

FEAR, THE MALDISTRIBUTION OF

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Serendipity! Today (10 Feb 92) I (1) came across a note from a subscriber asking for "#2429," & I wrote assuring him he'd get it when finished (I "rarely" fail to finish, usually at one sitting); & (2) bumped into this sheet with nothing on it but #, date, & title. You could write it yourself: it's all right there in the title.

1 Today I answered a letter from a liberal-seminary student who was laughed at in class for questioning universalism. "If God is power, justice, & love, how could any human beings be finally lost?" was the argument intended to undo her, but it didn't. It seemed to her unserious about what the Bible has to say about fear (esp. "the fear of the Lord"), sin, guilt, repentance, atonement, hell, & more. I agree with her that blocking out God's dark side in tangency with our down side has resulted in a superficial, sentimental liberal ethic of good feelings, good words, good deeds, & good intentions for society. The kneejerk liberal reaction to fear, eg, is to badmouth it, ruling it out of (eg) pedagogy.

2 The triangle of learning motives at all life-stages is composed of curiosity, love, & fear. Killing **curiosity** robotizes learning & is the unpardonable sin in teaching, while encouraging curiosity leads straight to **love**, a love of something in particular & of learning in general. And **fear**? It would be unnecessary in education if (two big ifs!) (1) students were curious about everything their souls & society need to have them curious about, & (2) all the teachers were skilled both in encouraging current curiosities & in leading ("ped-agogy") students to become curious about what they're not but should be curious about. Yes, in the former sentence, "need" & "should" involve what for two generations now educationese has been calling value-judgments. The beginning of wisdom here is to recognize & confess that there can be no value-free educational principles & practices. Here I'm upfront: the basic values of late-18th-century English gentlemen are America's basic values & should be taught to all our children, while multiculturalism teaches us to respect certain additional values.

3 While fear is only of third-rank importance in education, it's an essential pressure wherever students resist learning anything they need to learn, & wherever a teacher is of too low quality to use to the full both curiosity & love. (I'm being pragmatic: almost no teachers are of high enough quality to use to the full both curiosity and love.)

4 The American public-education establishment is liberal, thus negative about fear, especially societal fear, ie fear at levels within students' feeling & understanding, which with almost all students includes corporal punishment. There's some intellectual fear, the fear of failing to "pass," & the social stigma attaching to that failure. But that fear & that stigma have been declining in successive waves of students. With corporal punishment gone ("student's rights" defined as including freedom from it) & academic values in decay, fear of the educational authorities has virtually disappeared for students' psyches.

5 Has this resulted in fear-free public schools? The reverse!

(1) Fear is running wild among the students. Fellow-fear, fear of one's fellow-students, since the school authorities are no longer feared. (Geopolitically, the collapse of central government in many areas of the earth is a parallel to American public-school anarchy.) Wm. Golding's moral allegory LORD OF THE FLIES is not, in my opinion, overly pessimistic in preaching the horrors that break out among human beings who, under no authority, declare that their wants are needs & needs, deserts & deserts, rights.

Fear has ceased to flow from **above** & is now flowing **alongside**.

(2) Teacher-fear (**up** from the students) has replaced student-fear (**down** from teachers & administration). In some schools this has intensified to the degree that the teacher dropout rate (teachers abandoning teaching) now exceeds 20% per year, & the remaining teachers are too frightened to try to exercise the measure of discipline necessary to come anywhere near reaching learning goals.

In short, in America's public schools, fear is now **maldistributed**. Note my assumptions in "carrying" this term "over" from economics to education. (The heart of this Thinksheet is this metaphor I made--"meta-phor" being Greek for "carry over"). The assumptions are projections from "bad[mal]-distribution";

(1) Fear is badly, improperly, destructively distributed--as are wealth, goods, services in the economic parallel.

(2) Like wealth, goods, services, fear has social value. Since liberal dogma challenges this, this Thinksheet here is a counter-challenge.

(3) Social therapy, the healing of society, requires that fear be redistributed. In the main, the redistribution should reverse the present distribution, returning us to the status quo ante. But we should look to the possibility of some learnings from (a) the fact that the old distribution broke down, (b) the new situation is not entirely negative, & (3) since the reign of the old arrangement, the social sciences have somewhat advanced our knowledge of intra- & inter-personal human realities.

6 How is it with the **Bible** & fear? It's to the inner life what pain is to the outer, the body: a divine signal that something's wrong, amiss, & as such a gracious divine invitation to discover & correct the aberration. God intends pain & fear (metaphorically, psychic-spiritual pain) to be educational-therapeutic. Those who refuse the correction-healing suffer loss--the loss of what they might have learned instead of remaining in ignorance, the loss of the peace & joy human beings experience when what went wrong goes right, the loss of communion with God & the righteous (not the self-righteous, but those who decide not to resist correction-healing). I'll content myself with two references affirming fear:

Jesus (esp. in Mt.5.22,29,30; 10.28[L.12.5]; 16.18; 18.9[M.9.47]; 23.15,33) has a lot to say about gehenna-hell (ie, afterlife punishment). In the pattern of the OT prophets & Jn. Baptist, he warns &, to those open to acting on the warnings, announces good news (the pattern continuing in Jesus' followers & in the Qur'an). The hoped-for response is fear moving the God-scared to repentance, which includes amendment of life. One example, which is also an example of political theology:

Mt.10.28: "Don't fear those who kill the body but can't kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (parallel: L.12.4f; cf. 2Clement 5.2-4). Be more scared of God--the God who in love wants you to be free from fear in love!--than of any persecutor. (Qur'an: "The only shelter from God is in God." By replacing the personal "God" with an impersonal such as "truth," one can get some but not the full force of the Qur'anic saying.)

"Cheap grace" is Bonhoeffer's familiar phrase for those who delude themselves into thinking they can appropriate to themselves, & communicate to others, the good news without the contexting warning-fear. "Amazing Grace" sings about an un-cheap, expensive grace, expensive at both ends, for "a wretch like me." Public-school wretches should have to face the bad news that teachers & administrators are to be feared "or else," & the good news of freedom from ignorance--just as criminal wretches....but this leads us to....

Paul (Ro.13 NRSV): "Do you wish to have no fear of the [government] authority? Then do what is good....But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid....be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience....Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." The apostle speaks of good law well administered, the coercive backbone of social order: fear resides in criminals, so the populace need not fear the criminals. In our country today, handgun sales steadily rise along with fear of criminals & conviction that "the system" will not protect us the populace from criminals. Fear has become displaced, maldistributed; & jurisprudence lacks the will, the skill, & the legal freedom to reverse the fear. If people feel they must look to their own protection, arming themselves, is it fair to forbid children to come to school armed?

7 A false scrupulosity is preventing a pro-human, pro-social redistribution of fear. Being a liberal evangelical, I am saddened that I must count liberal religion a hindrance & enemy to what now is needed in school & society.

8 Much of our private & public life today has a **paranoid tinge**. Even if we have nothing to fear but fear itself (which is not true), we are fearing fear. And we'd like to eliminate it or, barring that, transport it elsewhere, like our garbage & nuclear wastes. (If we've got it, it must be maldistributed!) Nukes frightened the Japanese, now their Nissans are scaring us. This mood fosters scapegoating; for if nobody else is to blame for our fear, we are, & that thought can only increase our fear. Here lie demonic uglinesses, the isms of prejudice & the inflations of false pride. Fear fosters false analyses, encourages the maldistribution of fear, & impedes reason, opening the private & public psyche & purse to scam & demagoguery. **Cure?** (1) Undermine false fear with fact & faith. (2) Promote the fearing of what should be feared; for by a reverse Gresham's Law in the moral order, true fear drives out false (eg, again Jesus' "fear him [God]"). (3) Reverse fear where it's been maldistributed--eg, the largely successful terrorizing of hijack & kidnap terrorists. The main burden of this Thinksheet lies with this third type of action: *Where fear has gotten out of place, what personal-social-economic-political policies will return it to where it belongs?* And the main obstacle to getting on with this work is the ideological double-nonsense notion that since fear is unnecessary, we should figure out how to get along without it at every level of power & responsibility.

9 Like light, which is particles & waves, fear comes both as incidents & as waves. In writing the "Statement" (p.4), I was concerned about the AIDS-fear wave which hit the Mass. public-education authorities so hard that they decreed all our schools should distribute condoms! I believe that religious communities should help the schools (1) resist "panicky thinking" (paranoid, because excessive fearfulness leading to irrational behavior), (2) aggressively teach abstinence, & (3) avoid "focusing on the physical threat of AIDS" to the neglect of considering, & teaching, "the psychological, moral, and spiritual dimensions of genital sexual activity." Not that the school authorities should be less fearful; rather they should distribute the fear over a wider range of woes: the fear is maldistributed when it's all put in the AIDS basket. If you run from a lion, you may meet up with a bear (in "the day of the Lord" context, Amos 5.19).

10 Psychosocial note: Fear is the **negative social control**, & in a healthy society it works as a three-sided pyramid (call it the fear quadrangular). The angle overseeing all is God, who in the holiness of righteousness & love, judgment & mercy, oversees (both senses) "all," the universe, including the human world with its three angles--home, community (at heart, the church), school. Diva Kathleen Battle so describes (without my geometry) her experience in growing up in an all-black Ohio small town. She was (in my figure) in the center of the horizontal triangle, directly under the eye of God, but loving, disciplinary eyes looking at her from all three horizontal corners. "Everybody knew everybody, & you couldn't get away with anything anywhere. For example, you were in a squeeze between your parents & your teachers. It's so different today, so chaotic."

Integrated fear is what Miss Battle grew up with: fragmented fear is what today's children (& not just black) face today. Fellow-fear, peer fear, street fear, economic-social-political security fear, the presence & absence of guilts & shames, existential fear ("Nothing means anything"), suicide fear, drugs fear, AIDS fear, pregnancy fear--but little or no fear of God, parents, teachers, clergy & other community leaders (including truant officers & police).

11 But we've good reasons to hope for the reinstitution of **neighborhood** with its holistic, four-directional fear. Large- & small-scale institutions have so crumbled that their dysfunctionality is no longer deniable, & repentance must precede renewal. After their HABITS OF THE HEART skewered the hypertrophied individual (furthered panned in the 17 Feb 92 NEWSWEEK cover article, "The Curse of Self-Esteem"), Robert Bellah + completed their diagnosis of our sick society in a work that is strangely, rightly optimistic, **THE GOOD SOCIETY** (Knopf/91). Statecraft & soulcraft are inseparable, & optimal fear is one bridge between them. "Perfect love casts out fear" (1Jn.4.18), but our less than perfect love flounders & fails when it tries to do without it. And halting social & planetary degradation will require better distribution of it.

^{proposed}
**A STATEMENT OF SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, CENTERVILLE, met in
 annual meeting 25 January 92,
 TO THE BARNSTABLE SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

While we commend your concern for the health of our publicschool children vis-a-vis HIV/AIDS, we oppose the use of our public schools as agencies for the distribution of condoms.

You distribute textbooks, because you promote learning from them. Whatever you distribute, you promote. That is why you do not distribute promotional literature of religious organizations: you want to avoid promoting particular religions. Whatever you distribute, you promote the use of.

Distributing condoms is promoting their use. To argue that they will be used only by students who are already sexually active is as specious as the claim of tobacco companies that their advertising, including the distribution of free cigarettes, aims not at gaining new addicts but only at stealing addicts from other companies.

Myopic as well as specious is the claim that "Saving even one student from AIDS is worth the distributing of condoms." Such panicky thinking is falsely persuasive in playing up to the American emphasis on the individual. But in focusing on the physical threat of AIDS, it is blind to the psychological, moral, and spiritual dimensions of genital sexual activity. Is one to be saved at the cost of corrupting and endangering many? Further, whatever promotes teen sex spreads the AIDS danger, so that hypothetical one student will not be saved.

Further, our culture, even without condom distribution in the schools, over-promotes sex. And the resulting stresses are, many studies agree, a factor in the steadily rising teen-suicide rate. Condoms in the schools inevitably increases internal and external pressures for sexual intercourse and thus adds to the stresses that push some over the brink into suicide.

Again, school distribution of condoms feeds the illusion that condom sex is safe sex. Many factors militate against this notion. Giving children a false sense of security is bad education. It is true that condoms--if used, if properly used, and if the particular condom is reliable--reduce the danger of dying of AIDS. But should not the schools rather be teaching the elimination of this danger, instead of saying in effect "You probably won't die of AIDS if you use condoms"?

America's spiritual heritage, Christian and Jewish, teaches premarital abstinence; & this view finds increasing support among scholars & practitioners in the social sciences. This is what parents and the schools should be teaching, along with other aspects of sex education. Condom distribution sends wrong signals and fights good physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual sex education.