

July 13, 2003

Hello Louise,

Please excuse the very long time it has taken me to respond to your letter, written November 8, 2002. I have been very stressed, working in three major directions all at once, and there has been almost no time for anything else. And, of course, once something gets put on the back burner, it can be very hard to move it back to the front burner.

But I haven't forgotten about our interactions, and at last I have some time to make a response.

What follows consists of two major pieces: the impersonal, followed by the personal. The impersonal piece is under the heading *The Thing Itself*, below. In this section I address the external, material component of our dispute.

The personal piece appears later, under the heading *Personal Liabilities*. In this section I address the personal elements of our dispute; specifically your complaints about my disrespectfulness, and my response to this.

The Thing Itself

I will answer your points in the same order you made them. You are in Arial; I am in Times Roman.

1. "You describe the portion of Karen's work that involves animal experimentation as the moral equivalent of slave trading and child prostitution. Once again, I'm going to use the words absurdly reductionist to characterize your contention here, because, quite simply, it *is* absurdly reductionist. Are you a complete moral relativist? Is there not a spectrum of good and evil along which you range people?"

But *why* is my contention absurdly reductionist? Merely repeating your assertion, with the word "is" italicized for emphasis, is no argument at all.

I have indeed made the assertion that Karen can be compared to a slave trader or a child prostitutionist. But I have done much more than this: I have actually presented a *case*. My case has several elements, but the essential heart of the matter is this:

Karen is the perpetrator of a coercive action against a victim, in which the perpetrator benefits at the victim's expense.

This is very abstract and general, but we can add some specifics: Karen is involved in something exceedingly inhumane. She causes prolonged suffering to sentient creatures. And she has a history of doing this, throughout her professional career.

Every single one of these statements, both the abstract distillation and the specific details, applies with equal force to the slaver, the prostitutionist, and Karen. Therefore on this basis, they are all morally equivalent.

This, Louise, is an argument. I have made a statement, but I have also supported it with facts and reasoning. The claimed facts can be examined for truth or falsehood; the reasoning can be examined for logical integrity. My argument is right there on the page, in black and white. Where is

yours? Which of my claimed facts do you dispute? At which point does my reasoning fail?

(By the way, if you need to review the entire argument, I can return a copy of my notes for you to look at.)

There is a second dialectical principle that needs to be established at this point. Note that what I actually said is slightly different from the characterization you have given. What I said in fact was this: “At this point in the debate, I think we may agree, Karen has yet to distance herself from moral equivalence to a slave trader, or a child prostitutionist.”

The key phrase is “at this point in the debate,” and, four paragraphs up in this letter, “on this basis.” What is my point here? My point is that I understand that my argument is not complete. But nothing we have said so far is complete. I start off by saying:

Karen causes harm and suffering to others

This is the opening challenge in virtually *all* moral arguments; it is the white pawn-to-king-four of almost every moral debate. But is this conclusively damning? No, of course not, because in this case it is open to the response:

But there are significant benefits

This is the black pawn-to-king-four of this particular debate; it is the pat answer that trips out of the mouth of every vivisectionist—and every supporter of vivisection, like yourself. Is this sufficient for conclusive redemption? No, because it is open to my white knight-to-queen’s-bishop-three:

But all acts of depredation have their beneficiaries

Every one of the above statements is simplistic, but they become progressively less so. Each adds a little more complexity, and thus approaches the ultimate truth a little more closely. But these are only the opening moves in a lengthy debate.

Karen says what she does is OK *because there are benefits*; I then set out to destroy *this particular defense as stated*. And my tactic is to point out that if we are talking about benefits pure and simple, then Karen is morally equivalent to a slaver or a child prostitutionist. My argument may be simplistic or it may not; that is up to you to demonstrate. But its purpose is to destroy an even more simplistic argument: *vivisection is OK because there are benefits*. And in this, it succeeds.

I am well aware that my argument is not complete. I know that it is open to various possible rebuttals; indeed it is deliberately structured that way. My problem is that there are many ways in which you could answer; there many specious arguments you can come up with. I do not know which ones you will try, and I cannot possibly answer them all in advance.

Like a game of chess, this proceeds a move at a time. When I see your next move, *then* I will block it. When I hear your answers, then I will discredit them, or expand on my own case, or whatever is necessary. But I need to hear a coherent argument from you. The use of italics, the repetition of an assertion with vehemence, is worthless.

So I must ask you once again: *why* is my assertion absurdly reductionist? Is Karen doing something inhumane, yes or no? Is she, or is she not, *the perpetrator of a coercive action against a victim, in which the perpetrator benefits at the victim’s expense*? Yes or no?

Two other loose ends from your opening paragraph. First, you ask, “Are you a complete moral relativist?” I will base my answer on the following definition which you gave in one of your e-mails:

What I meant by "moral relativist" was one who in a blanket assessment views all evils in the world as morally equivalent because "it's all relative."

I'm still not sure what this really means, and in any case this definition is ambiguous, because the basis for moral equivalence has not been defined—in other words, we have not stated the criteria for equivalence. But my answer is that according to my personal morality, I do not view all evils in the world as morally equivalent, therefore according to your definition I would not be a moral relativist.

Second, you ask, “Is there not a spectrum of good and evil along which you range people?” The answer to your question is: Yes, there is a spectrum of good and evil along which I range people. If there is a point to be made here I'll leave you to make it; in any event, those are my answers.

2. “Again, do we not acknowledge a moral continuum here? I guess I do. There is good and evil in this world and it does a disservice to intelligent discourse to engage in the kind of sophistry that equates Karen's work with that of a sex trader because both could be justified in terms of the benefits they bring.”

Yes, like you, I do acknowledge a moral continuum. Again, your question is asked and answered, but you'll have to spell out where you are going with this.

Regarding your second sentence, several things. First, you do not accurately capture the crux of my argument when you say “...equates Karen's work with that of a sex trader because both could be justified in terms of the benefits they bring.” This phrasing is a bit garbled, so let's be absolutely clear on what I am saying. I am saying two key things: first, that both Karen and the child prostitutionist are the *perpetrators of a coercive action against a victim, in which the perpetrator benefits at the victim's expense*. And second, that in each case the injury to the victim is far from trivial, that both Karen and the child prostitutionist *cause severe harm to their victims*.

These two considerations are the heart of the analogy, and in these respects the two situations are identical. Forgive me if I am being repetitive, but if you fail to address the main thrust of my argument, you leave me little choice to repeat it.

Next, you have labelled my assertion as sophistry. But where is the sophistry in this? Is my fundamental assertion above, that *in these respects the two situations are identical*, true or isn't it?

One way of countering my assertion would be to say something like “Well, that's all true, but there is more to it than that.” But you are not saying this. You are not saying “true, but incomplete”; you are saying “not true at all.” When you characterize something as sophistry, you are claiming that the argument is inherently false.

So, *why* is my assertion sophistical? *Why* is it “a disservice to intelligent discourse”? Merely using these words and phrases without any supporting argument tells me nothing—it is as worthless as your use of italics. You must provide an explanation, otherwise the discussion is useless.

Your letter to me is riddled with, if not exactly sophistry, at least intellectual confusion. But it is hardly sufficient for me just to assert this without support. It is my responsibility to put my finger

precisely on the confusion, and address it with clarity. The same is true for you. If you are going to contend sophistry, then you must support this contention with a coherent argument.

3. In response to my statement, “Benefits may be big, and benefits may be small, but despite Karen’s attempt to relabel them with lofty phrases such as ‘important work,’ that is all that they remain,” your reply is, “I can’t agree with this statement.”

You can’t agree, or you don’t agree? Or, as in the case of “I want” versus “should be,” are you unable to tell the difference?

This statement of mine, that ultimately Karen’s work is motivated by a desire for benefits, is a fundamental underpinning of my entire argument, so I will be defending it strongly. Though you state flatly that you disagree with this statement, you present no valid counter-argument. I assume that your follow-on sentence to this (quoted below as the first sentence of your point 4), is intended to be your counter-argument. But this follow-on sentence appears to be no more than *yet another* re-statement of the fact the Karen’s work has benefits—in other words, it does nothing to negate my statement.

So let me ask you directly: If the positive consequences of Karen’s work are not benefits, then what are they? When you categorically disagree with my statement that her work is ultimately about benefits, I take it that you consider that her work somehow transcends the realm of benefits, and enters into some other realm, perhaps one more pure and lofty. So what is this other realm, and how, exactly, does Karen’s work achieve transcendence into it?

4. “Put quite simply, the environmentally conscious work that Karen does causes pain to fish but ultimately is done to effect positive ecological change, something many people can agree is a “good” worth the pain caused. I haven’t done a poll or anything, but I suspect most people whom we identify as moral and ethical beings would agree that the harm caused to a child prostitute far outweighs the benefit produced. ... The point is that in our moral community ... we are capable of distinguishing between these two examples and seeing one as “worse” than the other.”

There is a great deal wrong with this paragraph.

(a) First, your statement that Karen’s work is “done to effect positive ecological change” is very simplistic. Yes, this is part of the truth, but it is only a small part, and a complete accounting of all the personal and societal motivations behind Karen’s work encompasses much more than this.

What was the reason for the war with Iraq? Was it to disarm a brutal dictator? Well, sure, this was part of the reason. But anyone who thinks that this was the principal motivation is completely clueless.

Like national foreign policy, animal experimentation is driven by many vested interests, most of which have nothing to do with the superficially apparent objective. I do not have the time or the space to justify this here, so for the moment let me just state that I strongly dispute your assertion that Karen’s work “ultimately is done to effect positive ecological change.” This is only one among a more complex set of motivations, such as money, prestige, and other factors.

(This is a relatively minor point at this stage of the debate, but it will become extremely important later. Thus far I have been focussing on the debit side of the ledger, and pointing out the very considerable harm that Karen does to her victims. Later I will be turning to the credit side of the led-

ger, and pointing out that the benefits of her work are far less than I think you imagine. I suspect that you are carrying around in your mind an image of pure air and crystal-clear waters, free from our manufactured poisons, supporting a happy and healthy ecosystem, and all of this directly attributable to Karen's work. But this is, of course, a complete fantasy. But I'm anticipating a stage of the debate we haven't reached yet—for the moment, you may continue to keep this image in mind.)

(b) But by far the biggest problem, implicit throughout your paragraph above, is this. In considering any issue, one can address the merits of The Thing Itself, or one can address the merits of Some Other Thing, that may, or may not, be related to The Thing Itself.

Animal experimentation is one thing. Societal attitude towards animal experimentation is a different thing, and it is important to distinguish clearly between these two things. I am challenging you about the first thing; but in the above paragraph you are addressing yourself entirely to the second thing.

I am not particularly interested in

(A) whether most people would agree that the harm caused to a child prostitute outweighs the benefit produced;

rather, what I *am* interested in is

(B) whether the harm caused to a child prostitute outweighs the benefit produced.

Likewise, I am *not* challenging you on the basis of

(A) whether most people consider that Karen's work is justified;

rather, I *am* challenging you on the basis of

(B) whether Karen's work is justified, in any given frame of reference.

Though you seem to think otherwise, the answers to questions like (A) tell us very little about the answers to questions like (B).

In *any* society there will be some sort of consensus, and the society will act upon that consensus. This was true of the Taliban; it was true of white South African apartheid; and it is true of our own Western liberal democracy. (In this context I am of course speaking of the society in which power is vested, such as the religious patriarchy, or the white minority—not the broader society which may also include a large disfranchised component.)

If this societal consensus and action were a reflection of true moral integrity, if it were a manifestation of genuine societal accountability based on frank and earnest self-examination, then you would have a point. But it isn't, and you don't.

Throughout history, human societies have behaved appallingly—not human individuals, I emphasize, but human *societies*. Slavery, horrific colonial exploitation, the destruction of numerous indigenous peoples, the tyrannical repression of women—the list goes on. As a student of history, you surely know that societies are notoriously negligent in analyzing the true and complete consequences of their actions. If you think that our own society is any different; if you feel that our society can be relied upon to act with wisdom and humanity, then you are living in a dreamworld.

We can either think for ourselves, or we can simply adopt the beliefs of those around us. Unlike yourself, I am unwilling to place my faith in the values, beliefs and actions of my society.

I am not just challenging the moral legitimacy of vivisection. Since vivisection is overwhelmingly supported by our society, I am therefore in the same breath also challenging *the moral integrity of the society that supports it*. Maybe I didn't make this clear before; let me make it clear now. Not only am I saying that Karen is morally corrupt, I am saying that so are you, and so are the legions of others who share your mentality.

It is true, as you say above, that “many people can agree,” and “most people...would agree,” and so on. But as a man who can think for himself, what is that to me? The society that reaches this consensus, and that countenances animal experimentation, is nothing more than multiple copies of Louise.

(c) Finally, in your ending sentence “...we are capable of distinguishing between these two examples...” I object to your use of the word “capable.” I will grant you this: our society *does* distinguish between those two things. But your use of the word “capable” implies that this distinguishing represents an intellectual success; whereas I am saying it represents a failure.

You are conflating two things: societal *action*, and societal *accountability*. You seem to think that because our society acts in a certain way, this means that this action is based on well-founded principles—the result, perhaps, of lengthy and difficult intellectual birthing.

I see the action all right, but I don't see the accountability. It is misleading to say that our society is “capable” of distinguishing between human and animal suffering, just as it is misleading to say that the Taliban were “capable” of distinguishing between the value of a man and a woman.

A small point, perhaps. But one more example of a pervasive lack of clarity in your thinking—in this case a failure to distinguish clearly between societal action, and genuine societal accountability.

5. “I have had to look into my heart and face the (ugly, in your view) truth that, quite simply, I see animals as lower than humans in the pecking order of our moral community. I am speciesist.”

Ah, now we come to the real heart of the matter.

This, of course, has been the fundamental truth all along, and everything else you have said has been smoke screen. The simple fact is, you are organically constructed to react to suffering with widely differing degrees of concern or indifference, depending on your sense of affinity with the subject.

Note that nothing in your letter so far (and the rest is no different) stands up to close scrutiny. You can produce a string of specious justifications: it's OK because there are benefits; it's OK because of the qualitative nature of these benefits; it's OK because society implicitly sanctions it.

But these are all *ad hoc* rationalizations, selected *a posteriori* to support a predetermined conclusion. Faced with a sustained challenge, eventually you are compelled to make the above confession.

This is progress Louise; congratulations on reaching this understanding of yourself.

The good news for you is that this is the truth, and is therefore completely unassailable by me.

But there is also some bad news for you. First, note that personal inclination is most emphatically *not* a moral justification. If it were, every perpetrator of harm to others, who simply felt that his

victims were of lesser account, would have an instant moral defense.

Second, this statement about yourself places you in the same class as *every* person who simply feels differently about different constituencies of victim. You are suddenly aligned with every racist, every sexist, every homophobe on Earth.

The racist feels that blacks (let's say) are of lesser account. Why? Well, the real reason is that this is genetically hard-wired into him—it is a fundamental part of human nature to exercise lesser consideration towards those with whom we feel lesser affinity. But he doesn't understand this in these terms; he doesn't understand that evolution has wound him up like a little clockwork toy and let him go; he isn't capable of understanding his own nature and transcending it. He just knows that blacks are different; other; less deserving of consideration. He *knows* this.

The racist exists inside an intellectual box. And inside this box he is perfectly comfortable. While those of us outside the box can see how benighted and ugly a person he really is, he sees none of this. On the contrary, despite his mistreatment of blacks, he continues to think of himself as a moral and compassionate person. How does he accomplish this amazing trick? It's really quite simple: it is axiomatic to him that blacks are (to use your repugnant phrase) "lower in the pecking order," and so his personal morality is in no way compromised.

All of this applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to you. Just as it applies with little change of wording to the sexist; to the member of a patriarchal society which strips women's lives of almost all meaning and fulfillment; to the man who is willing to murder his sister as an honor killing, and think himself the better person for it. Just as it applies to a thousand other examples of people who countenance the oppression, exploitation or injury of others because they see them as "lower in the pecking order."

They have their axioms; you have yours. The vivisectionist/racist/sexist simply sees the animal/black/woman as being worthy of lesser consideration than some other group, with whom he identifies more closely. And to each, clutching their articles of faith within their respective boxes, this all makes complete sense.

So, is this an ugly truth about yourself? Since ugliness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, let me assure you that it is.

6. "What's the big difference for me among the three examples you cite—slave trading, child prostitution, and experimenting on fish? The first two involve people; the final one involves animals."

But the real thrust of my questioning, that you have left unanswered is this: why does this make any moral difference? You have correctly identified a *factual* difference between the things you oppose and the thing you support, but anyone can do this, about anything. The slaver and prostitutionist can do exactly the same thing; it is trivially easy to identify factual differences between one thing and another. Yes, agreed, animals are not people; blacks are not whites; children are not adults. But to all three of you, and to the proponent of any form of exploitation, I ask the same question: why does this make any difference? How does this factual difference constitute a moral justification?

7. "I would describe myself as anti-vivisectionist regarding animal testing that could be described as "frivolous." Is there no difference between using rabbits to test cosmetics and

subjecting fish to toxins in an effort to better understand and improve our natural environment?”

Yes, there is a difference. What is your point?

8. “And what about the fact that the vast improvement in the general health of Western populations in the last two centuries is due almost entirely to research which involved animal experimentation. Are you willing to give up vaccines, antibiotics, general anesthesia, complex operative techniques, heart/blood pressure medication or cancer treatments?”

It is true that *historically*, the benefits you describe have largely been the result of research involving animal experimentation. However, this does *not* mean that animal experimentation is/was necessary for those benefits. Historical causality is one thing; logical necessity is another. You are conflating those two things.

Regarding your question, my answer is this. To the extent that the alleviation of suffering in one constituency is accomplished by the imposition of greater suffering on another constituency, I am ready to prohibit the alleviation of suffering by such means. So in this case, yes, I am willing to give up everything you mentioned.

Question asked, question answered. What is your point?

9. “So you would say, who decides what is “frivolous”? And I would answer, we do, as a society. We weigh the benefits (not whether they are big or small, but qualitatively) and we make a decision. And we do this a thousand times a day.”

(a) No, I would not ask such a weak question. What you are saying here is not much more than a variation on your point 4 above. In point 4 you were talking about societal *consensus*; here, you are talking about societal *decision-making*, but these are practically the same thing. In point 4 you observed that societal consensus backs you up; agreed. Here you are pointing out that societal action is the result of societal decision-making; also agreed.

But again, so what? In *any* society there are decision-making mechanisms, and those mechanisms will result in societal action. Example: a whole bunch of complicated things happened; the cogs turned, the cams lifted, and we went to war with Iraq. All quite clear and straightforward.

Your implication of course, is that societal decision-making mechanisms can be relied upon to result in wise and humane action. Your use of the phrase “we weigh the benefits,” implies that societal decision-making is a careful, thoughtful, deliberative process, in which every affected constituency receives full representation and consideration.

But Louise, it is time you learned that it just isn’t so. The real functioning of society is this: *the people who are running the show do whatever they want*. Sure, there will be fine talk of accountability, and responsibility, and justice, and all the rest of it. But the reality is this: with few exceptions, the people in charge will act in their own self-interests.

Even the word “decision” itself is misleading in this context—the truth is that societies do not “decide” in any formal sense at all; they simply do. The counterexamples to your idealized notion of societal decision-making are glaring and abundant. I have already cited the Taliban and South African apartheid; both of these societies “weighed” and “decided,” and we have seen the decisions they came to. These are now defunct societies; among extant ones we see that today Saudi

Arabia “weighs” and “decides” that women are to be strictly oppressed; that our own society “weighs” and “decides” to go to war with Iraq; that our own society “weighs” and “decides” that we will use Draize tests to ensure the safety of women’s cosmetics. I could readily give you a dozen more examples; with research I could give you limitless others.

So let me ask you this: do you have complete confidence that all these “weighings” and “decidings” are wise and honorable? If you were thinking clearly, Louise, you wouldn’t state your opposition to Draize testing in point 7, then in point 9 espouse a principle according to which you must support it.

If societal decision-making were a process of intellectual integrity and egalitarianism across all constituencies, then your point 9 might actually mean something. But it isn’t, and your point 9 tells us nothing.

(b) In describing our societal weighing of benefits, you use the phrase “not whether they are big or small, but qualitatively,” to describe the basis for this weighing. Let’s be quite clear on what you are saying here. You are introducing the *qualitative* nature of the benefits as an important consideration, and, you are saying, it is the *qualitative* nature of the benefits of Karen’s work that provides its moral justification. A qualitative assessment of benefits—this is the crucial thing that Andrew has overlooked throughout his entire analysis.

Here is what has happened. I left our simplistic opening exchange at white’s second move, which I repeat and expand upon here:

But all acts of depredation have their beneficiaries. On this basis alone Karen is no different from any other perpetrator of harm which results in benefits, such as the slaver, the child prostitutionist, or the terrorist.

Both you and Karen at this point elected to make the following black second move:

But the benefits of Karen’s work are qualitatively different from the other benefits you mention.

Which I then promptly countered with white’s third:

But the same can be said of all the perpetrators—each of them can claim that their benefits are qualitatively different from all the others.

So in this early board position, all of our protagonists remain on the same footing. All are doing something harmful to others; all can claim benefits; all can state that their benefits are qualitatively different to all others. This was all laid out very clearly in my notes to you.

This now presents you with the following problem. What you must now do, is demonstrate not just that Karen’s benefits are different, but that *they are different in a way which provides moral justification.*

You know that if the justification for Karen’s work reduces to benefits pure and simple, then on this basis alone she cannot readily be distanced from her co-protagonists. She is then revealed as just another perpetrator of exploitation and injury, motivated by nothing more than the pursuit of benefit.

Your challenge, therefore, is to find some distinguishing consideration, some vital difference, that

can be inserted like a shim between Karen and all the others. But what can this difference possibly be? You know there must be one—you *know* this. You know it, because you know that Karen's work is OK, but those other unpleasant things are not. So you must grope for a definition, an explicit expression of this crucial difference. But the true nature of the difference you are groping for is this: *Louise feels that one thing is OK, but not the others*. That elusive difference you are looking for does indeed exist, but it exists as an organic predisposition within yourself.

Your problem is to take a personal inclination, and elevate it to something external, definable, and defensible. But this problem is insoluble, because there *is* nothing external, definable, and defensible. The best you can do is say, without any support whatsoever, "the qualitative nature of the benefits makes one thing OK, but not the others."

But then, of course, I will be demanding a full and complete explanation of *why* the qualitative nature of one thing justifies it, but the qualitative nature of another does not. I will be demanding explicit principles and definitions, not just your say-so.

Hmm ... another problem. You know that the qualitative nature of Karen's work justifies it, but for the life of you, you cannot state why. So what do you do? Well, you just say society will make those decisions. But all you are doing here is *replacing your own predispositions, with those of a society consisting of multiple clones of yourself*.

Essentially, your point 9 amounts to this: "The qualitative nature of the benefits determines what is justifiable and what is not, and society will make that call." But my question is this: *how is that different from society simply acting upon its predispositions?*

This is what it looks like when a society weighs the benefits (qualitatively, of course) and makes a decision: we have our Draize tests, the Spanish have their bullfighting, and the French their foie gras. It is not obvious to me why the qualitative nature of the benefit of foie gras—the enjoyment of that rich, delicious silky-smooth pate—justifies the grotesque cruelty involved, but as you have explained, the society in question has weighed the benefits (qualitatively, of course) and decided that it does. This society has had ample time to consider the issue carefully, so we may have confidence in their decision.

As you say, Louise, we do this a thousand times a day.

You have latched onto the qualitative nature of the benefits as the key redemptive factor, but you are just not thinking clearly. So let me ask you point-blank: In any act of depredation, what relevance does the qualitative nature of the benefit have? Why, *exactly*, is Karen's work justified on this basis? I ask you to state your answer clearly, explicitly, and in writing, if you please.

(As I read your answer, I will be watching closely for a single key word, or one of its synonyms. And as soon as I see that word I will tug on it, and your argument will fall apart. Do you know what the word is?)

10. "...no, I don't describe the terrorist bomber's actions as a "necessary evil." Again, we have a spectrum of behavior here. Clearly killing people to publicize your cause is the wrong path to take. But interestingly enough, like the work that Karen does, the terrorist bombing happens precisely because the group ... feels there is no alternative. But we both know there are alternatives for these groups. They can lobby for their cause, they can appeal to the international community. You don't like the work that Karen does and you think that she should stop doing

it, so her alternative you would say, is to cease doing it. No, we don't have to know what toxins kill which fish in our environment... But we want to know, not just for our own benefit, but for our environment (including the fishes') benefit."

Many things wrong here.

First, *why* do you not apply the same tag of "necessary evil" to the terrorist bomber's actions, that you apply so readily to Karen's work? His actions appear to satisfy *everything* cited so far as justification for Karen's work:

- The benefits this man is pursuing are among the most lofty and honorable imaginable: he is working to free his people from tyranny. So in common with Karen's, his work is allegedly done to effect positive change. Furthermore:
- it is supported by societal consensus (of the oppressed society that creates terrorist bombers);
- the perpetrators presumably see their victims as "lower in the pecking order";
- it is the result of societal weighing and decision-making (as always, by a societal constituency that does *not* include the victims);
- and finally, although you have yet to define the criteria for assessing benefits on a qualitative basis, the qualitative nature of freedom would seem to have a good chance of meeting your criteria when you eventually do define them.

So everything you have cited so far that justifies applying the tag "necessary evil" to Karen's work also applies to the terrorist bomber—so why doesn't he get this tag too? Why does all this work for Karen, but not for him?

"Clearly killing people to publicize your cause is the wrong path to take."

Two things here. First, terrorist bombings are about much more than publicity. They are driven by several agendas, one of which is publicity, but this is typically *not* the central motivation. A much more important motivation is to make the oppressors share some of the pain of the oppression, so that they are compelled to take this into account as a consequence of their oppressive behavior. Sometimes this works; sometimes it doesn't. Second, why, exactly, is this the wrong path to take? Despite your adverb this is not clear to me; please explain.

"we both know there are alternatives for these groups"

We know nothing of the sort. Oppressed peoples are facing the most grim, perilous and hopeless situation imaginable: other people. Other people who want something, that comes at their expense.

They are facing the Karens and Louises of this world, and God help them.

Your suggestion that oppressed peoples can solve their problem by lobbying, and appealing to the international community, is utterly preposterous.

We recently read *Dark Star*. Do you think that the German Jews could have escaped their fate by lobbying and appealing? Could the North American Indian have escaped cultural destruction by lobbying and appealing? The *only* thing that could possibly have saved these people would have been to organize and fight. Different times and different rules, perhaps. Very well, then consider some more contemporary situations—the Cambodians under Pol Pot, the Chileans under Pinochet, and today, the Kurds, the Palestinians, the Chechens, the Tibetans, the citizens of China,

North Korea, Myanmar, Zimbabwe—do you seriously imagine that they are likely to get anywhere by lobbying and appealing? I beg you, read some history.

You have the notion in your head that oppressed peoples can escape oppression by means of rational discourse, and the amount of energy it would take for me to dislodge this notion is huge. I'm not even going to try. Let me just say this: this notion of yours is breathtakingly naive, overwhelmingly contradicted by historical experience, and I dispute it strenuously.

“so her alternative you would say, is to cease doing it”

That is one alternative, certainly, and an entirely practical one. There are also other alternatives; I leave it to you to think what they might be. If you are completely stumped, let me know.

If you are trying to imply here that the essential difference that sets Karen apart from the terrorist bomber is that one has alternatives while the other does not, this doesn't stand up to honest scrutiny. The only thing we can take for granted is that each of them has at least one clear-cut alternative: that of forbearing to harm others. Beyond that, we must analyze the merits of whatever other alternatives may be available. You seem to imply that Karen is in much more of a bind than the terrorist; he has a wide range of simple, easy, productive alternatives you suggest; whereas she has none at all. But this is just not true. From my understanding of the facts, the terrorist faces far, far more dire circumstances than does Karen. Karen merely faces an indifferent universe that may or may not give up its secrets easily. The terrorist faces the active, directed, wilful actions of a clever and powerful opponent. No question at all who faces the greater challenge.

So I repeat my question: why does Karen's work receive your indulgence as a “necessary evil” but the terrorist does not? Clearly, explicitly, and in writing, if you please.

“No, we don't have to know what toxins kill which fish in our environment... But we want to know” Well of course we *want* to know. But every perpetrator of every act of depredation *wants* the resulting benefit. What is your point here—that moral justification is provided by the mere fact of wanting? I rather think not. If I have missed your point, please explain.

11. “I would not use the glib phrase ‘necessary evil’ regarding toxicological experimentation on a human being. But fish are not human beings.”

But *why* would you not use this phrase for experimentation on a human being? Look, Louise, I know damn well that you would not; this is not news to me. The really important part of my question, that you left unanswered, is this: ‘And if not, why not?’ The Socratic payoff comes when you are compelled to express your reasons, and we both get to take a good long look at them—this is when we can really come to grips with things.

“But fish are not human beings.”

While true, this statement appears to be completely lacking in relevance. I understand that fish are not human beings. I also understand that blacks are not whites, and that women are not men. To you, and to the racist and the sexist, I ask the same question: what does this have to do with anything? What difference does it make, that your victim is in one group, and you are in another?

12. As for Question 3, again, absurdly reductionist. Nobody's hands are entirely clean in this world. John Franco may not be in favor of a woman's right to choose ... Ursula may defend the scum of the earth ... Scott actually told me that he had been involved in toxicological research on fish in the past ... I have heard you occasionally eat meat ... We both know there is a world of difference between Joseph Mengele and Karen or any of the other people I have

mentioned. Again, it is a matter of the qualitative differences that you so breezily dismissed on page 2. Karen causes pain to fish to produce a benefit that many would agree is a good benefit. Mengele experimented on Jews to produce a benefit that in moral terms can only be described as “bad.”

Why is my question absurdly reductionist? The context in which my question is posed is this: You say that a person’s moral value is one thing, but her contribution to book group is another. You say it is a pity not to have someone in the group, if they are going to be a good contributor. You made both of these statements quite clearly, so my understanding is that for you personally, moral considerations have no bearing on book group membership. Did I not understand you correctly? Is that not what these statements mean?

Very well then, I ask, if moral considerations play no role for you, then why may we not have Joseph Mengele in book group?

So what is reductionist about this question? Your mind seems to have latched onto the notion that I consider all misbehavior to be morally equivalent, from littering to genocide. But I never said this—this is just something you have mentally glommed onto.

You have completely missed the thrust of my question. You make the assertion that on principle, it is inappropriate to apply moral considerations to book group membership. I then set out to discredit *this principle*. Joseph Mengele does the job very nicely. My potential vetoing of Karen’s membership may be inappropriate on some other grounds; that is up to you to demonstrate. But it is not inappropriate *on the basis of your implied principle*. Get it?

“We both know there is a world of difference between Joseph Mengele and Karen”

No, we don’t know this; this is what we are arguing. My argument is that in fact there is *not* a world of difference between them, an argument which still has its legs. In the briefest of nutshells: they are both doing something vile and unnatural to their victims. This would appear to be an irrefutable point of similarity. When you have defeated this assertion, *then* you may make this statement, and not before.

“Again, it is a matter of the qualitative differences that you so breezily dismissed on page 2.” Again, you refer to qualitative differences as the essential, differentiating, and redemptive factor. But you have not given a clear explanation or justification for this. In fact, as I argue in my response (b) to your point 9, the qualitative nature of the benefits is a complete red herring. I repeat my question to you: what relevance does the qualitative nature of the benefit have?

“Karen causes pain to fish to produce a benefit that many would agree is a good benefit.”

Well, even I would agree that the benefit is a good benefit. All benefits are good benefits; a benefit is something good by definition. If you meant to say “... that many would agree is morally justifiable,” then you are right again. But this is a repetition of your point 4, already rebutted comprehensively.

Mengele experimented on Jews to produce a benefit that in moral terms can only be described as “bad.”

In a letter characterized by confusion, this may be the highlight. How can a benefit possibly be bad? This would appear to be a contradiction in terms. I don’t know very much about the Nazis’ human experiments, but I know that in some of them the alleged purpose was to understand the body’s physiological reactions to hypothermia—how long it took for people to die from cold, how

best they could be resuscitated, and so on. Their soldiers, their airmen, were dying of exposure, and they wanted to save their lives. How is it a bad thing to save the lives of ones countrymen? Please explain what you mean by a “bad” benefit.

(It occurs to me that you may be conflating two things: the *benefits* to the perpetrators, and the *costs* to the victims. Possibly you are investing the one with the characteristics of the other. But surely, no one could be so hopelessly muddled.

Or could they? Bonnie got wind of our dispute, and a couple of times asked me, “But wouldn’t the experiments actually benefit the fish?” Bonnie does not seem to be able to distinguish between two sets of fish: those who are the victims, and those who are the beneficiaries. I have no problem at all with the fish who benefit; indeed, I have no problem with *any* of the benefits we have mentioned: the clean environment, the orgasms, the free labor, the alleviation of male insecurity, the freedom from oppression, the pate. This is all wonderful stuff. The problem I have in every case is with the victim who must pay the price for this. Someone like Bonnie, who cannot distinguish between victims and beneficiaries, is obviously not worth talking to.)

13. “until the time comes that we have figured out how to train heart surgeons without having them experiment on dogs ... I know what my choice is going to be every time between saving my dad’s life and a dog’s.”

Two things here. First, you are very seriously misrepresenting exactly what benefit is purchased, and at what cost. The dog’s life does *not* buy your father’s life. The cost for the dog truly is its life; it will die with certainty. But if the dog is spared, your father will not die with certainty. The benefit from the dog’s death is an incremental change in the probability of surgical success—your father’s chances of survival might improve from 99.8% say, to 99.82%, or some other minuscule improvement. By characterizing the benefit as *life versus death* for your father, you overstate the benefit enormously. Also, you understate the cost to the dog. Dying is one thing. But the animal’s experiences up to the moment of death are something else altogether. The typical laboratory animal undergoes a lifetime of sensory deprivation, fear, intrusive procedures, and other highly unnatural experiences up to its death. This is as true for dogs used for surgical experimentation as for any other laboratory animal.

Thus you overstate the benefit, and you understate the cost. This is not an honest analysis on your part. Here we have a very clear example of intellectual bias, that I can easily point out. But your letter is pervaded throughout by similar kinds of bias, that require much more work on my part to expose.

Second, all you are doing here is stating that you *want* something, and that given the power, you will take it. You want your father to have slightly better odds, and so you will take the thing you want, despite the price that must be paid by the victim. My response to this parallels my response to your announced speciesism in point 5. Like your speciesism, your *wanting*, and your *choosing on the basis of wanting*, do not constitute a moral justification. If they did, all forms of exploitation would become instantly permissible. In every one of the examples of exploitation I have mentioned, without exception, the perpetrator *wants*, and he can say the same thing that you did: he knows what his choice is going to be every time.

Your statement 13 has absolutely no moral content whatsoever; it is merely a statement of how you can be expected to act when faced with a conflict of interest. My own father’s health is fail-

ing, and he suffers greatly from his ailments. His welfare means more to me, I can assure you, than your father's, or any member of your family. Suppose I announce to you that I am ready to sacrifice the lives of your husband and daughter to make my father more comfortable. What does this tell you about me? Only that given the opportunity, I will act with ruthless self-interest.

Your statement says more than you may realize. Essentially it says that you are willing to sanction cruelty, exploitation, injury and death to others in the pursuit of your own interests. That is what it says, isn't it? That you, Louise, wife and mother, Seattleite, book group member, are ruthlessly self-serving when your own interests are at stake?

14. "You know my position now. I am speciesist. I believe that we *are* more important than animals. So, yes, I am a product of my time and values."

This is more or less a re-statement of your point 5 above, and everything I said there also applies here. But let me add one thing here, that may sharpen your thinking a bit. You say "we are more important." My question is, *more important to what?* Importance is not an absolute; things are important or not in reference to something; in some context. So *why* are we more important, exactly?

(Of course, I'm pretty sure I know what answers you are going to give. But honesty and clarity require that your answers be explicitly stated, on the page in black and white, where we can take a good look at them.)

15. "But what, I wonder, gives you the right to attack me and Karen so vehemently?"

This is very easy: I am claiming no such right. What are you suggesting—that we need rights to do things? Whatever gave you that idea?

If you are going to adopt the principle that we need formal, explicit rights in order to do things, I believe this will come back to bite you in the ass. You may want to think carefully, before declaring this as one of your personal principles.

16. "Look at yourself. Are you entirely morally consistent? Where are the microchips made that you use in your computer work? If I learn that they are made by people in bad conditions working for peanuts does that give me the right to compare you to Adolph Hitler? You would be right to think such a comparison laughable."

I try to be morally consistent to the best of my understanding and abilities. This does not mean that I truly am morally consistent, because (1) I am not omniscient, and (2) I have intellectual limitations. This means that I cannot know with certainty the true and complete consequences of all my actions. But on the basis of whatever understanding and intellectual capabilities I do have, I do the best I can to live my life humanely. If you or anyone else can draw my attention to any shortcomings in this regard, I am willing to consider the matter, and modify my behavior accordingly.

Regarding the microchips used in my computer work, it is true that I exist in a complex world in which everything is connected to everything else, and almost anything one does may cause harm somewhere. If you were to demonstrate to me that my use of computers causes severe harm to others, in a direct and connected way, then this is something I would be willing to take seriously. If you can make this case please do; I will be happy to listen.

“...compare you to Adolph Hitler? You would be right to think such a comparison laughable.” No Louise, you are quite mistaken to characterize my thinking this way. I would not necessarily consider such a comparison laughable—it would depend entirely on the case you made. Either the comparison would be valid, or it would not. If the comparison were valid I would acknowledge it; if it were invalid I would argue against it. But I ask you to note this very well: if the comparison were invalid, I wouldn’t simply tell you it was laughable, or reductionist, or sophistry, or a disservice to intelligent discourse, and leave it at that. I would do more than this—I would give you a reasoned and coherent explanation of *why* the comparison was invalid.

Personal Liabilities

The above completes my response to everything you had to say about the impersonal, external issue—i.e. the moral characteristics of Karen’s work. I believe I have answered all your points—if I overlooked anything, please let me know.

In this section I will address the personal dimension of this matter; specifically our very negative reactions to one another as individuals. There are a couple of things to make clear at the outset. First, I have some harsh things to say to you, and I am not going to mince words. You have reproached me about my bad attitude; my response is that your values and presentation are so hugely offensive that it is unrealistic of you to expect anything else. To get you to understand this, I am going to speak plainly. It is not my intention to be gratuitously insulting, but neither will I be euphemistic. The facts are unpleasant; it requires unpleasant language to describe them. I intend to give full expression to the dismay, disappointment, anger, repugnance and contempt I have experienced throughout my interactions with you.

You do not have to hear any of this if you do not want to. I am going into it because you have challenged me on the basis of my attitude; very well, here is my answer. But it is not essential to me that we go into any of this. What matters to me most is the impersonal, analytical discussion under *The Thing Itself*, and I am less interested in whose feathers got ruffled, or why.

From my point of view it will be sufficient for me to acknowledge your reproaches, to tell you that I have very little sympathy for you, and to let you know that your own offensiveness is a mountain to my molehill. If you wish, we can simply leave it at that, and abandon this component of our dispute altogether. If so you may skip this entire section, and at this point jump straight to *Moving Forward* on page 25.

Second, throughout this section I will not be taking the same closely reasoned analytical approach that I took in *The Thing Itself*. It takes too long, and besides, to some extent we are talking about our individual perceptions here, which are less amenable to this form of presentation. So at certain points I will simply make assertions without formal logical support—this is just how I see things.

You have complained rather bitterly about my lack of courtesy and respect. I believe the following excerpts accurately capture the sense of your grievance:

“I have to ... tell you how upsetting and insulting I found your tone to be.”

“I find your tone and approach profoundly alienating.”

“I wish you hadn’t taken the arrogant, condescending, and frequently insulting tone that you did.”

Let me begin by accepting responsibility for my own liabilities. There is no doubt that at times I can be all the things you describe: arrogant, condescending, insulting, and all the rest of it. As I

review the parts of my notes that caused you such indignation, I can see the characteristics you describe, though not nearly to an extent sufficient to cause your degree of upset—by my reading everything is mostly within appropriate bounds, given the context in which it was written.

But it is always easier to understand sins against oneself, than ones own sins against others; so let me not quibble with you. I am willing to concede that my attitude is everything you have said it is; and that this is not helpful in debate. I am willing to concede that my inappropriate aggression is a failing and a liability, and this is my own responsibility. To the extent that my attitude is a consequence of my own liabilities, I take full responsibility for it.

But my attitude is not only a consequence of my own failings. You have enormous liabilities of your own, and the attitude you see in me is also a consequence and a reflection of these liabilities, and their extreme offensiveness to me. On your side your liabilities are these: you are morally corrupt, you have clear intellectual limitations, and you are intellectually fraudulent. When you put this triple liability on display in the way you have, you cannot be surprised when the results are (respectively) disgust, condescension, and contempt.

Your feathers have been ruffled, and true to your human nature, you want to blame me for this. But the far greater part of the blame lies with you. You can blame me for my less than perfect conduct in dealing with you and Karen. But you must take full responsibility for the ugly vices of your own that result in the strong reaction you see in me.

First Liability: Moral Corruption

You stand in support of something of the utmost vileness. The obscenity of animal experimentation is quite obvious—it is abundantly, glaringly obvious to anyone who is willing to look at it squarely for a single second. Of the various nasty things we have considered—the slavery, the child prostitution, the terrorism—there is not one that comes even remotely close to matching the horrific cruelty that is visited upon laboratory animals every day, by people who function the way you do. Read the books, watch the videotapes. Educate yourself, then come back and tell me it isn't so.

If you are going to support this, then you must accept responsibility for the disgust that this causes in others. You must understand that your position causes exactly the same feelings of repugnance that you feel in contemplating any of the other examples of exploitation we have mentioned. Of course, you want a special dispensation for your particular form of exploitation, your particular vested interest. But so does everyone else. Please understand that from where I'm standing, you are just one of the crowd.

Second Liability: Intellectual Incompetence

Take a look at the clarity and intelligence of what you have written. As I review your letter paragraph by paragraph, this is what I see:

- You apply the label “absurdly reductionist” without any explanation or support.
- You make allegations of “sophistry,” and “disservice to intelligent discourse,” again without explanation or support.
- In response to my assertion that Karen's work is about benefits and no more, you flatly disagree, yet provide no explanation of how her work transcends the realm of benefits, and enters

into some other realm.

- You cite societal consensus, and later societal action, as clearly being in support of animal experimentation; your implication, presumably, is that this provides moral justification. But not only does societal consensus/action provide no such assurance, this also represents an absolving of your responsibility to think for yourself, instead of blindly accepting the values of your society.
- You state frankly that you are speciesist—that you simply see animals as “lower on the pecking order.” Not only does this provide no moral justification whatsoever, it also aligns you with every other -ist, who simply sees the victims of his exploitation as “lower on the pecking order.”
- You have observed that there is a factual difference between animals and people, but given no explanation of why this provides moral justification for harming one but not the other.
- You point out that, historically, animal experimentation has yielded enormous benefits. But you do not explain why this provides moral justification for Karen’s work.
- You assert that it is the qualitative nature of the benefits that provides moral justification, but you provide no explanation or support for this.
- In seeking to pardon Karen while maintaining condemnation for the terrorist bomber, you suggest that one has an abundance of easy alternatives, while the other has none; a suggestion that doesn’t stand up to even the simplest examination. As part of this suggestion you come up with the stunningly facile advice to oppressed peoples of “lobbying and appealing.”
- When I ask you if we may have Josef Mengele in book group, you label the question as “absurdly reductionist,” but you provide no explanation as to *why* the question is absurdly reductionist. You refer to the qualitative differences between Karen’s benefits and Josef’s, but again, you provide no explanation of why the *qualitative* differences make any *moral* difference.
- You come up with the apparently self-contradictory, and completely unexplained, notion of a “bad benefit.”
- You state that given a choice between exploitation and forbearance, you will choose exploitation every time. As in the case of your speciesism, not only does this provide no moral justification whatsoever, it also aligns you with every other -ist who likewise knows what his choice will be, every time.
- You suggest that I may be morally inconsistent myself, but without making any clear or coherent case for this.

As far as I can see, that pretty much sums it up. Thus from your entire letter, only two solid things remain: the fact of your speciesism, and the fact that you will act on it. Everything else has been discredited, or remains unexplained, or has no dialectical content at all.

During our conversation outside Sarah’s house, you announced to me with some complacency that you had “managed to poke a few holes” in my argument. I am stunned that you consider any of the above to poke any kind of hole in anything. *Everything* in my notes still stands; you have refuted *nothing*. Where are these holes of which you speak? Please give me one clear, unambiguous example of something in my notes that you have conclusively refuted. If you have poked the

holes you say you have, this should be quite easy for you.

Whether you know it or not, your letter has been demolished. I ask you to read both letters again very carefully, and see if you do not agree. If you still don't see this, I suggest that you recruit the assistance of one or two trusted friends. Seek out the most ferociously intelligent, relentlessly questioning people you know, and ask them to review your letter and mine. Perhaps they may be willing to be gentle and diplomatic with you, in a way in which I am not.

As I review your letter and the bullet-point summary above, I inevitably make an assessment of the person whose thoughts they represent. And the assessment I make is that this is ... how can I put this politely ... someone who is not very good at analytical thinking.

In and of itself, this in no way makes you deserving of condescension—on the contrary, it makes you more deserving of patience. But when this incompetence is flanked by, and acts in the service of, your moral corruption and intellectual fraudulence, you cannot be surprised when a little condescension shows through the cracks.

Third Liability: Intellectual Fraudulence

The above shows that you are befuddled; that you have difficulty following an argument, and constructing a coherent one your own. Still, no great crime in that—we can't all be geniuses, and shame on me for even mentioning it.

But you are displaying something much, much worse than simple befuddlement.

There are two entirely different ways of conducting oneself in a discussion. In one you seek the truth. In the other you have an agenda, a pre-defined conclusion, which you then try to justify by any means available. These two approaches are as different as night and day, and each of them is instantly recognizable for what it is. One of them has integrity; the other does not.

If you are seeking the truth you do certain things: (i) you consider the totality of the facts; (ii) you address the facts honestly; (iii) you provide clear support for your assertions; (iv) you establish your principles *first*, and only then do you apply them to the case at hand. And many other things besides, all in the spirit of genuine discovery.

But if you are seeking to justify an agenda you do things very differently. Here (i) you consider only those facts that support your case and ignore the rest; (ii) you address the facts with bias and misrepresentation; (iii) you make assertions and apply labels without providing any support; (iv) you fix your eye on the desired conclusion first, and *then* tailor your principles to support that conclusion. Any many other things, all in the spirit of justifying a pre-established agenda.

Your letter is shot through with all of these forms of misrepresentation. I can readily provide clear examples of every one, and will gladly do so if challenged. Anyone with decent LSAT scores could do the same thing. But right now I will limit myself to the fourth thing: the glaring difference between (a) principle leading to conclusion, and (b) conclusion leading to principle.

Note that frequently, when someone makes what they think is a “point,” they are basing the point on an implied principle—though the speaker may be quite unaware of this.

When you ask, “what gives you the right to attack me and Karen so vehemently?” the implied principle is that, in general, a formal right is required in order to challenge someone. When you

cite societal consensus/decision making/action as justification for Karen's work, the implied principle is that societal action is a reliable indicator of moral rectitude.

If you are thinking honestly, you *establish principles without reference to any special case*. You ask yourself the abstract question: What do we think about the exploitation of one constituency by another constituency? Under what circumstances is this or is this not justified? Only when you have a well-defined principle, *established without influence by any conflict of interest*, do you apply it to any particular case. This, Louise, is genuine personal and societal accountability.

But if you are thinking dishonestly, then you first establish the desired conclusion clearly in your mind, and *then you select your principles on the basis of the desired conclusion*. You don't much care for my ferocious attack on you and Karen, and you would like to conclude that this is inappropriate. You need a principle that will support this conclusion, so you espouse the principle that I need an explicit right to do this. But this principle *has not been established a priori*—it has been *conjured up a posteriori to suit your purpose*.

You wish to conclude that Karen's work is morally justifiable, while the actions of the slaver, the terrorist and so on, are not. You need a principle to support this. So you take a look at the two things you want to distinguish, and you look for a factual difference between them. Here's an obvious one: society sanctions Karen's work, but condemns those other things. Excellent. Now, having identified a factual difference, you then invent a principle based on that factual difference: you conjure up the principle that *societal action demonstrates moral justification*. Finally, you apply this principle to Karen and the others, and *voila*—Karen's work is justified, but the others are not.

Louise, you are cheating. You don't realize you are doing this, because your conflict of interest, your speciesism, your certainty, are so strong, that for you they are indistinguishable from reasoned, external truth. But the fact is that in almost every sentence, you have your thumb on the scale. You know what conclusion you want, so at every turn you select a principle that will support this conclusion, without bothering to think whether the principle is valid or not. To a tough-minded interlocutor like myself, this is glaringly obvious. Both of the above-mentioned principles are false, as anyone with half a brain can see in a second.

For purposes of exposition I have drawn a distinction between your intellectual incompetence and your intellectual fraudulence; but this an artificial distinction, because these are really both sides of the same coin. I am not saying that you are knowingly and deliberately making misrepresentations to me—that's not it at all. It is more accurate to say that the fraudulence is just another manifestation of the incompetence. You start off with certainty, but you lack the intellectual rigor to examine the soundness of your certainty—you simply accept it as equivalent coinage to truth. Then you support your certainty with whatever argument comes most readily to hand, regardless of whether the argument has any integrity or not. This is intellectual fraudulence, but you have insufficient mental acuity to examine your own arguments and recognize them for what they are.

Nevertheless, this all makes me very, very angry. Throughout everything you have said to me, verbally and in writing, you have been guilty not merely of simple intellectual negligence, but also of this constant, fraudulent, self-serving partiality. This is a shameful abuse of the unique gift that most truly set us apart: our ability to reason with honesty. As a man who is fully committed to intellectual integrity, this is exceedingly offensive to me. When you offend me so greatly, you must understand that there is a price to be paid for this.

“I considered you a friend...”
“You don’t know the first thing about me.”

You considered me a friend, but I don’t know the first thing about you? Not only a silly statement, but also plainly incorrect. I know you the same way you know me: partially. I have had many discussions with you, literary and otherwise. I know you opposed the war in Iraq; this says something about a person. Let me take a couple of wild guesses: You don’t own a gun. You have never considered breast augmentation.

I know you support Karen’s work, and this says something monumentally significant about you. I heard your opening arguments, and like a blood sample this contains a universe of information; it reveals your character in every syllable.

Consider this: as you found yourself repeatedly blocked in your initial discussion with me, at a certain point you asked, by way of defense for the choices that Karen has made, “but where is there room in this for how people feel about things?” But moments later, as soon as you saw how this would apply to Josef Mengele, you abandoned the implied argument instantly. Why? Why did you invoke this argument, then immediately drop it? I’ll tell you why: like a glittering bauble, this argument was initially attractive to you as a means to defend Karen’s choices; a moment later, in reference to Josef, it suddenly lost its luster.

This simple exchange, long since forgotten by you, immediately tells me how you function intellectually: you function on the basis of *conclusion leading to principle*. You pick up whatever argument looks appealing on this basis; if it doesn’t work, you drop it.

You don’t much care for me writing things like, “When you use the phrase “necessary evil,” I know instantly where this comes from and what it says about you.” You may not like this statement, but I stand upon its accuracy. I believe I have you quite well characterized in this matter. I have just re-read the two paragraphs from my notes that offended you so much, and though it may have been ill-considered for me to write those paragraphs, and my words ill-chosen, nevertheless I stand upon their underlying factual accuracy.

“But where do you draw the line?”

When you first challenged me about this on the phone, almost the first thing out of your mouth, in reference to my potential vetoing of Karen’s membership, was “But where do you draw the line?”

The “where do you draw the line” argument is very, very common. It is also almost always fallacious. This argument is invoked whenever some sort of boundary, or limitation, or constraint is proposed, which someone doesn’t like. Here the implied principle is, that once we impose any sort of limitation, then we must of necessity impose that same limitation up to its most extreme extent. (Or perhaps the implication is that establishing the precise placement of the limit is going to be insolubly problematic. Typically, the speaker doesn’t even know himself.)

Your use of this argument is absolutely classic. I say I am ready to veto Karen on moral grounds, and *you don’t like it*. You want to conclude that this is inappropriate, so you need a principle that will support this conclusion. You promptly adopt the principle that exercising any form of moral discrimination is completely impractical. Establishing the location of any kind of discriminatory boundary is going to be impossible; so if we apply moral considerations to anyone, then we must apply them to everyone, and since none of us is without sin, then none of us may be in book

group. We cannot possibly apply moral considerations to membership, you seem to be saying, because then no one would qualify. Am I understanding you correctly? Is that not your point here?

But notice that lines get drawn, quite successfully, all the time. On most stretches of Interstate highway the speed limit is 55 miles per hour. The drinking age is 21. The annual limit on 401(k) contributions is \$12,000. Every one of these things is a line, a boundary between acceptable and unacceptable.

When it was first proposed to impose some limit on the speed of automobiles, I can well imagine some nitwit piping up with, “But where do you draw the line?” His implication being, of course, that if we impose any speed limit at all, then we must impose it all the way down to zero mph.

The notion that lines must always be at their extreme limit, or their precise placement rigorously defensible, is simply false. In general there are three choices:

1. There is no limit imposed at all (drive as fast as you want, drink at any age you want, contribute as much as you want).
2. The limit is placed at some intermediate position, somewhat arbitrary to be sure, but still representing an educated-estimate trade-off between desirable and undesirable.
3. The limit is imposed up to its maximum extent (speed limit is zero, you may not drink at any age, contribution is zero).

When someone invokes “where do you draw the line,” the truth is that *they don't want any kind of limit*; in other words what they really want is choice # 1. Somebody comes along and proposes choice # 2, and the knee-jerk reaction is to assert that any choice # 2 will be impractical or arbitrary, and so must inevitably lead to choice # 3. But our speed limits and tax laws demonstrate that this isn't so.

When I say I am ready to veto Karen, the fact is that *you don't like it*. The conclusion you seek is that this is unreasonable or impossible, so you pluck out of thin air a principle that will lead to this conclusion. And a principle that will do the job is that choice # 2 is logically equivalent to choice # 3.

When you ask me, “where do you draw the line,” at that moment you place an unfortunate stamp on your forehead. Whenever you hear this from anyone, right off the bat you know that you are dealing with someone who is either young, or inexperienced, or not very smart, or dishonest. One of those things, for sure. People of intelligence and integrity do not reflexively pose this question, because they know it is worthless.

Why am I going into this so exhaustively? Because you have complained bitterly about my treatment of you, and I want you to begin to understand your own responsibility for this. The reason I became so aggressive with you so quickly when we began discussing this, is because you trotted out a string of fraudulent arguments just like this one. When I hear these kinds of arguments I become instantly hostile. An unfortunate reaction on my part, agreed. But one for which we are both responsible.

This is not quite the end of this particular thread.

When someone invokes an *ad hoc* principle to support a desired conclusion, one way of dealing with this is to carefully explain to them what is wrong with this in general, dialectical terms, as I

have tried to do for you. But this takes an enormous amount of time and energy, and most people are not capable of thinking in these abstract terms in any case.

So instead, the classic maneuver is to take the implied principle, and immediately apply it to some other situation that clearly demonstrates its falsehood. Some bonehead is defending the Texas anti-sodomy laws. Desired conclusion: sodomy is depraved and wrong. So he says, “it isn’t natural—animals don’t sodomize one another.” Implied principle: doing things that animals naturally don’t do is depraved. So you retort, “animals don’t go to the cinema.” Boom. Principle invalidated; ring run around redneck.

So when you say “where do you draw the line,” in order to demonstrate the invalidity of your implied principle, I immediately retort “So then may we have Josef Mengele in book group?” My expectation is that you will put two and two together, and recognize that if drawing the line really is impossibly problematic, then we cannot object to Josef. Either Josef is in, or your principle is no damn good; figure it out for yourself.

Unfortunately, by this time you have completely forgotten the statement of yours that this was said in response to; it flew out of your head the moment you said. The only thing that gets through to you is “Josef Mengele,” and you immediately latch on to the idea that I am saying that Karen and Josef are morally equivalent, and moreover, that *all* misbehavior is morally equivalent. And you have been clamped onto this idea like a bulldog ever since.

When you say things based on immediate *ad hoc* expedience; when you don’t stop to think whether your comments well-founded or not; when you forget what you have said the moment you say it; when you are unable to relate what I say to what you said ten seconds previously; when you completely misunderstand my point—when you do all of these things, Louise, you must allow me to draw the obvious conclusions.

Andrew Attitude

If we were discussing calculus, say, and there were some abstract subtlety that you were having difficulty grasping, I can assure you I would be endlessly patient with you. But under those circumstances we would be engaged in a genuine quest for understanding—no agendas, no politics, no duplicity of any kind. Just a straightforward and honest seeking to understand what’s what.

But that is **not** what is going on here. Throughout our entire discussion you have shown pervasive intellectual prejudice. I know you are unaware of this. Blair or Bush are unaware of this in themselves also, but as I think you can see quite clearly, neither one of them is capable of stringing together two honest sentences. But for each of them, the conclusion they seek is so clear and compelling, that *the desired conclusion becomes its own form of truth*. The same is true of you. You have a certainty, and this certainty is so strong that you are not really doing any analysis at all—you know what’s what, so there is no need for analysis. Instead of analysis, you simply pick up whatever comes most conveniently to hand in support of your certainty, and you lob it at me. This is not what a genuine analysis looks like.

“I attempt to engage you in polite debate and you reply with sneering contempt and anger and I really don’t deserve that.”

You do deserve it, Madam. You stand in support of something monstrous, and you are using intellectual fraudulence to justify this. These are offensive, repulsive things, and they are fully deserv-

ing of anger and contempt.

If all we had were your incompetence, but this were accompanied by a basic humanity, by an instinctive compassion for all living things, and by an integrity of thought and word, then you would be quite right to berate me for my lack of respect. Under those circumstances you would be fully deserving of my patience and courtesy.

But your incompetence is accompanied by neither of those virtues. Instead it exists in concert with, and in the service of, a readiness to exploit others, and a readiness to justify this with whatever form of shoddy pseudo-reasoning comes most easily to hand. Under these circumstances your incompetence, multiplied many times over, is as deadly and dangerous as George Bush's, and it deserves to be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

Your willingness to sanction the vile exploitation of others, and your self-serving duplicity, are colossally offensive to me. You didn't understand this; perhaps now you do. If you are going to adopt this position and manner of presentation you must accept responsibility for the consequences, including the disgust and contempt that this engenders in others.

Others may be willing to shield you from their more caustic judgements, and in different circumstances, so am I. But not when you are using massively offensive intellectual fraudulence to defend something monstrous. At that point my willingness to safeguard your feelings evaporates.

We are very good at understanding when we have been sinned against; but we are very poor at understanding when we have sinned against others. The 9/11 attacks were exceedingly nasty, and they loom large in the minds of the American public. But these attacks were made in response to things that were far nastier still, but which do not loom in the American mind at all. Like Louise, the blissfully unaware public complains that "we didn't do anything to provoke this." But they are wrong, and so are you.

In our e-mail exchange I made the following observations, to which you never responded:

You are not angry, Louise, and it shows. And whether or not I respect this depends on the reasons why you are not angry. If you never get angry about anything; if you can calmly debate with Josef Mengele; if you can answer his slippery self-serving arguments and fully maintain your courtesy and composure; if all of these things are true then your position is truly consistent. You are a better person than I am, and you fully deserve my respect.

But if not, then your position is not consistent. In this case your comments are just another manifestation of your double standard. You say my tone is inappropriate; I say on the contrary, it is entirely appropriate. Your friend is doing something harmful, and you are making excuses. The one fact is ugly, and the other shameful. I have presented an argument in support of these statements, which remains unrefuted. My tone fully reflects the nature of these facts, and how I feel about them. Tell me my analysis is wrong, and then you may tell me my tone is inappropriate.

Someone who isn't angry finds it easy to debate with courtesy. But someone who isn't angry is not inclined to provoke debate in the first place. You certainly enjoy the luxury of not being angry; that much is plain. Unfortunately, Karen could wait a thousand years to hear a peep out of you.

I'd like to request that you respond now. Specifically, let me ask you this: if you were in debate with Josef Mengele, and he gave you the sort of expedient arguments you've given me, what sort of a tone would you take?

I began by apologizing for my very slow response, and I cited having been stressed and busy; but this is only part of the reason. The rest is that every time I look at what you have written I am both repelled and overwhelmed. I am repelled by the boldfaced **I am speciesist** declaration at the top of your letter, and by your many frank declarations of your readiness to sanction cruelty and exploitation. These may be honest statements, but this makes them no less repugnant.

And I am overwhelmed by just what a hopeless muddle your letter is, and the enormous task I face in bringing clarity to this. It is very easy for the clumsy, thoughtless person to create chaos with simplistic phrases and specious arguments; it is far more difficult to create clarity. You just toss off "where do you draw the line," or "lobbying and appealing," or "bad benefits," and you're all done for the day. Then you can sit back complacently, fully satisfied that you've actually said something worthwhile.

But all you have done is make a gigantic mess for me to sort out. It takes just a second to come up with these things, but it takes work, and thought, and commitment to analyze and explain carefully what is wrong with every one of these empty, thoughtless phrases.

I can well understand that I have touched some kind of nerve—as you explained to me during our conversation outside Sarah's house you have spent your life struggling to be taken seriously by assertive men. But given what you have shown to me, it is hardly surprising you haven't been taken seriously. We all want respect; the problem is we want it whether we deserve it or not. Obviously, Louise, I respect neither your humanity nor your intelligence. But I am not responsible for this; you are.

Moving Forward

In the first part of this letter, under the heading *The Thing Itself*, I have given a complete response to everything you said on the impersonal side of our dispute. I have read through your letter many times, thought about it carefully, and done my best to give coherent and reasoned responses to everything. If I missed anything it is a genuine oversight on my part; if so let me know, and I will address it promptly.

I expect the same kind of diligence and commitment from you.

Let me remind you that you initiated this debate with me. I responded to our initial discussion by providing you with a set of notes which set out the basic elements of my case against your friend Karen. In your letter to me you have simply ignored much of what I said in those notes. You have left questions unanswered; important observations unacknowledged or unchallenged.

This is not acceptable. Integrity of debate requires that you respond to the totality of my challenge; you do not get to pick and choose which of my arguments and questions you will answer. Clearly I have considered it an obligation to address the totality of what you have said to me; I consider you to be under the same obligation to me.

In the current letter, you are free to ignore everything under *Personal Liabilities* if you wish. However, I expect a complete response to everything under *The Thing Itself*. I have challenged you

with many questions throughout that section; except when obvious, none of them is rhetorical; all require a formal answer from you. Even when I do not ask a specific question, all my arguments require some form of response; an acknowledgment of their validity, a rebuttal, whatever; but they may not be ignored.

To the extent that you are willing to do this, you can simply concede that I am right. But to the extent that you wish to persist in defending your position, a comprehensible rebuttal is required on your side. Completeness, openness, and genuineness of debate require that you do no less than this.

If this would make it any easier, I can provide you with this letter in electronic format.

Given my extreme tardiness, I am in no position to demand a quick response. So by all means take your time. But I think it is reasonable to ask for the following two things reasonably soon:

1. That you take the time to give this at least one complete and careful initial reading, and let me know that you have done so.
2. That you let me know what your eventual intention is—if you have no intention of making the sort of comprehensive written response I am demanding, I would like to know this right away.

Thank you.