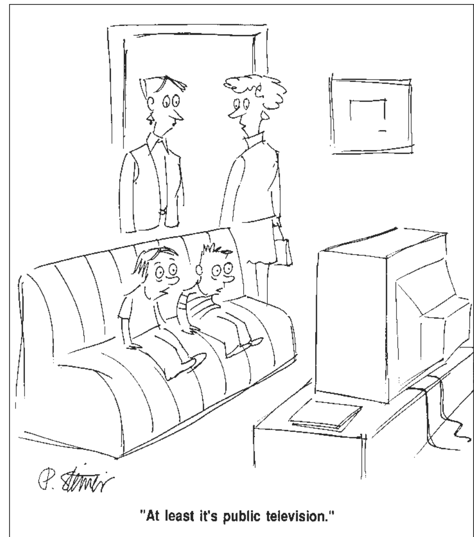
chusetts at Amherst, shows that, to use a bit of *Sesame Street* argot, the criticism "just doesn't belong."

Instead of being mesmerized, preschoolers seem to engage in "selective looking," he says. Put in a room with toys, the children looked at and away from the TV screen relatively often—an average of 150 looks an hour, some only brief glances, others lasting several minutes. Older kids tended to pay more attention.

"If, as Healy and others claim, attention to *Sesame Street* is reflexively driven by visual movement and shot changes," Anderson points out, "then attention should be maintained even if the program becomes difficult or impossible to understand." But when he and his associates made the show's dialogue less comprehensible (e.g., by putting it in Greek), the children paid much less attention. That showed, Anderson says, that meaning matters. Healy drew a different conclusion: that children easily give up on TV that is challenging. But Anderson cites another study of educational TV which found that making an announcement for children somewhat harder to understand but still within their "developmental level" did not prompt young viewers to turn away.

The claim that *Sesame Street*'s short segments and fast pace reduce the attention spans of young viewers seems to have arisen from a 1975 report that attributed the "hyperactive" behavior of two-year-olds to watching the program. But the study had no control group (i.e. a comparison group that did not watch the program). And when Anderson and his colleagues made both an exceptionally fast-paced version of the program and a slow one, they found that preschoolers' postshow attention spans did not change.


"At least it's public television."

Despite the intellectual passivity rap, Anderson concludes that research indicates that young children "are about as cognitively active and engaged" with educational TV programs as they are when they read or listen to stories.

In fact, he notes, several studies show that, even allowing for level of parent education and other characteristics, children who watch *Sesame Street* generally score better than others on tests of vocabulary and readiness for school. The payoff is apparently long-lasting, according to a major study published last year. It found that among 570 high school students, those who had watched such programs as *Sesame Street* as five-year-olds frequently had higher *high school* grades in English, math, and science. That result should give even Oscar the Grouch something to smile about.

The Swedish Solution

"Ombudsman to the Swedes" by Steven Price, in *American Journalism Review* (Apr. 1998), 8701 Adelphi Road, Adelphi, Md. 20783–1716.

Sweden has what a lot of Americans who are fed up with news media "excesses" say they want—a formal nonjudicial system for handling complaints against the press. But Price, a lawyer and Fulbright Scholar from New Zealand who is working at the *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record* in Arkansas, doubts that it provides a good model for the United States.

Sweden's press ombudsman, who investigates about 450 complaints a year, is appointed by a special committee with representatives from the press, the government, and the Swedish Bar Association. The office is funded by the media, not the government. All the daily newspapers have agreed to abide by a code of ethics concerning accuracy, privacy, and rights of reply. (Broadcasters sign the code but are not under the ombudsman's

purview.) The ombudsman reports to the Swedish Press Council, which includes journalists and publishers but is dominated by representatives of the public. If the council rules against a publication, as it did 46 times last year, almost always on the recommendation of ombudsman Per-Arne Jigenius, the offending newspaper or magazine must publish the council's decision and is fined about $3,000.

More often, Jigenius is able, drawing on his 20 years of experience as a newspaper editor, to arrange a settlement, with the publication providing an appropriate correction and apology. He manages to resolve about 70 cases a year in this fashion. The ombudsman handles only complaints alleging harm to an individual from publicity (rather than beefs about ideological bias and the like), and he dismisses the overwhelming majority of the complaints he receives.

Only two or three complaints out of the 436 cases Jigenius handled in 1996 ultimately went to court. But that may be in part because libel laws are very weak in Sweden.

"Whatever its limitations," Price says, "it is clear that in a significant number of cases the [ombudsman] system gives injured members of the public what they want most—a prompt and inexpensive correction, while helping the media avoid what they most fear—a long and expensive lawsuit."

But the system may not work well elsewhere, Price says. It is "a product of a combination of factors that may be unique: a population that is accustomed to regulation and confident in bureaucracy as a solution to social ills; an industry that is prepared to cooperate—with remarkable unanimity—for mutual advantage; a government that may very well legislate if the media become overly irresponsible; and a culture that prizes rationality and consensus, and loathes confrontation and mudslinging." That hardly sounds like the rambunctious United States of America.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Morality and the Modern University

A Survey of Recent Articles

The University of Chicago and other elite colleges and universities are "fundamentally amoral" institutions. Aside from issuing formal condemnations of cheating, plagiarism, and academic fraud, they make almost no effort to give their students any moral guidance. Once it was different, of course. But the founding religious purpose of the University of Chicago and many other institutions was lost, and the effort by social scientists to develop an independent "scientific" morality proved a failure. "Today, elite universities operate on the belief that there is a clear separation between intellectual and moral purpose, and they pursue the former while largely ignoring the latter."

What sounds like a serious indictment of the University of Chicago in particular and of academe in general is, in fact, drawn from an unusually candid address on "The Aims of Education" that was given last year to Chicago's incoming freshmen by John J. Mearsheimer, a professor of political science at the university. *Philosophy and Literature* (Apr. 1998) reprinted the speech to kick off a symposium including seven other scholars. The issue: whether institutions of higher learning are, or should be, in Mearsheimer's words, "largely mum on ethical issues."

Universities, in his view, have instead three aims: to teach undergraduates "to think critically . . . to broaden [their] intellectual horizons [and] to promote self-awareness." A University of Chicago education also serves as "a meal ticket," he observed. Though costing more than $120,000 over four years, it enables those who possess it "to make lots of money" and "achieve an upper-class lifestyle." Not that moral questions are unimportant, or that students should pay them little mind, Mearsheimer said, but "for better or worse," his university and other such institutions offer little help in finding answers. Few classes at Chicago, he said, even "discuss ethics or morality in any detail."

Wayne C. Booth, an emeritus professor of English at the University of Chicago, says that Mearsheimer doesn't seem to know what is going on at their university. "Teaching about morality and how to think about moral