

D:N::V:Non-N

Democracy is to negotiation as Violence is to "nonnegotiables"

This Thinksheet is for testing out-loud (in its medium, paper) the proposition implied in its title: Being unable to accomodate public nonnegotiables, democracy either quiets their claimants or disintegrates. How quiet such claimants? South Africa's Truth Commission (Desmond Tutu et al) is one model--but #3002 does not deal with this question.

1 To the extent that a nonnegotiable is so because held as sacred (the sacred being the religiously inviolable), its claim is religious no matter the specific content of the nonnegotiable. Since every nonnegotiable is (I think) to some extent sacred, every nonnegotiable is religious. One conclusion: No secular analysis, denying or downplaying the specific religious dimension, is adequate. Another: Neglecting religion in pedagogy proper (i.e., the ed of children) produces a public lacking an essential sense-making tool.

2 An essential distinction: Personal integrity requires faithfulness to nonnegotiables, which are more important to the person than is life itself; but pressing one's nonnegotiables into the public sphere/square results in (1) violence to democracy (to which there are no nonnegotiables) & (2) denial of the rights of those holding contra-nonnegotiables. Instance: "Pro-life" bombing of reproductive-health clinics & murder of "abortionists." Nothing in Dick Neuhaus' monthly FIRST THINGS frightens me except the nonnegotiability of abortion (= "fetal-life murder"); & the debate, in that periodical, over whether American democracy has a future confirms my assumption in this Thinksheet: public nonnegotiables = violence to democracy first, then to one's neighbor.

Continental INSTANCE: postcolonial **Africa**. After WWII, Europe's imperial hold on Africa yielded to Africans' desire for independence from Europe. Democracy was Europe's hope for Africa, autocracy was Africa's traditional choice: the tribes had neither the will to nor the skills of democracy--atleast the will was weaker than tribal entropy. Now, in black Africa, the only nation approximating democracy was the last to surrender "Europe": Mandela, a black, succeeded a politically liberal (white) Africaan; but even there, economic democracy is far distant (& getting farther, the black womb continuing to be more fertile than the white--keeping blacks in relative poverty & ignorance).

3 A highly respected sociologist, James Davison Hunter, asks (in BEFORE THE SHOOTING BEGINS: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture War [Free Press /94]) whether democracy is right for Africa--then extends the question to whether **America**, with its clashing pluralistic nonnegotiables, can survive as a democracy. We had a "culture war" over slavery & didn't manage to settle it peacefully, by compromise or *modus vivendi* (North & South agreeing to disagree). The violence of the South (at Fort Sumter) eliminated democracy; the violence boomeranged, the South was crushed, & democracy very gradually returned (after 1865).

Since the abortion controversy is over a nonnegotiable (viz., abortion is/not murder), our democracy is being asked whether (in my words) it's capable of & willing to quiet the clashing claimants. Roe v. Wade (1973) didn't: the "murder" folks lost, but were not violently crushed--so the outcome is doubly indeterminant: will "pro-life" win, or democracy once again suffer violence.

Hunter shows how Nazi imagery leaks into debates over nonnegotiables. To the Nazis (after Swazee, 1942), Jewish life was (at least theoretically, & in the mass) nonnegotiable: extermination was the simple solution. "Pro-life"ers now in America want to eliminate abortion. (In Nazi Germany, you'd be executed for an "Aryan" abortion.) Since for Americans Nazism is the incarnation of evil, painting one's opponent with the "Nazi" brush commits one to insist on total defeat & unconditional surrender--as in our present President's "evil axis" of terrorist-harborers, & "with us or not" vis-a-vis first the Taliban & then other governments harboring/

Elliot
△
Thinksheets

309 Lake Elizabeth Drive
Craigville, MA 02632
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008 \$20 per year
e-mail wandell@elliotthinksheets.net

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sheltering any "terrorists." Why do I put "terrorists" in quotes? Because--like, & the opposite of, "freedom fighters"--it's a political-polemic expression for guerilla warriors. The Iran-Contra scandal was about the White House's covert *support* for terrorism: the Contras against the Sandanista gov't. of Nicaragua. Nothing confusing about U.S. foreign policy on this: Our guerillas against them are "freedom fighters": their guerillas against us are "terrorists." Am I against such spinning (adversarial loading of connota)? No, it's words gone to war (Gk., "log-o-machy"). But when we twist words, we're in danger of forgetting the twisting & are buddies with liars who come to believe their lies.

4 As I write, democracy in postTaliban Afghanistan depends on (1) the warlords' negotiating away their hegemony to the new central gov't. or (2) the latter's violent crushing of the former, the death of the nascent democracy being the only alternative to the crushing if the warlords' try to maintain their several autonomies as **nonnegotiables**. Never, in history as we know it, have nonnegotiables entered through the door marked "DEMOCRACY"--& it can never be. Persons with private nonnegotiables (a category including all persons of integrity) can walk through that door: groups with public nonnegotiables find the door barred to them.

That's the rule. The exceptions? (1) The sign is taken down, the door is forced open, democracy yields to the violence of nonnegotiability. Since WWII, that has happened to more than a hundred fragile infant democracies. (2) The door may open from the inside, as happened with the 1964 & 1965 U.S. legislation which increased justice in our democracy. The door didn't open till a fire was started on its outside, creating fear on the inside. (I was widely accused of "ripping the social fabric" when in the N.Y.TIMES I said "not enough cities are burning." "The Movement" was the ultimately politically acceptable nonviolent alternative to chaos, & the fear of democracy-destroying violence had to be strong enough to give nightmares to swing-Senator Everett Dirksen.)

5 For at least a century (I predict), the world's central locus of the democracy /violence dynamism will be the **Islam/West** confrontation, with clashing of nonnegotiables & widely variant views of force as a factor in continuity & change. Democracy is natural to the West (though nowhere perfectly achieved) & unnatural to Islam (of the 18 Islamic countries, only 1--Turkey, a secular state--is a democracy).

LLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 Lake Elizabeth Drive
Craigville MA 02632

