

## WHAT I AM READING

**Stephen Harrod Buhner**

Here are five articles that caught my attention today (May 10, 2021) and stimulated some thoughts and responses. (You will have to cut and paste the addresses I fear, I had trouble getting wordperfect to input them for some reason.)

### 1) <https://nautil.us/issue/99/universality/why-people-feel-like-victims>

As a number of writers have remarked, among the current social justice trends is one that views many non-white populations as victims. Critical race theory and intersectionalism are essentially built on that perspective. It turns out that there is a specific psychological mindset that this stimulates. It is called the Tendency toward interpersonal victimhood or TIV.

*The study of TIV is built around four pillars. The first pillar is a relentless need for one's victimhood to be clearly and unequivocally acknowledged by both the offender and the society at large. The second is "moral elitism," the conviction that the victim has the moral high ground, an "immaculate morality," while "the other" is inherently immoral. The third pillar is a lack of empathy, especially an inability to see life from another perspective, with the result that the victim feels entitled to act selfishly in response. The fourth pillar is Rumination—a tendency to dwell on the details of an assault on self-esteem. . . . **Why is it so difficult for people with a high degree of TIV to recognize that they can hurt other people?** They don't want to divide up the land of victimhood with other people. They see themselves as the ultimate victim. And when other people say, "OK, I know that I hurt you, but you also hurt me," and want them to take responsibility for what they did, the person with TIV is unable to do it because it's very hard to see themselves as an aggressor.*

There are a large number of non-white commentators who are particularly upset with using these people's psychologically warped perspective as a baseline for all non-white people. These articles by John McWhorter go into

some of the problems with this, here:

<https://johnmcwhorter.substack.com/p/do-black-people-enjoy-being-told>

and here:

<https://johnmcwhorter.substack.com/p/no-more-tests-we-should-measure-black>

The thing is, allowing a psychologically warped perspective to be the default approach to solving social problems, especially one with an inherent inability to feel empathy for others which is itself embedded within a belief oriented around a feeling of being wronged, inevitably leads to evil done in the name of good. History is filled with examples of this. There is none better than that of the historical moment when christianity (whose adherents viewed themselves as the victims of Roman paganism) achieved dominance in the western world. In their paranoid drive to fight all other spiritual orientations, especially animism, because they were expressions of a false consciousness imposed on humanity by satan, they killed millions and warped humanity in ways that are only now becoming apparent, to the detriment of all life on this planet.

As Ann Heberlein once commented, “ The potential to perform evil acts or to accept evil acts by others is present in us all. The antidote, as one might think, is not goodness, but rather reflection.” Thus, the inability to engage in reflection on the true impacts of critical race theory and intersectionalism on our social bonds enables the evil hidden within the more psychologically damaged members of the group to move unimpeded through culture.

History is not kind to those who refuse to reflect.

2)

**<https://www.openculture.com/2021/04/how-filippo-brunelleschi-built-the-worlds-largest-dome-at-the-dawn-of-the-renaissance.html>**

A person who was trained neither in architecture nor engineering built the world’s largest dome in 1418. Experts are still unsure how he did it. (As most people know, I am not a fan of licensure, for any profession, including medicine (and maybe especially medicine). This is an aspect of why.)

3)

**<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/25/reproduction-without-pregnancy-emancipate-women-artificial-wombs>**

There is a belief among certain feminists that they are victims of ecological fascism. Even Camille Paglia, whom I generally admire, gives it credence:

*I maintain that our true oppressor is not society but nature, which in its fascist ecology has imposed biological gender upon us at birth. . . . Why is it necessary to solidify and literalize one's mercurial, ever-evolving identity in the frail envelope of the flesh? - which all the major world religions have rightly described as an illusion destined to decay and vanish. No one is completely satisfied with his or her body, which will inevitably betray us anyhow as we slide toward death. . . . Against Nature: that is the argument of my book.*

Paglia is hardly alone in this hatred of Earth and the ecological limits that have been placed on all life forms here . . . and really, if her position is contemplated at all, a hatred of the body for its continuing impacts on the (apparently non-physical) mind and self.

It is an expression, in its bleakest form, of the mind/body dualistic split. This sort of thinking has gained tremendous momentum the past half century; it's integral to the transhumanist movement and core to the long term christian and scientific hatred of nature which believes that nature is inherently dangerous and must be brought under human control. Irrespective of its particular partisans, whether feminists, or scientists, or christians, or technoutopianists, the underlying beliefs have the same origin: hatred of Earth, rage against ecologically imposed biological limitations. It is headed no place good.

Sasha Isaac, in her piece for Aeon Magazine ("Is artificial-womb technology a tool for women's liberation?"), comments that while some women love the idea of pregnancy and carrying and sustaining a child within them "others find themselves recoiling in horror at the physical demands of carrying and sustaining a child in their womb, and even more at the potential brutality of giving birth . . . [they] assume a far less forgiving view of the process, likening It to "shitting a pumpkin."

*For [writer Shulamith] Firestone, artificial wombs would eliminate a crucial condition that currently ensures women's oppression by neutralizing the heavily gendered process of reproduction. Though there exist indisputable biological differences between the sexes, she argued that this difference becomes oppressive in the unfair division of reproductive labor and its naturalization through the ideal of the nuclear family. But if foetus were to develop in artificial wombs, women would finally be free to pursue their interests and desires outside their reproductive duties.*

This is a psychological orientation that people are meant to grow out of during the terrible twos of their second year of life and to face and mature out of once more during the rage of their adolescent years. We are meant to have limits placed upon us. How we deal with them is the measure of our character. And there are no more important limits than the ecological. Split gender physiology is a Gaian innovation of extremely long duration. It has a specific ecological function that is integral to life on this planet, to the continuation of everything we love here. Death, too, is just as crucial. Death is built into the system for a reason. Without it, there would be no life, no Earth, no plants, no new generations.

These two dynamics are root to the continuation of life on this planet. But those who attempt to surmount these limitations, at root, hate future generations, hate all life. For they put their own desires as paramount over all other realities. It is this hatred of ecological limits and realities, along with the belief that it is possible for us, our species, to exist outside them, to, in essence, destroy any capacity of those limits to affect us, that lie at the root of most of our ecological troubles.

The psychological underpinnings of those movements (and the people who promulgate them) are quite different than the orientation that Baudelaire captures in these words of his . . .

*The Natural world is a spiritual house, where the pillars, that are alive*

*Let slip at times some strangely garbled words*

*Man walks there through forests of physical things that are also spiritual things*

*That watch him with affectionate looks.*

Which one will bring us a world that we want ourselves and our children and their children to live in?

4) <https://e360.yale.edu/features/species-or-ecosystems-how-best-to-restore-the-natural-world>

I am not a fan of “invasives” thinking, that is, the hysterical attempts to eradicate Japanese knotweed for instance. As I have long written, such attempts fail to understand the ecological functions of invasive plants. This insight is embedded within the understanding that what is most important is the functioning of ecosystems over time, not how they look at any particular moment or decade. For instance, the removal of goldenseal from its range in the east due to overharvesting also saw the slow emergence of *Phellodendron amurense* as an invasive in the same regions. It is a berberine-containing tree.

This article looks at how ecosystems tend to remain functionally identical over long time lines while the individual species come and go. New species take on the same functions as the old ones, the ecosystem is merely adapting to long term environmental changes while still remaining coherent. Within this orientation, human/landscape interaction is seen as an integral aspect of ecosystem health. Human/landscape problems arise, researchers note, only with the emergence of industrialization and its focus on extraction for the profit of a few.

One of the things I have long wanted to do is to take a series of photographs along I-40 from New Mexico to Arizona ending with a photograph of Saguaro national park. I am having trouble finding a photograph that captures the region I want to visually show, but the one I have included here is sort of close.



It is fascinating to see the transition from this to free range cattle grazing (which still allows a great deal of plant diversity) to abandoned agricultural fields (which are essentially barren, containing few plants, most of them invasives which are trying to restore the soil), to abandoned industrial sites in which nearly nothing will grow. Through this it is possible to see the impact on the land as humans moved from hunter/gatherer to cattle to agriculture to industrialization. This is the one place that it is easiest to see the impact on

the landscape. In places like Vermont, it can't as easily be seen due to the fast growth of understory plants. But the damage to ecosystem function and health is identical.

5) <http://www.robertbly.com/interview.html>

(And for some reason, the link works on this one, I actually kind of hate the internet world and computers.)

This is a pretty good interview with Robert Bly, conducted by Fran Quinn for the Paris Review. I met Fran Quinn when I was one of the keynote speakers at the Great Mother Conference a few years ago. I was quite taken with him. His book, *Sound Ideas*, written along with Eugene McCarthy (not the politician) is a stunning exploration of the importance of sounding, that is the oral expression of language in storytelling and poetry.

I was revisiting this interview as I had just been corresponding with Ruth Bly, Robert's wife, about the use of some of his work in *Earth Grief*, the new book I am working on. Robert's health is very poor now, the Alzheimer's is much progressed it seems. I first heard Robert Bly some 40 years ago and he became one of the main influences on my work. He is greatly missed . . . even by himself. After the Alzheimer's had taken hold, he once said, after watching a video of himself with his family, "I think I would have liked him."

Yeah, he would have. And he did.