



THOUGHTS

**ESSAYS ON LIFE, SOCIETY,
ETHICS, & PHILOSOPHY**

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To Chanelle

Love always transcends reason

Preface

Thank you for downloading this ebook.

What you will find contained in these pages are select essays from the past three years procured from the archives of CHESadaphal.com. Hence, *Thoughts* is an assortment of philosophical treatises and mental notes in which I explore some of the seemingly endless contradictions of the modern world, of social and political institutions, and of human nature.

In modernity, many tend to accept the artificial constraints placed on what is true and what is possible. My intent in this book is to vigorously challenge and scrutinize common thought so that the contours of possibility are expanded and that mature, vetted beliefs may triumph. My hope is that readers will emerge from *Thoughts* invigorated by a new intellectual imagination and eager to cultivate novel ways of thinking. Many of the essays in this book draw upon then-recent events to illustrate alternative methods of thinking, and so the underlying principles remain readily applicable in the present and beyond.

Happy reading!

Dr. Charles Haddon Elijah Sadaphal
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THE FALLACY OF ANARCHY

Order is, in fact, a good thing. One would only need to consider the destructive, consumptive, and unpredictable nature of chaos to arrive at the same conclusion. However, in the political arena, order taken to an extreme, at the expense of the freedom of the people, all of whom are endowed with certain inalienable rights as a function of natural law, is a bad thing. Any form of an overreaching central authority is malevolent, but that authority is not evil *in and of itself*. Accordingly, the government is an institution molded in the image of its creators, or human beings, and it is those same human beings who are inherently predisposed toward evil, radically corrupt, and marred in selfishness. Government, then, is not fundamentally bad, but is fashioned into an instrument of evil *by the sinful citizens that comprise them*. Therefore, in the long run, little good could ever result by empowering groups of totally depraved evildoers so that they may yield their power against others. However, on the other extreme, why would one ever assume that leaving people to their own nefarious devices would yield a better collective result than *with* some form of order? The fallacy of anarchy is that selfishness acting alone will not prove more beneficial than selfishness acting together. This is why anarcho-capitalism, or any of its derivations, will inevitably fail. It is a philosophy that is only attractive in the fantasies of the disgruntled, or plausible in the ideology of civil intellectuals.

Governments do not self-assemble, nor do they enact judgment or coerce without distinct human hands behind their diabolical machinery. And unfortunately, the summative destructive power of human-made command far exceeds that of the individuals alone. The corrupt will of humankind permeates all facets of society and often finds its most treacherous outlets of expression under the banner of “committees,” “organizations,” “bureaus,” and “agencies.”

If the corrupt form a spontaneous order (meaning in the absence of or with a strict limitation of government power [e.g., anarchy, libertarianism, or anarcho-capitalism]), then what more favorable benefit exists for society at large? Certainly, select *individuals* will reap the benefits of limited oversight, but society is not intended to be disconnected individuals working against each other—it is a collective whole that seeks to live in peace and harmony. What is the free market but conceited people engaging in market transactions? What is voluntary cooperation but self-interested parties seeking to secure the most favorable outcome *for themselves*? What is the nonaggression principle (NAP) but a means of simply ensuring the permanence of *the self* and its property from society at large? What then is the absence of government but simply the transfer of unrestrained desire and carnal libidinal impulses to do evil from behind the anonymity of bureaucracy to the confines of an individual soul, now less impeded by a formal central power? Would not a spontaneous order of individuals, each driven by self-interest, quickly establish an equilibrium where the “freedom” of those most eager to engage in predatory aggression dominates over those with more admirable intentions? In the struggle between private interest and conscience, the former overwhelmingly triumphs, and in that triumph, morality is thrown aside as a burdensome and costly extravagance.

Consider, for example, the subprime mortgage crisis, which did hurt banks (before the bailout) but hurt many homeowners even more. This all happened *with* regulation and a big government influence. Imagine what would have happened *without* any restraints on the banks at all.

It is foolish to think that any human being can prescribe the correct formula for a utopia on earth, and it is even more dangerous *to attempt* to create such a paradise. Cognizant of this

fact, would an ideal anarchistic society not attribute many of life's imbalances to the nebulous "free market" and simply substitute the dangers of bureaucratic authoritarian intervention with community apathy?

Natural law, liberty, and freedom are necessary and fundamental characteristics of a healthy human existence, and the pillars of a successful society. Yet to assume that said liberty *in and of itself* would ameliorate the malevolence of an overbearing state is also wrong. Relatively, it simply creates a scenario that is ideologically more desirable but practically venomous.

As Reinhold Niebuhr said in *Love and Justice*, "For absolute liberty always turns out in the end to be the liberty of the strong to take advantage of the weak. Liberty can never stand alone." To suggest otherwise would be to simply switch the attributed root cause of failure—from the state picking winners and losers to the "objective" and "unbiased" market "sorting things out"—while conveniently dismissing any and all individuals of responsibility.

One recognizes that humankind being what it is—thieves, liars, con artists, rapists, and murderers—will invariably *not* act in adherence to the rule of law. Hence, at a bare minimum, the law and central authority *must exist* to deter and punish evil.

Classically, the state has served one of three unique functions: maintaining law and order, being the final judge in decision making, and being the only entity with the legal rights to impose taxes. Hence, the state has a monopoly in these arenas, and from an economic standpoint, all monopolies are to the detriment of the consumer. While the law bars competitors, the quality of products goes down while prices invariably go up. The taxpayers pay an enormously high price for abysmal service from the U.S. government.

In the end, if we were to look at all forms of government on a sliding scale with anarchy on one end and complete control by the state on the other, I think the *least harmful* scenario would rest somewhere in between anarchy and the scale's midpoint. I was very careful not to say *ideal* because the first step toward totalitarianism is to believe that your prescription for the construction of a society is *the* ideal. Instead, one must make such a decision cognizant of the fact that each and every choice has its inherent downfalls. As such, the choice is really between which systems are less evil and least likely for abuse—there can be no "best" or "better" because all systems must rely on the corrupt men and women who work for them. There can be no absolute solution because it is impossible to rid man of his pride, and it is equally irresponsible to frighten people with the perils of "Big Government" without also considering the destructive capability of unrestrained individuals.

In fact, anarchism would only work in a fictional society where there was no scarcity at all. With unlimited resources, there would be no need for competition, and no need for social cooperation or conflict. Once any resource becomes scarce, conflict will invariably arise, shifting the equilibrium to favor those who are stronger or, more likely, those who aggress against their neighbor.

As Niebuhr said in *Radical Religion* (1937), "Anarchism is a dangerous doctrine. Its conceptions of human nature are purely romantic. It imagines that if it can only destroy the present instruments of power and greed, humanity will naturally and inevitably express the innate goodness of human nature, thus securing the blessings of both liberty and voluntary cooperation. Pure anarchist doctrine is dangerous because it confuses the political realities and prompts men to chase phantoms and illusions . . . It does not know that the same power that is the source of injustice in a society is also a *sine qua non* of its public order and peace . . . Anarchism is, in short, a disease. It is the psychosis of infantile idealists who do not know what

kind of a world it is in which we are living, what human nature is really like, and what the necessities of government are.”

Martin Luther erred when he declared his greater fear of anarchy than of tyranny—I think he should have feared both equally. To fully invest or to place unquestioned faith in either extreme is to walk in the path of fool who chooses to ignore reality and dedicate himself to a fantasy. Faith only yields true dividends when placed in the divine and not the corrupt.

In developing a political philosophy, the first step is to recognize that whatever is proposed *will fail*; it just depends on *how much*. After all, the government is made to serve people, and it’s only a matter of time before that formula is altered to serve the people in the government.

Pride certainly is a powerful force.

THE CASE AGAINST WAR

While reading news online recently, I came across an [article](#) that detailed a very troubling statistic: in war, approximately 90% of all deaths are civilian casualties. In other words, for every ten people that die because of war, nine are innocent victims. The case against war is very simple: it kills the innocent.

As an aside, can you guess which country is the biggest contributor to civilian deaths because of war? The United States. In fact, from the end of World War II to 2001, there have been 248 armed conflicts across the globe. Of those, the United States started 201 of them. This helps explain why the United States is responsible for over 40% of the world's total military spending, and in 2011, we spent more on defense than the next 13 nations combined.

War will never be a good thing, and there will always be unintended consequences, fallout, and blowback. Yet in a very small way, war is a necessary evil.

A brief case *for* war: In a perfect world, war would be unnecessary, but we live in an imperfect world, where war should be used as a last resort, but *not* to be regarded as totally abhorrent. War can be justified in certain senses and, in fact, is most effective when there is a specific moral reasoning behind the use of force. If war were dismissed as an abomination (pacifism), this would simply create an unstable equilibrium where the aggressors wait their turn to crush and gobble up all those nations who thought their “moral high ground” would buy themselves favor with nations who have no morals. Even the most highly moral of us must face the reality of human nature—weakness invites aggression, and only the most disciplined of us can resist the temptation of aggressing upon those who are unable to fight back.

Moreover, one must also consider the even greater threat to the world at large if a vile regime or an immoral tyranny is allowed to march across the face of the earth and infect the world with its vile poison. Let us all not forget that Hitler was able to consume [almost all of Europe](#) by 1942 simply because other nations refused to recognize the writing on the wall. Accordingly, to assume that diplomacy can be the most effective resolve for all conflicts simply ignores humankind's predilection to sin and thirst for power. To desire peace is admirable, but to desire peace absolutely is foolish.

As Hitler demonstrated in early World War II, on the heels of conflict, doing nothing will only add weight to the inertia of what already is.

The case *against* war: War is normally waged by those who stand to lose little from the conflict, and those who do stand to lose the greatest often play no role in waging war in the first place. As the numbers from the first paragraph indicate, armed conflict inevitably and overwhelmingly destroys innocent civilian life.

The problem with contemporary American exceptionalism is that it assumes *our* model for the rest (war with an ideological end) is what's best for the world, even if they prefer what they've been doing. The whole idea of harmony entails finding a *natural* equilibrium of interests, not the superimposition of them. Additionally, although Americans tend to pride themselves on being the prime example of democracy, our version of democracy has become so riddled with hypocrisy, violations of constitutional principles, and contradictions that what we package and export as democracy is valid in name only. It's impossible to export genuine ideology when the parties responsible for the ideology's corruption are its manufacturers.

When a nation decides to use force for immoral or fallacious reasons, then coercion turns into a venomous disease that erodes the aggressor down to the core and robs the exerciser of all

validity. Even more, when such a force is used against innocent people, they may be forced to follow in a physical sense, but such methods create a seed of discontent in the will of the afflicted, whose long-term destructive potential is far greater than any short-term gains. Loyalty, acceptance of ideology, cohesion, and a community can never be achieved by force—what *can* be achieved is to turn the target so far away from your viewpoint that the efforts at “victory” become the exact same means that plant the seeds of defeat. When rules and regulations are imposed, the lack of trust makes any attempt at legal reconciliation futile. Force cannot bring together better than real life.

When engaged in war, either faction will invariably end up violating moral standards, which nullifies any “just” reasoning they may have had in the first place. War itself is a state separated from normalcy, where soldiers are ordered to abandon their conscience and eliminate the enemy. (On the battlefield, shooting someone in the head may be easy, but certainly walking up to a stranger in the supermarket parking lot and pulling the trigger is a more challenging task.) To purposely kill another human being is psychologically tormenting, but to eliminate a decrepit scoundrel is a completely different story. The mechanization of warfare has heightened and accelerated this dynamic by removing the operators of “drones” or other such devices from the arena of combat and placing them thousands of miles away, separated both physically and mentally. After all, pulling a trigger and watching someone die is vastly different from pushing a button on a keypad. Target dehumanization relinquishes the aggressor of his conscience and any moral restraint that may have kept his actions along more just lines of behavior.

The “War on Terror” is a fitting example. The catastrophic events of 9/11 were horrendous. However, by now, have we not, as a nation, become the exact perpetrators of immorality and injustice that we, not long ago, so vigorously denounced? On 9/11, just under [3,000 people died](#) (by no means a small number) on American soil, yet since then, in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the war has resulted in approximately [162,000 civilian](#) deaths of people indigenous to those countries. This figure does not include the more than 6,500 American forces that have died since 2001 or account for the \$3.1 trillion in military and defense spending, a sum that will be paid for by taxpayers for years to come. At what point did we lose our moral right at retributive justice, and when will we realize that we have now become the monster we have been fighting to exterminate?

Furthermore, force, in and of itself, spawns anger, hatred, and therefore a right to retribution and violence *within the targets of force*, prompting them to aggression and destruction that would *not* have existed had war not been waged in the first place.

A practical problem in our current era is that even when using nonviolent means, this does, in fact, equate to covert violence (e.g., economic sanctions leading to monetary collapse and subsequent poverty), which ultimately does not give its user a higher moral standing than the one who used force overtly. Realistically, putting a gun to someone’s head and saying, “Give me your bread!” and then pulling the trigger is the same as preventing that person from buying any bread, leading to starvation and ultimately death—the latter is simply an act of “civil” diplomacy.

To live in harmony does not mean to live without conflict, for in any heterogeneous society, harmony simply equates to an equilibrium where conflict remains covert in a state of cease-fire. At some point or another, covert intentions will inevitably lead to overt actions. War is simply a means to restore the said cease-fire, with a bias for those lucky enough to end up on the winning team. That bias simply reshuffles the deck to set up the conditions for the next conflict.

In choosing war, we must always do so very carefully because, in an attempt to fend off the “terrorists,” “revolutionaries,” or “barbarians,” we must first recognize our own self-righteousness and the pervasive self-interest that infects all aspects of life and finds its most diabolical expression in the atrocities of state-sanctioned armed conflict. Terrorism may be evil, but so are the steps taken to rid the world of it.

INCARCERATION vs. RESTITUTION

What wins the battle of incarceration vs. restitution?

Incarceration refers to being in jail; restitution means restoring an injured party to the preinjured condition.

Incarceration locks an offender away in a remote guarded prison. In general, restitution allows the offender to continue operating in society.

Incarceration *indirectly* benefits the wronged by removing the bad apples *from society*, thus preventing them from enacting any further damage. Restitution *directly* benefits the wronged through restoration, reimbursement, and remuneration—the exception, of course, would be cases that involved the loss of life.

Many people find comfort that our current legal system can “deal with” those individuals who err and deviate from the legal framework that guides societal operation. But is that system working? Is the American criminal justice system’s philosophy of prosecuting and then incarcerating criminals (1) making our society safer by decreasing crime and (2) actually reforming the criminals themselves, measured by recidivism? The answer to both questions is a resounding no.

According to the [Sentencing Project](#), the number of individuals incarcerated has increased by more than 500% since the 1970s. This phenomenon has occurred while the U.S. population has increased by less than 50% over the same time period. From 1920 to 1970, the U.S. population roughly doubled, and the U.S. prison population increased in line with the population rise. Since the 1980s, we have seen a dramatic and swift increase both in the number and rate of persons being incarcerated. As it stands today, more than 2.3 million people are in prison, making the United States the world’s most jail-loving country, with more than 1 in every 100 adults locked up behind bars (the Chinese, for comparison, have more than a billion people in its country, but less than 2 million in its prisons). In fact, in America, 1 in every 31 adults is either incarcerated, on parole, or on probation.

The United States has 5% of the world’s population but has 25% of its prisoners, and this perverse system costs the taxpayers more than \$60 billion annually, or approximately \$30K per inmate per year to keep them behind bars.

Furthermore, the relationship between incarceration and crime is complex, but by no means is the latter inversely related to the former. There is no direct link, and history has demonstrated that crime has both increased and decreased when incarceration rates have steadily increased. In the 1980s, for example, rates of incarceration increased by 65% while crime rates increased by 17%. Additionally, there has been a gradual decline in the crime rates nationwide since the mid-1990s despite astronomical increases in the prison population.

In fact, in one study of specific American communities, only about 25% of the decline in violent crime under analysis could be attributed to increased incarceration. Hence, 75% of the crime drop was attributable to factors other than incarceration.¹

One reason to explain this phenomenon is the “replacement effect.” The surge in incarceration has largely been due to drug-related offenses, and once one person is locked away, they can be easily replaced by another susceptible individual.

¹ Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman, eds., *The Crime Drop in America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 97-129.

The Pew Center has also released a state-by-state study on recidivism detailed [here](#). In the results of this examination, “45.4 percent of people released from prison in 1999 and 43.3 percent of those sent home in 2004 were reincarcerated within three years, either for committing a new crime or for violating conditions governing their release ... recidivism rates between 1994 and 2007 have consistently remained around 40 percent.”

If four out of every ten prisoners will return to prison within three years of release, the conclusion to be drawn is troublesome: our correctional system does not rehabilitate prisoners, and their chances of heading back into a life of crime is slightly better than flipping a coin. *Even if* the system had been painstakingly engineered and tinkered to rehabilitate its inhabitants, the system is now broken.

Let us also not forget that once someone has been incarcerated for whatever reason, they will have a permanent stain on their record that will invariably follow them wherever they go. So even if they have in fact been rehabilitated, the society to which they will return to will place little to no value on them, making reintegration harder. The hard-hearted reader may then say, “Well, then they shouldn’t have gotten into trouble in the first place. Tough luck!” There is some truth to that, but the whole idea of being punished and paying a penalty is that it should be time-specific, explicitly quantifiable, and proportional to the offense—not a persistent, ceaseless, and limitless judgment that torments you even after penance has been made. George Bernard Shaw once said, “Imprisonment is as irrevocable as death.”

The causes of crime are multifactorial and beyond the scope of this essay, but we should all consider that the prison system, especially prison privatization, is a business, and with any business, the goal is to make a profit. Sadly, profit in this case entails feeding more and more inmates into the system. There is no reliable data on the exact costs to taxpayers for private prisons, but consider all the different sectors building and then running a prison encompasses—construction, subcontractors, in-house personnel, food services, electronic security, housekeeping, linens, medical doctors, and counselors, just to name a few. Now also consider what would happen if private prisons had a lobbying interest where politicians would allocate public money to subsidize their private institutions.

In some despicable cases, states have even gone as far as to sign contracts with privately run prisons that *guarantee* the states will keep a certain number of prison beds filled with alleged “convicts.” This obligation has been deemed a “prison-bed occupancy guarantee” and is further detailed [here](#). So even if a municipality is improving and crime is decreasing, the state will have a financial incentive to put more people in jail in order to fulfill contract obligations. If the state fails to meet its quota, they will have to pay a penalty.

With profit as a motivating force in the penal system, law enforcement and lawyers will be incentivized to find, charge, arrest, and convict people of more serious crimes in order to fill vacancies. It also persuades the courts to direct convicts to private jails instead of public ones, and encourages the powers that be to send nonviolent people who commit less serious crimes to jail (e.g., income tax evasion) in lieu of alternatives like probation or community service. I guess that might explain why the population of private prisons has increased by *more than 1600%* in the past 20 years, even though they have been [shown](#) to be more expensive and less cost-effective than public jails.

Taking all of this in, I think the most objectionable trait of the American criminal justice system is its focus on punishment, a penalty that is exclusively reserved for and enacted by the local, state, and federal authorities. Consider this scenario: Mr. Robber steals money from Mr. Jones. Jones calls the police, who then track Robber down and arrest him. Robber is convicted of

theft and is sentenced to prison. Jones, being a respectable taxpayer, foots the bill to incarcerate Robber (along with every other taxpayer) since it is public money that funds jails (and if Robber goes to a private jail, the same conditions apply since the private institutions receive state subsidies). Oh, and by the way, while Robber is in jail providing free (or critically undervalued) labor, Jones is still working and paying taxes to support Robber in jail. Jones never gets his money back, and Robber in no way shape or form gets rehabilitated as he toils at making license plates in the prison yard.

There is no justice in this paradigm: Jones never regains what was lost, the government gains, and the data tells us that Robber has no decent chance of turning toward a path of righteousness.

So if incarceration doesn't work, then what would? Restitution.

Restitution repairs the damage that the crime has inflicted. It does not indirectly rely on a vague and indistinct entity to enact "justice," nor does it increase the total amount of harm suffered by all involved. Restitution sets as its goal to directly repair and reimburse the victim, at the offender's direct expense. Unlike punishment that can set an arbitrary set of limits of what and how long a penalty is enacted, with sentencing discretion given to one person, restitution is an exact formula and calls for an equal penalty that is directly related to the offense. Restitution also forces the offender to acknowledge that a wrong has been committed and mandates that the one who erred is the exact and only individual to initiate restorative action, quenching the thirst for vindication on the part of the victim. Note also that restitution would prevent the offender from carrying any type of stigma in society at large, less the immediate friends and family of those parties involved. It allows for real and genuine repentance, rehabilitation, and reintegration without being the subject of perpetual punishment.

Restitution has its roots in the Bible (the books of Exodus and Leviticus) and provides specific remedies for specific offenses. What differentiates the biblical model from other and more ancient models of legal frameworks (e.g., Hammurabi's code) is its emphasis on egalitarianism. Hence, if you commit X, then the penalty is Y. The penalties transcend all human boundaries, no matter if you are a king, shepherd, slave, or free person.² For example, if you were to steal an animal, the thief must pay back the animal taken plus a penalty (sometimes well and far beyond what was taken). In the case of money, the general rule is to return the stolen sum plus 20%. Mosaic law protected victims from all forms of theft, fraud, and negligence and mandated that restitution be done quickly (the same day) and made directly to the offended party; no court or judge was involved. All the people were required to know what not to do, and when an accusation had been made, confirmatory testimonies of at least two witnesses were required in order to safeguard against giving false testimony and to dilute the influence of those who may have taken bribes (the book of Deuteronomy). Furthermore, before an Israelite could approach God for forgiveness, they had to restore their neighbor first; *then* it was allowable to make peace with God.

In the case of a death, capital punishment was allowed, but only in circumstances when someone was *murdered*—a premeditated act of malice—as opposed to someone being *killed*—an unintentional, spur-of-the-moment *accident*. The words for *kill* and *murder* are separate and distinct in Hebrew (the language the first part of the Bible was written), and the proper

² Notably, even though the word "slave" has been selected to be the appropriate English translation from the original Hebrew, the institution in the Israelite tradition was vastly different compared to contemporary perceptions of slavery. For instance, striking a "slave" meant their immediate release from bondage.

translation of one of the more famous instructions in the Ten Commandments is “Thou shall not *murder.*”

In cases of murder, it became the responsibility of the deceased’s family to enact punishment or “life for life.” In the cases of unintentional killings, cities of refuge were designated for the alleged offender, specifically for the purpose of shielding them from angry and zealous family members who would unjustly seek to enact their own revenge.

RACISM

There are two core underlying beliefs in racism: (1) Individuals are not distinct but uniformly representative of their respective groups. (2) Said groups are in some way inherently inferior compared to other human beings.

Racism does in fact require that *both* conditions be met since applying assumed group traits to an individual (e.g., “Since you’re tall, you must play basketball,” or “You’re skinny as a twig, so you must be a model,” or “You must not be that smart since all blondes aren’t the brightest of the bunch”) does not equate to the presumption of racial superiority. Similarly, to think of others as inferior, you must therein assume yourself to be more than human by comparison—fashioning the racist above humanity and closer to deity. The master of lies has already charted this perilous course.

Additionally, thinking oneself to be better than the rest is just plain arrogance or pride—vices that are essentially competitive and directed against *everyone* globally. This perverse paradigm is a deplorable form of self-idolatry that unfortunately nurtures itself.

There was a shameful time in this nations’ past where racism was visible and palpable mostly everywhere. Progress has been made, but racism still exists, even though it has become much more subtle and disguised in exceedingly clever ways. Take for example the now-defunct policy of the former NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg called stop and frisk. This policy, formed in the “public interest” in order to ensure “safety and security,” had a rate of failure of over 90% for its entire existence and disproportionately targeted male minorities. Deceptively, this program was executed with “good” intentions but used as a means to intimidate and discriminate. Even more troubling was the fact that the program was in existence for more than a decade before being dismantled and was repeatedly supported despite the fact that it was racially prejudiced and failed to satisfy its stated goals.

Equal treatment under the law is a good thing, and the law (in theory) is supposed to be color-blind, race blind, *and* sex blind. However, on the other side of the coin, many groups in society nowadays ironically call for *equal* treatment by requiring *preferential* treatment of certain groups—this is simply prejudice by stealth and has the potential to be as dangerous as the more overt forms of discrimination.

While no one can deny the legacy of racism, one must also be cognizant of the slippery slope of perpetual group identification leading to claims of perpetual group victimhood. At the end of the day, if anyone has been wronged, retribution is in order. However, when a claim is repeatedly abused or relied on by default, a sinister pattern develops and leads the alleged victim(s) to think and behave in a specific mode. The psychology of victimhood places the victim’s nexus of control *externally* so that consequences are invariably a result of peripheral factors and never internal ones. This thinking promotes lack of self-confidence, guilt, hopelessness, and feelings of inadequacy. The dangerous twist happens when such feelings demand the *continual* reparation from the victimizers. This dynamic absolves the victims of any future responsibility to and of self, even after all debts have been paid (or at least attempted), and can extend to those who never participated in the victimization in the first place. This representation becomes exceedingly murky when the victimizers and victims are nebulous, or when the extent of the damage is not quantifiable.

Sadly, bigotry is a disorder of heart condition, regardless of the means by which this disorder developed. While everyone has the right to say what they want, unfortunately, laws and regulations can't rectify ignorance and stupidity.

In essence, collectivism tainted with disdain and aimed at particular racial sects equals racism. Anything that persuades us to think in terms of groups, and not individuals, actually promotes racist ideology. It's the obsession with race itself than can lead someone down some treacherous paths. Children playing together don't notice that Billy is Black, or Walter is White, or Andrew is Asian; they just see the other little boys and will go about playing happily. Unfortunately, time will indoctrinate them all to see the other children's race first, and then see the rest of the person second. Living in a truly color-blind society does not mean that we purposely ignore race, but rather we refrain from elevating its importance and attributing it so much significance that it trumps all other characteristics, both physical and mental.

Is there a cure for racism? Absolutely not, because there's no cure for human ignorance. What any civilized society *can do* is attempt to minimize its own contribution to racism's development, while nurturing an environment that emphasizes *him or her* as opposed to *they*. This attempt is best understood in a free and liberated society, where the governing bodies do not base political platforms and agendas predicated on group claims or generalize experiences to all persons of the same racial group. True freedom and genuine blindness to race, then, would regard it as an inconsequential incidental, just as one would dismiss other negligible physical characteristics such as freckles or bow-leggedness. In this type of society, rewards would be given for accomplishment and competency, not race, gender, or ethnic background.

In the prior examples, I've described an individual's adoption of racist ideology based on their own volition, but the promotion of discriminatory dogma, sadly, has a legacy of being wielded as a manipulative tool. If C wants to eradicate B, C can attack B directly (the path of most resistance). Conversely, C can also convince A that B is a threat to everyone, thus turning A into a mortal enemy of B (the path of least resistance). Who knows what else C can accomplish or has up its sleeve when such a diabolical scheme is executed and its seeds of hatred are consumed by the masses.

The reader should also keep in mind that when promoting fear or hatred, it becomes prudent to direct resentment at a group whose power and resources can be usurped. Oftentimes it's never really about "them" being inferior or "them" being a threat, but said groups occupy a niche that someone else wishes to control—thus, race happens to be secondary, a smoke screen to conceal true intent. If a potential target's role cannot be effectively taken over, then there would be no gain at all in promoting odium. Notably, this prototype can be extended to any issue within political grasp and need not be limited as a function of race. For instance, suppose you wanted a certain economic cohort to pay more taxes. Coming out and saying, "Pay more taxes," wouldn't be so palatable. But what you can do is stir up resentment against inequality and demand that these other folks pay their fair share. Now everyone jumps on the bandwagon, and away we go.

Would any tyrant or political demagogue persecute another group if the group were a nonfactor? I think not. Genuine hatred may play a role, but so does lack of familiarity, an alleged threat, and a perceived gain.

WHY FREE SPEECH CANNOT ALWAYS BE FREE

Speech cannot always be free because context determines meaning. Indeed, true freedom is not free, nor is it always convenient. The root of the word should never delude any of us because true freedom is always costly.

Free speech is certainly an ideal, but that often means hearing things you would rather not hear, and dealing with people whom you would rather not deal with. In the end, everyone should simply get over it because when others are “free” to say what they want, you also become “free” to say what *you* want. Political correctness only shields the wolves who prance around in sheep costumes.

Possessing a free mind is one of the greatest gifts ever bestowed on humankind. The free exercise of reason empowers us to reject deity, a force presumably greater than we are. So, if we, as subordinate human beings, are able to reject God, then who gives humans the right to mandate what other humans must and must not reject? Certainly, for the sake of communal well-being, individual freedom must be sacrificed for the collective whole, but that should never involve thought preference, prescribed behavior, or the selective application of the said freedom. If freedom were sacrificed in these ways, then what you’d be left with wouldn’t be freedom at all, but the greatest trick that democracy and progressivism had ever played: the relinquishment of liberty under the pretense of tolerance and under the guise of ‘egalitarianism,’ the modern euphemism for ‘coercion.’

Yes, but herein lies the problem: What happens if the *restriction* of free speech serves a good that is not only lawful but is also increasingly more profitable to a large group of people? And I don’t mean profitable in the sense of what a dictatorial majority subjectively deems appropriate for the common good. I mean profitable in terms of the objective standards of natural law—life, liberty, and property. I wonder if, *in select cases*, the limitation of liberty actually results in the promulgation of liberty. If your frame of reference is the individual, then this perspective fails; but if your perspective is communal, then it is worth consideration.

Take, for example, the case of two former [Oklahoma University students](#) who were also members of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. Both students were expelled after videos were posted online depicting them (and other members of the fraternity) chanting a song that featured racial slurs, referred to lynching, and proclaimed that a person of color would never be a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon. The video was recorded while the fraternity members were riding a bus to an event.

Oklahoma University President, David L. Boren, justified the expulsion based on the fact that the two individuals had created a “hostile educational environment.” The national office of Sigma Alpha Epsilon expressed its intent to expel all the members of the Oklahoma chapter from the national organization and affirmed that it was in favor of the university’s decision.

In this case, it was *the video* taken on the bus and not the speech itself that changed matters. As I expect happens all the time all around the world, people make prejudicial comments in private settings, and everyone else is none the wiser. In private settings, then, speech is always and irrevocably free—as long as no one has a device that will turn a private moment into a public spectacle.

If we analyze free speech as an isolated part, separate from a community of people with common collective interests, then we champion the component at the expense of the whole, not realizing that natural rights are only relevant as they pertain to interpersonal interactions. In *The*

Law, Frederic Bastiat says, “It is not because men have made laws, that life, liberty, and property exist. On the contrary, it is because life, liberty, and property exist beforehand, that men make laws.” Men (plural) make laws. The person is a part. The community is the whole. Laws, rights, or privileges only become relevant when the whole exists, for if a man were an island, why would he need the law? A part finds its identity as part of the whole, and the whole consists of a series of parts, each serving a unique and fundamental purpose. If that paradigm is abandoned, then someone can say, “I’ll keep on saying the N-word to every black person I see. It’s my right,” or “Red lights are an oppressive form of state power. I run all of them,” or “Others are getting in the way of *my* liberty. They are expendable and must be eliminated.” In such extreme cases, the libertarian becomes one of his or her own worst nightmares: an aggressor treading upon others.

Consequently, if we think of free speech as an innate freedom in the context of a *whole* set of natural rights in a community, then the free speech of one man, two students, or three women subjugates itself in the context of an educational institution. People go to college in order to learn, develop skills, and improve themselves. The school derives its identity through the students that it serves. The students derive their identity from their attendance of the institution. Both parties absolutely need each other in order to be productive, so why should the productive community be inhibited from achieving its admirable goals by a few bad apples whose ignorant and racist behavior offers no tangible dividends? If I were running a corporation, the racist song singers would hurt my bottom line and threaten the company’s primary aim. My response would be to eliminate the non-performing parties. If I were leading a church, the bad apples would turn the congregation toward sin. My response would be to discipline them accordingly. In either case, the bad apples would be “free” to say whatever they wanted, but uninhibited freedom would be costly and ignorance would not be tolerated where illumination was being nurtured.

The fact remains that the First Amendment protects people who use hateful and racist speech. The issue then becomes *how* we ought to use that freedom. Should we use it for the edification of the self or for the edification of the whole? If we choose the former, we risk losing the whole that makes liberty so attractive in the first place. For what is liberty if I am free to do what is lawful in my eyes while everyone else bears the burden of my freedom? *That* sounds exactly like authoritarianism to me.

So, I applaud Mr. Boren for taking responsibility as the leader of an institution and assuming accountability for the educational welfare of his students—these are two very mature and manly forms of behavior in a society that would rather turn a blind eye to the iniquity of others in the name of independence.

MORAL PANIC

I have long held the assumption that the media's role in modern society is not, in fact, to objectively report events that happen in the world but rather to selectively choose those stories that serve an ideological end—the news, then, is not the news but those phenomena *chosen to be the news*. In pursuing these ideological ends, it is often the case that fear can be utilized as an effective tool in order to induce behavioral change. When the genuine threat is low, yet the desired behavioral change is high, there tends to be a *fear-inducing* message promulgated by the media. Conversely, when the genuine threat is high, and there is a demand for containment and control, there is a *fear-reducing* message. I recently came across a study where my assumptions have been validated by proper academic analysis: [here](#), Sheldon Ungar, a Canadian sociologist, writes about “moral panics” and “hot crises” where the author basically says, when the media tells you “don't worry,” be afraid, and when they tell you “worry,” just relax. The lack of certainty and the nefarious desire to control everyday people is what fuels the fire that burns in the engine of hysteria.

In his paper from the *British Journal of Sociology*, Mr. Ungar describes three different models of moral panics: (1) those constructed by the elite in order to achieve a specific end point, (2) those constructed by a specific interest group in order to set agendas and subsequently gain from the fear response, and (3) organic panic that starts small and then builds momentum as it spreads, eventually boiling over. Essentially, the first two are top-down paradigms, and the third is bottom-up. What makes the third so dangerous, however, is the lack of organized control. When the powers that be realize that bottom-up panic is about to boil over, Mr. Ungar says that media narratives switch from stories that provoke hysteria to ones that attempt to assuage the public angst.

In describing the Ebola epidemic of 1995 in Zaire, for example, the author describes narratives labeled “contagion” followed by “containment.” This type of paradigm explains why just a few weeks ago, in response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the disease could be regarded as a remote threat localized to a region of the world far, far away where poor medical facilities and health care infrastructure allowed the quick spread of the disease (contagion). The security of thousands of miles plus modern Western health care acted as a buffer, but with recent reports of inadequate preparation, [treatment](#), and lack of knowledge of how to treat Ebola, the aura of American invulnerability has now evaporated. Enter fear, hysteria, and panic and the resultant need for order (containment).

Such tools need not be constrained to the recent saturation of media with Ebola fears. For example, consider influenza and the threat of another terror attack in the post-9/11 world: statistically speaking, loss of life from either the seasonal flu or terrorism was, and still remains, drastically low. One trip to any international airport or counting the number of surveillance cameras in any major urban square on American soil reveals the innumerable end points derived from point (1) discussed above.

Subsequently, the sociologist and author of *Moral Panics*, Erich Goode, argues that “seizing on small threats from the putative agent supposedly responsible for the danger and exaggerating them into major threats, to the point where even imaginary agents become threatening” are characteristic of moral panics. This exaggeration blames the innocent simply because they resemble a remote putative agent. Goode describes this as, “an evil agent responsible for the threatening condition” but not the evil itself. This helps explain why Muslims

in general are associated with terrorists, or the tendency to associate everyone from West Africa with Ebola. Herein lies the irrational fear leading the demand to cease any and all flights from that area of the world.

By and large, the most dangerous effect of moral panic is its propensity to drive irrational behavior. And, when those in positions of power become infected by the moral panic, they are able to criminalize the innocent through coercion and at the expense of personal liberty and reason. Human history is plagued by cycles of moral panics constructed against things, and even worse, select groups of people, and the results are never beneficial.

A fitting example is the widely publicized case of Kaci Hickox, a nurse returning from West Africa, who was originally quarantined in a New Jersey hospital under the mandate of New Jersey's Governor Christie. Moral panic demanded that Ms. Hickox, returning home from Sierra Leone, be locked in a box away from the rest of society *regardless* of the fact that she lacked symptoms of *any* disease, and she also lacked a fever when it was appropriately measured. In an even more extreme case, an asymptomatic child, Ikeoluwa Opayemi, was barred from her education because of the concern of panicked parents, described in this article in the [NY Times](#).

Besides the fact that quarantine of the asymptomatic defies current scientific [logic](#), if one were to think of Ebola from a global (as opposed to a regional) perspective, in order to stop the spread of the virus, it must be stopped *at the source*, or West Africa. Accordingly, any measure that inhibits healthcare workers from traveling to and from the source in order to stem the epidemic is a paradigm that may assuage fear nationally but acts to the detriment of the health of the community internationally. Also, if there were an infinite supply of healthcare workers, then mandatory quarantine wouldn't be an issue. America may have a small shortage of healthcare workers, but in Africa that deficiency is severe.

Finally, the fuel that feeds the moral panic are the sensationalized cases of those who contracted the disease, and to date (November 1, 2014) the total number of confirmed cases on U.S soil remains less than 7—meaning there are roughly 316 million Americans who remain Ebola-free, but the odds of 7 out of 300 million plus won't make the big headlines.

A reasonable approach is being taken in Texas where the more than 70 health care workers who cared for the late Thomas Eric Duncan (he died of Ebola) are *not* being quarantined, but instead report daily on their health and have also been advised to avoid public venues. So far with this reasonable approach, none have developed symptoms. And, in the least reported story of them all, the four people who actually lived with Mr. Duncan for days as his condition worsened all have not been infected.

Let us all not panic.

THE VALUE OF LIFE

There are many tragedies in recent memory where select members of the police (a group officially sanctioned to use force) recklessly use guns against those who are unarmed. The tragic cases of Michael Brown and Eric Garner rest heavily on our hearts, but the reader should also not forget the case of [Tamir Rice](#), the 12-year-old boy who was murdered by police who thought he had a gun when in fact it was a toy (how barbaric has society become when grown men fire upon children in the park?). Also, consider the case of [John Crawford](#), who was shot in Walmart after picking up a pellet gun that fell out of its packaging.

The value of life transcends race, so even though these individuals suffered their premature demises at the hands of someone of a different color (white and blue), the common theme remains the same: because the value of the target's life was deemed diminutive, evil triumphs over good.

As a physician, I am bound to a professional and legal standard of accountability that typically safeguards my patients from my medical *omissions*, which have led to either a loss of life or a poor medically related outcome. The medical malpractice system has its flaws, but the basic premise is logical: if a doctor is negligent and deviates from the objective standard of practice, a penalty is paid to the victim. Yet when it comes to the police, who have the right to use intentional lethal force, they are often freed from acts of *commission* simply by the loose and subjective legal stipulation that they acted rationally based on what was going on in their head at the time. An example of such reasoning can be found [here](#), where the prosecutor in Mr. Crawford's case (the officer here was *not* indicted) basically says don't judge the officer based on what you think is right, judge him based on what he felt at the time.

Unfortunately, in the heat of a tense moment, calm, rational logic is often sacrificed to the fury of nerves and emotion. People are on edge, and reason is suffocated by fervor. Combine this reality with the fact that in at least one psychological [study](#), research has proven that unconscious intentions play a role in conscious actions. Keith Payne's experiment revealed that study participants were *more* apt to recognize a hand tool as a gun when responding hurriedly *and* immediately after being shown an image of a black male. The effect was most pronounced among the white males in the study.

We live in a very imperfect world where racism is very real and exists in all levels of society. The horrific conclusion is that police officers who can use lethal force are likely (whether consciously or unconsciously) to execute some form of prejudicial miscalculation in the times when lethal force is often used to the detriment of the victims—yet the scale used to determine the validity of said actions is built upon biased subjectivity. In essence, the primary standard a policeman is held accountable to when using lethal force against a civilian is himself. Combine all of this with police forces nationwide who are being outfitted with [military-grade weapons](#), resultantly making police officers look less like police and more like soldiers. Local forces stay local, so the “enemy” or the “threats” are you and me. If we, the people, are therein the enemy, and renegade police officers are now empowered to be warriors, they need not think of citizens to be served but rather enemies to be fought. And no matter what your race, gender, ethnicity, or religion is, as long as you are not in the ranks of the militarized elite, you may find yourself being harmed or even killed because you “acted,” “gestured,” or “postured” in a way that threatens the man with a tank and a machine gun.

In fact, those officers who do carry guns do so in a job that is actually *less dangerous* than far more common professions. [The Rutherford Institute](#) reports that “militarized police—twitchy over perceived dangers, hyped up on their authority, and protected by their agencies, the legislatures and the courts—have actually made communities less safe at a time when violent crime is at an all-time low and lumberjacks, fishermen, airline pilots, roofers, construction workers, trash collectors, electricians and truck drivers all have a higher risk of on-the-job fatalities than police officers.”

In the end, is it very clear that we live in a world where some of those who are left in charge of “protecting and serving” the public are exactly the ones who devalue the lives of those they are supposedly protecting. Instead of preserving life, they have chosen to destroy it. If the powers that be reserve the right to the monopolization of force in the collective interest of security, that interest has now been exposed as being a fraud, stripping the state of its legitimacy and rendering its justifications null and void. If I defend my personhood from a threat (because no one else will) and then that defense is criminalized, where does that leave me but in a perpetual cycle of subjugation where I am forced to either obey or face the violent consequences of revolt? That isn’t liberty but authoritarianism masquerading as progressivism.

ON RACE & THE REBEL FLAG

What is racism?

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines racism as “the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.” Recent events have made it abundantly clear that race still plays a significant and powerful role in 21st-century America. Yet, although *race*—an observed and verifiable trait—is something that can be measured objectively, *racism* is being calculated much more subjectively. Resultantly, the idea is much more susceptible to manipulation.

The inherent difficulty with racism is that the *belief* cannot be quantified, but the *behavior*, a presupposed reflection of belief, is readily observable.

Sometimes objectionable behavior can result from racist beliefs, but in other instances, the behavior is rooted in something completely different and benign. The problem, of course, is that if the mainstream deems certain behaviors as unequivocally racist, an erroneous label is subsequently placed on individuals who execute certain behaviors *without* the correlating belief. This paradigm ironically uses prejudice to sort out and label others as prejudicial. This method produces prescriptions for “proper behavior” and, by implication, thought control. This need not even apply to race. A very common application is seen with accusations against Christians: “Since you don’t agree with *this*, then you must think *that* ... therefore you *must* be a bigot!” Ultimately, if racism truly is something clear and determinate, then there ought not to be such ceaseless disagreement over what is “racist” and what is not.

This does not dismiss the utter tragedy of current events in the slightest, nor does it minimize the fact that racism in its most detestable form is thriving. For example, according to witnesses, in a very clear instance of blatant racism, Dylann Roof walked into a church in South Carolina specifically to “[shoot black people](#).” He also [told](#) his victims (all black) prior to shooting them, “You rape our women, and you’re taking over our country. And you have to go.”

But what if the example is not so obvious? What if the behavior may *seem* “suspicious,” but the assessment of the person’s internal beliefs essentially comes down to attempts of mind reading? Because even if you have logically sound and blameless reasons for your outlook, if the behavior is deemed unacceptable by public opinion, your beliefs and the condition of your heart become irrelevant. Hence, the only way to satisfy the desires of popular demand is to acquiesce and abandon your views, even though you do not cherish and hold onto them with malice or malevolent intent. Realistically, the most dangerous forms of racism aren’t the ones that are obvious and easily visible—the most dangerous forms of racism are the ones hiding in plain sight, pretending to “behave” in popular fashion.

A racist threat does not exist in the Confederate flag *per se*. Taking it down is only a cosmetic fix. The flag is just an inanimate symbol, a symptom of a much larger disease. This disease, of course, is racism, and it has many visible symptoms. In plain sight, urban education has robbed innumerable numbers of black children of an education. In plain sight, the war on drugs has caused gang violence, death, and countless numbers of black men going to jail. In plain sight, extraordinary numbers of African Americans are being mistreated by law enforcement, and police brutality all across the country has mercilessly murdered unarmed people of color who have committed non-violent crimes or done nothing illegal at all. And guess

what? All of these events occurred well after the Confederacy, under the tenure of the *American flag*.

The Confederate flag *may* be used as a symbol of racism. The Confederate flag *may* signal a desire to re-enslave people of color. It *may* also be used as a sincere symbol of states' rights, individual autonomy, minimal government, and a deep-felt heritage. Hanging a flag is a behavior, and it *may or may not* signal a perverse internal belief. Albeit, what history does teach us is that the Confederacy would not have had to fight for slavery *if slavery had not already existed*, being sanctioned by enactment of the *United States Constitution* in 1789. That same Constitution deemed persons of color to be three-fifths human. Again, this happened under the tenure of the *American flag*, and slavery remained legal for 76 years until 1865 (13th Amendment).

Before the Confederacy was even born, the disease of racism had infected the entire American nation, and the American flag still hangs proudly from coast to coast without any calls to remove *it*. If people really want to take a racist symbol down, I wonder if they're focusing their attention on the wrong flag. It is now clear why curing the underlying disease is much more important than chasing after symptoms.

On the other side of the argument, many people may cherish a symbol cognizant of the good it stands for while also acknowledging, but not embracing, the bad. A person who looks at an American flag may not think about slavery at all. They may see capitalism and apple pie and are proud to have fought for these things. A Japanese American may not see internment camps in World War II but a better life for his or her family. A Democrat may see a flag that represents marriage equality and not see perpetual war. A Republican may see unsurpassed military might but not see social entitlements. And a libertarian, despite all his or her rants, may see the symbol of the only place they would honestly prefer to live.

Ultimately, racism is a disorder characterized by deep-seated hatred of persons of a particular race. This profound internal disorder transcends the boundaries of external symbols and is motivated by a much, much deeper miscalculation of judgment than the simple appreciation for a historical flag. While unfortunate and destructive, hatred is a sheltered style of belief and behavior, and it will form the basis for some associations. The price of freedom is that we tolerate the non-violent expression of hate.

However, while a Confederate flag to some represents Southern pride, to others it represents slavery and an insurgent rebellion. Well, guess what? History teaches us that it represents both *at the same time*, and in order to change that paradigm, you would have to change history. Hence, there is no "right" answer to what it stands for. What is right, however, is that a government of any kind should not hang the flag of a non-existent political entity. That would give the government the power to have a belief and then act on that belief. Governments ought not to have opinions, and the government does not enjoy freedom of speech—only people have that right.

TOTAL DRUG LEGALIZATION

Over and over again, Reinhold Niebuhr has written that humans are incapable of perfect love. Yet, in spite of this fact, we perpetually try to fashion a perfect world from that which is inherently imperfect.

Resultantly, our pursuit of excellence and moral purity is most certainly doomed from the start, and the struggle against wickedness, at the very best, can achieve only marginal victories. Therefore, any attempt to achieve such elusive purity will only hurt the very people we are trying to “rescue.” Invariably, this leads to persecution and the rejection of the rescuer. It is in this context that I shall consider whether drug legalization is a “moral” choice.

The first issue to consider with drug legalization is who defines what a “bad” drug is. The “who,” in this case, is secular authority, an institution that not only enacts self-contradictory rules, but needlessly violates people in enforcing these rules (i.e., the war on drugs). For example, tobacco is an addictive, destructive, yet legal drug. According to the [CDC](#):

Tobacco use remains the single largest preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Cigarette smoking kills more than 480,000 Americans each year, with *more than 41,000 of these deaths from exposure to secondhand smoke*. In addition, smoking-related illness in the United States costs more than \$300 billion a year, including nearly \$170 billion in direct medical care for adults and \$156 billion in lost productivity. In 2013, an estimated 17.8% (42.1 million) of U.S. adults were current cigarette smokers. (italics mine)

Cigarette smoking causes cancer, and cigarettes contain more than 7,000 toxic chemicals, 70 of which are known carcinogens. According to the [American Cancer Society](#), “smoking accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths in the United States. It causes 87% of lung cancer deaths in men and 70% in women.”

In fact, smoking causes more deaths *than all other illegal drugs combined*.³

Cigarette smoking is more dangerous than American war. According to a 2014 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [Report of the Surgeon General](#), “10 times as many U.S. citizens have died prematurely from cigarette smoking than have died in all the wars fought by the United States during its history.”

As a physician, I can think of no better objective way to ascertain how dangerous a threat is than by considering how many lives it has taken. Hence, there is no moral foundation whatsoever for the continued legalization of cigarettes, especially considering the fact that second-hand smoke also poses a threat to human life. Exposure to second-hand smoke is a coerced, involuntary molestation of an individual’s natural rights by the inconsideration of their cigarette-smoking neighbors. A similar dynamic holds true for tobacco companies: they knowingly manufacture, distribute, and profit from a carcinogenic toxin that not only kills smokers, but also harms those who happen to be around smokers. Second-hand exposure makes tobacco so much more malevolent and makes other drugs less threatening. For example, considering only chemical exposure to illicit drugs, no one ever died from second-hand cocaine,

³ AH Mokhad, et al., “Actual Causes of Death in the United States,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 291, no. 10 (March 2004): 1238-1245.

second-hand LSD, or second-hand heroin. If an adult knowingly and voluntarily ingests a substance that is harmful to them and accepts these risks, it remains their right as a free person to make that choice whether good or bad. If society artificially restrains this choice, we are resultantly, as Niebuhr has said, making a futile attempt to create a perfectly moral person within an immoral world. Consequently, using tobacco as a benchmark, there is no medical rebuttal to total drug legalization. It follows, then, that the second issue to consider with drug legalization is who truly defines what people are free to do and not to do. Can a human being reject God? Yes, because natural law (given from God) gives humankind that fundamental freedom. If, therefore, a human can reject what is eternally good, why then can he or she not also accept that which is temporally evil?

The second consideration asks, based on current moral standards, what remaining justification exists for *not* enacting total drug legalization?

According to current standards, just because something is legal does not mean you have to engage in it, *because you have the free choice not to*. For example, other people may worship money and wealth or engage in prostitution, but this has no bearing on how you live your life.

According to current standards, just because something is addictive does not mean it should be criminalized. Examples of such addictions include social media, coffee, gambling, and pornography.

According to current standards, just because something is dangerous does not mean it should be illegal. Examples of such dangerous activities include driving a car, riding a bicycle without a helmet on the wrong side of the road, and skydiving.

I was careful to preface all of these statements with “according to current standards.” I personally do not use illicit drugs, nor do I desire to use any of them. I believe that addiction to an illicit drug in many cases reflects a lack of self-control and an attempt to hopelessly fill a void that drugs ironically cannot satisfy. Illicit drug use suggests a numbed reality in which normal life is no longer stimulating because users have forgotten how to get their “kicks” from the ordinary. I say this because it is possible to co-exist and peacefully go about your own personal business in a society that has adopted less-than-admirable rules. This points to the third consideration: that availability does not exclusively create demand. People are the ones who create demand, and thus the only surefire way to “eliminate” the drug problem is to curb appetites and assuage the joylessness and the many other variables that drive people to use drugs in the first place.

The fourth consideration affirms that we cannot legislate a perfectly moral world and we are often forced to choose between a greater evil and a lesser evil. The lesser evil is the legalization of all drugs. The greater evil is the war on drugs.

As Lawrence M. Vance recently wrote on LewRockwell.com:

Some unfortunate Americans have been sentenced to life in prison for drug possession because it was their third drug offense. Thanks to the War on Drugs and civil asset forfeiture laws, police regularly practice “policing for profit” whereby they confiscate cash from law-abiding Americans because having a large sum of money on you “must” mean that you are involved in drug trafficking. And then there are the outrages that are generally not seen: Americans incarcerated for drug offenses who are raped, beaten, humiliated, and suffer the loss of their jobs, their money, and their families. And drug warriors maintain that it is drug users who are immoral?

In a nutshell, what is the War on Drugs? It is simply government bureaucrats, nanny state do-gooders, puritanical busybodies, statist drug warriors, and assorted hypocrites telling you what you can and can't consume, swallow, smoke, sniff, snort, inject, or ingest, and locking you up in a cage if you possess, manufacture, process, buy, sell, distribute, transport, cultivate, or "traffick in" a substance the government doesn't approve of.

Since the war on drugs began in 1971, the U.S. Government has spent more than \$1 [trillion](#) with little to no tangible dividends. We spend [billions](#) every year to seek out and thwart drug users and distributors at the taxpayer's expense. We then prosecute these individuals at the taxpayer's expense and then incarcerate these individuals at the taxpayer's ongoing expense. This "war" has resulted in the United States having the largest incarcerated population in the entire world and the largest population of drug users in the entire world. The drug war is ridiculously expensive, has failed to curb demand, has failed to eliminate supply, and requires that taxpayers finance the incarceration of all these "prisoners of war" in the process. And in this war, the central disease is never treated—it settles for chasing symptoms. The drug war, like Iraq and Afghanistan, has failed miserably. It's time to stop fighting.

[C.S. Lewis](#) once said, "Of all tyrannies a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience."

Indeed. And so total drug legalization—an idea that may whisk many into a dreadful and dreary apocalyptic nightmare—admittedly is not a moral idea *in and of itself*. The proposal in no way changes those moral absolutes that are immutable.

Drug legalization is, however, the *relatively* more moral choice in an immoral world. If we stick with what we've been doing, the economic and human costs are so insurmountable we would have to abandon our entire notion of morality altogether.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT (August 15th, 2015)

The truth hurts, and when the truth forces you to challenge your deeply-held assumptions about reality, that's when it hurts the most. With the facts, we can take the painful step and pivot, cognizant that we will now proceed in that which is genuine. Or, we can ignore the truth, and continue to believe what is in fact grounded only in fantasy.

Here then is a painful test of the truth: which of the following poses the greatest threat to American life in 2015—ISIS, a police officer, or a legal medical procedure?

The truth will hurt.

The Guardian is making an attempt to tally the number of people killed by police in the United States during 2015. Sadly, July of this year was the deadliest month of 2015, with [118](#) people being killed by police. As of this writing, 682 people have been killed by deadly force by authorities since January 1. A very informative infographic can be viewed [here](#). *The Washington Post* gives a lower tally of 573 people being killed by police this year. To be fair and honest, 481 (84%) of these people had a weapon and posed a credible threat to the lives of the police officers. Seventy-seven (13%) of these people either had no weapon or had a toy gun. One hundred forty-eight of these people (25%) had signs of mental illness. White people were killed (336) more often than other groups, but black people were killed at a rate far higher than any other group (4.21 per million compared to a rate of 1.7 per million for whites).

Statistically speaking, dying at the hands of a police officer is a far greater threat to the average American than are terrorists. The United States is currently fighting a proxy war against ISIS, but ISIS has killed [four](#) Americans since the summer of last year. The police have killed *more than 100 times* that amount. In reality, you are [50 times more likely](#) to die at the hands of a police officer than a terrorist, and this estimate runs the risk of being inaccurately low because, as *The Guardian* reports, “An average of 545 people killed by local and state law enforcement officers in the US went uncounted in the country’s most authoritative crime statistics every year for almost a decade.” This reality is shocking, but not as revealing as the fact that the US government maintains no comprehensive record of the number of Americans killed by law enforcement. Subsequently, this calls into question the validity of “official” tallies by the [FBI](#) that report “justifiable homicides by law enforcement” annually. Hence, projects from outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* have become valued necessities from private institutions when the government has failed.

Of course, reality illuminated by data defies popular perceptions because we have all been indoctrinated to think that some threats are more real than others. Daniel Benjamin, the Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the United States Department of State from 2009 to 2012 is [quoted](#) as saying in January of this year (10:22):

The total number of deaths from terrorism in recent years has been extremely small in the West. And the threat itself has been considerably reduced. Given all the headlines people don't have that perception—but if you look at the statistics that is the case.

But the truth gets even more painful.

This month, former Congressman and Presidential candidate [Ron Paul](#) wrote on his website that those activists who speak out against police brutality and racial discrimination

should instead focus their attention on preventing black women from getting abortions. Why? Because, as Mr. Paul suggests, black women who decide to have abortions are more lethal than men armed with guns.

Mr. Paul uses this fact as a springboard to justify his staunch opposition to federal funding of Planned Parenthood, in that taxpayer money is thus used to fund an organization that facilitates the destruction of American life.

He writes:

The majority of [Planned Parenthood's] abortion "services" are still provided to lower-income and minority women. Every day, nearly 2,000 African-American babies lose their lives to abortion, a rate five times higher than the Caucasian abortion rates.

I support the Black Lives Matter movement. I have long advocated for an end to the drug war, police militarization, and other threats to liberty that disproportionately victimize African-Americans. However, I wish some of the Black Lives Matter movement's passion and energy was directed to ending abortion. Unborn black lives also matter.

A bit of clarification is in order. First, [Planned Parenthood](#) certainly does more than perform abortions; for example, they [provide](#) sex education, breast exams, pap smears, adoption services, and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. Each year, they offer healthcare services to more than five million people. Second, *three percent* (3%) of all Planned Parenthood services are abortion services, and according to their [annual report](#), they performed 327,653 abortions from 2013-14. Third, while Planned Parenthood does proportionately serve more minorities, non-Hispanic white women account for the largest percentage of [abortions](#) (36%) in the United States. Non-Hispanic black women account for 30%. In 2011, 1.06 million abortions were performed in the United States, and 58% of women who have abortions are in their [twenties](#). Fourth, Planned Parenthood does not create abortion demand—people do, and this demand has a lot to do with extrinsic variables such as poverty and a lack of access to preventative healthcare and sexual education (things Planned Parenthood does provide). If we kept Mr. Paul's logic consistent, then the federal government should deny funds (i.e. Medicare, Medicaid or any federally subsidized insurance mandated under Obamacare) to *any* healthcare provider who provides abortion services. Even though I do not support government-mandated or government-backed insurance, the fact remains that according to Mr. Paul's reasoning, these providers would be globally penalized for one thing that they do at the expense of everything else that they do. Fifth, Mr. Paul is absolutely correct in that a majority of Planned Parenthood's clients are low-income and minorities *because that is exactly the demographic it is intended to serve*. In fact, the data reveal that wealthier and non-minority women are actually having *more* abortions, they simply are served in different health outlets.

All life matters, and I say that not as politicians do to garner votes—I say that in recognition that there are many people in the contemporary world who demote certain *types* of life—examples include “infidels” at the expense of loyalists, regular citizens at the expense of law enforcement, and the unborn at the expense of the already born. This doesn't mean that a cure is for us all to hold hands and sing. It does mean that there are many outlets in our modern world where precious human life is being lost. The central problem is not one of race, secular

authority, religion, nationality, occupation or gender—it's one of life. And the gut-wrenching, mind-bending truth is that while a rebel holding an ISIS flag or a police officer firing a gun at an unarmed person may whisk even the most dormant heart into a frenzy, there is a hidden threat to human life even more dangerous than both of those things combined, and it is abortion. So while I agree with Mr. Paul that “unborn black lives also matter”, I also contend that it is because we have become so comfortable in destroying life—even when helpless and before it leaves the womb—that we have found ourselves in a world where it is so easy to wipe each other out.

A truly upsetting statistic: abortion destroys more life than each of the leading causes of [death](#); abortion is more deadly than heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, accidents, and strokes. In [2011](#), abortion claimed 1.06 million lives. In the same [year](#), diseases of the heart claimed 596,577 lives; cancer killed 575,691 people, and chronic lung diseases killed 142,943 people. Abortion is not only one of the leading causes of American mortality, but it has killed nearly twice as many people as the second leading cause of death.

I asked a question at the beginning of this post. Here is the startling answer: *abortion is a greater threat than terrorism and deaths by law enforcement combined.*

You are 1,800 times more likely to be put to death by abortion than you are by a police officer. You are nearly 43,000 times more likely to be put to death by abortion than to be killed by a terrorist.⁴ A massive threat to American life is right here at home, executing lethal strikes each and every day and hidden in plain sight.

Yes, the truth is painful.

⁴ Risk profiles derived from 2011 [CDC](#) “Abortion Surveillance Report” and [FBI](#)’s “Justifiable Homicide by Law Enforcement.”

VOTER ID

Are voter ID laws racially biased or completely benign and necessary for the enhancement of our democracy?

On July 13th, a federal trial began in Winston-Salem over the 2013 North Carolina law ([H.B. 589](#)) that repealed a series of voting access measures—such as same-day voter registration, early voting, pre-registration for eligible high school students and out-of-precinct voting—that were enacted over the last two decades. The law also required a voter ID, or photographic identification, for everyone voting in person. As [The New York Times](#) recently reported:

Lawmakers claimed that H.B. 589, which was approved in a sneaky last-minute maneuver that insulated it from any real debate, would reduce fraud and inefficiency in elections. In truth, it is a pile of blatantly discriminatory measures that lawmakers knew would make voting harder, if not impossible, for many lower-income citizens — who are disproportionately black and Latino, and many of whom tend to vote Democratic. The election-law scholar Richard Hasen has [called](#) it “the most sweeping anti-voter law in at least decades.

Challengers of the law include the Justice Department, the NAACP and the League of Women Voters. The allegation is that the law discriminates against minority voters and therefore violates their constitutional rights. Specifically, the NAACP’s [brief](#) states that without the repeal of H.B. 589, the current voter ID law “will disproportionately injure African-American voters, who are less likely than other members of the electorate to possess the required forms of identification and also face disproportionately greater burdens in obtaining such identification.” Perhaps. But then again, perhaps not. The allegation is that the voter ID law *will* disproportionately injure. The first question must therefore be:

Have voter ID laws caused disproportionate harm in the past or in other instances? It appears that real, objective, scientific data say no.

The second question is: Why would any state repeal laws (e.g., early voting and pre-registration for eligible high school students) that common sense tells us makes it easier for *all* people to vote? After all, we live in a presupposed democracy, the cornerstone of which is the right to vote. Shouldn’t the overall impetus, then, be to encourage as many people as possible to vote *and* to eliminate barriers that prevent them from voting?

In an ideal world, voting should be ridiculously easy. It should be as easy as sending an email or “liking” something. If it takes almost no effort to express your support for a picture or a comment online, why would voting for the next president, senator, congressperson or local official be any harder? Moreover, if you’re concerned about voter fraud, recent research shows that repeat or fraudulent ballot casting and vote buying are [extremely rare](#) phenomena.

There is also [research](#) that suggests that voter ID laws *do not* affect turnout of minority voters. Accordingly, even if laws such as H.B. 589 were made with malevolent intent, such intent would not produce its desired results. A 2013 [study](#) by Rene Rocha and Tetsuya Matsubayashi looked at how voter ID laws changed voter turnout. Over the course of 30 years (1980 to 2010) in 49 states, they compared election results before and after voter ID law changes took effect. Their conclusion:

Our primary explanatory variables, photo ID and nonphoto ID laws, have no statistically discernible relationship with the probability that whites, blacks, and Latinos voted in the general elections between 1980 and 2010 except that the nonphoto ID law has a *positive* and significant relationship with Latino turnout.

The bottom line, at least according to this study: Voter ID requirements do not affect *global voter turnout*—a fact that applies to all racial and ethnic groups. The pair also mentioned that “universal mail voting, no-excuse absentee voting, and early in-person voting, have no systematic effect on turnout when racial and ethnic groups are analyzed separately.”

In contrast, a 2015 [study](#) from the University of San Diego determined that stricter voter ID laws *do* change the probability that people will vote in *primary* elections—turnout rates for *all* races go down, not just select populations. The same study also found that such laws have *no effect* in *general* elections, and they do not have any wealth bias as such laws affect all income brackets the same.

Interestingly, what the data from select research reveal is that voter ID laws have a negligible effect *either way* when it comes to voting: They do not suppress fraud because fraud is already negligible, and they do not have racial bias in deterring groups from coming out to the polls. Hence, whatever the justification might be for the passage of stricter voter ID laws, it appears that such justification is grounded in subjectivity, not reality.

Common sense tells us that if politicians are working for the people, then they should pass laws that make the smooth operation of democracy—and therefore voting—as easy as possible. Instead, they have involved themselves in a game of barrier-raising to the detriment of those people whom they serve. The issue of voter ID, then, has little to do with race and much to do with the representative agents of democracy working against the people living in that democracy.

Voter ID laws are neither biased nor necessary. They simply give politicians ammunition for a war that they themselves have waged against the people.

ON NATIVISM, IMMIGRATION AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

I personally do not believe in American exceptionalism. What I do believe in is human fallibility. I personally do not believe in government superiority. I do believe in the natural rights of all human beings.

Resultantly, what has made America “exceptional” in the eyes of the world is not how forcefully it applies its authoritarian boot to the necks of its citizens; rather, American “exceptionalism” is derived from the ability of people to freely pursue their own interests without governmental intervention. If individual freedom and liberty do not exist, then America is by no means “exceptional” but quite similar to other regimes across the globe. Distinction requires separation, and throughout the last century, many people fled from their country of origin to the United States because they believed that they too could be “exceptional” and be free to pursue their own ends.

Natural rights are a human privilege, and sadly, what makes a modern government “exceptional” is their ability to uphold these innately human rights above national interests.

This is what makes natural rights so simple and powerful: You have them *as a function of being human*, so no matter who you are or where you are born, you have the same natural rights as everyone else, no matter where you go. This is a sentiment expressed by the Founding Fathers both in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. This sentiment reflects the feeling in the late 1700s that natural rights were being ignored, and so the writers of these two documents used language to ensure the protection of natural rights.

Yet, in the 21st century, our national conversation has changed so that many derive their exceptionalism as a function of being American, not as a function of being a human being *who happens to live in America*.

A very destructive derivative argument is that if you are not an American, then you are something less than exceptional and are therefore unworthy of natural rights. Birth is an immutable trait that no person has any control over. Yet, we have begun assigning personal culpability to those born elsewhere and individual superiority to those born within.

Recent discussion on immigration has adopted the destructive argument mentioned above. What is discussed is how the government can control and contain the “immigration problem.” What is never discussed is that the Constitution, which allegedly grants the federal government all its power, *does not grant power over immigration*—it only grants power over those naturalized or born *in the United States*. The text of the 14th Amendment says, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” Hence, the Constitution does not grant the federal government power over those individuals who were *not* born in or *not* naturalized in the United States. If the Constitution did grant that power, then persons all over the globe living independent lives in other countries would fall under the jurisdiction of the United States federal government.

Yet, this is exactly one of the prescriptions that many presidential candidates are prescribing: taking federal action (e.g., [drone strikes](#)) against illegal immigrants, who fall outside of federal jurisdiction. Such prescriptions highlight the surge in American nativism, the policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants.

Nativism is built from the same raw materials as racism and dehumanization. In all three cases, you think your self-identification makes you better than another group. The targeted groups change, as do the words used to describe the “problem,” but the underlying formula remains the same: We don’t like you because you’re not like us.

Accordingly, inciting fear about the “immigration threat” has been the catalyst to expose the dormant racism always lurking just below the surface of our American “exceptionalism.” In many cases, racism doesn’t even bother to put on politically correct makeup before it goes out into public. Consider [this](#) incident, where rhetoric from one presidential candidate directed against immigrants was channeled into violence: Two brothers from South Boston urinated on and beat a homeless man because he was believed to be an illegal Hispanic immigrant. After being asked why he did it, one of the attackers [said](#), “Donald Trump was right, all these illegals need to be deported.”

Reporting for the *Post* and covering an Alabama rally of Donald Trump, Dave Weigel provided this [quote](#) from an interview with a white farmer in Alabama:

You probably think we’re prejudiced, but my whole life we had niggers work for us in the field. And they were niggers. My daddy called them niggers. I’m not ignorant. That’s just the way I was raised. There’s black people and there’s niggers. You live around here, you know the difference.

As [CNN](#) reports, “David Duke, the anti-Semitic former Ku Klux Klan leader, praised Republican front-runner Donald Trump for his immigration policy proposals and said Trump is ‘the best of the lot.’” As [Buzzfeed](#) reports, “America’s white nationalists have spoken, and they’ve spoken loud and clear: Donald Trump is their presidential candidate of choice.” [Yahoo! News](#) reports the following:

Like so many others in this country who are afflicted with the political handicap of intelligence, protester Efrain Galicia simply couldn’t stand to see Donald Trump’s oft-repeated slogan “Make America Great Again” again without making one small edit. Joining fellow protesters in New York near Trump Tower earlier this week, Galicia debuted his slogan remix via a handmade blue sign reading ‘Trump: Make America Racist Again.’

Mr. Trump’s campaign slogan may not be “Nativism.” His real slogan is “Make America Great Again.” That may sound like a nice idea, but the ultimate question I have is *for whom* exactly is it being made great?

Because it seems, at least from anecdotal reports, that Mr. Trump’s message of nativism resonates very well with racists. Yet what those racists fail to realize is that they are being exploited by Mr. Trump to serve his own presidential end. He is a [billionaire](#), which means he lives in a world surrounded by a border that most people—regardless of race or native-born status—can almost never cross. The average racist couldn’t emigrate over to Mr. Trump’s economic cohort even if Trump himself built a luxurious, gold-plated highway to the destination. One of the greatest economic threats to the average prejudiced American, then, is not from below in those *seeking* an economic opportunity; it’s from those above who *already have* enormous economic power and strive to protect their own interests.

For centuries, people have always held that America is great (and it is) because it allows anyone to apply themselves and excel. If that formula is changed and it is made great for some at the expense of others, then we have rejected the core principle of natural law that an exceptional America was founded upon. If we reject natural law, then we will have taken something exceptional and great and turned it into something plain and ordinary.

History repeats itself time and time again: A powerful majority suppresses the rights of powerless minorities by demonizing them with group prejudice, persecuting entire groups because of malevolent segments, and creating alleged “threats” to the “natives” that are purposeful distortions of reality. History has taught us that this has happened before, and such a script may secure short-term political gain at the expense of long-term national vitality.

Winston Churchill once said, “The price of greatness is responsibility.” Will we now act responsibly, or will we choose instead to throw away that which made us great to begin with?

ON THE MINIMUM WAGE (October 31st, 2015)

There is no “right” answer to address the issue of raising the minimum wage. That is, any solution will have adverse effects, so one must choose what is going to be sacrificed.

The federal minimum wage is currently \$7.25 per hour. President Obama, in his 2014 State of the Union address, called for this wage to be increased to \$10.10 per hour. The rationale is that increasing the minimum wage will benefit workers, lift people out of poverty, boost the economy through increased spending, and correct the diminishing value of the current minimum wage by adjusting for inflation. On a federal level, efforts to raise the minimum wage have stalled, but such efforts have progressed in many states (e.g., Vermont at \$10.50 an hour by 2018 and Connecticut at \$10.10 an hour by 2017) and municipalities (e.g., Seattle at \$15 an hour rolled in over time and Los Angeles at \$15 an hour by 2020). In some instances, local groups have taken even bolder steps. The Micah Institute, for example, launched the [Real Living Wage NYC Campaign](#) this month that seeks to secure \$20 per hour for all New York City workers. This figure is not arbitrary, but is the wage required to meet basic needs without government subsidies in Manhattan. [MIT](#) has calculated that a genuine “living wage” for an individual living in New York City is \$14.30 per hour.

A wide range of opinions exists on tinkering with the minimum wage, as does a lack of consensus about the overall effects of an increase in the figure. Moreover, politics, as usual, tends to taint the facts with agenda-serving biases, so it is very difficult to obtain an objective analysis on whether raising the minimum wage is in fact helpful or harmful.

The point that I hope to convey is that any way you go, someone is going to lose something in the minimum wage fight—it’s just a matter of what they lose and how much. What one chooses to do thus becomes a matter of what variable holds the most weight in their economic equation: profit, workers, or ethics.

On the one hand, full-time employment of 2,080 hours a year at the current federal minimum of \$7.25 an hour yields an income of \$14,500 a year. This amount is above the individual annual income poverty threshold of \$11,770 but below the [poverty line](#) of \$15,930 for one adult supporting one child. Essentially, what the federal government is saying is that it has set the floor on what an employer can legally pay an employee while also recognizing that the same floor places that employee either just above or well under the threshold of destitution. Living in one of the boroughs of New York City, I am wholly incapable of imagining how a full-time minimum wage worker making \$290 a week is able to survive. Honest work deserves honest pay, and \$7.25 an hour is nowhere near honest. Even if a \$15 an hour minimum wage was federally enacted, a full-time worker would still be making \$31,200 a year, a figure significantly below the [median](#) 2013 U.S. annual *household* income of \$52,250.

The point is that the government may be “handing out” a bigger slice of the pie, but the minimum wage worker’s slice will still be small relative to everyone else’s.

On the other hand, instituting a higher minimum wage defies basic market principles and arbitrarily places a value on labor without consideration of both the supply of and demand for that labor. Cost and demand are inversely related. So, if you set the minimum wage too high, you will get a shortage of jobs, but if you set the minimum wage too low, there will be an excess of low-paying jobs.

Beyond *quantitative* variables such as supply and demand, there are also *qualitative* ones such as the nature and quality of the work. For example, it may be fair to reimburse a fast-food

worker a lower wage if high [turnover](#) exists (it does), or if their job requires no comprehensive expertise or unique skills. It may not be fair, however, to reimburse a healthcare support worker the same minimum wage who in fact does have comprehensive expertise or unique skills.

Then, of course, one also has to contemplate that if an employer is coerced to pay his or her employees more money to do the same work, the employer *may consider* the termination of some workers, raising prices, or automating jobs. For instance, in a [study](#) completed this year by researchers at Purdue University, investigators found that raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for limited-service restaurant employees (fast-food workers) “would lead to an estimated 4.3 percent increase in prices at those restaurants ... increasing wages to \$22 an hour, which the Bureau of Labor Statistics says is what the average American private industry employee makes, would cause a 25 percent increase in prices.” Researchers also found that employers had the option of reducing product size to compensate for higher wages. In the case of Seattle raising its minimum wage in April of this year, some [evidence](#) suggests that increased labor costs have contributed to a loss of jobs exclusively in the food-service industry. It must be mentioned that in this case *causal* evidence does not exist—for now, the two phenomena are noted to be coincidental.

The prior two examples have to be taken with a grain of salt because they look at very isolated cases that cannot necessarily be applied nationwide. This is, in fact, the case with many analyses on the effects of minimum wage that choose very small and select population segments to extrapolate their conclusions. In one of the more exhaustive and recent analyses of more than 200 papers, Belman and Wolfson [conclude](#) the following in *What Does the Minimum Wage Do?*:

Moderate increases in the minimum wage are a useful means of raising wages in the lower part of the wage distribution that has *little or no effect on employment and hours*. This is what one seeks in a policy tool, solid benefits with small costs. That said, current research does not speak to whether the same results would hold for large increases in the minimum wage. Our suspicion is that large increases could touch off the disemployment effects that are largely absent for moderate increases, but evidence for the United States is lacking because there have not been large increases in the last generation. Similarly, increases in the minimum wage are not the only policy needed to address issues of low income in the United States (emphasis added).

In other words, if you increase the minimum wage slightly, people get more money (obviously) and there is almost no effect on how much or if those people work. The data does not predict a clear, empirical conclusion for large raises in the minimum wage, but if the goal is to subsidize people out of poverty, the issue is much larger than minimum wage.

In seeking to identify solutions to the problem, one must first acknowledge three important realities. First, within each state, all minimum wage workers may have an hourly pay rate in common, but the entities who pay them that rate are markedly different. Hence, forcing an employer that happens to be a multi-billion dollar, multi-national corporation to pay its employees more may not put too big of a dent in their bottom line. The situation is completely different if you're a local business with a handful of workers and barely enough financial resources to make each pay cycle. And if one of the aims of raising the minimum wage is to boost the economy, it makes logical sense that this step should not crush some vital components of that economy (the insolvent small business owners). The economists and mathematicians can

calculate a specific cutoff, but a loose rule should be that if any federal coercion is going to take place, it should not apply to businesses with less than a certain number of employees.

Second, according to the 2014 [*U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Report*](#), of the 77.2 million workers paid at hourly rates last year, “1.3 million earned exactly the prevailing federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. About 1.7 million had wages below the federal minimum. Together, these 3.0 million workers with wages at or below the federal minimum made up 3.9 percent of all hourly paid workers.” Basically, *more than 96% of Americans already make more than the minimum wage*, so minimum wage earners only make up a tiny fraction of the total workforce. Hence, changes to federal minimum wage laws will not portend economic Armageddon. Also, according to the same report, the “typical” person who earns an hourly wage at or below the federal minimum is an unmarried single black female aged 16–19 who lives in the South, works part-time, does not have a high school diploma, and works in the leisure or hospitality field.

So when we talk about minimum wage workers, the group we are talking about the most, statistically, is comprised of teenagers who work part-time, *not* mature adults whose career is in a minimum wage field.

The third point is that ultimately, federal minimum wage legislation *coerces* employers into doing things. Uncle Sam basically digs his hand into your pocket and then puts what he grabs into someone else’s pocket. And of course, Uncle Sam gets more tax revenue from the money he’s redistributing between pockets. Furthermore, the government creates no real value in federal minimum wage legislation. They simply enact a rule on a whim, yet the burden of executing that whim falls totally in the hands of employers who have no recourse in the matter. That isn’t capitalism or the American way—that’s dictatorship.

An amicable solution to solve the minimum wage quagmire has to go beyond shame and blame and focus its attention on forward-looking solutions. Hence, a solution has to go beyond the minimum wage. Ultimately, this demands rethinking who (1) provides the job (2) decides how much workers are paid and (3) what incentives exist to increase pay.

I’m not an economist, but here’s a crazy idea using the all-powerful tool of voluntary persuasion: the current federal minimum wage floor stays the same, but for all employers who have greater than a certain number of employees, they are granted a federal tax *credit* (not a tax deduction) for any raises granted to all the employees that currently make minimum wage. Of course, the rule would be voluntary, but employers would now have an economic incentive to pay people more money. Resultantly, people get paid more and the government gets paid less. Now, employers willingly and voluntarily give a pay raise that they deem just to their own productive employees whom they know and Uncle Sam keeps his greedy little hands out of everyone’s pockets. Pay goes up, business owners get to run their own businesses, and the government takes a back seat while everyday Americans get to work and make money. That sounds more like the American way to me.

DESIGNER BABIES (July 11, 2014)

Who has full rights to the genetic makeup of unborn children? Is it the parents, or is that privilege better left in the hands of the divine? Is “tinkering” with an unborn child’s DNA morally corrupt even when the parents have the best interest of the child in mind? Is too much knowledge indeed a bad thing, or does the removal of ignorance grant the newly enlightened a sense of unparalleled autonomy? The issue of designer babies is a complicated one.

I personally believe that *actively* engineering your potential children’s genes simply for the sake of personal choice is morally detestable and ethically flawed. Yet if parents know that some type of horrendous disease will afflict their child and make the youngster’s life miserable, and the parents want to save their future children from such misfortune, then I think the moral and ethical pendulum swings the other way. In essence, the same external manipulation exists, but the intent of said actions has a completely different disposition, a very important distinction to be made.

Take, for example, the case of [Amanda Kalinsky](#), a 20-something-year-old woman who carries the gene for Gerstmann-Sträussler-Scheinker disease (GSS), a rare and lethal neurological sickness that has no cure or treatment. GSS tends to run in families and on average begins to exhibit symptoms analogous to early-onset dementia (trouble speaking, unsteadiness on the feet, and forgetfulness) starting anytime in the patient’s 20s until the 60s. The progressive disease can cause problems for months to years before claiming the lives of its victims. Since Mrs. Kalinsky is a carrier of GSS, she poses a risk to pass the gene along to her children. Alongside her husband, Mrs. Kalinsky chose to have in vitro fertilization for her pregnancies. In each case, her eggs were tested for the disease-causing gene, and only those eggs *without* the gene were then implanted. The Kalinskys are now parents of three children, each of whom are GSS-free.

In this case, the parents were focused on one specific gene, but whole-genome sequencing and [next-generation sequencing procedures](#) will allow DNA testers to decipher a bunch of genetic material (i.e., an entire screening of the unborn child’s DNA) in order to determine genetic predispositions for even trivial characteristics (like hair color) to the risks of threatening diseases like cancer or heart disease. The technology does not exist yet that will allow parents to insert or change genes to match their desires, but current expertise does allow them to dismiss certain embryos based on a genetic profile.

Many ethical dilemmas subsequently exist, but notably parents are now faced with two cardinal problems: (1) the concept of an open future, a term used by bioethicists to denote a scenario where both parents and children remain ignorant of their genetic predispositions, is now rendered null, and thus behavioral patterns will undoubtedly change from birth; and (2) dismissing embryos with certain undesirable genes is analogous to playing God and concluding that these embryos do not in fact have a right to live.

The first issue is easier to navigate because in many regards, even without genetic testing, most people tend to *not* have open futures unless they suffer from a rare mutation or are the first person in their family to develop a certain disease. If John Doe, for instance, has 10 first-degree relatives with adult-onset diabetes, and Mr. Doe’s father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all had diabetes, there’s a pretty good chance John will develop diabetes. This may not have been confirmed by gene sequencing, but common sense and simple probabilities suggest a high likelihood. In this sense, John’s future is not “open,” but whether or not he chooses to embrace or ignore the facts will ultimately be a choice he will have to make as an informed adult. He may

adopt a healthy lifestyle at a very young age preventatively, or he may choose to binge daily on high-sugar foods and obtain no form of exercise. Individual autonomy is paramount, and that same autonomy may cripple some people with fear, doubt, hesitation, anxiety, and worry; but it may also simultaneously empower, strengthen, equip, and enable the well-informed. I don't think it's the physician's job to ever withhold valuable information, and it is our responsibility to inform patients and parents of concerning results; what is done with those results should always remain the prerogative of the owners of the genes—the patient and, indirectly, the parents. Let us all not forget that open futures are not fully closed by genes that code for *predispositions* but not *certainty*—many common diseases are caused by a multitude of factors (e.g., heart disease), and thus we are not in total bondage to a particular gene sequence.

The second issue is highly complicated for obvious reasons. The act will always be the same, but the intent (save the child from unnecessary hurt versus I want designer babies) can diverge remarkably. Is there any ethical argument that can be constructed against parents who want to save their children from avoidable pain, suffering, and premature death? Conversely, our society has already established the moral groundwork to make designer babies perfectly ethical and just since women have the right to *terminate* life (abortion), *without* reason, in the case of a genetically *undetermined* baby. Using this secular framework, who is to say then that parents cannot *choose* life, *with* reason, with genetically *favorable* characteristics? [Gattaca](#) may be closer than we all think.

In conclusion, I don't think there is any right answer to the moral dilemma of designer babies, but just as technology can be regarded as an inevitable path toward the perverse, it can also produce novel and groundbreaking means to save lives. Take, for instance, the case of [Joshua Osborn](#), a 14-year-old boy whose life was saved from a rare brain infection using next-generation sequencing procedures. This technology will not only provide more timely diagnoses, but it also has the potential to lead to more effective treatments for conditions that are hard to identify—in short, less guessing, more certainty, saving more lives, and producing healthier patients.

WHY THE FUTURE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PRESENT (November 28, 2015)

The French people have been struck by tragedy. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the recent catastrophic attacks on the French capital that claimed the lives of more than 120 individuals. As the [NY Times](#) reports, ISIS has called the attacks “the first of the storm” and degraded the city of Paris as a “capital of prostitution and obscenity,” according to statements released in multiple languages on one of the terror group’s encrypted messaging accounts.” Using an acronym for the Islamic State (Daesh), the French President, François Hollande, placed blame for the attacks on the terror group. In regards to the attacks, he [said](#), “It is an act of war that was committed by a terrorist army, a jihadist army, Daesh, against France.” Current intelligence suggests that [Abdelhamid Abaaoud](#), a migrant from Syria to Belgium, was the mastermind behind the Paris attacks. Most of those alleged to have perpetrated the attacks have been [identified](#) as nationals of France.

At this critical juncture in time, emotions run deep, and there is a common grief shared with others due to the senseless loss of life and the wanton use of mindless violence. Yet, fully cognizant of this fact, the world has unfortunately seen such terror before, and the question we must now ask ourselves is how we ought to respond. Almost 15 years ago, in the aftermath of 9/11, America was in a situation similar to that in France right now. Former President [Bush](#) made the statement, “We’re taking the fight to the terrorists abroad, so we don’t have to face them here at home.” In essence, that meant sending people to kill so those targets don’t come over here to kill. This strategy did not work, as the interventions to thwart Al-Qaeda helped *to build* ISIS, which was succinctly summed up by a college student when she [told](#) former Governor Jeb Bush, “Your brother created ISIS.”

Sadly, if we are to respond as we have in the past, then it seems that our actions may portend an escalation of terrorism as opposed to the containment of it. In response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, America engaged in two land wars and multiple proxy wars. And what quantifiable results have all those wars had? Today, in 2015, there is [more](#) terrorism in the world in addition to a five-fold increase in terrorism fatalities. Moreover, the Middle East—the area where the United States engaged in two land wars—is more unstable than it was in 2000. This must be considered in the context of President Hollande [promising](#) that France would act, in regard to ISIS, without mercy and “unforgiving with the barbarians.”

As Ed Krayewski writes for [Reason](#):

ISIS replaced Al Qaeda, weakened but not finished by fourteen years of American counterterrorist operations. By almost every measure, it is a more vicious organization even than Al Qaeda. This is not a new phenomenon—it is a well-known pattern wherever drug cartels and other crime lords (and what is a terrorist but that?) are knocked off. They are replaced by something more vicious.

Abdelhamid Abaaoud entered Europe from Syria through Greece. This fact has given rise to acute anxiety over people emigrating from the Middle East, both in Europe and in America. Many American governors have voiced their opposition to having Syrian refugees in their states. (More than [25 governors](#) have in fact expressed this sentiment.) The aversion to refugees is in fact a very big deal because the crisis in Syria has produced more than [four million refugees](#). A

majority of them are now located in government camps near the Turkish-Syrian border. Yet, although many have adopted an antagonistic attitude toward the refugees since the Paris attacks, both the refugees and the Parisian victims share a common link—both groups had their livelihood and personhood irreversibly changed by an external and coercive threat that sought its own limited purposes at the expense of the innocent. Hence, President Assad of Syria sought his own limited purposes, leading to civil war. The international community sought its own purposes in contributing military resources in the Syrian conflict, leading to four million refugees. Terrorists sought their own limited purposes, leading to the death of innocent Parisians. If we now seek our own limited purposes in our response to these crises, then the cycle continues without hope and without end.

Consequently, our response to the Syrian refugees should mimic our response to the victims of the Paris attacks. Both are victims of abominable evil, and both would have preferred to live their lives peacefully. This peace was disrupted by violence, and for *both* groups, what will serve them best is not judgment or scorn, but mercy.

This brings me to my closing point, the issue of providence. In a natural sense, providence refers to an entity intervening in the present to execute protective care while planning and preparing for future eventualities. Accordingly, a natural human response to the Paris attacks is to take quick, “decisive” action, therein assuaging the need for vengeance by exterminating the “barbarians.” As the argument goes, this would control the terrorists in the present and protect the innocent and thus prepare against future eventualities. This sentiment was recently expressed by CNN reporter Jim Acosta when, in reference to ISIS, he [asked](#) President Obama, “Why can’t we take out these bastards?” In the President’s calculated response, he said:

[ISIS] is not, as I said, a traditional military opponent. We can retake territory. And as long as we leave our troops there, we can hold it, but that does not solve the underlying problem of eliminating the dynamics that are producing these kinds of violent extremist groups. And so we are going to continue to pursue the strategy that has the best chance of working even though it does not offer the satisfaction, I guess, of a neat headline or an immediate resolution. And part of the reason, as I said, Jim, is because there are costs to the other side. I just want to remind people. This is not an abstraction. When we send troops in, those troops get injured, they get killed, they’re away from their families. Our country spends hundreds of billions of dollars. And so given the fact that there are enormous sacrifices involved in any military action, it’s best that we don’t, you know, shoot first and aim later. It’s important for us to get the strategy right and the strategy that we are pursuing is the right one.

Providence protects in the present while preparing for what lies ahead. If we, as a nation, or as a collective group of nations, begin to take swift, military action, we will indeed achieve some success in taking out these “bastards.” But that would not be preparing for future eventualities. That would be creating new, larger, more dangerous eventualities that can hurt us worse than it has hurt humanity up to this point. War is never without cost, and part of that cost is blowback: the victimization of the innocent, who thus are given reason and moral impetus to attack the victimizers. People often ask why there is so much evil in the world, and one of the answers is quite simple: because we all, as fallible human beings, would rather satisfy our desires with quick vengeance as opposed to patient providence. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

have taught us, quick vengeance will generate some snappy headlines and rapid results, but this comes at the expense of long-term peace and harmony among human beings. If we do act quickly and swiftly, then we will be fighting violence with violence, using evil in the name of good, and choosing judgment over mercy. It is mercy that always triumphs over judgment.

ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

At what age is sulking no longer acceptable behavior? In the case of *Fisher vs. University of Texas*, Abigail Fisher seems to be sulking well into adulthood, and she wants others to bear the burden of her pouting.

The very short version of the story is that Abigail Fisher applied to the University of Texas at Austin back in 2008. She did not get in, and thought that UT Austin's race-conscious admissions policy unfairly discriminated against her. She then sued the University, and that suit has reached all the way to the Supreme Court.

Ms. Fisher desired a particular outcome in life and did not get it. It is normal for anyone to be discouraged and upset when reality does not live up to their expectations. For people who have a growth mindset, they dust themselves off, pick themselves up, learn from what didn't work, and then press forward. But not Abigail—she dreamed of going to UT Austin, and anything less than acceptance demanded reparation. She is [quoted](#) as saying, "I dreamed of going to UT ever since the second grade ... My dad went there, my sister went there and tons of friends and family, and it was a tradition I wanted to continue."

Ms. Fisher decided that her misfortune was due to something completely external, and that had nothing to do with her internal performance—it *had* to be someone else's fault, and because the root of her problem is external, *that externality* had to change. Essentially, sulking led to criticism, criticism led to anger, and anger led to a lawsuit.

The interesting part about this case is that in Texas, where Ms. Fisher went to high school, it is written into law ([House Bill 588](#)) that all of those graduating in the top 10% of their high school class are *guaranteed admission* to all state-funded universities—this of course would include UT Austin, where Abigail applied and was rejected. Back in 2008, Ms. Fisher was in the top 12% of her class, but not the top 10%.

Texas enacted HB 588 in 1997, which means that Abigail knew well in advance what was required to get into a state-funded university. Texas drew an objective, race-blind line in the sand that said, "If you perform this well, you get in." She had four years to apply herself, to work hard, and then execute and academically demonstrate the gumption to qualify and to belong amongst the upper-tier of achievers. However, she did *not* qualify and she did *not* earn a spot amongst the elite. She did *well*—but doing well is not the same as doing *great*. The top 12% is not the top 10%. The only person at fault here is Abigail Fisher alone.

Sometimes in life, people don't make that cut and they lose. That's life. What separates the doers who create real value from those who leech or destroy value, is how they respond to hardship. Abigail chose the latter path.

By the way, Abigail has since graduated from Louisiana State University with a degree in finance and currently works in Texas.

The senseless irony in the story of *Fisher vs. University of Texas* is that it is a case about affirmative action—yet the alleged "victim" is a white female who had a perfectly legitimate alternative opportunity to obtain her education, and she took it. She was not denied an opportunity or access across the board—she was only denied access at a select point—*due to variables under her complete control*. Her desired solution to amend the alleged discriminatory racial practices of UT Austin is to take away from others something she already has: the opportunity of a college education. That isn't justice, but the redistribution of choices and the editing of personal outcomes at another's expense.

Whether or not affirmative action is the legitimate answer to a complicated problem is a topic I will leave to other writers. What is very clear from this case, however, is that when adults sulk, they resort to childish behaviors to try to solve their grownup problems. It is truly unfortunate that we live in a day and age where sulking is cultivated and nurtured all the way up to the highest court in the land. The single worst thing that the Supreme Court can do is vote in favor of Ms. Fisher and against the University of Texas, thereby ending race-conscious admissions practices at the University. This opinion has nothing to do with race, and has everything to do with subjugating that wretched part of the self inside of all of us that would rather have the path made easier than to pick up our own stick and walk. If the court votes in favor of Abby, they will encourage every querulous individual who spits in the face of tenacity, grit, and the development of genuine character, and exchanges those timeless truths for the abhorrent and value-destroying lies of self-pity, vanity, and peevish complaint.

HOW MARRIAGE TAUGHT ME HOW TO RESPOND TO TERRORISM (December 19, 2015)

Being married has taught me a lot about how to make wiser decisions. Why? Because experience has demonstrated that in order to make a decision *now* that will be best for both of us *in the future*, I have to distance myself from short-term emotions. It is from this perspective that I approach and respond to the recent violence that has traumatized our country.

The tragedy in San Bernardino, California, in which a man and woman needlessly took the lives of 14 people and injured 21 others, is being treated by the FBI as a terrorist attack. The two individuals that perpetrated the attack—Tashfeen Malik and Syed Rizwan Farook—gunned down their victims with more than 100 bullets. Mr. Farook, born in America, and Ms. Malik, born in Pakistan, were Muslim. The Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the violence by making a statement that two of its followers executed the attack. Furthermore, on the day of the attack, Ms. Malik is reported to have made a post on Facebook, where she declared her allegiance to ISIS.

Of course, short-term emotions now run high because of the wanton use of violence and the mindless use of coercive force by two extreme individuals against other members of humanity. The fervor of the moment fuels the chorus for quick and decisive action. Such a reaction is compounded by the availability bias, the psychological principle and mental shortcut where people use information that's immediately available to make a decision. So whether we're talking about terrorism, religious extremism, guns, or immigration, the tragedy in San Bernardino is what is most accessible. This act of terror comes to the forefront of our minds *first* and thus trumps all prior data we have when it comes to making an assessment about a specific issue. Add to this the fact that the human brain devotes *more* consideration to negative experiences than to positive ones, and what you're left with is a troubling dynamic where one instance of recent evil can amount to much more than a past filled with ample good.

Just like in marriage, having a big fight stirs up our emotions and compels us to view our partners in a less positive light. We begin to look back and taint the past with pollution of recent heartbreak. We may even disregard what our partners have done throughout our relationships and allow the disheartening present to paint a future based on our angst. In marriage, the obvious danger here is that we throw away the whole person because of one temporal act. In society, the obvious danger is that we throw away an entire group of people who share a common trait because of a few evil individuals. Accordingly, the question we ought always to ask ourselves in life is: Even though this decision feels right *right now*, will I feel right living with the consequences of the decision weeks, months, or years from now?

In regard to the San Bernardino attack, short-term emotions tell us that we *must* do something, and do something *now*. But I dare to ask: Is doing something *right now* really better than first distancing ourselves from the moment? We may not like the future we create with the choices made in the present.

An example of short-term emotional decision-making comes from a Republican presidential candidate who recently called for a "total and complete shutdown" of entry into the United States for Muslims. The given reason for this restriction is that, according to the candidate, Muslims have a deep-seated disdain for America and therefore pose a legitimate terror threat. The availability bias tells us that "those people" did it, therefore "those people" can't be

let inside our borders. Yet, when we distance ourselves from the moment, it becomes clear that condemning all members of a group because of the sins of two is erroneous and flawed.

According to the [2013 American Community Survey](#), 41.3 million immigrants were living in the United States as of July 2013. Of those immigrants, 1.8 million came from the Middle East and about 340,000 came from Pakistan. From 2010 to 2013, the number of people immigrating to the United States from the Middle East and Pakistan was about 250,000. From 2010 to 2013, fewer than five Muslims have committed acts of terrorism on U.S. soil. So, even if we boldly assumed that every single immigrant from the Middle East and Pakistan is Muslim (they're not), the percentage committing acts of terror is less than one-hundredth of 1%. The number of Muslims who committed acts of terror relative to the total number of Muslim adults in America ([1.8 million](#)) yields a percentage very close to zero (0.0003%). Both of these figures do not even speak to the fact that most terrorists committing acts of terror on American soil are *not Muslim*. Now you may say to yourself, "That date range doesn't even include 9/11!" Yes, you're right. But according to the FBI, if you look at all the terrorists who attacked on U.S. soil from 1980 until 2005, more than 90% were *not Muslims*.

Essentially, banning all Muslims from entering the country because of the disgraceful acts of two of them is like banning all women from entering your house because your wife and her female friend made a mess of your man cave and destroyed some of your prized sports memorabilia. (And no, that is not comparing the real-life victims to imagined material losses. The comparison is in the response.) Ultimately, as time moves on and you look back and remember what you felt just in the moment, will you be able to live with the long-term consequences of your decision based on short-term emotions? The thing with history is that you are only doomed to repeat it if you ignore it. Just consider the Chinese who were targeted and banned in the 1800s (the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882), the Jews who had strict immigration limits placed on them during the first quarter of the 1900s, and the internment of the Japanese in the 1940s. We look back now and say, "That was despicable." Indeed, this is true. But *at the time*, it may have felt like the right thing to do in the heat of the moment.

A successful marriage is built upon two people who want to be together. A successful nation is built upon groups of people who want to live among one another and work together. Freedom and liberty are what make America American. Bigotry and xenophobia are what will make us just like the rest. Group condemnation may satisfy the short-term emotions of the moment but will cost us in the long term. To separate ourselves from the fervor of the moment means that we value wisdom and that we treasure the future more than the present.

WHY TEENAGERS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE STUPID

My wife is an adolescent medicine doctor, meaning she is a pediatrician that specializes in teenagers. A key idea she has always emphasized is that the adolescent brain is not fully developed—particularly when it comes to executive function.

This means the teenage brain has yet to develop the neurons or brain tissue that regulate impulse control and tell them things like, “This isn’t a good idea.” This lack of brain development helps explain why teenagers are more likely to engage in risky behaviors and why, in their minds, there is a distinct gap between short-term behaviors and their long-term consequences. Indeed, a scientific and biological explanation exists as to why teenagers are supposed to be stupid.

With this in mind, consider two recent cases of utter insanity in the news.

The first case involves a former Arizona high school student by the name of [Hunter Osborn](#) who was arrested and taken to jail after being charged with 69 counts of indecent exposure and one count of supplying detrimental materials to minors. The latter charge is a felony.

So what did Mr. Osborn do? He exposed himself in a yearbook photo of the school’s football team. Mr. Osborn admitted to doing what he did after taking a [dare](#). Most people who saw the photo didn’t even notice the indiscretion. Yet, a parent did notice and then notified Red Mountain High School. The school then called the police.

It certainly seems logical for Mr. Osborn’s parents and Red Mountain High School to take some form of disciplinary action against him since what he did was stupid. At the end of the day, even if he does suffer from “teenage brain,” this does not dismiss the fact that he should be held accountable for his actions. That accountability can take many simple forms that do not involve creating a criminal record for an 18 year old. He may atone for his wrongs with a sacrifice that matches the gravity of his sin. For instance, he could perform community service. He could be sentenced to clean the school for weeks. He could be required to do extra coursework. But considering that Mr. Osborn did not intentionally cause any irrevocable harm to any person, he certainly does not belong in jail. His infraction was so unnoticeable that the photographer and the school didn’t even notice his exposure until someone later pointed it out. In the end, we’re treating a teenager like a dangerous adult criminal while acting as though teenagers aren’t supposed to be stupid—but they are.

Does any reasonable adult think that putting Mr. Osborn in jail for a stupid teenage mistake will actually serve *him* better in the long run and transform him into a productive adult? If one thinks that is the case, then we should, by that logic, turn high schools into jails. Why? Because, according to The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, The Pew Internet & American Life Project and the Cox Communications Teen Online & Wireless Safety Survey, [one out of five](#) teens admits to having sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos or videos of themselves. Social proof does not condone foolish behavior but invites the authorities to consider that locking up teens (which inhibits value creation) may not be the best approach to stemming such a pervasive problem. On the other hand, the alternative³/those teens being in school—does create value.

The second case of insanity involves [Levar Allen](#), a 17-year-old Louisiana high school student. A 16-year-old girl initiated and texted Mr. Allen nude pictures of herself. Mr. Allen reciprocated. The police then charged him with contributing to the delinquency of a minor and

possession of child pornography. Because the girl is younger than 17, she was also charged with sexting, but as a misdemeanor. Because Mr. Allen is 17, he was charged with a felony.

Without even getting into the issue of race, Mr. Allen's case is the more absurd for one reason: in Louisiana, sexting is criminal while actual sex isn't. The age of sexual consent in Louisiana is 17, and those younger than 17 can consent if their age is within two years of their partner. This means Mr. Allen (17 years old) could have *legally* had sex with his 16-year-old sexting partner, yet sexting between these same two people is *illegal* according to Louisiana state law. Essentially, Louisiana is exposing itself for the sheer absurdity of its laws. You don't even have to agree with the state's laws to appreciate that they defy common sense. Here, pictures that are suggestive of an act are deemed more offensive than the act itself.

In these cases, the laws against child pornography are valid, reasonable, and intended to protect the vulnerable. Yet when such laws are applied recklessly without common sense and without a regard for the people that they are intended to protect, the rule of law is thereby transformed from a shield into a weapon.

The adolescent brain is underdeveloped. We know this. So, we know teenagers are supposed to be stupid. The stupid application of valid laws, however, does not yield intelligible results.

When I was a teenager, I was stupid. Now, I believe I have grown into a well-adjusted adult. Looking back, it is clear that criminalizing my teenage stupidity would have done more harm than good. So can't we all stop being so hypersensitive for one moment and simply embrace the fact that teenagers are supposed to be stupid and that, generally speaking, the ultimate cure for that isn't jail time—it's just *time*.