

# THE Ayn Rand LETTER®

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## MORAL INFLATION

### Part III

The ideologues of altruism have miscalculated in regard to this country. Materially, they have obtained more than they could hope to extort from any other, poorer nation. Spiritually, they have failed: they mistook generosity for guilt; the guilt-infection did not take hold. Men who live on an earned income are not likely to accept an unearned guilt.

Since the inflation of altruism has not breached the American people's basic self-esteem, the altruists are now trying to revive the grotesque, anti-moral absurdity of original sin - i.e., of prenatal guilt - in a secular form. Having failed to induce personal guilt, they are struggling to induce racial guilt - by proclaiming that people must suffer and pay for the (alleged) sins of their fathers.

This prehistorical notion requires more than the destruction of morality. It requires the obliteration of all the concepts which centuries of growing civilization struggled to identify: reason, individualism, personal integrity (and person), volition, choice, responsibility, language, understanding, and human communication.

The inversion of all standards - the propagation of racism as anti-racist, of injustice as just, of immorality as moral, and the reasoning behind it, which is worse than the offenses - is flagrantly evident in the policy of preferential treatment for minorities (i.e., racial quotas) in employment and education. (See my essay on "Racism" in The Virtue of Selfishness.) If there is a quicker way to destroy people than by preaching brotherly love while spreading blind, inter-racial hatred, you name it.

The most eloquent example of that policy is the DeFunis case.

In 1971, Marco DeFunis, Jr., a Phi Beta Kappa, magna cum laude graduate of the University of Washington in Seattle, was denied admission to the University's Law School. The school accepted 275 out of 1600 applicants (for an eventual class of 150). They were chosen mainly on the basis of special tests which purported to give a student's "Predicted First Year Average," estimating his ability to succeed in law school - and, in part, on the basis of various other considerations. Four racial minority groups - Black, Chicano, American Indian, and Filipino - were singled out for preferential treatment; their applications were processed separately and differently from all the others. I quote from



Justice Douglas's opinion in a subsequent Supreme Court decision: "Thirty-seven minority applicants were admitted under this procedure. Of these, 36 had Predicted First Year Averages below DeFunis' 76.23, and 30 had averages below 74.5, and thus would ordinarily have been summarily rejected by the Chairman....What places this case in a special category is the fact that the school did not choose one set of criteria but two, and then determined which to apply to a given applicant on the basis of his race."

DeFunis sued the University of Washington, claiming that he was a victim of "reverse discrimination," that his constitutional rights had been violated and he had been denied the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee of "equal protection of the laws." The Washington trial court upheld his claim and ordered the school to admit him. The school complied, but appealed. The Washington Supreme Court reversed the decision. DeFunis took the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, obtaining a stay which permitted him to attend the Law School until the final disposition of his case.

The case aroused intense public controversy. Various groups and organizations filed friend-of-the-court briefs, supporting DeFunis or opposing him - a greater number of briefs than in any other case in recent history. It was clear to both sides that a crucially important moral issue was at stake. The Court announced its decision on April 23, 1974. By that time, DeFunis was completing his last term at the Law School, and the school had agreed to let him graduate, regardless of the Court's decision. This permitted the Supreme Court to avoid judgment on the issue.

It was the Court's conservative majority that took advantage of a legal technicality and - in a brief, unsigned opinion - declared the case to be moot, since DeFunis's rights were not affected any longer. The four liberal Justices dissented, objecting to the avoidance of the constitutional issues. Justice Douglas wrote a separate, dissenting opinion of an extremely confusing, inconclusive nature. The moral question was left unanswered.

What is of special significance to this country's public morale and morality, is the kind of argumentation that this case brought forth in advance of the Supreme Court's ruling.

The brief of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, filed in support of DeFunis, states: "If the Constitution prohibits exclusion of blacks and other minorities on racial grounds, it cannot permit the exclusion of whites on racial grounds....discrimination on the basis of race is illegal, immoral, unconstitutional, inherently wrong and destructive of democratic society....A racial quota is a device for establishing a status, a caste, determining superiority or inferiority for a class measured by race without regard to individual merit."

This, of course, is unanswerable. The advocates of racial quotas do not attempt to answer it; they ignore it, or worse: they declare that their goal is to end racial discrimination eventually by means of practicing it temporarily. (This is borrowed from the methodology of Marxism, which claims that we can bring the state to wither away eventually by means of establishing a totalitarian dictatorship temporarily. In neither case are we given any indication of how such a trick is to be accomplished.)

An article eloquently entitled "Discriminating to end discrimination" (The



New York Times Magazine, April 14, 1974) presents a good cross section of arguments offered by both sides of the issue. "Advocates of affirmative action [i.e., of preferential treatment] like to compare the racial situation in America to two runners, one of whom has had his legs shackled for 200 years.... Removing the shackles doesn't make the two instantly equal in ability to compete. The previously shackled runner has to be given some advantage in order to compete effectively until he gets his legs into condition." (How? By shackling the fast runner, lowering the standards, and slowing down everyone's running? No answer is given. But it must be mentioned that many intelligent blacks regard this type of argument as a racist insult, which it is.)

The article quotes a woman attorney for some anti-DeFunis groups, who said: "It is now well understood, however, that our society cannot be completely color-blind in the short term if we are to have a color-blind society in the long term." She "argues that a racial classification can only be presumed unconstitutional if it disadvantages a group subject to a history of discrimination or held down by special disabilities. She contends that the 14th Amendment was meant to help powerless, oppressed minorities, and that the white majority needs no such help." (This is altruism superseding and rewriting the Constitution: if you have no special disabilities, you have no rights and no protection of the laws.)

The University of Washington, according to the article, "concedes that some white students may be excluded from law school because of the affirmative-action program, but it maintains that its program is 'necessary' to achieve an 'overriding purpose' - i.e., to increase the number of minority lawyers in the state and the nation... And, the university notes, had it not been for the nation's history of racial discrimination, white students would have had far more students to compete with than they do now."

This type of argument, which modern intellectuals permit themselves to use with growing frequency, is a measure of their growing distance from reality: it consists in changing one factor of a complex situation and assuming that all the rest would remain unchanged. In fact, if racial discrimination hampered the intellectual development of black students, the absence of such discrimination would not have brought more competition to white students, but less: it would have created more universities to satisfy a greater demand (assuming a free economy).

But if projected potentialities are to be equated with actuality, if "might have been" is to be the equivalent of "was," then I submit the following argument: If my grandfather had come to this country and if he had gone into the oil business, he would have given stiff competition to Nelson A. Rockefeller's grandfather and, therefore, Mr. Rockefeller would not be as rich as he is today and, therefore, I demand my constitutional right to half of Mr. Rockefeller's money.

Absurd? Not by today's standards. The grossness of such absurdity did not prevent the broadcast of an editorial which declared: "WCBS Radio endorses the argument of the University of Washington Law School - had it not been for the nation's history of racial discrimination, white students would have far more students to compete with than they do today. Affirmative-action programs that give preference to qualified minorities over more qualified whites may seem unjust, but that injustice pales beside the monstrosities of two centuries of segregation." (May 1, 1974.)



Dr. Alvin Lashinsky, Vice President of the Jewish Rights Council, who broadcast a reply to that editorial, sounded like a welcome voice of sanity: "We utterly condemn what appears to us to be a call by WCBS for retribution - to have children pay for acts their grandfathers committed, and for innocents of other minorities to also suffer only because their skin is white....Excellence of our professions has always been achieved by high standards and the only way to give minorities self-respect is by improving the ability of the poorly qualified through remedial education beforehand, otherwise the finished product may be a poorly qualified physician or lawyer or a poorly skilled surgeon or even a semi-literate clerk or secretary. Does anyone, WCBS or the minorities, really want this?" (May 3, 1974.)

The answer is: Yes - as far as the ideologues of altruism are concerned - that is precisely what they want. They do not want to lift the poorly qualified, but to tear down the competent; they do not want to help the weak, but to destroy the strong. How many of them would admit such motives, even to themselves, I do not know. Observe that the WCBS editorial did not dare openly to demand the rejection of the qualified in favor of the unqualified; it fudged, it spoke of "qualified minorities" versus "more qualified whites," making it a matter of degree - which does not make the injustice any the less vicious.

While the altruists proclaim that the financially or racially handicapped are their chief concern, none of them noticed the fact that DeFunis was doubly handicapped. The admission requirements at the University of Washington Law School (as at most universities) are highly arbitrary: apart from scholastic achievement, the committee considers such factors as "recommendations" from prominent persons or groups (i.e., pull) and a student's "extra-curricular and community activities" (i.e., altruism). "Community activities" are a luxury which DeFunis could not have afforded: his "extra-curricular activity" consisted in working his way through college. And if the persecution suffered by a student's ancestors is grounds for giving him special advantages, DeFunis belongs to the racial minority that suffered the longest, most horrendous record of persecution in history: he is Jewish. So much for the sincerity of the altruists' motives.

Now consider the moral import of their arguments. Observe that the common denominator of their claims is the total absence of the concept of a person. An individual and a group are regarded as interchangeable - and it is instructive to observe the switching. A group can be "shackled for 200 years," an individual cannot - but it is individuals who collect reparations, not the group as a whole. A group, the white majority, must pay for their ancestors' racial discrimination, it is alleged - but it is white individuals who pay, by being denied job and education opportunities, not the group as a whole. It is, allegedly, an "overriding purpose" to increase the number of minority lawyers in the nation - but minority lawyers are individuals, and what is being "overridden"? The rights of other individuals, who are white.

The crass indifference of all such tribal profiteers to the reality of an individual human life, is their most vicious and shocking characteristic. An individual human life is a brief and fragile period of time. If the goal of "reverse discrimination" is a color-blind society in some indeterminate future, what good will it do to DeFunis (and to thousands like him), who is denied a professional education in the brief, irreplaceable years of his youth and finds his plans, his future, his life-course wrecked? Who has the right to do this



to him? For the sake of what? For the alleged future benefit of society, i.e., of a large majority of people? But it is for the sake of a minority that he has been sacrificed.

There is no such thing as a collective guilt. A country may be held responsible for the actions of its government and it may be guilty of an evil (such as starting a war) - but then it is a public, not a private, matter and the entire country has to bear the burden of paying reparations for it. The notion of random individuals paying for the sins of an entire country, is an unspeakable modern atrocity.

This country has no guilt to atone for in regard to its black citizens. Certainly, slavery was an enormous evil. But a country that fought a civil war to abolish slavery, has atoned for it on such a scale that to talk about racial quotas in addition, is grotesque. However, it is not for injustices committed by the government that the modern racists are demanding reparations, but for racial prejudice - i.e., for the personal views of private citizens. How can an individual be held responsible for the views of others, whom he has no power to control, who may be his intellectual enemies, whose views may be the opposite of his own? What can make him responsible for them? The answer we hear is: The fact that his skin is of the same color as theirs. If this is not an obliteration of morality, of intellectual integrity, of individual rights, of the freedom of man's mind (and, incidentally, of the First Amendment), you take it from here; I can't - it turns my stomach.

What I am able to discuss is the ancient notion of paying for the sins of one's fathers, and the effect of this notion on morality. Suppose a man leads a decent, responsible life financially: he works hard, lives within his means, plans his future accordingly, and always pays his debts; then, suddenly, he is confronted with a demand that he pay a debt of his father's, contracted before he was born - and he is given to understand that other demands will be sprung on him, for the debts of his grandfather, his great-grandfather, etc. Would he accept it? Would he remain decent, conscientious and hard-working? Or would he blow his savings on one drunken orgy, then drift at the whim of the moment, mooching and chiseling as best he can?

The same is true in the realm of morality. Morality is inseparable from personal choice and personal responsibility. If a man lives conscientiously according to a set of moral principles, then hears that his moral rectitude does not depend on his actions, but on the actions of his ancestors, he will not remain moral for long. He will let himself slide into that cynical, senseless, hopeless gray bog which is today's culture, where floating shapes scowl at him menacingly and hoarse voices screech about "affirmative action."

No, men are not evil by nature - and when evil ideas take over a culture, two factors are responsible: the absence of good ideas, and force. Just as financial inflation is caused by the government, so is moral inflation. The government is destroying the people's morality by many forms of injustice, which include such things as forcing racial quotas on schools and business concerns. As the Times Magazine article explains in regard to the DeFunis case: "H.E.W. [Department of Health, Education and Welfare] was leaning hard on the university for alleged noncompliance with affirmative action in campus hiring. The university, like 2,500 other institutions of higher learning in the United States, holds Government grants and contracts and thus is required by Federal



law to institute 'goals and timetables' for hiring more women and minorities on its faculty." (So much for the notion of the government granting subsidies to education without strings attached, i.e., without affecting the schools' intellectual freedom.)

The next time you hear a politician deplore the moral decline of this country, remember (and, perhaps, remind him) that if one wants to preserve a nation's morality, one must set up conditions of existence in which moral behavior is rewarded, not punished - and that this cannot be done on an altruist basis: after centuries of moral inflation, the balloon of altruism has burst.

Ayn Rand

P.S. This Letter was written later than the date that appears on its heading.

#### OBJECTIVIST CALENDAR

On Sunday, October 20, Ayn Rand will give a talk at The Ford Hall Forum in Boston. Time: 8 P.M. Place (new location): Alumni Hall, Northeastern University, 360 Huntington Ave. The title of the talk will be announced later. (Advance tickets are not available. On past occasions, the auditorium was filled to capacity, and many people had to be turned away. If you plan to attend, we suggest that you arrive at Alumni Hall far in advance of 7:30 P.M., when the doors open.)

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The following starting dates have been scheduled for Dr. Leonard Peikoff's taped courses. Founders of Western Philosophy: Thales to Hume. Nashville, September 18 (contact R. Paul Drake, 615-322-4465, after 7:30 P.M.). Introduction to Logic. South Chicago, September 29, and North Chicago, October 3 (Dr. Douglas Mayfield, 312-649-4400, days or 312-787-9836, eves.); Toronto, October 2 (Edmund West, 416-661-1777, after 8 P.M.); Providence, October 5 (Bill Dawkins, 401-331-4346, eves.).

Correction: The course that will begin in Boston on September 15 is Founders of Western Philosophy: Thales to Hume (Frank Peseckis, 617-261-2491, after September 3).

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A reminder: The opening lecture of Allan Blumenthal's course, Music: Theory, History and Performance, will be given on Tuesday, September 17, 7:30 P.M., at the Statler Hilton Hotel, 7th Ave. at 33rd St., New York City. Visitors may attend this lecture, space permitting; admission is \$7.50.

B.W.