



## The Longest War

### EDITOR'S MESSAGE



By John Loofbourow, MD

TO ESCAPE OUR HUMAN CONDITION as slaves of Nature, we have progressively limited and co-opted her through an ever growing use of technology. Today, we still fight this oldest of all known human wars: humanity against Nature.

Why? Perhaps as good a reason as any is found in the Biblical Garden of Eden story of the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> We fight with tech-knowledge. Consequent to our rebellion, we became responsible for our actions.

The war began tens of thousands of years ago when humanity lived totally subject to the bonds of Nature. Then, people knew her power and cruelty well, and tried to buy her favor. Maybe humanity's first rebellion began with the discovery (or gift?) of fire. Or the development of language, the Word, which allowed people to be heard beyond reach of their voice, and to speak to the unborn. Or when women in central Asia<sup>3</sup>, closely chained by the enemy herself to the birthing and rearing of children, developed agriculture and husbandry while men were off hunting and gathering; stable communities followed, trade and specialization.

We have lost many battles to Nature, and will lose more: to plagues<sup>4</sup> of various sorts, to cataclysms of many degrees, and to our own human passions, not the least of which are wars between civilizations. How curious that so many of these wars against ourselves have arisen in Eurasia where people first began taming many of our seeds of roots and grasses, and first developed so many herding animals for food and clothing. Pulses, legumes, rice, sheep, and cattle, as well as cities, civilizations, religions, and war; technologic accomplishments, all. At one time or another, many nations have been leaders in this, the longest war. In a process that almost seems inborn, as if scripted by Nature herself, each civilization has led the vanguard for a time until falling victim to its own contradictions, excesses, and internal decay.

A great nation's life is like a recapitulation of any individual life and, in the end, Nature wins. Even so, in the longest war, each civilization has contributed technologic advances to the armamentarium of humanity. We now live so far from the natural state that many people long for some contact with the earth, with risk, with hardship. So we climb Everests of various sorts swaddled in unnatural gear, for the personal high of overcoming some aspect of Nature.

We manipulate life before conception; we now can consider lending, after demise, our flesh or our genetic material to others, patenting or commercializing it. Like latter day Egyptian pharaohs, we contemplate structuring our lives both before and after living. Is this a mistake? I contend it is not. It is only a further stage in our war against Nature in all her manifestations including the cosmos.

For some years now, the USA has been the leader in this longest war. If we believe history, that should be sobering for us. We are now engaged in what can be called a religious or cultural war in Iraq and elsewhere. Yet it is less dangerous to our future than

maintaining leadership in the longest war. Whether we make peace with radical Islam or crush it, if we neglect our technologic strength, our valued freedoms and way of life will suffer greatly. And there is much evidence that is already happening.

While we are engaged in trivial pursuit, South Korea has cloned the first dog, the first human embryo, and the first series of embryonic stem cell lines from diseased humans. Our much acclaimed (by us) drug industry has lost the edge to "old" Europe.<sup>5</sup> China, India, and the world in general produce proportionately far more scientists than we do and have for some years. Lists of outstanding achievers are heavily weighted with immigrants and their children.

So are the lists of those who care for our yards, grow our food, and serve it. For generations, brilliant scientists came here to work, to live a better personal and professional life; they now have many other options, and better ones for various reasons. There is evidence they are beginning to leave and to leave off coming.

Why? Look no further than right here in Sacramento, on the evening of August 10, 2005. Despite a reasoned and extensive presentation from the entire scientifically grounded community, our Sacramento County Board of Supervisors failed again to allow either needle exchange or the prescription-free purchase of syringes.

Logic, common sense, and sound evidence were ignored for political considerations. Many new cases of lifelong illness, hepatitis C, and HIV among adults and their unborn, were assured by board inaction. Millions more taxpayer dollars will be spent for treatment. Yet dollar cost for allowing people to buy their own needles and syringes would have been negligible; the problem is it may have cost a few votes. Fear of the minority controls the fate of the nation because of political greed, self interest, and cowardice. How many Einsteins will want to move here now?

Meanwhile our own children are locked into an exorbitantly expensive but dysfunctional educational system that sends many to college for remedial math and English, or into the so called "service industry" to consume and serve a bloated public; often themselves. How long can that last?

Among our ever growing list of "rights," there is one we shall never have: The right to prevent people in other countries from working hard and smart to build, to produce, to dare, to risk, to educate their children and their scientists, and to seize the technologic sword in the war against Nature. It is arrogant to think they must steal technology from us. They will develop their own.

Meanwhile, the longest war goes on while we, having abandoned rational thought and action, threaten to slide into a fat, fearful, ignorant, and arrogant mediocrity.

john@loofbourow.com

1. Genesis 3.
2. Greek myth of Prometheus. After he gave us fire the gods chained him to a rock where rapacious birds could forever feast on his liver.
3. *Guns Germs and Steel*, by Jared Diamond, and Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*.
4. As the world urban population grows, it seems likely we will see more. The current likelihood of a new flu epidemic is a case in point, one of many possibilities. Nature will not resign without a fight.
5. See Sharon Begley in "Science Journal," *The Wall Street Journal* August 12, 2005.

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society  
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819  
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

Copyright © 2000-2008 Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society - All Right's Reserved