

A HELLER OF A MESS

i'm working the last day
of walk-in registration
and nearly all our classes are closed.
a bright-looking kid says,
"i need advanced composition."
i ask, "have you taken freshman composition?"
and he says, "no."
so I say, "you have to take freshman composition
before you can take advanced composition,"
and he says, "okay, then, give me a card
for freshman comp."
i have to tell him: "i can't. all the sections are
closed."

from the way he's looking at me
i can tell what's going through his mind,
so i say, "i know it sounds like catch-22,
but that's only natural. we do the best catch-22's
of all in the english department
because, you see, we're required to memorize the book
before we can be hired."

i don't have the heart to tell him
that none of this has mattered anyway
because all the advanced comp sections
are also closed.

KINESTHETIC SCULPTURE OF JOHN STUART MILL BANGING HIS HEAD AGAINST THE ROCK

john stuart mill, in his essay on liberty,
enunciated a principle that proved,
for over a hundred years,
as workable as it was simple:

make laws only against tangible,
direct, measurable harm.
don't make laws against people
harming themselves or giving bad
example or lowering the moral tone
of the society.

murder was out; the private life was in.

then, in the late 20th century,
someone in the insurance companies
had a brainstorm -- if you harmed yourself

you were probably raising the insurance rates
for everybody. therefore, you were actually
(or actuarially, at least)
doing tangible, economically measurable
harm to others.

thus, the mandatory seatbelt law.
thus, the smoker left
with no place to smoke.
thus, the sin taxes -- pay in advance
for your eventual cirrhosis.

if aids were confined to the homosexual population
the country would just let them all die off.
but since it may not be, don't be surprised
to see the nisei internment camps
extended to gays.

i'm sure the technology already exists
to detect whether you are brushing your teeth
regularly and correctly.
if not, why should i or my employer
pay your periodontist for you?
and if you get robbed or raped
by someone who's just read
a book of my poems,
why shouldn't you be able to sue me for damages?

what's frightening is that i find that all
but a few of my students,
even the brightest of them,
see nothing wrong with the above.
they are comfortable with a world as
projected and protected by the statisticians,
politicians, criminologists, a.m.a.,
and the radical leaders of these
and other pseudo-liberal reforms.

but maybe they're right.
god (read: b.f. skinner) knows
how much of an impediment
to our blandest of new worlds
might prove even so pitiful
a reactionary remonstrance

as this poem.

I'VE HAD MY UPS AND DOWNS WITH WOMEN

usually i knock them up
and they knock me down.