

Propositions

Dear Reader,

Here's a revealing little trend. Commercial advertisers, who supply what may be today's most influential cultural grammar, are increasingly suggesting that corporations are more reliable than lovers and families. You can't really trust your marriage, but you can trust . . . the company that brought you this ad.

Consider. A recent magazine ad from Chevrolet Cavalier shows a dependability meter which begins with "the weather" (very undependable), goes on to "Mom" (somewhat dependable) and ends up with a Chevy Cavalier: "one of the few things in life you can actually depend on." A current ad from Chrysler shows a splendidly isolated 2001 PT Cruiser under the banner "Emotional rescue" and above the line "Ah, emotional fulfillment at last." An ad from Avis, the rent-a-car company, features a blurry, black-and-white photo of two unsmiling figurines, a bride and a groom. The ad banner says: "Trust. Understanding. Commitment." The ad copy begins: "We've got someone special for you." And who would that person be? Yes, it's that "one person to meet your car rental needs."

Here is the entire text of a recent magazine ad from Honda: "The sad thing is, it'll probably be the healthiest relationship of your adult life. You've tried the personals, blind dates, even one of those online chat rooms. Why? The Civic Sedan is smart, fun, reliable and good-looking. Not to mention, it's ready to commit, today. Looking for a good time?"

To make the same basic point, several new print and television ads bluntly employ the themes of divorce and unwed childbearing. A magazine ad from MassMutual, the life insurance company, features a 30-something mother, looking very much in charge, holding her new baby and explaining her situation quite clearly: "I is now 'we'. My new start-up has only one key shareholder." Which is why she is partnering with MassMutual.

In a new television ad from John Hancock Financial Services, a tired, stressed-out single mother is imploring her ex-husband to "do more" for their son, Joey, only to be told by the ex-husband that his girlfriend wants him to move to California. "You tell Joey that," the woman replies angrily. "You tell him." Which is why she needs John Hancock, a company that offers "Insurance for the Unexpected." In another TV spot from John Hancock, we see a couple engaged in heaving petting. They stop. Him: Please stay, I don't want you to go. Her: "I promised the sitter I'd be home at 11." Him: Let's move in together, get married, so that "I could take care of you and Molly." Her, with quiet determination: "We can take care of ourselves." Well, not exactly. She and Molly will still need some friendly support from . . . John Hancock.

Commenting on the Hancock ads, Judith Langer, who runs a trend consulting firm in New York, told the *New York Times* that women consumers, includ-

In this letter

- *Looking for someone to trust?* — pps. 1, 8.
- *Looking for a father?* — p. 3.
- *Looking for the laws of love?* — p. 4.
- *Looking for a good divorce?* — p. 6.
- *Looking for modern values?* — p. 11.
- *Looking for a new president?* — p. 11.
- *Looking for certainty?* — p. 15.

ing those who are married, view marriage as a “precarious” arrangement today, adding: “There’s a lot of anxiety out there.” Anxiety which advertisers now use to sell their products, in part because people’s sense of vulnerability on this issue is immediate and real, and in part because divorce and unwed childbearing are now becoming normative in our society.

By the way, not to sound naive or overly literal-minded, but does *anyone*, including the people who make these ads, actually believe that the suffering and anxieties stemming from the collapse of marriage can be reduced, or addressed at all in any meaningful way, by car, insurance, and financial services companies?

Patricia Winters Lauro, “Advertising: Divorce Becomes More Common in Campaigns,” New York Times, October 12, 2000.

We Pay Them

Here’s another revealing little trend, also concerning advertising. Children’s books are increasingly using advertisements for children’s food products as the basis of the books. For example, a new book from Simon and Schuster is called *The Oreo Cookie Counting Book*. The book teaches young children to count, as in: “one little Oreo . . . too tasty to resist.” Other recent titles include *The Sun Maid Raisins Play Book*, *The Kellogg’s Fruit Loops! Counting Fun Book*, *The Cheerios Play Book*, *Reese’s Pieces: Counting by Fives*, *The Hershey’s Milk Chocolate Bar Fractions Book*, and *Skiddles Math Riddles*. Some of the most popular books make direct use of the foods themselves. In *The Kellogg’s Fruit Loops! Counting Fun Book*, for example, young learners are taught to insert pieces of Fruit Loops cereal into small cut-out holes in the book’s cardboard pages.

These books are big hits with many children, teachers, and parents. *The Cheerios Play Book* alone has sold more than 1.2 million copies in the last two years. The basic idea behind the books is that children are more interested in learning when learning is connected to brand names that they recognize from advertisements.

But all of that is introduction. The truly revealing aspect of this trend is which way the money flows. Do you assume that these companies are paying authors and publishers to create books that look like advertisements for their products? Actually, it’s the reverse. The authors and publishers pay the snack-food companies. Typically, a company receives an upfront advance from the publisher, then splits all royalty payments with the author on a 50-50 basis.

What does this trend tell us? At least with respect to teaching young children to read and count, the circle has been closed. Not only are advertising, education, and entertainment all slowly blending into more or less the same thing, but we now have a generation of young children so tuned in to advertising, so intellectually and aesthetically captured by it, that some companies no longer find it necessary to pay for their advertisements aimed at our children. Instead, we pay them.

David D. Kirkpatrick, “Snack Foods Become Stars of Books for Children,” New York Times, September 22, 2000.

I think the fees should come down, because these books take the brands to a place where they ordinarily can't get to. They can't usually get to the books that parents read to their kids, and they can't get to advertise in schools. You can't come in and blast children with advertising in those places, and [so] these books are actually getting the exact target age group.

Barbara McGrath, an author of children’s books, complaining about the fees that she must pay to snack-food companies.

Lotta Bull

I love nature programs on television, and in particular, can't get enough on the social lives of lions and elephants. My only complaint is that most of the shows pay too little attention to the males. The adult females, understandably enough, seem always to be in the thick of things, leading the group, finding food, rearing the young, communicating with one another and organizing everything. Whereas male lions, for example, seem to spend all of their time alone and out of sight, patrolling the territory, leaving scent marks, and occasionally roaring at other adult males who might be contemplating an invasion.

But now comes a wonderful study on adult male elephants, recently reported in *Nature* magazine. Between 1992 and 1997, 17 young, orphaned male elephants, whose parents had been killed in herd cullings, were relocated to a park in Pilanesberg, South Africa. They promptly started acting, well, wild. In particular, they went into musth — a hormonally induced state of heightened sexual and aggressive activity — earlier than is normal, and for longer periods of time than is normal. As a result, the young males stormed around the park, quite out of control, killing about 40 white rhinoceros in the process.

Then, in 1998, the people who run the park relocated six older bull elephants from Kruger Park to Pilanesburg. The “deviant behavior” of the young males, the researchers report, was quickly “rectified.” No more rampaging, no more dead rhinoceros. What happened? Specifically, there occurred a significant reduction in musth in the young males. Put colloquially, their hormones calmed down. And why did this occur? More research is needed, but it seems clear that old bulls keep young bulls in line, and that exactly how this happens involves both social and physiological factors.

Of course, none of this has anything directly to do with human beings. However, apart from my silly, anthropomorphic desire to identify with the big bulls, I am struck in this regard by new research findings, published in the journal *Evolution and Human Behavior*, showing that new and even expectant human fathers living with the mothers experience significant hormonal changes that “may play a role in priming males to provide care for young.” (The same phenomenon seems to occur in other biparental species — that is, species in which couplings are largely monogamous and in which both parents help to raise the young.) I am also struck by two recent studies (I wrote about them in letter 8) showing that human fathers residing with their daughters slow down the onset of their daughters' puberty, or sexual maturity, whereas the close proximity to young girls of unrelated males, such as stepfathers or mothers' boyfriends, actually speeds up the onset of puberty.

It seems that we are only beginning to understand the complex relationships, involving chemicals and hormones as well as communications and social behaviors, between adult and juvenile members of the same species. But while we are figuring all this out, old bulls, take heart. You too have a role in life.

Rob Slotow, Gus Van Dyke, Joyce Poole, Bruce Page, and Andre Klocke, “Older bull elephants control young males,” Nature 408 (November 23, 2000): 425-426. Anne E. Storey, Carolyn J. Walsb, Roma L. Quinton, and Katherine E. Wynne-Edwards, “Hormonal correlates of paternal responsiveness in new and expectant fathers,” Evolution and Human Behavior 21 (2000): 79-95.

So Stop Worrying About Me

A recent episode of “Arthur,” the children’s cartoon program from PBS, is called “1001 Dads.” Buster’s parents just got divorced and Buster’s father, who now lives far away, won’t be able to take Buster to the annual Father’s Day Picnic. Arthur and his friends are worried that Buster will feel bad, even though Buster seems to feel fine, saying repeatedly that he simply has “other plans” for the day of the picnic. Arthur’s big idea is to find a substitute father for Buster.

First, he rents a clown with balloons. Buster likes the balloons, but sends the clown away. The next idea is a robot, which doesn’t operate properly. The next idea is Mr. Ratburn, a teacher from their school, but Mr. Ratburn can’t stop assigning homework, which disqualifies him. Next is a CD containing images resembling Buster’s real father; Buster is not impressed. Finally, Arthur recruits Binky Barnes, a friend, to read a book called “How to be a Parent” and to start treating Buster like a son; Buster is even less impressed.

Finally, Buster confronts Arthur. Yes, sometimes he is sad when he wants to see his father, but can only call him on the phone. However: “Even though my parents aren’t together anymore, we are still a family, so stop worrying about me!”

Father’s Day arrives. All the fathers and their children are at the picnic. Buster is absent. Then everyone looks up. There is Buster, up in the sky, in a multi-colored hot air balloon! The balloon lands. Everyone gathers around. Something amazing has happened. Buster reports that his father has rented the balloon for him for the entire day! All the children can ride! Everyone is delighted.

To conclude the episode, real children appear on camera to describe their own families and to talk about family diversity. For example: “Just like people are different, families are different. If they were all the same, that would be boring!” And: “No matter what kind of family it is, it’s still a family.”

What are we to make of this story? First, within this genre, which is widespread on children’s television, this episode is as good as it gets. We clearly see that fathers matter and that children of divorce suffer. At the same time, even in this episode, it’s hard to miss the adult propaganda. Even though divorce can be rough at times, things are basically fine. My friends may worry about me, but their concern is misplaced. We are still a family. My dad is still terrific. Look what he did on Fathers Day. Even though he couldn’t be with me, he bought me something really great!

The New Laws of Love

In a recent Institute report, *The Experts’ Story of Courtship*, Dan Cere of McGill University describes his visit to Montreal’s largest bookstore in search of current books on courtship and marriage. First, he was directed to an entire floor devoted to “Self-Help” books: “On this floor, however, there is no section of books called either ‘Marriage’ or ‘Family.’ All books on marriage, divorce, dating, courtship, seduction, friendship, and lesbian and gay relationships are now displayed under one inclusive category called ‘Relationships.’”

Regarding the status of marriage in our society, if you want to know which way the wind is blowing, there is no better barometer than our growing displace-

ment of the word “marriage” with the word “relationship.” A recent book on, well, relationships, by Maurice Taylor and Seana McGee is called *The New Couple: Why the Old Rules Don't Work and What Does*. The book is organized around the ten “new laws of love.” The bad old laws supported “the traditional marriage.” The new laws support “the new couple.”

The Law Commission of Canada recently published a report, *Recognizing and Supporting Close Personal Relationships Between Adults*. The main recommendation is that laws formerly enacted to protect and regulate marriage must now cease to focus on the “form” of intimate relationships, such as whether the two persons are married, and instead focus on “substance,” such as whether the relationship is “close” and is “neither dysfunctional nor harmful.” Clearly, what is being proposed is legal recognition for Taylor and McGee’s “new laws of love,” in which the old thing, marriage, is essentially displaced by the new thing, the couple — you know, people in a relationship.

Another recent Institute report, *Hungry Hearts: Evaluating the New Curricula for Teens on Marriage and Relationships*, by Dana Mack, criticizes many U.S. high school curricula ostensibly focused on marriage precisely because they are so shy about using the word “marriage.” Many of these curricula strongly prefer the word “relationships.” At a recent conference in New York to discuss the report, several curriculum developers argued that Mack’s criticism was unfair. Personally, they would welcome a focus on marriage, but as educational professionals, they have to be realistic. Local school officials, even when evaluating proposed “marriage and relationships” curricula, typically will not accept course material that seems to endorse marriage. They favor instead an educational recognition of Taylor and McGee’s “new laws of love”: marriage out, couples in.

Is this dispute over vocabulary really important? It is all-important. Nothing matters more. If we lose the word “marriage,” we lose marriage.

Dan Cere, Principal Investigator, The Experts' Story of Courtship (New York: Institute for American Values, 2000). Maurice Taylor and Seana McGee, The New Couple: Why the Old Rules Don't Work and What Does (New York: HarperCollins, 2000). Recognizing and Supporting Close Personal Relationships Between Adults (Ottawa: Law Commission of Canada, May 2000). Dana Mack, Principal Investigator, Hungry Hearts: Evaluating the New Curricula for Teens on Marriage and Relationships (New York: Institute for American Values, 2000).

The New Laws of Love, II

The movie stars Bruce Willis and Demi Moore, married in 1987 and the parents of three young daughters, recently got divorced. In a cover-story profile and interview in *Us weekly* magazine (Willis has a new movie coming out), we learn that Willis, whose own parents divorced when he was 16, is deeply devoted to his three daughters, who live with their mother in Idaho. As for the rest of his life, he “bops between homes in Hailey, Idaho, Los Angeles, and his new \$15 million Trump Tower apartment in New York,” and “recently ended a 13-month relationship with Spanish beauty Maria Bravo.”

Philosophically, Willis clearly endorses the “new couple” model, in which formal structures are suspect and “relationships” reign supreme. The interviewer:

Parliament has to keep in mind the distinction between the substance and the form of law — between the legal consequences that have until now been made dependent on establishing a particular status relationship, and the relationship itself . . . Canadian laws now use the concepts of marriage and spouse . . . Whatever may have been the case in the past — and it is far from clear that these traditional socio-cultural concepts were ever a good point of reference — it is obvious that they are no longer adequate to achieve Parliament's purposes.

Law Commission of Canada, May 2000.

“Two bodies meet, stay together for a while, and then separate again. That is love, life, the world.”

Magazine ad, Strellson Menswear

“Can you see yourself in another long-term relationship?” Willis: “For most people, life is a series of relationships. Some are long-term, some are in a married state, some have everything but the slip of paper that says you’re married, some are short, passionate relationships . . . it’s all different. I think the people who get married and stay together are in the minority. I’ll probably have other relationships. I’m not trying to predict when the next one will happen.” And then, about Demi Moore, to whom he reports being “as close now” as he ever was, this remarkable formulation: “Our friendship continues. The institution has been set aside.” I don’t know how it could be said any better, and in today’s marriage debate, I don’t know of any viewpoint — focus on relationship, put the institution aside — that is gaining ground any faster.

Todd Gold, “Bruce Willis: Just a guy. Just a very fortunate guy.”, Us weekly, December 11, 2000.

An Old Law of Love

Taylor, McGee, and Willis are going with the cultural flow, nothing more. But they are wrong to suggest that marriage is simply one version, and quite possibly an inferior version, of a private relationship. To remind yourself of what marriage is, listen to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing to a young bride and groom from his prison cell in Nazi Germany in 1943: “Your love is your own private possession, but marriage is more than something personal — it is a status, an office. Just as it is the crown, and not merely the will to rule, that makes the king, so it is marriage, and not merely your love for each other, that joins you together in the sight of God and man.” And then, about what does the elevating, this remarkable sentence: “It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love.” I don’t know how it could be said any better, and in today’s marriage debate, I don’t know of anything more important to say.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: Collier, 1972), 43.

Looking at Divorce

Dr. Judith S. Wallerstein, the clinical psychologist and a member of this institute’s Council on Families, has written an important new best-seller, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25-Year Landmark Study*. More than any other person in the country, Wallerstein has changed the way that we look at divorce. Twenty-five years ago, when she began interviewing the children of recently divorced parents, the prevailing view, at least among academics and other opinion leaders, was that children typically recover from their parents’ divorce rather quickly, and that parental divorce usually benefits everyone, including children, since children won’t be happy unless the parents are happy.

Almost single-handedly in the 1980s, and with only a few colleagues by her side in the 1990s, Judy Wallerstein challenged and ultimately overturned that conventional wisdom. It was not easy. As recently as a year ago, she was regularly attacked as an extremist. (I wrote about these attacks in letters 3 and 4.) But today, quite suddenly, her insistence that the impact of divorce on children is typically

harmful and long-lasting has become widely accepted, virtually the new conventional wisdom. This past fall, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* was featured on the cover of *Time* and also on the cover of the *New York Times Book Review*. She appeared on “Oprah” not once, but twice. After the first show, thousands of adult children of divorce phoned in to say to say, essentially, “she is telling the story of my life.” So Oprah invited her back, and she was a big hit again. All in all, a remarkable personal achievement, and more broadly, a sign of an important shift in our national debate. The old question was whether the divorce culture is harming our children. The new question is whether we want to reform the divorce culture, since we know that it is harming our children.

Judith S. Wallerstein, Julia M. Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee, The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study (New York: Hyperion, 2000).

Looking at Divorce, II

For those writers still determined to defend our high rates of divorce, the intellectual cupboard is increasingly bare. More and more, they rely on tired clichés that have long since been exposed as phony by serious scholars. For example, here is the novelist Jane Smiley in the *New York Times*, attacking “Wallersteinians” by pointing out that today’s high rates of divorce stem largely from nothing more sinister than longer life spans: “Historians of domestic life have suggested that marriages in the premodern period were usually short — death did the work of divorce.” Here is the historian Stephanie Coontz making the same point for the same reason in *Time* magazine: “In the 1940s the average marriage ended with the death of the spouse. But life expectancy is greater today, and there is more potential for trouble in a marriage.”

Coontz’s formulation deserves a prize. Her first sentence, about the 1940s, is simply a pretentious and confusing way of stating the obvious: Prior to the modern divorce revolution, most marriages lasted for life. Her second sentence, suggesting that longer life expectancy in recent decades is a principle cause of more divorce, is ludicrous. Longer life spans today are due primarily to sharp reductions in infant mortality, a piece of progress that does not affect divorce rates at all.

As Norval Glenn has shown, if we put aside changes in infant mortality, and look instead at the life expectancy of young adults, who account for the great majority of marriages and divorces, death rates have changed little since 1950. Moreover, while older adults today can expect to live a bit longer than did previous generations of adults of the same age, people today also get married at later ages. As a result, the “natural” life span of a typical marriage (excluding divorce) is not much longer today than it was 50 or 60 years ago. For example, from 1940 to 1990, life expectancy from the age at first marriage increased only about 6.6 years for women and 4.5 years for men. From 1960 (still prior to the divorce revolution) to 1990, life expectancy for newly married adults increased only about five months for women and one year for men.

So here, apparently, is how it works. Jim, age 28, is unhappy in his marriage and is contemplating divorce. He finds an actuarial table and makes his calculations. Since he has 50 years left to live, he decides to divorce his wife. Whereas if

“Til death do us part” was easier to honor at the turn of the last century, when average life expectancy was only 47, than today, when it is 76. More years to live means more time for couples to grow tired of one another.

Newsweek, December 4, 2000.

he were looking at only 45-49 more years, he definitely would have decided to stay married. Whenever you find writers defending the divorce revolution, watch carefully for this “yesterday it was death, today it’s divorce” proposition. It’s one of their favorite arguments.

Jane Smiley, “There They Go, Bad-Mouthing Divorce Again,” New York Times, September 12, 2000. Walter Kirn, “Should You Stay Together for the Sake of the Kids?,” Time, September 25, 2000. Norval Glenn, Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: The Textbook Story of Marriage (New York: Institute for American Values, 1997): 9.

Looking at Divorce, III

If my parents divorce, does the separation make me more or less likely to trust Mom? How about Dad? People in general? On these questions, the current weight of clinical and social science evidence is clear: More divorce, less trust. When the very thing that I most want and need to trust — my parents’ love for one another and, by extension, for me — is compromised or taken away, I will find it harder, not easier, to trust other people and the world around me.

But a recent study from Valerie King and Alan Booth of Pennsylvania State University seeks to challenge this idea. These scholars want us to know, as the *USA Today* headline about their study recently put it, that “Children’s trust in adults survives divorce.” According to the study, children of divorce “are no worse off in terms of trust than kids from intact families.” So what gives? Here’s their main point: “It is not the divorce itself, but the relationship with parents after the split that is the key to trust in adult life, says Valerie King . . . The message, King says, is that while parental divorce doesn’t affect a child’s ability to develop intimate relationships as an adult, his relationship with his parent does.”

My curiosity aroused, I got and read the study itself. Here is how the authors summarize their findings, based on telephone interviews with parents and their adult offspring: “although parental divorce and divorce proneness are negatively associated with trusting parents in adulthood, these affects largely disappear once the quality of the early parent-child relationship is controlled. Trust of parents, intimates, and others is strongly linked to positive early parent-child relations regardless of divorce. The one exception is the remaining pervasive negative effect for trusting dads. Similarly, close relationships with parents mediate the negative effect of early parental divorce on trusting others and some of the negative effects of divorce proneness on trusting intimates. Thus, contrary to current suggestions that parental divorce may set the stage for inhibiting the development of trust among offspring, especially in regard to their own intimate relationships and more generally to trusting others, our findings reveal little support for a strong negative role of parental divorce if parents can maintain good relationships with their children.”

These are remarkable sentences, deserving of careful translation into plain English. First, let’s consider the short sentence buried in the middle: “The one exception is the remaining pervasive negative effect for trusting dads.” What this means is that children of divorce, as a direct result of the divorce itself, tend *not* to trust their fathers. Indeed, this is the study’s single clearest and arguably most important finding. To its credit, the *USA Today* story did report that, for children of

divorce, trust in fathers “falters over time.” But if King and Booth themselves had chosen to underscore this finding, instead of rhetorically demoting it to something approaching a footnote, merely the “one exception” to their main argument, the *USA Today* headline would likely, and more accurately, have announced: “Children of divorce mistrust their fathers.”

But what about that main argument? Looking at the rest of their summary, the tell-tale phrase is that the problems they discovered “largely disappear” when “the quality of the early parent-child relationship is controlled.” What can this mean? It does *not* mean that the actual problems experienced by the children of divorce somehow “disappear.” The study clearly shows, and the summary tersely admits, that children of divorce do suffer from a measurable loss of trust in others.

No, what “disappears” are certain coefficients in the authors’ statistical tables. They “disappear” because King and Booth contrafactually assume — simply insert numbers that suggest, without any evidentiary basis — that parent-child relationships in divorced families are just as strong as parent-child relationships in intact families. That’s called “controlling” for the “quality” of parent-child ties. By playing this game of make-believe, the authors can statistically cancel out (make “disappear”) the previously measured effects of parental divorce on children’s trust in others. If you are competent with numbers, it’s an easy trick.

It’s also a corrupting trick. Consider an analogy. The negative effects of flooding largely disappear once the impact of water damage is controlled. Here’s another. The negative effects of father absence largely disappear once family income and male role models are controlled. (Unfortunately, I’m not making this last one up; it’s common enough in the academic literature on fatherhood.) But in real life, of course, flooding tends to *cause* water damage. Father absence tends to *cause* lower income and the loss of a male role model. And parental divorce tends to cause deteriorations in parent-child relationships. In real life, these consequences cannot be “controlled” and therefore their effects on people do not “disappear.”

When done properly, “controlling” for particular variables can help scholars to estimate with some precision the different ways in which a phenomenon expresses itself. Here are examples of how estimates based on such controls might properly be expressed. Flooding your home is typically harmful to the furniture, in part through the measurable mechanism of water damage. Father absence is typically harmful for children, in part through the measurable mechanisms of lowering family income and removing a male model from the home. And parental divorce usually makes children less trusting, in part through the measurable mechanism of worsened parent-child relationships. What is intellectually fraudulent is for King and Booth to suggest that identifying one measurable mechanism through which a problem is expressed somehow makes the problem itself “disappear.” As a matter of logic, this is a simple point. How can King and Booth, and so many other people with Ph.D.’s, fail to grasp it?

If we strip away the fog and nonsense, here is what King and Booth found. Children of divorce are less trusting of others, in large part because divorce seems typically to lead to worsened parent-child relationships. In those atypical cases in which parent-child relationships after divorce remain as strong, or almost as strong, as parent-child relationships in intact families, children seem to be as trusting, or almost as trusting, as children in intact families with respect to mothers and

to others outside the family. With respect to fathers, the experience of divorce appears to be so influential that even a strong father-child bond after divorce is not enough to prevent children of divorce from losing trust in their fathers.

If King and Booth had said it this way, as opposed to the fog-and-nonsense way that they chose, I don't know what the *USA Today* headline would have declared. But it obviously would not have declared that "Children's trust in adults survives divorce." Meanwhile, for those intent on showing that divorce does not harm children, and willing to overlook the corruption of social science methodology, this study is a godsend.

Karen S. Peterson, "Children's trust in adults survives divorce," USA Today, April 25, 2000.

Valerie King and Alan Booth, "Family Instability and Interpersonal Trust," paper for the annual meeting of the Population Association of America (Los Angeles, CA: March 2000).

Higher Anxiety?

Recent "meta-analyses" of 269 studies conducted from the 1950s through the early 1990s suggest that levels of self-reported anxiety and depression among U.S. children and college students have increased dramatically in recent decades. What is causing the trend? According to the investigator, economic factors seem to play little if any role. Yet rising anxiety among the young does correlate strongly with the decline of "social connectedness." For example: "Changes in the divorce rate, the birth rate, and the crime rate are all highly correlated with children's anxiety." This basic empirical finding, as well as the hypothesis regarding causation, seem quite plausible, and give us yet another reason to be skeptical of King and Booth's suggestion that divorce is somehow unimplicated in what appears to be a sharp increase in emotional and mental distress among young people.

At the same time, two questions. Do more reports of anxiety only reflect an increase in anxiety, or do they also reflect an increase since the 1950s in general psychological awareness, including greater fluency in the language of psychology? Also, in examining the decline of "connectedness" as a cause of the trend, why investigate only *social* connectedness, while ignoring spiritual connectedness? Are there links between emotional and spiritual well-being? Between depression and spiritual isolation? Between growing anxiety among the young and growing secularism in the society? Wouldn't these also be questions worth asking?

Jean M. Twenge, "The Age of Anxiety? Birth Cohort Change in Anxiety and Neuroticism, 1952-1993," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 79, no. 6 (December 2000): 1007-1021.

Biased Headline Contest

The New Republic once ran a contest for the year's most boring headline. (The winning entry had the word "Canada" in it, prompting some Canadian readers to protest. Michael Kinsley, the magazine's editor at the time, replied brilliantly that it was not necessary for a boring headline to contain the word "Canada," merely helpful.) My preferred category is biased headlines, ones that erase the distinction between news and opinion, often with unintended comic effect. I detect them

often enough in the liberal-leaning *New York Times*, but my favorite current source of “headlitorials” is the conservative-leaning *Washington Times*. Here are several doozies, all from the *news* section of that newspaper’s August 14-24, 2000 National Weekly Edition: “Sen. Lieberman tries to distance himself from Bush-like positions.” “Babs, bunnies and bucks: Tinseltown salutes Democrats.” “Agents who snatched Elian to be honored.” “Stagnant Hillary seeks Lieberman’s aid.” “Lieberman record reveals tilt to the left.” “NAACP official’s comment on Jews highlights division.” “Democrats admit, and condone, double standard on religion.” And: “[Betty] Friedan was the violent one, ex-husband says.” Can you top these? I’ll try to publish good ones that you send in.

Modern Values

The name “Institute for American Values” is probably more trouble than it’s worth. For many on the left, the name smacks of preachiness and cheap, America-first boosterism. For growing numbers on the right, “values” has become a weasel word, suggesting moral relativism and a retreat from the real thing, which is “virtues.” For what it’s worth, the thinking behind this particular name — which, technically speaking, should have been Institute for the *Study* of American Values — is that cultural values (mores, moral attitudes, what Tocqueville often called manners) are crucial influences on both individuals and society, and that consequently, as Tocqueville insisted, they are at least as worthy of study as, say, economic or political structures.

Hence the relevance of Harvard professor Tu Weiming’s reflections on “Asian values.” For example: “it is undeniable that communities, notably the family, have been ignored as irrelevant in the mainstream of Western political discourse.” And regarding the potential contributions to the modern project of East Asian societies: “as the first non-Western region to become modernized, the cultural implications of the rise of ‘Confucian’ East Asia are far-reaching. The modern West as informed by the Enlightenment mentality provided the initial impetus for worldwide social transformation . . . Enlightenment values such as instrumental rationality, liberty, rights-consciousness, due process of law, privacy and individualism are all universalizable modern values. However . . . ‘Asian values’ such as sympathy, distributive justice, duty-consciousness, ritual, public-spiritedness and group orientation are also universalizable modern values. Just as the former ought to be incorporated into East Asian modernity, the latter may turn out to be a critical and timely reference for the American way of life.”

Tu Weiming, “An Alternative Vision of Modernity,” Harvard China Review 1, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 75-76.

The laws contribute more to the maintenance of the democratic republic in the United States than the physical circumstances of the country, and the manners more than the laws.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

Post-Election Diary

Wednesday, November 22. If God had intended a perfect test to see if there are any grownups left in the United States, I don’t see how He could have done better than providing us with the exact situation that has given rise to our current post-

election presidential contest. (I write these lines two weeks after Election Day, without the benefit of even a good guess as to who will ultimately become our next president.) What a piece of work! On Election night, after millions of dollars and months of intense campaigning, have each level of the contest — the balance of power in both the House and Senate, the popular presidential vote, and the electoral college vote — result in a nearly mathematically perfect tie. Late into the night, after most of the counting is done, have one presidential candidate appear to have won the popular vote by a scintilla of a fragment, and his opponent appear to have won the electoral college vote, and therefore the presidency, by an equal margin. Then, before most people awaken to hear the news, in one county in a Southern state with many electoral votes, in which the apparent winner's brother is the governor, have it become known that a legally adopted but ill-designed ballot might account for the apparent winner having apparently won, since this ballot might have led some voters, including a small but critical number of elderly Jews, to vote by mistake for a marginal candidate who — how to be polite about this? — doesn't care for Jews. Absolutely perfect.

By grownups, I mean people who recognize that who wins the election is less important than the integrity of the election. Grownups distinguish their natural desire to see one candidate win from their commitment to fairness and the rule of law, and believe that, in a constitutional republic such as ours, the latter must trump the former. Of course, since all of us are limited and short-sighted — truth is objective, but can only be understood subjectively — none of us will ever fully embody this ideal. So let's just say that grownups are the people who try hard.

I don't think He sees us trying hard. To me, the most shocking development since Election Day has been the sheer ferocity, the undisguised aggression, with which the Gore campaign has sought to overturn the results of the Florida ballot count and the mandated statewide recount. Here are examples of what I mean. The brazenness with which William Daley, Gore's campaign chairman, declared on Election night that, whatever others might hear or do, Al Gore was the legitimate winner of the election. In particular, Daley's open insinuation that, since his guy won the popular vote, his guy is the rightful president.

Following Daley's announcement, the creation of a campaign-style war room (complete with a slogan, "Stand and Fight!") and the immediate flooding of the state with lawyers, media spinners, and campaign professionals, virtually all of whom state that their goal is to make sure that the right guy, their guy, is declared the winner. Continuing Democratic allegations of voter fraud and intimidation, none of which, to date, have been legally substantiated. Harsh denunciations by the Gore campaign of an elected state official, Florida's secretary of state, Kathleen Harris ("commissar," "a hack," "a Republican operative").

The straight-faced claim by Democrats that overseas absentee ballots in which voter intent is clear must be discarded whenever they fail to meet certain formal requirements, such as legible signatures or properly postmarked envelopes, since following the letter of the law is paramount; whereas all other ballots must be accepted even if they fail to meet certain formal requirements, such as having fully punched holes in the correct places, since honoring voter intent is paramount. In general, the assertion that a candidate can legitimately gain the presidency through post-election political hardball and aggressive litigation, the obvious purpose of

which is less to seek compliance with a process than to achieve a particular political result. Specifically, the assertion that selective ballot recounts — done only in places and in ways that are mathematically certain to increase the number of votes for Gore — constitute a legitimate way to reverse the outcome of a previous statewide ballot recount and thereby win the presidency.

Republicans don't seem to be trying very hard, either. Here are examples of what I mean. Repeated Republican allegations that Gore is attempting to “steal” the election. (To suggest that Gore is acting unlawfully is plainly to suggest that Gore, if he eventually wins the election, will not be the lawful or “real” president. That assertion is formally similar to Daley's suggestion that Gore, since he won the popular vote, is the rightful or “real” president. Both statements seeks to cast doubt on the constitutional legitimacy of an opponent's prospective victory. If there are ways, using mere words, to damage our constitutional system and legacy more than these statements do, I do not know what they would be.)

Harsh denunciations by the Bush campaign of the entire Florida Supreme Court. A Republican-organized street protest that was unruly enough to disrupt, and perhaps contribute to the ending of, the process of recounting ballots by hand in Miami-Dade County. The straight-faced claim by Republicans that overseas absentee ballots in which voter intent is clear must be counted even if they fail to meet certain formal requirements, such as legible signatures or properly post-marked envelopes, since honoring voter intent is paramount; whereas all other ballots must be discarded if they fail to meet certain formal requirements, such as having fully punched holes in the correct places, since following the letter of the law is paramount. In general, the master assertion, which flies in the face of much of U.S. law as well as popular conventional wisdom, that counting ballots by hand is inherently wrong. Specifically, the assertion that a candidate can legitimately gain the presidency through post-election political and legal strategies which prevent the recounting by hand of Florida's ballots.

A week ago, putting aside as best I could the question of who I want to win, I thought that the preferred solution for grownups was a third and final counting of all of Florida's ballots, this time by hand, done as impartially as possible, and governed by strict standards of what constitutes a valid ballot (sorry, no dimpled chads). It's an admittedly imperfect idea, mostly because it would seem to reward the thuggish insistence of the Gore campaign that we keep counting and counting until Gore wins. But the proposal did have two advantages. In principle, it is not inherently rigged in favor of either side. And it would aim to embody our desire, especially in extremely close elections, to count votes as accurately as possible. But a week ago is now ancient history.

At this point, can either candidate win in a way that the country as whole will accept as legitimate? I'm not sure. Of course, if Gore wins all or most of his immediate legal demands, especially the demand for hand recounts in selected counties, but still somehow loses the final ballot count, and then concedes, I doubt that many people will conclude that the election was a fraud. But that would be an outcome dependent mostly upon happenstance, not upon a broad grownups' agreement regarding what is procedurally legitimate. Perhaps the only other solution is to let these guys fight each other all the way to the U.S. House of Representatives. This

way of proceeding would be extremely messy, and would generate no end of partisan bitterness, but would also have two great advantages. It would conform to the Constitution, which vests the legislative branch generally, and the U.S. House of Representatives in particular, with ultimate decision-making authority in cases of disputed presidential elections. It would also — the Founders showed great wisdom here — permit the losing side to fight on, vigorously and legitimately, by taking its case directly to the people in the House elections of 2002.

Sunday, November 26. Sometime in the next few minutes or hours, Florida's secretary of state, Kathleen Harris, appears likely to announce that the final statewide recount of Florida's votes, conducted primarily by machine also but including (as sought by the Gore campaign and sanctioned by the Florida Supreme Court) some hand recounting in several Florida counties, shows that George Bush won Florida, and therefore the presidency, by a hair. And it appears equally likely that the Gore campaign will contest and seek to overturn this conclusion through every legal and political means at its disposal. It looks like this thing is going to drag on.

My colleague Enola Aird says that her children and their friends are already making ironic-cynical comments such as "My teacher gave me an 85 on this test? I demand a recount!" That's just what we need, more children who believe that objective standards are an illusion, that aggression is everything, and that, as a business guru recently put it, you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate.

Monday, November 27. In the current issue of *The Weekly Standard*, the lead editorial denounces Democrats who, without presenting any credible evidence, have charged Republicans with illegally intimidating African American and other voters on November 7 in Florida. Then, without presenting any credible evidence ("In our bones, we're pretty sure what happened here."), the editors charge Democrats with wholesale ballot-stuffing on November 7 in Florida. In *The Wall Street Journal*, Peggy Noonan recently argued that "the elephant in the living room" — the huge fact that few are willing to acknowledge — is that modern Democrats are people who believe in stealing elections. John Salley, the former pro basketball player who now hosts an interview program, "BET Live," on Black Entertainment Television, casually commented on his show several nights ago that Republicans in Florida "turned old ladies away" from the polls in Florida's black communities. His guests reacted as if the truth of the assertion was so obvious that it required no further discussion.

What are we to make of this phenomenon? I don't know if illegal things were done in Florida or not. But surely, as of today, it makes no sense to give any credence to any these charges. If someone has some proof, he or she should obviously bring it forward. But these constant rumor-allegations are deeply pernicious.

Wednesday, December 13. Bush wins. Appropriately enough, he wins by one vote, in a 5-4 U.S. Supreme Court decision handed down last night that effectively prevents any further counting of votes in Florida. Personally, I prefer Bush over Gore — even more so as a result of Gore's appalling behavior since Election Day — but today I feel no sense of elation, or even relief. This post-election fiasco has caused real damage. It has almost certainly made us more bitter, more partisan, more certain that "it's all politics." It has clearly deepened the racial divide. It has

The whiff of fascism is in the air.

U.S. Congressman Jerry Nadler, a Gore supporter, on "Meet the Press" on November 26.

So Republicans and conservatives cannot rest, cannot breath in the glorious air of victory. It's war.

Columnist John Podhoretz, a Bush supporter, in the *New York Post* on December 13, the day after the Supreme Court decision.

likely made us less trusting of leaders and institutions generally, and ultimately, therefore, more estranged from one another. Millions of good people will sincerely believe that Bush won unfairly, just as millions of good people, if Gore had won, would have believed that Gore had won unfairly.

Looking back, it seems clear that the best, most unifying solution would have been a statewide manual recount, impartially administered and governed by strict standards. But no one wanted to do it. Early on, Gore's lawyers explicitly declined to pursue such a goal, preferring instead to demand selective recounts whose only discernible rationale was to increase Gore's total. The Bush team also consistently opposed such a goal, for reasons that are understandable, but not admirable. Why the Florida Supreme Court would essentially embrace Gore's demand for partial, patently unfair recounts, I have no idea. Why the U.S. Supreme Court would intervene to stop all further counting, I have a good idea, but the decision still leaves a sour taste. In the end, the one obvious thing we should have done, we never did.

"The Gore Coup," The Weekly Standard, November 27, 2000. Peggy Noonan, "The Donkey in the Living Room," Wall Street Journal, November 17, 2000.

Certain

In my last letter, inspired by Eric Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics*, I argued for uncertainty over certainty as a way of seeing the world, and specifically suggested that religious faith is, or should be, "closer to hope than certainty." My Institute colleague David Brenner disagrees: "David Blankenhorn seeks to translate the idea of uncertainty into a kind of spiritual principle, and by doing so, implicitly embraces relativism. Certainty is clearly dangerous when its object is false. Yet most great acts in human history — think of Martin Luther King, William Wilberforce, or Mother Theresa — stem from certainty regarding something that is true.

Regarding Jewish and Christian faith, the notion that uncertainty ought to reign in our understanding of spiritual reality is at odds with biblical revelation. The first commandment given to Moses is: 'Here O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord your God is one. Thou shall have no Gods before me.' Jesus teaches that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all of your heart and soul and strength and mind. These commands presume the possibility of certainty, for how can one love God with all of one's heart if one is not even sure he has rightly discerned the true God? At stake in the issue about certainty is the very possibility of binding revelation. Moreover, certainty in knowing and loving the true God is the best and only antidote to political fanaticism and human misery.

The scriptures teach us that sureness of faith is a gift, a supernatural work upon the heart. (We do not choose God as much as God chooses us.) The New Testament teaches that God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, comes to live within the believer. For Christians, this occurrence is the ultimate source of assurance, or, if you will, certainty. Paul writes that Christ's followers "have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." And since this is entirely a gift, due in no part to the merit of the believer, arrogance or pride is unwarranted and in fact precluded.

The moment one believes, one automatically doubts, doubt being an integral part of faith. After all, we can only hope to see the image of truth, not truth itself. But there are true and false images. Jesus is a true image

Malcom Muggeridge,
1978.

David Blankenhorn misreads the definition of Christian faith found in Hebrews 11:1. Faith is not mere hope; it is real and substantive. The New International Version's translation conveys this meaning: 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.' The trajectory of faith is toward greater certainty, not less. Luke informs us that his purpose in investigating and writing his gospel is 'so that you may know the certainty of things you have been taught.' And Jesus says, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'

That's not to say that Christians never experience doubt or misinterpret divine commands. But the antidote to these problems cannot be to install uncertainty as a tenet. In due time, God restores those who are truly His. Jesus commended child-like faith, and like Jesus, Christians ought to pray: 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.'"

These are strong points, and in so many ways I admire, and seek for myself, the unwavering faith that rests behind them. I particularly like and will remember the warning about how the "wise and learned" can be blind to what is most important. At the same time, my friend David Brenner goes where I cannot go. I agree with him that it's better to be certain only about things that are true, but for me this formulation only begs the question. What are the true things about which I should be certain, and why am I certain that they are true? David Brenner is certain about Christianity, mostly due to his "real and substantive" faith in God. But again, the proposition is somewhat circular, since it suggests that I know with certainty what is true because God tells me what is true. I see the argument, but it doesn't strike me as very . . . humble.

To me, this type of certainty of knowledge must ultimately stem less from intellectual inquiry (though I know that intellectual inquiry is part of it) than from what the knower understands to be a personally transforming and "true" relationship with God. ("God restores those who are truly His.") In some ways, as a Christian, and as someone who declines relativism, I wish I had such certain knowledge. But I don't. (Maybe part of my argument on this issue was defensive or jealous in nature.) For now, I have to settle for hope.

Sincerely,

David Blankenhorn

Propositions is published quarterly by the Institute for American Values. Individual subscriptions are \$18 per year. For information about the Institute or to subscribe to Propositions, contact: Institute for American Values, 1841 Broadway, Suite 211, New York, NY, 10023; Tel: (212) 246-3942; Fax: (212) 541-6665. Visit our website at www.americanvalues.org. Email us at info@americanvalues.org.