

X10 – EXchanging Worldviews, 10: EXploring Prospects for Peace & Prosperity, 2: EXtending Justice

Dear: If you're becoming discouraged – if on the one hand, you think that social justice is not only overwhelmingly complex but also essentially impossible to achieve, and if on the other hand, you don't see how any of it has anything to do with belief in any god – then please bear with me for a little longer. Emerson said, in effect, that social injustice is just opinion, and I tend to agree with him. Heraclitus said strife (e.g., arising from differences in opinion) is necessary, and I also tend to agree with him. It therefore seems that differences in opinions and associated social injustices and strife are unavoidable. But the important question that begs exploration is: **on what are different opinions based?**

I want to address that question in this chapter, because its answer will suggest ways that more social justice might be achieved. What I hope you'll see is that opinions emerge from worldviews, within which goals are defined and from which, in turn, values follow. Consequently, if we could 1) attain some convergence on worldviews (and therefore on goals and values), 2) rid societies of all data-less ideas about all gods, and instead 3) base opinions on evaluating reliable and relevant data, then chances for convergence of opinions should vastly improve – and then, so would chances for more social justice. Yet, as I'll try to show you (and as you probably know anyway), **“the devil is in the details.”**

To try to show you what I mean, I'll start by assuming you agree that, in this country and throughout the world, a huge number of “value judgments” must be made about “social justice”. In this country, for example, there are questions about whether abortion or same-sex marriage should be permitted, how to promote equal opportunity, how much money should be allocated to welfare, education, health care for the elderly vs. for children, etc.

Throughout the world, there are problems with disease, dictatorships, environmental degradation, fanaticism, human rights violations, national boundaries, poverty, sales of armaments, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, etc. In each case, opinions range – and sometimes rage! Thereby, reaching a consensus on “values” seems essentially impossible and claims of social injustice are rampant.

That's to be expected. As Emerson said (paraphrased): **one person's opinion of social justice is another's opinion of injustice**. These different opinions are derived from different sets of values, and in turn, different values are derived from different goals. As I've written many times: essentially all of our values have meaning only relative to some objective (the only exceptions I can think of are the values we associate with such things and processes as sunrises, art, symmetry, etc.). Consequently, if there were widespread agreement on goals, then widespread agreement on values would generally follow, which in turn would lead to less cantankerous opinions about how to solve humanity's many problems and fewer claims of social injustice.

DIFFERENT WORLDVIEWS LEAD TO DIFFERENT GOALS

Although it's probably obvious that we choose goals consistent with our worldviews, I want to belabor two examples – for reasons that I hope will soon be clear:

- 1) If people adopt a world of “make believe”, if they choose to believe that some Jabberwock (or magic man) in the sky rules the world (even though there's not a sliver of data to support such an idea!), if they “believe” that when they die they don't die (!), then it's consistent with such nonsense to adopt as humanity's prime goal to try to placate the giant, omnipotent, omniscient Jabberwock in the sky, e.g., by obeying con-artist clerics who claim to represent him (or her or it); but
- 2) If people choose to evaluate rather than obey, if they choose to rely on the scientific method rather than clerical con artists, if they accept as principles only those hypotheses that succinctly summarize a substantial quantity of reliable data and whose predictions have been repeatedly validated, if they proceed with the “useful working hypothesis” that the universe is natural (which is supported by a huge amount of data and an enormous number of validated predictions), and thereby, if they reject all ignorance associated with some silly “supernatural” Jabberwock in the sky, then it's consistent to adopt the prime goal to try to help humanity solve its many problems by using the best knowledge and intelligence that we can muster.

Thereby, it's no wonder that arguments rage: different people have different values, derived from different goals, derived from different worldviews, derived from different ways of seeking “truth” (e.g., *via* “listening to one's heart” *versus* obtaining data and applying the scientific method).

As an example, your mother holds the opinion that abortions are “terribly unjust” (to the unborn) because, cutting to the chase, she wants to get into

heaven. In contrast, my opinion is that making abortions illegal would be not only “terribly unjust” (to women) but also “terribly dumb” because, cutting to the chase, I think that the last thing that this poor old world needs is more unwanted children. She and I are therefore unlikely ever to agree on “the justice” of abortion – I’ll never accept the worldview of the religionists (unless reliable data about the existence of some magic man in the sky become available) and I doubt that she’ll ever accept the worldview of Humanists (because she finds comfort in her daydream that she won’t die).

As another example, my mother lived in a dream world of spirits, ghosts, and gods. I don’t know what might have been more important to her than placating her god, “doing the Lord’s will.” I doubt if she would have refused to do anything that her priests dictated – so she could continue to dream that she would get into her imagined paradise.

Extrapolation from my experiences with your mother and mine, I can easily comprehend:

- How, ~3,000 years ago, Jewish clerics would have been able to convince their followers to slaughter the original inhabitants of “the Holy Land” (although, as I’ll show you in **Yx**, the story is almost certainly a myth);
- How, during the Dark Ages in Europe, Catholic clerics were able to convince their followers to torture and murder millions of “heretics”;
- How, a little more than 100 years ago in America, Mormon clerics were able to convince their followers to murder innocent but doubting neighbors and settlers; and
- How, today, Islamic clerics are able to convince their followers to tie explosives around their waists and blow themselves up to kill “the infidels”.

As Voltaire said: “**If we believe absurdities, we shall commit atrocities.**” In contrast, no one who is convinced that the scientific method is the only way to gain reliable knowledge about the world can buy into such make-believe nonsense – although as Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and other notorious leaders demonstrated (as well as millions of their followers), one needn’t be religious to participate in atrocities. As the Nobel laureate in physics Steven Weinberg reportedly said:

With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion.

Weinberg added:

One of the great achievements of science has been, if not to make it impossible for intelligent people to be religious, then at least to make it possible for them not to be religious. We should not retreat from this accomplishment.

This commitment to “not retreat”, making it possible for intelligent people “not to be religious”, puts all Humanists in conflict with all religionists – of course causing more strife, leading to more claims of injustice, and leading to calls from both sides for “more tolerance”.

INTOLERANT HYPOCRISY

But, Dear, be careful with the concept of ‘tolerance’. The word ‘tolerance’, similar to the word ‘freedom’, needs an object. Thus, if someone says that he’s in favor of freedom, then feel free to punch him in his nose – since he’s apparently in favor of your freedom to do so (or was careless in describing what freedoms he favored). ‘Tolerance’ is similarly meaningless until modified: you may be tolerant of a trouble-making sister, but can you tolerate the smell of dead horses? I would even go so far as to say that a “totally tolerant” person doesn’t and couldn’t exist. Someone who’s tolerant of everything wouldn’t have any opinions – a capability that may be beyond even this damn computer of mine!

Meanwhile, though, rarely do religious people worry about the meaning of their words. For example, in his Sunday 8 October 1995 address in Baltimore, Maryland, Pope John Paul II preached:

Religious tolerance is based on the conviction that God wishes to be adored by people who are free: a conviction which requires us to respect and honor the inner sanctuary of conscience in which each person meets God...

Hello? “God wishes to be adored by people who are free”? Really? Poor old Pope John Paul should have checked what his namesake wrote. Thus, at *Romans 6, 16*, “Saint” Paul wrote:

If you give yourselves to be slaves and obey your master, you are not free. You are his slaves. Do you not know this: you may be slaves to wrong things? But you will not live forever. *Or you may be slaves to obey God.* [Italics added] Then you will be made good people and live with him [forever].

So, what justification did the Pope have for claiming: “**God wishes to be adored by people who are free**”? Closer to reality would be to say that, similar to all religious leaders, Pope John Paul II doesn’t want his followers to realize that they are slaves to his ignorance. Further and more to the point, Pope John Paul’s claim that we are to “**respect and honor the inner sanctuary of conscience in which each person meets God**” leads me to ask: What if that “**inner sanctuary of conscience**” tells the day dreamer to burn heretics at the stake? What if “**inner sanctuary of conscience**” informs the moron to do whatever it takes to stop abortions? What if “**inner sanctuary of conscience**” tells the idiot to tie explosives around his or her waist to kill as many unbelievers as possible? We are to tolerate such idiocy? Riiiiiiight.

It’s easy to find similar idiotic statements on ‘tolerance’ made by other religious leaders. For example, in the May 1999 issue of the Mormon magazine *Ensign*, President Gordon B. Hinckley wrote:

We must never forget that we live in a world of great diversity. The people of the earth are all our Father’s children and are of many and varied religious persuasions. We must cultivate tolerance and appreciation and respect one another.

That, of course, is “all very well and good” – but then, the original Mormon prophet [profit!] Joseph Smith, Jr., himself, said:

I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.

Further and as I reviewed in the “excursion” **Qx**, the Book of Mormon is loaded with intolerance, e.g., see Chapter **Qx24**, starting on p. 12, including such statements as (starting at *1 Nephi 14*, 10):

Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God [No doubt Rigdon’s new church, i.e., the Mormon Church] and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations [this ‘mother’ is undoubtedly the Catholic Church; maybe by ‘abominations’ Rigdon means all the Protestant denominations]; and she [the Catholic Church] is the whore of all the earth.

But such hypocrisy (i.e., “do as I say; not as I do”) certainly isn’t confined to the leaders of the Mormon and Catholic Churches. Thus, as I tried to show you in the “excursion” **Qx**, the “holy books” of our culture are little more than manuals for intolerance of other people’s views:

- In the Old Testament, recall God’s alleged intolerance of the homosexual inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and the alleged slaughter by the invading Hebrews of all of those people who were peacefully living on their land but worshiped other gods.
- In the New Testament, recall the intolerance of the clerics’ Jesus for his fellow Jews, for the money-changers who were honorably conducting their trade in the Temple, and for all the “infidels” whose screams from Hell he promised to ignore.
- In the Quran, recall the murders of so many “infidels” by Muhammad and his cutthroat accomplices and Muhammad’s demands that Muslims wage continuous war on “unbelievers” (in his balderdash) until Islam dominated the world.

And as a case in point in the Book of Mormon, you might recall from **Qx24** that I expressed concern for my own safety when you visit, because you’ve been indoctrinated with the intolerance promoted, e.g., at *1 Nephi 4*, 13:

Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

You don’t really “believe” such nonsense, do you, Dear? Are you really that intolerant of my opinions that you want to kill me?!

In general, any such claim of (and support for) “tolerance” by religious leaders is a façade for their and their followers’ hypocrisy. That’s easily seen from the convictions promoted and adopted in every religion derived from Zarathustra’s crazy speculations (also called “the Abrahamic religions”, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism). Thus:

- Similar to the Pygmies, religious Jews have convinced themselves that the giant Jabberwock in the sky made them “his chosen people”,
- Christians have convinced themselves that “no one comes to the Father [i.e., the magic man in the sky] except by [Jesus]”,
- Muslims have convinced themselves that Islam is “the one true religion”, and as you know,
- Mormons have similarly convinced themselves that theirs is the “one true church”.

Even Hindus, who are generally the most tolerant of all religious people (viewing all religions as just part of Shiva’s dance), are thereby intolerant, as if to say: “Good: at least you’ve learned a part of it!”

Thus, all exhortations for “tolerance” by leaders and followers of all religions are made with a lying wink and a sinister smile, as if to say:

Go ahead and believe your silliness; go ahead with your idolatry and iniquity; what do I care; it's you who will suffer the consequences.

As far as I can make it out, the source of so much intolerance (albeit camouflaged) by religious people is insecurity: the leaders apparently want a steady supply of new converts (for fear that their coffers won't be filled) and followers also seem to want a steady supply of new converts (perhaps to bolster their own sagging convictions that their religion is “true”, maybe also concerned that others will also recognize that what they're doing is crazy). Meanwhile, it's common that Humanists also display intolerance – because they're “sick and tired” of so much religious idiocy and hypocrisy!

Yet, in my (biased) opinion, I think that Humanists are more tolerant of other people's ideas than are religious people, save perhaps for Hindus. Our position generally is: we don't really care what make-believe games people play, so long as we aren't forced to play their silly games and provided their foolishness doesn't influence those of us who can still think for ourselves. But we start to object – and then object strongly – when religious ignorance starts to endanger or cause harm to others, especially children.

TOLERATING IGNORANCE CAN BE DANGEROUS

To begin to see some of the harm religionists cause the rest of us, consider a few, progressively-more-serious consequences of some current religious ignorance promoted by various religious “fundamentalists” (including Mormons, many Christian Evangelical sects, and essentially all Muslims). Without a shred of data to support their ideas, they proceed from the speculation that some giant Jabberwock in the sky rules the universe to conclusions such as the following.

- Americans are to include the words “**under God**” while reciting their Pledge of Allegiance and to tolerate “**In God We Trust**” on their currency.
- Children aren't to learn about the theory of evolution (as currently the best explanation of how life on Earth evolved); instead, they're to learn some ~3,000 year old speculations about how life formed – speculations “pulled out of thin air”, concocted by some ignorant Persian or Egyptian priest (who also thought that the Earth was flat, that diseases were caused by evil spirits, that life continues after death, and that ghosts flittered through the air, occasionally impregnating virgin girls).

- Women are to be subservient to men, and in particular, any woman who inadvertently becomes pregnant must not terminate her pregnancy, but because her body is like soil (or dirt) in which a man's seed has recently been planted, she is to give birth even to her unwanted child, whose "immortal soul" must be saved.
- Although the world currently has approximately ten times more people that it can sustainably accommodate, all "artificial" means of birth control are to be prohibited.
- Those people who don't buy into such ludicrous speculations should be killed.

The above list certainly isn't exhaustive, Dear, but surely enough has been included so that you see why Humanists respond:

Tolerance be damned: you religious kooks are not only ignorant, some of you are downright dangerous!

In 1916, the humanist H.L. Mencken made a significant observation:

The most curious social convention of the great age in which we live is the one to the effect that religious opinions should be respected.

Dear: please think for a while about Mencken's idea. Why should anyone's opinions or beliefs be "respected"?

People can think what they want – because, so long as brain waves can't be deciphered electronically, nobody knows what someone else is thinking! But when someone expresses an opinion or belief, then the idea is "in the public domain" and can be evaluated. Then, a sensible person will not (and should not!) automatically "respect" someone else's stated opinion or belief – unless data or other evidence are provided that support the idea.

Certainly it's sensible to "respect" reliable data or other evidence, but if none is provided, a sensible person won't respect someone else's opinion. Instead, if a sensible and kind person can't convince someone else to abandon his delusions, then she'll probably explore possibilities of getting him some help from a competent psychiatrist!

For example, if one person expresses his opinion that drinking milk causes tooth decay and another person expresses her opinion that eating candy causes tooth decay, then rather than just "respect" one or the other (or both?!) of those opinions, isn't the most sensible approach to examine

relevant and reliable data? Or if someone expresses his opinion that he's been visited by extra-terrestrial visitors (ETs), then if he fails to provide some evidence to support his claim, would you "respect" his opinion? And so on – apparently until (according to religious leaders) you encounter religious opinions or beliefs.

According to the (hypocritical) clerics, if someone expresses his opinion that some magic man in the sky created the universe and occasionally sends messages down to people *via* angels, wants women to keep popping out babies until there's "standing room only" on Earth, wants people to kill all "unbelievers" [of religious balderdash], wants all the other nonsense that the damnable clerics claim, but isn't supported by a shred of data, then we're to "respect" such "beliefs".

Why? For what purpose? Is the clerics' real purpose to maintain power over their slaves? Is the purpose they propose for our tolerating their ignorance: So they can keep their con games going? So they won't need to work for a living? So they won't order their slaves to kill us for not tolerating (or even "respecting") their beliefs? How about if they blow it out their ears?!

TO INCREASE SOCIAL JUSTICE, REDUCE IGNORANCE

From arguments such as the above, Dear, I reach the conclusion that people are just "whistlin' in the wind" who advocate that the key to more social justice is more "tolerance". For example, in 1946 another famous U.S. judge wrote something similar to the statement by Heraclitus:

The opposite is beneficial; from things that differ comes the fairest attunement; all things happen by strife and necessity. People do not know how what is at variance agrees with itself. It is an attunement of opposite tensions, like that of the bow and the lyre.

Thus, Judge Learned Hand wrote:

Justice, I think, is the tolerable accommodation of the conflicting interests of society... [This] much I think I do know – that a society so riven that the spirit of moderation is gone, no court can save; that a society where that spirit flourishes, no court need save; that in a society which evades its responsibility by thrusting upon the courts the nurture of that spirit, that spirit in the end will perish.

I'm rather underwhelmed by this advice from Judge Hand, which could be summarized by Homer's ~2700 year-old advice "**moderation in all things**". Instead, if major progress is to be made toward more social justice and more peace and prosperity, then in my opinion, more than "**moderation**" and "**tolerable accommodation**" are needed, namely: **less ignorance and more knowledge!** But as I've written already and will now try to show you with an example, "**the devil is in the details.**"

An Example Issue: Abortion

In the quest to find more social justice, to see that "the devil is in the details", consider the contentious issue of abortion. And if your immediate reaction, Dear, is something similar to "**Thanks anyway, but abortion isn't an issue that interests me**", then I would ask you to "internalize" the issue. Suppose that a certain granddaughter found herself pregnant – when having a child wasn't her intention. What would she want to do? What do you think she "should" do? What would she do? One thing I'm sure that she "would do" is find herself in the middle of a very contentious issue, and if she sought advice, she'd find that it was "all over the map."

Now, Dear, I assume that I don't need to provide you with data supporting the assessment that abortion is a contentious issue in this country. Generally the "fault line" of the contention is between those who advocate "reproductive rights" (the "right" of any woman to decide if she'll try to have a baby or not) *versus* those who advocate "the right to life" (of the unborn). In general (but not unanimously so), Humanists support the woman's right to decide; in general (but not unanimously so), religionists support the right of the unborn to life. But before I suggest why the squabbling would subside if people had a similar worldview and therefore similar goals, let me begin to address a topic that will emerge repeatedly in what follows, namely, naïve discussions about "human rights".

Rights AND Responsibilities

Dear: if anyone ever starts talking to you about "rights", you may want to do something to keep your mind focused on what's important. Take out a coin and keep manipulating it: rub it (both sides), turn it over in your fingers (again and again), see if you can roll it along your fingers (as dexterous gamblers sometimes do), see if you can spin it on its edge, flip it from your thumb and catch it, keep track of the number of heads *versus* tails, and so on – until the idiot lecturing you about "rights" finally gets sufficiently distracted to ask you what the devil you're doing. Then, maybe respond:

* Go to other chapters *via*

Oh, I was just remembering how my grampa used to warn me about people who tried to sell me one-sided coins.

My point, Dear, is that anyone who talks about “rights” without addressing the other side of the coin, namely, “responsibilities”, is either ignorant or a con artist trying to sell you a one-sided coin. As an example, consider the two “rights arguments” dealing with the abortion issue.

Even those people (e.g., Humanists) who advocate “a woman’s right to choose” usually neglect to mention the “responsibilities” associated with those “rights”. A more complete presentation of their position is that (“heads”) a woman should have the right to determine if she’ll carry her fetus to term, and (“tails”) she’s the one who must bear the responsibilities for her decision (e.g., remorse for not having a baby, remorse for putting the baby up for adoption, remorse for being required to rear her child, happiness for...). That is, on this side of the abortion argument (the side generally taken by Humanists), the coin is two sided: the right to choose AND the responsibilities associated with the choice. And actually, it’s rather silly of such people (generally, Humanists) to neglect to mention both sides of their coin, because mentioning the women’s responsibilities would probably bolster their argument!

The other side of the argument is also a two-sided coin, with both rights and responsibilities. But it’s easy to see why the anti-abortionists (generally, the religionists) don’t mention the other side of their coin, because if they did, their argument appears quite sick: they argue that the “unborn child” has a “right to life”, but neglect to mention that the burden of the “responsibilities” (associated with this “right”) is to be borne primarily by the pregnant woman. In essence, their argument (against the woman’s right to have an abortion) is:

Unless you’ve been raped, you’re responsible for being pregnant; therefore, you’re responsible for rearing the child.

If a woman wants an abortion, her possible argument (“Well, yes, I did become pregnant, but I didn’t intend to – and now I plan to correct my mistake”) apparently falls on deaf ears of the anti-abortionists: maybe they’re so “holier than thou” that they never need to correct their own mistakes – just someone else’s!

Would that the anti-abortionists showed as much responsibility, themselves, as they try to force on pregnant women who want abortions! That is, if anti-abortionists are so intent on bringing into this world a new version of the human genetic code, then let them take responsibility for it. Let them offer every pregnant woman who wants an abortion \$5 million (or so) to care for the new genetic code until its born, to meet the child's expenses, and for the huge expense and effort required to rear a child. That is, the damnable abortion protestors should be required to pay \$5 million (or so) for their pickets, with the \$5 million put into a trust account for the child of any woman who then chooses not to have an abortion!

Wouldn't that be something?! Let the picketers march around the family planning clinics carrying rational signs. Thus, the anti-abortionists should carry a sign conveying a message something similar to:

Please consider this. It's my opinion that we must protect the immortal soul of every unborn child. Therefore, if you'll agree to have your baby and to help your child reach adulthood, then I'll help you by setting up a trust account in your baby's name (for you to manage) for 5 million dollars. Alternatively, I'll give you \$1 million for having the baby and then I'll look after your child. Signed xxx.

If they did that, I bet that few women would choose to have abortions – in fact, I bet that many women would choose to become pregnant!

Meanwhile, maybe the people advocating the opposite would carry pickets stating something similar to:

I, in contrast, am convinced that the last thing this poor old world needs is another unwanted child; there are already too many unwanted children on the Earth, which has a limited carrying-capacity and whose rational limit has already been surpassed. Therefore, I'm willing to pay for the cost of your abortion. Signed yyy.

Sorry, Dear, sometimes I get carried away, but as I've mentioned before, my tolerance for ignorance is quite low.

Rights Aren't Granted; They're Claimed!

As another illustration, consider the following ignorance from an article¹ entitled *A Clash of Orthodoxies* by Robert P. George (the Cyrus Hall McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University and author of the recent book *In Defense of Natural Law*):

¹ Copied from <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9908/articles/george.html>.

Reason affirms that if any of us have a right to life, then all of us have it; if we have it at one stage of life, we have it at every stage of life; if we have it in the middle of life, we have it at both edges. There is no rational argument that anybody has been able to come up with... that shows that a healthy thirteen-year-old or forty-two-year-old has a right to life, but a comatose eighty-year-old or an unborn child has no right to life. There is no rational basis for distinguishing a class of human beings who have a right to life (and other fundamental human rights) and a class of human beings who do not. This is the moral core of the great “self-evident truth” upon which our nation was founded: the proposition that all of us are “created equal”.

My reaction to such nonsense (which this “Professor of Jurisprudence” at Princeton obviously deduced by relying on reason rather than data) is:

Yah, sure, and in Boston, in the winter, it commonly snows, but at least in Boston, the Red Sox are revered and not red herrings.

My point, Dear, is that this professor of nonsense is trying to sell a one-sided coin: rights without responsibility. Where does he think that “right to life” comes from? Nature doesn’t give anyone a right to life! If you’re lucky enough to be born and if you’re alone, then you get the option to try to stay alive – but you’ll need to fight for your life against whatever threatens you (tigers, rattlesnakes, starvation, viruses, whatever). If there are other humans and you’re lucky, you may be able to join a society in which others will help you survive – in exchange for your similarly helping them (i.e., your “right” to be able to struggle to survive in a society carries with it the responsibility to give others the equal “right”). But pray tell: what society could continue to exist that supplies everyone with the “right to life”?

People who claim that their society owes them a “right to life” (e.g., currently, the Saudis) are simultaneously claiming the right to possess slaves: someone else (e.g., the King of Saudi Arabia, with enormous revenue from oil) is to shoulder responsibilities to provide free-loaders with food, clothing, shelter, medical care, a comfortable home, a BMW, a summer vacation...! Thereby, I can of course agree with Prof. George who states, “There is no rational basis for distinguishing a class of human beings who have a right to life... and a class of human beings who do not” (that’s as obvious as Boston’s winter snow), but that doesn’t lead to his conclusion that the unborn therefore have a “right to life”. It leads to the obvious conclusion that no one has the “right to life” – only the “right” (as claimed by any claimant) to try to survive, or if one is lucky enough, the “right” of some protector to try to help the protected one to survive.

If a pregnant woman (who doesn't want the responsibility of a child) needs a response to an idiotic statement such as the above by Prof. George, maybe she'd like to say:

Okay, fine, you think that this embryo has a right to life, then if you'll pay for the operation, you can have the embryo and all the responsibilities that go with it. Although I'm not into slavery, myself, if you want to be its slave, then go for it. People (even Princeton professors) obviously have the right – or maybe better, the ability – to make fools of themselves.

Of course, if a majority in any society decides that everyone has a right to life (and thereby accepts the responsibility to provide free-loaders with free food, clothing, shelter, medical care...), then so be it! But I for one would choose not to be associated with such a communist state. In our society, in contrast, and Prof. George's claim notwithstanding, no such right has been agreed upon. He wrote:

There is no rational basis for distinguishing a class of human beings who have a right to life (and other fundamental human rights) and a class of human beings who do not. This is the moral core of the great "self-evident truth" upon which our nation was founded: the proposition that all of us are "created equal".

For "the Cyrus Hall McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University" to make such a dumb statement is mind boggling – and sad.

Dear: What Thomas Jefferson was advocating with his flowery statement in *The Declaration of Independence* (which of course is not "legally binding", because it's not part of our *Constitution*), namely, that "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...", is that a society was being formed (for the first time) in which people would have control over their own lives (the unalienable right to their own lives, rather than have their lives "owned" by some "nobleman"), in which all people would have equal liberty (to be successful, or to starve to death, being up to them), and in which people would have equal opportunity to pursue their trio of survival goals (and thereby pursue happiness). Jefferson wasn't announcing the formation of a communist state in which people are allegedly equal and in which their welfare would be looked after by the state. In short, as humans have had to relearn over and over again: rights aren't granted; they must be claimed!

Consequently, Prof. George's claim (in essence, that “the moral core of the great ‘self-evident truth’ upon which our nation was founded” prescribes that a human embryo has a “right to life” equal to its mother's) is a red herring, which he uses to distract the reader from noticing his failure to reach the goal that he sets himself for his essay:

I shall argue that the Christian moral view is rationally defensible. Indeed, my claim is that Christian moral teaching can be shown to be rationally superior to orthodox secular moral beliefs.

Instead, what Prof. George manages to show (by emphasizing rights while ignoring associated responsibilities) is not only that he's fixated on a one-sided coin but also that he's in favor of communism and slavery – at least the enslavement of pregnant women. And of course it's fine with me if anyone wants to advocate such concepts, but I happen to be opposed to both concepts and happen to have a low tolerance for ignorance – including his ignorant view that the universe is controlled by some magic man in the sky!

IGNORANT WORLDVIEWS YIELD IGNORANT OPINIONS

Anyway, Dear, maybe you now see why I encourage you to be on guard against people trying to sell you one-sided coins (i.e., advocating “rights” without mentioning associated “responsibilities”), but in typical grandfatherly fashion, I've yet to get to my main points. What I want to do is use the abortion issue to illustrate my expectation that, if the majority of us had similar worldviews and as a result, if there were widespread agreement on goals, then contentions about how best to achieve such goals would be expected to be much less cantankerous – because with an agreed-upon worldview and goals, we'd necessarily have similar values (measured with respect to agreed-upon goals). I'll turn to those points, now, first by looking more closely at causes of the current contentions about abortion and then by speculating how the contentions might be resolved more peacefully in the future – by reducing ignorance!

As I already mentioned, the “fault line” on the abortion issue in this country is generally between religious “fundamentalists” and “secular” humanists (with what Prof. George calls their “orthodox secular moral beliefs” – which is a weird and misleading string of adjectives). The same “fault line” exists for many other contentious issues, e.g., those dealing with contraceptives, sex education, family planning, “family values” (whatever that means!),

euthanasia, homosexuality, science education (especially re. evolution vs. “creationism”, recently relabeled as “intelligent design”), etc. That is, the roots of all such contentions are buried in differences in worldviews and therefore in goals and associated values.

Different Worldviews, Values & Opinions

In the worldview of the religionists, “supernatural beings” [cough, cough] rule the universe. Consistently, but without a shred of data to support their opinions, religionists convince themselves that they’re being watched by some giant Jabberwock in the sky and that their prime goal is to do HIS bidding – as dictated by the damnable clerics, who get their dogma from their perverted interpretations of musty old “science” books that they call “holy” but which more accurately should be described as “wholely holey”!

Thereby, religious people obtain their values, with the fundamental “value” being to “obey” (the clerics). Consequently, if the clerics tell them that “abortion (or euthanasia or homosexuality or the theory of evolution or inter-racial marriage or...) is “**an abomination before the Lord**”, then such are the firm convictions of the religionists – convictions held so firmly that in some cases they’re willing to kill people who think otherwise, (fake) clerical exhortations for “tolerance” notwithstanding.

In the worldview of Humanists, in contrast, the universe is entirely natural. In fact, for Humanists, even the word ‘supernatural’ is nonsensical: with everything natural, there’s nothing left to be “supernatural”. Initially, this concept leaves Humanists with no known goal; as Sartre said: “**Existence before essence.**” But as Humanists become more aware, they begin to define their goals (which of course have nothing to do with any supernatural entities), and with these goals are associated a set of values.

Now, as I might have written once or twice before, all humans seem to pursue as our prime objective a trio of survival goals: our own survival, the survival of our family (whatever we recognize the extent of our “family” to be), and the survival (or promotion) of our values (whatever we adopt as our set of “values”). As I’ve also written before, maybe it would be better to substitute the phrase “well being” (or “thrival”) for “survival, i.e., all humans seek the “thrival” of themselves, their families, and their values.

Consider, then, some contrasting examples:

- Most religious people (including all Mormons, Muslims, Christians, and Hindus) are (or have been) convinced that their primary concern is their “eternal survival” (or the “well being” of their “eternal souls”); all Humanists scoff at such a concept, because no data support it.
- Essentially all religious people recognize their “fellow believers” as members of their extended “families” (to the credit of some religions, they recognize all people to be “children of God”); all Humanists recognize all humans as members of their extended family (and some Humanists and Buddhists include all life forms as members of their extended family).
- All religious people accept the values dictated by their clerics; all Humanists (and most Buddhists and probably most Confucians) are logically forced to base essentially all of their values on the well being of themselves and their extended families.
- The fundamental value thereby adopted by all religious people is “obey” (the clerics), whereas the fundamental value adopted by all Humanists (and most Buddhists and Confucians) is to “evaluate” (all relevant and reliable data).

Thereby, one can start to see some of the causes of the contention in this country (and throughout the world) over, for example, the abortion issue.

Illustrations in the Abortion Issue

In the worldview of religionists, data are irrelevant and “**the Lord’s commandment**”, “**Go forth and multiply**”, is paramount. The clerics, in their criminal arrogance, tell their sheepish followers that “the eternal soul” of the unborn must be protected – and so the mindless followers picket abortion clinics (and some go on rampages, bombing the clinics and shooting their doctors). Meanwhile, Humanists basically say (with much less certainty than the clerics): “**The problem of unwanted children is very complicated. Is there any chance that we can ascertain some sensible solutions.**” But no “sensible solutions” can be found that are capable of spanning the chasm between such different worldview and associated goals.

As far as religionists are concerned, every unborn child has an “immortal soul” that must be protected – regardless of the cost to its mother. If “religious fundamentalists” (whether Mormons, Muslims, or Christians) don’t try to protect the life of the unborn, then their clerics threaten them with “eternal damnation”. Thereby, religious anti-abortionists are pursuing their prime goal of placating the giant Jabberwock in the sky, in turn in pursuit of their own greedy goal to get their “heavenly reward” in “eternal paradise”.

And notice, Dear, that religionists apparently don't worry about the illogic of their views (e.g., if greed governs your actions, then the giant Jabberwock won't reward you; if the unborn has an "immortal" soul", then no one need worry it...), illustrating what Bishop George Berkeley said, centuries ago: "Few [people] think, yet all will have opinions." Meanwhile, Humanists totally reject the clerics' attempts to rule ignorance with fear – but find it essentially impossible to construct a bridge across the chasm, because they find that no constructive discussions are possible with people whose ideas aren't supported by data.

And if you think I exaggerate, Dear, then after admitting that I frequently do, I'd ask you a question: how can one respond to an ignoramus who states "I know in my heart that God is opposed to abortion"? As C.W. Dalton wrote in *The Right Brain and Religion*:

Believers are interested in fulfilling emotional and spiritual needs, not intellectual needs... For many people God is primarily a warm feeling. How can one argue with a warm feeling?

Oh, I admit that one can argue with such people, but is there any chance that such arguments can be resolved?! Data recommend doubt.

Irreconcilable Differences

It certainly doesn't bode well for a future resolution of the abortion issue when the Vatican's 16 January 2003 "Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life" [approved by Pope John Paul II and signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now better known as Pope Benedict XVI)] describes certain "non-negotiable ethical principles" as follows [to which I've added some notes in brackets]:

Scientific progress has resulted in advances that are unsettling for the consciences of men and women [or at least, "unsettling" for clerics who cling to their ancient Egyptian and Persian views of the universe!] and call for solutions that respect ethical principles in a coherent and fundamental way [as if religious "ethical principles" were "coherent and fundamental", when they're based on data-less speculations about a magic man in the sky!]. Catholics, in this difficult situation, have the right and the duty to recall society to a deeper understanding of human life and to the responsibility of everyone in this regard... ["Deeper understanding" of the desires of a fictitious giant Jabberwock in the sky!] John Paul II, continuing the constant teaching of the Church [in spite of the findings that the Earth isn't a flat plate and revolves around the Sun!] has reiterated many times that those who are directly involved in lawmaking

bodies have a “grave and clear obligation to oppose” any law that attacks human life [dealing with abortion and euthanasia – for doncha know, laws dealing with capital punishment, wars, or polluting human life with religious balderdash are a totally different matter!]. For them and for every Catholic, it is impossible to promote such laws or to vote for them [for otherwise, the revenue stream supporting us Catholic clerics will diminish, and we certainly can’t tolerate that!].

But if you ignore my snide remarks, Dear, I hope you notice something about the above quotation that seems to be sufficiently important to be identified as a general rule: It’s usually unproductive to try to negotiate with someone who starts by proclaiming “non-negotiable ethical principles”!

Most Humanists Support Preventing Abortions *via* Contraception

Yet, in spite of the wisdom in the above “general rule”, one might think that a resolution might be possible – by skirting the abortion issue. Thus, I expect that most (maybe even “all”) Humanists would agree that abortion is highly undesirable: almost every abortion (save for a few medically extreme cases) represents a failure to prevent conception. It might therefore be expected that most people on both sides of the abortion issue would be well satisfied if essentially all abortions were eliminated *via* improvements in the science, technology, and associated education for contraception. Stated differently, it might be expected that most people would support major improvement to “preventive medicine”.

That most people (but not “religious fundamentalists” and politicians who pander to them) agree that better preventive medicine (in particular, more widespread use of contraception) is the best way to solve the abortion problem is described well in an article² by Anna Quindlen entitled “A Simple One-Word Answer”, which was published as an opinion article in THE LAST WORD column of the 21 October 2002 issue of *Newsweek*. It’s quoted below; I’ve added a few notes in brackets and italicized some statements to emphasize them.

A report on the abortion rate in America just released by the Alan Guttmacher Institute straddled the good-news/bad-news divide. In the good-news column, the [abortion] rate plummeted among teenagers, *falling by almost 40 percent*. But the bad news was that among the poorest women in the country, abortions were way up; although the rate has dropped overall, *for women below the poverty line it has increased by 25 percent*.

² Available online at http://www.agi-usa.org/media/pdf/news2002/1015_clip.pdf.

Many of those in the business of women's health said they were perplexed and concerned by that second result. And the researchers at the Alan Guttmacher Institute said it would take more work to explain the increase in abortions among the poor. But those working closely with actual patients said that one word goes a long way toward explaining both the good news and the bad.

Contraception. It's been the rallying cry of those who favor keeping abortion legal for years now. As the bitterest public-policy (and personal-privacy) debate of the 20th Century refused to resolve itself, those who believed in planned parenthood argued that easy access to birth control would make abortion less and less necessary. It seemed a simple argument behind which everyone could rally, but it never built consensus among warring parties, because some anti-abortion activists thought it diverted attention, *and because others are as opposed to an IUD as they are to a termination [of pregnancy]*.

But in the way they so often do, the people outside the eye of the storm quietly went about making sensible choices. Thus the rate of teenage pregnancy began dropping steadily throughout the 1990s. Another Guttmacher Institute study found something for everyone in the reasons why: three-quarters of the teenagers surveyed said they were using contraceptives, and a quarter said they were putting off sexual activity. While adults sometimes believed that they were spitting in the wind, the kids actually got the message: *don't rush into sex, but if you are sexually active, take care of yourself.*

Yet for poor women the use of contraception was simultaneously becoming more problematic. New welfare-reform regulations changed what was available through Medicaid. Those in low-paying jobs often found themselves uninsured or with health-insurance plans that didn't cover any or all contraceptive devices. A Planned Parenthood clinic in Denver reports running out of the year's loan money for abortions for women in need after only six months.

It's preposterous that a nation this prosperous would have business and government policies that result in emergency borrowing from friends for an abortion because regular shots of Depo-Provera were too dear to maintain. Every private health-care plan should be obliged to cover contraceptives (and shame on those that currently underwrite Viagra but not The Pill); every public program should make them available at discount rates or, when necessary, free...

These are good times for the development of new methods, from an implant that may work for as many as three years to microbicides that will prevent STDs as well as pregnancy. But it's a bust in terms of initiatives from Washington, *where abstinence-only plans have now received enthusiastic federal support* but the Title X program devoted to providing family planning to poor women isn't adequately funded. The Bush administration even wants an FDA panel on women's health policy to include a doctor who doesn't approve of prescribing contraceptives to adult women, but will if they really insist. He also suggests reading Scripture to treat PMS.

Preventive medicine has come to be accepted as the ruling principle of good health care, and birth control is no more, or less, than one form of preventive medicine. The Guttmacher study shows that teenagers increasingly understand this, which may bode well for the future. For their part, policymakers need only look at a country like the Netherlands, which has long had legal abortion. It has, however, one of the lowest abortion rates on earth, because widespread use of birth control is taken for granted.

This is one of those strange and seemingly relentless areas in this country in which the ghosts of Puritanism have a headlock on the spirit of progress. It's ridiculous to have to restate the simple fact that cheap, accessible, and reliable methods of contraception drive down the rate of abortion, yet in terms of public policy there has always seemed to be a disconnect on the issue, perhaps because there was the sub rosa notion that this was a carnal rather than a medical issue.

Surely there are still some who believe the sole purpose of sex is untrammelled procreation, but it would be a pitiful nation that would let those fringe zealots run things for the rest of us. The good news is that we do not have to figure out what needs to be done, but only to do it. Contraception. Enough said.

How these “fringe zealots” (as Ms. Quindlen describes them) managed to gain so much power (both in this “pitiful nation” and in the world) is a long and complicated story, which I’ll only outline and provide you with some references, so you can dig into details on your own (should you desire).

Catholic Clerics Are Trapped in a Conceptual Dead-End

A brief summary of what happened is the following. With the issues of abortion and contraception, the power structure of the Roman Catholic Church found itself trapped in a conceptual dead-end, and unable to retreat for fear of losing revenue from its followers, it chose to fight. It fought by manipulating political processes both in this country (by stimulating the formation of the “Christian Right” swing voters of the Republican Party *via* quite-likely unconstitutional means) and throughout the world (*via* subterfuge within the United Nations, e.g., within the World Health Organization). The result is the mess we now have, throughout the world and especially in our “pitiful nation”.

To outline what happened, I’ll start by sketching the Vatican’s “conceptual dead-end” in which they trapped themselves. In essence it’s the idiocy of “papal infallibility”: the crazy concept that the pope is always right – because, doncha know, he speaks for god. It’s the same claim as made by the first medicine man who said he spoke for the volcano god (or whatever). As Voltaire said:

* Go to other chapters *via*

The first priest was the first rouge who met the first fool.

In the case of the Catholic pope, the origin of the silly notion of “papal infallibility” can be traced to a preposterous claim in the New Testament at *Matthew 18*, 18, which allegedly gives Christian clerics the right to rule not only this world but also heaven (!) and which (as you can find on the internet) was almost certainly added by some clerical scribe much later than when *Matthew* was first written:

I tell you this: whatever you forbid on earth shall be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you allow on earth shall be allowed in heaven.

Although you can find books written on the subject of papal infallibility, you can read a quick summary of its twisted and tangled history at, e.g., http://www.geocities.com/trvalentine/orthodox/trv_infallibility.html. The relevance of all this to abortion, contraception, and similar is that various popes have made some blatantly ignorant statements about these subjects, and with its commitment to papal infallibility, the Vatican now finds itself trapped in the dead-end of defending papal ignorance.

To illustrate the idiocy of some of these papal pronouncements, I’ll quote extensively from an analysis by Paul N. Tobin³ dealing with why most Christian clerics prior to the 20th Century preached that contraception was “evil” and how Catholic clerics continue to preach this idiotic concept of “evil” – unless the “faithful followers” abide by the Church’s “approved method” of contraception, namely, “Natural Family Planning” (NFP).

[Up] to the beginning of the twentieth century all Christian churches, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, were anti-contraception. Since then, thanks to the development of liberal theology and modernism, the mainstream non-fundamentalist Protestant churches had accepted contraception. The Catholic Church, however [and also Mormon and Islamic clerics] remained obstinately anti-contraception. In the 20th Century, three papal encyclicals set the tone for the Church’s position on contraception: the *Casti Connubii* (1930) of Pope Pius XI (1876–1958), the *Humanae Vitae* (1968) of Pope Paul VI (1897–1978) and the *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) of Pope John Paul II (b.1920).

³ Quoted from his web page at <http://www.geocities.com/paulntobin/contraception.html>, although I’ve omitted his references. His home page, which I encourage you to visit, is at <http://www.geocities.com/paulntobin/index.html>.

In the *Casti Connubii*, Pope Pius XI ruled out any reason that would allow the use of contraception:

No reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything which is intrinsically against nature may become conformable with nature and morally good. [Dear: this is the essence of the idiotic idea of “natural law”.] Since, therefore, the conjugal act is designed primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purposely sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.

Pope Pius’ argument that contraception is “against nature” is ludicrous to the extreme. Isn’t it against nature to shave? Isn’t it against nature to have a bypass operation? Isn’t it against nature for the pope to refrain from sex?... Today more and more Catholics are citizens of the poorer third world countries. The papal ban on contraceptives can only mean more children than the poor parents can afford to raise. Apparently the church does not consider starving children and infant deaths “against nature.”

A slight modification went into the papal position in the next encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. The development of the birth control pills in the fifties had... given the world the most effective method of contraception ever devised. Rather than welcome the development, the Church condemned it. In the *Humanae Vitae* Pope Paul VI asserted that contraception was to be condemned as much as abortion. He gave three reasons for this condemnation. The first, in line with the earlier encyclical of Pius XI, was that contraception “is a sin against nature”. The second reason was that contraception “could open up a broad and easy path to conjugal infidelity”. The third reason was even more incoherent than the first two, he asserted that “Men who have become accustomed to using contraceptives could lose their respect for women”.

Ranke-Heinemann gave the following comment on this reasoning:

A church that understands human rights chiefly as men’s rights and human dignity as male dignity... should show some restraint when the topic is human dignity, and not impute their lack of respect for women to husbands...

It was also in this encyclical that the pope introduced the church approved method of birth control, the so-called “rhythm method” or, more recently, “natural family planning” (NFP for short). There are actually several methods grouped under this umbrella term, all of which involves periodic abstinence from sex.

The calendar method (or calendar rhythm) involves the abstinence from sex for about two continuous weeks each 28-day cycle of the woman in order to avoid her fertile period. The method is extremely unreliable as a method of birth control. Some women have menstrual cycles so irregular that the rhythm method cannot be used by them at all. Even in those who have regular cycles, the “failure-rate” for the method is about 40 percent.

Another form of the rhythm method is called the body temperature method. This method involves a woman charting her temperature every morning after waking up. The idea is that since the body temperature normally rises slightly (about 0.2 to 0.4 degrees Celsius) after ovulation, abstaining from intercourse from the day menstruation ceases until after three consecutive days of sustained elevated temperature would ensure prevention of conception. Anyone who understands this method will immediately see how useless it is. Firstly, the temperature rise is very small, most normal thermometers cannot register such a slight rise. Secondly, temperature rises could be caused by other reasons – such as the onset of a low grade fever or even due to the husband turning the electric blanket on! Thirdly, if for one reason or another the couple could not detect a temperature rise, they would have to abstain from any conjugal relations until the next cycle. Reported failure rates of the temperature method are around 30 percent.

Theoretically, the most effective form of the rhythm method is the Billings method. Also known as the ovulation method or the cervical mucus method, the idea behind this is that the color and consistency of the cervical mucus changes around the time of ovulation; mainly it becomes clearer and less tacky around ovulation. The couple is to abstain from sex from the day the cervical mucus changes into the wetter and slippery form until three days after it reverts to its original consistency. As I mentioned above, theoretical studies of volunteers who participated in the research program on the Billings method report a failure rate of only 3.1%. However couples not under the research program tends to use this method imperfectly and actual failure rate among users is the highest – with an astounding 86.4% pregnancy rate in one year reported among women who used this method! As the experts in sex research Masters, Johnson and Kolodny warned “[D]on’t rely on this method unless you are absolutely, positively committed to it.”

When the rhythm method as a whole is compared with other forms of contraception, it fares the worst. Given below is a comparative table adapted from Masters, Johnsons, and Kolodny’s book *Heterosexuality* (p. 263):

Method:	IUD	Pill	Condom	Diaphragm	Spermicides	NFP
Failure Rate	6.0%	7.3%	15.8%	22.0%	30.2%	31.4%

...The third encyclical, *Familiaris Consortio*, gives the same tiresome condemnation of birth control. Perhaps the most memorable message of this encyclical was the assertion by Pope John Paul II that the soul’s salvation and marital happiness is essentially based on the couple choosing the “right” method of birth control: the rhythm method. In the same encyclical the pope criticized the actions of some governments in imposing a limit to the number of children a couple can have as “a severe affront to human dignity”. But as Ranke-Heinemann reminds us:

He forgets to say that many Catholic spouses see in the pope’s style of limiting their freedom at this point an equally “severe affront to human dignity”. In addition they perceive it as hypocrisy when the church insists upon freedom against contraception, but outlaws freedom for it, because at

bottom the church doesn't really defend the freedom of a single couple. It merely strives to impose its own moral dictatorship without regard to the welfare of married people, a dictatorship based on pleasure-hating celibate contempt for marriage, and *a maniacal cult of virginity*. [Italics added]

The Church today is doing its utmost to prevent the spread of contraceptive knowledge in the underdeveloped countries. The result of this action can only mean suffering for the poor in the third world. With more children than they can afford to feed, doubtless starvation, disease, and infant deaths will remain a common occurrence in the third world. But then starvation, disease and infant deaths are not “against nature”.

Sorry to quote so much, Dear, but I don't know if anyone can appreciate the full depth of religious depravity without digging into details.

Digging Deeper Into Clerical Depravity

One of the details into which you may want to dig still deeper is beneath the phrase from Ranke-Heinemann that I italicized, describing Christianity (and therefore Mormonism) as “*a maniacal cult of virginity*”.⁴ If you do so dig, then some ideas and questions that you may want to address include the following:

- Against what goal is virginity to be measured as a “good”? Certainly virginity is “good” if one seeks to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, but is it a “good” relative to procreation? Is it a “good” relative to enjoying your body? And if virginity isn't a “good” re. procreation (as it obviously isn't!), then why would the alleged “perpetual virginity” of the alleged mother of the alleged Jesus be judged a “good”? Or did it all arise (as I'll suggest in **Yx**) from the clerics' claim of “authority” for their Jesus, by claiming that he fulfilled Old Testament (OT) prophecies – plus the mistranslation from the OT of the Hebrew word for “young girl” into the Greek word for ‘virgin’?!
- There is something else bizarre about the New Testament (NT) – a sexual deviance that might best be described as “perverted pornography”. The Greek word ‘pornography’ literally means “writing about prostitutes”. In contrast to the NT, much of the OT is little more than pornography (e.g., the story about Abraham prostituting his wife Sarah, the story about Sodom and Gomorrah, and many more such stories). In contrast, in the NT, it's as if the pendulum swung to the other extreme, “glorifying” chastity so much that it becomes “perverted pornography”!
- As a result of the “perverted pornography” of the NT, it seems that (as Ranke-Heinemann suggested) “*a maniacal cult of virginity*” developed, not only worshipping

⁴ At <http://theology1.tripod.com/readings/ranke-heinemann.htm> you can read Chapter 4 from her book *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven* (subtitled *Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church*, Penguin Books, New York, 1990, pp. 46–63).

the “virgin” Mary but with Catholic priests and nuns taking vows of “celibacy”, refraining from sex (at least when no one was looking or so long as the children were too young or too afraid to inform on the damnable pedophiliac priests).

And now, such “paragons of virtue”, the priests, claim to have the moral authority to dictate sexual “morality” for the world! I’m sorry, Dear, but I’m strongly motivated to respond: morality never has (and never will have) anything whatsoever to do with what’s between people’s legs; instead, it has absolutely everything to do with what’s between people’s ears.

That is, Dear, in all matters sexual (as well as all matters, period!), please use your brain as best you can – which of course includes evaluating all relevant, reliable data. In particular, think of the idiocy that the three most recent popes (before Benedict) promoted: not that practicing contraception is evil, but that it’s evil to practice contraception in any manner except the way they say!

Their “reasoning” is seen clearly in the *Humanae Vitae Encyclical* “The Regulation of Birth”, written by Pope Paul VI (25 July 1968) and available on the internet:

...an act of mutual love which impairs the capacity to transmit life which God the Creator, through specific laws, has built into it, frustrates His design which constitutes the norm of marriage, and contradicts the will of the Author of life. [The “author of life”? This ignorant pope knows what “the author of life” wants? You mean he communicates with organic goo when it’s zapped by ultraviolet radiation? Amazing!] Hence to use this divine gift [i.e., engage in sex] while depriving it, even if only partially, of its meaning and purpose [The purpose of human life is to have children? Even when there’s no standing room left on Earth?!], is equally repugnant to the nature of man and of woman, and is consequently in opposition to the plan of God and His holy will... Therefore... We [the Royal “we”] are obliged once more to declare that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children. Equally to be condemned... is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary. Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation – whether as an end or as a means. [And worst of all, you people have got to stop thinking for yourselves!]

Not only did this ignorant, arrogant pope claim to know that there’s a God, he knows “HIS holy will”... about how to have sex!

And let there be no doubt about it: God's not to be frustrated; HE wants more children – because, doncha know (based on the Bible), HE loves killing them – especially first-borne Egyptians and those living on the land that HIS “chosen people” had abandoned a few hundred years earlier! Apparently HE also wants more death by disease and natural disasters – so don't frustrate HIS plan! All doctors, relief workers, and rescuers are “**Abominations before the LORD.**”

Sorry, Dear, but my tolerance for such ignorance is essentially zero. It's true that the ends don't automatically justify the means (as I've written many times: the means are ends in themselves; therefore, one must evaluate which are the most important “ends”), but to claim that it's “good” to base contraception on counting or chemistry or thermometry and “evil” to base it on physical or biological barriers is bizarre!

Physical barriers are “**against nature**”? What about clothing, houses, and churches? Influencing biological processes is “**against nature**”? What about operations, medication, and immunization? If these idiot popes want to talk about “**sins against nature**”, how about the “sins” of planting fields, building dams and irrigation ditches, stopping floods, developing Tsunami warning systems... Somebody please provide some evidence not of “papal infallibility” but of “papal sanity”!

When it comes to reproduction, do these preposterous popes really want us to conform to nature? If the current pope would take such a drastic step as to look at some data, he'd find that nature's way is to produce as many offspring as possible – until there's standing room only. As Richard Dawkins wrote:

They express a preference for “natural” methods of population limitation, and a natural method is exactly what they are going to get. It is called starvation.

Think, Dear, of weeds, think of ants, think of fish, think of bunny rabbits! Their DNA molecules are amazing – but also amazingly dumb! The only way they “know” how to continue is to keep producing new copies. Thus, the “**natural way**” is for humans to keep reproducing until our numbers are restricted by starvation and disease – but if these ignorant popes don't mind too much, I vote that we restrict our numbers by using our minds. Mind over molecule!

As you well know, ignorance similar to the popes' is promoted by the leaders of the Mormon Church. An example is the following statement in a letter from the First Presidency to bishops and stake presidents, dated 14 April 1969 (as reported by Philip F. Low in an article in the May 1971 issue of *Ensign*):

We seriously regret that there should exist a sentiment or feeling among any members of the [Mormon] Church to curtail the birth of their children. *We have been commanded to multiply and replenish the earth* [italics added] that we may have joy and rejoicing in our posterity. Where husband and wife enjoy health and vigor and are free from impurities that would be entailed upon their posterity, it is contrary to the teachings of the Church artificially to curtail or prevent the birth of children...

And by the way, Dear, of course I'm not alone in reacting so "intolerantly" to such blatantly idiotic statements. For example, as I showed you in an earlier chapter, at the 1968 Dallas Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), approximately 2,000 scientists signed the following statement (developed in response to Pope Paul VI's "Humanae Vitae" encyclical):

More than half the world is hungry and the environment of the world is deteriorating rapidly because of over-population. Any action which impedes efforts to halt the world population perpetuates the misery in which millions now live and promotes death by starvation of millions this year and many more millions in the next few decades...

It has been stated by Roman Catholics that the Pope is not evil, but simply unenlightened, and we must agree. But, whatever the motives, the evil consequences of his encyclical are manifest...

The world must quickly come to realize that Pope Paul VI has sanctioned the deaths of countless numbers of human beings with his misguided and immoral encyclical. The fact that this incredible document was put forth in the name of a religious figure whose teachings embodies the highest respect for the value of human dignity and life should serve to make the situation even more repugnant to mankind.

Moreover, Dear, I hope you'll see (in the above quotations from religious leaders as well as the Christian "Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton") illustrations of two dangers that I cautioned you about in earlier chapters. One of these errors is carelessness with words and associated concepts; the other is "the dangers of deduction".

As for carelessness with words, who but a religious nut could define “good” policies as those that “conform with nature”, promote “the spiritual nature of man”, and recognize the “authority of God” (i.e., the supernatural)? That, Dear, is gobbledygook of the first order! “Good” (i.e., morality) can be measured only relative to some objective; to “conform with nature” isn’t a measure of morality (because obviously murder, starvation, deprivation, etc. “conform with nature”); the “nature” of humans is what we make of it; and there’s no such thing as “the supernatural”! How about if such idiocy is fed back to such nincompoops: according to their distinction between good and evil, then by not being natural, a supernatural God is evil!

The second major error that I hope you notice is what in an earlier chapter I called “the dangers of deduction”. Recall that deductions start from one or more premisses and that it’s impossible to generate new information from deduction; at best, one can deduce conclusions that are consistent with the premisses. In the cases illustrated above, church leaders and the “Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton” start from the (improvable, untestable, and therefore useless) premisses that their god exists and that they know his “will”. From such idiotic premisses, they then deduce a set of idiotic conclusions. And the real danger of such deductions occurs when those who are even dumber than these “leaders” follow such dictates – populating the poor world with even more children who will be brainwashed into believing that their leaders are brilliant.

But, Dear, I’m sorry to relay that, if you’ll dig deeper, you’ll find that the consequences of religious leaders ignorantly linking morality to what’s between people’s legs get much worse, not only with people led by fools who attempt to generate new information from faulty premisses but also with people trapped by dogma into defending such fools as glorious leaders. It’s the same as occurred with Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and the current “glorious leader” of North Vietnam, and no doubt it’s the dream of every dictator.

Further, that the leaders of the Catholic Church realize they’re trapped is evident even in the writings of its recent dictator, Pope John Paul II. To illustrate, I’ll quote from a 1999 article by Stephen D. Mumford entitled “Why the pope can’t change the Church’s position on birth control: implications for Americans.”⁵

⁵ Available at <http://www.population-security.org/STLouis99.html>.

In 1964, Pope Paul VI created the Papal Commission on Population and Birth Control. It was a two-part commission, and met from 1964 to 1966. One consisted of 64 lay persons, the other, of 15 clerics, including Pope John Paul II, then a Polish cardinal. Pope Paul gave the Commission only one mission – to determine how the Church could change its position on birth control without undermining papal authority. After two years of study, the Commission concluded that it was not possible to make this change without undermining papal authority, but that the Church should make the change anyway, because it was the right thing to do! The lay members voted 60 to 4 for change, and the clerics, 9 to 6 for change. We know this because one or more members released the details without permission to an Italian and a French newspaper. Pope Paul did not act immediately. A minority report was prepared, co-authored by the man who is now Pope John Paul II. In this report he stated:

If it should be declared that contraception is not evil in itself, then we should have to concede frankly that the Holy Spirit had been on the side of the Protestant churches in 1930 [when the encyclical *Casti Connubii* was promulgated], in 1951 [Pius XII's address to the midwives], and in 1958 [the address delivered before the Society of Hematologists in the year the pope died]. It should likewise have to be admitted that for a half century the Spirit failed to protect Pius XI, Pius XII, and a large part of the Catholic hierarchy from a very serious error.

This would mean that the leaders of the Church, acting with extreme imprudence, had condemned thousands of innocent human acts, forbidding, under pain of eternal damnation, a practice which would now be sanctioned. The fact can neither be denied nor ignored that these same acts would now be declared licit on the grounds of principles cited by the Protestants, which popes and bishops have either condemned or at least not approved.

In these two texts, the [current] pope [John Paul II] took the position that a change on the birth control issue would destroy the principle of papal infallibility and that infallibility was the fundamental principle of the Church upon which all else rests and, thus, must be protected at all costs. A change on matters of birth control would immediately raise questions about other possible errors popes have made in matters of divorce, homosexuality, confession, parochial schooling, etc., that are fundamental to Roman Catholicism. So we have these admissions in the pope's own words.

Another illustration (again from Mumford) is a 1980 letter to German bishops in which Pope John Paul II wrote:

I am convinced that the doctrine of [papal] infallibility is in a certain sense the key to the certainty with which the faith is confessed and proclaimed, as well as to the life and conduct of the faithful. For once this essential foundation is shaken or destroyed, the most basic truths of our faith likewise begin to break down.

Hitler could have written the same – in fact he did (in *Mein Kampf*):

For how shall we fill people with blind faith in the correctness of a doctrine, if we ourselves spread uncertainty and doubt by constant changes in its outward structure?... Here, too, we can learn by the example of the Catholic Church. Though its doctrinal edifice, and in part quite superfluously, comes into collision with exact science and research, it is nonetheless unwilling to sacrifice so much as one little syllable of its dogmas... it is only such dogmas which lend to the whole body the character of a faith.

Consequently, regardless of their personal opinions on abortion, contraception, homosexuality, or whatever, members of the Catholic power structure (trapped in the conceptual dead end of “papal infallibility”) must defend and continue to defend the dogma dictated by their popes – in turn for fear of losing power, followers, and associated revenues.

The resulting actions taken by the Catholic hierarchy have been absolutely astounding – and in a sane world, would be judged not only immoral but also illegal. Adolph Hitler saw it, even before the more recent idiotic statements by the popes dealing with birth control. Thus, Hitler wrote (here from Aiken’s collection):

I have followed [the Catholic] Church in giving our party program the character of unalterable finality, like the Creed. The Church has never allowed the Creed to be interfered with. It is fifteen hundred years since it was formulated, but every suggestion for its amendment, every logical criticism, or attack on it, has been rejected. The Church has realized that anything and everything can be built up on a document of that sort, no matter how contradictory or irreconcilable with it. The faithful will swallow it whole, so long as logical reasoning is never allowed to be brought to bear on it.

If you desire details about how the Catholic hierarchy (led by the pope and the Vatican) manipulated politics both in this country and in the world to protect their dogma, Dear, then I’d encourage you to start by reading the well-documented on-line book⁶ by Stephen D. Mumford entitled *THE LIFE AND DEATH OF NSSM 200 – How the Destruction of Political Will Doomed a U.S. Population Policy*. The rather strange (and easily forgotten!) title of this book refers to the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM – Number) 200, a study that on 24 April 1974 Henry Kissinger (on behalf of President Nixon) directed be performed to determine “Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests”.

⁶ Available at <http://www.population-security.org/index.html>.

From copies of original documents assembled in Mumford’s book, you can see details of how the Catholic hierarchy not only created what in this country is called “the Christian Right” (which now has become the controlling “swing vote” in both local and national elections, and has virtually a stranglehold on the Republican Party) but also managed to gain control of what should be worldwide population control policies promoted by the UN’s World Health Organization (WHO). As Dr. Milton P. Siegel (Assistant Director of WHO for its first 24 years) stated:⁷

I think one can provide many illustrative examples of the way in which politics has interfered with the progress of health. And the influence of religion never did show itself [in WHO planning] until the Vatican began to use its influence through the church organizational structure, *which, incidentally, probably is one of the best organizational structures the world’s ever seen.* [Italics added] ... [One] way or another, sometimes surreptitiously, the Catholic Church used its influence to defeat, if you will, any movement toward family planning or birth control.

Of course it’s not just the Catholic power mongers who promote such ignorance. Similar is promoted by the leaders of various Christian “fundamentalist” sects (including Mormons and various “evangelicals”) as well as various Muslim sects. As a result, this year alone, throughout the world, millions of young people just learning about their sexuality won’t be able to obtain contraceptives, who knows how many young girls will die from back-alley abortions, millions of women will give birth to unwanted babies for whom they can’t provide, and millions of children will die of starvations – courtesy applications of a worldview developed by savages and promoted by fools.

Reducing Strife by Eliminating Religious Ignorance

Thereby, I think that neither the common call for “tolerance” nor Judge Hand’s “moderation” is the key to finding Heraclitus’ melodious “attunement of opposite tensions, like that between a bow and the lyre”. Instead, I think that humanity must seek:

- Widespread adoption of the common worldview that this universe is entirely natural and that it should be possible to understand it by applying the scientific method – because Humanists will never accept the religionists’ silly ideas about “the supernatural” (unless some supporting data become available),

⁷ A transcript of the full interview is available at <http://www.population-security.org/29-APP3.html>.

- Widespread adoption of the prime goal to expand scientific knowledge (in depth and especially in breadth) to help humans intelligently solve their many problems and thereby help creative intelligence to evolve – because Humanists will never accept as their prime goal serving some fictitious god,
- Widespread recognition that the prime impediment to reaching our prime goal (to help intelligence evolve) is ignorance (maybe we could adopt the slogan: “**We have met the enemy; it’s ignorance!**”),
- Widespread adoption of a consistent set of values (e.g., from Socrates’ idea: “**There is only one good, willingness to learn, and one evil, refusal**”), and
- Widespread adoption of the will and perseverance to accomplish the agreed-upon prime goal to try to help intelligence evolve.

Then would strife disappear? Then would social justice prevail? Then would “peace and plenty” prevail? Well, Dear, as I already said, I don’t think so – but the strife should become more civilized.

Thus, even if there were widespread agreement on the prime goal of helping intelligence evolve, it doesn’t follow that there would be comparable widespread agreement about how to reach that goal, i.e., opinions would still differ. As examples, to help intelligence evolve:

- Your experiences might lead you to the conclusion that “We the people” should provide more support to the arts,
- Your dad’s experiences might lead him to the conclusion that more support is needed for science, whereas
- My experiences convince me that more support is needed to purge humanity of all the ludicrous ideas about the existence of any gods.

Consequently, unless all people were identical (which would be impossible to achieve – and even if it could be, it would be highly undesirable!), then differences in opinions about how to reach even an agreed-upon prime goal are essentially guaranteed. Nonetheless, arguments derived from such differences in opinions about how to reach an agreed-upon goal would be expected to be very much less cantankerous than arguments derived from different opinions about the prime goal – because although differences in opinions would be derived from different experiences (different interpretations of different data sets), these differences could be examined objectively, and hypothesis derived from them could be tested.

As an illustration, consider again the question of whether abortions should be permitted – but suppose that the vast majority of humans agreed that humanity’s prime goal was to try to solve our problems more intelligently. Then, the small minority who still objected to abortion on the grounds that they knew what God wanted (to protect the immortal souls of the unborn, to “go forth and multiply”, to provide bodies for “heavenly souls”, etc.) could be given psychiatric help in attempt to teach them not to “believe” propositions that aren’t supported by reliable evidence.

The rest of us, however, would still have problems with abortions. To see what I mean, consider the following.

- Substantial data support the contention that one of humanity’s most serious problems (if not the most serious problem) is that there are too many people in this world: it’s estimated that the total population of humans will exceed 10 billion during the 21st Century; in contrast, although it’s difficult to estimate the population that the Earth could sustain at the rate at which Americans consume resources, surely it’s not larger than 1 billion, which therefore should be a first-estimate of the desired goal for the human population at the end of this century.
- Further, surely an absolutely essential goal for humanity is to do our best to make sure that every child is wanted. Consequently, if any woman on Earth doesn’t want a child, then certainly I would be willing to pay for whatever reasonable costs are necessary to satisfy those desires.

It doesn’t necessarily follow, however, that concern about abortions would disappear. If the population bomb has been defused, if some responsible couple desires the child, and if the birth mother is willing to carry her fetus to term, then abortion would be undesirable.

More significantly, there is need to address the question: why is any woman carrying an unwanted child? Surely this question leads to an obvious need (which I would be willing to help fund) for drastically improved contraception techniques and associated education. Although I expect that my opinion would be contentious, I would go so far as to advocate that methods be developed to reversibly sterilize all young people before they reach puberty, an operation that they could have reversed after they demonstrate abilities to evaluate data and to reject speculations that are unsupported by data (such as the existence of any magic man in the sky).

And let me add my opinion that the current sexual-health policies both for this country and for the world promoted by the Bush-II Administration (developed to placate the “Religious Wrong” in this country) should be treated as criminally irresponsible: the bums don’t belong in the White House; they belong in jail.

Now, Dear, I trust you realize that social strife caused by religious ignorance extends far beyond the contention issue of abortion, which I emphasized only to focus my writing. To view more broadly some of the problems caused by religious ignorance, I recommend you read the recent article⁸ by Judy Stone, MD, where you can see many other medical issues in which particularly Catholic hospitals in the US force the opinions of ignorant Catholic bishops on the public – while taking the public’s money! She writes:

If religious organizations want to impose their beliefs on others who do not share them, should they be receiving public monies – our monies – to deny care that we need and deserve? ...less than 3% of Catholic hospital funding is received from the Catholic Church... Should their “conscience” trump yours? Who should decide what care is right for you?

Further, as I’ll show you in subsequent X-chapters, strife from religious ignorance also extends far beyond health-care issues, including damaging children’s education, restricting women’s rights, callous treatment of the environment, curtailing free expression, interfering in scientific research, and promoting ignorance, poverty, terrorism, and wars.

But returning to the point that I was trying to make, maybe you see that, even if the vast majority of people adopted the prime goal of trying to solve our problems more intelligently, it doesn’t necessarily follow that it would be easy to find “*an attunement of opposite tensions.*” There would still be differences in opinions – but at least all such opinions could be referenced to the same prime goal.

For example, although you might be prepared to argue with me (I’m used to that!), yet if your goal is to expand knowledge to help solve human problems more intelligently, then I hold the opinion that probably the best thing for you to do, now, is get some exercise... ☺

⁸ Available at <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/2012/04/02/molecules-to-medicine-when-religion-collides-with-medical-care-who-decides-what-is-right-for-you/>.