

On Manhattan and elsewhere I occasionally see, on a "development" area, the sign "WARNING! EXPLOSIONS AREA." The contractors want to protect themselves against litigation in case somebody gets hurt, so the public's warned to stay away the distance the signs indicate....This thinksheet is a caution vis-a-vis a current mental explosion, viz., the associative expansion of the notion of human rights: if THAT is a "right," what is not THIS also a "right"?

1. "Association" has, as legal precedent, a political force precisely because it's a psychological reality: so the human mind works. And, I believe, the human mind so works because reality is an extracontinuum (with the mind of God) and an intracontinuum ("all things" in continuity with one another, only God's mind and the human mind having the power of discontinuity). An electrical/electronic connection "works" only when the contact(s) is/are made: "thinking" is contact-making + implications-drawing, and is challengeable both as to the vailidity of the contacting and as to the pertinence of the im/ap-plications.

2. I'm dead-live serious about continuity. The growth of a mold (eg, penicillin) in an agar medium, the condensation of a nebula into a solar system, the interweaving of dendritic systems as the human brain develops, the increasing intricacy of intellectual history (esp. the history of philosophy and theology--even, at a very modest level, my thinksheets!)--all this I see as one extra/intra-continuum: the maturation of the global-social mind is not apart, different, from the development of species and galaxies....This aspect of my FAITH is deep and early. I'm now (July/86) reading, day by day, my diary of 52 years ago, when (it turns out) I was reading, on my own (for no schoolcredit), ten times more science than religion: my head was so spinning with worlds that (diary, 26 July 34) "somehow I do not seem to take an interest in current events" in this world. Mine was/is one kind of mind the Creator creates to fight off boredom: the Creator creates many kinds of minds, all contiguous to, none comprehensive of, God's. All are asked to share their minds with God (in prayer) and with one another (in conversation): my thinksheets are both.

3. The dark side of this fact of association is diseases of mind/body, violation of "mens sana in corpore sano" (the old Roman, also Greek, ideal of "a sound mind in a sound body"). The electron microscope reveals this in the early stages of some cancers. In the social mind, critical consciousness will always raise the question whether a particular expansion--say, of "human rights"--is healthy or cancerous. Alfred Rosenberg's development of the Aryan philosophy for Hitler is obviously an instance of cancerous mental association-development-expansion-explosion. The recent "children's rights" explosion in the USA, mocked in this Bill Hoest "Laugh Parade" cartoon (13July86), is either healthy, or cancerous--or both.

Cancerous, to the extent that the children's-rights movement and resulting legislation have forced the schools to deal with disruptive pupils as bodiless minds: no corporeal punishment. Since brats (ie, misbehaving pupils) are not bodiless minds, teachers are forced into unreal behavior--and the brats instinctively know how to take advantage of the fact that Teach's hands are literally tied.ANCIENT NOTE: I went all the way through public school without any successful disruption of the teaching-learning process.



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At the slightest inkling of disruptive behavior on the part of any pupil, Teach would say "Principal's office," and off to that ominous place the culprit would go. I went once: once was enough. It was in the days before iodine was discovered to be a specific for thyroid goiter --so Mr. Irwin's eyes bulged horribly out of his head, terrorizing the good, the bad, and the indifferent. That once I was forced to go to his office, he fiddled with his spanking paddle and said, "Willis, will you ever be sent to me again?" And I said "No." And from then on he was even friendlier to me than he'd been before. No corporeal punishment. Just terror. But the terror included the imagining of the pain and shame of corporeal punishment. The notion that this imagining is unnecessary to school decorum is romantic at both ends: (1) It assumes the teacher has the power of mental control over all students, a power few teachers have; and (2) It assumes that all children are able, and inclined, to be controlled by words only (whereas the reality is that some are biopsychologically and/or mentally uncontrollable by words only: of course they need special attention--but do they have the right to be disruptive?). Yes, educational methods in the PS are imperfect--but does that give children the right to be disruptive? Would claiming such a right be an in/valid parallel with Jefferson's right of revolution in the case of adults? (Early this month, the Supreme Court ruled that PS children do not have the full adult right of free speech: they refused to overturn a lower court's judgment against a highschooler who'd made a speech the school authorities condemned as dirty.)

4. What, now, is our culture's grounding of "rights"? The holy phrase is "democratic rights," whether in the American PS (as defended by ACLU) or in S.Africa. What's behind this use of "democratic"? Three notions:

(1) DIVINE rights--not God's rights, but God-given rights. This idea has a long history of good and evil effects. The ancient Near-Eastern suzerains, then the Roman emperors, claimed divine right and even at least quasidivine being--so revolt was evil and even demonic! A tinge of this remained in George III's psyche, and "1776" was a definite-defiant rejection of the whole notion. But ideas don't die, they fade away only to fade in again. And they sometimes reappear on new ground: the notion of divine right appears, in the Declaration of Independence, as pertinent not to government but to the citizen.

(2) NATURAL(ISTIC) rights--combined, in the Declaration's "nature, and nature's God," with divine rights. Argumentation here rests on the medieval "natural law," the Renaissance sense of human dignity, the Reformation's reemphasis on the doctrine of creation, the Enlightenment's stress on the autonomy of human reason, and the postDarwinian reasoning in the mode of humanity-in-nature (a.k.a. "secular humanism").

(3) SOCIAL-CONTRACT rights, chiefly argued on the intellectual basis of French sociologism, rooted in the theorists of the French Revolution.. A.k.a. "humanistic ethics" and "Rousseauism."

These three strands in "democratic rights" are signaled, though indirectly, in the slogan "the sacredness of all human life." What I may call the 7 NOs or prohibitions are supported by this phrase: NO contraception (including sterilization), NO abortion, NO infanticide (not even by neglect within the first ten days), NO murder, NO capital punishment, NO euthanasia (even when life degenerates from the biographical to the merely biological), and NO war.

5. Politically, "the sacredness of all human life" becomes absolute democracy, "one person one vote." To Tutu, this seems so obvious that he now says "The West can go to hell" if it does not press Pretoria with this demand. This simplism does not comply well either with the Christian religion or with human history. But who is against "democracy"?