

public expense, is to buy into the false hopes that medicine fosters.

Callahan's vision of a sustainable, steady-state, basic medicine isn't confined to the U.S.; one of the really admirable things about Callahan's view is its global scope. Health care in much of the developing world isn't anywhere near as good as it should be; in the U.S. and the other fancy industrialized nations, in contrast, it's far too good and far too expensive. Rather than watch the disparities between medically poor and medically rich nations increase, we should improve the dismal care now offered in many woefully underfunded systems in the Third World but rein in the excesses of engorged systems in the fat nations, so all citizens of the world can enjoy approximately the same hopes.

What are these hopes — appropriate hopes, not the false ones Callahan attacks in his title? A normal lifespan, relief from chronic physical suffering, treatment for trauma and disability where reasonable function can be achieved. But forget living on into "ancient" old age, the repair of every injury, purely cosmetic surgery, extensive infertility treatment, or trying to save tiny newborns with desperate prognoses.

This doesn't mean just cutting out waste, and Callahan is honest about this. It means cutting back on useful technology that improves health and saves lives. It means not trying to save people with rare, expensive-to-treat diseases; it means letting people with terminal illnesses die earlier than might now be the case; it means not trying to restore perfect function if some physiological system has failed. It doesn't always mean giving up, but it often means not trying very hard.

That's Callahan's picture. Required reading, important, indeed imperative to think about. But I think we shouldn't swallow the medicine even after we've seen the prescription.

The analogy between "sustainable" medicine and "sustainable" ecological practices is engaging, but in the end unpersuasive. Sustainable ecology has to do with not using up nonrenewable environmental resources. But

health care is different. Health care is primarily a service, not a nonrenewable resource like minerals or fuels, and while it certainly uses resources to manufacture its CAT-scanners and surgical bandages and tongue depressors, the heaps of used hypodermics left over as medicine does its work aren't the limiting feature we are worrying about.

It's money. But money isn't an exhaustible resource; it's an indicator of how much societal effort we decide to devote to a given purpose. We can supply all the care we want, if we're willing to spend the time doing it; and in this respect "sustainable" health care isn't like "sustainable" energy policy or any other ecological issue. The real question is about priorities, not usage. Callahan thinks our priorities for medicine ought to be lower; I think they ought to be higher, though for medicine trimmed of waste and refocused in many of the ways Callahan suggests.

In the end, Callahan's prescription is wrong — or if it's right, it's only half strength. Much of what he has to say is indeed the right medicine for what ails our health care system. But "good enough" isn't really good enough, when it means giving up on patients just as their needs become great. For the vast majority who will need only basic care throughout their lives to write off a minority who need more help is indecent; to give up on the dying because they are dying is inhumane. Callahan is right that medicine, like any expansionist commercial conglomerate, is capable of engendering desires that are not really genuine, and he is also right that medicine is guilty of unconscionable waste, but it is a mistake to confuse trumped-up wishes for pointless treatment with real, human desires for meaningful care. Community interests ought not override the needs of the individuals who make up that community, if it is possible to provide for both. Callahan assumes that it isn't possible; but many of the insights he provides suggest that it is.

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Guns and Numbers

by Jens Ludwig

IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO separate the problem of crime in America from questions about how guns should be regulated. There is typically some uncertainty about how a change to our gun laws will impact crime, since guns in principle have both helpful and harmful aspects.

Given this uncertainty, it is noteworthy that more than 30 states have now passed "right-to-carry" laws that allow private citizens to carry concealed guns. Proponents of these laws hope that increased gun carrying will increase the "costs" of crime and thereby deter some criminals. Yet it's also possible that some criminals will respond to an increase in gun carrying among the citizenry by using a gun more frequently themselves, which may increase the number of shootings that result from street crimes. The other potential drawback of these laws is that the daily annoyances of modern life, such as rude driving or Yankees fans, can lead to fights that would be more lethal if one or both of the parties is armed.

Ideally, we would measure the effects of right-to-carry laws by comparing the crime rate that a state like Idaho experienced after enacting a right-to-carry law in 1990 with the crime rate that Idaho would have experienced had that state not enacted a right-to-carry law in 1990. Because we cannot actually observe what would have happened had this law not passed, we are forced to compare Idaho with other states without such laws, such as California. The challenge is to statistically control for all of the relevant factors that will cause crime to be different between places like California and Idaho. (This is not a trivial exercise, since reliable measures for many of these factors are simply not available.)

The first attempt at a national study of the effects of right-to-carry laws is found in a new book by John Lott Jr., whose conclusions are hint-

ed at in the book's title: *More Guns, Less Crime*. The book is a dizzying collection of 27 graphs, 27 figures, five appendices, 30 pages of footnotes, and even a few qualifications about the research. Most readers are unlikely to appreciate the importance of these qualifications, and will walk away with just the message of the concluding sentences: "Will allowing law-abiding citizens to carry concealed handguns save lives? The answer is yes, it will."

This is unfortunate, since Lott's analysis ultimately cannot support his conclusion.

John Lott first called me in August 1996, as I was enjoying a cup of coffee in my windowless office at Georgetown University, to invite me to discuss his paper at a forum sponsored by the Cato Institute. I had never heard of Lott and barely knew where the institute was, but he asked nicely and I thought there might be a free lunch involved. (As it turns out, there was.) My job was to determine whether Lott's article had solved the relevant statistical problems that plague this type of inquiry.

Several aspects of Lott's statistical approach struck me as troublesome. For example, he cannot adequately control for the fact that states with right-to-carry laws and those without are different with respect to poverty, gangs, drugs, and police practices. Inadequate controls for these factors will cause Lott's analysis to reveal that California has a different crime rate from Idaho even when this difference is unrelated to right-to-carry legislation. The concern that his statistical "fixes" might not fully correct for these problems received some support from his results: Several findings don't line up with previous research in criminology or common sense, and some of his findings were grossly inconsistent with each other. (For example, the implied effects of right-to-carry laws on homicide are 8 percent in Table 3 and 67 percent in Table 11.) There seemed to be enough of these troublesome points to decide that his conclusions about the benefits of such laws

were premature at best.

Shortly thereafter, Lott's data were reanalyzed by Professors Dan Black of the University of Kentucky and Daniel Nagin of Carnegie-Mellon. Their reanalysis was published this January in the same journal that carried Lott's original article, and provided more support for my fears about the Lott study: A well-known statistical test revealed that Lott's methods produce misleading estimates. When Black and Nagin address this problem using Lott's own data, they find no evidence that right-to-carry laws reduce crime. Other reanalyses have also cast doubt on Lott's findings, including my own study, currently in press at U.C. Berkeley.

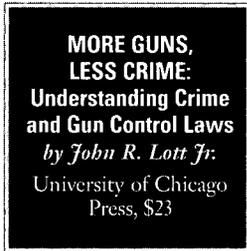
The results from Lott's original article form the heart of this book. While he includes a chapter that contains replies to his critics, unfortunately he doesn't directly respond to the key Black and Nagin finding that formal statistical tests reject his methods. The closest he gets to addressing this point is to acknowledge "the more serious possibility that some other factor may have caused both the reduction in crime rates and the passage of the law to occur at the same time," but then goes on to say that he has "presented over a thousand [statistical model] specifications" that reveal "an extremely consistent pattern" that right-to-carry laws reduce crime. Another view would be that a thousand versions of a demonstrably invalid analytical approach produce boxes full of invalid results.

If there are now well-documented problems with Lott's research, what can account for the attention that journalists, politicians, and others continue to devote to this work? The answer can be found in part in some of the responses to his original article, which, regrettably, included attacks on his integrity as an academic researcher. Lott has thus been able to paint himself as the victim of those who are out to enforce the "politically correct, anti-gun orthodoxy." This distraction has apparently caused some observers to discount the growing body of evidence

on the central limitations of Lott's analysis. To dispel the notion that Lott is simply being victimized by the "PC crowd," it may be helpful to mention the reaction of Gary Kleck, a Florida State criminologist known for his generally "pro-gun" views, who has launched a nasty attack on the public health community for what he perceives to be its "anti-gun" stance. Kleck argues in his recent book that it is "more likely [that] the declines in crime coinciding with relaxation of carry laws were largely attributable to other factors not controlled in the Lott and Mustard analysis."

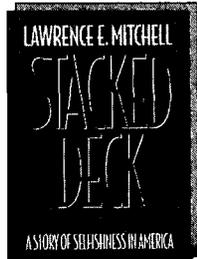
Most of us would be inclined to support right-to-carry or other changes to our gun laws if they would save lives. While *More Guns, Less Crime* cannot answer this question, the discussion surrounding the book may nonetheless be helpful by highlighting how much more we still need to know about the role of gun laws in addressing our nation's crime problem.

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Televiolence

by Stephen Metcalf

IN 1996 TWO TEENAGERS, AFTER repeated viewings of Oliver Stone's movie "Natural Born Killers," committed a brutal murder. One of the victim's friends later wrote a letter of protest. Stone's film, he argued, should not be allowed the excuse of artistic freedom. Instead, the film should be treated as a product, "something created and brought to market, not too dissimilar from breast implants." If something goes wrong with the product, he concluded, "either by design or defect, and injury ensues, then its makers are held responsible. It will take only one large verdict against the likes of Oliver Stone, and his production company, and perhaps the screenwriter, and the studio itself, and the party will be over. The verdict will come from the heartland, far away from Southern California, in some small courtroom with no cameras. A jury will finally say enough is enough, that the demons placed in [the killer's] mind were not solely of her own making."

Is it a coincidence that the author of this letter was John Grisham, creator of such bestselling literary products as *The Firm* and *The Pelican Brief*? Many of us may share Grisham's outrage, and might even be happy to sit on such a jury. But we may also suspect the task is at once subtler and more awesome than Grisham allows. How do we begin to pinpoint causality when considering an act of violence? How can we distinguish art from schlock when labeling a movie a mere "product"?

The presumably intractable nature of such questions has limited debate on the subject, but has not deterred Sissela Bok, an accomplished public philosopher and the author of widely acclaimed books on lying and on secrets. With her new book, Bok seeks to initiate a "probing society-wide discussion on violence in society and its links with cultural life, including all forms of entertainment."

Bok is in no hurry for Grisham's version of heartland justice, but is fed up nonetheless with the interminable hand-wringing that postpones any serious discussion about violent images in TV and the movies. She identifies the sources for our inertia perceptively: First, we have placed the bar of empirical proof for the causal relationship between the consumption of violent images and deleterious effects way too high. The tobacco lobby put off cigarette legislation for decades with similar arguments; instead Bok urges us to settle for "probabilistic causation," or the intelligent suspicion that the nightly carnage piped into living rooms everywhere has a meaningful impact on viewers. Second, our national fetish for the First Amendment now has the perverse effect of stifling free thought, stopping any discussion about how obscenity laws might cover violent as well as sexual images dead in its tracks.

MAYHEM:
Violence as Public Entertainment
by Sissela Bok
Addison-Wesley,
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It is this second assertion, of course, that will give civil libertarians pause. Bok tells us in its day Moliere's great play "Tartuffe" was a "symbol of depravity to some, evidence of [theatre's] glory to others." Doesn't this counsel us to err on the side of permissiveness? Bok's position on the suppression of violent images by law is not exactly announced outright; instead she leads us through a thumbnail history of Church Fathers, Thomas Bowdler and French theatre, then canvasses pundit-academics, from the prudish Robert Bork to the libertarian Nadine Strossen, only to assure us in the end that the distinction between violence and gratuitous violence can be perspicuous. She offers the unassailable example of "Schindler's List," a "film about gratuitous violence, without in any sense exploiting it or representing an instance of it." This is certainly true, but what about the bloody films of Samuel Fuller and Sam Peckinpah? While Bok acknowledges the persistent difficulty of borderline cases, she has a habit of gazing on popular culture as if from quite a distance, leaving the issue conveniently blurred.

The moral center of Bok's book, however, is unmistakable: Children have the right to flourish as

autonomous beings, capable of rational self-direction and choice. Society, furthermore, has the duty to nourish that development. How can this be reconciled with TV's relentless marketing juggernaut? TV programs are little more than bait, sleekly crafted delivery systems for commercials; and violent programming, Bok surmises, is designed to put us in a state of semi-arousal for the ads, which act as little oases in between homicides. All of which adds up: A television character, by some estimates, is a thousand times more likely to be raped, tortured, maimed, or killed than an average person. Bok insists that no particular crime need ensue for this to be socially toxic: Heavy viewers, for example, begin to suffer from the so-called "mean-world" syndrome, with its baleful feedback effect of keeping people indoors, where they watch more TV, becoming even more convinced of the risk of leaving their home.

For adults as well as children, TV creates a vast no-place where it is difficult to find the moral purchase to organize and protest. Of course, into TV's no-place come Commissions and laments and 10 minutes of pseudo-introspection, all substitutes for real change, before the inevitable cut back to Jerry Springer. Bok describes this well, but unfortunately backs away from anything too radical, allowing Cass Sunstein and a handful of law professors to make the argument for governmental regulation for her. In the face of the carnage she so vividly conjures, Bok's solutions are surprisingly tepid and familiar: We must trust in conscience and private-sphere solutions, such as more self-scrutiny and restraint on the part of journalists and producers, more responsibility and fortitude from parents, and the V-chip.

All of which isn't to say Bok's work doesn't have a serious moral center: It does, and it's the well-being of children. Bok's may not be the last word on American violence and the industries of distraction, but she inspires us to ask how we can treat children as something more than the "radio fodder and television fodder" they seem to have become.

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