To the Editor:

I am writing this letter just after returning from the first LSC showing of Ordinary People Friday night, to capture my rage at the audience for ruining for me a movie I think I would have otherwise enjoyed. When asked by a friend outside what I thought of the film, all I could do was shake my head. One of the comedians has two people talking, who, for convenience, will be called Lazy and Wrong.

Lazy calls directory assistance to get a number which he could have easily looked up himself. Wrong chastises Lazy, saying that directory assistance is expensive. Lazy says that Wrong is incorrect and that directory assistance is free. Wrong says that directory assistance costs $50 million in Massachusetts alone last year, and that all phone users must share this expense. Not surprisingly, Lazy is so shocked by this figure that he readily agrees to use the phonebook next time and never again to use directory assistance.

So where is the fallacious reasoning, you ask? Suppose that everyone agreed not to use directory assistance. If directory assistance is expensive, then directory assistance in the United States (population about 224 million) probably costs about $2 billion a year—a remarkable tenth of one percent of our Gross National Product.

With no one using directory assistance, some 150,000 directory assistants would lose their jobs, along with some people who make radio commercials, and the resulting recessional shock would be devastating to an economy already suffering from oppressively high interest rates.

Furthermore, directory assistants, like the former air traffic controllers, have a skill which is not of much use in other industries. They would have no choice but to go on the Federal dole. Since the Federal dole is being severely cut back, however, many ex-directory assistants might have to go without food (or at least touch-tone service). Riots could ensue.

Admittedly this is a worst-case scenario, but it does highlight the danger of fallacious mathematical reasoning leading to an incorrect economic policy. A policy of causing directory assistance as often as possible, on the other hand, would get Americans to work, strengthen the economy, and may be even bring about lower interest rates. Phonebooks would perhaps become obsolete, considering a dwindling natural resource—trees. Clearly the Phone Company's reasoning was completely incorrect. The overuse of directory assistance is not a problem, although underuse may be.

Since MIT is presumably an institution designed to promote correct thinking, we must set an example for the rest of the state and the rest of the country. We must use directory assistance whenever possible.

Remember, all it takes is three little numbers. 411. America can become a great nation again, but only with the Phone Company's assistance—and yours.

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Columns are usually written by members of The Tech staff and representing the opinion of the writer, not necessarily that of the rest of the staff.

Letters to the Editor are written by members of the MIT community and represent the opinion of the writer.

The Tech will attempt to publish all letters received, and will consider columns or stories. All submissions should be typed, preferably triple spaced, on a 57-character line. Unsigned letters will not be printed. Authors' names will be withheld upon request.