

# **NO! Against Adult Supremacy Vol. 9**

Various Authors

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# **Ageism: A Pillar of Ableism** *Kathleen Nicole O'Neal*

Several years back I began reading and learning about disability rights issues. As is the case with my interest in LGBT, women's, people of color, social justice, youth, and other issues, I was particularly drawn to the highly theoretical critical work that many disability rights theorists have been producing since the late twentieth century. One viewpoint I found repeatedly represented in this body of work (and which I have also heard expressed multiple times by my friends with disabilities) is that one of the primary pillars of disability oppression is the way in which people with disabilities, regardless of age, are treated as if they were forever children. My friend and fellow youth and disability rights advocate Matt Stafford has written about the ways in which parents and others use the institution of guardianship in order to exert undue influence in the lives of people with disabilities who have passed the age of majority. Another friend who is a youth and disability rights advocate has spoken with me about how the doctors they work with will refuse to talk respectfully and directly to them about their medical issues despite the fact that my friend has no cognitive impairments and even recently graduated from law school.

Disability rights advocates have long sought greater rights and autonomy for all people with disabilities, including individuals with cognitive and communication impairments. They have challenged our entire society, especially the institutions set up by the non-disabled to manage people with disabilities, to view disabled persons as being as deserving of autonomy and dignity as everyone else no matter what mental or physical limitations or differences they may possess. In doing so they have not only greatly improved the lives of disabled people, they have also laid the theoretical groundwork for a compelling defense of youth liberation.

Disability is a complicated issue. There are various types of disabilities and there are various frameworks for understanding the rights of disabled people and even disability itself. However, every serious advocate of disability rights will agree that centering the autonomy of disabled people is important and that all too many people believe that an inability on the part of disabled people to function according to the standards of non-disabled individuals justifies their lifelong infantilization. Of course, the reason that many people feel comfortable with denying rights and autonomy to persons with disabilities on these grounds is that we already have a widespread precedent within our society of using this as a pretense to deny rights and autonomy to children.

The implicit assumption behind the actions and belief system of every judge that casually turns over guardianship of a person with cognitive disabilities to another adult, of every parent who believes they have an undisputed right to make medical decisions for a disabled adult son or daughter, and of every legislator who defends the corralling of disabled individuals into oppressive and even abusive institutional settings are not only ableist (although they are that). They are also profoundly ageist.

The way our society treats minors has set the precedent for what we believe is the ideal way to relate to those whom we perceive (rightly or wrongly) as lacking the capacities of the average

adult human being. We deny them bodily autonomy. We ignore their needs and preferences in the realm of education. We segregate them in various institutions where they are rarely permitted to interact in a meaningful way with the rest of the world. We deny them the right to their sexuality, either alone or partnered. We turn their decision-making authority over to various institutions and family members without asking them what they prefer in the matters which affect them most. We deny them opportunities for meaningful work. Finally, we expect them to react with gratitude for the nearly endless oppression they live under because first and foremost we view them as a burden who should feel fortunate that anyone wishes to fool with them at all. No wonder so many people believe that relating to disabled individuals this way is the best that can be done for them. It is the only way our society believes that we can relate to minors. Thus nearly universal acceptance of the oppression of youth opens the door to tolerance and even admiration of the oppression of disabled people of all ages. Of course, no one calls it oppression even though by any reasonable definition it is.

It is important for disability rights advocates to recognize the link between youth and disability oppression. Ageism does much of ableism's heavy lifting and it is important to recognize that in order to combat the pernicious influence that ableism plays in the lives of disabled individuals. It is also important for youth rights advocates to recognize that support for youth liberation logically necessitates support for the disability rights movement. Allowing anyone in our society to be denied liberty, justice, and equality sets a precedent whereby doing this to any other group of individuals becomes much more widely accepted. We best protect youth and people with disabilities when we protect their rights and not when we pretend to protect them from themselves.

## The Child and Its Enemies *Emma Goldman*

Is the child to be considered as an individuality, or as an object to be moulded according to the whims and fancies of those about it? This seems to me to be the most important question to be answered by parents and educators. And whether the child is to grow from within, whether all that craves expression will be permitted to come forth toward the light of day; or whether it is to be kneaded like dough through external forces, depends upon the proper answer to this vital question.

The longing of the best and noblest of our times makes for the strongest individualities. Every sensitive being abhors the idea of being treated as a mere machine or as a mere parrot of conventionality and respectability, the human being craves recognition of his kind.

It must be borne in mind that it is through the channel of the child that the development of the mature man must go, and that the present ideas of the educating or training of the latter in the school and the family—even the family of the liberal or radical—are such as to stifle the natural growth of the child.

Every institution of our day, the family, the State, our moral codes, sees in every strong, beautiful, uncompromising personality a deadly enemy; therefore every effort is being made to cramp human emotion and originality of thought in the individual into a straight-jacket from its earliest infancy; or to shape every human being according to one pattern; not into a well-rounded individuality, but into a patient work slave, professional automaton, tax-paying citizen, or righteous moralist. If one, nevertheless, meets with real spontaneity (which, by the way, is a rare treat,) it is not due to our method of rearing or educating the child: the personality often asserts itself, regardless of official and family barriers. Such a discovery should be celebrated as an unusual event, since the obstacles placed in the way of growth and development of character are so numerous that it must be considered a miracle if it retains its strength and beauty and survives the various attempts at crippling that which is most essential to it.

Indeed, he who has freed himself from the fetters of the thoughtlessness and stupidity of the commonplace; he who can stand without moral crutches, without the approval of public opinion—private laziness, Friedrich Nietzsche called it—may well intone a high and voluminous song of independence and freedom; he has gained the right to it through fierce and fiery battles. These battles already begin at the most delicate age.

The child shows its individual tendencies in its plays, in its questions, in its association with people and things. But it has to struggle with everlasting external interference in its world of thought and emotion. It must not express itself in harmony with its nature, with its growing personality. It must become a thing, an object. Its questions are met with narrow, conventional, ridiculous replies, mostly based on falsehoods; and, when, with large, wondering, innocent eyes, it wishes to behold the wonders of the world, those about it quickly lock the windows and doors, and keep the delicate human plant in a hothouse atmosphere, where it can neither breathe nor grow freely.

Zola, in his novel "Fecundity," maintains that large sections of people have declared death to the child, have conspired against the birth of the child,—a very horrible picture indeed, yet the conspiracy entered into by civilization against the growth and making of character seems to me far more terrible and disastrous, because of the slow and gradual destruction of its latent qualities and traits and the stupefying and crippling effect thereof upon its social well-being.

Since every effort in our educational life seems to be directed toward making of the child a being foreign to itself, it must of necessity produce individuals foreign to one another, and in everlasting antagonism with each other.

The ideal of the average pedagogue is not a complete, well-rounded, original being; rather does he seek that the result of his art of pedagogy shall be automatons of flesh and blood, to best fit into the treadmill of society and the emptiness and dullness of our lives. Every home, school, college and university stands for dry, cold utilitarianism, overflowing the brain of the pupil with a tremendous amount of ideas, handed down from generations past. "Facts and data," as they are called, constitute a lot of information, well enough perhaps to maintain every form of authority and to create much awe for the importance of possession, but only a great handicap to a true understanding of the human soul and its place in the world.

Truths dead and forgotten long ago, conceptions of the world and its people, covered with mould, even during the times of our grandmothers, are being hammered into the heads of our young generation. Eternal change, thousandfold variations, continual innovation are the essence of life. Professional pedagogy knows nothing of it, the systems of education are being arranged into files, classified and numbered. They lack the strong fertile seed which, falling on rich soil, enables them to grow to great heights, they are worn and incapable of awakening spontaneity of character. Instructors and teachers, with dead souls, operate with dead values. Quantity is forced to take the place of quality. The consequences thereof are inevitable.

In whatever direction one turns, eagerly searching for human beings who do not measure ideas and emotions with the yardstick of expediency, one is confronted with the products, the herdlike drilling instead of the result of spontaneous and innate characteristics working themselves out in freedom.

"No traces now I see

Whatever of a spirit's agency.

'Tis drilling, nothing more."

These words of Faust fit our methods of pedagogy perfectly. Take, for instance, the way history is being taught in our schools. See how the events of the world become like a cheap puppet show, where a few wire-pullers are supposed to have directed the course of development of the entire human race.

And the history of our own nation! Was it not chosen by Providence to become the leading nation on earth? And does it not tower mountain high over other nations? Is it not the gem of the ocean? Is it not incomparably virtuous, ideal and brave? The result of such ridiculous teaching is a dull, shallow patriotism, blind to its own limitations, with bull-like stubbornness, utterly incapable of judging of the capacities of other nations. This is the way the spirit of youth is emasculated, deadened through an over-estimation of one's own value. No wonder public opinion can be so easily manufactured.

"Predigested food" should be inscribed over every hall of learning as a warning to all who do not wish to lose their own personalities and their original sense of judgment, who, instead, would

be content with a large amount of empty and shallow shells. This may suffice as a recognition of the manifold hindrances placed in the way of an independent mental development of the child.

Equally numerous, and not less important, are the difficulties that confront the emotional life of the young. Must not one suppose that parents should be united to children by the most tender and delicate chords? One should suppose it; yet, sad as it may be, it is, nevertheless, true, that parents are the first to destroy the inner riches of their children.

The Scriptures tell us that God created Man in His own image, which has by no means proven a success. Parents follow the bad example of their heavenly master; they use every effort to shape and mould the child according to their image. They tenaciously cling to the idea that the child is merely part of themselves—an idea as false as it is injurious, and which only increases the misunderstanding of the soul of the child, of the necessary consequences of enslavement and subordination thereof.

As soon as the first rays of consciousness illuminate the mind and heart of the child, it instinctively begins to compare its own personality with the personality of those about it. How many hard and cold stone cliffs meet its large wondering gaze? Soon enough it is confronted with the painful reality that it is here only to serve as inanimate matter for parents and guardians, whose authority alone gives it shape and form.

The terrible struggle of the thinking man and woman against political, social and moral conventions owes its origin to the family, where the child is ever compelled to battle against the internal and external use of force. The categorical imperatives: You shall! you must! this is right! that is wrong! this is true! that is false! shower like a violent rain upon the unsophisticated head of the young being and impress upon its sensibilities that it has to bow before the long established and hard notions of thoughts and emotions. Yet the latent qualities and instincts seek to assert their own peculiar methods of seeking the foundation of things, of distinguishing between what is commonly called wrong, true or false. It is bent upon going its own way, since it is composed of the same nerves, muscles and blood, even as those who assume to direct its destiny. I fail to understand how parents hope that their children will ever grow up into independent, self-reliant spirits, when they strain every effort to abridge and curtail the various activities of their children, the plus in quality and character, which differentiates their offspring from themselves, and by the virtue of which they are eminently equipped carriers of new, invigorating ideas. A young delicate tree, that is being clipped and cut by the gardener in order to give it an artificial form, will never reach the majestic height and the beauty as when allowed to grow in nature and freedom.

When the child reaches adolescence, it meets, added to the home and school restrictions, with a vast amount of hard traditions of social morality. The cravings of love and sex are met with absolute ignorance by the majority of parents, who consider it as something indecent and improper, something disgraceful, almost criminal, to be suppressed and fought like some terrible disease. The love and tender feelings in the young plant are turned into vulgarity and coarseness through the stupidity of those surrounding it, so that everything fine and beautiful is either crushed altogether or hidden in the innermost depths, as a great sin, that dares not face the light.

What is more astonishing is the fact that parents will strip themselves of everything, will sacrifice everything for the physical well-being of their child, will wake nights and stand in fear and agony before some physical ailment of their beloved one; but will remain cold and indifferent, without the slightest understanding before the soul cravings and the yearnings of their child, neither hearing nor wishing to hear the loud knocking of the young spirit that demands recognition. On the contrary, they will stifle the beautiful voice of spring, of a new life of beauty and splendor

of love; they will put the long lean finger of authority upon the tender throat and not allow vent to the silvery song of the individual growth, of the beauty of character, of the strength of love and human relation, which alone make life worth living.

And yet these parents imagine that they mean best for the child, and for aught I know, some really do; but their best means absolute death and decay to the bud in the making. After all, they are but imitating their own masters in State, commercial, social and moral affairs, by forcibly suppressing every independent attempt to analyze the ills of society and every sincere effort toward the abolition of these ills; never able to grasp the eternal truth that every method they employ serves as the greatest impetus to bring forth a greater longing for freedom and a deeper zeal to fight for it.

That compulsion is bound to awaken resistance, every parent and teacher ought to know. Great surprise is being expressed over the fact that the majority of children of radical parents are either altogether opposed to the ideas of the latter, many of them moving along the old antiquated paths, or that they are indifferent to the new thoughts and teachings of social regeneration. And yet there is nothing unusual in that. Radical parents, though emancipated from the belief of ownership in the human soul, still cling tenaciously to the notion that they own the child, and that they have the right to exercise their authority over it. So they set out to mould and form the child according to their own conception of what is right and wrong, forcing their ideas upon it with the same vehemence that the average Catholic parent uses. And, with the latter, they hold out the necessity before the young "to do as I tell you and not as I do." But the impressionable mind of the child realizes early enough that the lives of their parents are in contradiction to the ideas they represent; that, like the good Christian who fervently prays on Sunday, yet continues to break the Lord's commands the rest of the week, the radical parent arraigns God, priesthood, church, government, domestic authority, yet continues to adjust himself to the condition he abhors. Just so, the Freethought parent can proudly boast that his son of four will recognize the picture of Thomas Paine or Ingersoll, or that he knows that the idea of God is stupid. Or that the Social Democratic father can point to his little girl of six and say, "Who wrote the Capital, dearie?" "Karl Marx, pa!" Or that the Anarchistic mother can make it known that her daughter's name is Louise Michel, Sophia Perovskaya, or that she can recite the revolutionary poems of Herwegh, Freiligrath, or Shelley, and that she will point out the faces of Spencer, Bakunin or Moses Harmon almost anywhere.

These are by no means exaggerations; they are sad facts that I have met with in my experience with radical parents. What are the results of such methods of biasing the mind? The following is the consequence, and not very infrequent, either. The child, being fed on one-sided, set and fixed ideas, soon grows weary of re-hashing the beliefs of its parents, and it sets out in quest of new sensations, no matter how inferior and shallow the new experience may be, the human mind cannot endure sameness and monotony. So it happens that that boy or girl, over-fed on Thomas Paine, will land in the arms of the Church, or they will vote for imperialism only to escape the drag of economic determinism and scientific socialism, or that they open a shirt-waist factory and cling to their right of accumulating property, only to find relief from the old-fashioned communism of their father. Or that the girl will marry the next best man, provided he can make a living, only to run away from the everlasting talk on variety.

Such a condition of affairs may be very painful to the parents who wish their children to follow in their path, yet I look upon them as very refreshing and encouraging psychological



forces. They are the greatest guarantee that the independent mind, at least, will always resist every external and foreign force exercised over the human heart and head.

Some will ask, what about weak natures, must they not be protected? Yes, but to be able to do that, it will be necessary to realize that education of children is not synonymous with herdlike drilling and training. If education should really mean anything at all, it must insist upon the free growth and development of the innate forces and tendencies of the child. In this way alone can we hope for the free individual and eventually also for a free community, which shall make interference and coercion of human growth impossible.

# Exploitation and Moral Management *Jeremy Weiland*

Child exploitation is an evil that has plagued humanity throughout its history. Social awareness of child welfare and consensus on its definition is relatively recent but on the rise. Following this trend, many in Congress work continuously to address this issue, creating new legislative prerogatives for the State to interdict predators and protect children.

How, then, do we reconcile these goals with the case of Mark Foley, a Congressman recently caught engaging in sexually explicit conversations with a minor? Perhaps those who seek to protect us from the nameless, faceless criminals out there have completely misunderstood the problem. The body empowered with enacting nationwide laws, creating criteria for punishing people, and directing the full power of the State contains the very corruption it seeks to root out among us.

It makes one wonder: whom can we trust?

As an anarchist promoting the abolition of this governmental body, it seems reasonable to me that Congress would be as prone to the evils and weaknesses of human experience as any of us. That is precisely the reason they are worthy of ruling neither me nor anybody in this country. We are all fallible, equally capable of deceit and depravity — but also nobility and prudence. We learn whom to trust and whom to avoid not by decrees from on high but by building relationships.

Society is the answer to our problems: the fashioning of markets, communities, networks, and organizations on a voluntary basis, allowing people the freedom to experiment, innovate, band together, and part ways based on their own interests and judgment. We defend our families by allying ourselves with our neighbors, hiring agents among a proven pool of open competitors, and sharing information and advice. Protecting children is best accomplished by the people who understand the stakes: parents and communities.

Of course, bad things happen — whether or not you have the power to pass laws. This brings us to a question anarchists are often asked: how would we prevent x, y, or z from happening without the state? What mechanisms exist to guarantee outcomes acceptable to all? How do we “balance” the sheer volume of competing interests in the world without some empowered and managing body? And in the case of child exploitation: how do we ensure our children’s safety from depraved individuals?

These are all good questions whose answers normal people seek. Unfortunately, they’re rarely asked honestly in politics. Rather, they are posed as rhetorical preludes to some new control placed on society. Instead of looking at the problem as one of complex interpersonal and community dynamics, with a host of causes and possible solutions, we are encouraged to see the problem as a one-dimensional, simple omission: evil originates from a lack of sufficient governance.

The answer from government is always to cripple ourselves for our own good. By making society less complex, less adaptive, and less empowered, we are easier to manage in a top-down fashion and, therefore, more predictable and homogeneous. Through stricter oversight and pro-

hibitions handed down by Congress we can start to rediscover our virtue, at least as Congress defines it.

But the irony is that Congress doesn't have virtue figured out, either.

The Foley scandal demonstrates the impotence of authority to effect moral management of society. Those who make laws on our behalf are just as flawed as we are. Their officialdom grants them no special insight into human nature. Their power doesn't convey the ability to discipline society – or themselves. When we ask for leadership from above, a guarantee of safety and order, we surrender our consciences to the unworthy. Government will forever attempt to deliver on unreachable guarantees of safety and moral health by instituting more controls on us.

Indeed, reports indicate that politicians from both parties may have known of the problem and yet did nothing to stop it. Think about it: the most powerful body in the Nation, ignoring a case of exploitation they can address immediately without resorting to political maneuvering or deliberation. Then ask yourself: is any of this about the children?

Think about Foley the next time a law is passed that takes away more of our liberty and freedom “for our own good” or to “protect the children”. He demonstrates the truth of politics: virtue is not a matter of coercive laws and enlightened governance. We must place our faith and trust in ourselves, cooperatively building the solutions we seek rather than hoping they will be forced upon us.

## Working Moms & the Battle for Play *Aya de Leon*

Lately, I've been reading non-fiction books about overworked moms. Really, I listen to them in audio format as I do overworked mom things like housework and schlepping my kid to and from preschool. First I read *Maxed Out: American Moms on the Brink* by Katrina Alcorn and now it's *Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time* by Brigid Schulte. They catalog how moms are drowning in the demands that we be perfect workers and perfect mothers.

In *Overwhelmed*, I felt validated by the chapters on overwhelm and inequality. I felt vindicated by the section where she reveals the gender bias in the leisure researchers' methods. Her message is clear: we, as working moms, are being squeezed by a US society that demands perfection from both workers and mothers. Working motherhood sits at the intersection of various oppressive structures in the society. Decades of anti-feminist backlash have engineered the myth that our children will suffer if we work outside the home. From flawed studies to commercials to peer pressure from "helicopter moms," countless daily messages reinforce mothers' anxiety that only our perfectly attentive presence 24/7 will ensure our children's well-being. Yet meanwhile the economy demands two incomes for families to keep up with rising cost of living. Economic insecurity and mistreatment of workers keeps everyone anxious and determined to be the perfect worker in order to keep their jobs and ensure their economic survival. This fear-based pressure intensifies for parents and in times of economic recession. And (unlike many European societies) the US refuses to organize structures to support families in general and working families in particular. So we working mothers live in the center of this dual pressure, using our sheer will and overwork to ensure our economic survival and our children's well-being.

I loved these books! But when Schulte got to the chapter on play, it got hard to keep listening. In the play chapter, she pushed her readers to look at the places where we, as working moms, routinely collaborate with the oppression and deny ourselves joy in the pursuit of perfection in these other two areas.

I didn't want to look at that. I have lowered the joy bar to be satisfied the joy of accomplishment and the satisfaction of crossing something off the to-do list. I have settled for creating a spark of delight in my daughter's eyes. My own spark is only reflected light these days. In this context, it was downright painful to think about my own joy and play and delight. Because it feels like one more thing to do. And I couldn't imagine how I can make it happen.

But fortunately for me, I hit the heart of the play chapter while I was camping in the redwood forest. Somehow, surrounded by trees that are a few hundred feet high, anything seems possible. Some of the biggest trees have serious burn scars, but they have continued to grow and thrive anyway, their tops are lush and green in the far above distance. The burns are scars from a fire they survived and kept growing.

So I claim parenting through my kid's early years has been a fiery time I survived but now I'm ready to thrive. To that end, my biggest project this summer is reclaiming play. Miniature

golf. Waterslides. Karaoke. I have a whole list. And it's not gonna be easy. I've been home five days and have only managed to do one thing on my list: order the platform shoes off the internet.

It's hard to prioritize play. As mothers go to work, and our small children cry and don't want us to leave, many of us comfort ourselves with the notion that it's important for kids to see their moms engaged in the world. And many studies bear this out, that there are advantages to having working moms. Particularly if we have daughters, working moms can model women's engagement and influence in the larger world.

As a teacher and performer and writer, I have modeled this easily for my daughter. The area of play is the biggest place where my life is lacking. This is the place where I want to model for my daughter that adult women get to have fun, too. Particularly as a black woman, this goal is a crucial contradiction to the historical legacy that we are workhorses in this country. Previous generations of black women have worked ourselves ragged to ensure our children could have a better life. They had to. The conditions were that hard. But I have a chance to do it differently, so I plan to. My goal is not only to run around like a crazy person to make sure my daughter has a good life, but to set up my life that I'm modeling a good life for her. And that needs to include play.

## 12 Helpful Ideas for Caregivers *Benjamin Fife*

Alicia Lieberman and Patricia Van Horn of the UCSF Child Trauma Research program have written extensively on the topic of psychotherapeutic treatments that support development in young children impacted by early trauma and loss. They contributed a very thoughtful chapter to the 2009 third edition of the Handbook of Infant Mental Health, where they described a model of working with young children and their parents which they called Child Parent Psychotherapy. CPP is a relationship based model that combines an array of other approaches to work with young children and their parents. Like earlier models developed from the 1980s onward CPP uses joint child-parent therapy sessions to promote healthy child development. Lieberman and Van Horn organize their treatment model on the premise that long term mental health and resilience is supported when attachment relationships can meet infants', toddlers' and preschoolers' basic needs for "care, protection, and culturally sanctioned patterns of affect modulation, interpersonal relatedness and learning." One thing I love about this model is that it provides 12 easy to understand, and useful guidelines for understanding and interpreting young children's behaviors in the context of their attachment relationship.

While the authors use the term parents when describing these guidelines, I've paraphrased their guidelines here and use the term caregivers instead. I make this change in language this because I think that caregivers more accurately reflects that children often have significant attachment relationships with people who are not their biological or legal parents and that both distress and resilience can be born of these relationships. I intend caregivers here to be a term that includes parents while also including the attachment relationships young children have with non-parental adults in and outside of the family that can be so key to development.

1. Young children's crying and clinging are attempts to communicate an immediate need for their caregivers to be close and to be caring.
2. Young children's distress at separations is an expression of the fear of losing their caregiver or caregivers.
3. Young children fear their caregiver's disapproval and want to please their caregivers.
4. Young children fear being hurt and fear losing parts of their bodies.
5. Young children imitate their caregiver's behaviors because they a) want to be like their caregivers and b) assume that their caregiver's behavior is a model to emulate.
6. Young children feel responsible and blame themselves when their caregivers are upset, whatever the 'real' reason is for the upset.
7. Young children are convinced that their caregivers know everything and are always right.

8. Young children need clear consistent limits put on dangerous or culturally inappropriate behaviors in order to feel safe and protected.
9. Young children use the word “no” to establish their autonomy and to practice being and feeling autonomous.
10. Memory starts when babies are born. Babies and young children remember experiences before they can speak about them.
11. Children need their caregiver’s support and help in order to learn to express strong emotions without harming themselves or others.
12. Conflicts between children and their caregivers are inevitable because children and caregivers can and should have different developmental needs. Conflicts between children and their caregivers can be resolved in ways that promote trust and support development.

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