

ANDY FREDERICK

Paradise only wishful thinking

If you had three wishes, what would you wish for? I was asking myself the very same question recently when, as the result of events too complicated to explain, I was visited by a genie:

"So what's it going to be?"
I have three wishes, right?
"Of course."

Wow. The possibilities are endless.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Anything you want is yours. You know the spiel. And step it up, would you? Lamps are being rubbed as we speak."

Oh, sure thing. Well, I probably shouldn't be too selfish. I suppose I could take care of world problems with the first wish, and then I could go ahead and use the last two for myself. OK, I wish for paradise.

"How do you mean?"

Oh, you know. World peace, no suffering, everyone living in happiness.

"Could you be more specific?"

More specific? I don't understand.

"I can't just whip up paradise without knowing what paradise is."

I thought it was obvious. You know, it's what everyone dreams about. A perfect world.

"It's not that easy, kid. Not everyone wants the same thing. Your idea of paradise is not necessarily the same as someone else's idea of paradise."

Well, they're all pretty close, aren't they?

"Not even. Take Sen. Jesse Helms, for instance. His idea of a perfect world would be one without obscenity — or at least, without what he considers to be obscene. On the other hand, the perfect world of just about any male college student would consist only of cars, women and beer. Perfection is in the eye of the beholder, you know."

I thought that was beauty.

"Same thing. But the point is, you have to be more specific about what you consider to be a perfect world."

OK, OK. Can you rid the world of suffering?

"How do you mean?"

Oh, come on! Is it really that difficult? Surely you know what suffering is. Pain, misery, sadness, depression, anxiety, loneliness, hunger, agony, stuff like that.

"I don't think you really know what you're asking for. How should I end hunger? Make food grow in the desert? Then the world would become overpopulated. Or do I just kill off all of the people who live in areas of the world with sparse food supplies? I don't really think you want to substitute death for hunger."

"And what of misery and sadness and depression? How do I put an end to those? Death and sickness cause people to be sad. Should I turn people into emotionless zombies so no one cares about anything or anyone? Or should I make people immortal? There'd still be the problem of overpopulation. Maybe if I made people into cannibals, that would also solve



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the problem of hunger."

Be serious.

"I am serious. There's a lot more to paradise than meets the eye."

Apparently so. But I thought that was your problem. I thought I was just supposed to make three wishes and you were supposed to figure out the details.

"I used to do that, but I just made people angry. People weren't specific enough and they didn't think things through. I'd try to give them what I thought they wanted, but I'd always get it wrong. And of course they'd blame me for their problems. Yeah, like I'm some sort of mind reader or something."

"I mean, Jimmy Swaggart wanted sex, so I gave it to him. Then he goes and blames his troubles on 'demons.' What an ingrate. But he wasn't completely selfish. He actually used his first wish a few years ago to have me send some sex Jim Bakker's way. I thought that was pretty nice of him."

"Anyway, to avoid communication problems, I now make sure everyone understands exactly what they're asking for and the consequences they can expect. It's better that way. So, don't get frustrated. Just tell me what you want."

Well, can you put an end to war?

"Sure. I can make it so one nation conquers the whole world. With only one country, there's no one to fight."

"Or, I could make it so humans have no ambition. Then they'll always be completely satisfied with whatever they have and will never find reason to go to war. And they'll be just as happy sleeping as working, and nothing will ever get done."

"Or, I could just make it so that all nations are completely selfish and do not care about what happens in the rest of the world. Countries would still find reasons to attack each other, but at least then the rest of the world wouldn't feel compelled to choose a side and add to the bloodshed. Then, all of the helpless little countries would be taken over. Eventually just a few

countries would be left and they'd all be so powerful that none would want to risk attacking another."

You have a gift for making things seem hopeless.

"Not at all! Anything is possible. But nothing is free. Everything has consequences. I'll grant any wish you desire, but first you must decide exactly what it is you want and what you're willing to give up for it."

In other words, every silver lining has a cloud.

"Well, no. Not exactly. I just mean that everything has a price."

"For example, if you want to reduce crime, you have to limit freedoms. You'll have to ban guns or put strong restrictions on their ownership to keep them out of the hands of criminals. You'll have to raise taxes to finance programs that help turn troubled teens around and to pay for a complete overhaul of the judicial system. And..."

I get the picture. But does it really have to be that complicated? Can't you just change people so they no longer desire to do bad to each other?

"I could do that, but that has a price as well. Do you want to give up free will? No one would do bad because they would no longer have the choice."

That doesn't sound like a very enjoyable existence.

"I didn't think it would."

So, are you saying that there's no point in trying to improve the world?

"No. I'm just saying that humankind doesn't have the capacity to create paradise. At least, not just by wishing for it."

"Improvements are possible, but they'll take time. People will have to reach some kind of agreement about what exactly those improvements should be and what should be given up to achieve them."

"Is increased safety worth a reduction in freedom? Is increased choice worth a reduction in morality? Is increased education worth a reduction in wealth?"

Tough questions. Can you help us find the answers? Can you help us see what is wrong and how things can be put right? Can you show us what our priorities should be?

"That's why I'm here."

Then I don't really get to make three wishes?

"You just did."

Oh, I see. You're very clever.

"Thank you."

So, you just go from place to place helping people understand the world, right?

"Actually, no. Most people ask for a new car, good looks and job security."

You mean I could have had...

"Whoops, gotta go. Jimmy wants to make his third wish. Funny — he keeps calling me 'Father.'"

Frederick is a senior news-editorial journalism major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist and photographer.

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Constitution justly includes firearms

Were it not for the threat posed to my liberties, I would prefer not to dignify Eric Pfanner's moronic and unreasoning editorial ("Needless Death," DN, Oct. 21) with a response. However, inasmuch as he is using the newspaper to promulgate a dangerous misunderstanding of our constitutional liberties I feel duty requires me to explain Pfanner's rights to him.

Our Constitution's Second Amendment reads: "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." As Pfanner suggests, the men who wrote that amendment did not envision modern firearms — they did, however, envision privately owned cannon (it was the militia's cannon the British were out to seize the day Lexington-Concord touched off the Revolutionary War) and warships (they were called privateers, and were commonly used for commerce raiding during wartime. They were authorized by Congress with the "Letters of Marque" mentioned in

the Constitution's Article I, Section 8). Does Pfanner intend to suggest today's pistols can kill more readily than a legally owned privateer's broadside discharged onto a crowded wharf? Yet the framers had no problem with the lethal threat of legalized private pirates, nor with giving citizens access to the latest and best weapons of the day. Indeed, the inclusion of the Second Amendment shows they felt running that risk essential to the continued freedom of the republic. Why?

The point of our right to bear arms is not hunting, nor even self-protection against nuts like George Hennard, but to ensure that armed force is not the exclusive monopoly of government. Though he does not so state, Pfanner apparently feels that modern firearms are unconstitutional because police cannot perfectly protect citizens against criminals so armed. His faith in police protection is touching, but misplaced. I would like to know what the politically correct, willingly disarmed Pfanner intends

to do if the duly elected Adolph Hitler's police should come for him and his family? Die willingly, like the sheep he has willingly become?

It troubles me to read Pfanner thinks citizens shouldn't be trusted with too much firepower, because to be consistent he must extend this distrust to speech, voting, assembly, petition and all the other potentially dangerous rights the framers saw fit to guarantee. Pfanner may consider himself incompetent if he so desires; if that editorial is representative, I am inclined to agree. In extending this assumption of incompetence to the citizenry at large, he would shift the onus of responsibility for our lives for ourselves to our government, and with responsibility goes power. Either the citizens can be trusted with free speech, arms and the vote or they cannot; these rights are an indivisible package required to secure our inalienable right to liberty against governments that may not always remain benevolent.

Peter Szczepanski
first-year law student