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Cyberpsychology and Virtual Reality: Is an Update Necessary

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Title: Cyberpsychology and Virtual Reality: Is an Update Necessary

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Abstract. This article explores the notion that something called "human nature" may be changing in an era of significant information technology developments.

One might make a strong case that human nature is either under siege or undergoing change due to contemporary developments in information technology (IT). This case could be buttressed by theoreticians, observers, and experimental researchers who have been positing a number of psychological changes induced by various aspects of these IT developments. However, each posited linkage of aspect and change are based on combinations of reason, observation, and faith in certain assumptions and can be effectively challenged by the same epistemological tools.

For example, one might posit that virtual reality technology (VRT) threatens or is already changing important constituents of the self--if not the notion of self. The argument here would be that VRT facilitates or impedes the construction of conceptions of reality never before conceived; access to already conceived and never before conceived reality; phenomenologically more dynamic absorption in various constructed realities; and choice in how, when, where, why, and with whom to approach all of this. Applications of the above might be identified in the training of pilots and surgeons; entertainment through movies and games; cognitive-behavioral therapies addressing anxiety disorders; attempts to engage in personality restructuring; the so-called "breaking of minds;" accessing sensitive information; and belief modification with prisoners of war and captured espionage agents. Yet the notion of virtual reality and multiple realities is an extremely old one that cognitive ethologists, anthropologists, and evolutionary psychologists might associate with the dawning of human consciousness. More recent personality and social psychological constructs bearing on virtual reality include the dispositional attribute of intrapsychic and behavioral consistency, the robustness of situational influence on behavior, and social constructionist theorizing on the saturated self.

As another example, one might posit that the Internet is psychologically potent given its opportunities to obtain myriad types of information and engage in various social interactions from the pornographic through the most profound musings of philosophical discourse. Already there have been assertions that Internet usage is positively correlated with various emotional deprivations and noxious experiences. However, such assertions often are based on focusing on the Internet out of its users social contexts. And the Internet as a qualitative as opposed to quantitative psychological venue must still be founded only on speculation and faith in the very distinction.

As a last example, one might posit that telecommunications developments and capabilities for global, "around-the-clock" awareness may have dire consequences for a human psychology that--at least on an evolutionary basis--may still require significant interludes of the antithesis of awareness. The followers of Mammon must always be "on" in a globalized economy that does not obey time zones. Yet security--of which the economic is but a type--has always been an always "on" concern. Technological developments have not changed this an iota.

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One last unchanging feature of the discourse on cyberpsychology and virtual reality is the "bandwagon" phenomenon of academics, pundits, and other "content providers" who will continue to construct a brave new world until it's time to move on to the next one bearing no more or less ontological validity. More valid is the notion that the discourse but mirrors an unchanging politics of discourse. (See Banos, R.M., Botella, C., Garcia-Palacios, A., Villa, H., Perpina, C., & Alcaniz, M. (2000). Presence and reality in virtual environments: A unitary construct? *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, 3, 327-335; Friedman, T. L. (January 30, 2001). Cyber-serfdom. *The New York Times*, p. A27; Gordo-Lopez, A.J., & I. Parker (Eds.). (1999). *Cyberpsychology*. Taylor & Francis/Routledge; Kahan, M. (2000). Integration of psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioral therapy in a virtual environment. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, 3, 179-183.)(Keywords: Internet, Telecommunications, Virtual Reality.)

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Title: A Peculiar Logic of Pro-Abortion Advocacy

Keywords: Abortion, Bush

Abstract. This article identifies a weakness in pro-abortion advocacy and how this weakness can be resolved to support said advocacy.

Many pro-abortion forces throughout the world have attacked United States (US) president George W. Bush for issuing an executive order that denies US federal funds to foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGO) that furnish legal abortions, counsel women on the legal abortion option, and/or advocate for policy changes to facilitate abortion. The usual rationales to support the attack include contentions that women should control their own bodies and that (without the funding) the NGOs will not be able to provide non-abortion related family planning and women's health services. Both these rationales may be logically founded but miss the mark of what is really at issue among anti-abortion advocates and about abortion itself.

Should women be allowed to control their own bodies? One unfortunate aspect of focusing on this question is that it reinforces the notion that women's bodies are but objects that are to be controlled by someone--by women or by others. Thus, the very women and men who seek to attenuate the notion of women as objects may be doing the contrary. Another unfortunate aspect of focusing on this question is suggesting that women or men should have complete control over their bodies. Should such control always be the case if individuals choose to use their bodies to take the lives of others or even themselves--not just through violence acts but through choosing not to receive treatment for deadly and highly infectious disease?

Does President Bush's decision necessarily preclude non-abortion related family planning and women's health services provided by NGOs? Only if the NGOs also engage in what the President seeks to prohibit. And only if women desire abortion-related information and/or abortions. And here the abortion issue returns to the main issue. Is abortion taking a life?

Most pro-abortion advocates assert that abortion is not taking a life. This stance facilitates advocacy for pro-abortion but also facilitates anti-abortion advocacy. A more intellectually honest position would be to agree that abortion is taking a life and that taking a life is ethically and morally acceptable in certain or all situations. By choosing all situations, pro-abortion advocates would logically be supporting their own demise when continuing to live would get in the way of others controlling their own bodies. By choosing certain situations, pro-abortion advocates would be adding to scenarios in war, crime fighting, self-defense, and the like. By choosing certain situations, pro-abortion advocates would change the primary argument from what is taking a life or whether to ever take a life to when one should take a life. Many anti-abortion advocates who would answer "never" might have to change their positions given that many of them do advocate taking life in other situations.

President Bush's executive order is made to order for all sides in the abortion discourse to take a more intellectually and emotionally honest position. (See David, H. P. (1994). Reproductive rights and reproductive behavior: Clash or convergence of private values and public policies? *American Psychologist*, 49, 343-349; Linders, A. (1998). Abortion as a social problem: The construction of

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"opposite" solutions in Sweden and the United States. *Social Problems*, 45, 488-509; Pellegrin, K. L., & Frueh, B. C. (1994). Why psychologists don't think like philosophers. *American Psychologist*, 49, 970; Pellerrom, D.E. A deadly global gag rule. *The New York Times*, p. A27; Stotland, N. L. (1996). Conceptions and misconceptions: Decisions about pregnancy. *General Hospital Psychiatry*, 18, 238-243; Thornton, J. G. (1994). The ethics of prenatal screening and abortion for fetal abnormality: A personal view. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 12, 155-161.) (Keywords: Abortion, Bush.)