

Evil by whose standards?

Re:female genital mutilation.
This letter is in response to Terry Swan's letter in *Gateway*, March 26/81, regarding female genital mutilation. Referring to this practice in different parts of the world, Swan asks, "What are we going to do about this matter?"

My answer to this question is a strong **NOTHING**. This answer might shock the North American opponents of female genital mutilation as much as does the act itself. My rationale for inaction on this matter, however, is based on the notion that no one society has the understanding or authority necessary to judge the social values and customs of another society.

To begin with, I think the word mutilation should be replaced in our discussion with the proper medical term, "clitoridectomy" (excision of the clitoris). While in North American culture, such an act may be interpreted as mutilation, the people in societies where this act is practiced do not perceive the clitoridectomy as a form of mutilation (that is, according to the Oxford Dictionary definition of mutilation, as the "damage by breaking, tearing or cutting off a necessary part").

By suggesting that North Americans intervene to stop the practice of clitoridectomy, you imply the following:

1. That you have the authority to stop and/or introduce certain social customs into any society in the world, regardless of the will of the majority of people in that society.

2. That your social practices are superior to those of others, and therefore worthy of imposition elsewhere.

If you believe in the equality of different societies (as I think you should), you should respect the rights of different cultures to maintain their own values and

practices, unhampered by interference from outsiders. Furthermore, you may not even be successful in trying to stop the "primitive custom" of clitoridectomy, since your efforts in this regard will be contrary to the will of the majority of people in societies where this custom prevails.

It should be pointed out, in regard to the question of differing social values, that the people whose customs you condemn might be equally repulsed by some practices which North Americans respect and encourage. What if, for instance, the practices of tubectomy ("excision of the uterine tube") and vasectomy ("excision and/or severing of the sperm duct"), which are increasingly practiced in North America, were found to be considered sadistic and inhumane in some other societies. Without attempting to pass judgment on these practices, do you think that their opponents should react in the same way as you propose to deal with female genital mutilation, that is, by:

1. Getting all kinds of articles on what they see as the "horrid" practices of tubectomy and vasectomy published in university papers?

2. Circulating petitions protesting these practices?

3. Making their protests known to the governments of all concerned nations in the world?

4. Pressuring their governments to stop the export, to all countries permitting these "objectionable" practices, of resources essential to the survival of these countries (for example, oil and mineral resources)?

The answer to all the above questions, I contend, is **NO!** For whatever reasons, (economic, health, etc.) that tubectomies and vasectomies are practised in this society, let them continue, so long

as the majority of the people find them acceptable. Similarly, allow the "female genital mutilators" to continue, as long as they find it acceptable, a practice which, regardless of your views, they find socially meaningful and necessary.

A point aside: your concern for the health and welfare of others in this world is commendable. I would suggest, however, that such concern could, at this point of history, be directed to a more serious issue than the termination of clitoridectomies. Today, millions of people are losing, not only parts of their genitalia, but their entire bodies and souls to the practice of torture and starvation, at the hands of repressive, minority governments.

The illegal, racist regime of South Africa is a case in point. In this instance, the will of the majority has been suppressed, due to the excessive power and influence wielded by a dictatorial minority. I think that North Americans could do more for the betterment of mankind as a whole by attempting to stop this wholesale mutilation and slaughter of human beings, than by trying to stop any of the current practices of clitoridectomy, tubectomy or vasectomy.

Attinaw Ayentisnu
Agriculture

Do-gooder? No, just a great way to get a job

Perhaps the most pervasive misconception people have of volunteers is that they are do-gooders. This may have been true when people volunteered out of a sense of duty, but today this is fast becoming a myth. Today more than ever people are volunteering on their own terms, refusing to do volunteer work unless they receive payment.

Expecting payment, not in monetary terms, but in such things as career-related experience, or a job reference, has probably been the most important factor in, bringing about the growth in volunteer opportunities. The possible range of volunteer opportunities, both operational and administrative, grows all of the time, and the clear line between the two is getting fuzziier, too, as policy decision-making is distributed more widely in organizations.

At the University, perhaps more than in any other segment of the population, it is obvious that volunteer work is done for reasons other than to be a do-gooder. Students in all faculties are volunteering to gain valuable work experience and a job reference; both important prerequisites to getting the right job

after graduation. These motivations, far from being selfish, are very legitimate considering the skills that University students are offering non-profit organizations.

As the stereotypical view of volunteers changes, more and more people are seeing the benefits they can get from doing volunteer work. This week is Volunteer Recognition Week on campus; a time more than any other that we have the chance to change some of our misconceptions about volunteers. If you are one that views all volunteers as do-gooders, ask around, you may be surprised to find that some of your best friends are volunteers. How about you?

Fred Reynolds
Educations 4

A lyrical word hunt

HELP! I am involved in a scavenger hunt.

One of the items that I have to find is... lyrics of "Ballad of a Young Man" as sung by Helen Ramsey.

I have written to the Library of Congress, copyright division, over 50 record finders on both coasts, several radio stations and numerous magazines and unions connected with the music world. No success.

Perhaps one of your readers has heard of the song and/or the artist and would write to me at the address below. A prompt response would be appreciated as there is a deadline involved.

Mignon Diane Lauber
120 West First Street
Juneau, Alaska, 99801

More than just a trade school

Dear Ms. Just:

I have read your "Second Wind" (Thursday, March 26) and cannot determine whether the *Gateway* is yet again attempting to discredit the opposition to a side it supports by making it appear ridiculous, or whether it is, in fact, an example of the piteously poor reasoning that presently passes for intelligent criticism.

Your attack on MacKay's brief to the Senate Task Force on University Purpose is a hilarious example of self-satire. You argue: "It is not reasonable to assume that all students are disillusioned because they took the wrong courses or because the quality of teaching is substandard." What is "reasonable" then, Ms. Just?

MacKay did point out that

some students are in good programs with decent courses and professors. But it is an unfortunate truth that many more are not. Given that genuine learning is, to the vast majority of people, a source of great personal pleasure, that the universities are billed as places of "higher learning," and that this institution is, to many students, "dangerous to one's intellect." Does it not follow, Ms. Just, that this is a legitimate cause of disillusionment?

You argue that students spend considerable time contemplating whether or not to attend university and when they get here they know what to expect. This is garbage. An inordinantly high number of first and second year students, do, in

fact, either flunk or drop out because they were poorly counselled or lacked the intellectual abilities. This would have been obvious if you had checked either the statistics or talked to University counsellors.

You argue that it is insulting to relate to problems of declining standards and facilities to student disinterest and disillusionment. Why, pray tell, is this insulting? The real insult, Ms. Just, is for students to have to pay ever-increasing costs for ever-declining quality.

You argue that the end of semester "is hardly the time of year to submit a report on student motivation." What, in God's name, does the date on the cover sheet have to do with the contents? This is one of the most facile criticisms I have ever heard!

You argue that "students have been unmotivated for years. Very few of them are in it for the joy of learning. Quite the contrary, for a university education is almost a necessary requirement for most jobs." That is the entire problem! A university is supposed to be something more than a glorified trade school. It is intended to teach people how to think (a point you evidently missed). It is not supposed to be the setting for guerilla warfare between students' creative intellects and the institution's teaching systems.

If one believes that higher learning is inherently enjoyable for adults and of intrinsic value, the fact that it is neither to many students should be of dire concern. Yet this is not what terrifies me the most, Ms. Just. That terror is reserved for the complacency that people like you display.

Chanchal Bhattacharza
Commerce III



Mahood, London Times

"I can't see the objection to spraying people with napalm if it makes the world a better place to live in."

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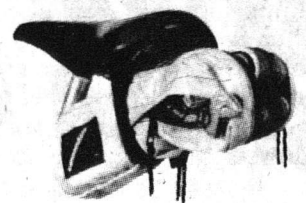
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