

Abortive assumption

If someone claims to have settled a long-standing moral controversy in a couple of sentences, we can be sure something has gone wrong.

What is wrong with John Savard's attempt so to settle the abortion debate (Human fetuses are members of Homo sapiens; so are we; it's wrong to deprive us of our lives; so it's wrong to deprive them of theirs) is that it rests on the erroneous assumption that what makes it wrong to deprive something of its life is that it is a member of the species Homo sapiens.

Just one of the things that is wrong with this assumption is that if it were true it would rule out the possibility of even considering whether it might be wrong to deprive members of any other species of their lives. Savard, who claims to be against discrimination, would surely not wish to be counted in the ranks of the human chauvinists. If not, though, he will have to look for other grounds for the prohibition on taking life. Only then will he be in a position to say something about abortion.

In the meantime he will have to give up any such simple-minded and indeed preposterous idea as that from the resoundingly uncontroversial 'observed fact' that the human fetus is a member of Homo sapiens we may move directly to the conclusion that abortion is 'homicide,' or indeed that abortion is untoward in any way whatsoever.

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Quixote

by David Marples

Uncle Sam is an unhappy figure these days. His "American dream," which has continued unabated for over 200 years appears to be approaching an abrupt and unwelcome end. The dream has survived less through the efforts of thirty-nine Presidents or Congress than through the American people, an entity which has displayed a remarkable homogeneity from Alaska to Florida. Americans have retained their ambitions, openness and friendliness, but their optimism of past years has been dispatched to the four winds. Instead one finds bewilderment and consternation that all is not well with the world.

The prevalent feeling is that the United States has been humiliated, not by some recalcitrant African state which has chosen to renegade on a "well-meaning benefactor," but by Iran, a longtime and hitherto faithful ally. Carter may play his waiting game, but the public is almost speechless with impotent rage about U.S. inability to free the embassy hostages. I recently asked several Americans whether they were perturbed more by events in Iran than by those in Afghanistan and opinion was unanimous that the former was the major preoccupation.

Nevertheless, the frustration with the Soviets is also in evidence. A poll carried out in Washington state revealed that fifty-nine per cent of Americans are now in favor of the draft, as compared to forty-three per cent in 1971. Forty-nine per cent felt that women should also be conscripted. In turn, the European states, and especially France, are considered by many to be ungrateful allies, with pitifully short memories. Canada, of course, redeemed herself in Tehran. Yet recent letters to the *Seattle Times* have condemned the "sickening" effusive gratitude bestowed by Americans upon their northern neighbor. Implicit in such comments was the feeling that U.S. benevolence generally goes unnoticed.

The presidential election campaign is displaying more examples of American bitterness. The results of the New Hampshire caucus, with easy victories for both Carter and Reagan, underlined the importance of foreign affairs in the mind of the electorate. In contrast, Senator Kennedy has paid a heavy price for attempting to focus on domestic issues. Americans speak

of him as an "opportunist" (what presidential candidate isn't!) and his attacks on Carter are often depicted as unpatriotic in this time of crisis. The success of the vacuous Reagan can only be attributed to the forlorn hope that a strong leader-figure can take Americans back to the promised land.

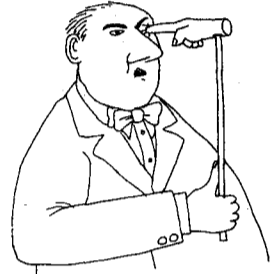
Perhaps the nationalism inherent in U.S. society has sometimes been underestimated. Recently it has achieved new heights that have bordered on ostentation for the outsider. Witness for example the celebration of America's hockey triumph at Lake Placid. While Lord Killanin was considering a suggestion that national flags be removed from Olympic ceremonies, the Russian and Swedish teams must have thought that U.S. independence had been re-declared as they drowned in a sea of star-spangled banners. A reporter commented that there was scarcely a dry eye in the arena.

Such euphoria over a hockey victory is a poignant indicator of the demise of the American dream. As Jimmy Carter noted, there are few heroes in 1980. However, the rude awakening of Americans to an unpleasant reality is not without benefits. Disillusionment has given rise to inquisitive attitudes; "Did the Shah really commit all those crimes?" "How come we are so unpopular in Central America?" The answers may seem self-evident, but that is immaterial. What is of significance is that such questions are being asked. Amidst the superficial patriotic revival, the American people are gradually beginning to re-examine the role of their government in world affairs.

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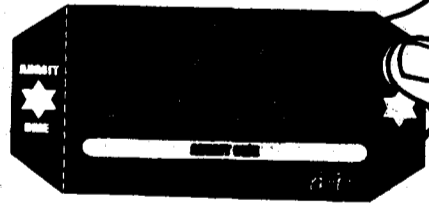
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