

"Despite the song's obvious overtones, it sounds less like a build-up to some unseen climax than a rougher version of that last song in *Grease* when Sandy finally, unconvincingly, sluts it up."
 —Meral Agish, TC '05, reviewing the Kills' new album, p. 17

Social Security is better left to the private sphere

By Stephen Schwartz

In the recent debates over the president's plan to reform Social Security, an important issue has been largely overlooked: Should it, in fact, be saved at all? Since the New Deal, Americans have come to expect more and more federal financial benefits, to the point where almost half the U.S. budget is devoted to paying for them. More than

outright starvation. But while saving the elderly may be a worthwhile goal for the government to undertake, the modern aim of guaranteeing them a comfortable, modern standard of living and full medical coverage is not. The first employees of the Social Security Agency (my grandfather among them) surely never expected or wished to see Social Security become a standard component of most retirement plans. Federal medical insurance benefits would have surprised them even more. We have gone well beyond the limits of reasonable altruism and entered the realm of dangerous unrealism.

The current approach to spending is dangerous in several ways. First, the arguments of my liberal friends who posit a societal obligation to redistribute wealth to those who need it are untenable. All human beings are morally equal in certain respects, but inequality of means and resources is a natural aspect of the human condition. Since differences in wealth correlate with normal human differences in capacity for work, collaboration, innovation, leadership, thought, and so on, economic inequality is a healthy byproduct of differences between people. Furthermore, as long as individuals differ in wealth, some will be able to afford better standards of living and healthcare than others. A close examination of the inequalities of nationalized health systems in Europe and elsewhere leads one to a difficult conclusion: Especially in a free society, we must accept that some people will always be better provided for than others.

Second, these programs are rapidly becoming demographically infeasible. When Social Security was first established, the ratio of workers to benefit recipients was 16 to one. It is now three to one, and will soon drop to two to one. Even so, the Social Security Administration currently receives more money than it pays out and uses the excess to buy Treasury bonds. This is the so-called Trust Fund.

By 2018, the situation will be reversed, and the Treasury bonds will have to be spent. The Treasury will immediately lose the revenue of the Social Security surplus, meaning that the Social Security budget crisis will begin long before the Fund is exhausted in 2042. Raising taxes is not a promising solution, for it is utterly unreasonable to expect every two American workers to support a senior's comfortable quarter-century of retirement—medication and all. Especially considering that almost half of all income-tax forms

filed in the United States show zero tax liability as it is, the burden posed by the elderly will prove too great to sustain at the current level. The only viable choices are for seniors to adjust to reduced standards of living, retire later, or prepare more effectively on their own.

Third, there is a powerful case to be made that all government spending on Social Security, welfare, medical insurance, and the like is harmful not only to society as a whole but also to the ostensible beneficiaries of such programs. Social spending makes individuals dependent on the government rather than their own work. As Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute has argued, the greatest accomplishment that individuals can look forward to is the knowledge that they provide for their families. When the government guarantees comfort and healthcare, and such individuals are deprived of their basis for feelings of self-worth, they and their families suffer.

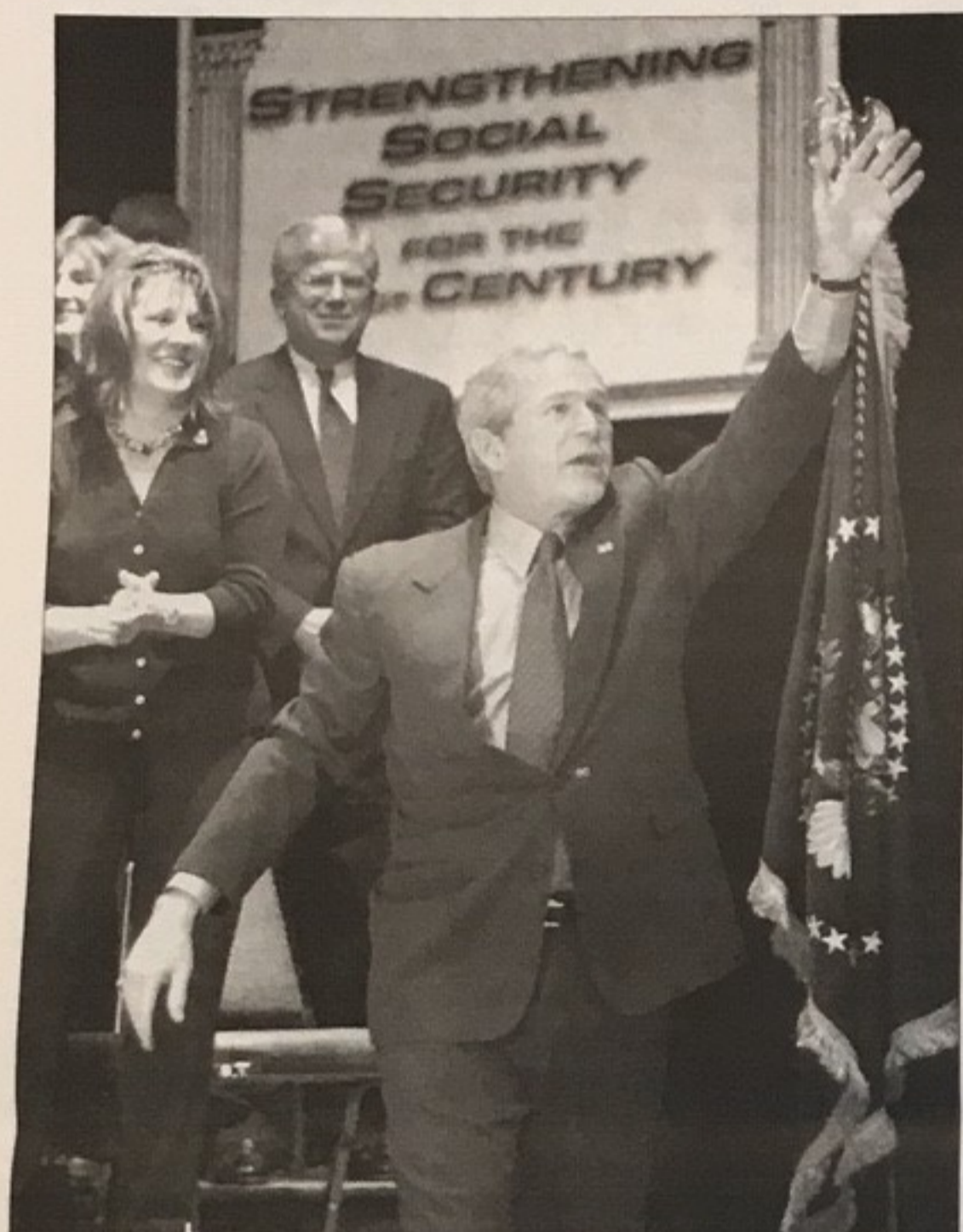
Related to this point is the ancient insight, confirmed by all our experience, that reminds us that people who come to depend on an outside agent (be it a patron,

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government, or parent) for their livelihoods are inevitably somewhat less than fully mature adults. Government guarantees also erode the impulse to donate to charity. Americans are naturally generous, but the vital spirit of personal kindness can only be undermined when individuals with the means to give are allowed to believe that the government is performing their duties for them.

Liberals overestimate the ease with which a gentle conservative can condone Americans suffering for lack of money. It pains all decent men and women. But some people will always have higher standards of living than others. The question is how severely we wish to strain our economy in a vain attempt to make things otherwise. Government intervention threatens to make them morally impoverished as well. Some people will slip through the cracks of any support system. The promise of help from distant bureaucrats allows the wealthy to feel excused from their responsibility to help. Social spending programs—including, but not limited to, Social Security and federal medical benefits—are not the solution, but part of the problem.

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An expansive social-security program goes beyond the license of the government to interfere in the public sphere.

40 percent of federal spending goes to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid alone. Modern Americans see these programs as entitlements rather than as privileges. Nonetheless, changing circumstances call for a re-examination of their true value.

Social Security was introduced during the Depression simply to ensure that elderly Americans without families to care for them would be secure from the threat of

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letters

Kirchick not conservative

To the Editor:

Though I was glad to see Dan Munz's long-overdue inaugural piece ["For the American Right, it's faction over nation," 2/11/05] as a regular columnist for the Herald, I was more than a little disappointed to see him so inaccurately represent my views about the left's reaction to last month's elections in Iraq.

First off, Munz seeks to group me as part of the "American right," along with the likes of Senator James Inhofe (R-Okla). I am not a member of the Republican Party and am by no means a political conservative. This guilt by association is part and parcel of an attempt to make all war supporters out to be political conservatives in order to more easily target them for rebuke. While support for the War in Iraq may have been confined largely to conservatives on Yale's campus, it was by no means a strictly partisan issue nationwide—the overwhelming congres-

sional authorization for the war stands as a testament to this fact.

More important, Munz accuses me of "invok[ing] the fiction that anyone unsatisfied with our mission in Iraq must have preferred Hussein's hellish reign." I have done no such thing. What I have done is point out the irony of the American left's cynicism and bitterness towards the exercise of the democratic process in Iraq. Whether it be Ted Kennedy—the dean of American liberalism—or the host of other liberal media outlets and public figures, the response from the left towards the elections has been anything but positive. I need not repeat what Iraq was like under Saddam and how different Iraq is now that he rots in prison. (Yes—America, Iraq, and the world are much better off now that the Butcher of Baghdad is in our custody.) What Munz has failed to realize is that the question of whether or not we should have gone to war in Iraq is becoming increasingly unimportant. What matters now is how we will get out. And last month's election is a positive step forward in that process. Too bad the left has yet to figure that out.

I am not an absolutist on the question of war in Iraq. I am, however, an absolutist when it comes to support for democratic liberalism. Of course, it is appropriate for the left to chal-

lenge the Administration's handling of the post-war situation in Iraq. But it is disturbing when the initial reaction to a free election in a once-Stalinist country is cynicism rather than joy.

—James Kirchick, PC '06, Columnist, Yale Daily News

Church not divided

To the Editor:

The article "St. Thomas More: A church divided" [YH, 2/4/05] is quite misleading. That a handful of extremely conservative students have left over the COMPASS issue does not make for a "church divided." The Legionaries of Christ are an unusually divisive organization and have been banned from the Minneapolis-St. Paul and Columbus archdioceses as a result. Their founder is also under investigation for multiple instances of pedophilia. Fr. Beloin clearly acted appropriately in this situation. St. Thomas More is an unusually cohesive parish and is in many respects a model for the U.S. Church. There are many important issues that do threaten to divide Catholics, but fringe groups like the Legionaries of Christ are not an issue except for a very small minority of Catholics.

—Arthur Simen, fourth-year resident, Yale Psychiatry department

Corrections and clarifications

The article "Despite eco-friendly funds, toxic waste collects" [YH, 2/11/05] contains several mistakes.

The word "toxic" is misused. The correct term is "hazardous."

The article incorrectly states that Yale's Art department is one of the two largest generators of toxic waste on campus.

The article incorrectly states that "the Chemistry department has been less responsive to the program than the Art department." The Office of Environmental Health and Safety is currently working with the Chemistry department on data collection.

The article "Campus progressives go national" [YH, 2/4/05] incorrectly identified Alex Bartik, TD '08, as one of the founders of the Roosevelt Institute at Yale. Jesse Wolfson, TD '07, is the third founder.

The Herald regrets these errors.