

Gruden and Miller: Considering the Pardonable and the Unpardonable

by Theodore Dalrymple



Las Vegas Raiders head coach Jon Gruden

Forgiveness is in the gift of the wronged, but pardon is in the gift of us all. What we consider pardonable and unpardonable reveals our scale of values.

Two recent cases from the world of sport demonstrate, however, that making relative moral judgments can be complex.

In the first case, a football coach, Jon Gruden, pre-emptively resigned after e-mails, supposedly private but written on a company e-mail account, that contained racial and other slurs, were made public—or made almost public, since most of the slurs have been described in the press euphemistically rather than reproduced *verbatim*.

In the second case, the executive of a sports equipment company, Larry Miller, has revealed that, aged 16, he committed murder. This was unknown throughout most of his career, during which he reached the top of the tree.

Whereas Gruden has been widely, almost unanimously, condemned, Miller has drawn almost equally widespread praise.

Does the contrast between the reactions to the two cases not reveal a strange or even perverted scale of values, in which words not intended for public consumption call forth more severe punishment, or at least more social and economic ostracism, than the crime of murder?

Let us examine the difference a little further. Gruden was a fully-grown and mature adult who owed a duty to his employers not to damage their reputation by using the kind of language that (apparently) he did use. He seems to have written as he might have spoken if he had been drinking with pals in a low dive. At the very least, then, he was foolish to the point of stupidity.

An apology and a promise not to behave in this way again would surely have been enough, combined perhaps with a reduction in his salary, with the difference being donated to a worthy charity.

But his apology—which struck me as not entirely sincere or credible—was not deemed enough in these vengeful times. It is to be hoped that, four years into a contract at \$10 million a year, he has put enough by not to suffer real economic hardship as a result of his professional death.