



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 9, 2017

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Infantile Nation: How Breeding Overgrown Children Begets the Nanny State

A United States naval midshipman, David Farragut, commanded a captured British vessel during the War of 1812 — at age 12. Now major universities provide “healing spaces” with Legos, coloring books, Play-Doh, and puppies for students who “can’t handle” Donald Trump’s election victory.

In 1798, Giocante Casabianca, who was 10 to 13, would not abandon his post without his commander’s word, and perished on his ship’s fiery deck during the Battle of the Nile. Today, undergraduates demand protection from “microaggressions,” which can include statements such as “America is the land of opportunity” and “I’m colorblind! I don’t see race.”

Calvin Graham became the United States’ youngest decorated war hero, receiving the Bronze Star and Purple Heart at 13, serving heroically aboard the USS *South Dakota* during WWII. (He’d lied about his age to military recruiters.) Now college students demand “trigger warnings” when a professor might present something traumatizing, such as *The Great Gatsby*, whose “trespass” is that it portrays suicide, domestic abuse, and graphic violence.

Why, we might say today’s little snowflakes need to “man up,” but watch out! That term is verboten on some campuses because, supposedly, it’s “offensive” and distressing. But what’s really distressing is that many “adults” today aren’t half the boys our ancestors were.

In reality, it was common years ago for young children to assume adult responsibilities. Apprenticeships at age eight weren’t unusual; Spartan boys would be conscripted into military camps at age seven; and in the Middle Ages, six- or seven-year-old boys of noble lineage might begin training to be knights. Teen marriages also weren’t uncommon; today, perhaps even more teens have children — but sans marriages. And now millions of grown Americans while away hours playing video games, with the average age of “gamers,” as they’re known, being 31 to 35.

It doesn’t take great maturity to realize that, somehow, modern society is stunting people’s moral, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional development. This is frightfully alarming for a simple reason: Overgrown children cannot maintain their liberty any more than the young lads in *Lord of the Flies* could avoid their quick descent from democracy to dictatorship.

Of course, an analysis of what’s breeding modern immaturity first requires defining what true maturity is. Obviously, this doesn’t merely concern cognitive development; for all we know, with puberty beginning considerably earlier now than 200 years ago, kids may experience this sooner today as well (seems doubtful, though). As serial killers and tyrants prove, intellectual capability without





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corresponding moral understanding just makes for a more formidable evildoer. No, at issue is the development of something else: *virtue* — that set of good moral habits.

Ah, virtue. While many moderns can't define the term, the Founding Fathers often stressed its importance. Ben Franklin noted, for example, "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters." And Samuel Adams wrote that men "will be free no longer than while they remain virtuous." There's no question someone would be considered mature if he'd mastered his moral self and exhibited faith, hope, honesty, charity, fortitude, justice, temperance, prudence, chastity, diligence, patience, kindness, forgiveness, humility, and love (the preceding is mostly a combination of the theological, cardinal, and heavenly virtues). There's also no doubt that everything we now complain about regarding über-sensitive young people infused with a spirit of entitlement — those now dubbed "social justice warriors" — is a function of lacking virtue.

Consider the all-too-common playing of the victim card, the blaming of outside forces (other people, the "patriarchy," "racism," etc.) for one's own failings, real or imagined; it would be beyond a person who was honest, charitable, just, prudent, kind, forgiving, and loving. For another example, in "The Coddling of the American Mind," a 2015 piece appropriately accompanied by a picture of a four-year-old in a college lecture-hall chair, the *Atlantic* lamented a current movement on campuses that "is largely about emotional well-being" and "presumes an extraordinary fragility of the collegiate psyche." Yet any actual fragility reflects a lack of the virtue of fortitude, whereas feigning fragility is dishonest. And excessive focus on one's own emotions is narcissistic, indicating pride, vanity, self-absorption; it isn't a fault plaguing a humble, loving individual. Of course, the obvious is being stated here: All man-caused problems are the result of sin, of vice. The solution always is virtue.

What's Going On?

As a house or car left to sit will evidence, things move toward disorder and dilapidation without the application of energy; a civilization is no exception. Failing to forge the next generation properly ensures degeneration; this is why Thomas Paine noted, "Whenever we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary," and President Ronald Reagan warned, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction." Our enemies understand this, too. As ex-KGB agent and Soviet defector Yuri Bezmenov (a.k.a. Tomas Schuman) once explained, it only takes one generation to complete the first step in the Soviet process of "ideological subversion"; this step is called "demoralization," mind you, and involves undermining the *morals* of a target nation. Of course, except in the cases of revolution, such as in 1917 Russia, freedom's loss is an incremental process. Yet there is no doubt that, theoretically, we could transition from constitutionalism to communism in one generation — were parenting bad enough. This is yet another reason why raising children is a holy calling.

It's no surprise moderns fail to instill virtue in their children; not only is the word poorly understood, it's rarely used. Instead we hear statements such as, "Children have to be raised with values," which is as meaningful as the diet advice, "Food has to contain calories." As social commentator George Will wrote in his 2000 column "Forget Values, Let's Talk Virtues":

Today it would be progress if everyone would stop talking about values. Instead, let us talk, as the Founders did, about virtues.

Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb rightly says that the ubiquity of talk about "values" causes us to forget



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how new such talk is. It began in Britain's 1983 election campaign, when Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher jauntily embraced the accusation, which is what it was, that she favored "Victorian values."

Time was, "value" was used mostly as a verb, meaning to esteem. It also was a singular noun, as in "the value of the currency." In today's politics, it is primarily a plural noun, denoting beliefs or attitudes. And Friedrich Nietzsche's nihilistic intention — the de-moralization of society — is advanced when the word "values" supplants "virtues" in political and ethical discourse. When we move beyond talk about good and evil, when the language of virtue and vice is "transcended," we are left with the thin gruel of values-talk.

How very democratic values-talk is: Unlike virtues, everyone has lots of values, as many as they choose. Hitler had scads of values. George Washington had virtues. Who among those who knew him would have spoken of Washington's "values"?

Values-talk comes naturally to a nonjudgmental age — an age judgmental primarily about the cardinal sin of being judgmental. It is considered broad-minded to say, "One person's values are as good as another's." It is nonsense to say "One person's virtues are as good as another's."

The point is, virtues reflect Truth and are good by definition; "values" may just reflect individual preference and can be good, bad, or neutral. No parent, anywhere, fails to raise his children with "values." Virtues? Ah, they're a different matter.

Why are virtues out of vogue? First, they spoil the fun of, and render implicit judgment on, those in vice's grip. It's man's nature to seek justification for his sins, and you can't eliminate the concept of vice (thus achieving complete absolution: You can't sin if sin doesn't exist) without eliminating its correlative reality, virtue. Second, however, virtue, again, refers to *moral* habits, and morality's existence presupposes a source beyond man: God's Truth. Thus, a prerequisite for belief in virtue is belief that Truth and, therefore, morality exist. Yet today the vast majority of people are moral relativists — as 2002 Barna Group research showed — embracing the notion that what we call "morals" are inventions of man and are thus just *preferences*. Of course, this is just another way of saying morality and hence moral habits, virtue, don't exist. And then you're left with those generic things, "values," whose existence requires only that someone somewhere for some reason values something.

Thus do we today place great emphasis on children being excellent, but not nearly as much on their being good. Parents will spend thousands of dollars on tennis or music lessons or on academic tutors, understanding well that their child likely won't develop the skills or attain the knowledge in question by happenstance. For they well know there are rules (fundamentals) governing these matters and that what constitutes proficiency in tennis, music, or math isn't mere "opinion." Yet awash in the relativistic belief that moral rules essentially don't exist (and, of course, some believe this more consciously and completely than others), parents today generally don't know the "fundamentals" of virtue. And you can't teach what you don't know — or model what you don't embody. No matter, though, the children certainly will adopt "values," whether they derive them from television, the Internet, school, friends, a combination thereof, or the Devil himself.

Yet as with tennis and math, children won't become virtuous by accident. People once understood this and also recognized that instilling virtue in a child was a prerequisite for everything else; it's the fertile soil in which good things can develop and flourish. Ancient Greek philosopher Plato, for instance, wrote at length about cultivating an "erotic attachment" (meaning, emotional) to virtue in young children.



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Reflecting my earlier point about the relationship between faith and morals, Declaration of Independence signatory Benjamin Rush stated, “The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be aid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty.” And virtue-oriented teaching was a staple of American education — until it went by the wayside in the first decade of Great American Vice, the 1960s.

Worse still, today’s teaching often casts vice as virtues. A generation or so ago, the “self-esteem” movement began, fueled by the notion that girls performed worse than boys on standardized tests because our white, male, linear-logic, patriarchal society damaged their self-esteem. So self-esteem “tests” were devised and, sure enough, girls scored lower. Theory proven?

Not exactly. Not only did educators overlook that girls were already getting better grades than boys, they also ignored that scoring highest on the self-esteem exams was the group performing the worst academically: black males. Moreover, that one self-esteem exercise was to have children stand before their class explaining why they were great should have told the tale: “Self-esteem” had become a euphemism for the sin of pride.

And so it goes. Lust is called “sexual liberation” and incredulity (lack of faith) sophistication. Envy masquerades as compassionate redistributive policies; and vindictiveness, wrath, and injustice as “social justice.” Dishonesty is spun as “spin” or a “narrative” while imprudence can be a “lifestyle choice.” Cowardice in action may be called compromise, and indifference is branded tolerance.

Then there’s the point that growing up just isn’t in fashion nowadays, with many lamenting our “youth culture.” Yet part of the reason there is a youth culture is youth congregation. For most of history in most places, children were mainly socialized within the family unit, with secondary exposure to the tribe, village, or clan. This ensured ample mature role models and a balance of interaction, with the young exposed to other children, such as siblings and cousins, but also parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, at whose sides they’d often work. Yet modern society has a child spend a good part of each day, five days a week, in institutions composed almost entirely of children. Not only may these youngsters reinforce each other’s childish behavior, but there is that tendency for the bad apple to spoil the whole bunch. Moreover, today’s undisciplined school environment reduces most government schools to babysitting centers at best, quasi-prisons where the inmates run the asylum at worst. This can create a situation vaguely approximating that in *Lord of the Flies*, the aforementioned 1954 William Golding book about a group of schoolboys who, upon being stranded alone on an island, descend into barbarism.

Consider another aspect of this radical childhood-period departure from the historical norm. Work was always an integral part of most children’s lives. It might have been a boy hunting or tending the fields with his father or a daughter helping her mother keep house. This is significant because as the proverbs tell us, “Work ennobles man” and “Busy hands are happy hands.” Work builds character — it encourages virtue.

This model began to change by the 19th century, explains the online Marriage and Family Encyclopedia, and, gradually, “children as a whole were excluded from the adult world of work and the period of dependent childhood lengthened.” This raises an interesting point: We know what dependency breeds among welfare-class adults. Is it much different with children when that dependency becomes excessive?



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To be clear, a certain amount of dependency is proper. And we certainly don't want children slaving away 12 hours a day in hellish factories, as could be the case during the Industrial Revolution. Yet "an idle mind is the Devil's playground," and today we occupy the other extreme. With ample free time, including summer vacations, we've become a decadent recreation culture in which youth sometimes spend hours playing video games or viewing porn (according to psychotherapist and "screen addiction" expert Dr. Nicholas Kardaras, "8- to 10-year-olds spend 8 hours a day with various digital media while teenagers spend 11 hours in front of screens"). College now reflects this, too, with young people having the expectation the play will continue; in fact, going away to university and having the "party experience" is considered a rite of passage. Even intimate human relations have been made frivolous. "Recreational sex" and "sex toys," anyone?

Moreover, consider the modern parents who, let's say, during summer vacation, struggle to keep their children entertained, only to find the kids ever dissatisfied and craving something more. Such children are typically called spoiled, yet there's another factor: Adults living frivolous, aimless lives can descend into a sense of meaninglessness, which is no doubt one reason Hollywood types too often take the drug-addled walk of shame. And while children are in a different phase of life, they nonetheless have the same human needs. Will they not be happier having a sense of meaning? We've all heard the catchy proverb, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," but, not surprisingly, the second part of it is seldom today uttered. To wit: "All play and no work makes Jack a mere toy."

So our problems clearly are systemic. Yet it must be reiterated that things tend to start at home, and today we're in the grip of parenting so permissive it permits vice (misbehavior). Family psychologist and writer John Rosemond has called this a dysfunctional parenting paradigm, explaining the permissiveness thus: "Where we once viewed misbehavior as a moral problem, we now see it as a psychological problem." Before proceeding, note that this again simply reflects our atheistic, relativistic spirit of the age. After all and harking back to my earlier explanation, we won't perceive moral problems if we believe morality is an illusion. As for psychology, Rosemond slams psychologists as "professional enablers" peddling a "mechanistic" lie in which misbehavior is blamed on biology (genes, chemical imbalances, etc.) or environment, with free will removed from the equation. Yet this makes sense from an atheistic perspective. Without a soul, man is a mere organic robot, some pounds of chemicals and water. And then you evaluate him as a robot: Misbehavior is malfunction, caused either by faulty hardware (biology) or software (programming), with all the causative forces lying beyond the automaton's control.

The traditional (correct) view is different, Rosemond explains in his 2000 book *Raising a Nonviolent Child*. It was always recognized that we're born fallen and uncivilized, acting on impulse, and prone to selfishness, aggressiveness, and all manner and form of vice — and the sooner these impulses are tamed, the better.

Of course, since virtues are caught more than they're taught, modeling proper behavior is imperative. Yet childhood obedience was also recognized as a prerequisite, for how can someone learn from you unless he first will listen to you? Listening comes before learning. So the traditional parent established obedience, and deterred misbehavior with sufficient punishment.

Today, though, such tactics are deemed harsh and damaging to self-esteem. There is little accountability, and this results in what Rosemond calls the "no fear" (and no respect) generation, raised by parents who are quite fearful of many things: their children's misbehavior, not pleasing their



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children, and not being loved by them. Of course, this itself is selfish. True love means giving a person what he needs, even if it may displease him and make him displeased with you. What these parents are exhibiting is not love, but emotional dependence.

The consequences of not taming the beast, of not instilling virtue, are all around us. So-called ADHD is just an example of professional-enabler psychologists redefining what was formerly recognized as a sin (misbehavior) as a condition of the brain; as Rosemond points out, “ADHD” behavior is simply typical toddler behavior extended into later childhood by modern parenting. And, not surprisingly, childishness is extended beyond childhood. Do we not see this in the young people rioting because the election didn’t go their way and who demand “safe spaces,” “trigger warnings,” and other types of coddling?

Moreover, the schools, which Rosemond calls “punishment free zones,” just exacerbate this problem, with colleges offering a panderly, partying, propaganda-filled atmosphere that can serve to extend childhood beyond graduation.

True civilization is when most people have become morally advanced enough to attain authentic adulthood. And what are the consequences of this not occurring? As I explained in “Written in the Eternal Constitution” (The New American, April 14, 2008), beginning with the micro, a small child is incapable of “self-government.” So his parents must micromanage his life, watch his every move — hence baby monitors and the use of cribs or gates or harnesses to limit his movements — and do for him what he cannot do for himself, which is a lot. They must be his “nanny state.”

As he grows, however, ... matures morally and increasingly starts to impose proper rules and standards on himself, the need for a parent to impose them diminishes proportionately. Then, finally, if his parents have succeeded, he can enjoy the full freedoms of adulthood.

... But what happens when his parents don’t do a good job? Or when, despite their efforts, outside influences corrupt the child? He then will have weak internal governance. He may descend into vice, taking drugs or drinking in excess; or greed and envy may capture his soul, causing him to covet. And, should his impulse control be poor enough, the overgrown savage beyond the crib may run afoul of the law, perhaps by driving drunk, buying illegal drugs, or stealing. Then, incapable of adequate self-government, he may find himself back in a crib. The authorities will lock him up, and he will once again be controlled from without.

Such an outcome is a disaster for the given family, yet the wider problem arises when barbarism becomes prevalent enough so that it characterizes the people. For a people whose collective mind-set would, like a toddler, make it nanny-worthy, will end up being governed by the nanny state.

The solution? It has already been stated. As John Adams put it, “The only foundation of a free Constitution is pure virtue.” We’re fond of talking about liberty, but like a child who wants freedom but not responsibility, this puts the cart before the horse. Speak of virtue, of morality, of seeking Truth — and walk that talk — and liberty takes care of itself. It’s also now in fashion to speak of making America great again, but this, too, confuses the order of things. The apocryphal saying warns, “America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.” Take care of the goodness, and the greatness takes care of itself. Fail to do these things, and, ironically, we’ll be forging our fetters with cries of freedom.



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