

THE  
CHILD-BOMB:  
HOW “WHAT ABOUT  
THE CHILDREN?”  
CAN TURN AN  
ARGUMENT AROUND

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**A BIG STICK**

My late Grandmother was born and raised in Tsarist Russia. From all accounts it was a wonderful place to come from.

I recall a story she once told me about a wise old man who lived in her village. One day this old man was walking home when he passed two Tsarist policemen who were having a heated row. One of the policemen stopped the old man and said:

“Hey, old man, you’ve read lots of books, haven’t you?”

“Yes, I do read books” said the old man.

“Well, you can settle an argument then. I say the earth is flat but my colleague here doubts my word. Tell me I’m right.”

“I’m afraid” said the old man “that you’re wrong. The earth is round.”

The policeman’s face reddened.

“But I believe that it’s flat” he snarled.

“I’m sorry but science and astronomy have proved beyond doubt that it is round” said the old man, whereupon the policeman drew his baton and clobbered the old man around the head, knocking him to the ground.

“Now do you agree the earth is flat?” said the policeman.

“Well,” replied the old man, blood tricking down his face “since you put it like that ...”

Get the point? Of course you do. The above illustration shows that possession of the facts may be nowhere near as effective as the possession of a big stick. And that’s as true today as it was in Tsarist Russia. This is not to say, mind you, that if you express some rational, critically analysed libertarian principle some self-righteous member of the National Viewers and Listeners Association will turn up at your front door with a baseball bat ready to leave a bad impression on your mind. No, no, no. But, big sticks are still out there.

**“WHAT ABOUT YOUR CHILDREN?”**

There was a time, many years ago, when God was the big stick. Thus, if your chosen foible was lashings of moonshine whisky, hallucinogenic herbs, sunbathing nude in your garden or sexual abandonment while dressed as an altar boy, you would find yourself being severely battered with the assurance that your particular peccadillo was an affront to God and His Order. But God seems to be in the twilight of his career and there are very few people who, today, would publicly invoke his wrath (least of all the clergy).

No, a new stick has to be unwrapped, polished and wielded menacingly at the slightest hint of rational debate. Ladies and gentlemen — drum roll please — may I present the unconquerable, multi-purpose last line of defence for all right-thinking people: The Child.

The Child is a marvel of modern weapons technology. It can be used in any arena of combat with a minimum of training and it never misses its target. In fact, it’s a war-winner.

Allow me to illustrate and, simultaneously, admit to a flaw in my character: I like to watch Talk TV. About a year ago I tuned into one of Carlton TV’s midweek ‘debate’ shows which had as its chosen target a middle-aged man whose sexual gratification, he cheerfully admitted, was derived from Sado-Masochistic practices. In fact, he was part of a network of like-minded individuals who periodically gathered together for the express purpose of dripping hot wax onto their respective naughty bits.

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**FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY**

For the first twenty or so minutes of the 'debate' the atmosphere was fairly light-hearted as the Presenter and the audience members ribbed the Subject about his sexual habits and the subject, to his credit, laughed along with them. That is, until one rather grim-faced member of the audience thrust his righteous hand into the air and said: "What about your children? What about the effect you're having on them?"

A mood change of El-Nino proportions blew through the studio. The audience muttered. The Presenter frowned. The Subject shifted nervously in his chair. He had to admit, apologetically, that he did have two children but added that his 'sessions' involved consenting adults only and never took place when the children were in the house.

Fine, you might think. This man was engaging in sexual practices with other consenting grown-ups who were harming only each other and only to the extent that express or implied permission existed for the infliction of said harm. The children were not involved and had no knowledge of the affair so what 'harm' could possibly come to them? Right?

Wrong. Nobody in the studio expressed this view. Once the spectre of 'harm' to children had been invoked the subject became, to all intents and purposes, a Child Abuser by Proxy. No-one in the studio took the trouble to identify exactly what damage the subject was allegedly doing to his children or how, but who needs hard evidence in cases like this?

For the remaining minutes of the 'debate', the Subject squirmed like a lab-rat as various members of the audience stood up and attested to the fact the people like the subject 'ought to be banned'. Each such call was greeted with wildly enthusiastic cheers. Just at the point where things might have got out of hand, the Presenter brought matters to a close. I was left with the feeling that certain audience members would happily have hauled the subject out of the studio and hanged him up by his whatsits, had it not been for the fact that he probably would have enjoyed that.

## **RATIONAL DEBATE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS ARE FORGOTTEN**

The 'Child-Bomb' is dropped again and again into discussions both on television and the radio and whether it is relevant or not. The discussion in question may be about the level of income tax or North Sea fishing rights but, sure as eggs is eggs, someone, sooner or later, will crowbar children into the conversation together with the accusation, express or implied, that harm is being done to the little cherubim and seraphim or that not enough is being done to protect them from such harm.

It's a kind of moral trump card (perhaps the only one left?) that gets slapped down with all the table-banging affirmation of a gypsy horse-trader. "Aren't we forgetting the children in all this?" The effect is sensational. Rational debate and critical analysis are forgotten in the frantic scramble of every participant to give testament to his or her concern for the welfare of children. And woe

betide those who don't; for, if you don't concern yourself with the welfare of children then, of course, you're out to harm them and that makes you a 'child-abuser'. They're the ones who have to deal with the army of Waynetta Slobs outside their front door, waving banners, hurling bricks and demanding public castration.

## **ASSUAGING THE NEED FOR REVENGE**

Why has this malevolent manifestation crept itself into the public consciousness. I believe that those who wield the 'Child-Bomb' are not the slightest bit concerned for children but, rather, are desperate to keep the moral high ground. And what better way to do this than by presenting an allegation that others dare not question? A new religion has been born and, along with it, a new heresy. How did this situation come about?

I have one theory, which I know treads on dangerous ground. However, I venture to say that all this may be due to an outpouring of national guilt over the carnage of Dunblane. Since Thomas Hamilton saved the last bullet for himself, the public has been denied the vilification of the living culprit. Other means to assuage the unspoken demand for revenge had to be found and the Handgun Ban was, I fear, merely the first step. Ever since then, or so it seems, public expressions of the concern for children are inescapable and bleated out like testimony at a revival meeting. Those tots were sacrificed for our sins. Isn't it only right that we who remain honour that sacrifice? The result is a mass of unworkable restrictions which, almost invariably, do nothing to improve the lot of children anyway.

## **NOTE OF HOW LONG IT TAKES**

I am not a parent and therefore have no experience in raising children, but shielding them from every potential threat (physical or psychological) is surely a pretty foolhardy way to go about things. Every parent has a duty to protect their child from the worst excesses that this wicked world has to offer but, surely, the child that has encountered and learnt to deal with potential harm is in a much better position to sidestep it when it comes along for real? Little innocents will inexorably grow up to be adults, and innocence abroad is nothing if not supremely vulnerable.

Some may charge that since I am not a father I cannot understand the vagaries of the paternal instinct. Maybe that's true. Maybe this whole thing is just the product of a fertile imagination which is overcompensating for a yet-to-be-proved-fertile body? Possibly.

But let me suggest a little experiment. The next time you encounter someone of the 'Nanny Knows Best' persuasion and engage them in a discussion on, say, relaxation of the liquor licensing laws, make a note of how long it takes them to hit you with the 'Child-Bomb'. My guess would be that they'll do it just at the point where they realise they are losing the argument. Go further, if you dare, and say: "I'm not that bothered about children and, truth be told, neither are you." Observe their faces as they splutter out their indignation, but make sure they don't know where you live.