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EDITORIAL

New Year's Resolutions, 1995

Science. Dr. Noitall, you are the inventor of New Year's resolutions, the man responsible for the most massive statement of good intentions ever orchestrated, the man who originated the legislative resolution.

Noitall. A vast understatement of my true worth.

Science. Have you any new thoughts on the value of resolutions?

Noitall. It is time New Year's resolutions came under government regulation. People are constrained from smoking, from unsafe sex, from failing to buckle seat belts. Why not prevent overblown fantasies of self-improvement that frequently aren't implemented?

Science. But does such an expression of goodwill need any regulation?

Noitall. We all know where good intentions lead, so we cannot leave such a powerful instinct in the hands of ordinary people.

Science. But who is to tell a person bent on self-improvement when to stop?

Noitall. The appropriate federal agency will step in. For example, if a person resolves to lose 5 pounds in 1995, the Department of Commerce will issue an injunction. Restaurants, candy manufacturers, and fast-food operators will all be deleteriously affected. The economy will grind to a halt.

Science. That seems exaggerated, but possible. Are there any other dangers?

Noitall. A person who decides to take up jogging must be stopped. The damage to knees and ankles, to say nothing of energy diverted from the workplace, is catastrophic. Many such people lack health insurance and are putting financial stability at risk.

Science. People who jog frequently gain self-esteem; but is there anything else?

Noitall. Some people unwisely vow to read all instructions on home appliances, hotel fire instructions, airplane emergency instructions, and so on. The damage to eyesight, the increased apprehension, and the frustration from incomprehensibly described gadgets will generate a nation of psychotics.

Science. But some people actually succeed in carrying out New Year's resolutions.

Noitall. That only generates more problems. These people are part of an elite few. They immediately become smug and look down on fellow citizens who fail to come to grips with their frailties. This divides our citizens between the obnoxiously uprighteous and the lovably undisciplined. Smugness is divisive in a democracy.

Science. But some instructions are quite simple: "Don't take the elevator, walk down the stairs."

Noitall. Have you any idea how many people hurt themselves on stairs as compared with elevators? We are inviting a panic response to a little smoke and damnation.

Science. What will be the environmental impact of such regulations?

Noitall. All for the good. We have regulations for all other aspects of our lives; we can't exempt good intentions.

Science. How do you expect to implement such a sweeping change?

Noitall. We will have a legislative resolution with the usual whereas's, saying that henceforth New Year's resolutions must be kept to a total of three and confined only to those intentions that will have no effect on commerce, health, or international relations.

Science. Can the ordinary person adjust to such a massive deprivation of personal civil liberties?

Noitall. Happily. The failure to succeed in New Year's resolutions is the cause of widespread anxiety and disgust at the polls. By being able to say, "I would like to have lost 5 pounds but I wasn't allowed to," a person can successfully avoid guilt feelings, transfer responsibility to the government, and kick the bums out.

Science. But how do you, a man of unbridled sanctimoniousness, plan to cope?

Noitall. Wonderfully well. I shall abandon any plans for self-improvement. That will give me more time to improve everyone else.

Daniel E. Koshland Jr.