Animal Farm Redux

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Living with both intelligent awareness and HIV poses trials of endurance little documented in the vast literature of the plague, quite apart from outright physical challenges. High among these ranks the need to deal so carefully every day with the painfully delicate sensibilities of others. Compared to your own necessarily hardened, somewhat extreme perspective, the general outlook of your acquaintances, especially the negatives, seems hopelessly naive and shallow. Even the hardiest is sometimes bruised by your callouses. This is too bad. It would be a great blessing, after all, not to have to be so hard just to resist, literally, dissolving. Sentimentality, though, is a luxury of peace. Those of us who will fight to live require a certain durability. And while we love and cherish our durable, heroic, slightly sore friends, they are few; most of life places us queasily amidst the modern American ideal of enforced superficiality, of 500 channels and nothing on.

Many, even in our own community, often regard it as a right to remain utterly timid and squeamish in the face of troublesome issues. The moment you speak up with any uncomfortable insight they run for cover, as from a contagion, and cringingly accuse you of cynicism, pessimism and bitterness. This stress is bad for you, you know. Have you tried Prozac? No matter how cheerfully you try to say it, no matter how lightly you yourself bear this awful awareness, for them it is too weighty, too threatening of their comfortable but fragile rafts of denial. They simply will not hear and defend themselves, canting fortissimo the routine, easy dismissals currently in vogue. You can only sigh and keep to yourself. If you won't play by their rules then you find yourself playing alone. Hence no one has the courage to take any really decisive action or even to draw the logical conclusions from their own experience. We wait meekly for the camps.

And here is what cannot be heard, where language stops, the whisper that will not, however, fall silent in my ears. Have we not just surrounded ourselves with seductive illusions and grown drunk on our narcissism, mendacity and denial as on our own blood? Finally, the whisper asks: What if, simply, there is no longer any smoke?

Everyone praises your bravery and calm acceptance of fate, never admitting even to themselves that at times raging fury is the only sane emotion for a human being with any shred of dignity. God help us, is it because they have none? Baaa, baaa. Poor lambs, anger frightens them even more than death -- certainly yours. Then, later, they can cry at your funeral and tell each other how wonderful you were and wallow luxuriantly in their hard-earned trough of survivor's guild. Baaa, oink.

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