

GARY LONGSINE

Bush theory holds no answer

I was standing just off the traffic flow in my favorite downtown pub, contemplating the nature of the function describing the number of ping-pong balls it would take to fill the expanding universe, when I felt fingers in my back pocket.

Because the fingers of my left hand were on the bar in front of me and those of my right were wrapped intimately around a vodka sour, I decided to investigate.

The guest fingers left my pocket. I turned around and saw two lovely young women on their way to the restroom in the back of the bar. A pocket inquiry revealed that one of them had deposited a french fry.

What could this mean? After drunken consideration and prompt dismissal of the gesture as a sign of an intense desire to copulate, I pondered the likelihood that one of the women thought I looked hungry.

I looked at the fry. It was cold, one end was bitten off, and I wasn't very hungry. I put it back in my pocket.

Most likely, I decided, she must have been wondering what to do with the french fry, short of dropping it on the floor. It was an act of environmental desperation — there were no trash cans. She didn't want to risk stepping on it herself and getting greasy potato remains on her shoe as she left the bar. In my contemplative mood, I must have looked as though I wouldn't notice or wouldn't mind.

The course of my thoughts thusly derailed, I turned back to the bar. An open newspaper brought to my attention a thoughtful analysis of the problem with drugs in America. President Bush, in a rare and brilliant moment of lucidity preceded only by his insight that Reaganomics was voodoo economics, declared that drug use, suicide and teen pregnancy are merely a symptoms of a broader societal problem.

His analysis didn't stop there. In fact, it was so insightful that I found myself wondering whether Bush had been to the Maharishi and returned with The Truth.

"In the fourth year, ye shall come face-first, and behold the dragons before your eyes," the Maharishi spake.

"People think the problem in our world is crack or suicide or babies having babies. Those are symptoms. The disease is a kind of moral empti-



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ness." Right on, Bush.

"We cannot continue producing generations born numbly into despair," he said.

What a beautiful phrase.

Such a deft summary of the plight of our generation and several before it was worthy of the greatest of modern poets. Charles Bukowski would be proud to call it his own.

But then it fell apart. Bush's brilliant analysis was killed by a prescription as limp as the soggy french fry, now somewhat flattened in my pocket.

Bush, hinting at his own despair, said: "If I, as president, had the power to give just one thing to this great country, it would be the return of an inner moral compass, nurtured by the family and valued by society. A strong conscience is more irresistible than a crack pipe."

What does that mean?

Does it mean cutting the funding for two national surveys on sexual practices in the United States? One was designed to gather data about teens, the other about adults. The intention was to help researchers in the battle against AIDS by giving them accurate demographic information on sexual activity. The \$10 million for the adult survey was diverted to programs conceived to convince teenagers not to have sex by just saying no.

These programs are premised on

the idea that young people are doing self-destructive things that they know are bad for them and don't want to do. If we give them the encouragement to just say no, teen pregnancies and social diseases will just go away.

This analysis makes a fundamental mistake, and applying Bush's theory of moral emptiness will help us to see what it is. Most young people are not participating in sexual relations because of peer pressure. They have sex for the same reason we do — it feels good in a world where many things feel bad.

Generations born numbly into despair don't want to give up one of the few pleasures in life powerful enough to wash over the painful distance between people and who they want to be. Everyone can be a poet, or an artist, or even happy, with their lover. Everyone can have some power over how they feel. Everyone can be a success.

So instead of teaching them how to enjoy it safely and wisely and investing in their future safety, we moronically tell them to "just say no."

Bush didn't order these cuts directly. He merely stood by while Jesse Helms, the man in Washington with The One True Morality, led the battle to replace the quest for knowledge with the preaching of dogma. Just say no to blind faith, Jesse.

The moral emptiness theory can be applied to the way our country interacts with other countries as well as how we deal with our own moral issues. Is moral emptiness a driving force in our foreign policy? Or does the way we treat others make us feel empty?

The U.S. Army during the Persian Gulf war used tank-mounted plows to bury thousands of Iraqi soldiers in more than 70 miles of trenches. Live, dead and wounded were buried beneath tons of sand by giant plows running down both sides of the trenches, while armored vehicles drove ahead firing into the trenches. Not a single American was killed during the assault.

I pulled the french fry from my pocket and looked at it, numbly. I was hungry, so I ate it, in despair.

Longsine is a senior international affairs and economics major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Speech class most valuable

While attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the early-1970s, I found some classes that helped round out my education. Most valuable was a basic speech communications class. I remember wishing that my other instructors would have had the skills I learned in that class.

Later, while teaching a course on coaching, I recommended to my students that they enroll in that same

speech class.

Now, the administration wants to cut the entire speech communication department. This should never happen. If it does, every college at the university should offer classes in communication skills.

What good is knowledge if not shared?

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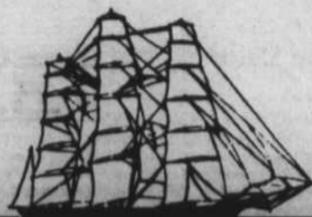
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