

## **IT'S MY RIGHT... TO BE STUPID**

BY

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South of the border, wearing masks now that we have passed BCE and live in CE, is a political statement and mark of tribal affiliation. Any (public) health quality seems to be a secondary dimension. To quote the most beautiful verbose imbecile: #sad.

Before getting comfortable on a moral high ground, or on the back of one's high horse anyway, it's worth a little collective introspection. After all, it's not like everyone in Canada is donning a mask to complement their social distancing. If observation is enough, then we're not there by a long stretch. If we were even close then this newspaper's editorial staff would not have to publish an editorial exhortation for the government to make wearing a mask mandatory.

I am a mask wearer. I have no tribal affiliation and don't consider the mask to be a symbol of my membership in anything more than the group of people that would rather not spread or contract COVID-19 if it can be helped. My assessment of the risk/reward and cost (imposition on me) clearly says, to me: Wear the damn mask.

It wasn't always like this. I'm older now, sandwiched between senior citizens and children in my proximity. Even if I feel robust and healthy in my middle age, many around

me are not. Why, I reason to myself, should they sustain undesired and unwarranted (higher) risk in this situation *because of me*? But, perhaps because I'm old(er), and if not given to have taken some time for introspection, I can recognize the resistance and acknowledge its source. The ephemeral need to protect "one's rights."

That got me to thinking about situations, in some of which I was irrationally hostile to the imposition.

Start with seatbelts. There was a time when seatbelts were just an annoying part of the car seat and a strong suggestion. Then it became law to wear a seatbelt, initially for drivers, then front seat occupants, then everyone. As a headstrong, young driver I refused despite driving too hard in a powerful sports car. It was treading on my right to do as I chose, and that happened to be not to wear a seatbelt. (In retrospect, the seatbelt was sensible if only to help drive the car by being affixed to the seat through sharp turns.) It took a while and some brushes with the law, but eventually I—like most everyone else—complied.

In some ways this situation is more apt for holding one's rights. After all, the overwhelming probability is that a negative impact would only affect me. It would not change the effect of an accident on others. Only my odds of better outcome change as a result of wearing or not wearing the belt. This is, of course, the logic that underlies all of these abuses of personal rights.

Now let's think about sunscreen. Again, there was a time when sunscreen didn't even really exist. The lotion that one put on one's skin outdoors was tanning lotion/oil. It had the exact opposite effect: rather than dull the UV impact, it heightened it. When the transition was made, many people (even to this day) eschew anything that would limit the "healthy brown" proof of a life lived out doors... or on a tanning bed. Sunscreen isn't law, it's only a strong suggestion. But if I felt that sunscreen's effect was inhibiting my right to

be brown, and then I ended up with melanoma, it would be my problem. That trump card is always played with the savage intensity of personal skin in the game (pun intended).

After all, who are you to force me to do something against my will if I, consciously, choose to test the odds?

Then, of course, there's smoking. What we know with absolute proof is that—as crazy as it sounds—putting carbon heavy exhaust into your lungs is carcinogenic. And it stinks too. That doesn't stop people because it's their right to do something they want to do or are physically addicted to doing. Despite it being dangerous to everyone else around them. Because of the evidence for the deleterious effects of secondhand smoke, the societal saw off is to regulate who can smoke and where: adults and nearly nowhere. That these regulations are often broken is testament to the ego logic that says "my right to harm myself..."

These are not extremes and they are of a kind. More importantly, what they particularly share with mask wearing is an ultimate impact on public and personal health. And, in Canada among those nations where healthcare is a public right, that means the cost of your everyone's personal health—or impact thereon—is borne by everyone else.

Irrespective of how much or how little my choice immediately impacts upon the rest of Canada, near and far, there is an ultimate negative impact on society of the choice to "retain my rights" to be stupid. I don't care about your family's emotions in the event of your illness or death. As I wouldn't expect you to be concerned for mine. On the other hand, should your choice cause illness in you or others—ranging from seatbelts to smoking—it ends up that the whole of Canada pays.

The obvious and inevitably high-probability of drawing on the collective health care budget, costs all of us. The resources attending to your self-inflicted or caused issue cannot attend to others who may not have been so cavalier. The cost of any actions to

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deal with unnecessary and unwanted health care issues in others because you or I don't want anybody imposing upon our right to not wear a seatbelt, not wear sunscreen, smoke... around others, or not wear a simple mask in public during a pandemic is borne by us all.

All of which is to say, your rights end at my nose. Grow up. You're part of "Us." Put a mask on.

XXX

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