




bb's critique of Daniel's "License to Procreate"

Author	Message
<p>bb</p> <p>Joined: 10 Aug 2006 Posts: 26</p>	<p>Posted: Thu Feb 01, 2007 3:41 pm Post subject:    Readers Digest values</p> <hr/> <p>When Cesar first told me about this site I read a large number of Daniel's essays. I didn't find much to disagree with strongly. Since then, I've read some newer ones which were mentioned on the forum. <i>Thirty-Four Reasons To Circumcise Your Beloved Newborn Baby Boy</i> is a gem!</p> <p>However, <i>License To Procreate</i> really did strike me as benign fascism. I am not a parent, so it would have been very easy for me to nod my assent without thinking too deeply about the implications. I give my whole-hearted support to Item 1-- Applicants must demonstrate involvement in a committed, stable, two-parent relationship. But Dennis is right to point out "What if the partner dies?" Most of the remaining items offer no guarantee that an applicant does in fact possess a capacity for love and nurture, but they might help remove some material hardships and obstacles.</p> <p>Item 5 made me laugh: "Applicants must successfully complete a two-year, ninety-hour-a-week child-rearing internship with others' children." Paedophiles would be queuing up around the block to enroll for internships like that, just as they do for employment as care workers in childrens' homes, or as choirmasters or cub-scout leaders. Did you ever read in the newspapers about the allegations of child sexual abuse by Disneyland employees?</p> <p>Despite being a non-religious person, two couples asked me to be a Godparent to their kids. All the first-time parents I've known well have said exactly the same thing: There's a special feeling that simply cannot be experienced with other people's kids. Anyway, a <i>License To Procreate</i> is not a realistic proposition in a true democracy. Only a police state could enforce it. Like China perhaps.</p> <p>Dennis made the analogy with dark Sci-Fi movies. To me, the first sub-clause of Item 2 -- Applicants must demonstrate emotional health -- completely knocks the whole thing out of water. <i>Twice-weekly individual psychotherapy for a minimum of three years?</i> What kind of psychotherapist would that be with, I wonder. An Ericksonian Hypnotherapist? A Freudian psychoanalyst who believes the Oedipus Complex is the true reason why adults become tempted to 'seduce' children? Or maybe a Cognitive Therapist who believes that strongly felt emotions are indicative of an underlying genetic disorder?</p> <p>On Dennis's forum someone told my friend Ian that John B. Watson, the founder of the Behaviorist school of psychology, was a heavy drinker who died of cirrhosis of the liver. I checked up on this and discovered that he was the author of the most influential child-rearing manual in the first half 20th Century. In <i>For Your Own Good</i> Alice Miller devotes a large section to examples from poisonous child-rearing manuals of the 19th Century (schwarze pedagogy). I wonder why she didn't mention J.B. Watson's <i>The Psychological Care of Infant and Child</i> in the 20th Century? The website of Johns Hopkins</p>

University, where J.B. Watson was Professor of Psychology until 1920, has an article about him: [Hopkins History: John Broadus Watson](#).

Quote:

"Sadly, there is evidence from Watson's own family that his child-rearing ideas caused more harm than good. The actress Mariette Hartley, the child of Watson's daughter, has described a painful childhood, saying, "There wasn't exactly a plethora of physical affection in our family." Both her parents became alcoholics, and her father shot himself in the head with his family nearby. Her mother, Watson's daughter, later attempted suicide several times."

The Johns Hopkins University article makes no mention of the fact that his son Billy, who rebelled against his father's behaviorism and established a successful career as a Freudian psychiatrist, took his own life too -- as you can discover from this article on the website of Clayton State University: [The story of John Watson, Founder of Behaviorism](#).

Quote:

"...although B.F. Skinner got to brag that his "baby in a box" grew up healthy and happy, Watson's application of science to child-rearing lacks that testimonial validity: William, the older of his and Rosalie's two sons, committed suicide at age 40, just four years after John Watson's death."

There are [extracts from Mariette Hartley's autobiography](#) on the website of Sonoma State University in California.

In the Introduction to *Against Therapy*, Jeffrey Masson says:

Quote:

"The fact that some psychotherapists are decent, warm, compassionate human beings, who sometimes help the people who come to them, does not shelter the profession itself or the practice of that profession from the criticism I make in this book. It only means that they function in this manner in spite of being psychotherapists, and not because of it."




The shortcomings of J.B. Watson's pernicious child-rearing methods lead me on to the other item I disagree with very strongly: Item 8 -- Applicants must complete a college degree. Quite apart from the case of J.B. Watson, it's all too easy to find examples of emotionally stunted, cruel parents who are highly educated. My father was one of them. But leaving him aside, what about the case histories of clients/patients that appear abundantly in the writings of nearly all famous figures in the history of psychotherapy? In nearly every case, the parents were doctors, lawyers, clergymen, university academics, respected businessmen, etc., etc. Just about every kind of college education is represented among the parents who caused severe psychological distress to their children.

My objection to Item 8 is not sour grapes on my part. I have a university degree and a postgraduate qualification. It's abhorrence at the conformist middle class mindset which accepts the education system as sacrosanct. A person doesn't need a high level of emotional intelligence to obtain a Ph.D. Cognitive skills alone are sufficient.

Although it is seldom mentioned, this kind of bias in the system may be contributing to the rising incidence of depression and other mood disorders in recent decades. Teenage suicides have trebled in the past 20 years. And the pressures on young people to do well at college continue to escalate. I see it as a symptom of a society with the wrong set of values. Tremendous economic progress was made during the Industrial Revolution -- less than three lifetimes ago -- with only a small proportion of the population able to read and write, let alone flaunt Masters degrees in 'sports science' and such like.

Bookish

kaleo

Posted: Thu Feb 01, 2007 6:21 pm Post subject:  quote  edit  IP
Re: Readers Digest values

Joined: 06 Oct 2006
Posts: 209

Bookish -

I think many of your points are dead on (the college one in particular, I chose not to touch it in my response, but I agree with you). If this were something proposed in reality, there would be a lot more refining and hacking to be done. It's a bit like Cesar's "if I ruled the world" posts (remember him?).

I read it as more of a Jonathan Swift type of effort - some truth, some shock value in its extreme nature. It's not going to stand up on a number of grounds, but it's worth seeing what one person's fantasy test for parents could look like.

cheers,
Kaleo

bb

Posted: Fri Feb 02, 2007 4:04 am Post subject:  quote  edit  IP

Joined: 10 Aug 2006
Posts: 26

Hi kaleo.

Oops! I took the *License To Procreate* manifesto seriously. I didn't look at it as a flippant exercise. If a fantasy proposal is admissible, how about a birth control additive in public water supplies? At least that way, anyone determined to have children would have to undertake a pro-active, long-term plan to obtain drinking water from alternative sources. No more casual or accidental parenthood. Of course, the idea of a water additive comes with pitfalls of its own. There's no way to ensure, in the real world, that it wouldn't have unforeseen metabolic side effects, possibly with a latency of decades. Another drawback is that wealthy people would find it easier obtain additive-free water. So for them, parenthood could continue to be a casual choice.

There are parents out there who would never respond to intellectual arguments imploring them to change their child-rearing practices. They can be reached in other ways. I can imagine a parent who might feel obligated to maintain a family tradition of circumcision while at the same time harbouring grave doubts about its value. If such a person came across Daniel's *Thirty-Four Reasons To Circumcise Your Beloved Newborn Baby Boy*, it might tip the balance. I think it's a brilliant piece of satirical writing.

Bookish

Daniel Mackler
Site Admin

Joined: 03 Aug 2006
Posts: 523
Location: New York City

Posted: Fri Feb 02, 2007 1:48 pm Post subject:
Re: Readers Digest values



Hi Bookish:

bb wrote:

Since then, I've read some newer ones which were mentioned on the forum. *Thirty-Four Reasons To Circumcise Your Beloved Newborn Baby Boy* is a gem!

Thanks. I actually was just told that one of my reasons was wrong (Michelangelo's David is not circumcised) so I had to amend it.

bb wrote:

However, *License To Procreate* really did strike me as benign fascism.

Well, these challenges/critiques are really getting me to think – and consider whether or not I really want to keep that “essay” up on the site. Or maybe I need to add an explanatory paragraph of introduction to it to better orient the reader.

bb wrote:

I am not a parent, so it would have been very easy for me to nod my assent without thinking too deeply about the implications.

I don't think being a parent or not being a parent is the actual issue, but I think the implications of what I write in the License To Procreate are worth studying anyway.

bb wrote:

Most of the remaining items [past item #1] offer no guarantee that an applicant does in fact possess a capacity for love and nurture, but they might help remove some material hardships and obstacles.

Agreed. Of course, few of the items in the License To Procreate are realistically quantifiable. Even Item #1 – how can people PROVE that they're in a committed and loving relationship, after all? Lots of people fake it to the world, and even to themselves!

bb wrote:

Item 5 made me laugh: "Applicants must successfully complete a two-year, ninety-hour-a-week child-rearing internship with others' children." Paedophiles would be queuing up around the block to enroll for internships like that, just as they do for employment as care workers in childrens' homes, or as choirmasters or cub-scout leaders.

True, and lots of pedophiles have children as well – mothers and fathers. After all, most sexual abuse happens right in the family.

bb wrote:

Anyway, a *License To Procreate* is not a realistic proposition in a true democracy. Only a police state could enforce it. Like China perhaps.

Okay, that's fair, but the bigger point that I was going for in writing the License To Procreate is that nowadays anyone – pedophiles included, as well as murderers, rapists, severely delusional people, people with terminal illnesses, etc. – has the right to have a child. Who defends the child? Granted, I see all the flaws in enforcing any such law, but I see you as siding with the adult in your criticisms of my License To Procreate – regardless of the legitimacy of the criticisms (and I see your logic as you use it as largely impeccable, by the way).

It's such a deep and entrenched given in our society that parents have inalienable rights when it comes to procreating, and to infringe upon those rights in any way is from society's perspective tantamount to fascism.

Many laws, as I stated elsewhere, are initially met with rage and hatred by many – even the majority – but that doesn't mean they're entirely bad. Now I grant that my License To Procreate is highly flawed if you apply it as a purely practical law, and again, I need to find a way to make it clear that I wrote that to make a point, with awareness of the License's impracticality. But I still stand by the essence of what I was going for in writing it.

bb wrote:

To me, the first sub-clause of Item 2 -- Applicants must demonstrate emotional health -- completely knocks the whole thing out of water. *Twice-weekly individual psychotherapy for a minimum of three years?* What kind of psychotherapist would that be with, I wonder. An Ericksonian Hypnotherapist? A Freudian psychoanalyst who believes the Oedipus Complex is the true reason why adults become tempted to 'seduce' children? Or maybe a Cognitive Therapist who believes that strongly felt emotions are indicative of an underlying genetic disorder?

Well said. And these are all thoughts that went through my mind when I wrote it. Perhaps you didn't know, but by and large I find most therapists, regardless of their theoretical orientation, to be dangerous. Also, by the way, I'm against mandated therapy, which this would be.

But I didn't know another way to phrase the idea I was going after. How do you gauge the emotional healthiness of a parent? I believe some people should not have children. They're not ready for it in a huge way, and this will seriously damage their future children. Do you agree with this? Again, who fights for the child? What really gives these terrible parents or parents-to-be the right to just go on mindlessly procreating?

If you do think that anyone, regardless of their emotional maturity has a right to have children, and that it's fascism (benign or otherwise) to put a stop to them (even in semi-fantasy theory), then I think you could use your same arguments to justify abolishing

basically MOST or even ALL laws...and certainly abolishing driver's licenses!

In the Introduction to *Against Therapy*, Jeffrey Masson says:

Quote:

"The fact that some psychotherapists are decent, warm, compassionate human beings, who sometimes help the people who come to them, does not shelter the profession itself or the practice of that profession from the criticism I make in this book. It only means that they function in this manner in spite of being psychotherapists, and not because of it."

Yes, I have to read this book. I think Masson makes some good points, but I see him as no expert on therapy.

bb wrote:

My objection to Item 8 is not sour grapes on my part. I have a university degree and a postgraduate qualification. It's abhorrence at the conformist middle class mindset which accepts the education system as sacrosanct.

I hope you don't think I hold the educational system to be sacrosanct! I largely hated school, hated college, and hated grad school – and once I became more aware participated in these educational systems to allow myself to move forward in life, because I saw no other way around it.

bb wrote:

A person doesn't need a high level of emotional intelligence to obtain a Ph.D. Cognitive skills alone are sufficient.

True, and I know some brilliant people without college degrees, though I can't say I know anyone who is deeply unintelligent who has a college degree (...though I know some very twisted people with college degrees).

But again, it sounds like your arguments center more around defending a parent-to-be's right to procreate than they do around a child's right to have a halfway parent.

So I'll ask it more clearly: Do you think a child has a right to have a decent parent?

(I do, and I think the child's right to have a decent parent FAR supercedes an adult's "right" to procreate, if adults even do have this right at all.)

If you do think a child has a right to have a decent parent, then how do you propose to ensure – or even attempt to ensure – that this child's right be met?

I made a preliminary, and clearly flawed, attempt in this direction. Can you do better? I would like to try.

So, all in all, Bookish, I really do thank you for your critique. It's very stimulating for me.

Best,
Daniel

Daniel Mackler

<http://iraresoul.com>

Daniel Mackler
Site Admin

Joined: 03 Aug 2006
Posts: 523
Location: New York City

Posted: Fri Feb 02, 2007 1:56 pm Post subject:
Re: Readers Digest values



kaleo wrote:

If [the License To Procreate] were something proposed in reality, there would be a lot more refining and hacking to be done.

Yes.

kaleo wrote:

I read it as more of a Jonathan Swift type of effort - some truth, some shock value in its extreme nature. It's not going to stand up on a number of grounds, but it's worth seeing what one person's fantasy test for parents could look like.

I more or less agree with this. I will say, though, that I don't spend a lot of time thinking about fantasy worlds based on myself as king/god, and so I didn't play out all the possible negative scenarios that would or could result from my License To Procreate.

That said, Kaleo, let me rephrase what I asked Bookish (and this is open to all):

Do you think a child has a right to have a decent parent?

If so, do you think the child's right to have a decent parent supercedes an adult's "right" to procreate, if adults do even have this right at all?

Best,
-Daniel

Daniel Mackler

<http://iraresoul.com>

Daniel Mackler
Site Admin

Joined: 03 Aug 2006
Posts: 523
Location: New York City

Posted: Fri Feb 02, 2007 2:04 pm Post subject:



bb wrote:

Ooops! I took the *License To Procreate* manifesto seriously. I didn't look at it as a flippant exercise.

I wouldn't call it either flippant or an exercise. And I would say I wrote it to be taken seriously, though perhaps in a figurative sense. That said, I didn't make it clear at the outset, and I didn't write it as satire, so the fault might be mine here. I was trying to make a deeper

point, and through this process of receiving good criticism about the essay I'm thinking more about what the deeper point really is.

bb wrote:

If a fantasy proposal is admissible, how about a birth control additive in public water supplies?

If someone put hormones in my tap water I'd start buying bottled water, thank you very much.

bb wrote:

At least that way, anyone determined to have children would have to undertake a pro-active, long-term plan to obtain drinking water from alternative sources.

Oops, I see you thought one step ahead of me!

bb wrote:

No more casual or accidental parenthood. Of course, the idea of a water additive comes with pitfalls of its own. There's no way to ensure, in the real world, that it wouldn't have unforeseen metabolic side effects, possibly with a latency of decades. Another drawback is that wealthy people would find it easier to obtain additive-free water. So for them, parenthood could continue to be a casual choice.

Points taken!

bb wrote:

There are parents out there who would never respond to intellectual arguments imploring them to change their child-rearing practices. They can be reached in other ways. I can imagine a parent who might feel obligated to maintain a family tradition of circumcision while at the same time harbouring grave doubts about its value. If such a person came across Daniel's *Thirty-Four Reasons To Circumcise Your Beloved Newborn Baby Boy*, it might tip the balance. I think it's a brilliant piece of satirical writing.










Well said – and I agree. How about, however, if I changed my License To Procreate and stated upfront that it was just fantasy, and not intended to be implemented as written, and WAS just written as a thought-provoking exercise...something like that?

So often I see people who have no business being parents, and it just sparks my thoughts. And then to see them getting pregnant again...and often again and again. I am troubled by this. Where is our responsibility to the rights of the child?

Anyway, curious to hear your thoughts on all this.

-Daniel

Daniel Mackler

	http://iraresoul.com
<p>kaleo</p> <p>Joined: 06 Oct 2006 Posts: 209</p>	<p>Posted: Fri Feb 02, 2007 2:25 pm Post subject:   </p> <p>Re: Readers Digest values</p> <hr/> <p>Hi Daniel and Bookish -</p> <p>I think Daniel's writing here is a bit different from Cesar's ruler fantasy (that sci-fi dude, can't remember his name - sounded like Magellan?). It's not exactly satire, is it? I didn't take it as flippant, either. But not feasible, either. To me, it's extreme creative thought, sort of along the lines of "If I Ran the Zoo". In that spirit, I didn't want to get caught up in the "is it really possible" tangent, as much as what the real point is, which I thought was how little is expected of parents. This is why adoption doesn't seem so bad to me - those parents jump through a lot more hoops along the lines of your license than someone who just pops out a kid of their own.</p> <p>I too see people ALL the time who would not be parents if I had my way. I could give you examples in my cases that would practically turn my hair white. So yes, I absolutely think children have the right to decent parents, superceding any right on the adult's part to have children. After all, what is the adult really being deprived of by not having children that outweighs the child's right to be raised well?</p> <p>Still, that raises another question: how broadly can you define what constitutes a decent parent? There are millions of ways to be a bad parent. Are there as many ways to be a good parent? I think there are plenty. I see the License to Procreate restricting those ways to a degree, if put into effect as is.</p> <p>More later, Kaleo</p>
<p>Cesar Tort</p> <p>Joined: 02 Aug 2006 Posts: 394 Location: Mexico City</p>	<p>Posted: Sat Feb 03, 2007 4:16 am Post subject:   </p> <hr/> <p>Karellen (not "Magellan", Kaleo!) would surely sterilize 99.999 per cent of the world's population, and not by adding a birth control additive in public water supplies but directly into the air (rich people are not spared). Nothing brutal, you see: but ultimately more effective than a thousand Auschwitzes running 24 hours a day...</p> <p>In my "If I Ran the Zoo" Neanderthal-extermination scenario, only the helping-mode parents would have the right to reproduce.</p> <hr/> <p>Cesar</p>
<p>bb</p> <p>Joined: 10 Aug 2006 Posts: 26</p>	<p>Posted: Sat Feb 03, 2007 4:46 am Post subject:   </p> <hr/> <p>Daniel wrote > "I see you as siding with the adult in your criticisms of my License To Procreate"</p> <p><i>reply:</i> What was at the back of mind was something different. Changing the attitudes of parents in the population at large is no easy task. However, I think they can be influenced if alternative approaches are presented in a non-confrontational way. Intellectual arguments in long-winded essays fail to spark their interest. Most of</p>

your essays are quite short, which I think is a very good thing if you want the "undecided" to read them. Proposals for draconian legislation are simply too confrontational, and are likely to provoke resistance and hostility.

Daniel wrote > *"Also, by the way, I'm against mandated therapy, which this would be."*

reply: I'm relieved to hear it. I gave some background on J.B. Watson because the Behaviorist approach is still influential in a variety of psychotherapy methods. Medical insurance companies and [HMOs](#) are willing to pay for behavioral therapies while shunning most types of emotionally-oriented analytical therapy.

I would be horrified by the prospect of a government department setting the standards. Let's not forget that lobotomy was a state approved psychiatric treatment for many decades. [Egas Moniz](#) was awarded the Nobel prize for medicine in 1949 for inventing it. Electroshock is still a state approved treatment for emotional ill-health in most parts of the world and psychosurgery is not yet banned.

Daniel wrote > *"I think Masson makes some good points, but I see him as no expert on therapy."*

reply: I have copies of Masson's *Final Analysis, Against Therapy, and When Elephants Weep*. If eight years of analytic training, followed by a year as Projects Director of the Sigmund Freud Archives, followed by several years of very thorough research into the history of *all* types of psychotherapy doesn't qualify Masson as an expert, then I don't accept that there are any genuine experts on the subject anywhere.

Daniel wrote > *"I can't say I know anyone who is deeply unintelligent who has a college degree..."*

reply: I've met quite a few... Nit-wits who can memorize facts but who lack the capacity for balanced reflection on complex issues. To me, the notion of "intelligence" -- as distinct from factual knowledge - - as something that can be conferred on a person by means of a formal, state-approved curriculum, is an example of what I mean by "Readers Digest values."

I didn't make any arguments defending a parents' right to procreate, but I'll answer your question, "Do you think a child has a right to have a decent parent?" Yes, is the short answer. However, I just don't believe that decent parents can be legislated into existence. In Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* the state raised perfectly adapted adults by cloning and incubating babies, and then conditioning them to rejoice in whatever social role they were assigned to (Readers Digest values again). You, personally, might have enlightened guidelines to offer government policy makers, but there's no way to ensure that a powerful politician doesn't modify them later on as a means of social control.

Daniel wrote > *"I made a preliminary, and clearly flawed, attempt in this direction. Can you do better? I would like to try."*

reply: If there was an easy way to guarantee every child's right to

decent parents I'm sure we would all have heard about it by now. The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) has been ratified by most member states (except the USA and Somalia), but many of them haven't taken much positive action. I originally posted my comments because the idea of a *License To Procreate* is not new. There's a 1994 book by Jack Westman, M.D., called [Licensing Parents](#) (NY:Insight Books, 1994). Judge Charles D. Gill, of the Superior Court, State of Connecticut, wrote the Foreword. The book has been discussed quite a bit on the Internet -- although it hasn't taken the world by storm -- and Judge Gill hasn't been able to make it happen. Foster homes have had stringent licensing requirements for more than fifty years, but that doesn't prevent cases of abuse from occurring, which the media put under the spotlight from time to time.

There is a more benign way for the state to prepare the ground for better quality parents in the next generation. It has been tried out in the UK, but the government still hasn't made it mandatory in every school. This newspaper article describes what has been done so far: [Lessons in love](#). In Sweden, parenting classes are part of the curriculum in every school. It may not be a perfect answer. Parenting classes might be conducted by boring teachers, for example, but if the ideas get through to just a small proportion of the pupils I think that's more palatable than measures forced on parents-to-be later in life. There would be a snowball effect generation by generation (if there's enough time left for the human race, that is). I believe proposals to introduce parenting classes, or emotional literacy classes, would be more acceptable to the public at large, and therefore would have more chance of seeing the light of day in the foreseeable future.

At present, there is a surfeit of prolix, intellectualized writings about better ways to be a parent on the Internet. Short, easily digestible essays like the ones you write are harder to find, although [The Natural Child Project](#) wisely keeps articles to a reasonable length. You know how to write short articles which make an impact, so I wouldn't be eager to see the *License To Procreate* piece salvaged by redefining it as a fantasy.

This forum has a section about The State Of Our Natural World. I've written a couple of articles on the subject which I put on my personal website. I haven't forgotten about childhood issues, and I'm mulling over some ideas. In the meantime, I slipped in a link to a Newsweek magazine interview with a university psychologist who supports Alice Miller's viewpoint. It is near the bottom of the page in the following article: [Pro-War Personality Disorder](#).

Bookish