

Continued from page 21

ties' effort to curb the rise of civil society."

It may be too much to expect Western reporters to have anticipated developments that also caught Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. intelligence experts by surprise, as Tismaneanu does. But he warns that they still do not understand that it is the strength of the groups that constitute civil society that will ultimately determine the success or failure of freedom in the nations of Eastern Europe.

A Second is a Terrible Thing To Waste

How can the degradation of American political debate be explained? Fresh evidence is offered in the *New Republic* (May 28, 1990) by Kiku Adatto, who compared television's coverage of the presidential elections of 1968 and 1988.

By 1988 television's tolerance for the languid pace of political discourse, never great, had all but vanished. An analysis of all weekday evening network newscasts (over 280) from Labor Day to Election Day in 1968 and 1988 reveals that the [two candidates'] average "sound bite" fell from 42.3 seconds in 1968 to only 9.8 seconds in 1988. Meanwhile the time the networks devoted to visuals of the candidates, unaccompanied by their words, increased by more than 300 percent.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Mind and Manners

"I Think; Therefore I Thank" by Judith Martin and Gunther S. Stent, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 1990), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Modern philosophers rarely have anything to say about etiquette, and when they do they seem to make a terrible hash of things. In 1972, for example, Philippa Foot wrote a controversial essay called "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives." In attacking Immanuel Kant's argument that morality is a categorical imperative, she compared morality to the "silly rules" of etiquette. A long debate followed, but not one of Foot's fellow philosophers took issue with her callow comparison.

"Extremely distressed" might be the most polite term for the reaction of Martin, better known as the newspaper columnist Miss Manners, and Stent, a Berkeley biologist. "As heirs of the Greek founders of their discipline," they scold, philosophers should "be expected to remain concerned with the quest for the virtuous life, where 'virtuous' refers to proper behavior in general."

Just as the commands of morality are categorical imperatives for anyone who desires to be moral, so the rules of eti-

quette flow from the subscription to manners—the belief in communal harmony, individual dignity, and so on. And the evidence from man's earliest history suggests that the embrace of morality and manners is fundamental to human nature. Even today, criminals cling to a belief in manners. During the summer of 1986, the 30 motorists who were arrested for shooting fellow drivers on the freeways of Los Angeles defended themselves by arguing that they were provoked by gross violations of traffic etiquette.

Etiquette has three chief functions, the authors say. First, it is "a system for the codification of ritual in the service of the sacred." By that they mean that it tells one how to behave at weddings and (less and less these days, they lament) funerals. It also has a "symbolic" function: An individual's compliance with the etiquette of, say, diplomacy or professional sports, signifies his adherence to the values of these professions. Finally, etiquette has a "regulative" function; it exists on a continuum with law. Etiquette seeks to avert conflict; law

addresses serious violations of morality. Etiquette restricts freedom of expression; law restricts freedom of action. But they are mutually dependent: Law cannot be administered justly without the order provided by courtroom etiquette.

As for Mrs. Foot, as the authors are care-

ful to call her, her fundamental error was in assuming that morality and etiquette are two different things. Both are part of a single, highly complex system of rules for the governance of social conduct, the authors insist. Without both of them, civilization would disappear.

Inventing The Yarmulke

"Holy Headgear" by Harry Steinhauer, in *The Antioch Review* (Winter 1990), P.O. Box 148, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387.

Harry Steinhauer was troubled when he received a fund-raising appeal from Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) in 1988. Lautenberg told the story of Captain Simha Goldman, an orthodox rabbi in the U.S. Air Force who had been barred by his superiors from wearing a yarmulke while on duty. The rabbi's case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the Air Force, and then to Senator Lauten-

berg, who helped win congressional approval of a 1987 bill allowing servicemen to wear religious apparel. Lautenberg enclosed a yarmulke with his letter, along with the warning that we "can never take our freedom for granted." Nor, the letter suggested, could the Senator's reelection be taken for granted without a generous contribution.

What bothered Steinhauer, a professor

The Language of Hope

The Austrian philosopher Wittgenstein said that only those who have mastered a language can know how to hope. The inability to express hope, writes Leon Botstein in *Daedalus* (Spring 1990), not simply incompetence in reading instruction manuals or newspapers, explains why mass illiteracy—or pseudoliteracy—is a threat to American democracy.

If indeed the categories of freedom, justice, truth, and humanity are to flourish, a language must be mastered. . . . We need to retard the evolution of thoughtless language use exemplified, ironically, by the way we use the word hope. It is now accepted (and has been since the 1950s) to use the adverb hopefully as a replacement for the phrase I hope. . . .

A shift in thinking is perceptible in the linguistic change. In the shift one can perceive a distancing from the idea of personal responsibility and a weakening of faith in personal efficacy. "I hope," the older formulation, makes clear the presence of the speaker as actor. Indirectly, one knows that the speaker not only holds the view but is in a position to

say the next logical point. "I hope," if used, can and ought to be followed by "since I hope, I will . . .," or "I think . . .," or "I urge . . .," and so forth. The older formulation carries with it the assumption of personal responsibility to act on hope and expressed the potential of utility in hoping, speaking, and acting.

The abuse of hopefully, in contrast, signals the idea that what happens is the result of neither one's beliefs nor one's actions, that one is powerless and subject to amorphous circumstances and impersonal forces apart from one's existence. . . .

In the shift in our usage there is camouflaged a pessimism and an exhaustion—a sense of the superfluity of individual belief and influence. This cuts against Wittgenstein's suggestion and (perhaps) admonition that we command a language sufficient for authentic hope. Since hope is contingent on language, real hope derives from a confidence in human knowledge and action. In this sense, it is the dissemination of language and its consequent capacity to spread hope—the essential meaning of literacy—on which the future depends.