

NO END TO THE
^ SHIT THAT
PISSSES ME OFF

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Magenta

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A Man Shaken by a Bomb

I picked up a sci-fi novel the other day at a used bookstore. The jacket said it was set after a nuclear war and written by someone who'd rubbed shoulders with a lot of military people. Well, I figured it'd be interesting to see what *they* imagined life'd be like after a nuclear war. (The pages weren't blank.)

What can I say, it was slow reading. For example, the author said, "A man who's been shaken by a bomb knows what it feels like." So I had to stop and wonder why a woman wouldn't know. Is he saying women never get shaken by bombs because they're never in bombed areas? Or they are, but for some reason, they don't get shaken by them? Or they do, but they nevertheless don't know what it feels like?

And that was just the preface. Chapter One introduced Florence. Who gossiped. She didn't design state of the art mp3 players. And she certainly wasn't looking for the cure to cancer. She gossiped. However, "If your sister was in trouble and wired for money, the secret was safe with Florence. But if your sister bore a legitimate baby, its sex and weight would be known all over town."

Only if *my sister* was in trouble? What about me? I realized then that this guy hadn't even *imagined* the *possibility* that *women* might read his book. And, well, we might. After all, we *can* read.

And apparently it didn't occur to him that someone's sister, a *woman*, might have money of her own. Or that she might ask another *woman*— not a man, not her brother—for a loan.

Then of course we have the phrase "in trouble". Being pregnant, having a life begin to grow inside your body—that's not being "in trouble". It's either amazingly wonderful or incredibly devastating. But it's not being "in trouble".

Then there's that word "legitimate". First I had to back up and figure out that being in trouble meant, to him, not only being pregnant, but also being unmarried. Which would make the baby 'illegitimate'. (And *that's* why she decides to abort?) Right. As if men alone confer legitimacy on life. My, my, aren't we a little full of ourselves. ('Course that might explain why they feel they have the right to take it so often, so capriciously. Coupled with the gross underestimation of its value indicated by the phrase "in trouble" to describe its creation...)

And what precious information would Florence, otherwise, spread far and wide? Whether his sister survived the birth? No, apparently that's not important. What's important is the sex and weight of the baby. And presumably it's important that it be *male* and that it be *big*. Okay, and why is *that* important? Well, the best I could come up with was that the guy has in mind a world in which food and shelter is gained by one-on-one physical combat (not our world), and the combat is such that brute force is an advantage (what, no weapons?), and he's assumed positive correlations between maleness and size and capacity for said brute force (not a valid assumption).

Okay, onto the next couple sentences...

* * * * *

“I can do whatever I want on my own property!”

I am so very sick and tired of hearing that. The latest instance concerns a neighbour who has stuck some of those new solar lights in front of her cottage dock, lakeside of course. They don't have an on/off switch. So what she's done, on her own property, means the rest of us will have to see her lights every night, all night, for the rest of our lives.

If we lived in the city, maybe it wouldn't be so bad; they'd get 'lost' in their surroundings. But we live on a lake in the forest. Where the stars are amazing, and the trees silhouette against the dark sky, and the moonlight glimmers across the water—and now her three bright lights that stand out like a middle finger.

I can understand the desire for outdoor lights in order to see where you're going, but then turn them off when you go to bed! (And when you leave to go back to the city, if you don't live here.) Or, if you've been foolish enough to buy ones that don't have an off-off switch, cover them! And I can understand the possibility of wanting all-night lights to deter wildlife, but motion-sensor lights would be a far better choice, if only for the startle effect.

Please, people, are you really that stupid? Do you really not see that what you do, even on your own property, affects others? On that basis, those others most certainly do have a right to ask you not to do something.

In the same way, your pre-1980 use of spray cans was justifiably subject to my complaint and request to stop using them. It's why I'm at risk for skin cancer now. Your excessive use of fossil fuels was partly responsible for the flood or drought that ruined my livelihood. Your actions often have consequences for me. Not immediately and not directly and maybe you're too stupid to see any other kind of consequence, but nevertheless, most certainly, what you do affects me. (These people probably also have the second of two conflicting interpretations of public property: the first is that if it's public property, that means we have to share it; the second is that if it's public property, it means you can do whatever you want on it—since no one owns it.)

The really sad thing is she doesn't even notice the lights. She doesn't believe me when I say I do. She's that desensitized to her environment. Or that inattentive. She thinks I'm exaggerating the intrusion. I got the same response when I complained about the bright red Home Hardware sign that suddenly appeared nailed to a tree at the end of the lane. And when I've complained about any one of a hundred noises—dirt bikes, atvs, leaf blowers, weed trimmers, generators, chain saws. Those of us who see things, who hear things, those of us who pay attention to what's around us, we're the ones to suffer. The dullards who go through life with a 'What?' expression permanently on their face, who wouldn't notice, well, anything, they're the ones living happily. So in order not to go crazy, I wear earplugs half the time now. And my reading glasses, so everything more than six feet past the tip of my nose is just sort of blurred. The alternative is to become as oblivious as the rest of them.

* * * * *

Gay Bashing

Gay bashing. Now there's something I don't understand. 'Queers are disgusting, man. Men touching other men, that's really sick.' So, yeah, go beat 'em up. Get real close and touch 'em all over. And they say men are the logical ones.

But of course it's not just the no-necks roaming the streets at night. It's also the ones in the offices during the day. Consider these words of a cable television program manager: "...men French kissing and ...caressing ...thighs...the scene [was] offensive...bad taste." But men hitting each other, bruising and breaking bodies with fists, and men killing each other, spattering blood and guts with bullets and knives—this is, what, *good* taste? I'd rather see men kissing each other than killing each other any time. (But then I'd *really* rather see *Boston Legal* reruns.)

It's weird, the relationship between sex and violence. I don't understand it. Mitch, the bouncer, says "They're either gonna fuck or fight." *He* understands it. Okay, think like a man. (I can't, it hurts.) (Yes you can, try harder.)

Okay, they both involve physical contact. So do football and ballet; the former, laced with violence, is okay, but the latter is not.

They're both tension releasers. Well isn't that flattering: she thinks they're making love; he's just releasing tension. (Men, what do you get all that tension from?)

They're both opportunities to display dominance—well, heterosex in a sexist society is an opportunity to display dominance. (I see, you're tense because you're *not* dominant.)

So what does all this have to do with gay bashing? I have no idea. Told you, I don't get it. Maybe their problem is they never learned "Rub a dub dub" when they were kids. Maybe the problem is they did. Maybe, they figure homosex means one of them has to be *not* dominant—is that why they fear it, why they must attack it? (Right. Get over yourself. He's so not into you.)

Wait a minute, gay bashers are often white supremacists, aren't they? Hm—and misogynists. Could it be as simple as 'If it's different, kill it'?

Gee, I hope the aliens get it.

* * * * *

The Condom Recall

Back in the 80s when condom recalls first made headlines, which was when AIDS also first made headlines, the reason given for the recalls was that the old condoms didn't meet the new standards. Companies felt a certain social responsibility, they said. Ah. How nice. How very good of you.

Before, when a defective condom could fuck up a woman's life (either way, her life would've changed forever—to abort and suffer the anguish before and how long after, or

to give it up and know forever she or he was out there somewhere, or to keep it and give up her own life for a good fifteen years)—well, that was okay. That was an acceptable risk, apparently.

But *now*, now that a *man's* quality of life is at stake, now the condoms have to be better. In fact, now they can even be advertised, now they're even in the school washrooms. (Hey wait a minute, wouldn't it have been *your* kid too? —which reminds me of that judge who ordered that prostitutes be tested for AIDS, but not their customers.)

New standards, you say? They sound just like the old ones to me: double.

* * * * *

What's Wrong with Profit?

Many would say it's simply undeserved. By any standard—be it need, ability, effort, or accomplishment/contribution. In this respect, one might be tempted to compare profit to the ridiculously high salaries of sports stars. And senators. But salary is not profit. Even if a salary is ridiculously high, it is still a salary, a payment for services rendered; and as such it is, in theory, deserved. Or at least earned.

Profit, on the other hand, is, by its very definition, in a separate, completely gratuitous, *undeserved* category. It's the difference between how much X cost you to make or do and how much you were paid for it when you sold it. Profit is getting more than you give.

It is, therefore, perhaps more like lottery winnings: you put out a dollar and get back a million. One might argue that at least with a lottery, everyone has an equal chance at that undeserved excess; at least it's fair. But everyone has an equal chance with profit too. Anyone can open a business. And with a little luck, you can put out a dollar and eventually get back a million. At least with profit, it's not *just* a matter of luck: one needs to do a little more than scratch a ticket. And don't forget that Bozo Smith could take his million dollar lottery win and purchase a million tickets in the next lottery, the one with the five million pot. So much for equal chance.

Perhaps the problem with profit is that it seems like such a selfish thing. But that's making an assumption about what the profit will be used for. What about Carnegie? (And yet, when was the last time Bozo set up a public interest foundation?)

What if the profit were used not for philanthropy but for research and development? Or expansion? What if the company is in the cure-for-cancer line of business? Is profit okay then? Do the ends justify, excuse, the means?

Maybe the problem isn't profit per se, but the amount of profit. One could argue that ridiculously high profits could not have been acquired without some exploitation, some wrongdoing: if there's that much profit, that much difference between expense and revenue, then either your wages are too low or your prices are too high. In a perfectly fair world, there should be *no* difference between expense and revenue: X should cost exactly what it cost.

And there's the problem: rather than establishing an absolute standard, a rule of *ought*, prices and expenses are set by rules of *can*; further, prices and expenses are determined independent of each other. The result is a difference, a profit—or a loss. Ah. Imagine a world without losses. Easy. Just imagine a world without profits. Imagine fixed values.

On what basis could we establish fixed values? Not need, because need fluctuates. Earthquake victims will pay \$25 for a \$10 two-by-four, and the otherwise unemployed accept jobs at \$2/hour.

Ability and effort would likewise lead to unfixed figures. If Person A has to work twice as hard as Person B to type a letter, he would get paid twice as much; the price of the letter would thus vary according to who typed it.

Using contribution or accomplishment as a standard might work. A perfectly typed letter could be worth \$5. And a perfectly-placed brick could also be worth \$5. And a perfectly-repaired ruptured artery could be worth \$500. If you find typing letters difficult and time-consuming, you should go into brick-laying instead. And if the person next to you is able to lay bricks twice as quickly or with half the effort, why shouldn't they get paid twice as much or put in half the hours? Chances are if they find it that unchallenging, they'll be happier doing surgery anyway.

One last note, though, about loss: even if the prices and expenses are fixed and fair, a loss can be incurred—but only if products already made are not purchased. Note that this can't apply to services: you can't perform a service and then find no one willing to pay you for it. Well you can. But that would be really stupid. Couldn't we say you were just as stupid to make a hundred thousand cars before you had a hundred thousand orders?

* * * * *

War Rape

It's not just an enthusiastic spillover of violence and aggression. The act of sexual intercourse is too specific, too far removed from the other acts of wartime violence and aggression. Shooting a person twenty-five times instead of once or twice would be such a spillover; forcing your penis or something else into a woman's vagina is not. Furthermore, war rape is often not a spontaneous, occasional occurrence; apparently it's quite premeditated and systematic.

And it's not, or not *just*, a matter of ethnic cleansing. If men truly wanted to eradicate the other culture, (and if they believed ethnicity was genetic), they'd just kill the women along with the men. (Women *are* killed, but as I understand it, they're usually raped first.) (Or sometimes after.) (And men are castrated, but not nearly as often as women are raped.)

And if they truly wanted to increase their own numbers, they'd hang around and see that the kid reached maturity. (Raped women *are* sometimes kept prisoner until the child is born—but unless the kid is subjected to specific and exclusive cultural conditioning, how is their purpose achieved? They'd have to look after the kids themselves for ten

years.) (Which is unlikely.)

And it's not, or not *just*, a property crime against the enemy. If men sought merely to destroy their enemy's property, they'd, again, simply kill their women and children, along with their livestock, before or after they burned their houses. (Unless, of course, they wanted to confiscate their property—in which case, they'd enslave the women rather than rape them.)

So what is it? What can explain this peculiar practice of male soldiers forcing sexual intercourse with enemy civilian women? Some insight can be gained if we consider that for men, sexual intercourse is an act of conquest. But then we must ask, since one army of men conquers another, why don't the soldiers rape each other as an act of conquest?

Perhaps men are so afraid of being considered homosexual, they rape the enemy women instead of the enemy men. (So only homophobia prevents men from raping enemy men? Note the vested interest women have, then, in discouraging homophobia: maybe then men *would* rape each other instead of us.)

Or perhaps the conquest involved is not that of one person over another, but that of one person over another's property—and women are men's property. And as long as conquest, rather than destruction, is the point, the property will be occupied, not destroyed. And in sexual intercourse, men *literally* occupy women's bodies—they thus occupy the enemy's property.

But all of this is nothing new. One might persist, however, and ask how men can continue to regard women as property when legal and economic conditions no longer support that interpretation. The answer lies in attending not to the ownership part of property, but to the inanimate part of property: to be property is to be a thing.

Men do not, clearly, consider us equals—otherwise, we would be the enemy, not the enemy's property. And they'd kill us as they do the men (or they'd rape the men as they do us) (well, except for the homophobia bit).

They don't even consider us inferior human beings, say, as children. Children are either spared or ignored. (Or, increasingly, drafted.)

We aren't even considered (non-human) animals. They too are either spared or ignored. (Or just killed.)

We belong to some special category—that of cunt: we are a vagina, and sometimes a uterus; we are a sexual body part, a sort of subhuman thing. Rape is not so much *impersonal* as *apersonal*. It's no coincidence that one protests, or tries to escape, rape by claiming the characteristics of personhood: you're hurting me! (sentience); I have a name! (identity); I have a life! (interests). (One might wonder how the husbands and fathers can renounce their raped wives and daughters—don't they recognize it was against their will? But of course not: subhumans don't have will, don't have volition.)

Greer once said something like women have no idea how much men hate them. To be hated would be a step up. I say women have no idea how much men fail to see them as anything but their sex. On the basketball court, playing with a bunch of high school boys, a pick by me is not just a pick: it's a pick *by a girl*, and so it elicits extra humiliation and anger, it elicits shame and rage. And the next time I set a pick, the boy aggressively ploughs me out of the play. In the university classroom, teaching to male students, a critique of an argument is not just a critique: it's a challenge to one's masculinity, and so it elicits strong defensive action. Complaints are made to the Dean. And a suggestion to a colleague, a male colleague, is not just a suggestion: it's a woman telling you what to do,

and so at best it's not taken seriously. (At worst, it too is taken as a challenge.) It's certainly not accepted. Thus our agency in, our interaction with, half the world is denied. Men's insistent perception of us as *female* limits us, because to be female precludes being a person.

Such a perception may indeed be irrational—and the consequent behaviour, such as rape, may indeed be primitive and/or pathological. But it *is* their perception, and women would be wise to understand that. (Even more wise would be the men who understand it: for enlightenment and/or imprisonment is surely not going to be brought about by anything we subhumans do.)

* * * * *

The Freedom to Fail, the Right to Succeed

Call it what you will, 'bell curving' or 'marks inflation' or 'social passing', or even 'maintaining a certain flexibility with regard to evaluation', an A is not necessarily an A.

True, the more students fail, the more apt they are to drop out, and the fewer students a school has, the less money it gets. But to lie to students about the quality of their work in order to get more money is to use them. Furthermore, if the students who fail *did* quit (and perhaps they should—institutionalized education, academic education, is not the be-all and end-all for everyone, and those who say it is are probably just trying to save their jobs), so what? The institution may not need the money. So what's the problem? A 'money for the sake of money' mentality is the problem. (Unless of course that money would benefit other students, those who don't quit; but then it's X's benefit gained at Y's expense.)

And true, the greater the number of failures, the worse the teacher or the school looks. But looks can be deceiving. In an ideal world, student success *does* reflect teacher/school competence—but ours is not an ideal world. Students in increasing numbers don't bother to show up for class on a regular basis; nor do they bother to do the assigned homework. Oh, but if your class was *really* interesting, they'd show up, and if your assignments were *really* relevant, they'd do them. Excuse me, but let's not delude ourselves: teachers are seldom that important in a student's life. I have, as a student, on occasion skipped class, and it was *never* the teacher's fault: I would've skipped whatever class I had at that time on that day. And I have, as a student, on occasion gone to class unprepared, and again, it was *never* the teacher's fault: probably I hadn't done the work for any of my classes that day or that week.

And then there's this argument: a pass boosts the students' confidence, their self-esteem, their social development. Yes, it's good for students to have self-esteem, but at some point our schools must change from being wellness centres to being educational institutions: if I need surgery, I wouldn't want a surgeon whose professors considered self-esteem when grading. Further, students need a genuine self-esteem, not a fake one. And, unless they're very young, they usually know the difference; they can smell a gift, an inflated mark, from two desks away. And if they don't know at the time that it's a gift,

a lie, they'll find out five years later—and then they'll *really* be pissed and may not survive the blow (for what inner resources will they have, once they know that any confidence they thought they had was fake?).

If we respect our students, we'll tell them when they've made a mistake, when they've done it wrong, when it's just not good enough. We don't have to be brutal about it. And we certainly don't have to be terminal about it: few failures are irrevocable; in fact, most mistakes are opportunities to learn—knowing how to do it wrong often sharpens knowing how to do it right. Notwithstanding that, no course should be unpassable *for the student with the necessary prerequisites, who attends every class, and who completes the assigned practice.*

Which leads to what makes bell curving, in particular, invalid: it's based on the faulty premise that effort and ability are distributed within a class according to a certain stable pattern. I don't know whether this was ever the case, but it sure doesn't seem to be the case now: it seems *half* of my students are academically unprepared for the course they signed up for and *half* are attitudinally unprepared for *any* course.

The other problem with bell curving is that it makes grades completely relative. If an A just means that you're better than most of the others in the class, then why bother with grades at all—why not just use ranks? In fact, why bother with *standards* at all? When the grades are relative, a B *can't* mean 'a clear and competent grasp of the course material,' it can only mean 'a clearer and more competent than a C,' which is 'better than a D,' which is 'better than an F', which is, hm, 'worse than a D'.

Perhaps the biggest problem with 'marks fixing' is this: if students know they'll pass anyway, most will be less apt to bother going to class and doing the work. This feeds a vicious cycle: the marks are fixed so they don't do the work, so the marks have to be fixed.

No, actually, the biggest problem is this: if students don't have the freedom to fail, they'll probably never experience success. And I mean true success—genuine understanding of the material or mastery of the skills, after genuine effort. Surely students have that right. But in a system in which it's impossible to fail, it's also impossible to succeed.

* * * * *

Baby Androids

It finally dawned on me after reading one too many 'failed android' stories. I can't remember whether it was sci-fi or AI, but suddenly I saw the problem: they always try to create an adult without a childhood.

If it weren't for Mary Shelley, I'd be tempted to put the blame on our sexist society: leave it to the men to 'forget' childhood, to forget that we don't come out of the womb fully formed, to forget that we are as much a product of our nurture as our nature. After all, most men aren't responsible for it, they don't participate in it, they don't 'raise' their kids^[1], they don't work at daycares, they don't teach elementary school.

You want to create an android? An artificial life form that can think and feel, that can respond to questions, to situations, like an ordinary human being? Then create a baby android. One with the capacity to learn, to benefit from experience, to grow, to develop. In fifteen or twenty years, eureka!

[1] Mothers spend twice as much time as fathers caring for their children (12.9 hrs/week compared to 6.5 hours/week) according to *Changing Rhythms of American Family Life*, Suzanne Bianchi, John Robinson and Melissa Milkie

* * * * *

Tax Exemptions for Charitable Institutions

If you believe in the supernatural and on that basis obtain a paying job, as a minister, priest, pastor, whatever, you don't have to pay income tax. If you establish a group of like believers and buy a piece of land and/or a building for meetings, you don't have to pay property tax. And if your group buys stuff, like computers, billboards, and so on, you don't have to pay sales tax. You're a charitable institution.

What's charitable about killing people (or at least endorsing the killing of people) who don't believe what you believe? What's charitable about telling half of your group that they're subordinate? What's charitable about telling another portion of your group that they're sick? What's charitable about discouraging rational thought unless it supports your beliefs? What's charitable about telling all of them they're sinners just by virtue of having been born?

If we're going to exempt people from contributing to the upkeep of our roads, hospitals, schools, and so on because of their (presumed) ethically good behavior (an interesting idea, by the way), then let's at least be consistent: let's exempt snowplow operators, doctors, nurses, teachers, firefighters, police officers, counselors, plumbers, electricians. And so on.

* * * * *

Sports are Too Dangerous

'Sports are too dangerous for women; they might get hurt.'

This from the sex that makes beating someone senseless *part of the game*.

And has its reproductive vitals hanging by a thread at bull's-eye of the body with nary a half-inch layer of fat for protection. (What's next in the evolution of the male, a brain growing outside the skull?) (Oops, been there—)

The sex that got the girls' and boys' bicycle designs backwards.

And competes on the pommel horse, voluntarily.

Do I need to point out that women's musculature is generally more elastic, rendering it less prone to injury?

And that women seem to have a better developed survival instinct? We duck. We run the fuck the other way. And we don't make insupportable claims about our opponent's sexual preferences or those of her parents.

* * * * *

To the Morons who wear Make-up

First, there's the ageism you're perpetuating: make-up is intended, to a large degree, to make one look younger. In many respects, younger *is* better, but in many respects, it isn't (and anyway, make-up merely gives one *the appearance* of being younger). True, at some point in time, being old is completely the pits, but hey, that's life, deal with it—*without* delusion or deception (or implied insult).

Second, if make-up were merely intended to (attempt to) make one beautiful, well, I suppose there's no harm in that—the world can always use a little more beauty. However, I despair at the pathetically low aesthetic standards in use if a blue eyelid is considered beautiful—let's at least see a glittering rainbow under that eyebrow arch! Further, I despair at the attention to beauty of skin if at the expense of beauty of character.

However, make-up is intended as much, if not more, to (attempt to) make one sexually attractive. (To some extent, I suppose physical beauty *is* sexually attractive, but that suggests a very narrow definition of beauty: a dog running full-out is beautiful but not, at least to me, sexually attractive.) (It also suggests a very narrow definition of sexual attractiveness, for its emphasis on appearance.) I'm thinking, for example, of reddened (and puckered) lips—what is that but an advertisement for fellatio? Consider too the perfume (especially if it's musk rather than floral), and the earrings (earlobes as erogenous zones), and the bras that push up and pad—all are part of the woman's morning grooming routine, her 'getting ready' (that phrase itself begs the question 'Ready for what?') ('Sex!').

Now there's nothing wrong with being sexually attractive per se. But there is something wrong—something sick—about wanting to be bait (sexually *attract-ive*) *all day long*. Especially when those same women complain about the attention they receive for their sexual attractiveness—the looks, the comments, the invitations (can you say 'sexual harassment?') Not only is there a serious self-esteem problem here, there's a serious consistency of thought problem here.

Third, combine the first point with the first part of the second point and we see another problem: make-up endorses the '(only) young is beautiful' attitude.

Combine the first point with the second part of the second point: make-up endorses the '(only) young is sexually attractive' attitude.

Add the shaved legs and armpits (and eyeliner, for that big baby doe-eyed look?), and we see we're not just talking 'young' as in twenty years old but 'young' as in *pre-pubescent* (only pre-pubescents are hairless, only pre-pubescents have such smooth skin).

And that's *really* disturbing—to establish/reinforce the sexual attractiveness of pre-pubescents.

Why is it (we think) men find young women, girls, sexually attractive? I doubt it's just the 'healthy for childbearing' thing. Because actually, it's *not* healthy for girls to bear children, and it's not even *possible* for pre-pubescents to do so. (And it's not like the men follow up in nine months to claim their progeny.) (But then I'm assuming rational behaviour here.)

I suspect it's the power thing. Men can have power over, feel superior to, children more easily than adults. So in addition to encouraging child sexual abuse, women who shave their legs and otherwise appear/act prepubescent are reinforcing the 'sex as power' instead of 'sex as pleasure' attitude (though of course I guess for many men power *is* pleasure).

Last, compounding all of this is the custom that only women wear make-up. Which reinforces the whole patriarchy thing: the women are sexual *objects* while the men are sexual *subjects*. ('Course, without make-up, the loss of about 20 pounds, and, well, major surgery, most men couldn't cut it as sexual objects anyway.)

* * * * *

Impoverished Scientists

To read the science journals, one would think animal life consists of nothing but predation and reproduction, both thoroughly competitive in nature. The absence of any capacity for pleasure, or at least for non-competitive pleasure, is frightening. Lining a nest with warm and soft material is not for comfort, but to "increase the survival rate of offspring" and arranging for others to watch the baby during long and deep dives is not from attachment and affection but to "maximize reproductive success".

This is of concern for two reasons. First, to judge by my own life and that of the dog with whom I live, that view is, to say the least, narrow and thus incomplete.

Second, what does it reveal of the scientists? Do they really see nothing but predation and reproduction—nothing but competition for food and sex? If it's true that we see what we want to see, well, why do these people want to see nothing but that? Is it a projection of their own view of life? How awful—how impoverished one must be—to see life—to live life—as nothing but a competition—and, worse, a competition for nothing but food and sex. Or does it provide some sort of vicarious satisfaction? Either way, there's the possibility of an ever tightening and dangerous circle: if that's all we think there is, that's all we'll see, and if that's all we see, that's all we'll think there is. Socializing not as a reproductive strategy, but for companionship; playing not as practice for evading a predator or capturing prey, but for fun; lying in the sun not to regulate one's body temperature, but simply because it feels good—why are these things so unthinkable?

Or perhaps these things *are* thinkable, are visible, but are considered unimportant, trivial. What a value system that reveals! Not only that food and sex are more important

than beauty and laughter, but that competition is more important than cooperation.

These are our scientists. These are the people who are collecting information, amassing knowledge, constructing our view—or rather, imposing their view—of the world. Surely a little more responsibility, a little more maturity, is called for.

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Having Kids and Having Religion

Most people associate pronatalism with religionism. Either because of its ‘go forth and multiply’ view, its ‘sanctity of life’ view, or its ‘*we* have to outnumber *them*’ view. I agree there’s a relationship, even a causal one. But it’s not that religion ‘causes’ pronatalism; rather, some other thing causes both religionism and pronatalism.

What is this other thing? An inability to find fulfilment in the here and now. The sci-fi stories featuring a last generation due to some global infertility always seem to show some sort of widespread malaise, even despair. Many, not content to die in a few years, decide to kill themselves immediately.

If I didn’t know better, I’d call it an existential crisis. One not handled very well. ‘I’m too unimaginative or too lazy, or both, to have made my life worthwhile. I know! I’ll have kids—*they’ll* make my life worthwhile!’ (And then in a really clever leap of logic, they even blame the kids for their existential black hole—‘How can I be out following some dream when I gotta put food on the table for you kids?’)

The same people insist on believing there’s a heaven no matter how many photographs of ‘up there’ they’re shown. (Never mind the extensive non-visual physical evidence against the possibility.)

In short, those of us who have purpose and value in our own lives have no need of kids—or heaven. Those of us who don’t, pass the buck.

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Men who need Mom to clean up after them

I spend a lot of time walking on the dirt roads near by place, as well as on the old logging roads through the forest. Twice a year, I take a large garbage bag with me to pick up the litter—mostly beer cans and fast food containers, but often whole plastic bags of garbage have been tossed in among the trees. (Lately, I’ve had to take *two* large garbage bags.)

I typically wait until the fall, because it seems the summer people litter more than those of us who live here, and I typically wait until after the spring hunt, because it seems the hunters leave quite a bit of trash.

I have always suspected that men litter more than women, and I've come across a statistic supporting my hunch :males do 72% of deliberate littering and are responsible for 96% of accidental littering (<http://www.greenecoservices.com/myths-and-facts-litter/>).

Why is this so? I think it's because 'cleaning up after' is seen as a woman's task. (This thought occurred to me when one guy slowed down as he passed me in his truck, while I was on one of my litter pick-up walks, and called out, "Good girl! Good to see you're good for something!") After all, wasn't it Mom who cleaned up after them when they were kids? (Mom did the cleaning; Dad did the fixing.) Of course the generalization from Mom to all women is a mistake: "Mom cleaned up after me, Mom is a woman, so women should clean up after me" is the same as "Princess is a kitten, Princess is white, so white things are/should be kittens". But I doubt these morons can think in a—well, I doubt these morons can think.

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The Illegality of Assisted Suicide

Let's say assisted suicide is illegal because it's often a tragic, premature, perhaps even ill-informed, death. But so is unassisted suicide.

And there are alternatives to assisted suicide—better pain management, for example, or counselling. Same goes for unassisted suicide.

But assisted suicide violates our social values, our respect for life. And yet unassisted suicide is legal because 'It's *your* life'.

So it seems it's not the suicide per se that's the problem, but the *assistance*, perhaps because the involvement of someone else opens the door to possible abuse, to coercion. But *unassisted* suicide can also be coerced: 'If you don't kill yourself, I will'. And really, allowing unassisted suicide already puts us on a slippery slope. Today, it's okay to kill yourself. Tomorrow, it's okay to kill someone else.

But it's *not* a slippery slope, because we draw lines. For example, the person has to consent.

And actually, the line can be more certainly drawn in the case of assisted suicide than in the case of unassisted suicide because of the presence of disinterested third parties in order to determine said consent, and to make sure the consent is competent, informed, and voluntary.

Furthermore, the assistance in assisted suicide is not as distinguishing as you might think. Most 'unassisted' suicides also require assistance—the provision of a gun, a razor blade, a bottle of pills. A bridge.

Oh but the 'assistance' is provided without the intent to bring about the other's death. So? Unassisted suicide is legal. How can intentionally assisting something legal be *illegal*?

Lastly, assistance is typically required in only two cases. Either the person is physically incapable—in which case prohibiting assistance is clearly discrimination on

the basis of physical ability (suicide is a right but only for physically capable people)—or the person just wants to get it done right—in which case assistance wouldn't even be required if reliable, painless, user-friendly even-by-the-feeble methods were available.

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The Pill for Men

“Outrageous!” That was the word used way back in ‘85 in response to the expectation that men take a contraceptive that had a side-effect of reduced sex drive. Hello. Let me tell you about the contraceptive pill for women. Side-effects include headaches, nausea, weight gain, mood changes, yeast infections, loss of vision, high blood pressure, gall bladder disease, liver tumours, skin cancer, strokes, heart attacks, and death. Oh, and reduced sex drive. (Thing is, and get this—do not pass go until you do—taking the pill is, for many of us, preferable to getting pregnant.)

But really, it's okay that men refuse to be responsible for their reproductive capability. They wouldn't remember to take the pill every day anyway. What with their busy life of going to work and coming home again. So we'd end up being responsible for reminding them—perhaps after we pick up the kids on our way home from work, and make dinner, and do the dishes, but before we start the laundry and see that the homework comes before the tv. Which sort of defeats the purpose.

‘Course if it were meat-flavoured and chewable, like, say, the beef jerky treats my dog scarfs down...

And it would have to come in regular and extra-strength so men could boast about their virility (‘I need the extra-strength to subdue my guys!’).

And it would have to be available without a prescription of course (‘Don't need to see no doctor to tell me what I can and can't take!'). At all hardware stores. And beer st—hey, wait a minute! Why not put it *in* the beer!

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The Political is Personal

Back in the 60s or 70s, one of the insights feminism gave us was that the personal is political. It's been a valuable insight. Many of us now routinely interpret personal interaction politically: we try to understand the influence of race, class, and gender; we try to determine the nature of the power differentials.

I suggest that the converse is an equally valuable insight: the political is personal.

I think we often imagine politics, broadly defined as decision-making by those in power, to proceed according to carefully considered principles and policies. Decisions are

thought to be well-informed, conscious choices. We may not agree with the decisions, but we recognize them as decisions nonetheless.

I'd like to suggest, however, that the outcomes are seldom by decision; most of the time, they're by default. From the local shop hiring a secretary to the corporation hiring an advertising firm to the government appointing a Supreme Court judge—it may appear that resumes and recommendations are carefully considered and compared, but I think more often it's just a matter of 'you go for who you like'. It's 'the personal' that makes the difference.

That's why interviews are so important. They're personal. Sure, the masquerade is that the questions asked during an interview enable a finer appraisal of merit; but those questions could be given to shortlisted applicants with the request that a written response be submitted. The truth is the interviewers are trying to figure out if they like you, if they can get along with you, if they want you to be in the office with them every day. It's personal, through and through.

Oh, they may not know it; I dare say most people in positions of power are not that conscious. In fact, they'll probably justify their choice on grounds of merit. Perhaps the more honest will simply admit they've 'got a good feeling about this one'. Which is why it's less a decision, a deliberated choice, than it is a default, a failure to act, a failure to deliberate.

Perhaps men in particular, having relegated the private, the personal, the subjective, to women, cannot and will not see, let alone consider, its role in their own behaviour. They deny the self, the ego. And if they deny the psychological (individual), they must also deny the social (individuals in groups). So they are ignorant of, and often derisive of, any mention of psychological factors—that's too personal.

Consider also the importance of networking—making friends, by any other name. People know that's the way in—to offers, to opportunities. People ask 'someone they know'—they don't advertise. And if you aren't someone people know, you won't be asked. Knocking on the door won't work—no one's there to hear you. Having a key won't work—there's no lock. The door only opens from the inside. They call you and when you show up, they'll be there to open the door for you.

If you think about it, this notion of 'the political is personal' makes sense of a lot. The tennis court, the golf course, and the after work pub—we all know that's where the deals are made. Not literally, of course: the contract to be signed is back at the office. And often not even directly: the contract may not even be discussed; it may not even exist yet. But if and when it does, it'll go to good ole' Jack. We like Jack. We're personal with Jack.

That's why Joan won't get the contract. Oh she's not excluded from the Board room. She's not even excluded from the clubs anymore. But still, a man and a woman can't 'just' be friends. *They can't get personal.* (Well, they can, but only in a way that would exclude her altogether.) Race and class are as high a hurdle to friendship.

And if you think about it, this is a scary idea. Not just the cronyism part of favour. Think of the other side: the foeism part of disfavour. Maybe 'the government' makes cuts to 'education' because the Prime Minister doesn't like the Minister of Education—they go way back and there's no way he's going to *increase* funding, in fact, nah nah, I'm gonna *decrease* your budget. Maybe President X *really* declares war on Country Y because he doesn't much like President Y—maybe President Y insulted him, and

President X could've just resorted to economic sanctions, but his ego is involved, *this is personal!* (Whether he admits it or not.)

So should we be voting for the most likeable person? Well maybe. If the other guy *likes* our guy, he'll trade with us. He won't come over and kill us. Social skills is all. I suddenly understand the value of PR, all those lunches and dinners I thought should've been negotiation meetings. This doesn't *necessarily* preclude voting for the smartest person, the most experienced person, or the person with the most integrity. But it *probably* does. Think back—how many friends did the smart kid have? And standing up for the right thing, rocking the boat, seldom makes you a nice guy. So, next election, who do we want? “Norm!”

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Fight Breaks Out in the House of Commons

Have you watched the House of Commons proceedings lately? It's unbelievable. I haven't seen such petty bickering, name-calling, and tongue-sticking-outting since Dicky called Peter a wuss at recess back in grade two. Then Johnny, who was on Dicky's side, started throwing clumps of dirt at Dougie, who was on Peter's side, and a bunch of other boys started yelling and kicking and when the teacher came out, they all accused each other, pointing fingers, 'He started it!' 'No I didn't, *he* did!' 'Oh yeah?' 'Yeah!' and it started all over again.

But they weren't grown ups, wearing suits-and-ties and saying “Mr. Speaker, I humbly submit...” And they weren't being paid to run the fucking country.

It's hard to believe they can be so immature. So instead I believe it's all a charade. To further convince us that there's simply no point in voting, let alone calling our MP or lobbying for this or that, no hope in hell of *any* participation in the process making *any* difference at all. That way the corporate agenda can proceed, with nothing whatsoever in its way.

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Quarantining HIV/AIDS

What does a clear-thinking society do when a contagious and fatal disease breaks out?

- (a) Shoot everyone who gets it.
- (b) Worry a lot and hope like hell you're not next.

(c) Quarantine those affected and help them make the best of what's left of their lives.

To our credit, we haven't chosen (a). To our discredit, we haven't chosen (c). (And if you've read the How-Not-To-Flunk Guide to Multiple-Choice Tests, you know that (c) is the correct answer because it's the longest.)

I am, of course, talking about HIV/AIDS.

Quarantine? Are you serious? Well, yes. It was good enough for the Bubonic Plague, tuberculosis, and the Ebola virus. Why shouldn't it do for HIV/AIDS? We don't have to *shoot* them. Some of them are very nice people. A quarantine is the obvious solution.

So why haven't we done the obvious? Why haven't we put our HIV/AIDS-infected people in quarantine? I think it's because we made two mistakes early on, and we're stumbling over ourselves to make up for them. One, we associated HIV/AIDS with sex, most especially homosex. Two, we associated sex, most especially homosex, with morality. And so we associated HIV/AIDS with morality: getting HIV/AIDS was a sure sign of sin.

But, with a little help from the Red Cross, we've grown up since then. We *know* now that some of them are very nice people. And, well, if we quarantine them, that would make them feel like outcasts. And we're trying so hard to accept them now, to apologize for our past stupidity.

Yeah, with our present stupidity! It could prove to be a very costly apology. Evil or not, people with HIV/AIDS *are* contagious, *fatally* so, under certain specific conditions. Just like—

But but but, you stutter, it's *not* the same, you can't get HIV/AIDS just by breathing. Good point. Though for many people, having sex *is* pretty much the same as breathing. (And certainly for a good number, shooting up is just as *important* as breathing.)

But you're quite right, it's not quite the same, HIV/AIDS is not quite as easily spread. Which is why (d) is *really* the right answer: mandatory testing and a tattoo.

But but but, you gasp this time, that's what they did to the Jews in Nazi Germany, they were 'branded' with the yellow Star of David, that's discrimination!

But but, I butt back, this is *justified* discrimination—justified because of one important difference: sex with a Jew won't kill you. (Well, okay, it depends on the Jew. I wouldn't screw around with Abraham.)

It doesn't have to be a big thing, no scarlet letter on the forehead. In fact, it doesn't even have to be that visible. Maybe something discreetly placed on the hip, a little warning sign of the danger ahead—or below as the case is. First Aiders, however, might prefer it to be a little *less* discreetly placed, maybe something on the chest would suffice—most people don't walk around with a pair of latex gloves in their wallet. (I *said* 'most'.) A skull-and-bones is a little too pessimistic, I think. A red circle with a diagonal, the universal 'no'? Wait, I've got it—a happy face!

Whatever, only the unenlightened would see it as a brand. (And the unenlightened have *already* branded people who have HIV/AIDS.) The rest of us could see it simply as a warning sign—or maybe as a fashion statement: I'm into dry sex. In any case, a tattoo would enable people with HIV/AIDS to walk among us, without endangering us: as long as we knew who they were, we'd be safe—we could choose to avoid the exchange of

bodily fluids with them.

Unless, of course, they forced themselves (and their fluids) upon us. But not even a quarantine would prevent that; we've tried it—we call it prison. So maybe we *should* consider (a)—maybe we *should* shoot them. Or maybe, at least, we should shoot the ones with a history of such forcible contact: people known to have raped or initiated blood-spattering fights, if and when they get HIV/AIDS, should be shot. Well, no, let's be humane about it, let's wait until a person with HIV/AIDS actually rapes or gets into a fight with someone, charge them with first degree murder—and *then* shoot them. And in the meantime, we can do (b), just worry a lot and hope like hell we're not that someone.

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Almost Psychopathic

I realize, spurred to reflection by an incident at Monday night basketball when, after I set a very successful pick, the young man involved fussed and fumed and threatened to 'plow me over next time!'—I realize that yes, I fear men. But it's not their superior strength or physical abilities I fear. We are *homo sapiens*: we have gone beyond brute force with our use of tools, as weapons if need be.

Rather it's their anger, their lack of control, their tendency to tantrums that I fear. Combined with their relative self-centredness—a focus on rights over responsibilities and a certain lack of ability to empathize—that tendency makes them capable, more capable than women, of causing great pain.

The man who may some day get back at me by kicking or shooting Chessie causes pain not as much because of his malicious intent as because of his ignorance: his ignorance of my love for her, of our incredible, amazing bond. Malicious intent is there, certainly, but it is intent to cause just X amount of pain—it's just a dog. His action will, however, cause tenfold X pain—it's Chessie!

I'm reminded of the man in *The Piano* who, in a fit of rage, a tantrum, cuts off the mute pianist's finger: he has *no idea* of the damage he's done, absolutely no understanding of the irrevocable loss he has caused—it *wasn't* just a finger. Not by a long shot. Not by a very long shot.

There's something more frightening about this kind of capacity to injure: to hurt with intent is at least to act with responsibility, and it shows a sort of respect for the other, an appreciation of the harm caused; but to hurt spontaneously, recklessly, casually, without bothering to even be aware of it, adds a sort of insult to injury (I think this is why victim impact statements are so important: we want the person to *know* just what he's done, to take on that burden of responsibility). To hurt in that off-hand cool sort of way, well, it's almost psychopathic.

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Property Tax—Justified?

Property tax (money one must pay to the government based on the land, and the building/s on the land, that one owns) is unlike sales tax (money one must pay to the government based on the goods and services one purchases) in that it is payable every year, not just once when you buy it. It is also unlike income tax: you don't pay tax on the *same* income over and over.

What justifies this difference, this having to pay tax on something you own again and again for as long as you own it?

One response may be that the revenue from property taxes goes to fund municipal services, and since property owners use these services on an ongoing basis, they should pay for them on an ongoing basis. But the revenue from sales tax goes to fund provincial services, which are also used on an ongoing basis, and the revenue from income tax goes to fund federal services, again, which are used on an ongoing basis.

Is there anything particularly unique about municipal services? I don't think so—my municipality provides/maintains roads (the local roads), education (elementary and secondary), the dump, the firehall, a public recreation center, and a library (and probably some other stuff too). Provincial and federal governments also provide/maintain roads (the highways), education (post-secondary—to some extent—we pay tuition, but it's subsidized by the government), provincial and national parks (akin to the recreation centers), and so on. So if provincial and federal levels of government can fund their services with revenue from one-time sales tax and income tax, collected from those who reside within their jurisdictions, why can't the municipal government do the same? Is it just because property doesn't tend to be purchased as often as pizza or on an ongoing basis as is the case for earning an income? So the conceptual inconsistency merely compensates for the time factor? But then why not instead, use all three taxes (and then property tax paid just once, at time of purchase) for services at all three levels?

In addition to this inconsistency of linking property ownership to payment for public services only at the municipal level, such a link is unfair. First, the assumption that all property owners use (and therefore should pay for) municipal services is mistaken. People who own empty lots in one municipality but who live in another municipality do *not* use any of the first municipality's services.

Second, one can't even assume that length of residency indicates extent of use, for example, that year-round residents use the municipality's services more than seasonal residents: I swear some of the summer people take more garbage to the dump in one weekend than I do in a whole month; they also use the roads a lot more than I do, going here and there and here and there, whereas I drive into town only once a week, tops.

And third, you certainly can't assume that someone who owns ten times as much land uses the municipality's services ten times as much—and yet, that person will be required to pay ten times as much in taxes.

It seems to me that municipal services should be paid for by, and only by, the people who use them. This means that payment may or may not come from the people who own land in the municipality, and that the amount of payment will be independent of both the length of residency in the municipality and the amount of land owned.

But why stop there? Why shouldn't provincial and federal services also be paid for

only by the people who use them? Okay, maybe not *only* by people who use them, but *mostly* by people who use them? Perhaps many of the services, the ones that simply make the municipality, province, or country a good one to live in (roads? education? dumps? certain health services such as vaccinations?) should be paid for by everyone, to some same basic extent. But beyond that, the services should be paid for by those who use them. So I would pay some basic amount for the dump, but I would also pay a per bag fee; I would pay a basic amount for the roads, but I would also pay a per kilometer fee; and so on.

Admittedly, this gets complicated. (But then the current income tax form is pretty complicated too.) We'd have to figure out the basic fee for each of the many services and the additional individual user fees... And then there's the monitoring. But it's certainly do-able.

'Course, there's an easier argument for abolishing property tax, or at least the land part of property tax (tax on the buildings should be simple sales tax: you pay when you buy your house, or the materials to build it, just as you pay when you buy your car), and that is to abolishing property ownership. I still haven't figured out the basis for *owning* land. You don't make land like you make a chair or even like you 'make' an apple orchard; it's not something you own because you've added your labor to the raw material to make it what it is (Locke)—it *is* the raw material.

Furthermore, you can't own air or water; it's considered 'the commons'. So why can you own land? Like air and water, land is required for the very essentials of life (which is, presumably, why we say you can't own air or water). (Then again, if the U.S. can buy Canada's water, I guess we *can* own it...well, the government can own it...how can the government own something I can't own?...)

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Making Taxes Gender-Fair

Since men commit 90% of the crime, they should pay 90% of the tax that supports the judicial system. Prisons are expensive to build and maintain. As are prisoners—they don't work while they're in prison, so we have to support them. Then there's the expense of the police forces and courts that get them there. We already require men to pay the bulk of car insurance premiums because they're the worse drivers. So what's stopping us from going further, making the system even more fair?

And since a large percentage of their crime is violent, it follows that men are responsible for far more ER visits than women (assuming no gender differences with regard to illness and other injury) (actually, since men take more risks than women, there probably *is* a gender difference with regard to injury) (don't forget the driving thing), so men should pay more of the tax that supports the healthcare system.

Oh and the military. Men are the ones who thrive on aggression, they get off on the excitement of fighting. *They* want to join the military. *They* want to go to war. So let *them* pay for it. Let *them* pay the \$530 billion required by the military budget.

Then there's all the environmental stuff. All those beer cans, empty cigarette packs, fast food cartons—most of the litter along the highways was put there by men. As they continue to drive their big gas-guzzler pick-up trucks with the high emissions. And the companies that dump toxic waste, and clear cut forests, and dam river systems? All run by men.

We could call it the Gender Responsibility Tax—a \$5,000 surtax could be levied on each and every male. Payable annually, from birth to death. By the parents, of course, until the boy reaches manhood.

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Permitting Abortion and Prohibiting Prenatal Harm

I think abortion should be allowed. And I think prenatal harm (especially that caused by ingesting various legal and illegal substances while pregnant) should not be allowed. Some accuse me of hypocrisy or, more accurately, maintaining a contradictory position: either women have the right to control what happens to their bodies or they don't, you can't have it both ways. No problem. But I can add a qualification: women, and men, have the right to control what happens to their bodies *except* when it causes harm to someone else—I can move my arms any way I want except straight into your face.

Ah, you may jump up and down, you said 'someone else!' So the fetus is a person! That's why you're saying prenatal harm is wrong! So that makes abortion wrong too! Again, you can't have it both ways!

Yes I can. The fetus can be a person and it may still be okay to abort. Killing in self-defence is permissible; killing in mercy is permissible. So if the pregnancy or birth poses a risk to me, I can kill the fetus. Or if the fetus is discovered to have some awful excruciatingly painful genetic disease, I can kill it. (In that case, one could argue I *should* kill it.)

Not only does being a person not mean I can't kill it; *not* being a person doesn't mean I can harm it. It's wrong to hurt a chipmunk, barring extenuating circumstances, because it can feel pain.

And in any case, I would argue that personhood isn't all-or-nothing. Sentience, brain activity, the ability to communicate, the capacity for rational thought, consciousness, interests—all of these attributes, typically proposed to determine personhood, exist in degrees. So creatures can be persons in varying degrees.

And since personhood is typically established in order to establish rights, it makes sense then to assign fewer rights to 'lesser' persons. While there is cause for concern about the impact of such an argument on 'disabled' people, I believe this slippery slope can and should be avoided. For example, if a mentally disabled adult lacks the cognitive competence to vote, that right is justifiably denied. But it doesn't follow that other rights, such as the right to a livelihood, also be denied.

In fact, we already assign rights according to various capacities and competencies: children, because of their lesser capacity for rational thought, and perhaps also because of

their lesser interests, do not have voting rights; only a few adults, because of their superior knowledge and fine motor skills, are awarded operating room rights. The acceptability of aborting a being with minimal personhood would not then contradict the unacceptability of harming a being with considerably more personhood.

In fact, going back to the matter of the right to control one's body, it might be reasonable to consider, in the case of pregnancy, the boundaries of one's body to be somewhat elastic. While the woman generally has the right to control her body, what is considered 'her body' changes through the pregnancy parallel to the changes in the personhood of the zygote/embryo/fetus: the less it is a person, the more it is her body; the more it is a person, the less it is just her body. Thus aborting when 'her body' is very much just her body may be acceptable, whereas harming when it is not may not be.

In addition to rights and personhood (though personhood 'reduces' to rights), there is another, perhaps better, consideration: consequences. Barring the capacity to feel pain, as long as there isn't going to be a human being who will at some future time suffer from any prenatal harm—that is, if the woman decides to abort the pregnancy—such harm, whether caused by the woman or some third party, isn't a wrong. In fact, assuming no such capacity, and given that it is has no interests or desires (which might justify pain, making it morally acceptable, as in the case of vaccination), it's weird to even call it harm. (Do I harm a virus when I take cold medication? Or cancer cells when I receive chemotherapy?)

However, if there *is* going to be such a human being—that is, if the woman decides to continue the pregnancy and give birth—there *will* be an infant, a child, an adult who will suffer the consequences, which can range from vomiting, inability to sleep, reluctance to feed, diarrhea leading to shock and death, severe anemia, and excruciating pain, in the newborn, to the more permanent growth retardation, mental retardation, central nervous system abnormalities, and malformations of the kidneys, intestines, head, and spinal cord[1]. Add to this the consequences to others, and the wrongdoing increases: the healthcare system (the rest of us) may have to pay (dearly) for newborn intensive care (Mathieu estimates the average cost of prenatal intensive care to be about \$2,000/day[2]); the education system may have to deal with one more 'special ed' student; chances are the welfare system will be involved (Oberman estimates the cost of lifelong care for fetal alcohol syndrome to range from \$600,000 to \$2.6 million[3]); and so on. Thus there is no contradiction in holding that abortion is morally acceptable and prenatal harm is not: generally speaking, abortion does not lead to morally unacceptable consequences, whereas prenatal harm does.

Of course, consequences to the woman must also be considered. For example eating a well-balanced diet is little to ask to ensure a healthy newborn, and giving up alcohol for nine months is well 'worth' a newborn free of mental retardation. But staying in bed for nine months may be too much to ask just to ensure the birth is not a week premature, and giving up life-saving treatment may not be worth the mere possibility of a healthy fetus.

[1] Madam Justice Proudfoot, "Judgement Respecting Female Infant 'D.J.'"

[2] Deborah Mathieu, *Preventing Prenatal Harm: Should the State Intervene?*

[3] Susan Oberman, "Sex, Drugs, Pregnancy, and the Law: Rethinking the Problems of Pregnant Women Who Use Drugs"

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Olympians

Insofar as competition is the measure of oneself against another, it entails the view that the other is more important than oneself. Otherwise, it would be sufficient to measure oneself against oneself (a past self or a hoped-for future self) or against some absolute standard not necessarily related to any self (a stopwatch or tape measure). Such an other-regarding view usually indicates low self-esteem.

It does no good to claim that one competes, rather, to better one's own best: it must be asked why one needs to perform alongside another in order to better oneself—a stopwatch or tape measure (or videotape) should suffice. That such competing against oneself is *insufficient* to bring out one's best suggests, again, that what matters is what the other does, thinks, etc.

This seems odd, though, at least in the case of the Olympics: most world class athletes have such self-discipline and have achieved such a level of excellence that for their self-esteem to remain low, they'd have to be quite out of touch with reality. Bingo.

The hierarchal nature of competitive sport is such that the context for comparison keeps getting narrower: as one excels, one compares oneself to a smaller and smaller pool of others who also excel; and the measure of difference becomes equally smaller and smaller. So unless the competitor keeps in mind the larger left-behind contexts, or the similarities of amazing achievement, one's self-esteem ends up depending on a mere ten or twenty out of six billion people, and a mere two seconds in a four-minute race or a few hundredths of a point out of ten.

I don't mean to suggest, however, that this display of low self-esteem is *all* there is to competition. Surely there is much more, especially when the competition is as big as the Olympics: a chance for businesses to advertise unnecessary or exploitive products, a chance for petty nationalism to strut its stuff, a chance to mispend resources (surely clean water matters more than whether A can jump 1 cm higher than B), and so on.

Nor do I mean to suggest that I won't be watching the Olympics. I fully applaud the pursuit and display of excellence—but why doesn't sport, like art, have non-competitive events? True, the arts also have their dance competitions and their music competitions; but more common are simply the performances—the pure celebrations of excellence.

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The Futility of Teaching Business Ethics or Why Our World Will End

There are four reasons why teaching ethics to business students is an exercise in

futility. First, business students believe that the profit motive trumps everything. As long as this is the case, there's no point in teaching them the intricacies of determining right and wrong. Whether something is morally acceptable or not is simply irrelevant. It might come into play when two options yield the same profit, but how often does that happen? And even so, other concerns are likely to be tie-breakers.

And *is* this the case? *Does* the profit motive trump everything? Yes, according to their economics, marketing, and even human resources professors: profit is the bottom line. It's primary. It's the *raison d'être* of business. Good thing. Because business students enrol in business because they want to make a lot of money. I have yet to meet someone who's enrolled in business to make the world a better place. (Wait a minute. Don't shareholders matter? Doesn't what *they* want trump everything? In theory, yes. In practice, no. Most shareholders don't cast their vote. And anyway most shareholders also want to make a lot of money. As much as possible, in fact. I have yet to meet someone who becomes a shareholder, who invests, to make the world a better place.)

Second, ethics is a grey area. It's complicated. There are often no clear-cut answers. Ironically, there's seldom a right and wrong answer to questions of right and wrong. And men prefer black and white. They gravitate toward the quantitative, the ill-(but sexually-aptly-)named 'hard sciences' of engineering and chemistry, rather than the 'soft sciences' of psychology and sociology. They say such fields are not as legitimate, but really they're just harder to navigate because the reasoning and the evidence are 'stronger' and 'weaker' rather than 'right' and 'wrong'. (Which is why, when men *do* get involved with ethics, they prefer moral legalism, the approach that equates right and wrong with legal and illegal, which is black and white.)

Third, ethics is for girls. (Apparently.) And business is dominated by boys. It's mom who teaches us right from wrong; she's the moral compass. And anything mom does is to be held in contempt as soon as a boy hits twelve. In order to become a man, it's necessary (to hold in contempt all things female). Ethics presumes caring, and real men don't care. (Qualification: they don't care about others. They care about profit, their own place in the scheme of things, and because their sons are extensions of themselves, they care about them, *their* place in the scheme of things, but caring about strangers? Strangers are other; the other is the competition.) Ethics is something for priests to worry about and we all know priests aren't real men. They're celibate for god's sake. So, men avoid ethics—it's effeminate to be concerned about right and wrong.

So actually, there's just one reason why teaching business ethics to business students is an exercise in futility: business is dominated by men (point 3), and the masculinist mode is quantitative (points 1 and 2). This explains, or is supported by, their obsession with size. Girth which in a woman would be considered obese and disgusting is carried by men as if it *increases* their legitimacy, their authority: they thrust out their gut just as they thrust out their chest. It brings to mind animals that inflate themselves to achieve greater size (the balloonfish can actually double its size). Men are concerned not only with physical size—in general and in particular—but also with the size of their cars, their houses, their corporations. Their profit. The bigger, the better. I think this is because the male mind is more primitive, and at a very primitive level, the contest for survival is won by the bigger animal. (Actually, that's not true even at a basic level—small creatures with toxic stings and the capacity to remain hidden often survive. But unfortunately, males have evolved enough to create a system in which it is true.) (And anyway, even as they

don't survive, they'll take the rest of us down with them.)

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