

JAMES MADISON ON OUR RECENT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

They held an election recently.

So it's probably time for a metaphor.

Don't worry, lawyers are going to come out looking good.

If you want to take a ride, you can (first prong) talk to the ticket agent; he's there to sell you a ticket and to answer your questions.

Then there is the conductor (second prong).

The conductor accompanies you. He points out items of interest. He personally vouches for the emotions you should have.

In short, he's a browbeater. His approach is this. You need help.

If you're rolling through a 'pro-America' part of the country, you'll get one package of emotions; if not, another will be supplied for you.

Hence, two debate styles.

One, a bit on the dry side. 'Here's my program. Here's the alternative.'

It's a list. We know that lists are incomplete because Lewis Carroll said so, even though he wasn't kidding at the time. Inevitably so. Logically so. So what the ticket agent sells (for a journey's price) omits essentials like the baggage handling or the caffeination.

Now the other style. The orator wants to vouch for the answer. It's a good answer. Ask him.

This is typically done through 'over-self-credentialing.' Don't look it up. I invented it.

The browbeater is very eager to explain why his credentials entitle him to dictate to you how you should feel. The ticket agent is more stand-offish; you get to pick and choose from a list of choices. You may even care to travel without significant affect. That's your choice.

The value of this metaphor is:

Philosophers have never had much luck getting human beings into any of their systems. There is no more difficult task in philosophy than getting a human being on and off what is – inevitably – a printed page. Human beings are worse than being unpredictable. If they're predictable they're not believable, and if they're unpredictable it's hard to imagine why anybody – author, academic department, publisher, bookstore or reader – would take a chance on having a human being crash a system.

In any event, doesn't a live participant make philosophy a performance art?

Take Socrates.

Three problems.

One, he smelled. Bathing requires water. Okay, the Greeks were into getting oiled and scraped, but they didn't invent the Baths of Caracalla.

Second, Socrates was a celebrity. Having celebrities crash 'the little theater that is the printed page' hijacks philosophy because pretty soon it's all about me-ology, not theology.

Third, Socrates is a creation of Plato and Plato really dug the printed page. So the 'Socrates' we know is accompanied by a strong odour of literary jest.

Wait, you ask. Where do the lawyers come in? And isn't it obvious that only a second browbeater can successfully 'one-up' the first in a contest of 'I'm tougher than you are, and I warrant said proposition'?

There are a variety of different tactical approaches. (We're speaking of someone who is designing a train ride or presidential debate, same thing.)

‘Put all the mutts in the same room,’ Madison offers a rather lawyerly suggestion in *Federalist 51*, ‘toss them a bone, and see what happens.’

Actually Madison put it this way. “[T]he great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others. The provision for defense must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place.”

So it really is all about venue.

If I have the right to argue my case against the browbeater and if I enjoy ‘equal time’ – lard in a few other rules of ethical discourse – then it is a fair fight, even if it’s browbeater vs. listmaker.

So this makes ‘me,’ whether a passenger on this terrestrial railroad or viewer at this debate, a part of the solution to the ‘how does a guy like Socrates fit into philosophy?’ problem.

But there’s more.

The more lively the debate in venue, that venue – as a place with constitutional rights – stands a better chance of defeating encroachment on its turf. Pit ambition against ambition; one personal motive against another’s. Madison makes it clear he expects human beings to fight on two fronts. “If angels were to govern men,” he says (and this is a bit later in No. 51), “neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.” Your debate partner is your ‘internal control’ when you share venue; venue itself is the ‘external control’ on another’s department’s lustful ambitions as to your venue’s turf.

Back to our recent debates. It isn’t really important whether the browbeater was browbeaten in return. What’s important is that “personal motives” were unleashed and that “[a]mbition [is] made to counteract ambition.” And this does get us from No. 51’s ‘constitutional rights of the

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place' over to my right (and duty) to advocate, attack and defend shouldness in venue.

Apparatus

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