of choice? Are those whom economists succeed in winning over to their position those best able to understand the truth, or only those most likely to become economists?

The idea of an economic policy implies dissatisfaction with free market solutions. If we identify individual freedom with individual choice, and assume that the free market is nothing other than an arena for individual choice, then we will have a difficult time finding any rational basis for policy consistent with individual freedom. We might end up with the idea that the only legitimate purpose of economic policy is to rectify market failures.

If by freedom we mean individual choice, economic policy can make, at best, a modest contribution. But if we equate freedom with respect for individual rights, the scope for legitimate policy widens considerably. If we accept the second view, then economic reasoning comes into play only when policy decisions have no major consequences for individual rights. The distrust that many of us have for economic reasoning can often be shown to stem from our rejection of the economist's identification of freedom with choice.

Discomfort with economic reasoning tends to focus on the treatment of distribution. Most of us recognize the significant advantage of solutions to policy questions that make use of the free market, but we also recognize that free market solutions (especially where basic necessities such as health and housing are at stake) tend to penalize the poor. Allowing prices to ration fuel means that the

poor do most of the rationing, since the rich can presumably continue to buy as much as they want. A convincing response to this argument can be developed within the framework of economic reasoning (Schelling attempts such an argument), but it raises some questions about its legitimate application.

Within the context of market solutions, it is still possible through taxes and subsidies to offset the adverse effects of rationing through the price system on those with low incomes. If we allow the price, for example, of gasoline to rise in response to excess demand, but tax the difference (windfall to the producer) and return it to the consumer in the form of a subsidy, then we gain a double benefit. Gasoline becomes relatively high in price. Since economists believe this will lead to substitution, they argue that demand will fall. Even at the high price, however, those with low incomes, given the subsidy, can still afford to buy the amount that they are in the habit of buying, without sacrificing other consumption, *if they so choose*. But in this case, they have the choice to spend their subsidy on other commodities. With a policy operating through the market, we reduce the amount of gasoline consumed without either penalizing those with low incomes, or constraining freedom of choice in consumption.

The point can be generalized in the following way. In the event of a shortage if the free market increases the price to the point of overburdening the poor, we really have two problems: the problem of shortfall in supply, and the problem of poverty. We do not need to use one policy to solve both. Instead, we can apply non-market solutions to the problem of distribution; then, given the distribution of wealth, we can apply market solutions to its allocation.

This approach, adopted by Schelling, denies that poverty is itself a free market solution. Others would claim that if income rewards effort, and by so doing also acts as an incentive to work, then the poor may, in some sense, have chosen poverty over wealth. If we allow taxes and subsidies to protect them from the implications of freedom of choice, the counterargument claims, do we not thereby protect them from the implications of their own decisions? Worse yet, will not doing so undermine the good works of the free market in making it possible for each individual to live up to his or her own abilities and aspirations by working as hard as he or she wants (given the incentives to work), and exercising his or her own creative instincts as much as he or she wants (given the incentives for that)?

This pure free market argument runs into some difficulty if the labor market values talent in addition to effort, and if talent is innate and we have no control over how much of it we have. When income depends upon a market valuation of labor, other factors than individual choice (including past and current discrimination) enter into determining distribution. Presumably, if we accept the idea that such factors play a part, then we need not accept the superiority of free market solutions.

We can deny that the free market should have the last word on distribution, we can allow the policymaker to fiddle with incomes, but not with prices. But

when we do so, important results follow. In particular, we deny the identity between individual choice and individual freedom.

What we can refer to as the liberal economist's view of policy runs up against its own paradox. This paradox results from the fact that it is difficult to make partial arguments about the market. If we think of policies as desired outcomes, economists entertain two bases on which to determine such outcomes: ethics and the market. Ethics refers to value judgments. When value judgments are "disinterested," do not further the self-interest of the policymaker, they are ethical. On the other hand, when we allow the market to determine the outcome we cannot impose our own value judgments: instead we encourage an outcome determined wholly by individuals acting on self-interest. To be sure, in some sense we have placed a value on the free market solution. But in this case, our enthusiasm is not for the particular solution, but for the idea of allowing all participants the maximum freedom to determine their own consumption patterns within their income constraints. It is hard to see how the imposition of the value judgments of the policymaker regarding specific outcomes (even when those reflect the values of a majority of the relevant population) can sustain freedom of the individual when they take precedence over that individual's self-determination.

In effect, when we allow for redistributive policies we protect certain individuals from the market. To what, other than our own value judgments, can we appeal for doing this? Two possible lines of argument suggest themselves. First, we may be convinced that all those dependent on the market have a right to a certain amount of generalized purchasing power, a kind of proportional participation in the market. Second, we may believe that individuals have certain specific needs that society has an obligation to satisfy. In both cases, redistributive policies are justified by a prior judgment regarding individual rights in the realm of the economy. We will consider the second line of argument first.

Evidently, if we have rights to some, but not all, of the things that we need, then our needs must divide into two types on the basis of some fundamental criteria. One criterion that springs to mind involves distinguishing a set of basic or subsistence requirements. At first glance, we might all agree that some minimum amount of food, clothing, and shelter will be required for basic survival.

The problem with this approach is that basic survival and deprivation are not absolute concepts: we cannot define them on the basis of nutrition or heat. If we take the poor and place them in heated tents, have we satisfied their basic need for shelter? In modern society the need for shelter also involves a need for privacy and a need for self-expression in organizing and furnishing a private place. If we lack the means to express our individuality when we satisfy our needs, we may experience deprivation as great as when we are cold at night. The deprivation may be different, and the pain it causes (being primarily, though not ex-

clusively, psychic) may be different, but they are not less real or less basic. In modern society, basic needs involve individual self-expression, and because of this they require at least a measure of individual self-determination in their mode of satisfaction. In general, when we require individual self-determination, we also require markets. When we work through the market, we do not depend directly upon some notion of social obligation.

The problem with using the term "basic" when we identify those needs that society is obliged to satisfy stems from the fact that need satisfaction is bound up with the expression of individuality. If we could identify a set of needs that were not more basic, but that are, in some sense, common to all individuals and necessary to the preservation of their integrity, we might be able to argue for a direct social obligation in providing the means to their satisfaction.

Possible candidates include, among others, police protection, medical care, and education (at least, up to a point). Obviously, different individuals will use these services in different ways: I may need to have my stolen car retrieved, while you may have to have your gall bladder removed. But in a more fundamental sense, our needs are not different. We both need the police to represent the fact that we live in a society of laws; we both need to have medical care available when our bodies function improperly. Furthermore, neither of us wants to, or wants the other to, impose his individuality upon the law; nor do we want our medical care to differ from that of others.

To an economist, this line of argument is a bit naïve. After all, when society provides these services, does it not use up resources? And do not these resources have an opportunity cost? Does not a little more medical care (a shorter wait in the emergency room) mean a little less police protection (a longer wait before the police arrive at the scene of a crime)? Furthermore, since a decision must be made regarding how much medical care and how much police protection will be supplied, does not the decision reached when individuals vote with their dollars accord best with individual freedom?

I think that two responses can be made to this line of argument. First, if society is sufficiently wealthy, and only a part of that wealth is devoted to fulfilling social obligations, the trade-off may not be between different social obligations (medical care and police protection), but between social obligations and what remains to satisfy individual needs. Furthermore, if society can identify a level of services that satisfies its obligations, then we do not need a market to determine the allocation of resources among the different social obligations. I think that this can be done in a reasonable way, but I do not think that it is by any means a simple matter.

Second, assuming that some decision needs to be made regarding allocation, especially between social obligations and individual needs, does the decision based upon individual choice as revealed through the price mechanism best accord with individual freedom? Economic reasoning applies when two condi-

plications for policy will be quite different from those that follow from economic reasoning, *in those cases where rights are involved*.

An example might help to sharpen the issue. Consider a group of individuals faced with a decision concerning whether they should legalize voluntary enslavement. Voluntary enslavement means that no one can coerce another into giving up his or her rights, but individuals can choose to do so. Examples would include joining the army (but not being drafted), or joining certain religious sects. Assume also that the individuals within our group have personalities such that, given the freedom to choose, they would choose to become slaves. I do not mean to suggest that the idea of voluntary enslavement makes sense, or that no problems arise when we assume that individuals with "slavish" personalities make free choices. In fact, such ideas make very little sense. They will serve, however, to highlight our main theme.

Now, consider these individuals under two different regimes. In one regime they have the choice of voluntarily enslaving themselves (we hesitate to call this a right) and, given their preferences, proceed to do so. In other regimes, they do not have the choice of enslaving themselves, but are "forced" to remain "free."

If we equate freedom with individual choice, the slave regime protects individual freedom, and the regime without slaves does not. If we identify freedom with respect for rights, the slave regime denies individual freedom. Indeed, the idea that individuals who choose to be slaves are *free* stretches the concept of freedom beyond recognition. The idea that a free society is one in which certain fundamental rights are respected seems virtually inevitable. The issue of choice has no particular relevance in this case. If our group identifies freedom with choice, it will decide in favor of legalizing voluntary enslavement. If the group identifies freedom with rights (and makes policy decisions upon the basis of their implications for individual freedom), it will decide against legalizing voluntary enslavement. In the interests of freedom, the society makes a sacrifice of welfare (defined upon the basis of choice).

Freedom means respect for individual rights. One of these rights may be the right to own private property, and to make choices regarding modes of consumption. Economic arguments have to do with those activities that involve property rights, and only property rights. If we can characterize all the requirements of the individual as truly private needs, then the economist's argument holds: each individual should be able to participate in society's provision for his private need. One way he can do so is by indicating (indirectly through the market) the relative value he might place on that need. But if some needs have nothing to do with individuality, the economist's argument fails even when we *mistakenly* place a valuation on the satisfaction of such needs. I may want a Mercedes-Benz more than I want health care, national defense, or prisons, but there may be rights involved with respect to the latter and not the former. In such cases, asking what people want, and how much they want it, as the market does, may be asking the

wrong questions.

The point is to distinguish those cases involving rights from those that do not. The criterion is not entirely adequate in this regard since it only deals with one aspect of the distinction. But that aspect involves an important quality of rights: all persons have the same rights, although they may exercise those rights in different ways.

At the onset of our discussion of distribution, we suggested two possible lines of argument for redistributive policies. The second line of argument, which we have followed to this point, involves separating out those goods and services to which individuals have rights. The first line of argument also involved rights, but in a different way. If the idea of right extends to income, i.e., if individuals have a right to a certain amount of income, then redistributive policies may accord not with the interests of the poor (and the ethics of the rich), but with the rights of the poor.

The right to income may mean different things. Individuals may have a right to at least a certain amount of income. If they acquire more than this we might want to think of the excess as a return to industriousness, talent, ingenuity, thrift, or something else. We might have a hard time distinguishing this right to income from a right to have certain needs satisfied, since we would need a strong argument supporting rights with respect to some income, but not all income; and we would need an argument capable of specifying to how much income we have a right.

Alternatively, we may want to argue that individuals have a right to as much income as they need. This idea seems somewhat shocking, but it does raise the question of whether we have a right to the things we need in an uncompromising way. If we intend to take the issue of rights in the domain of needs seriously, we cannot exclude this alternative automatically.

Finally, we might argue that each individual has a right to the same amount of income. Since individual needs presumably differ, this last conclusion would require an argument different than that which entails a right to the things which we need.

Although some individuals seem to think that one or another of these rights to income has force, I do not know of any very satisfactory argument that has been made along any of these lines. I will not attempt to develop such an argument here, but I think it may be worthwhile to indicate some of the implications of such an argument for the economist's view of policy.

The obstacles that stand in the way of its acceptance mainly have to do with incentives. The idea that income should be earned works against the idea of rights. Normally, all that we need to do to earn a right is to respect others in their exercise of that right. A criminal gives up his rights mainly because he has failed to

respect the rights of others. But in the case of income, it is not enough that we respect the rights of others; to receive income, we normally assume that we also have to work. Perhaps equating this with the issue of incentives identifies the matter too strongly with motivation. Presumably it does so, however, because our requirement that income be earned really stems from our conviction that without this requirement, there would be no income.

However, if we have a right to income, this right must take precedence over the question of incentives, since using income as an incentive would violate rights. If I have a right to privacy, but can only exercise that right if I can afford to rent an apartment, and if, in order to pay my rent, I need to work to earn the requisite income, then I may experience my right to privacy as a work incentive. But if I experience it in this way, can it still be a right? Or, if it is a right, does it not presume some sort of right to income?

Once we fully establish ourselves within a regime of rights, the idea of incentives loses much of its charm. If individuals, given a certain amount of income, refuse to work, and fewer commodities are produced, the purchasing power of their income will fall. This does not mean that income must be used as an incentive; it means that people do not want to work. While it may be the case that a guaranteed income would reduce the supply of labor for certain kinds of tasks (menial occupations, for example), this consideration is irrelevant if such labor has been unjustly coerced by the threat of deprivation. Likewise, consumers have no right to buy the products of such labor at a low market price.

If we can resolve the issue of rights, we can then consider the contribution of economic reasoning. Economic affairs take place within, and are circumscribed by, a system of rights. When policy issues arise, we must first determine whether individual rights are involved. In those cases, policy solutions that appeal to individual choice, or the self-interest of groups, do not dominate. The majority of individuals may prefer to spend their money on football games than on medical care. If individuals have a right to adequate medical care, however, this preference is irrelevant. On the other side, individuals may prefer large cars with low gas mileage. Unless we can argue convincingly that individuals have a right to live in a society with high-mileage cars and lower fuel prices, it will be hard to resist the argument that market solutions should prevail. If the effect of individual preference for low-mileage cars includes high fuel prices, and if high fuel prices burden segments of the population in such a way as to impede their ability to heat their homes or transport themselves to work, *and* if we can argue that this violates their rights, it still does not follow that we should impede by law those who want to purchase low-mileage cars. The inability of some individuals to exercise their rights does not stem from the consumption habits of others, but from the distribution of income. We do not have an energy problem, we have a poverty problem. Of course, whether we have a poverty problem depends ultimately on whether there really exists a right to income.

The issue of rights underlies all real policy questions. Policies secure rights, and they assure the necessary framework for the exercise of rights. Paradoxes of policy stem, in part, from a failure to reason carefully about the likely effects of policy in a market economy. But, in general, these paradoxes have a deeper origin in the ambiguity and uncertainty that surround rights — particularly, but not exclusively, rights to income.

A primary policy problem, even regarding economic policy, has to do with determining when, in fact, rights are involved, and when they are not. When individual needs are involved and rights are not, we should be well satisfied to accept market outcomes. When rights are involved, we need to give very close scrutiny to those outcomes. In such cases, we need to take a critical attitude toward economic reasoning, since it is not at all adapted to taking rights into account.

A crucial question has to do with how we can recognize rights within the sphere of the economy without necessarily losing the distinction between need and right. Does my wanting something create an obligation for society to provide it? If not, can I still claim certain specific rights to things that I need? If we expect to add clarity to policy debates, we need to begin to address these questions explicitly.

Economic reasoning concerns the way markets work, and the properties we might expect market outcomes to display. Markets provide one way to mediate the process of individual need satisfaction and allow for the exercise of individual self-interest. Markets survive within a system of rights, but markets do not secure rights. Policy, then, must be directed at securing and extending rights. The economist correctly reminds us of the dangers involved when we impede the working of the free market in dealing with those *individual* needs for which society can have no direct obligation. But when economists suggest that a correct understanding of the workings of the free market can resolve or eliminate important questions of policy, enlightened citizens can only shake their heads slowly.

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pythonic squeeze: "The 'Beat' movement waited in the wings of the American scene." It had to wait, you see, for "the jet passenger plane, Salk vaccine, peaceful nuclear power, and the computer were coming out of the wings and onto center stage." Hart is not always so unimaginative about his clichés; occasionally, he breaks fresh wind: "The taste of defeat for Dwight Eisenhower must have been a kind of death. It was at least a derailment of the freight train of greatness."³

It is not enough to belabor Hart's dismal style, but unfortunately his thinking is no better. When it is not just smug, it is overpoweringly lazy. He contents himself with insinuations and assertions—again, in language so banal they lack even the authority of eloquence. On the Sixties (the snake has come into the Garden): "Che Guevara's angry visage glowered from posters on the walls of college rooms. Hair had defeated irony and vigor."

As for refuting the idea that the Fifties were static and uncomplicated: "Eisenhower was a complex figure who masterfully manipulated his consciously crafted public image" (which ability, it turns out, is the measure of a man); "History does not really show a continuous development from more to less restrictive attitudes. Rather, there seems to be a more complex dialectic: indeed, the sexual landscape of the Fifties themselves was complex." "The period of World War II and then its aftermath—the Fifties—was complex and contradictory, as all times perhaps are."⁴ "Marilyn Monroe and Brigitte Bardot expressed in complex ways the sexual revolution which had been under way since World War II." "In its complex significance, the Eisenhower smile was American, and democratic. . . . Understandably, it drove fanatics and the alienated up the wall" (no matter that he's just described it as "defanaticizing").

The assertions that are truest turn out to be true of every other decade as well. "Modern artists have to absorb and master the past before they can launch forth into a new and distinct creation" (thanks). "The Fifties were years of intellectual ferment and intense excitement, of intellectual births and deaths, controversy and [what else?] resolution." "The Fifties were a distinctive period in sports"; "A spirit of literary ambition was in the air." When not?

He is no more discerning about his heroes. "No modern writer has possessed an authority comparable to Eliot's in the Forties and Fifties, not Joyce, not Hemingway. Eliot had an authority backed up by his poems but also by his criticism, the most influential in England. His authority was backed up by his intellectual and emotional career, a journey toward God. He was a modern Dante.

³ "Cultural history of this order always punctures the governing clichés"—Jacques Barzun from the back cover.

⁴ "Other decades, unaddressed by him, weep in envy"—from the foreword by William F. Buckley, Jr.

His mere presence was overwhelming." What does it mean to say a man was Dante for twenty years?

Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* is "magisterial and highly erudite"; *The Catcher in the Rye* "technically, is a very sophisticated piece of work."⁵ The success of *Lolita* shows that in the mid-Fifties, Americans were "adventurous intellectually and aesthetically," "though Nabokov was by no means recommending paedophilia" (no?). Nixon's *The Real War* was "intellectually impressive." "Reagan is to TV politics what William Jennings Bryan was to the outdoor stump speech." (Whoops. Mencken: "[Bryan] was born with a roaring voice, and it had the trick of inflaming half-wits.") The mythic structure holds: the reader is Job.

In fact, the one structural innovation Hart does try for is to alternate his fatty chapters with some little lean ones, each headed "The Camera Eye." Punchy word-snapshots of key figures or events in the Fifties (the old "frozen pieces of time" definition of photographs seems specially apt), they are to the epiphany what Howard Cosell is to the announcement: all phony portentousness and unnatural inflections. (The fact that these sections are set differently than the rest of the book only gives new and awful meaning to the term "ragged right.")

Though most of the accounts seem to be closely culled from other people's books (which he credits in small type in the back), in all but one instance Hart manages to lay a dead hand on what elsewhere may be lively enough material: "Floyd Patterson was a disturbing champion. He was gentle. . . . People did not expect a heavyweight champion to be a complex man, especially a black heavyweight champion." A vignette on Hemingway from Michael Arlen's *Exiles* comes off only by virtue of scrupulous paraphrase, and the sentences stand out as the only consistently readable ones in the book.

When Hart himself is the camera, he fails to take off his lens cap. These, frankly, are my favorite bits; the heaving froth, as Hart would say, on the author's exuberant psyche. While they are not worth the price of the book, they are worth about \$2. From the idolatrous "Sinatra" section: "he is a sexual Houdini [tied up in knots?], a Tarzan. During the Fifties, he had a tumultuous affair with a famous movie actress. She had bounced off an affair with Dominguin, the bullfighter, and landed on Frank. Sinatra began to experience a loss of artistic energy." Surely Ava Gardner is the real Tarzan here?

⁵ Only occasionally does Hart feel compelled to venture beyond the Valley of Placiditudes. *The Catcher in the Rye* clearly unsettles him. "No doubt this vision of an almost entirely corrupt adult world is one source of the book's congratulatory appeal to adolescents, but it is a weird vision to lie at the center of a literary classic." Mr. Hart would do well to read Balzac's classic and pharmacopoeia of corruption (where he will find his own work catalogued), *Lost Illusions*.

Generally speaking, when Hart goes for a metaphor it's every man for himself. Despite his disingenuous claim that in 1944 he "would not have known what the word 'metaphor' meant" (since earlier he says that the Democrats in his kindergarten class called him "an economic royalist"), it is clear he is still a little shaky. "The baseball diamond is geometrical [who is this book for? penguins?], has clean lines. It is exactly 360 feet around the bases to home plate, and perhaps this geometrical figure can be seen as a metaphor for the 360 degrees of the circle and therefore an abstract representation of the world itself." Whew.

As for absurdly irrelevant sexual details, they turn up in the least likely places, and their very inappropriateness may tell us something about Hart's real values. In a particularly pointless story about Nixon not believing reports that elections could be stolen, related by Robert Finch, we get this: "Finch, an ex-marine, had been close to Richard Nixon for years. . . . Along with Len Hall, he had been co-manager of the losing 1960 presidential campaign against Kennedy. . . . Finch was tanned, physically powerful, Californian. Women were walking around in bikinis, and in those see-through plastic knee-pants that required colorful underwear." Gee, Jeffrey, why stop there?

More often the remarks reveal a nervous homophobia—again, striking in its complete gratuitousness. "As I watched the rehearsals of his hit play, Eliot showed such an extravagant appreciation of the pretty young actresses that make, to me, the recent speculation about his possible homosexuality seem preposterous." After a long appreciation of Bill Tilden, Hart must add: "But all the evidence suggests that he was a practicing homosexual in only the most limited sense. . . . It is doubtful that he ever had sexual relations, homosexual or otherwise, with anyone." God be praised! The Fifties are saved!

Hart's nervousness goes deeper. When he talks about conservatives, they're always tanned (even Alf Landon), have "paneled" offices (a code word? there's no other excuse for it), and drinks in their hands. "Eliot proved to be a prodigious consumer of Kentucky bourbon," and once drank "both [Allen] Tate and e.e. cummings under the table." (Would Dante have bothered?) They're "Western," "Californian." But then there are the others. "Sam, the Communist—I have forgotten his foreign-sounding last name. . . ." "When I first encountered [Trilling] in a classroom, his intellectual intensity along with his personal elegance and his almost British manners—though he was Jewish—struck me as bordering on the un-American." I.e., a) there are no British Jews; b) Jews have their own special manners (q.v. Disraeli, Sandy Koufax). The author—though he is Protestant—strikes me as obnoxious.

Mr. Hart teaches a course called "The Age of Johnson." No way it could be Samuel the stylist. But even Walter, the great fast-ball pitcher?

Say it isn't so.