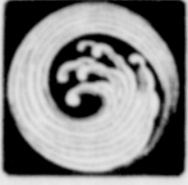


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Dear Uncle Mike,
 Does humanity have a future?
 Concerned in Cannon Beach



Dear Concerned,
 Future is an interesting word. Silly, but interesting. Mounting evidence points to a universe whose only state is simultaneity: an infinite nowness in which past and future exist only as projections of the present, like elements of an equation with two equal signs. Future? Who knows? One might as well ask if humanity has a past. None of it matters unless you count time. Which, considered in totality, the universe doesn't.

Reality aside, Uncle Mike can dig where you're coming from. What with AIDS, ozone holes, vanishing salmon, Bosnia, Rwanda, Rush Limbaugh and Oliver North, the human comedy isn't all that funny anymore. But then, it seldom has been. Humanity is not a collection of humans, it's a sum of behaviors. As lifeforms go, we seem to be a marvelously inventive virus with a penchant for collective psychosis. The seven deadly sins were not, after all, isolated from animal behavior.

If humanity has a future, it probably doesn't lie in the hands of government as corporation: a shotgun marriage of power and unlightened self-interest that has no goal other than the institutionalization of greed. The corporate animal, at its present stage of evolution at least, has allegiance to nothing but profit. Living nowhere, it has no sense of place, and feels bullishly free to rape the planet, scam the citizens, and defecate where the rest of us eat. If corporations were human, they'd be hunted down and beaten with large sticks.

Uncle Mike's faith (and yes he has a great deal) lies with the peasants. And the notion of critical mass. When fifty-one percent of us practice right action, matters will change for the better. Not one minute before. Like the past, the future is the present, waving from the fascinating mess like a final Burmashave sign saying, "It's a joke, right?"

Dear Uncle Mike,
 I'm an easygoing woman but I can be backed into a corner. I've had it up to here with stupid answering machine messages that a) are delivered by children too young to be interesting, b) rhyme, or c) sacrifice brevity for an unfortunate attempt at cleverness.

Knowing you, you have some withering countermeasure. Care to share it?

Shirley H, Coloma, Ca

Dear Shirley,
 Eventually. But first, Uncle Mike would like to know how someone in Coloma, California found him in Cannon Beach. For reasons we won't go into, it makes Uncle Mike nervous to be found by anyone too distant to buy him a drink or loan him money.

Are you a) a recent visitor to Cannon Beach, b) a loyal subscriber, or c) a member of a law enforcement agency? In any case, Uncle Mike would consider it a personal favor if you forgot his address.

As for answering machines whose messages should constitute grounds for flogging, Uncle Mike finds it satisfying to wait for the beep and then flood the instrument with any note played on his tuba.

Dear Uncle Mike,
 I read somewhere that cellular phones cause brain tumors. Do you know anything about this?

Eric in Coos Bay

Dear Eric,
 Uncle Mike knows everything. Else why would he be entrusted with filling in while Ann Landers is in rehab?

The wonders of technology notwithstanding, Uncle Mike must question the wisdom of bombarding delicate neural tissues with narrow beam microwave radiation. He has, after all, seen its broad effects on roast beef and burritos.

Do cellular phones cause brain tumors? Judging from the boorish behavior of many who use them, Uncle Mike refuses to rule it out. At the least, fear of being out of touch should be classed as a phobia and its sufferers offered diversion programs.

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